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Words Disenchanted, Words Reenchanted:

Local Elite Propaganda and the Internal Collapse of Ancient Imperium,

The Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兗 Area and the Region of Gaul

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

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Words Disenchanted, Words Reenchanted:
Local Elite Propaganda and the Internal Collapse of Ancient Imperium,
The Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兗 Area and the Region of Gaul

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by

Xiang Li

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Words Disenchanted, Words Reenchanted:
Local Elite Propaganda and the Internal Collapse of Ancient Imperium,
The Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兖 Area and the Region of Gaul

by

Xiang Li

“Ancient elite propaganda” can be defined as the institutional production of information in which ideological messages were communicated among elite groupings. During Late Antiquity, elite propaganda flourished in local areas of the Han Empire and the Roman Empire. Two such local areas, the Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兖 region in China, from the Han period to the Western Jin dynasty (ca. 200 BCE to 300 CE), and the Gallic provinces of the Roman Empire (ca. 1st century BCE to 500 CE), can help to illustrate this point.

The present dissertation includes two parts. Part I (Chapters One and Two) focuses on the institutions of local elite propaganda in Late Antiquity. Chapter One examines how the different interactive ethics of Han and Roman elites were expressed through their information institutions, and how such ethics were encoded into propagandistic messages that helped the elite populations ally with more companions. Chapter Two looks into how the interplay of three domains—information dissemination, textual production, and the use of language—reinforced local elite propaganda in the two

regions, the Qing-Xu-Yan area and Gaul, and how elite populations of the two regions gradually became definers of not only “appropriate language” but also “good opinions.”

Part II (Chapters Three and Four) focuses on the discourse of local elite propaganda in Late Antiquity. Chapter Three examines the sustaining and development of a “meta-discursive master” that dominated the production of local elite discourse, during the early stage of Late Antiquity. The propaganda discourse of local elites, in this period, obtained its power of persuasiveness from the meta-discursive authority of history and ritual. Chapter Four investigates the quasi-paradigmatic shifts in the propaganda discourse of local elite populations during the period of High Late Antiquity and the closing era of Late Antiquity. In the areas of QXY and Gaul, the meta-discursive master gradually disappeared from local elite discourses during High Late Antiquity, which rendered the realm of elite discourse somewhat centerless. When it came to the closing era of Late Antiquity, a new master emerged, and dominated the socio-political discourse of elites. The emergence of this new aesthetic master was based on the changing relationship between local elites and the new ruling group. To conclude, I argue that the triangular relationship between the idea of “truth,” the formation of textual authorities, and the operation of political regimes in Late Antique Eurasia was so complex that the boundary between the so-called “ancient” and “medieval” periods is not as clear as we may have thought.

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INTRODUCTION

Ancient Propaganda as Institutional Activities:

Questions and Approaches

This dissertation applies a framework of institutional activities to interpret “propaganda” in the context of the ancient world. Rather than centering on a purely notional-based investigation, in a more perceptual sense I focus on the extension, or range of applicability, of the word propaganda, to define what situations can be considered “propagandistic.”¹ I employ historical and archaeological materials as a lens through which to examine the various phenomena of propaganda happening on the ancient Eurasian continent, in the stage when two mighty empires—the Eastern Han Empire of China (25–220 CE) and the Western Roman Empire (285–476 CE)—were losing their grip on the institutional level, in particular geographical regions. I pay attention to the dynamics of institutionalized discourse within the cultural landscapes of two regions: the Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兗 area from the late Eastern Han period to the early Western Jin, and the broad area of Gaul from the latter half of the Western Roman empire to the early Medieval period, to analyze the interplay of specific periods, places, and peoples through which the concept “ancient propaganda” could be better recontextualized.

¹ G. S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell note that “there has never been a clear agreement on exactly what propaganda is” and argued that there is no necessity to give an ultimate definition. See Jowett and O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Fifth Edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.: 2011), 25–26. Jacques Ellul also claims that it is more useful to proceed with the analysis of the characteristics of propaganda as an existing sociological phenomenon. See *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, trans. Konrad Kellen and Jean Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), xii.

I. Two Problematic Examples: The Question of Propaganda in Ancient Materials

When analysts and scholars in the twentieth century used the English word “propaganda,” they routinely referred to its significance to modern nations. In his book *Munitions of the Mind*, Philip M. Taylor tries to transcend this narrow perspective by arguing that propaganda “is simply a process by which an idea or an opinion is communicated to someone else for a specific persuasive purpose.”² His new definition offers several refreshing points: first, propaganda is by its nature a form of human communication; second, it is widely seen in the transferring of ideas from some individuals to others; and finally, it serves the very broad aim of persuasion, so every communicative act that involves one’s deliberation might share some features of propaganda.

Such a conceptualization opposes the idea that propaganda, as a concept, can only encompass the intellectual legacy obtained from a very short history—no more than two centuries—of human experience. The history of propaganda is much extended; it can be considered to be as long as the history of human beings. There is, however, an issue that Taylor does not touch upon: the difference between “propaganda” as a given fact or ultimate reality, and “being propaganda” as a status that requires the measurement of its degree and probability in a certain context. Treating propaganda as an undeniable social fact might belie the subtle fabrics and hints in the raw historical materials. Moreover, when it comes to the ancient past when the English term “propaganda” neither existed nor

² P. M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: a History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester University Press, 2003), 7.

had any equivalents in foreign languages, discussions of the word might seem rootless.

Two examples can help to illustrate. The first text below is from the *Homeric Hymn 19 to Pan* composed before the eighth century BCE, as part of the Greek epic oral tradition. The second text is an inscription on the vessel, “Qiu Tripod of the Forty-Second Year” 四十二年逖鼎 from the mid-Western Zhou China (ca. 900–800 BCE). It addresses the Zhou king’s appointment of an official named Qiu 逖.

ἀμφί μοι Ἑρμείαιο φίλον γόνον ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα,
αἰγιόδην, δικέρωτα, φιλόκροτον, ὅστ’ ἀνὰ πίση
δενδρήεντ’ ἄμυδις φοιτᾶ χορογηθέσι νύμφαις,
αἶ τε κατ’ αἰγίλιπος πέτρης στείβουσι κάρηνα
Πᾶν’ ἀνακεκλόμεναι, νόμιον θεόν, ἀγλαέθειρον,
αὐχμήενθ’, ὃς πάντα λόφον νιφόεντα λέλογχε
καὶ κορυφὰς ὀρέων καὶ πετρήεντα κάρηνα.
φοιτᾶ δ’ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα διὰ ῥωπήια πυκνά,
ἄλλοτε μὲν ρείθροισιν ἐφελκόμενος μαλακοῖσιν,
ἄλλοτε δ’ αὖ πέτρησιν ἐν ἠλιβάτοισι διοιχνεῖ,
ἀκροτάτην κορυφὴν μηλοσκόπον εἰσαναβαίνων.
πολλάκι δ’ ἀργινόεντα διέδραμεν οὔρεα μακρά,
πολλάκι δ’ ἐν κνημοῖσι διήλασε θῆρας ἐναίρων,
ὄξέα δερκόμενος: τότε δ’ ἔσπερος ἔκλαγεν οἶον
ἄγρης ἐξανιών, δονάκων ὑπο μοῦσαν ἀθύρων
νήδυμον...

Muse, tell me about Pan, the dear son of Hermes, with his goat’s feet and two horns—a lover of merry noise. Through wooded glades he wanders with dancing nymphs who foot it on some sheer cliff’s edge, calling upon Pan, the shepherd-god, long-haired, unkempt. He has every snowy crest and the mountain peaks and rocky crests for his domain; hither and thither he goes through the close thickets, now lured by soft streams, and now he presses on amongst towering crags and climbs up to the highest peak that overlooks the flocks. Often he courses through the glistening high mountains, and often on the shouldered hills he speeds along slaying wild beasts, this keen-eyed god. Only at evening, as he returns from the chase, he sounds his note, playing sweet and low on his pipes of reed.³

³ For the original Greek text and the English translation, see anonymous, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica with an English Translation by Hugh G. Evelyn-White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann Ltd., 1914): <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0138%3Ah>

述...惟乃先聖祖考夾召先王爵勤大命奠周邦肆餘弗遐忘聖人孫子餘唯閉乃先
祖考有爵於周邦肆餘作□□詢餘肇建長父侯於楊餘令汝奠長父休女克奠於
師女唯克型乃先祖考□獫狁出捷於井阿於曆岩女不良戎女□長父以追搏戎乃
即宕伐於弓穀女執訊獲馘俘器車馬女敏於戎工弗逆朕親令釐秬一亩田於卅
田...

Qiu! ... Your former ancestors had been called by those kings in the past [to the
palace] to work hard on the important issue of the state, and [they helped] lay the
foundation of the regime of Zhou. I cannot forget the sages and their descendants
for even a brief moment. I often considered that your former ancestors owned
official titles in the state of Zhou. I would appoint you as the official of.... [You]
conquered the Xianyun and succeeded at Xing'e and Liyan. You resisted the Rong
people and fought against them. You attacked the Gonggu area, capturing
weapons, chariots and horses [of the enemy]. You are smart regarding military
affairs, and I hope you would not violate my order. You are rewarded with millet
in a *you* vessel, and to gather your garrison troops in the region of X-sa.⁴

Both texts have been considered to bear communicative purposes. In the first case where
the shepherd-god Pan is praised, a series of formulaic expressions is used to create the
feeling of distance and proximity between the figure Pan and the audiences. When the
narrator performed this piece, there must have been changes in their rhyme, voice quality,
and vocalization to show how the god runs far, turns back, and ultimately becomes part of
nature. Thomas W. Allen and E. E. Sikes argue in their comments on the poem:

“Nowhere in Greek literature has the love of the country found clearer expression than in
this hymn.”⁵ It was precisely here, in the territory called Greece, where the listeners were

[ymn%3D19](#)

⁴ For the entire transcription, see Lian Shaoming 連劭名, “Mei-xian Yangjia cun
jiaocang qingtong qi mingwen kaoshu” 眉縣楊家村窖藏青銅器銘文考述, *Zhongyuan
wenwu* 6 (2004): 42–46, and Li Ling 李零, “Du Yangjia cun chutu de Yu Qiu zhuqi” 讀
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⁵ See Allen and Sikes’ Notes, “Hymn to Pan,”
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0138%3Aymn%3D19>

now, that they could feel the happiness brought by the shepherd-god and enjoy the natural beauty he extended before his audiences.

The second example has been viewed as an exhortation of the Zhou king in the appointment ceremony, recalling Qiu's accomplishment and emphasizing his new responsibilities.⁶ The character *ru* 女 (you, your; viz., Qiu) is frequently used to lead sentences, with each sentence summarizing an accomplishment of Qiu: winning over the Xianyun 獫狁 army, capturing the weapons and horses of the enemy, smartly managing the military, and so forth. These words logically report the cause/reason why an individual must be honored. All of the sentences with *ru* are interwoven semantically so that they make up a chain through which the final conclusion—that Qiu should be appointed—is naturally achieved.

Both texts reflect Taylor's three standards of propaganda. They were for communicative uses, implanting the speakers' idea into the minds of their audiences, and intended to persuade the audiences that someone/something is well worth praising. But can we characterize the two as propagandistic texts?

I am hesitant to call the two texts good examples of ancient propaganda. Taylor offers only one of numerous propaganda theories, which is hardly the most precise. More importantly, as stated earlier, the mechanical application of Taylor's definition raises an important problem—the imposition of a context-independent framework that is

⁶ For instance, Virginia Kane's "Aspects of Western Zhou Appointment Inscriptions: The Charge, the Gifts, and the Response," *Early China* 8 (1982–3): 14–28; Li Feng, "Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou" in *Writing and Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar*, eds. Li Feng and David Prager Branner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 271–301.

essentialist by nature. There is a lack of background information for the two texts. We know very little about what actions of real historical figures were accompanied with the application of the texts, to facilitate the persuasive communication in their content. The *Homeric Hymn 19 to Pan* is known as a reflection of Greek “oral communication,” but scholars have provided insufficient evidence about how this process of communicating a poem occurred. The Qiu tripod was excavated from a Zhou tomb, which indicates its potential funerary uses; we are not sure, however, whether the text was read aloud to funeral participants, and whether it was allowed to be viewed by those people before the vessel was buried. In short, we have only limited knowledge about how the two texts were tied to actual, specific historical situations. Propaganda is not an abstract process; it must be accompanied by the concrete operation of a long-existing social apparatus, because only through such collective forces can an individual’s ability to maintain personal beliefs, or to raise doubts, be successfully suppressed.

Therefore I understand propaganda as a circumstance, in which a wide range of techniques for persuasive communication are organized to create an environment where a group of people are directed to a certain opinion or agenda. Those who direct the group are not individual persons but *institutions*,⁷ which guarantee the “encirclement and

⁷ Discussions about institutions have been complicated in realms like History, Political Science, Economics, and Sociology. An agreement among scholars is that institutions must indicate certain forms of cooperation and interaction of individuals that can help them transcend the mutually isolated ways of existence. Patrick Manning points out that two definitions of institutions coexist within the world of social science: “Among anthropologists but also among historians, institutions are seen as organizations. They are social structures created and maintained through the action of humans acting especially in groups but also as individuals—a lineage or a church is this sort of an institution. Among economists and many sociologists, however, institutions are seen as norms and ideas. In that view, institutions are seen as accepted principles that govern the behavior of

continuity”⁸ of the influence of propagandistic messages upon their individual recipients.

humans—the notion of private ownership of property is this sort of an institution.” See “Study of Human Institutions” in *Methods for Human History: Studying Social, Cultural, and Biological Evolution* (Springer International Publishing, 2020), 63–74. This is a response to Wolfgang Balzer and Raimo Tuomela’s dual-faceted model of the institution that “binds together the two central components of institutions, a) a ‘behavioral’ system of social practices as repeated patterns of collective intentional actions and b) the normative Überbau consisting of a task-right system which on the one hand is influenced and in basic cases even induced by the ‘underlying’ practices and on the other hand serves to stabilize them” (see “Social Institutions, Norms, and Practices” in *Social Order in Multiagent Systems*, eds. Rosaria Conte and Chrysanthos Dellarocas (Springer: 2001), 161–80).

The debates between the two perspectives of institution studies can be clearly seen in many publications of recent decades. Some scholars support a relatively abstract, mechanism-based explanation, arguing about institutions that “the general and common understandings developed by persons and by groups—i.e. culture—are the basis for the design of frameworks of more specific rules that govern human behaviour.” (See Keizer, “The Concept of Institution: Context and Meaning,” *Utrecht School of Economics, Tjalling C. Koopmans Research Institute Discussion Paper Series* 2008, 1–21). J. S. Coleman, M. Hechter and E. Borland, and some others support this opinion and suggest that institutional norms or rules and the sanctions attached to them establish incentives and constraints for the individuals to which they react rationally based on their self-interests. See Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 242; Hechter and Borland, “National Self-determination: The Emergence of an International Norm” in *Social Norms* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2001), 186–233; Zoltán Farkas, “The Concept and Coverage of Institution,” *Rationality and Society* 31 (2019): 70–97. Other researchers focus more on the visible organizations in human societies that materialize such norms and rules, thinking about the term “institution” in more tangible ways. This approach is more familiar to non-specialist readers. Dmitri M. Bondarenko et al. look into the mechanism of social evolution based on these organizations in *The Evolution of Social Institutions: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Springer: 2020). Johannes Urpelainen points out that there are two stages of the evolution of institutions as human organizations: Agents must first collectively adopt a particular symbolic representation of collective behavior as an “imagined institution,” so that its existence and salience become common knowledge; they then enact the institution by coming to an understanding that this imagined institution actually sets constraints on individual choice. See Urpelainen, “The Origin of Social Institutions,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 23, no. 2 (2011): 215–240.

Both groups of scholars have had great influence on the discussion nowadays. Throughout this chapter and the whole dissertation I will combine these ways of conceptualization, treating the institution as, on the one hand, a special system of norms or rules that act as social determinants of individual behavior, deriving from people’s collective expectation of different social roles. Although not always visible to many, these norms constitute an “institutional environment” such that the whole space where the rules apply can be regarded as a large institution. Language, art, and economic production are these kinds of institutions. On the other hand, there are smaller-scale institutions as real or imaginary organizations, like religious groups. They are not endogenous but established by people who have a common purpose or goals.

As a particular pattern of human affiliation, institutions enable the accumulation of resources and power. They provide individuals with monitorable rules of behavior to keep their membership in a given group, and to maintain the group stability through resisting divisive forces from the outside. In this sense, institutions offer propaganda the basic weapons and battlefield it needs. Jacques Ellul has correctly pointed out the would-be consequences of ignoring this aspect of propaganda: “We can hardly expect great results from a simple dissemination of words unless we prepare for it by pre-propaganda and sustain it by organization and action.”⁹ A large amount of chaos might be misunderstood as triggered by individual agents or occasional incidents, although they are actually rooted in the structural paradoxes of a community.

This institutional feature of propaganda—in the ancient past, particularly—is what I will focus on. Five aspects will be discussed in this introductory chapter:

- 1) Etymological research, which reveals that the notion related to the word “propaganda” has carried institutional connotations from periods in the distant past;
- 2) A revisiting of secondary literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which serves the theoretical foundation of our explanation of institutional propaganda;
- 3) A spatial angle, which selects two typical regions, the Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兖 area of Eastern Han China and the Gallic provinces of Western Rome, to examine how propaganda happened in relatively unified cultural communities;
- 4) A concrete analysis of primary sources of the two regions, to reveal how

⁸ See Ellul, *Propaganda*, 22.

⁹ Ellul, *Propaganda*, 22.

ancient propaganda displayed itself through various types of media;

5) A deeper investigation into a particular component of institutional activities—institutional discourse—to disclose how ancient propaganda has changed its forms of presence over time.

II. Etymological Analysis: Propaganda in Institutional Contexts

The English word “propaganda” obtained its basic denotations from a set of classical Latin words.¹⁰ The verb “propagate” derives from the Latin root *propāgāt-* (also *prōpāgāt-*), in which the prefix *pro-* is attached before *pag-*, the stem of *pangere* (to fix, fasten, set, plant, or compose).¹¹ The Latin *propaganda* is the feminine gerundive of the verb *propāgāre* (to propagate, disseminate, or spread), and the latter is often considered the immediate ancestor of the English term propaganda.¹² Several forms of the Latin words were employed to indicate the extension or reproduction of almost all kinds of things, e.g., *propagatus* (perfect passive participle of *propāgāre*), *propagandus* (used roughly as a verbal adjective), and *prōpāgātor* (as either a noun or singular future passive imperative of *prōpāgō*). However, there was a noticeable trend among important Latin authors during and after the Republican period: *propāgāre*, *prōpāgō* and their variants

¹⁰ In this section I place the Latin word propaganda in italics while the English term propaganda in the normal font.

¹¹ See “Propagate, v.” and “Page, n.2” in Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152613?rskey=op0c7Q&result=2#eid>, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/135995#eid32434380>

¹² See “Propaganda, n.” in Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152605?rskey=aXxd4h&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

came to carry socio-political meaning, especially in the sense of the enlargement or expansion of a group or organization. Livy's historical writing reflects the tendency:

(Quinctius describing Roman people) neque enim in Aeolidem Ioniamque coloniae in servitutem regiam missae sunt, sed stirpis augendae causa gentisque vetustissimae per orbem terrarum **propagandae**.

Colonies were not founded in Aeolis and Ionia to be in bondage to monarchs, but that their stock might multiply and a nation of ancient lineage be propagated throughout the world.¹³

(Words of Tiberius Gracchus) L. Scipionem, qui regem opulentissimum orbis terrarum devicerit, imperium populi Romani **propagaverit** in ultimos terrarum fines...

But that Lucius Scipio, who had subdued the most powerful king in the world, had extended the empire of the Roman people to the utmost limits of the earth...¹⁴

(On Acilius Glabrio defeating Antiochus at Thermopylae) ea omnia sacrificia laeta fuerunt, primisque hostiis perlitatum est, et ita haruspices responderunt, eo bello terminos populi Romani **propagari**, victoriam ac triumphum ostendi.

At everyone of those sacrifices, appearances were favorable, and the propitious omens were found in the first victims. Accordingly, the auspices gave this answer:—That, by this war, the boundaries of the Roman empire would be enlarged; and that victory and triumph were portended.¹⁵

¹³ *The History of Rome*, Book 34, Chapter 58. English translation by Rev. Canon Roberts. Evan T. Sage has a similar translation with only a few words changed. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0172:book=34:chapter=58&highlight=propagandae>. For the original Latin text of Livy quoted in this chapter, see *Titi Livi ab urbe condita libri editionem primam curavit Guilelmus Weissenborn editio altera aequam curavit Mauritius Mueller Pars III. Libri XXXI–XL*. Editio Stereotypica. Titus Livius. W. Weissenborn. H. J. Müller, Leipzig: 1911.

¹⁴ *The History of Rome*, Book 38, Chapter 60. English translation by William A. McDevitte. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0172:book=38:chapter=60&highlight=propagaverit>

¹⁵ *The History of Rome*, Book 36, Chapter 1. English translation by Cyrus Evans. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0172:book=36:chapter=1&highlight=propagari>

Written from the perspective of the Romans, the texts above are located within the context of Roman expansion, implying the expectation of the author upon those personages in the writing. The personages who acted as agents of *propāgāre* are presented as pioneers who were capable of removing obstacles during the development of the Roman polity, and as heroes who brought the Roman community to a new era by extending the region penetrated by Romanness. Their expansionist activities, in Livy's narrative, were derived from the common purposes of their group, and obtained their value through the (positive) collective assessment of the Roman public. When confronted with powerful enemies of the Romans, the *propāgāre*-related practices were understood as a shared solution to a recurrent problem. The brutal and aggressive nature of the territory enlargement is normalized in the texts, with its violent nature deliberately concealed by the author.

Other writers, like Cicero, had more flexible uses of *propāgāre* and its variants, linking the verb with other objectives like race and religion:

(Charges against Verres) qui cum se virtute non genere populo Romano commendari putaret, cum ipse sui generis initium ac nominis ab se gigni et **propagari** vellet, hominum potentissimorum suscepit inimicitias, et maximis laboribus suis usque ad summam senectutem summa cum gloria vixit.

Who, as he thought that it was better to be recommended to the Roman people by virtue than by high birth, and as he wished that the foundation of his race and name should be hid and extended by himself, voluntarily encountered the enmity of most influential men, and lived in the discharge of the greatest labors to an extreme old age with great credit.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Against Verres*, 2. 5. 180. English translation by C. D. Yonge. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0012:text=Ver.:actio=2:book=5:section=180&highlight=propagari>. For the original Latin texts of Cicero, see William Peterson, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Orationes: Divinatio in Q. Caecilium. In C. Verrem*

(To Quintus) Quam ob rem, ut religio **propaganda** etiam est, quae est iuncta cum cognitione naturae, sic superstitionis stirpes omnes eligendae.

Wherefore, just as it is a duty to extend the influence of true religion, which is closely associated with the knowledge of nature, so it is a duty to weed out every root of superstition.¹⁷

If we require an English verb that is generally equivalent to the *propāgāre* (disregarding its changing forms and uses) employed in the texts above, it should not be simply “extend”; I would suggest “aggrandize,” which conveys the meaning of making specific things (e.g., power, wealth, or reputation) great or greater. These things share the common feature that the evaluation of them must be based on a common value system of the society, not on individual standards. Here we encounter the concept of the we-group, which constitutes a critical connotation of the Latin *propāgāre*: the implications of the term and its variants are by no means neutral, but more or less intertwined with the institutional expectations, norms, and roles of Roman society.

As the texts above were situated by their authors within a social value system, the agents who completed the action of *propāgāre* were also under the value judgment of both the authors and their readers. These agents were portrayed as strong and able but entangled in the complicated relationship between their individual selves and the external circumstance. *Propāgāre*-related practices gave such individuals a chance to attribute meaning to their environment. These practices were typified by the Latin authors as

Recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit Gvlielmvs Peterson Rector Vniversitatis MacGillianaee (Oxford: e Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1917).

¹⁷ *De Divinatione*, 2. 149. English translation by William Armistead Falconer. See <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:2007.01.0034:book=2:section=149&highlight=propaganda>. For the original Latin text, see C. F. W. Müller, *De Divinatione. M. Tullius Cicero* (Leipzig: 1915).

representative actions in the development of a new form of imperium, and in the texts they evince a set of already established regularities of behaviors that had been accepted and normalized by a wide public. The act of *propāgāre* therefore can be categorized as a “stable, valued and recurring pattern of behavior”¹⁸ that reflected the core of existing social institutions at the time.

This explanation also offers a dimension scarcely highlighted by classical scholars. *Prōpāgātor* is often the secondary identity of a person in the texts mentioned above, coming after the primary one that the person is already a powerful leader of a group. Both Livy and Cicero took this primary identity as their focus while using the action of *propāgāre* to further qualify the given subject. This action does not need to be actually performed; it could be merely the duty or task assigned to an individual, or, that individual’s personal wish or prediction about the future situation. What makes *propāgāre* important is that the Latin authors extended its use to include the sense of power, manipulation, and leadership. A process of institutionalization is presumed to have occurred: the powerful man is expected to maintain and legitimize the existence of his organization (e.g., lineage, religion, or empire) by a set of *propāgāre* activities, as a way to respond to the internal or external forces that are placed upon both himself and his organizations.

It was through these ways of contextualization that classical Latin authors provided *propāgāre* and terms related to it with the implication of regularly occurring

¹⁸ Zoltán Farkas, “The Concept and Coverage of Institution,” *Rationality and Society* 31, 1 (2019): 70–97.

institutions. However, this implication constituted just one specific layer of the term before the second century CE, as important authors like Lucretius (ca. 99–55 BCE) and Seneca (ca. 4 BCE–65 CE) still used the word based on its original meaning of prolonging, increasing, and perpetuating all kinds of things.¹⁹ In such cases *propāgāre* was treated as part of the daily material life that did not necessarily have to be institutionalized. Similarly, the objectives of the verbs with the root *propāgāt-* mostly had visible or tangible forms (e.g., land or family). Abstract conceptions of *propaganda* became more widely accepted in the works of later writers, including Marcus Minucius Felix (died ca. 250 CE), Sidonius Apollinaris (ca. 430–481/490 CE), and Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (ca. 477–524 CE), who connected the action of extending/spreading with the nonphysical objectives of “dominion,” “affair,” or “glory,” all of which are related to the hierarchical, mutually connected existence of community members and the efforts they made to verify their importance in the group.²⁰ The appearance of these new

¹⁹ For instance, in Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* the subjunctive present form of *propāgāre* is used to indicate the general act of bringing forth: “*denique per maria ac montis fluviosque rapacis/frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis/omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem/efficis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent.*” Seneca used the indicative present form to express the prolonging of time: “*Cetera, quae per constructionem lapidum et marmoreas moles aut terrenos tumulos in magnam eductos altitudinem constant, non propagant longam diem, quippe et ipsa intereunt...*” Virgil’s poems also use the various form of *propāgāre* to delineate the phenomena of increase and reproduction in the natural world.

²⁰ For instance, Minucius Felix’s Octavius: “*Sic eorum potestas et auctoritas totius orbis ambitus occupavit, sic imperium suum ultra solis vias et ipsius oceani limites propagavit, dum exercent in armis virtutem religiosam...*” *The Epistulae of Sidonius*: “*nam, si ceteris nobilium studiorum artibus repudiatis sola te propagandae rei familiaris urtica sollicitat, licet tu deductum nomen a trabeis atque eboratas curules et gestatorias bratteatas et fastos recolas purpurissatos, is profecto inveniere, quem debeat sic industrium quod latentem non tam honorare censor quam censitor onerare.*” And the *De consolatione philosophiae* of Boethius: “*Videsne igitur quam sit angusta, quam compressa gloria quam dilatare ac propagare laboratis?*”

objectives consolidated the idea that actions related to *propāgāre* should happen within a community to be under the judgment of its members. At the same time the implication of imperial expansion continued to be obvious, as famous authors continued to express reflections regarding this aspect:

Omne regnum vel imperium bellis quaeritur et victoriis **propagatur**.

Every kingdom or empire is pursued in wars and expands by victories.²¹

Iulianus, perditor animae suae et Christiani iugulator exercitus... dumque Romanos **propagare** vult fines, perdidit **propagatos**.

Julian, as the ruiner of his spirit and the one to murder the Christian army... and while he wished to extend the territories to the Romans, he destroyed those who had created them.²²

So it is justifiable to claim that the Latin concept of *propāgāre* had been connected to the idea of institutions, whether political or nonpolitical, from the very distant past. The Latin term *propaganda* was used more frequently after Pope Gregory XIII (1572–85) established a commission of three cardinals known as *de propaganda fide* to spread Catholic doctrine in the face of a rising protestantism.²³ The well-chronicled establishment of the Catholic organization, Congregation de Propaganda Fide in 1622, initiated this new trend. The appearance of organizations like the Congregation de Propaganda Fide strengthened the idea that *propaganda* must be conducted by a concrete institution on the social level. The physical and practical existence of church

²¹ Tertullian, *Apologeticum*. English translation by myself.

²² St. Jerome, *Epistulae*. English translation by myself.

²³ See Erwin W. Fellows, “Propaganda: History of a Word,” *American Speech* 34, no. 3 (Oct., 1959): 182–89.

organizations, the persistent order and systematic arrangement of personnel, the announcement of a clear goal and blueprint, and especially the strict demand for discipline and behavioral principles among the organization's members for the achievement of its goals, all indicate: 1) that propaganda entailed the strategic promotion of a certain agenda among group members, and 2) the significance of centralized indoctrination in spreading this agenda. Two other features of the newly institutionalized idea of *propaganda* also deserve attention. Although words with the root *propāgāt-* took different forms in classical Latin texts such that they could be used in either the active or passive voice, the establishment of Catholic propaganda organizations affirmed the active sense, asserting that the act of *propaganda* could be aggressively pursued and had the power to direct people's faith both within and outside the Church.

III. The Existing Scholarship: Three Institutional Layers of Propaganda

Throughout the commonly accepted history of propaganda (mainly limited to the period after the 19th century), the institutional dimension of the phenomenon has been quite salient. Scholars tend to apply three institutional criteria in determining whether a problem can be regarded as a propaganda issue:

– Institutional leadership, which indicates the practices leaders use to relate the mission, values and character of their group.²⁴ Institutional leadership is oriented more

²⁴ See Harald Askeland, "Institutional Leadership: Maintaining and Developing the 'Good' Organisation" in *Understanding Values Work: Institutional Perspectives in Organizations and Leadership*, eds. Askeland et al. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 139–58.

towards the maintenance of the status quo than towards the future or change.²⁵

– Institutionalized media, or the formalization of media within organizational structures.²⁶ Such a type of media promotes a set of rules and procedures for the utilization of information with the purpose of maintaining group stability.

– Institutional displays of the leadership and the media, which occurs in front of targeted audiences. It indicates how effectively and efficiently the propagated value is delivered to targeted groups.

According to the majority of existing theories, only those phenomena that satisfy all these three criteria can be regarded as propaganda. The interplay between the three aspects has long been the focus of theorists, in whose discussions the triangular relationship is often simplified as that of the agents, media, and audiences of propaganda. Brian A. Patrick and Trevor A. Thrall categorize these discussions into “hegemonic” and “less hegemonic” perspectives according to the position of agents (i.e., institutional leaders) in the relationship. In hegemonic models leaders play the dominant (even determinant) role in the entire propaganda process, but they are less significant in the less hegemonic models.²⁷ Early theorists, who were under the influence of 18–19th century

²⁵ See M. Washington, K. B. Boal & J. N. Davis, “Institutional leadership: Past, present, and future” in *Handbook of Organization Institutionalism*, eds. R. Greenwood et al. (London: Sage, 2008), 721–36.

²⁶ Julián Villodre and J. Ignacio Criado, “Analyzing Social Media Institutionalization in Public Administration” in *The 21st Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research* (June 2020): 31–40.

²⁷ Patrick and Thrall, “Beyond Hegemony: Classical Propaganda Theory and Presidential Communication Strategy After the Invasion of Iraq,” *Mass Communication & Society* 10, 1 (2007): 95–118.

political philosophy, largely embraced the hegemonic perspective. Antonio Gramsci incorporates a Marxist view of the state in his *Prison Notebooks* (1926), and can be regarded as one of the founders of this tradition. He includes propaganda under his discussion of the government and state apparatus, highlighting the key role of policies and state officials in propaganda activities.²⁸ Another representative specialist is Walter Lippmann, whose *Public Opinion* (1922) focuses on how political elites disseminated information to reshape public minds.²⁹ Lippmann's analysis is fundamentally Kantian, given that he insists on the role of inner *priori*—stereotypes that are constructed socially and institutionally—in shaping the public's ways of understanding. This concern about an overwhelming, centralized force that redirects human minds reached its peak in Leonard W. Doob's *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* (1935). In this work, propaganda is defined as “a systematic attempt by an interested individual (or individuals) to control the attitudes of groups of individuals through the use of suggestions and, consequently, to control their actions.”³⁰

The scholars above focus on what enables organization leaders to dominate information production and reception, i.e., how they make the various media depend on

²⁸ For related ideas, see Antonio Gramsci, “States and Civil Society” in the *Prison Notebooks*, Volume II. SLP Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 445–557.

²⁹ Sue Curry Jansen, “‘The World’s Greatest Adventure in Advertising’: Walter Lippmann’s Critique of Censorship and Propaganda” in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, eds. Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo, <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199764419.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199764419-e-003>.

³⁰ See Leonard W. Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935), 89.

them and how they declare themselves the sole source of “truth” in front of the public. Such a theoretical tradition has led historians to underline the importance of institutional leadership in their studies while neglecting the two other variables. In a large number of articles and books, the authors treat a phenomenon as propaganda once they find a powerful leader of politics, economy, or culture conveying it. The essay collection, *Propaganda and Communication in World History*, Vol.1 (1979), set the foundation of this type of research. Many contributors to that volume, including, A. Leo Oppenheim who writes about the Neo-Assyrians, John A. Wilson, who writes about Egyptian politics, and R. S. Sharma, who writes about Indian monarchs, explicitly connect propaganda with a series of actions taken by ancient rulers.³¹ Later historians like Philip Pierce (1989), who treats Constantine’s political claim as the basis of Late Roman art,³² Joyce Marcus (1992), who works on the function of royal propaganda in the Mesoamerican writing system,³³ and Antti Laato (1995) who interprets King Sennacherib’s attempt to cover his military setbacks through royal inscriptions,³⁴ call these monarchs’ strategies “propaganda” and consider rulers’ authority as the basis of their information campaigns.

³¹ See A. Leo Oppenheim, “Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian Empires,” John A. Wilson, “Egyptian Civilization,” and R. S. Sharma, “Indian Civilization” in the *Propaganda and Communication in World History*, eds. Harold D. Lasswell et al. (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii: 1979), 111–204.

³² See Philip Pierce, “The Arch of Constantine: Propaganda and Ideology in Late Roman Art,” *Art History* 12, no. 4 (Dec., 1989): 387–418.

³³ See Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

³⁴ See Antti Laato, “Assyrian Propaganda and the Falsification of History in the Royal Inscriptions of Sennacherib,” *Vetus Testamentum* 45, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 1995): 198–226.

Some 21st-century researchers also follow this method of investigation. Matthew D. H. Clark (2010), by articulating how Augustus shaped his reputation before the larger populace, offers one of the most illustrative discussions of the “propagandistic” devices of ancient rulers.³⁵ In the recent book *Alexander the Great and Propaganda* (2021), many contributors focus on the desire of the monarch “to project himself in ways that would be receptive to whoever was his current audience.”³⁶

The drawbacks of such a hegemonic perspective are evident. Although it provides a clear focal point (i.e., the individual leaders of propaganda) for scholars, the model might lead historians to neglect the inability of some ancient rulers to control information, or to exaggerate the uniformity of the positions of ruling elites.³⁷ A less hegemonic perspective of propaganda is thus needed. Because the hegemonic process handled by institution leaders can only shape people’s views about a certain thing in one way without necessarily “making the opposition unthinkable,”³⁸ we should consider alternative sources of propaganda that could compete with the dominant one, which resides in the institutionalization process of media. Various choices are therefore available to propagandees, and the dominant leaders must consider the possible challenges to their

³⁵ See Matthew D. H. Clark, *Augustus, First Roman Emperor: Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival* (Liverpool University Press, 2010).

³⁶ For instance, Elizabeth Baynham, “‘Selling Alexander’: The Concept and Use of ‘Propaganda’ in the Age of Alexander,” Edward M. Anson, “Alexander the Great: A Life Lived as Legend,” and Hugh Bowden, “The Man Who Would Be King: Alexander Between Gaugamela And Persepolis” in *Alexander the Great and Propaganda*, eds. John Walsh and Elizabeth Baynham (London: Routledge, 2021).

³⁷ For further discussions on these problems, see Patrick and Thrall, “Beyond Hegemony,” 95–118.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

power to influence.

Supporters of this perspective are, more or less, social anthropologists with good knowledge about how “tricksters” distort messages received by individuals or groups.³⁹ Lasswell (1927; 1935) gave a broad definition of propaganda in his claim that anybody “who uses representations to influence collective responses” is equally a propagandist.⁴⁰ Representation is the key point here, signifying not only the media used to communicate with larger audiences but also the communicative power held by media personnel—and not just the leader of an institution—to fashion the minds of targeted audiences. Lasswell further argued in 1939 (together with Dorothy Blumenstock) that revolutionary propaganda directs social discontent against the symbols of the established order, implying that propaganda is not the synonym of “official ideology” but the cause and fruit of inter-institutional conflicts that occur when one group employs certain metaphors and expressions to fight another.⁴¹ Jacques Ellul, a post-war follower of Lasswell, developed

³⁹ William G. Doty and William J. Hynes have detailed discussion about the concept “trickster.” They point out: “The first use of the English term trickster appeared in the eighteenth century, not as an anthropological category but to designate morally one who deceives or cheats. In the nineteenth century Benjamin Disraeli employed the term to describe lying political opponents within the Whig party. It appears in Brinton’s 1868 *Myths of the New World*, and, in this century, it has been a technical term for figures from European literature as well as for non-European ethnological phenomena, particularly in North America and Africa.” See “Historical Overview of Theoretical Issues: The Problem of the Trickster” in *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 1993), 13–32.

⁴⁰ See Harold D. Lasswell, “The Theory of Political Propaganda,” *The American Political Science Review* 21, no. 3 (Aug., 1927): 627–31; and *Propaganda and Promotional Activities: An Annotated Bibliography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1935), 3.

⁴¹ See H. D. Lasswell and Dorothy Blumenstock, *World Revolutionary Propaganda: A Chicago Study* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), 56.

this conflict-based framework in his *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (1965) by arguing that there is a “social propaganda” that differs from “political propaganda.” Social propaganda is relatively loosely organized and based on various sources of messages, with entertainment and news media playing especially important roles by “standardizing current ideas, hardening prevailing stereotypes, and furnishing thought patterns in all areas.”⁴² Thus the effect of propaganda could be wide and profound, as it “codifies social, political, and moral standards” in all most all human domains.⁴³

Ancient historians who directly borrow this less hegemonic perspective are not prominent in their number, but we find in their work a new way to conceptualize propaganda: namely, that the leaders of organizations are merely one of the forces facilitating the integration of the group through communicative practices; other actors include wealthy members of the organization, people who have more convenient access to information outlets, and those who bear more responsibilities in education and knowledge production. These forces deeply penetrate the operation of media that they could influence the way in which an institution displays itself to both its members and outsiders. Jane DeRose Evans' *The Art of Persuasion: Political Propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus* (1992) is one of the most representative works in this category. Largely dependent on Ellul's theoretical framework, Evans suggests a “horizontal” angle of research in which “the group is all-important and the leader serves only as discussion

⁴² Ellul, *Propaganda*, 163.

⁴³ See Marshall Soules, “The Spectrum of Persuasion” in *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 22–40.

leader.”⁴⁴ She also examines the ways in which the various propagandistic forces in Rome helped provoke institutional conformity and stability, which is represented in her conclusion that “the individual participated in society in every way.”⁴⁵ Paweł Gołyźniak’s *Engraved Gems and Propaganda in the Roman Republic and under Augustus* (2020) absorbs many of Evans’ ideas, treating the Roman aristocratic class as a special group intervening in propaganda practices. The monarchs are no longer considered the only powerful ones who were responsible for the shaping of public opinion.

The works cited above are historical studies that explicitly locate the concept of propaganda at the center of their discussions.⁴⁶ According to our survey of the extant literature, it appears that the first criterion of propaganda, the existence of institutional leadership, can be easily satisfied in the ancient world, as the materials about the rulers’ activities are widely accessible and have already been meticulously examined. The second criterion, the existence of institutionalized media, seems less easy to satisfy, if we consider the limited number of academic discussions on the non-ruling forces that impacted communication within and outside of organizations. The third criterion, the

⁴⁴ Robert Ketterer, “Review: *The Art of Persuasion: Political Propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus*,” *Electronic Antiquity* 2, issue 2 (August 1994), <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/EIAnt/V2N2/ketterer.html>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Those works that only hint at the topic but do not directly use the word “propaganda,” or only examine propaganda as a secondary or tertiary topic, are excluded here for the precision of our theoretical discussion. For instance, Paul Zanker’s *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* has been seen as an important book on Roman propaganda, but is not included in my discussion because the author treats propaganda as only a subtopic under his analysis of the Roman forms of visual communication and the imperial program of cultural renewal.

institutional display of the leadership and media before targeted audiences, has been given insufficient attention by scholars and is thus filled with uncertainty regarding its application in ancient times. It is difficult to find a study specifically about the recipients of ancient “propaganda,” let alone the mechanisms of the reception and digestion of information among these people. Does this mean that propaganda did not exist, or was far from visible, in ancient periods? It is too early to conclude.

IV. The Perspective of Cultural Landscape: Where to Find “Ancient Propaganda”?

Given the limitations of the extant scholarship, I would suggest a more plausible approach to ancient propaganda, centering on the notion of *cultural landscape* as the ground it grew from.⁴⁷ Ken Taylor defines cultural landscapes as “symbols of who are and can serve to remind us of the past”:

They are the result of human intervention in the natural landscape and present a record of human activity, human values and ideologies.... Cultural landscapes are literally an imprint of human history. They can tell us, if we care to read and interpret them, something about the achievements and values of our predecessors.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ According to Luis Álvarez Munárriz, the origins of the term “cultural landscape” can be traced to late 19th century German and French historians and geographers: “Otto Schlütter’s focus on the concept of *Landschaft* as an area defined by a harmonious and uniform interrelation of physical elements. We must also refer to the so-called Landscape Science which appears in Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the first reflections on the geographical method for environmental study appeared....However, it became a classic category when a collaborative interdisciplinary work was carried out by professionals belonging to Social Anthropology, Cultural Geography, and Urban Ecology. All of these disciplines based their approach on an axiom which served as foundation: the relationships between cultural patterns and physical conditions are essential to understand human existence, both on an individual and collective level.” See “The Cultural Landscape Concept,” *Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 6, número 1 (enero–abril 2011): 57–80.

⁴⁸ Ken Taylor, “Cultural Landscapes: A Bridge between Culture and Nature?”

As he points out, this concept can effectively supplement theoretical-based research because it brings in empirical perspectives and tangible materials. At the core of cultural landscape is physical territory, which provides the space where human obtain their nature through a wide range of events.⁴⁹ It is not only the carrier of traces and remnants of a civilization that constantly frames and regulates human life, but the breeding ground of new ethics and affiliations based on people's reassessment of that civilization, its metaphors and values.⁵⁰ By focusing our attention on particular territories with their own "regional identity, cohesion, tradition, common history, experience and special language,"⁵¹ the perspective of cultural landscape offers a concrete, perceivable background where human extend their lives.

This perspective enables us to examine institutions of certain cultural groups, because it presupposes the existence of a relatively high level of cultural unity within a territory, and the close association between the territory and the activities of the humans who inhabit it. Institutions are among the the most representative indicators of the practices of specific groups within a certain geographical area. Their presence implies the potential existence and degrees of development of propaganda. The persistence of certain institutions guarantees the recurrence of propaganda over time, and the observability of

International Journal of Heritage Studies (November 2011): 1–8.

⁴⁹ See Luis Alvarez Munarriz, "The Cultural Landscape Concept," *AIBR: Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 6, no. 1(2011): 63–86.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Darko Vukovic et al., "Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units: Possibilities of Application in Serbia," *Journal of the Geographical Institute Jovan Cvijic SASA* 61, no. 2 (Jan. 2011): 11–24.

institutional practices assures that a propagandistic activity can be recognized from the complex network of human actions. All of these make it easier for us to identify how propaganda has resided in the established human groupings and their collective norms.

I choose two geographical areas as the center of my research: the Qing-Xu-Yan area (the provinces of Qing, Xu, and Yan; QXY hereafter) from the mid-Eastern Han period to the Western Jin (ca. 70–300 CE), and the broad area of Gaul, from the latter half of the Roman empire to the early Medieval period (ca. 280–500 CE). (See fig.s 1 and 2.) These two pieces of territories were on the eastern and western ends of the Eurasian continent, with one of them facing the Pacific Ocean, and the other the Atlantic. Though extremely distant from each other, it has been acknowledged that both areas are typical enough to illustrate the regional circumstances of Late Antiquity, regarding the various populations and their institutional activities.

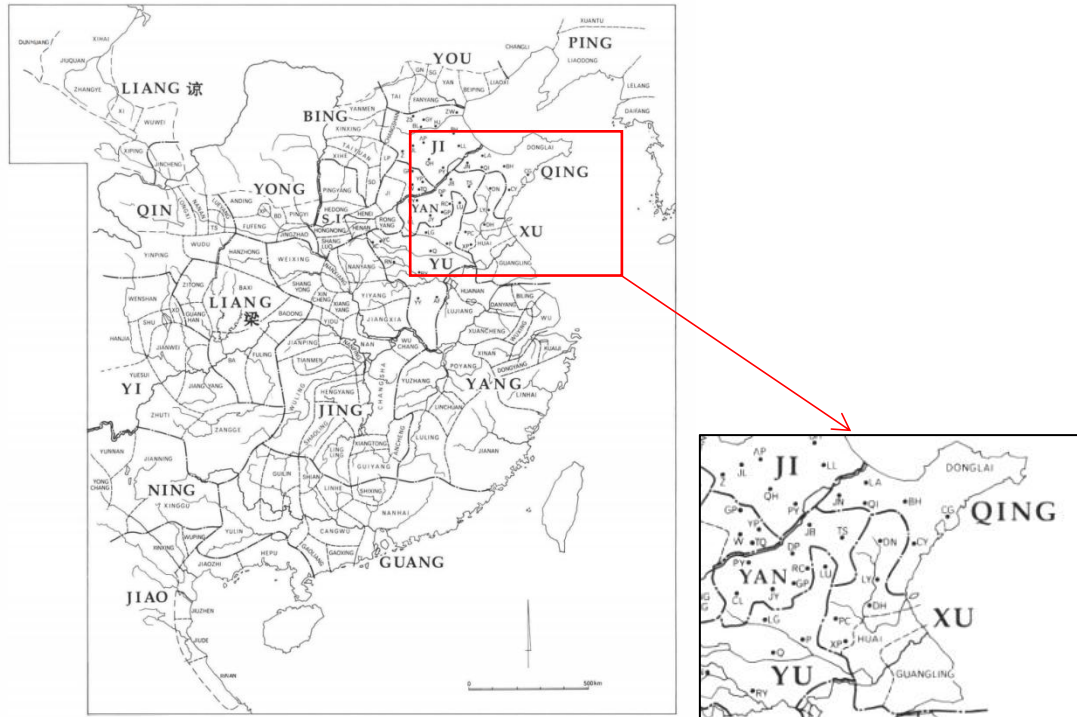


Figure 1. Map of the Qing-Xu-Yan region in the Eastern Han dynasty



Figure 2. Map of the Gallic provinces of the Roman Empire

From Qin to the Wei-Jin period, there had been no major changes regarding the geographic coverage of the QXY area. The names of the three provinces first appeared in the “Yu gong” 禹貢 section of *Shangshu* 尚書 and then in the “Di li zhi” 地理志 of the *Hanshu* 漢書. In the *Hou Hanshu* and later transmitted texts (e.g., *Suishu* 隋書), the three provinces are often referred together as “Qing-Xu” 青徐 (sometimes “Huai-Si” 淮泗 as its synonym)⁵² or “Xu-Yan” 徐兗 (sometimes “the north of the Yi and Si Rivers” 沂泗水以北 as its synonym).⁵³ For example, in the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書: “the gentry and commoner groups of the Qing and Xu areas” (*Qing-Xu shi shu* 青徐士庶), “those literate and decent people of the Qing and Xu areas” (*Qing-Xu ru ya* 青徐儒雅), or in the *Suishu*, “people from the regions of Xu and Yan shared similar customs” (*Xu-Yan tong su* 徐兗同俗). The area was also the center of the Yellow Turban Rebellion, which brought the rebel army a new name, “the Yellow Turban armies of the Qing and Xu areas” (*Qing-Xu huang jin* 青徐黃巾) (*Sanguo zhi* 三國志). During the Eastern Han and Western Jin dynasties, the connection of the three regions was officially confirmed, as the Regional Inspector (*cishi* 刺史) of one of these provinces was often commanded to govern another region of the three in their later career, or to govern two of the three provinces at the same time.⁵⁴

⁵² Wu Liquan 吳禮權, *Zhongguo yuyan zhixue shi* 中國語言哲學史 (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1997), 40.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Some records from the *Sanguo zhi*: 220–226 CE, Cao Xiu 曹休: “Supervising military affairs in both Qing and Xu” 都督青徐諸軍事; Wang Ling 王凌: Regional Inspector of the Province of Yan 兗州刺史 → Regional Inspector of the Province of Qing 青州刺史.

Scholars have already treated the three provinces as a whole. Chen Yinque 陳寅恪 offered the earliest scholarly discussion on the religious linkage between the Qing and Xu areas.⁵⁵ Tian Yuqing 田餘慶 explored the powerful family in this broad region during 1980s, which can be seen in several articles.⁵⁶ Wang Rui 王蕊 is the first one using the toponym, QXY, in academic publications.⁵⁷

The region of Gaul obtained its name also from transmitted history, *The Histories* of Polybius (around 2nd century BCE). From the late Iron Age to the Roman conquest in 58 BCE, people in the area shared the La Tène culture that morphed into a Roman-Celtic culture, before Caesar divided Gallic people into three broad groups: the Aquitani, Galli, and Belgae. Both characteristics of “Romanness” and local features of Gaul were

227–239 CE, Huan Fan 桓范: “Supervising military affairs in both Qing and Xu” 都督青徐諸軍事 → Regional Inspector of the Province of Yan 兗州刺史.

239–249 CE, Wang Chang 王昶: Regional Inspector of the Province of Yan 兗州刺史 → Regional Inspector of the Province of Xu 徐州刺史.

⁵⁵ See Chen Yinque, “Tianshi dao yu binhai diyu zhi guanxi” 天師道與濱海地域之關係 in *Jinming guan congkao chubian* 金明館叢稿初編 (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 2001), 439–66.

⁵⁶ The most representative of these works is Tian Yuqing’s “Han-Wei zhiji de Qing-Xu haoba wenti” 漢魏之際的青徐豪霸問題, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 3 (1983): 33–49.

⁵⁷ Wang’s major works include: “San si shiji Qing Xu Yan diyu zhengju yanjiu” 三四世紀青徐兗地域政局研究 (PhD diss., Shandong Univ., 2006); “San si shiji Qing Xu Yan diyu de yitixing yu zhongyaoxing” 三四世紀青徐兗地域的一體性與重要性, *Dongyue luncong* 東嶽論叢 5 (2007): 133–37; “Qing Xu Yan ji guanli yu Cao Wei zhengzhi” 青徐兗籍官吏與曹魏政治, *Henan keji daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 河南科技大學學報(社會科學版) 3 (2008): 16–20; “Dong Han monian Qing Xu Yan diyu de quanli juezhu” 東漢末年青徐兗地域的權力角逐, *Xuchang xueyuan xuebao* 許昌學院學報 3 (2008): 23–27; “Dong Han monian Qing Xu Yan diyu zhangguan yu geju shili de xiaozhang” 東漢末年青徐兗地域長官與割據勢力的消長, *Ludong daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 魯東大學學報(哲學社會科學版) 2 (2009): 64–67; “Qing Xu Yan fifang junzheng zhangguan yu Xi Jin houqi zhengju” 青徐兗地方軍政長官與西晉後期政局, *Dongyue luncong* 10 (2009): 92–97, etc.

incorporated into a hybrid cultural identity through the rebuilding of historical memories, myths, iconography, architecture and urbanization, as well as cults.⁵⁸ Gallic civitas-capitals were governed by elected officials bearing titles found in Italy, either *duumviri* (two chief officials) with *aediles* or *quattuorviri*.⁵⁹ A new Gallo-Roman identity came to be constructed, and Gallo-Roman aristocrats became prominent in their influence.

The Later Roman Empire witnessed the negotiation and collision within Christianity per se, and between Christians and the Gallic-Roman aristocracy. Although by the fifth century Orthodox Christianity provided a relatively unified world-view, as the Franks expanded into Gaul they nevertheless retained their pagan cults, and even into the sixth century they continued to worship at pagan shrines.⁶⁰ The division between the Eastern and Western Empires also played significant roles in the local history of Gaul. Different from the Eastern provinces that witnessed a relatively high level of ideological/political centralization, the region of Gaul had long been a “world without a center” even before the ultimate collapse of the Western Empire.⁶¹ But there has been a

⁵⁸ Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Andrew C. Johnston, *The Sons of Remus: Identity in Roman Gaul and Spain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).

⁵⁹ See Ramsay MacMullen, *Romanization in the Time of Augustus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 102.

⁶⁰ See Raymond Van Dam, “Merovingian Gaul and the Frankish conquests” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, 2005.

⁶¹ See Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 10th Edition (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), and Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

tendency of continuing to treat the Gallic provinces as a holistic territory, as a result of the literary contributions of great Gallic-Roman writers, such as Sidonius.

The most important feature shared by these two regions is the long-term presence of active local elites and their various institutions. For practical purposes in this dissertation, I define this group of people as including all those local individuals whose relatively concrete biographical information—origin, interpersonal relations, accomplishments, or personal characteristics, especially the accepted public image—could be obtained from extant primary sources. The fact that their lives had been publicly evaluated implies the importance of such people to a larger community.⁶² Therefore, the list of people examined in the present research include: members of powerful clans, bureaucratic officeholders, military commanders, landed gentry, wealthy merchants, religious leaders, and renowned literati who might have also played some of these other roles.

These elite populations and their organizations were highly concentrated in the two areas during the transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Medieval period. Their activities in both regions were primarily based on their local networks of interpersonal

⁶² Similar ways to define “elite” are also used by Nicolas Olivier Tackett in his investigation of the Tang-Song elites in China: “I have posited an inclusive definition of elite, generally classifying as such any individual for whom biographical material can be obtained in historical or archaeological sources.” See “The Transformation of Medieval Chinese Elites (850–1000 C.E.)” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006), 10–11. Tackett does not explain in detail what kinds of biographical material is needed. Many of those who only had their birth, career and death recorded were probably not influential in their times. So I especially stress the need to consider the accounts of one’s public image, i.e., a certain judgment of the person’s successes and failures, as they indicate that i) the personage had played certain roles in the public realm of their community, and ii) they were known to certain groups of their times.

relationships. On the QXY side, this network was built through activities within or across institutions such as family, government offices, schools, military units, and so forth.

Parties and coalitions of elites based on these networks came to flourish after the emperors Zhao 昭帝 (r. 87–74 BCE) and Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–48 BCE), as officials and intellectuals from the QXY area played significant roles in the imperial debates and public protests.⁶³ This facilitated the making of formal or informal elite institutions. For instance, the clan of Yang 羊 of the Taishan 泰山 area accumulated its power through at least three types of interpersonal connections: intermarriage with other powerful families, collegial relationships in government employment, and peer relations in military service. Yang Zhi 羊陟 (d. 180s) enjoyed a great reputation because of his comradeship with other righteous officials of intellectual parties, like Guo Linzong 郭林宗 (128–169) and Zong Ci 宗慈 (d. 2nd century) in the late Han Great Proscription, while Yang Xu 羊續 (142–189) helped to promote the public image of the Yang family by repressing the rebel armies, and Yang Dan 羊耽 (d. late 2nd century) through his famous father-in-law, the powerful official Xin Pi 辛毗 (d. 235).⁶⁴

Similar situations can be seen for Roman Gaul, as many Gallo-Roman aristocrats had their own groups/associations as part of their secular lives while sharing great power in local ecclesiastic organizations in the late period of the western empire. Though

⁶³ See Yan Buke 閻步克, *Shidafu zhengzhi yansheng shigao* 士大夫政治演生史稿 (Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1996), 223.

⁶⁴ See *Hou Hanshu* 31, 1110; *Sanguo zhi* 1. 25. 695–99. For related discussions, see Huang Juehong 黃覺弘, “Taishan Yangshi kaolun” 泰山羊氏考論, *Shenyang shifan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 沈陽師範大學學報 (社會科學版) 29, no. 5 (2005): 29–32.

building relationships in workplaces of both in and outside of the state bureaucratic system, their formal or informal institutional connections were usually reflected through literary ties, family circles, peers in school, and so forth.⁶⁵ Ralph Mathisen has offered an illustrative example, the correspondence circle dominated by four Gallo-Roman aristocratic writers of the late fifth century: Sidonius Apollinaris (ca. 430–481/490), Ruricius (ca. 440–510), Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus (ca. 450–517/518), and Magnus Felix Ennodius (473/474–521). All four of these men were bishops of local areas, which justifies the assumption that their interaction must have been, at least partly, related to church affairs and official patronage; however, it was the blood and marriage ties of their families that enabled them to meet and communicate frequently on daily occasions. Sidonius was the maternal uncle of Avitus, which can be seen from their correspondences that address the same ancestors. Marriages were also seen to have occurred between the families of Ruricius and Ennodius, although it remains unclear whether the two individuals were in the same generation or not.⁶⁶ In this sense, the commonly considered literary circle of the four individuals includes four types of institutions: family, religious, literary/educational, and bureaucratic. All of them indicate some levels of collectivity, organizational complexity, and the regularization of human practices.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See Ralph W. Mathisen. “Epistolography, Literary Circles and Family Ties in Late Roman Gaul,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974–2014), 111 (1981): 95–109.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For these features of institutions, see Randall Calvert, “Rational Actors, Equilibrium and Social Institutions” in *Explaining Social Institutions*, eds. Jack Knight and Itai Sened (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 58–60.

There are other commonalities of the two regional communities. Both of them shared a certain level of cultural homogeneity but also allowed heterogeneity. The majority of the QXY area overlaps with the old Qi-Lu 齊-魯 region, where traditional Confucianism came into being. Until the late Han, scholarship on the Confucian classics had long flourished in the local area. People from the Gallic provinces experienced the process of Romanization after the imperial conquest, which contributed to the making of a unified Gallo-Roman identity. The widespread practice of Christianity in the Gallic provinces also consolidated this cultural unification. But both concepts, Confucianization and Romanization, are intrinsically problematic, because they also contained heterogeneous elements. In QXY various intellectual schools claimed to represent an orthodoxy Confucianism. And the so-called “Romanization” or “Romanness,” if we treat seriously, is far from a unified whole.⁶⁸

Both regional communities also share a *seemingly* high level of provincial loyalty to the imperial court and official ideology. It has long been a common view that the state doctrine and ideology (Confucianism for the Han; Christianity for mid- and late Western Rome) deeply penetrated the local community of the two regions, and that local populations from the two areas were particularly loyal to the imperial court. Indeed, we can see evidence of direct intervention of the imperial court in local ideological issues, e.g., Constantine’s support of Gallic urbanization⁶⁹ and the Han emperors’ grand ritual at

⁶⁸ See Woolf, *Becoming Roman*; Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Digeser, “Crisis as Opportunity: Urban Renewal and Christianisation in Constantine’s Gaul”; Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 1996; Noel Lenski,

Mt. Tai, which made the local community more closely associated with the imperial core. However, considering the independence of elite institutions in both areas, it is arguable that the provincial loyalty of both regions to the official ideology was largely on a superficial level. In both QXY and Gaul, the local elite group enjoyed great power in the middle to late periods of each empire. Bishops in Gaul were expected to act as the exclusive judge and arbiter in cases between Christians, and even between Christians and non-Christians,⁷⁰ while the QXY elite groups were one of the strongest divisive powers at the end of Han.

These similarities between the two regions further warrant a mid-level comparative approach, which is situated somewhere between the macro perspective of “state-to-state” comparisons (i.e., Han and Rome) and the micro scope of “city-to-city” comparisons (i.e., Chang’an and the city of Rome).⁷¹ Focusing on *region* as both a concept and an independent socio-political formation provides many advantages for propaganda studies. By keeping a distance from the established framework of polity, it

Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

⁷⁰ See Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*.

⁷¹ For representative works of the state-level comparison, see Walter Scheidel ed., *Rome and China: Comparative Perspectives on Ancient World Empires* (Oxford University Press, 2010); *State Power in Ancient China and Rome* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Raoul McLaughlin, *The Roman Empire and the Silk Routes: The Ancient World Economy & the Empires of Parthia, Central Asia & Han China* (Pen and Sword History, 2016); Hyun Jin Kim, *Geopolitics in Late Antiquity: The Fate of Superpowers from China to Rome* (London: Routledge, 2018); Achim Mittag and Fritz-Heiner Mutschler eds., *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared* (Oxford University Press, 2009), etc. For works of city-level comparisons, *Chang’an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* (eds. Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen, Washington University Press, 2015) touches upon the potential comparisons and differences between the Chang’an and Rome.

avoids the problematic methods of reducing the question of propaganda to the question of intra-state consensus, or reducing the topic of institutions to that of bureaucratic organizations. Moreover, by investigating a geographical area much larger than a city/town, it prevents over-attention to those overly special cases, which had weaker connections with the imperial centers and could not appropriately reflect the role of propaganda in the early state-building process. This focus on region, a territorial unit not only politically acknowledged but also historically created, makes it easier to explain why a particular phenomenon, the local propaganda of elites, came to rise rapidly in the Late Antique world, probably on a global scale.

V. Primary Sources: How Did Ancient Propaganda Display Itself?

So how did this local elite propaganda extend itself in the daily practices of people in these two regions? How did elite populations present their leadership in local areas and the various media they used before targeted audiences, through institutional practices? The primary sources from the two areas offer significant evidence. Since propaganda should be considered an institutional practice, materials related to it must reflect how human beings, especially local elites, were acting within their organizational bonds according to their group hierarchy, to forge or maintain certain collective values. My study will give particular attention to three types of such materials.

(I) Inscribed Texts on Various Materials (Including Stone Steles and Other Forms)

Many inscriptions from the ancient and early medieval periods were produced by and for local elite institutions, recording and commemorating the significance of such

populations to their community. Some inscriptions are carved on slabs or panels completely devoid of other decoration or ornament, while others may have the incised text enclosed within a raised border. Although the production and use of these materials can be observed in both China and Rome,⁷² the situation of the two areas is different in two aspects: the total amount of the extant material and the authenticity of the sources. Based on the different situations of the two geographic areas, my use of the materials is, inevitably, asymmetrical. For example, it is often difficult to find a Latin stele—parallel to the steles used to understand the situation in China—to interpret similar circumstances in Rome.

The authenticity of ancient inscriptions has long been a problem, due to the lengthy history of forgery, tomb-looting, and trade in antiques. One issue about the existing Han steles from the QXY area is that many of them are unprovenanced rather than scientifically excavated. A representative example is the “Wu Ban Stele” 武班碑, whose text had been recorded by Song scholars, but the original artifact was then discovered in the Qing period from the real cemetery. The inscribed text, if authentic, is apparently the reflection of elite institutional values and ethics. The dedicatee is said to be

⁷² Both QXY and Roman Gaul witnessed the wide use of inscriptions in the local area. In Gaul around 2,900 pieces of inscriptions are known to scholars (see Mark A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300-750* (Crowmarsh: Archaeopress, 2003)). As for QXY, although no one have figured out the total number of inscriptions, at least 277 surviving stele inscriptions dated to Eastern Han are from present-day Shandong. See Miranda Brown, “Han Steles: How to Elicit What They Have to Tell Us” in *Re-Envisioning Culture: Ideals, Practices, and Problems of the ‘Han Dynasty Wu Family Shrines,’* ed. Cary Y. Liu (Princeton Art Museum, 2008): 180–95. The production of inscription was also an important social domain, as we can see from the records about the craftsmen in Han China and stonemasons/stonecutters who were called *lapicida* or *faber lapidarius* (“workman in stone”) in Rome.

an individual, Wu Ban, who was born in the Province of Yan 兗州 and holding his office in both Dunhuang and the imperial capital. His personal characteristics and accomplishments are addressed in the inscription as not only fully satisfying the requirements imposed by the Han bureaucratic offices: he also always carried out his obligations to the state and helped enlighten the public with classical ideology. However, although the text shares many commonalities with stele inscriptions recorded in the received historiography, most debates are surrounding the trustworthiness of Song scholars' discussion and the reliability of information provided by Qing excavators.⁷³

A hierarchy of reliability, therefore, can be seen from the extant sources of Han steles. The most reliable category is the excavated pieces with their information recorded in archaeological reports; the second most reliable group comprises those recorded in transmitted historiography, such as the *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Hou Hanshu*, which connects the texts with real events and personages and gives such writings a historical context; the third most reliable group comprises those in the collection of an individual's literary works, which were edited and published after the death of the author; the least reliable category is those only mentioned in fragmentary discussions in later periods. In this dissertation, I pay more attention to the first three groups while using the last group, fragmentary pieces in later transmitted texts, only as secondary sources to supplement the background information of primary sources. For instance, when using the "Wu Ban Stele" to illustrate how local elites in the QXY area propagated specific values among their

⁷³ See Cary Liu, "Curator's Preface and Acknowledgements," "The Wu Family Shrine as a Recarving of the Past," and "Reconfiguring the Wu Family Shrines"; Michael Nylan, "Addicted to Antiquity' (*nigu*): A Brief History of the Wu Family Shrines." In *Recarving China's Past*, 2005.

community members, I compare the stele with another late Han inscription, the “Hu Gong Stele” 胡公碑 from *Cai zhonglang ji* 蔡仲郎集, the Ming-Dynasty collection of Cai Yong’s work (in Chang Pu’s 張溥 *Han-Wei Liuchao bai san jia ji* 漢魏六朝百三家集). Other inscriptions from the Wu Family shrines, like steles for Wu Liang and Wu Kaiming, are used as secondary sources to support some central ideas expressed in Wu Ban’s text. Because these inscriptions are only recorded in the Song scholar Hong Gua’s 洪適 (1117–1184) collections and some other scholars’ monographs, which makes their authenticity dubious, they will not be the center of my discussion.

(II) Monumental Architecture, the Above-Ground Portion of Cemeteries, and Excavated Materials

Ritual and monumental remains like temples and shrines are visible to not only ritual participants but also passersby. They are important carriers of propagandistic texts and images, publicizing the viewpoints and agendas of certain institutions. For the QXY area, the Eastern-Han offering shrines are significant indicators of how local populations commemorated the deceased of their family, and worshipped the deities of their regional communities. The Xiaotangshan 孝堂山 shrine serves as an example from the mid-Eastern Han period, showing how the dedicatee and later people used funeral architecture to promote certain values of a private family or other types of integrated groups of individuals, and how messages containing such values came to be disseminated among wider groups of people.⁷⁴ Not only the dedicatee himself was commemorated;

⁷⁴ See Zheng Yan 鄭岩, “Dong Han Xiaotang shan shici de guanzhe ji qita” 東漢孝堂山石祠的觀者及其他, *Meishu yanjiu* 美術研究 2 (2021): 15–21.

later generations of local elites (e.g., intellectuals, officials, and military leaders) who passed through the site also inscribed texts here (both as graffiti and as formal steles), utilizing the site to publicize their own thoughts and agendas.⁷⁵ Other funeral remains from the surrounding area that have been recorded in archaeological reports, e.g., the stone carvings and epitaph from the Songshan 宋山 and Beizhai 北寨 sites, also serve as direct evidence that local elites used their funerals to propagate certain ideologies.⁷⁶ These stone carvings offer information about not only the tomb occupants themselves but also their formal and informal institutions: peer groups, political parties or non-political circles, and the local community as a whole, all of which entailed specific sets of rules that structured the interactions among social members.

Other components of cemeteries also sent information about both the deceased elites and their groups. They could be chambers above the ground, terraces for sacrifice, gates and roads, and so forth.⁷⁷ As these remains are relatively fragmentary and brief, what deserves more attention is the usefulness of entombed materials in propaganda practices. This is a particularly significant question regarding the case of China, since many of the early imperial decrees, edicts, and legal manuscripts have come from tombs,

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ For these remains, see Zhu Xilu 朱錫祿, “Shandong Jiexiang Songshan faxian Han huaxiang shi” 山東嘉祥宋山發現漢畫像石, *Wenwu* 9 (1979): 1–6; “Shandong Jiexiang Songshan 1980 nian chutu de Han huaxiang shi” 山東嘉祥宋山 1980 年出土的漢畫像石, *Wenwu* 5 (1982): 60–70; Lydia Thompson, “Confucian Paragon or Popular Deity? Legendary Heroes in a Late-Eastern Han Tomb,” *Asia Major* Third Series 12, no. 2 (1999): 1–38.

⁷⁷ Liu Zunzhi 劉尊志, “Han dai mudi citang yanjiu” 漢代墓地祠堂研究. *Kaogu xuebao* 1 (2021): 57–82.

wells, and hoards. Although it is uncertain whether some or all of these texts had circulated among living people before they were buried, they can, at least, provide examples of “model forms” of real administrative and legal codes in their time,⁷⁸ which makes it reasonable to categorize such materials as a specific form of “propaganda writing” that resembled real propagandistic texts, i.e., administrative and legal documents that projected both central and provincial institutions.

The Later Roman Empire witnessed a sharp decrease in the number of entombed texts.⁷⁹ A large number of funeral monuments were built for people who were relatively low down the social scale, such as freedmen.⁸⁰ Other factors, e.g., the lack of dedicatees’ names on monumental remains, the abandonment of the “epigraphic habit” among bishops and priests after mid-fifth century CE, and the divergent spellings that show

⁷⁸ For the role of these manuscripts and textual models, see Anthony Barbieri-Low, “Model Legal and Administrative Forms from the Qin, Han, and Tang and their Role in the Facilitation of Bureaucracy and Literacy,” *Oriens Extremus* 50 (2011): 125–56.

⁷⁹ See Lawrence Keppie, *Understanding Roman Inscriptions* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 125. For the concept of epigraphy, here I apply the definition provided by Alison E. Cooley: “Epigraphy is... texts carved individually upon stone and metal; texts reproduced in multiple copies by stamps; texts included within pictures on glass or mosaic or painting; painted texts imitating the style and format of monumental texts, but which are public notices of only temporary relevance; a variety of handwritten texts, shallowly incised, in ink, or painted on almost every conceivable surface, some, like writing-tablets, intended to be used for the purpose, and others being used willy-nilly, whether a wall of a public building, private property, or tomb enclosure.” See *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 117.

⁸⁰ Part of the explanation is that many people were able to afford an epitaph or other monuments because they had joined a “burial club”; these clubs were often set up for specific professional groups to get cheaper rates for burial plots and inscriptions. Members of the clubs could also pay annual or monthly subscriptions to alleviate the effect of a “one off” payment for an epitaph. See Mark A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain, AD 300–750* (Crowmarsh: Archaeopress, 2003), 35.

attempts to represent spoken Latin but which make the written language quite distorted,⁸¹ also make it difficult to treat such remains as directly related to the literacy level and personal opinions of their elite owners. This complex situation does not mean that we cannot use Latin epigraphic materials at all in the present study. These sources can, at least, help us understand the socio-political context of the real practice of elite propaganda, which includes the activity of emperors, local administrators, military leaders, important literati and merchants, and so forth.⁸²

(III) Epistolary Materials

Greek and Latin epistolography has long been an object of attention for scholars of Roman studies. Romans had long valued Latin letter collections for their didactic and moralizing elements, which helped to preserve a large number of letters. M. B. O'Brien has pointed out that from the third century CE, 177 letters survive from eleven writers in Latin, while from the fourth century, the works of twenty-one epistolographers have come down to us in 395 letters, and 933 from forty-one writers from the fifth century, while after the sixth century the number of letters falls off sharply.⁸³ For the late antique period, the letters of holy men were often collected in part to enlighten their followers. The epistolary corpus of some venerated Christian bishops was relatively slow in taking shape,

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² See Keppie, *Understanding Roman Inscriptions*, the contents page.

⁸³ M. B. O'Brien, *Titles of address in Christian Latin Epistolography to 543 A.D* (*The Catholic University of America. Patristic Studies*) (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1930), 37.

due to the involvement of official powers.⁸⁴ Such circulating processes verify that the information in those letters could be read by people from various types of institutions: literary circles, organizations, or even the entire regional communities. It was also a tradition that some letters were read aloud in front of the public,⁸⁵ which corroborates that these materials were not only for personal communication but also for institutional purposes of propaganda.

My dissertation relies heavily on Latin letters from late antique aristocrats, especially the letter collections of some highly venerated individual Christians at that time, e.g., Ambrose of Milan (ca. 340–397), Paulinus of Nola (ca. 354–431), Sidonius Apollinari, Ruricius of Limoges, Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus, and Gregory of Tours (ca. 538–594). English translation of the letters are well accessible.⁸⁶ However, although the original versions of these texts were produced directly by the elite “propagandists” themselves, it does not mean that the materials are more reliable than inscriptions and entombed materials regarding their presentation of one’s real intention. Because they were collected by contemporaries of the Roman authors, many of these letters experienced a process of polishing and re-editing when being passed down from one

⁸⁴ Ralph Mathisen, “The ‘Publication’ of Latin Letter Collections in Late Antiquity” in Gernot Müller ed., *Zwischen Alltagskommunikation und literarischer Identitätsbildung. Kulturgeschichtliche Aspekte lateinischer Epistolographie in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter* (Steiner, 2018), 63–84.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Except for the collection of letters of each individuals, I especially rely on annotations and interpretations in Christiana Sogno et al. eds., *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2017).

person to another.⁸⁷ For instance, the transmission of Sidonius' letter often involved private circulation that each individual who obtained the letter could make his own copy if he wanted one.⁸⁸

Letters also played important roles in the socio-political life of late antique China. Most of such materials were incorporated into other works like histories, encyclopedias, anthologies, collections of biographies, and so forth.⁸⁹ They were subjected to editorial interventions and the tradition of reproduction, and therefore face similar problems of trustworthiness as other transmitted texts.⁹⁰ For the present study I will look into both collections of one's literary works (e.g., *Kong Beihai ji* 孔北海集) and transmitted historiography (especially the *Hou Hanshu* and *Sanguo zhi*) to find evidence of local elites' daily activity, their interpersonal network, as well as their language and communication.

VI. The Framework of Discursive Shifts: How Did Propaganda Transform?

Nevertheless, this dissertation does not simply present how those static components of institutions—the sense of groupness, shared principles, persistent conventions, and all those coordinative projects based on collective norms—led to the appearance of ancient propaganda. It concerns more about the dynamics in and across

⁸⁷ Ralph Mathisen, "The 'Publication' of Latin Letter Collections in Late Antiquity," 63–84.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See Antje Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 8–10.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

institutions that made propaganda fluid. What conditions made it possible for “ancient propaganda” to change its content according to varying contexts, while making these changes invisible to many of the public?

I pay attention to institutional discourse, a special component of institutional behaviors, to reveal the shifting nature of ancient propaganda that it experienced quasi-paradigmatic transformations regarding how it was expressed. According to Foucault’s original discussion in 1970, the framework of discourse analysis should be used widely, not only within the study of modern communities.⁹¹ His emphasis on information censorship has made many scholars apply the framework to the analysis of Soviet Russia and other “closed societies” in today’s world, though discourse per se can be seen anywhere in any periods of time.⁹² Institutional discourses are the discourses employed in formal or informal institutional settings, which can be workplaces,

⁹¹ According to Foucault, “That in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its power and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.” See “The Order of Discourse” in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd edition, ed. Hubert Dreyfus (University of Chicago Press, 1983), 45–58.

⁹² Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus” in *On The Reproduction Of Capitalism: Ideology And Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London and New York: Verso, 2014); James von Geldern and Richard Stites, *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays, and Folklore, 1917–1953* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Michael Gorham, “Mastering the Perverse: State Building and Language Purification in Early Soviet Russia,” *Slavic Review* 59, issue 1 (Spring 2000): 133–53; Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generations* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Caloline Humphrey, “The ‘Creative Bureaucrat’: Conflicts in the Production of Soviet Communist Party Discourse,” *Inner Asia* 10, no. 1, *Special Issue: Cadres and Discourse in Late Socialist Societies* (2008): 5–35.

educational organizations, governmental departments, and so forth, to express people's rights and obligations that are endowed by their institutions. Such discourses are intrinsically standardized, indicating a uniformed order and a relatively fixed set of speech acts regulated or organized by the institutional context.⁹³ This feature leads to the restrictions on the discursive performance of institutional members, requiring them to express themselves based on three aspects:

—The “principles of conduct” of the institution, which is determined by the political, economic, and ideological needs of its patron;

—The expert knowledge required by the institution, which is related to the specific training its members are demanded to receive;

—The technical skills needed by the institution to direct its targeted audiences, like the ways used by its members to provoke certain emotions, to recall conventional prejudices, or to change topics frequently.

These aspects make institutional discourse different from the discourse employed in private/personal settings in which casual interactions and communications usually occur. In Late Antiquity, such public contexts made it possible for local elites to build a “regime of truth” through discursive practices. By bringing the collective values of certain institutions into verbal and non-verbal communication, these people created a discourse to distinguish “true” from “false” statements, used specific discursive techniques and procedures which were valorized for obtaining certain “truths,” and

⁹³ Alice F. Freed, “Institutional Discourse” in *The International Encyclopedia of Language & Social Interaction*, eds. Karen Tracy, Cornelia Ilie and Todd Sandel (Boston: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), 809–27.

declared themselves as “truth-makers.” This triangular relationship of “truth,” discourse, and politics was not stable. There were often shifts within the relationships, which were reflected through the various forms of power-discourse in different socio-political contexts. I will combine the Foucauldian concept of discursive regime with Bourdieu’s “linguistic market,”⁹⁴ arguing that local elites deployed their accumulated linguistic resources and implicitly adapted their words to the demands of the social field or market that was their audience. The term “discourse” has three layers of meaning in my discussion: the medium of power, the space where interlocutors exchange their information and build connections with the language, and the concrete individual practice that reflects an interlocutor’s competence as a strategic player—the ability to put language resources to practical use and to anticipate the reception of words to gain profit from this.

Based on these three dimensions of discourse, here I look into two discursive shifts that occurred in the making of local elite propaganda during the ancient period. These shifts reflect the changing relationship of “truth,” language, and the political regime. Throughout the entire process of such transformations, the institutional discourse of local elites oscillated between two situations: being subservient to an outside “master” or existing independently according to its own principles.

(I) The Dominant Discourse of Preimperial and Early Imperial Times: History, Ritual, and the Meta-Discursive Master

⁹⁴ For the concept, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 7th edition, trans. Gino Raymond (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

During the long period of the pre-imperial and early imperial eras, socio-political discourse was hardly a realm of human-to-human communication but a loftier domain where a non-human “master” or authority offered both sides of the dialogue a canon to follow. This master exerted its power over speakers and authors through mechanisms of history and ritual, the two important origins of imperial legitimacy which were controlled by the ruling class.⁹⁵

The fundamental principles of social practice grew outside of people’s daily conversation to discipline their day-to-day practice. Ritual and history offered socio-political discourse divine meanings and therefore made such a discourse context-independent, representing an eternal regime which will never come to an end. From the late Warring States to the Han period, socio-political discourses were largely controlled by the small group of rulers and central elites who shared not only literacy but also the freedom to use it. Most materials we have access to were produced by and for the central government, like the mountain stelae of the First Emperor, the excavated legal and administrative manuscripts, early historiographical writings, bronze inscriptions, and so forth. Relatively limited evidence of local propaganda can be found from this time period.

The existence of such a meta-discursive master can be observed on the Roman side as well. Monumentality is an important feature in late Republican and early Imperial Roman writings, which highlights tradition, ancestors, and the universality of imperial

⁹⁵ Mark E. Lewis and Martin Kern have already noticed the existence of such authority beyond words as a constituent element of state power. See Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999); Kern, “Announcement from the Mountains” in *Conceiving the Empire: China and Rome Compared*, ed. Fritz-Heiner Mutschler and Achim Mittag (Oxford University Press, 2008), 217–40.

virtues. The aim of literary works had been considered to be the preservation of tradition.⁹⁶ The absolute authority of ancestors, *nostri maiores*, was frequently mentioned to authenticate the Romanness of “our” Roman ways that were different from those of the Greeks.⁹⁷ The significance of history as a master beyond discourse was emphasized not only to define the Roman discourse per se but also to distinguish Roman people from “others.” This made the Romans different from the ancient Chinese, who used history primarily to consolidate domestic control.

Meanwhile, ritualistic elements can be seen in discourses that illustrated the importance of momentary events of lasting significance. Different from the Chinese side, Roman elites often invited more than two groups of people to participate in ritual-related discussions, and the importance of virtue came to be revealed and consolidated in such debates.⁹⁸ These “controversies” over monuments might have their basis in the tradition of public debate and training in oratory skills.⁹⁹ This use of debates to consolidate the non-negotiable position of a certain authority, to some extent, also shaped the European understanding of “truth,” that the highest principle is discovered rather than given. An authority beyond such discourses—an imperial ideal related to the divine past of Romans—therefore became the axis of conversation, which laid the hyper-human basis of

⁹⁶ See Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 18.

⁹⁷ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome’s Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24.

⁹⁸ E.g., Pliny who questioned the justification of Palla’s monument.

⁹⁹ For related discussions, see Robert Morstein-Marx, *Mass Oratory and Political Power in the Late Roman Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

socio-political language.

(II) The First Discursive Shift: The Disappearance of the Master

Materials from the late antique era indicate that the outside master seems to have largely disappeared from socio-political discourses. For China, this shift was hardly sudden. The pre-Qin period had already witnessed some harbingers of changes, in which ideological language, rather than centering on history/ritual and replicating itself from one context to another, became more associated with the circumstantial need of interlocutors. Early Legalists, e.g., Han Fei 韓非, insisted that the difficulty in conversation is usually related to the varying psychology of interlocutors.¹⁰⁰ In the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 text (3rd century BCE), the real connection between subjective interlocutors is further emphasized as the central element of language-related practices: only if a message makes its recipients “feel comfortable” could it be easily accepted and disseminated.¹⁰¹ The once hidden “selves” of language producers now appeared, redefining language production as a subjective psychological exercise that happens before and throughout the real act of communication.

Such a view of language came to flourish during the latter half of the Eastern Han (after 140 CE). As elite propaganda enjoyed growth in local areas, the previous

¹⁰⁰ The original text is from the “Shui nan” 說難 chapter of *Hanfeizi*: “All difficulties of persuading (someone of superior positions) is to understand the psychology and mindset of the one you are trying to persuade, in order to make my language better adapted to [their situation].” 凡說之難：在知所說之心，可以吾說當之。

¹⁰¹ “All languages (for edification) should give (others) the feeling of comfort rather than didacticism. All languages (for edification) should give (others) the feeling of comfort rather than didacticism.” 凡說者，兌之也，非說之也。 See the chapter “Quan xue” 勸學。

authority-based discourse was challenged, and the homogeneous representation of imperial power as a static and eternal construct was now brought into question. The persuasiveness of discourse was now a personal determination by information recipients. This was partly due to the changed circumstances, for the emperor was now hardly the sole judge and arbiter in many bureaucratic and legal matters.¹⁰² For example, in the text of the “Wu Ban Stele,” the dedicatee’s personal stories and ambitions are shared in the local context among his peer officials and patrons, for they were supporting the same sorts of ideologies and agendas. The traditional narration of history is disenchanting in the text and is used to reconstruct a past moment of the individual dedicatee, becoming inferior and secondary to the self-presentation of Wu Ban and his elite peers. Personal information prioritizes historical memories to become the subject matter.¹⁰³

Similar tendencies can be also observed from other writing practices. As Puett argues, commentarial practice in this period, e.g., Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127–200) work, “was concerned not with uncovering the intentions of a sage but in reconstructing an era... simply putting together the fragments of material we possess.”¹⁰⁴ Authors of texts had the authority to decide whether they needed to use historical narratives or not, which means

¹⁰² See Enno Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong’s Dudian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

¹⁰³ Except for the features that can be presented by the Wu Ban stele, ritual elements in texts also became more associated with provincial contexts rather than the abstract state ideology. This can be seen from the various local deities, sages, and heroes in Han stone inscriptions and images. See Lydia Thompson, “Confucian Paragon or Popular Deity? Legendary Heroes in a Late-Eastern Han Tomb.” *Asia Major* Third Series 12, no. 2 (1999): 1–38.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Puett, “Text and Commentary: The Early Tradition” in *Classical Chinese Literature*, eds. Wiebke Denecke, Wai-Yee Li, and Xiaofei Tian (Oxford University Press, 2017), 112–22.

that these narratives could be abandoned if writers found them unnecessary.

Gallo-Roman elites in the post-Constantinian era also used a language different from that of the past in their local propaganda. Some features of the Han local elite discourse can be seen in the communication among Gallo-Romans regarding Christianity—the official ideology at that time. Romans enjoyed a long history of linking language production with individuals or groups, which can be traced to the early influence of Plato and Aristotle, where rhetoric is essentially an art, a technique and logic that must be practiced in the hands of specific human beings.¹⁰⁵ The formation of a speaking subjectivity had often been the center of intellectual discussion. In Late Antiquity, strategies of self-presentation and the making of religious orthodoxy often took the shape of language-related performances in which the display of oratorical skills also incorporated moral and ethical judgments about the performer.¹⁰⁶ Impacted by this trend, the practice of writing highlighted the preeminent position of the individual writer (or speaker, in a broader sense) in the production of communicative materials. Christian writers, by having their subjectivity fully presented in written works, typically show how socio-political discourses became de-historicized.

Paulinus of Nola's (ca. 354–431) poem *Natalicia* offers an illustrative case. This

¹⁰⁵ For Plato's conception that rhetoric is essentially a pseudo art, see Charles L. Griswold, "Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-rhetoric/>; for Aristotle's central opinions in the *Rhetoric*, see Christof Rapp, "Aristotle's Rhetoric," *Ibid.*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/#dialectic>. Also see W. Martin Bloomer, *The School of Rome: Latin Studies and the Origins of Liberal Education* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 174–75.

¹⁰⁶ For this opinion, see Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas, *The Dynamics of Rhetorical Performances in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2019).

work was composed for Felix's feast day each January 14,¹⁰⁷ probably having been delivered by Paulinus himself in the ritual context in front of his "country people" audience.¹⁰⁸ Similar to Wu Ban's case, the mention of historical events and rulers only serves to build the personal history of Felix, the individual Christian martyr who represents Paulinus' own ideals. The author plays the role of an actor and borrows the old rhetoric of praise, e.g., panegyrics and *laudatio funebris* (in which a political life is publicly celebrated),¹⁰⁹ to justify the ideas in the text not through the connection between an individual and the realm of imperium, but by highlighting this person's special value as a local Christian. A "binary language" with old forms and new content thus emerges here.¹¹⁰ The existence of this form of language is partly due to the tighter connections among Gallic elites, through which they relied on informal institutions to "interact with wider social and political forces" and shared a series of block expressions that could hardly be deciphered by outsiders. Friendship and kinship networks facilitated the making of such institutions and associations.¹¹¹

(III) The Second Discursive Shift: A New Aesthetic and Visual Master

¹⁰⁷ See Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 162–63.

¹⁰⁸ See Ian Fielding, "Performing Miracles: The *Natalicia* of Paulinus of Nola as Popular Entertainment," *Ramus* 47, no. 1(2018): 1–15.

¹⁰⁹ For distinctions between the plain funeral oration and the ornate *laudatio*, see Catherine Ware, "Panegyric and the Discourse of Praise in Late Antiquity," *JRS* (2019): 1–14.

¹¹⁰ See Michele R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

From the last two decades of Emperor Xian 獻帝 (ca. 200–220 CE) to the Three Kingdoms and early Western Jin periods, the language of local elites experienced another shift in which a new, “third-party” authority came to dominate socio-political discourse. The very concept of “truth” changed again in terms of its relationship with language. In the first stage, it had been produced through the unified state, its history and rituals. During the second stage, it derived from individual interlocutors. In this new phase, it grew from language itself, the aesthetic form of messages. Tian Xiaofei has suggested that there was a tendency in Eastern Jin writing that authors made attempts to visualize the object of their observations and to represent this visualizing process in their literary work.¹¹² I argue, however, that the early forms of this tendency could already be seen in the Jian’an 建安 period and its aftermath, during which writing became a way of visualizing, following similar principles as the visual arts: balance, movement, proportion, variety, and contrast. This is also where the Wei-Jin metaphysics obtained its basic paradigms, for instance, the interplay between image (*xiang* 象) and mood (*yi* 意).¹¹³

One case from this period is Kong Rong’s 孔融 (153–208 CE) “Jian Mi Heng biao” 薦禰衡表 (A Memorial to Recommend Mi Heng). Kong Rong describes Mi Heng’s talent by using a series of metaphors with varying shapes and colors, while his audiences, or “viewers,” are expected to be disoriented. They might forget to think carefully about the theme (i.e., the exact definition and criteria of “being talented”) but be

¹¹² Tian Xiaofei, “Seeing with the Mind’s Eye: The Eastern Jin Discourse of Visualization and Imagination,” *Asia Major* Third Series 18, no. 2 (2005): 67–102.

¹¹³ Su Baohua 蘇葆華, *Wei-Jin xuan xue yu zhongguo shenmei fanshi* 魏晉玄學與中國審美範式 (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2013), 74.

distracted by the author's skill and artistry. This lack of referential function is partly due to the new position and status of local literati in this period. Because of their reliance on powerful warlords, literati were now less confident in their own capability to build a new society and thus came to pursue more collaboration. A new discourse based on aesthetic values, because of its impressiveness to all, could be used to advertise oneself to a wider community.

Meanwhile, because the recruitment of capable officials came to be a basic social question,¹¹⁴ evaluating one's personal talent and capability became a popular trend. Formal and informal practices of public evaluation of certain individuals, e.g., Xu Shao 許劭 (150–195) and Xu Jing's 許靖 (147–222) "Monthly Review" (*Yuedan ping* 月旦評), were welcomed by the entire elite class. These activities facilitated the emergence of a language filled with artistic exaggeration and ornamentation, which was initially applied to the assessment of individuals but then spread to other domains of discourse production.

The flourishing of Daoist religion was also partly responsible for the visualized texts. The emphasis on "mental seeing" and "imaginary landscapes" in Daoist practice could explain not only the specific writing style but also the elite interest in calligraphy and painting in the early Jin. The later art criticism, e.g., Xie He's 謝赫 (d. after 532) "Six Criteria" (*liufa* 六法) of traditional painting, was also partly influenced by these religious elements that centered on how to produce images through one's mind.¹¹⁵ The

¹¹⁴ Raje de Crespigny, "The Three Kingdoms and Western Jin: A History of China in the Third Century AD" in *East Asian History: The Continuation of Papers on Far Eastern History*. Vol. 1, ed. Geremie Barme (June 1991): 1–36.

¹¹⁵ See Paul R. Goldin, "Two Notes on Xie He's 謝赫 'Six Criteria' (*liufa* 六法),

overlap between Xie He and earlier literary criticism (e.g., *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍) corroborates the convergence of visual and literary arts after Han dynasty, which constituted the basic framework of aesthetics in medieval China.

In the case of Gaul, the shift took place in the period between the very end of late antiquity and the early era of the western Christian kingdoms (ca. 430s to the late sixth century CE). Michael Roberts has pointed out that the comparison between poetry and visual arts was a commonplace in antiquity and that the “visualization” of literary texts received special impetus in late antiquity.¹¹⁶ Other genres, e.g., letters, also witnessed such a trend. One indicator is the authors’ interests in describing the exterior style of things (like architecture and dresses) and their activity of intensifying the aesthetic aspect of such items to make the literary representations transcend reality. The other indicator is elite writers’ intentional use of skills from the visual arts, especially their growing interests in a “wandering” way of writing that challenged logic and rigid structure.¹¹⁷ Scholars define the style of representative elite literature at this time as “artfully learned playfulness (*lusus*),” which emphasizes the aesthetic aspect of communication in which language was a tool for entertainment.

Sidonius Apollinaris’ personal letters offer insightful instances of visualized texts. Like Michael Roberts and some other scholars have argued, there is an analogy between the technique of painting and the textual composition (which is quite similar to China).

Aided by Digital Databases,” *T’oung Pao* 104 (2018): 496–510.

¹¹⁶ See Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 66.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

The entire structure is broken into “a myriad of chromatically separated words... glitter and scintillate with reflected light and color”¹¹⁸ but re-arranged as a whole according to the changing perspective of the viewer. The art criticism of the 18th-century had focused on these issues of ancient art. European critics at that time offered important theories of classical art and made significant contributions to the making of the modern discipline of Aesthetics.

The use of visual strategies can also be observed from Gallic aristocrats’ textual reconstruction of history, which “called on the epic repertoire of classical exempla or images from mythology when necessary.”¹¹⁹ By representing Greek and Roman mythology as vivid scenes to their audiences, Sidonius and his comrades intended to defend and publicize their Gallo-Roman identity in front of the Frankish invasion. These seemingly ornamented discourses, especially the “playful writings,” served as protection for Gallic authors in the period of political instability, just as in the case of China.

VII. Chapter Outlines

The above discussion offers the fundamental framework of my entire dissertation. It provides both the logic and methodologies I follow, to examine the picture of local elite propaganda in two empires, Eastern Han China and Western Rome, from the late antique to early medieval period, and how this propaganda relied on textual media as its channels.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Roberts, *The Jeweled Style*, 71. Hans Peter L’Orange and P. J. Nordhagen, *Mosaics*. 1966: 58.

¹¹⁹ Sigrid Mratschek, “Creating Identity from the Past: The Construction of History in the Letters of Sidonius” in *New Approaches to Sidonius Apollinaris*, eds. Johannes A. van Waarden and Gavin Kelly (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).

Chapter One, “Manufacturers of the ‘Informational Empire’: The Ethics and Institutions of Local Elite Propaganda in Han China and Imperial Rome” explores the ways in which the elites of both the Han and Roman empires acted as formal or informal institutions to produce information, which made propaganda a specific social culture that helped define this group of population.

Chapter Two, “Information Nexuses, Text Production, and the Forming of Local Speech: The Elite Management of Public Communication in Two Regions” focuses on the QXY region from the Western Han to the early Western Jin (ca. 200 BCE–270 CE), and the region that had been called “Gaul” from the late Republican period to the early Medieval era (ca. 100 BCE–500 CE), to further illustrate how local elites in the two areas invented various types of textual materials as an agency to foster the cohesion of these people’s activities. Texts of different provenances and genres provided relatively unified forms of discourses that affected the mindsets and cognition of local elites.

Chapters Three and Four concentrate on textual materials of the two areas to explore the discursive shifts that occurred in the making of local elite propaganda during this transitional period. Throughout the entire process of such transformations, the institutional discourse of local elites oscillated between two situations—being subservient to an outside “master” or existing independently according to its own principles—which was reflected through the text-related practices of various elite groups, circles, organizations, and communities.

As a conclusion, I will argue that the changing relationships of “truth,” language, and the political regimes during this transitional period were so complicated that the real

boundary between the so-called “ancient” and “medieval” periods is probably not as clear as we have thought.

PART I
THE INSTITUTIONS OF LOCAL ELITE PROPAGANDA

Chapters One and Two focus on the institutional basis of local elite propaganda, from the beginning of the early imperial period to Late Antiquity. As stated in the Introduction, by “institution” I refer to two components of human society: 1) certain forms of cooperation and interaction of individuals that can help them transcend mutually isolated ways of existence, that is, formal or informal organizations of people; and 2) a special system of norms or rules that act as social determinants of individual behavior, deriving from people’s collective expectations about different social roles. Therefore I am examining not simply the exterior forms, or methods, that associated ancient people as a series of groupings, but also the inner principles that sustained the existence and development of such groupings. These forms and principles of human groupings served as the fundamental conditions for the operation of local elite propaganda, in not only the two empires under discussion here—the Han Empire of China and the Roman Empire—but also in two specific regions of these empires: the Qing-Xu-Yan area of Han China and the Gallic provinces of imperial Rome.

It has been acknowledged among modern scholars that the management of information is at the center of propaganda behavior. To propagate something is to determine the relationship of information/message to a specific context,¹ or, to enable the “toolization” or even “weaponization” of information.² This toolization or weaponization process happens within particular institutions, and obtains its meaning through the

¹ Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion* (New York: SAGE Publications, 2018), 2.

² James J. F. Forest, “Political Warfare and Propaganda,” *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 13–33.

institutional reception of information by certain audiences. But scholars have not yet reached an agreement about the scale of such an institutionalizing process in ancient propaganda activities. Many researchers of the ancient world have followed a macro perspective, treating states, countries, and empires as sites of the institutional management of information that served propaganda purposes. There is no doubt that these human groupings were, indeed, types of human institutions, but they were such large institutions that they could easily blur the features of propaganda behaviors on a relatively micro level, e.g., in a certain local community. This emphasis on political regimes has also led to a tendency in scholarly discussion to pay too much attention to the bureaucratic organizations/practices in ancient periods of time, while the quotidian lives of the people who had direct relationships with their local environments are usually neglected. Is it possible to transcend this angle of “state politics”?

Chapters One and Two offer a response to this question. I argue that local elites in the Han and Roman Empires formed various types of associations that played the role of information institutions. These institutions, which could be either physical or imagined, relied heavily on the practice of textual production. In specific cases, the messages they produced could become formal knowledge that served the public good and enabled the redistribution of power. Without this broader approach to textual production, our understanding of “ancient propaganda” might be reduced to persuasive communication, if we neglect the generative role of information such that it can form doctrines or faiths and give rise to social changes as autonomous forces.

CHAPTER ONE

Manufacturers of the “Informational Empire”:

The Ethics and Institutions of Local Elite Propaganda in Han China and Imperial Rome

I begin with two historical texts, one from early imperial Rome, the other from early imperial China:

M. Verrius Flaccus libertinus docendi genere maxime incla ruit. Namque ad exercitanda discentium ingenia aequales inter se committere solebat, proposita non solum materia quam scriberent sed et praemio quod uictor auferret. Id erat liber aliquis antiquus, pulcher aut rarior. Quare ab Augusto quoque nepotibus eius, praeceptor electus transiit in Palatium cum tota schola, uerum ut ne quem amplius posthac discipulum reciperet, docuitque in atrio Catulinae domus....et centena sestertia in annum accepit.

Marcus Verrius Flaccus gained fame especially from the character of his teaching: for he made a general practice of pitting students of similar ages and attainments against each other in competition, to give their talents a workout, and would propose not only the subject for their compositions but also a prize for the winner; typically, some old book that was attractive or rare. Because of this renown he was also chosen by Augustus to teach his grandsons, and so he transferred his teaching to the Palatium [presumably the imperial palace on the Palatine hill], taking the whole school with him; though on the condition that he accept no more students thereafter; he taught in the atrium of Catulus' house... receiving 100,000 sesterces a year.¹

文翁...景帝末，為蜀郡守，仁愛好教化。見蜀地僻陋有蠻夷風，文翁欲誘進之...又修起學官於成都市中，招下縣子弟以為學官弟子...每出行縣，益從學官諸生明經飭行者與俱，使傳教令，出入閭閻。縣邑吏民見而榮之，數年，爭欲為學官弟子，富人至出錢以求之。繇是大化，蜀地學於京師者比齊魯焉。

Wen Weng...towards the end of the reign of Emperor Jing served as Governor of

¹ *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* 17.1–2. For the Latin text, see Suetonius, *C. Suetoni Tranquilli De grammaticis et rhetoribus, edidit, apparatu et commentario criticis instruxit Rodney Potter Robinson* (Paris : E. Champion, 1925), 25–26. For the English translation, see *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*, 1st edition, trans. Robert A. Kaster (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

Shu Commandery (in present-day central Sichuan). He was benevolent, compassionate, and fond of enlightening others. Having witnessed that the Shu region was peripheral, rustic, and had many customs of barbarian groups, he decided to direct the people there to a more advanced civilization.... [He] built the Office of Academia in the urban area of Chengdu, enrolling students from subordinate counties. Each time he visited those subordinate counties, he had the existing students of the Office of Academia accompany him, letting them publicize teachings and ordinances. They even entered the private household to visit female members of the family. Local officials and commoners admired them very much, and for several years, competed to be enrolled in the Office of Academia. Wealthy people even sought to be enrolled by donating their money. Since then [the Chengdu area] became widely civilized, and Shu people who traveled to the imperial capital to study numbered as many as those from the Qi-Lu region.²

The first text is from Suetonius' (d. after 122 CE) *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus*; the second is from the *Hanshu* of Ban Gu 班固 (32–92). Both pieces have traditionally been conceived as evidence of the state-sponsored educational systems in the two empires.

Verrius Flaccus (ca. 55 BCE–20 CE) has been known for his transition from a freedman to an imperial instructor. Thanks to the work of Suetonius, his great reputation has long been regarded as resulting from his personal connection with Augustus, and many of his works have been considered “acts of propaganda supporting the new Augustan regime.”³

Similarly, the accomplishments of Wen Weng 文翁 (187–110 BCE), Governor of the Province of Shu 蜀 during the latter reign of Emperor Jing 景帝, has often been thought of, based on Ban Gu's interpretation, as part of the Han emperor's state-wide educational project to publicize the core ideology of the recently established empire.⁴ It is the notion

² Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 漢書 (hereafter *HS*), comm. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1964), 89. 3625.

³ Julia C. Hernández, “The Roman Calendar as an Expression of Augustan Culture: An Examination of the Fasti Praenestini,” *Chrestomathy* 4 (2005): 108–23.

of a wheel-and-spoke model of knowledge production that has shaped our understanding of the two individuals.

This preoccupation with the uni-centered machinery of message dissemination limits scholars' approaches to the two personages and their importance. Revisiting the texts quoted above could help clarify many points. Suetonius stresses the flexible teaching skills of Flaccus that required students to display their personal talents and capabilities, through competitions and awards. These teaching methods appear to have been Flaccus' personal methods, having been designed long before Augustus invited him to serve the imperial house. Likewise, there is no hint in the *Hanshu* that Wen Weng promoted local education to meet the demand of the Han emperor. His own personality—"being fond of enlightening others"—seems to have determined what he sought to accomplish. The two men's ultimate achievements are exceptional, with one of them transforming his private school into a royal institution, while the other made his local area one of the most civilized regions of the empire. But were they indeed just spokesmen of the imperial regimes, men who devoted themselves entirely to the need of their monarchs? To what extent were they "heroes of the empire," and in what sense were they working for themselves?

The present chapter explores the roles of such elites, like Flaccus and Wen Weng, in disseminating knowledge about their own groups and their significance in the making

⁴ For related discussions, see He Ruquan 何汝泉, "Wen Weng zhi Shu kaolun" 文翁治蜀考論, *Xi'nan shifan daxue xuebao (Renwen shehui kexue ban)* 西南師範大學學報 (人文社會科學版) 4 (1980): 34–42; Fang Rui 房銳, "Wen Weng hua Shu dui Ruxue chuanbo de tuidong yiyi" 文翁化蜀對儒學傳播的推動意義, *Kongzi yanjiu* 孔子研究 2 (2007): 46–51; Ren Jiantao 任建濤, "Wen Weng zhishu, Han jia zhidu yu guojia chongjian" 文翁治蜀、漢家制度與國家重建, *Tianfu xinlun* 天府新論 3 (2021): 32–42.

of a new form of polity that was founded upon the institutional production of information. I would argue that it was the key leaders of local areas who relied on new informational institutions to build their rule that constituted the value layer of “ancient imperium.” Recent scholars sometimes base their statements on the assumption that government agencies played the central role in the building of premodern “information polities,” reducing a society to a series of administrative organizational structures.⁵ In the above cases of Han and Roman elites, however, the pursuit of a cultural ideal was as significant as the desire for administrative power, especially considering that the two men had devoted much of their time to pure educational affairs, rather than to their official obligations. This elite passion for knowledge and information has two bases. As these elite populations wanted to distinguish themselves from others, they needed to let others know that certain social areas were exclusively dominated by them. It was also a need for them to appeal to allies to expand their party, wherein information was used to form a we-group; message producers served their parties, and did not work exclusively for the entire polity.

The two examples analyzed in this chapter, the Han empire of China (202 BCE–220 CE) and the Roman Empire before the fall of the West (27 BCE–476 CE), reflect this close relationship between the expansion of the elite community and the

⁵ For related discussions, see Sarah E. Bond, “Curial Communiqué: Memory, Propaganda, and the Roman Senate House” in *Aspects of Ancient Institutions and Geography*, eds. Lee L. Brice and Daniëlle Slootjes (Leiden: Brill: 2014), 84–102; Matthew D. H. Clark, *Augustus, First Roman Emperor: Power, Propaganda and the Politics of Survival* (Liverpool University Press, 2010); Hilde De Weerd, *Information, Territory, and Networks: The Crisis and Maintenance of Empire in Song China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016).

growing enthusiasm for information management in early imperial societies. The two vast geographic areas, one on the east of the Eurasian continent and the other on the west, have long been viewed as case studies for how ancient imperium was built. The present chapter examines how an important aspect of this imperium, the elite leadership coalition, was established through divergent interest groups, in the process of which specific ethics of elites were publicized through various information institutions, e.g., ritual/exhibition management institutions, teaching/advisory institutions, and philanthropic institutions. The establishment of elite coalitions thus should be considered societal-wide information campaigns, in which traditional institutions came to be incorporated into a new system of social organizations that were based on the encoding, decoding, storing, and retrieving of messages.⁶ A new elite culture of propaganda emerged, permeating the local community, so that most individual elites were, more or less, involved in the production or reception of certain values.

One crucial issue this chapter investigates is how the interpersonal relationships of individual elites helped form their larger-scale coalition by founding new institutions. Such institutions did not arise from a vacuum but were rooted in the real interplay among elite men and women. Researchers often use fixed labels to mark the dominant patterns of interpersonal relations in the two empires. For the Han side, the relations are considered isomorphic with Confucian filial piety; for the Romans, they are described as various

⁶ For these functions of information organizations, see Arvind Shatdal and Neharika Vohra, "How Information Sharing in Groups Changes with Passage of Time: A Transactive Memory Perspective," *IMJ* 3, issue 3 (October–December, 2011): 12–18.

forms of clientelism.⁷ These affiliations reveal the elites commitment to social traditions but largely neglect the new faiths and imaginations hidden behind their understanding of self and things. Social connections can foster meaning. They are closely associated with human notions of how people existed in the past, exist right now, and should exist in the future. These ideas might have risen in certain moments when one's profound emotions and rationality were ignited by others in a crowd where individuals acted as mutual resonators. What we are going to explore is how this ignition happened and how its effect was perpetuated. With the existence of new elite information institutions, such mutual resonance and the meaning it provoked were decoded as transmittable messages, accepted by more elite populations, and legitimized as part of the elite ethical system. It was through that transmission and legitimization that the "quasi-rulers"—those key leaders of local areas, grew in their influence as propaganda agents.

So my efforts here will concentrate on four aspects:

1) An informal structure of community leadership that followed a different mechanism from the bureaucratic system and enjoyed growth as the elite group became more active in voicing their position as contenders who were deeply engaged in society-wide debates. Such elite activities largely constituted the value dimension of the concept, "ancient imperium."

2) Elites in both Han China and Rome faced tremendous transformations and

⁷ For instance, see Tim Connolly, "Friendship and Filial Piety: Relational Ethics in Aristotle and Early Confucianism." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 39, issue 1 (Mar. 2012): 71–88; John Nicols, *Civic Patronage in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Peter Garnsey, "Roman patronage" in *From the Tetrarchs to the Theodosians: Later Roman History and Culture, 284–450 CE*, eds. Scott McGill, Cristiana Sogno, and Edward Watts (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

uncertainties in their status, which made them seek a stronger coalition. The new coalition was based on a new system of practical ethics. Basic principles of such ethics were derived from concrete interactions, especially communication, among elite populations.

3) These forms of elite ethics were developed by the agents as a new institutional philosophy. They were expressed by a range of informational institutions as readable messages, serving as representative narratives of elite parties. The major work of these institutions included ritual and exhibition management, teaching or advisory roles, and philanthropic issues.

4) Such information institutions served the key leaders of local communities by enabling these people to attract more elite allies. The elite allies accepted a dual-layered rulership, in which they supported their local master as much as they supported the emperor. An elite propagandistic culture based on information production and reception thereby permeated the entire elite group.

I. The Doubtful Integrity of States: Elite Voices and the Twofold Imperium

It is necessary to first examine some essential features of ancient imperial states before looking into their elite populations.⁸ In historical writing, the concept of “state”

⁸ The modern English term, “ancient,” was created in hindsight. It is more an intellectual device introduced in post-classical scholarship. Ancient already obtained its meaning of “belonging to time past” in Middle English no later than the 1400s. See Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7250?rskey=O0mmA1&result=2#eid>. From the early 20th century, scholars from the English-speaking world started to use the fall of the Western Roman Empire as the end date of “ancient history.” See I. S. Clare, *Library of universal history: containing a record of the human race from the earliest historical period to the present time; embracing a general survey of the progress of mankind in national and social life, civil government, religion, literature, science, and art* (New York: Union Book, 1906):

usually indicates a high level of structural integration in the realms of society, ideology, military, and material production. This does not preclude the possibility that, within such a polity, there might exist different frames of social rules or different institutional systems of decision making.⁹ In his book *The Dual State*, Ernst Fraenkel argues that there were two “states” in the Third Reich: the normative and the prerogative. The former refers to “an administrative body endowed with elaborate powers for safeguarding the legal order as expressed in statutes, decisions of the courts, and activities of the administrative agencies,” while the latter is “the governmental system which exercises unlimited

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433061830802&view=1up&seq=47>.

The Chinese equivalent of an “ancient period,” *gudai* 古代, is not entirely the product of that era either. A term often used interchangeably with *gudai* is *shanggu* 上古 (“high antiquity”), which was invented in the pre-modern era. It has been used to refer to different periods according to varying contexts. Tse Wai Kit (Wicky Tse) 謝偉傑 has analyzed the making of the term during the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms periods, pointing out that traditional Confucian scholars, e.g., Ma Rong 馬融 and Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, used the term based on their understanding of the *Shangshu* and its historical view. Tse also points out that the term was loosely used during and after Jin Dynasty. See Tse, “Hwei Zhonggu? Zhonggu yici jiqi zhishe shiduan zai zhongguo shixue zhong de mosu” 何謂「中古」? —「中古」一詞及其指涉時段在中國史學中的模塑, *Zhongguo zhonggu shi jikan* 中國中古史集刊 2 (2016): 3–19. *Shanggu* and *gudai* have long been translated as “antiquity” in English contexts. Michael Puett and Karine Chemla have looked into the applicability of this term regarding the historical view of Han and Jin times, while other scholars, e.g., Peter K. Bol, reviewed how this term has been used in the study of historiography of medieval China. See Puett, “The Belatedness of the Present: Debates over Antiquity during the Han Dynasty,” Chemla, “Antiquity in the Shape of a Canon: Views on Antiquity from the Outlook of Mathematics,” Bol, “When Antiquity Matters: Thinking about and with Antiquity in the Tang-Song Transition,” in the *Perceptions of Antiquity in Chinese Civilization*, eds. Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 2008), 177–90, 191–208, 209–236. The term *shanggu* was also borrowed by Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 to refer to the long historical period before the ultimate collapse of the Eastern Han dynasty, which then became widely accepted among modern historians. See *Shina jōkoshi* 支那上古史 (Tokyo: Kobundo 弘文堂, 1944).

⁹ For the definition of political integrity, see Nikola Lj. Ilievski, “The Concept of Political Integration: The Perspectives of Neofunctionalist Theory,” *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* Vol. 1, No. 1 (2015): 1–14.

arbitrariness and violence unchecked by any legal guarantees.”¹⁰ This division is based on whether the hard legal instruments work in real political practices. Ancient historians also accept similar dichotomies, looking into the realms beyond realpolitik. Mark E. Lewis argues that many people who were not employed by the Warring State polities (scholars, hermits, braves, writers, and locally powerful families, etc.) used specific language and practices to define a non-state public realm which remained in permanent tension with the imperial government.¹¹ Nicole Loraux, supporting a cultural viewpoint, suggests that the Greek city, in the eyes of poets like Hephaestus, includes two: one is engaged in the peacetime activities of marriage and justice, whereas the other confronts the war that rages at its gates.¹²

The authors remind us not to treat a state as being whole and entire, in the sense of legitimately using specific techniques in the arrangement of people and things. Within a state there could be different methods to arrange such elements, and the collaboration of people who employed such methods could not be taken as a given. This understanding of the state already had its primitive forms in antiquity when the notion of *imperium* came into being. The Latin term, literally meaning the power or authority to command or control, experienced a long development. Werner Suerbaum finds that the connotation of the term changed from the designation of the Romans’ political authority over other

¹⁰ Fraenkel, *The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship* (Clark: The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2010), xiii.

¹¹ See Mark E. Lewis, *Honor and Shame in Early China* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1.

¹² See Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache with Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

people to a notion with spatial implications that could also be applied to other regions.¹³

In the medieval period the concept was further connected with the sovereignty of the sole monarch, while its various implications—as not only a specific form of the political entity but also a culture in which rulers rely on their status to exert influence—were further confirmed.¹⁴ Many later researchers accept this multifaceted concept and consider it as the basis of another more recent notion, *imperialism*. In his article on the sociological views of imperialism, Mohammad H. Tamdgidi does not actually differentiate the two terms but takes both as signifying “political domination, cultural conversion, and economic exploitation” that restrict individual freedom and self-determination.¹⁵

So, a state penetrated by imperium, from the very beginning, should not be considered as a uni-dimensional, monolithic entity that does not allow measurements from different angles. Regarding the two ancient empires discussed here, Han China and Rome, two such patterns are especially noticeable in historical accounts. One is the constantly expanding system of state bureaucracy that produced new experiences and knowledge for the common public. Non-ranked individuals now had concrete feelings

¹³ Werner Suerbaum, *Vom antiken zum frühmittelalterlichen Staatsbegriff. Über Verwendung und Bedeutung von res publica, regnum, imperium und status von Cicero bis Jordanis* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1977), quoted in Christoph Mauntel, “Beyond Rome: The Polyvalent Usage and Levels of Meaning of Imperator and Imperium in Medieval Europe” in *Renovatio, inventio, absentia imperii. From the Roman Empire to contemporary imperialism*, eds. Wouter Bracke, Jan Nelis, and Jan de Maeyer (Etudes (Institut Historique belge de Rome), Turnhout 2018): 69–92.

¹⁴ See Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 1961).

¹⁵ Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, “Toward a Dialectical Conception of Imperiality: The Transitory (Heuristic) Nature of the Primacy of Analyses of Economies in World-Historical Social Science,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 29, no. 4 (2006): 291–328.

that they were part of the empire, as they could be directly contacted by the state administrative/legal institutions. Heads of the family were expected to have some practical knowledge about household or birth registration, while ordinary males and females should have some knowledge of the statutes to avoid punishment. Commoners also fulfilled certain financial and labor obligations to confirm their membership in the empire, by paying taxes or serving in the army. What helped maintain their involvement in such “state-related activities” was the intensive inspection and surveillance of officials. It was the administrative/legal techniques that connected local populations and the central government, informing either side about the situation of the other. What was presented to ordinary people was a set of clearly defined requirements that highlighted the non-benevolent, overwhelming role of the state which did not allow any public offenses or transgressions.

Yet this is by no means all the impression people had about their empire. They were also inhabiting an environment where knowledge about a wider world was shared, a society in which both economic and humanistic worth was produced. Hamilton, Jai, and Lu describe this environment in an idyllic narrative:

The distinct, functionally different forces of life joined in a dance of harmony, a dance that had no cosmological beginnings, no absolute law-like motions, and no predicted endings. Everything and everyone were implicated, and so all were involved in this cooperative dance of life, even the dead.¹⁶

These forces formed the community order of the two empires. Although the order was not

¹⁶ Gary G. Hamilton, Ben-Ray Jai and Hsien-Heng Lu, “Heaven Is High and the Emperor Is Far Away: Legitimacy and Structure in the Chinese State,” *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* T. 27, no. 84, *Sociologie de la Chine et Sociologie chinoise* (1989): 141–67.

entirely detached from the formal structure of state bureaucracy, it generated the “informal structure of community leadership”¹⁷ that constituted another layer of ancient imperium, which provided the common population with a series of perceptive modes, cognitive constructs, and emotional values. This community leadership was possessed by those individuals who won the support of non-ranked populations by dealing with daily issues like the “living” conditions for both the living and the dead, the supernatural realm and cults, medical treatments and healing, and education and personal intellect, etc. Some of them had connections with the government by serving as local administrative staff, including the district chiefs directly over the community people and those recommended to enter the central officialdom.¹⁸ Others were active in the sphere beyond realpolitik without deep involvement in the statecraft.

I choose the loose category “elites” to refer to such a group that built and performed such informal leadership. For the practical needs of this dissertation, the group generally includes all those individuals whose biographical information—origin, interpersonal relations, accomplishments or personal characteristics, and especially an evaluation of their public image—can be extracted from extant primary sources. The fact that their lives had been publicly evaluated implies the importance of such people to a larger community.¹⁹ Those people who only had their names mentioned in the materials,

¹⁷ See Hsu Cho-Yun, “The Changing Relationship between Local Society and the Central Political Power in Former Han: 206 B.C.–8 A.D.,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7, no. 4 (Jul. 1965): 358–70.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 360.

¹⁹ Similar ways of defining “elite” are also used by Nicolas Tackett in his

for instance, the deceased in Han times who are exorcised as ghosts in entombed writings, and the figures who sporadically appear in those Roman panegyrics that were dedicated to other personages, will not be discussed. Therefore, we have a list of people: members of powerful clans, bureaucratic officeholders, military commanders, landed gentry, wealthy merchants, and renowned literati who might have also played the roles described above. They constituted the elite group we are referring to.

In Han materials, the basic information about these people can be observed in the biographical chapters of the semi-official and official historical writings on the Han period, e.g., the *Shiji* 史記, *Hanshu* 漢書, *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記, and *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, in which thousands of personages from the Western and Eastern Han dynasties are documented. Transmitted literature, like the *Renwu zhi* 人物志 and *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, should also be given attention, though deeper investigation is needed regarding the intertextuality between these sources and other accounts.

Monumental objects from both the inside and outside of Han tombs are of particular significance, for they contain passages in which personages are praised. The Han stone inscriptions, above-ground shrines, and entombed images and writings are among the most representative. Some materials were supposedly produced by the elites themselves.

investigation of the Tang-Song elites in China: “I have posited an inclusive definition of elite, generally classifying as such any individual for whom biographical material can be obtained in historical or archaeological sources.” See “The Transformation of Medieval Chinese Elites (850–1000 C.E.)” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2006), 10–11. Tackett does not explain in detail what kinds of biographical material is needed. Many of those who only had their birth, career and death recorded were probably not influential in their times. So I especially stress the need to consider the accounts of one’s public image, i.e., a certain judgment of the person’s successes and failures, as they indicate that i) the personage had played certain roles in the public realm of their community, and ii) they were known to certain groups of their times.

Most of such works are collected in later volumes, such as the *Collected Writings of Sima Xiangru* 司馬相如集 that had been re-edited by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–6 BCE), Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643 CE), and other important intellectuals.²⁰

The Romans shared a large proportion of transmitted texts, too. Roman historiography is a bit different from that of the Han in two aspects. For one thing, there are surviving texts in both Latin and Greek: Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus are on the Latin side, while Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Cassius Dio are on the Greek side. The lengthy sojourns of Roman historians in Greece, and their interests in affairs beyond the Roman Empire proper, make it hard to define who are exactly the “Roman” elites. There are also a large number of writings and dialogues by Roman authors (e.g., Cicero) that were edited and “published” in their own time. Though both experienced the process of editing and circulation, these works are probably more reliable than the transmitted writings of Han authors, because they were transmitted when their producers were still alive and able to intervene in the circulation. Archaeology has been traditionally considered less important for the study of elites, as such materials were thought to represent the voices of “those silent lives” who did not enjoy elite status.²¹ Within the ancient history discipline, there has also developed an emphasis on the independent study of material culture mostly without reference to texts, though archaeological evidence has sometimes been deliberately neglected because of its potential to challenge the official

²⁰ For related information, see Jin Guoyong 金國永, *Sima Xiangru ji jiaozhu* 司馬相如集校注 (Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1993).

²¹ See J. C. Barrett, “Theorising Roman Archaeology” in *TRAC 96: Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Sheffield 1996*, eds. K. Meadows, C. Lemke, and J. Heron (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1996), 1–7.

history.²²

The distribution of these materials is by no means balanced across different periods of time. The later stages of the two empires provided richer elite materials than the earlier ages did. This is certainly not only related to later materials' better chances for preservation, but should be attributed to the changing role of the elites themselves. What factors made such people more active in expressing themselves in writing? Explanations can be found in these people's relationship to a series of transformations in their empire. The existing historical accounts warrant a division of the history of both empires into seven periods (see Table 1):

Periods	Han (202 BCE - 220 CE)		Rome (ca. 60 BCE - 476 CE)	
Founding	ca. 202-180 BCE	Western Han established Consolidating policies by Emperors Gaozu and Hui	ca. 60-31 BCE	The First Triumvirate Julius Caesar's dictatorship
Early development	ca. 180s-140s BCE	The Peace under Emperors Wen and Jing 文景之治	ca. 31 BCE-69 CE	The Augustan Principate
Political stability	ca. 140s-90s BCE	Emperor Wu's imperial expansion	ca. 30s BCE-180 CE	The <i>Pax Romana</i>
Crisis and responses (1st transformation)	ca. 90s-40s BCE	The growth of inner and outer divisive powers Debates of Salt and Iron Emperor Yuan's Confucianist reform	ca. 190s-280s	The Five Emperors and Severan dynasty Crisis of the Third Century Empire-wide, official persecutions of Christians
Split and dynastic change	ca. 40 BCE-25 CE	Fall of Western Han Xin Dynasty Emperor Gengshi and the restored Han	ca. 286-324	Division of the West and East The tetrarchy
Reunification and reforms (2nd transformation)	ca. 25-106	Eastern Han established Conference at the White Tiger Hall The Prosperity under Yongyuan 永元之隆	ca. 324-390s	Constantine controlled the entire empire Post-Constantine reforms
Imperial decline	after ca. 100s	The growth of imperial relatives and eunuchs The Great Proscriptions Yellow Turban Rebellion	after ca. 400s (the West)	Drought and plague The coming of Germanic and Alan barbarians The growth of usurpers and the western kingdoms

Table 1. Seven periods of both the Han and Roman Empires, compared.

²² See Ray Laurence, *Roman Archaeology for Historians* (London: Routledge Publishing House, 2012).

There are interregnums in the long history of both empires that interrupted the rule of a single lineage, in the Chinese case, or a unified “monarchy” in the Roman case. Two stages mark the tremendous transitions from unification to split, or from split to reunification; they are the periods of transformations in the diagram above. For the Han side, the two periods are around the first century BCE and the first to second century CE. As for the Romans, the crisis after the *Pax Romana* caused various reactions from the elite class, and the reforms that were started in the early fourth century did not solve the issue of division. It was during these transitional eras (marked in the table as “First Transformation” and “Second Transformation”) that the “elite group” under discussion experienced changes in their social identity and self-recognition. These people became widely known as competitors for greater rights, or fighters who were able to protect the “right” from “wrong,” not simply a privileged class spoiled by enormous wealth and excessive power.

Scholars like Michael Loewe have named the two competing elite groups involved in the Han crisis and reforms as “modernists/activists” and “reformers/traditionalists,” to indicate their different attitudes toward the imperial expansion that reached its peak under Emperor Wu 武帝.²³ These names fail to point out

²³ See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974); Hans Bielenstein, “Wang Mang, the Restoration of the Han Dynasty, and Later Han” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1: The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C. – A.D. 220*, eds. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 223–90; Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven:

the same ground of political ideals where the different parties obtained their agendas. In his relatively recent work Loewe changes the names to “defenders and opponents of the state monopolies,” which better explains their relationship.²⁴ As Emperor Wu deepened the imperial monopoly system to such an extent that it penetrated into most social realms, involving territorial enlargement, racial assimilation, and state-treasury accumulation, both major transitions were based on the controversies surrounding the role of the state in people’s daily lives. The first call for changes was a response to the growth of imperial rivals inside and outside of the state structure, as the result of the monopolizing policies. A series of open debates between the two groups, i.e., the so-called “Debates of Salt and Iron” (Yantielun 鹽鐵論) occurred, focusing on the aim and role of the imperial government, general policies in different realms, and basic attitudes toward the history of Zhou and Qin.²⁵ Although the opponents of the state monopolies seem to win over the other side, the debates are harbingers of long-term negotiations.

The larger-scale application of the anti-monopolistic (or reformer) policy was during the Xin dynasty (9–23) and Eastern Han. If we consider the Western Han skepticism of state monopolies (and the expansion of state power) as a rejection of Qin-style statecraft and a supposed return to the earlier Zhou tradition, the views and

Yale University Press, 1993); Tamara Chin, *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

²⁴ Loewe, “Han Yuandi, Reigned 48 to 33 B.C.E., and His Advisors,” *Early China* 35/36 (2012–2013): 361–93.

²⁵ See Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*; “The Former Han Dynasty” and “The Conduct of Government and the Issues at Stake (A.D. 57–167)” in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 1, 103–222, 291–316.

goals of this group was hardly monolithic. As the “opponents of the state monopoly,” the Confucian intellectuals who allied with the Confucian rulers split into the New and Old Text Schools, with both parties developing a set of distinct discourses to express their agenda. They were no longer simply the advisors of the emperor but could act on their own behalf. One of the most significant events in the second transitional period is the great court conference at the White Tiger Hall (*Baihu guan*) 白虎觀 under Emperor Zhang 章帝 in 79 CE. The emperor himself was a supporter of the Old Text school, but his viewpoint was ignored in the *Baihu tong* 白虎通, the compilation of the discussion at the court conference.²⁶ His son, Emperor He 和帝 (r. 88–106), was tolerant of both schools. During and after these two emperors the Imperial Academy (*taixue* 太學) was used as the platform for inter-party conflicts that determined the content of ideological reforms, until the collapse of the dynasty.²⁷

Compared with their Chinese counterparts, Roman society appears to have faced a more widely acknowledged conflict, that is the one between “pagans”—supporters of the old Greco-Roman religion—and Christians. In the first transitional period the Christians were much less influential than the “pagans” who constituted the majority at most levels in society. A clearer way to define the two groups is to call them the “supportive/tolerant”

²⁶ For the conflict between Emperor Zhang and the New Text School, see Rafe de Crespigny, “Scholars and Rulers: Imperial Patronage under the Later Han Dynasty” in *Han-Zeit: Festschrift für Hans Stumpfeldt aus Anlaß seines 65. ed.* Michael Friedrich, assisted by Reinhard Emmerich and Hans van Ess (2016), 57–77.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

and “intolerant” parties, based on their attitudes toward Christianity.²⁸ There is insufficient evidence about open debates at the imperial court, like the Debates of Salt and Iron in China,²⁹ but controversies among intellectuals can sometimes be observed. Origen (ca. 185–253 CE) argued against Celsus (fl. ca. 170–180 CE) by interpreting Christianity on the level of mainstream philosophy, especially Platonism.³⁰ He was then, however, questioned by the Neo-Platonist Porphyry of Tyre (ca. 232–310 CE).³¹ With the coming of the third-century crisis, the pagan emperors enjoyed an increase in their authority, which was related to their military power,³² that guaranteed the rulers’ full use of coercive measures to execute those whom they felt were threats. As a consequence, though there were some debates between the two parties, the first period of transition was more defined by a unidirectional oppression against Christians who were accused of

²⁸ For typical examples of such uses of terminology, see Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Paula Fredriksen, “Christians in the Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries CE” in *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, ed. David S. Potter (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 597–606.

²⁹ Michael M. Sage explains this as the consequence of the limited power of the Christians: “Such people were relatively insignificant in number and their power was incomparable with that of the Roman traditional cult; also they were accused mainly for potentially harming the social peace, not for publicly defying the authority of the emperor and the government.” See “The Persecution of Valerian and the Peace of Gallienus,” *Wiener Studien* Vol. 96 (1983): 137–59.

³⁰ See Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, “Origen and the Platonic Tradition,” *Religions* 8, 21 (2017): 1–20; “Origen’s Allegoresis of Plato’s and Scripture’s Myths” in *Religious Competition in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Nathaniel Desrosiers and Lily Vuong (SBL Press, 2016), 85–106.

³¹ Yip-Mei Loh, “Porphyry, An Anti-Christian Plotinian Platonist,” *The European Conference on Ethics, Religion & Philosophy*, 2017.

³² Géza Alföldy, “The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* Vol. 15, no. 1 (Oct. 2003): 89–111.

harming social stability. After Decius and Valerian's empire-wide persecutions in the 240–50s, Diocletian initiated the Great Persecution in 303 to unify the empire under the traditional polytheism. The fierce conflict was temporarily mitigated when Constantine publicly supported Christianity.

A new stage then arrived. Just like the emergence of internal conflicts among Confucian intellectuals during the second transitional period in China, this period in Rome was primarily defined by new conflicts within Christianity itself. A series of reforms were initiated by Constantine and later rulers to unify not only the Christian church but the empire. Elite Christians who supported the rulership, e.g., Lactantius (240–320) and Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–339), enjoyed the emperors' favor. Yet the division appeared to be irreversible. Fierce confrontations occurred in the East between Arius and Athanasius, and continued after several attempts of the fourth-century rulers to stop the debates. In the West the local councils, consisting of bishops, other clergy, and sometimes laymen,³³ enjoyed growth and became the patrons of new beliefs and also of civil affairs. The various Christian elites thus had more chances to have their claims promoted, sometimes relying on secular authority, while at other times depending upon their episcopal rule.

II. The Need for Coalition: Elite Interaction and Two Mechanisms of Practical Ethics

How did these elites help build the “informal” dimension of ancient imperium,

³³ Elmer Truesdell Merrill, “The Church in the Fourth Century,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 50 (1919): 101–121.

and what was the relationship between their personality and society—between individual inclinations and “social trends”? Noticeably, the elites of the two empires shared a different style of life from their predecessors who had enjoyed high social status. The meaning of “high status” had experienced changes. During the Warring States period (ca. 476–221 BCE) in China, a relatively stable, lineage-based feudal society was replaced by a more contractual form of society, which brought to the forefront the *shi* group, comprised of people of various origins. As one could be promoted based on personal qualities rather than just on one’s family background, a man came to be evaluated separately from his family.³⁴ A higher degree of inter-class mobility ensued. Mark E. Lewis points out that the term used in Han times to indicate one’s high status, *gui* 貴 (valued, honorable, expensive), was usually employed together with its antonym, *jian* 賤 (humble, shameful, cheap).³⁵ *Gui* by itself was less clearly defined and did not signify anything absolute, so one’s position of “*gui*” was not permanently guaranteed. This implies the relativity rather than certainty of one’s high position.

The Roman elite group seemed to have faced less changes in their status, at least in the transitional period between the Republic and the Principate. The “longevity of identity and memory” for the traditional aristocracy was well maintained during the Augustan age, as the ruler found it necessary to obtain senatorial support.³⁶ Yet the

³⁴ Hsu Cho-yun, *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C* (Stanford University Press, 1965).

³⁵ Lewis, *Honor and Shame in Early China*, 12.

³⁶ P. A. Brunt, “The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime,” *The Classical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1984): 423–44; Jessica J. Stephens, “Aristocratic Identities in the

situation gradually changed. The components of the senator group became increasingly complicated, and senators gradually lost their importance in the government. After the third-century crises, there developed new forms of military and bureaucratic institutions that added to the power of the imperial court, and their cadre—military men and administrative elites—grew as a consequence.³⁷ The development of Christianity also brought new changes. Not only did the church leaders benefit from the expansion of their religion, those who did not occupy official positions, e.g., the various kinds of holy men, also won positive fame even after their death. Intense competition among various types of elites, probably even more fierce than that in Han China, came to define the period after the third century.

By scrutinizing these in-group transformations, we can try to imagine how Han and Roman elites thought about the circumstances they were facing. There must be some feelings and interpretations they shared by experiencing the transformations together. There were prohibitions that limited their freedom of movement, but also praise and reward that revitalized their activity.³⁸ This is especially true if we look into a

Roman Senate From the Social War to the Flavian Dynasty” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2016). Stephens argues that it was mainly Augustus’s deliberate strategies that helped keep the old aristocracy in his reign: “In his accession to supreme power, Augustus did not entirely dismantle the social fabric of the Republic. Instead, whether consciously or not, he slowly and methodically manipulated these institutions of memory to redefine what it meant to be Roman. His more inclusive definition catered to the *novi homines* but also sought to mitigate the disenfranchisement of the old aristocracy through their incorporation into the imperial family by marriage or ancestry.”

³⁷ See Greg Woolf, *Rome: An Empire’s Story*, reprinted edition (Oxford University Press, 2013); Christopher Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³⁸ For related discussions of group behaviors in the social adaptation theory, see Vladimir Bekhterev, *Collective Reflexology* (London: Routledge, 2018).

phenomenon shared by Han and Rome in the transitional periods: state-level conferences/councils were held by the imperial court to decide policy. The Conference of the Stone Ditch Pavilion (*Shiquge huiyi* 石渠閣會議, 51 BCE) and Conference of the White Tiger Hall gathered Confucian scholars to discuss the “correct explanation” of traditional classics;³⁹ and ecumenical councils—the First Council of Nicaea (325), the First Council of Constantinople (381), and so forth—were held before the collapse of the Roman West, to mitigate conflicts within the Church. To Confucian and Christian elites such large-scale, open gatherings were both chances and challenges that might cause change to their current status. If they successfully persuaded the other side (or more importantly, the sovereign), they could enjoy appreciation and elevation; otherwise, they might be ridiculed or even expelled.

So, anxiety and uncertainty was usually present. Elite individuals needed something self-affirming to get rid of the unpleasant feeling of always being judged by others. A stronger coalition, relatively independent from the old institutions, was required. As for Han and Roman elites, the building of such coalitions was based upon a set of practical ethics to form good interpersonal relationships, which helped maintain the stability of an alliance.⁴⁰ Elite individuals knew very well that to be a “real man” meant

³⁹ For the aims of results of the two conferences, see Liu Dezhou 劉德州, “Shiquge huiyi yu Baihu guan huiyi xingzhi xintan” 石渠閣會議與白虎觀會議性質新探, *Shixue jikan* 史學集刊 1, no. 1 (2010): 108–112.

⁴⁰ For definitions of practical ethics and virtue, see Glen Pettigrove, “Virtue Ethics,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/>; <http://blog.practicaethics.ox.ac.uk/2018/04/what-is-practical-ethics/>; Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2006); and Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

to obtain meaning through membership in a group. Their ethics were largely pragmatic, deriving from the real situation of interpersonal communication.

A large number of cases of elite communication are observed in transmitted Han biographies. At the end of a biography there is often the author/compiler's overall evaluation of the person, and the cases of communication serve as evidence to support the author's final assessment. Sima Qian 司馬遷, in his "Biography of Lu Jia 陸賈," takes Lu's (ca. 240–170 BCE) conversation with Liu Bang 劉邦 (ca. 247–195 BCE) as an important proof of his personal quality:

陸生時時前說稱《詩》《書》。高帝罵之曰：‘乃公居馬上而得之，安事《詩》《書》！’陸生曰：‘居馬上得之，寧可以馬上治之乎？且湯武逆取而以順守之，文武並用，長久之術也。昔者吳王夫差智伯極武而亡，秦任刑法不變，卒滅趙氏。鄉使秦已並天下，行仁義，法先聖，陛下安得而有之？’高帝不懌而有慚色。

Master Lu often talked about the *Shijing* and *Shangshu*. The High Emperor (Liu Bang) scolded him: 'Your 'daddy' obtained the territory through military successes, why focus on these texts!' Master Lu replied: 'It is possible to obtain the empire on horseback, but can you rule it from horseback? Kings Tang and Wu obtained their territory through armed forces, but they used harmonious ways to maintain it. In the past, King Fuchai of Wu and Zhi Bo used up their armies but ended failed. The Qin kept employed its punishments and legal codes without change, and finally conquered Zhao. If the Qin had unified all under Heaven, and then promoted governance based on benevolence and righteousness, and learned from the sages in the past, how could it possible for Your Majesty to have your land [right now]?' The Emperor had an embarrassed expression on his face.⁴¹

Sima Qian commends Lu as "the excellent debater of that time" 當世之辯士 at the end of the biography. What we can get from such examples is the strong connection between communication and one's historical image. In the mind of Sima Qian, the communicative

⁴¹ *Shiji* 史記 (hereafter *SJ*), comm. Pei Yin 裴駟, Sima Zhen 司馬貞, and Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1963), 97. 2699.

practice itself illustrates an elite's ethical traits that could serve as lessons for others: the concrete context of interaction is the extension of one's charisma that creates values in and of itself.

In the Han historiographical evidence such communication-based, practical ethics are often portrayed in three aspects: one's self-awareness, utmost sincerity, and willingness for self-sacrifice. The starting point of an interactive act is to understand clearly one's position to avoid arrogance or self-underestimation. Two characters, *jiao* 交 (to build connections with) and *yu* 與 (to have interaction with), were frequently used in Han historiography to refer to the interplay between individuals. They are often used interchangeably without indicating the depth and closeness of the interplay. To posit oneself properly in a relationship, one must rely on himself/herself to measure the degree of *jiao* and *yu*. Mismeasurement could cause serious loss of decorum or honor. Ban Gu tells the negative case of Han Xin 韓信 (231–196 BCE) by using the two terms:

信曰：‘漢遇我厚，吾豈可見利而背恩乎！’通曰：‘始常山王、成安君故相與為刎頸之交，及爭張廩、陳釋之事，常山王奉頭鼠竄，以歸漢王。借兵東下，戰於鄆北，成安君死於泝水之南，頭足異處。此二人相與，天下之至驩也，而卒相滅亡者，何也？患生於多欲而人心難測也。今足下行忠信以交於漢王，必不能固於二君之相與也，而事多大於張廩、陳釋之事者，故臣以為足下必漢王之不危足下，過矣。...故以交友言之，則不過張王與成安君；以忠臣言之，則不過大夫種。...’

Han Xin said: “The Han side has treated me well. How could I betray this goodness for more profits!” Kuai Tong replied: “At first, the King of Changshan and Lord Cheng'an had so close connections (*jiao*) to each other that they had sworn to die together. After their debate on the incident of Zhang Yan and Chen Shi, the King of Changshan escaped and surrendered to the King of Han. Then he borrowed the army of Han and went eastward to attack the north of Hao [and fought against Lord Cheng'an]. Lord Cheng'an died south of the Zhi River with his head and feet left in different places. The interaction (*yu*) between the two is among the most harmonious under Heaven, but they failed. Why? This is because risks arise from desires, and it is difficult to conjecture what others might think.

Therefore, although you behave loyally and reliably to build connections (*jiao*) with the King of Han, it is impossible [for your connection] to be tighter than the interaction (*yu*) between the two men. There could always be incidents more serious than that of Zhang and Chen. Considering these, from my perspective, your view that the King of Han will not threaten you is just an overestimation [of you two's closeness].... When it comes to your connection (*jiao*) as friends, it cannot be compared with that between the King of Zhang and Lord Cheng'an. When it comes to your status as a loyal subordinate, it cannot be compared with that of the Grand Master Zhong."⁴²

In Ban Gu's narrative, Han Xin's overestimating himself as a close friend of the ruler caused his ultimate failure; he regretted it when he was finally charged for treason.⁴³ By telling the result, Ban Gu warns his readers again that "risks arise from desires, and it is difficult to conjecture what someone else might think." One's appropriate self-evaluation is divided into two parts, the knowledge about the unpleasant nature of humans, and the acknowledgment of one's own ignorance. Most interactions are fragile and bound to fail, due to people's common unawareness of these issues.

But Ban Gu insists that a favorable interaction is worth attempting. If one can be completely sincere with others, he/she would be repaid by similar levels of sincerity. This sincerity includes recognition, understanding, and complete trust. In the *Hanshu*, the term *zhi* 知 (to know/recognize/comprehend/appreciate) indicates the standard of a long-term relationship. Ban Gu explains its meaning through the words of Zou Yang 鄒陽 (206–129 BCE):

‘有白頭如新，傾蓋如故。’何則？知與不知也。故樊於期逃秦之燕，借荊軻首以奉丹事；王奢去齊之魏，臨城自剄以卻齊而存魏。夫王奢、樊於期非新於齊、秦而故於燕、魏也，所以去二國死兩君者，行合於志，慕義無窮也。....

⁴² *HS* 45. 2163.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

兩主二臣，剖心析肝相信，豈移於浮辭哉！

“Two old friends can still find new things from each other, like in their first meeting-up; two individuals who built a friendship by chance can be so intimate like old friends.” How could it be? Because there is “knowing” (*zhi*) and “not knowing” (*buzhi*) between them. Previously Fan Yuqi escaped from Qin and went to Yan, letting Jing Ke borrow his head, to fulfill the order of Prince Dan; Wang She left Qi to Wei, then committed suicide when the state was attacked, so the Qi army could be driven out while the Wei was rescued. Both Wang and Fan were not new to the states of Qi and Qin, but they finally died in Yan and Wei. They left their [old] states and sacrificed their lives for the two [new] masters. This is because their behaviors were compatible with their aspiration, and their admiration of [their masters’] righteousness was endless.... These two masters and two subordinates trusted each other so much, just like exposing their hearts and dissecting their livers in front of each other [to show their frankness]. How could their minds be distracted by others’ words!⁴⁴

The stories of Fan Yuqi 樊於期 and Wang She 王奢 illustrate how one’s awareness of one’s own nature leads to the knowing of others and the building of relationships. The act of “exposing the heart and dissecting the liver” (*pou xin xi gan* 剖心析肝) signifies a supreme frankness that is different from the traditional Confucian doctrine of *xin* 信 (being honest; keeping one’s promise). *Xin* arises when one’s language matches one’s own actions morally, but it is not necessarily accompanied by mutual recognition and admiration, which are on the transmoral level. In the Han and Three-Kingdoms historiography this recognition/admiration is based on two elements, the “telepathy of minds” (*gan* 感) and the “meeting of minds” (*tong* 通). If two persons’ authentic nature is the same, then there is no problem for them to read each other’s minds and thus become close. Interpersonal communication is not only a procedural but also a substantive notion of human action, deriving from human nature as its inherent inclination.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *HS* 51. 2345.

This connection of minds is by no means the end of an interaction. The interpersonal relationship is deepened as individuals surpass themselves at the cost of their individuality, to repay the recognition/trust they have obtained from the other side. Such willingness for self-sacrifice is, on the one hand, expressed as the action of *yue* 約 (having the consent to keep the relationship), in which all sides of the relationship agree to have their lives connected. The literal meaning of *yue* is “to knot ropes together” (*chan shu ye* 纏束也) according to the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, but is extended to the description of human relations that two or more individuals build linkage among themselves by some means. It could transcend the narrow realm of personal interactions and become a life-long mission. Li Yi 李軼 (d. 25), the Han general, told others that his consent to keep friendship with Liu Xiu 劉秀 (5–57), the future Emperor Guangwu, was actually a determination to share with him the same destiny:

軼本與蕭王首謀造漢，結死生之約，同榮枯之計。

I, Yi, have devised with King Xiao (viz., Liu Xiu) to revive the Han. We are bound to each other in a pact to live and die together. We made plans based on our decision to share both prosperity and poverty together.⁴⁶

Li Yi’s concern for self dissolves here. What he devotes to this friendship is his autonomy to choose his own fate. Relationality prioritizes individuality as the source of meaning for

⁴⁵ It is debated whether a “philosophy of mind” was included in the Han Confucian teaching. Yu Xie and Miranda Brown argue that, during the Han (even the East Han) period, “heart and mind” (*xinxing* 心性) had not yet “become the core of Confucianism.” See “Between Heaven and Earth: Dual Accountability of Chinese Bureaucrats in the Eastern Han Dynasty,” *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 1, issue 1 (Mar. 2015): 56–87.

⁴⁶ *Quan Hou Han wen* 全後漢文 (hereafter *QHWW*), vol. 11. *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, ed. Yan Kejun 嚴可均. The text is titled as “Bao Feng Yi shu” 報馮異書.

one's existence. This is not, however, the ultimate way to show one's supreme closeness to another person, because *yue* is based on the equal contribution of both sides of a relation, in which the sacrifice of one side can be neutralized by that of the other.

A even more selfless form of interaction is *xiao* 效, "to serve/offer someone (with all one's knowledge and life)." This is the highest level of trust, marking the nearly entire sacrifice of one's individuality to connect himself permanently to another one's life and career, without asking for any repayment. Through the mouth of Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (ca. 114–47 BCE), Ban Gu explains *xiao* as one's natural reaction to the admirable virtue of someone else:

將軍以功德輔幼主，將以流大化，致於洽平，是以天下之士延頸企踵，爭願自效，以輔高明。

You, General, assist the young master based on your accomplishments and morality, which could have a profound influence upon the public, generating harmony and peace. This is why all gentlemen under Heaven would crane their neck and step on the road [to follow you], competing to serve you with all their knowledge and life, to assist the virtuous and wise.⁴⁷

"To devote oneself entirely" is here an ambition pursued by many. It indicates not merely sufficient trust but the offering of true human emotions that surpass pure rationality. A better-known example comes from the later *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 text. In Chen Shou's 陳壽 (223–297) narrative, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234), prime minister of the Shu-Han kingdom, was exactly in the position of "*xiao*" when he was asked by his dying ruler—also a true friend—to assist the young heir apparent; he burst into tears beside the

⁴⁷ HS 78. 3272.

deathbed and swore to devote all his intelligence and loyalty, until his own death.⁴⁸ Such a dramatic scene, not commonly seen in official historiography, might imply the author's own preferences and values.

Cases about the practical ethics of Roman elite are also seen in historiography, but they are not very rich regarding the process of relationship building. In Livy we find a few personages who were troubled by affairs related to personal connections. Similarly, Tacitus' character portrayals do not appear to care so much about how one's personality was shaped through his communication with others. It should be acknowledged that the interactive/communicative behaviors of historical figures are not so much treated as a dynamic process, which forms an individual's personality step by step until its completion. Rather, the event of personal interaction is like a stamp that labels the unchanging nature of someone; it is both a screenshot of a certain moment in one's life, and a conclusion about how he should be evaluated at the end. When Tacitus delineates the life story of Galba (3 BCE–69 CE), he treats Galba's interaction with other people as evidence that this man, with his significant lack of insight, probably did not deserve assistance from others:

...pauca praefatus de sua senectute, Pisonem Licinianum accersiri iubet, seu propria electione sive, ut quidam crediderunt, Lacone instante, cui apud Rubellium Plautum exercita cum Pisone amicitia; sed callide ut ignotum fovebat, et prospera de Pisone fama consilio eius fidem addiderat.

Having first said a few words about his advanced years, he (Galba) ordered Piso Licinianus to be summoned. It is uncertain whether he acted on his own free choice, or, as believed by some, under the influence of Laco, who through

⁴⁸ Chen Shou, *Sanguo zhi* (hereafter *SGZ*), comm. Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1964), 2.5. 918.

Rubellius Plautus had cultivated the friendship of Piso. But, cunningly enough, it was as a stranger that Laco supported him, and the high character of Piso gave weight to his advice.⁴⁹

Though far from passionate in describing the details of interpersonal connections (as Han historians did), Tacitus appears to agree that one's achievements and failures are related to their style of personal relations. Even one important personal relationship can determine whether an individual would be successful or not. Galba does not win the true friendship of Laco, who prefers to assist him anonymously; his collapse does not even need to be reconfirmed by others, because the very superficial connection he has with others already proves that he is unsuccessful as a ruler. As Stephen G. Daitz has stated, these fragmentary instances of interaction constitute an individual's stable personality "with which one is born and with which one dies, without any basic change taking place."⁵⁰

The description of one's interpersonal connections is, therefore, employed to reveal the stable character that determines one's success or failure. Non-historical genres of elite writings offer more information about how such interactions between individuals were formed and deepened. Some of these writings, especially those focusing specifically on the language of interpersonal contact (e.g., oratory), make great efforts to define a

⁴⁹ Tacitus, *The History* 1.14.
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0080%3Ab ook%3D1%3Achapter%3D14>. The Latin text is from Charles Dennis Fisher, *Historiae. Cornelius Tacitus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), the English translation is from William Jackson Brodribb and Sara Bryant, *Complete Works of Tacitus*, edited for Perseus (New York: Random House, Inc., 1873. reprinted 1942).

⁵⁰ See Stephen G. Daitz, "Tacitus' Technique of Character Portrayal," *The American Journal of Philology* 81, no. 1 (Jan., 1960): 30–52.

“successful” communication, the content of which constituted a significant part of Roman historiography.⁵¹ The longing for victory is always there: it is the showing of better communicative skills that marks one’s success in interactions. For a Han Chinese who expected to dissolve his “self” succeed or fail as part of a bound relationship, this aim might be too self-serving and functional, like a kind of utilitarianism. But for Roman elites, it was such “success-driven” ethics in daily interactions that enabled them to confirm their status. Each time a man won over someone in a conversation, his identity as an honorable person was verified. In other words, one’s personal value was derived directly from the immediate outcome of oral interactions. Interaction is thus a kind of *Aktualität*, a moment that denoted a high degree of reality in which one made visible efforts to win his honor.

Such interactive ethics include two main aspects: to solve real confrontations, and to seek some everlasting truth hidden behind the interaction. The Romans favored a specific context of communication that could give all sides of the interlocution a feeling of real engagement, i.e., a situation wherein a real conflict was solved. The value of an individual was derived from a clear sign: the effective solution of the conflict by having one side entirely persuade the other. Quintilian, in the *Institutio oratoria*, points out a traditional view shared by many: what makes a communication effective is, in many cases, the power of persuasion (*vis persuadendi*).

hi fere aut in persuadendo aut in dicendo apte ad persuadendum positum orandi

⁵¹ For the relationship between Roman historiography and rhetoric, see Rhiannon Ash, “Rhetoric and Historiography” in *The Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, ed. Micheal J. MacDonald (Oxford University Press, 2017), 195–204.

munus sunt arbitrati. id enim fieri potest ab eo quoque, qui vir bonus non sit. est igitur frequentissimus finis, rhetorice esse vim persuadendi.

These persons have as a rule held that the task of oratory lies in persuasion or speaking in a persuasive manner: for this is within the power of a bad man no less than a good. Hence we get the common definition of rhetoric as the power of persuading.⁵²

Although Quintilian feels somehow uncomfortable with the trend, it is undeniable that the Romans “had a taste for moments of high tension”; they were eager to interpret any and every confrontation as an ordeal, an opportunity for the exercise of will.⁵³

Communication appears to have the feature of expediency, not necessarily related to one’s constant performance of morality but more connected to the instantaneous status of winning over someone else in a dialogue. Communicative techniques, especially oratory, thus enjoyed favor among elites. Important authors like Cicero and Quintilian believed that oratory, in many circumstances, could be the primary instrument to direct or even ruler over others’ thoughts.⁵⁴ They highlighted the honor of the individual elite as a winner, not only to praise their skillfulness in speaking per se, because oratory itself is a respectable form of culture. In the *De Oratore* Cicero explains his banning of Latin instructors by pointing out their negligence of oratory as a field of knowledge with its own value system:

⁵² Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.15.3.
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2007.01.0060%3Abook%3D2%3Achapter%3D15%3Asection%3D3>. Latin and English texts are from Harold Edgeworth Butler, *Quintilian: With an English Translation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann, Ltd. 1920).

⁵³ Rob Wiseman, “Ancient Roman Metaphors for Communication,” *Metaphor and Symbol* 22, no. 1 (2007): 41–78.

⁵⁴ Joy Connolly, “Rhetoric and Politics” in *The Oxford Handbook of Rhetorical Studies*, 183–94.

Atque ut omittam Graeciam, quae semper eloquentiae princeps esse voluit, atque illas omnium doctrinarum inventrices Athenas, in quibus summa dicendi vis et inventa est et perfecta, in hac ipsa civitate profecto nulla umquam vehementius quam eloquentiae studia viguerunt.

For to say nothing of Greece, which was always desirous to hold the first place in eloquence, and Athens, that inventress of all literature, in which the utmost power of oratory was both discovered and brought to perfection, in this very city of ours, assuredly, no studies were ever pursued with more earnestness than those tending to the acquisition of eloquence.⁵⁵

There seems to be a paradox. If communication is expedient and functional, how could oratory keep its essential value as a long-lasting culture? Cicero further elaborates in other works by giving concrete examples of interpersonal conversations. For him, communication and its related techniques are the means through which an individual discovers their inner rationality and has it refined. They direct a person to self-correctness, while keeping their utilitarian aspects as one's instant reaction to the outside environment. This dimension of introspection and reflexiveness, in Cicero, is reflected through one's attempt to clarify a truth by oneself in logical conversations. In the *Tusculan Disputations* he portrays a fictitious dialogue between two reasonable interlocutors, A and M, to show what the process of persuasion should be like. A holds that death is always miserable, and M tries to change his opinion:

A. Ita iocaris, quasi ego dicam eos miseros, qui nati non sint, et non eos, qui mortui sint. M. Esse ergo eos dicis. A. Immo, quia non sint, cum fuerint, eo miseros esse. M. Pugnancia te loqui non vides? Quid enim tam pugnat quam non modo miserum, sed omnino quidquam esse qui non sit? An tu egressus porta Capena, cum Calatini, Scipionum, Seviliorum, Metellorum sepulcra vides,

⁵⁵ *De Oratore* 1.13. The Latin text is from A. S. Wilkins, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Rhetorica. M. Tullius Cicero* (Oxonii : E typographeo Clarendoniano, 1902), <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0120%3Ab ook%3D1%3Asection%3D13>. The English translation is by J.S. Watson (1860), <https://www.attalus.org/cicero/deoratore1A.html>

miseros putas illos?

A: As if I had said that those men are miserable who are not born, and not that they are so who are dead.

M: You say, then, that they are so?

A: Yes; I say that because they no longer exist after having existed they are miserable.

M: You do not perceive that you are asserting contradictions; for what is a greater contradiction, than that that should be not only miserable, but should have any existence at all, which does not exist? When you go out at the Capene gate and see the tombs of the Calatini, the Scipios, Servilii, and Metelli, do you look on them as miserable?⁵⁶

M points out two logical loopholes of A as the conversation goes on: “miserable” is not an absolute status but needs its context, and the concept of existence is vague. What makes M impressive is his ability to clarify the core of the debate, by reconfirming the standpoints of both sides step by step. This process illustrates precisely the final aim of technical communications, as Aristotle originally argued in *Rhetoric*: to show the objective *fact* about “what is or is not, what has or has not happened.”⁵⁷ Here the struggle between “expedient communication” and the ontological pursuit of “the truth” is reconciled. Although communication could happen at any moment for any reason, it serves a sole, ultimate goal: to engender the reality that it purportedly represents.⁵⁸ For

⁵⁶ Book I, VII. 13. The Latin text is from A.E. Douglas, *Cicero: Tusculan Disputations I* (Warminster: Aris & Philips Ltd., 1985), 28. The English translation is from *Cicero's Tusculan Disputations; Also, Treatises on the Nature of the Gods, and on the Commonwealth*, literally trans. chiefly by C.D. Yonge (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1977), 14.

⁵⁷ See William Vincent Byars, *The Handbook of Oratory: A Cyclopedic of Authorities on Oratory as an Art and of Celebrated Passages from the Best Orations* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), 27–28.

⁵⁸ Michelle L. Zerba, “Aristotle's Rhetoric: Theory, Truth, and Metarhetoric” in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, eds. M. Griffith and D. J. Mastronarde (University of California, Berkeley, 2005), 241–56.

Cicero, this final emphasis on the *fact* also indicates the reconciliation of the quarrel between philosophers and rhetoricians, as well as the building of a new Roman synthesis of philosophical and rhetorical training.⁵⁹ It was in the daily communicative practices that scholars from different realms could reach agreements, because communication itself is an action shared by all human beings.

III. Displaying, Imparting, and Spreading Ethics: Elite Information Institutions and Their Values

Such ethics were transformed from abstract principles to real tools to make structural changes to society. They were routinized as a new institutional philosophy, which allowed individuals to associate in new ways. These new institutions served many positive objectives for elite populations. They offered a platform for different elite parties to express and exchange socio-political standpoints (which we will discuss in the following chapters), and also a podium for these people to let others know *who they were* and *whether it is worth being in line with them*. New rights and obligations were thereby given to elites, as these institutions directed their attention to new things—the production, exchange, and acceptance of information. They can be called “information institutions” in this sense.

These information institutions generated and transmitted political agendas like today’s intelligence offices (which will be examined later), but before doing so they needed to consolidate their inner organization to polish their self-image. Compared with

⁵⁹ See Elaine Fantham, *The Roman World of Cicero’s De Oratore* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 53.

traditional institutions like government bureaus, they made more attempts to improve the quality of partnerships among their members. To a large extent, the ideal partnership itself was the central value of these institutions that would attract outsiders. It was transformed into readable information that might draw other people's attention. Concerning this, such ancient information institutions are somehow different from the official information organizations nowadays that fabricate biased messages meant to deceive the public.⁶⁰ Deception cannot be considered the aim of the ancient institutions, because the "personnel" of those institutions, who made contributions to their formation and maintenance, were usually confident about the truthfulness of their messages; they did not doubt the righteousness of their ethics. The targeted audience of the ancient institutions are also hardly just commoners, as these organizations were to appeal to their elite allies by disseminating shared values, with the aim of enlarging the group. People of lower classes were sometimes banned from participating in this elite game.

Since we pay special attention to the informal aspects of ancient imperium, the legal and bureaucratic offices of the two empires, which also produced and managed information, are not our focus. In this chapter we investigate three primary types of information institutions: ritual or exhibition organizing institutions which were formulated to display the elite ethics; teaching or advisory institutions which would actively impart those ethics; and philanthropic institutions, which spread the ethics to a wider population.

⁶⁰ For the operation of those modern organizations, see John D. Marks and Victor Marchetti, "Propaganda and Disinformation" in *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc, 1974), 137–57.

(I) Ritual or Exhibition-Organizing Institutions

This type of institutions functioned like a store window that offers outsiders a superficial understanding of what is going on inside. Han elites found rituals to be one of the most effective means through which they could inspire other people to take a leap of faith with them. This is because ritual, by producing and sending messages that dramatize a certain moment, can amplify the significance of that moment to make it memorable.

Scholars on Han China have investigated how different social institutions with visible boundaries (e.g., family, schools, government offices, military units) used specific ritual to fulfill their aims.⁶¹ It is problematic, however, to consider institution that conducted rituals as always having physical forms and clear borders. In many situations individuals who organized a ritual together were relating themselves to an imagined assembly, not a tangible one. The interdependence among those people is expressed through symbols and performance, rather than through physical materials. For elite populations, organizing a ritual meant having their patterns of collaboration interpreted and codified in readable messages, in front of people from other parties. A typical example is the oath ceremony for the building of an alliance. Liu Xie 刘勰 (465–522) summarizes the types of the oath in the pre-Han and Han periods, arguing that the consolidation of an assembly is their ultimate goal: “[The oaths] must praise those who

⁶¹ For instance, Patricia Buckley Ebrey’s *Confucianism and Family Rituals in Imperial China: A Social History of Writing about Rites* (Princeton University Press, 1991); Michael Puett’s “Centering the Realm: Wang Mang, The Zhouli, and Early Chinese Statecraft” in *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History*, eds. Benjamin A. Elman and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 129–54; Ge Feng and Zhengming Du, *Traditional Chinese Rites and Rituals*, trans. Jieting Huang and Yinjie Jiang (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

are loyal and obedient, make people live and die together, encourage them to devote their hearts and energy...Make them touched by generating sincerity; use the most earnest words to express feelings in plain ways” 獎忠孝，共存亡，戮心力....感激以立誠，切至以敷辭。⁶² The role of the alliance leader is to emphasize the collective aim and to practice it in person, which requires him to maintain his authority while also remaining a group member. The institutional experience is created here. A common value system is highlighted, and a governance center is established that cuts across traditional sectors.

In Han times such ritual practices were often used to attract potential companions to join the alliance. They not only legitimized the provisional alliance as an officially acknowledged organization but also directly displayed the necessary components of an idealized interpersonal connection: self-awareness, utmost sincerity, and the willingness for self-sacrifice. When Wang Mang 王莽 (ca. 45 BCE–23 CE) was making efforts to expand his group, he freed many prisoners and took oaths together with them.⁶³ When trying to challenge the authority of their political enemies, Wei Ao 隗囂 (d. 33), Yuan Shao 袁紹 (154–202), and Zang Hong 臧洪 (160–196) all deliberately located themselves in an equal position with others. The *Quan Hou Han wen* 全後漢文 and *Sanguo zhi* offer some of the words of such oaths:

凡我同盟三十一將，十有六姓，允承天道，興輔劉宗。

All members of our alliance include thirty-one generals from sixteen clans. We

⁶² “Zhumeng” 祝盟. *Wenxin diaolong jizhu* 文心雕龍輯註, in *Sibu beiyao Jibu* 四部備要集部, eds. Lu Feida 陸費達 et al. (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju ju yuan keben jiaokan 中華書局據原刻本校勘), 102.

⁶³ *HS* 99A. 4040.

are following the Way of Heaven to assist the Liu lineage.⁶⁴

凡我同盟之後。畢力致命。以伐凶醜。同獎一定。翼戴天子。

All members of our alliance, since then, will devote all our forces to fulfill our mission, to attack the wicked and deplorable. Our code of rewards and punishments are uniform and settled. We will support the Son of Heaven, like the wings of a bird [that support its body].⁶⁵

糾合義兵，並赴國難。凡我同盟，齊心曠力，以致臣節。

We organize our armies of righteousness, to together overcome the catastrophe faced by our state. All members of our alliance will share the same mind and unite all the forces, in order to fulfill our obligation as subjects [of the emperor].⁶⁶

As these paragraphs were edited long after the occurrence of such oaths, it is uncertain to what extent they were indeed from the mouths of the three men. However, taking into account the real situation faced by these individuals, we can at least imagine what was going on in their alliance-building ceremonies. In Wei Ao's case, the over thirty generals he allied with were mostly from powerful clans of the Longyou 隴右 area.⁶⁷ As the head of the generals, Wei needed to prove that he was able to lead people from all these areas. His efforts to unite those capable men is verified in a letter from Fang Wang 方望, one of his advisory assistants: "You admired Guo Wei, and wished to become Yue Yi... you honored the worthies based on your highest virtue, listened to a wide group to design your strategies" 先崇郭隗，想望樂毅....以至德尊賢，廣其謀慮。⁶⁸ Yuan Shao and

⁶⁴ *QHHW* vol. 11. The text is titled "Yu zhujiang meng" 與諸將盟.

⁶⁵ *QHHW* vol. 30. The text is titled "Zhanghe mengci" 漳河盟辭.

⁶⁶ *SGZ* 1.7. 232.

⁶⁷ For related information, see Wang Zhenya 王震亞, "Luelun Wei Ao geju zhengquan de xingshuai" 略論隗囂割據政權的興衰, *Xibei shifan daxue xuebao* 西北師範大學學報 2 (1988): 47–51.

⁶⁸ *QHHW* vol.11. The text is titled "Cixie Wei Ao shu" 辭謝隗囂書.

Zang Hong faced similar circumstances. Before building his alliance to attack Dong Zhuo 董卓, Yuan had already been renowned for his reaching out to the gentry groups from various regions.⁶⁹ Zang Hong is also known for persuading Zhang Chao 張超 and other officials to collaborate.⁷⁰ So, it is arguable that the oaths, read aloud in the ceremony, were not only to maintain the existing alliance; they were also used to send information to those elite populations who might provide support, to convince them that the alliance was worth joining and the leader was worth following. In such information three aspects of the alliance ethics are expressed out:

—Self-awareness of the group membership: the phrase “all members of our alliance” (*fan wo tong meng* 凡我同盟) recurs in the oaths, and there is usually an emphasis on the collective status of these members, who are all “subjects” of the emperor. the institution is “ours,” so all members understand their position; they are equal to each other as part of “our alliance.”

—Utmost sincerity of group members: all are willing to devote themselves entirely to a collective aim of righteousness (e.g., “to attack the wicked and deplorable” 以伐凶醜). There is no room for selfishness, as “sharing the same mind and uniting all the forces” 齊心曠力 is a required principle.

—The transcendental goal of self-sacrifice: group members obtain their dignity by relating their own career with the destiny of a much larger entity, the imperial state. By proclaiming “fulfilling our obligation as subjects of the emperor” 以致臣節 as the

⁶⁹ *HHS* 74A. 2373.

⁷⁰ *HHS* 58. 1886.

collective goal of the alliance, all their attacks on other forces are legitimized. As many of these people were themselves divisive powers (i.e., autonomous warlords), it was necessary to grant them a new, uniform title that appeared to support the only legitimate government, i.e., that of the Liu 劉 house.

These oaths, pronounced in public rituals, attracted outsiders by presenting an ideal scenario of complete mutual recognition, trust, reliance, and support. The speakers did not speak for themselves but voiced the value of the entire institution, in words that people from other parties could also understand. By involving such outsiders in communication, the elite leaders of the existing alliances expected to be able to enlarge their groups.

Though also interested in ritual practices, Roman elites relied on another type of institution to attract potential allies. By organizing public exhibitions in various places, e.g., temples, theaters, gardens, private villas and palaces, they expected to persuade audiences more directly than they might do through ritual performance. To show valuable or monumental objects, which contained explicit meaning in themselves, immediately provoked among the viewers strong attitudes—usually positive—toward the exhibition organizer. The exhibited objects were often expensive. They could be a collection of artwork (like images and sculptures), utilitarian objects (like armor), plants and animals, or larger things like architecture.⁷¹

⁷¹ For such categories of objects, see *Collecting and Dynastic Ambition*, eds. Susan Bracken, Andrea M. Gáldy, and Adriana Turpin (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Alessandro Poggio, “Accumulating and Interacting Artworks in Ancient Rome’s Public Spaces” in *Beyond “Art Collections”: Owning and Accumulating Objects from Greek Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Gianfranco Adornato, Gabriella Cirucci, and

So, what messages did the exhibition organizers intend to send out? How did these messages reveal the particular elite ethics of the Roman world? There is no doubt that the holding of these exhibitions was, to a large extent, encouraged by a success-driven mindset, the pursuit of winning over others regarding one's great wealth and possessing a knowledge or taste that were compatible with high status. One's affluence was often the basic condition for him/her to join the elite competition. It appears that Cicero often asked his friends for opulent objects to fill his house, as many as possible:

Hermae tui Pentelici cum capitibus aeneis, de quibus ad me scripsisti iam nunc me admodum delectant. qua re velim et eos et signa et cetera quae tibi eius loci et nostri studi et tuae elegantiae esse videbuntur quam plurima quam primumque mittas et maxime quae tibi gymnasi xystique videbuntur esse.

As to your Hermae of Pentelic marble with bronze heads, about which you wrote to me—I have fallen in love with them on the spot. So pray send both them and the statues, and anything else that may appear to you to suit the place you know of, my passion, and your taste—as large a supply and as early as possible. Above all, anything you think appropriate to a gymnasium and terrace.⁷²

In another letter he explains that he needs the artworks to compete with Crassus (d. 53 BCE), to have the right to look down upon the possessions of others.⁷³ Arguably there are deeper reasons for the two men's contest, as we can observe from historical materials: Cicero was assisting Pompey at that time, hoping to get the latter's favor; while Crassus

Walter Cupperi (Berlin: De Gruyter GmbH, 2020), 113–32; James F. D. Frakes, *Framing Public Life: The Portico in Roman Gaul* (Wien: Phoibos Verlag, 2009).

⁷² Letters to Atticus, 1.8. Both the Latin text and English translation are from *The Letters of Cicero; The Whole Extant Correspondence in Chronological Order*, ed. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh (George Bell and Sons, 1908–1909): <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0022%3Atext%3DA%3Abook%3D1%3Aletter%3D8>.

⁷³ *Att.* 1.4.

was assisting Caesar, who was Pompey's significant opponent.⁷⁴ Moreover, as Allen M. Ward argues, Cicero was also hoping to keep his close connection with Pompey, who could help him realize the goal of "keeping the traditionally antagonistic orders of the Senate and the *equites* in a mutual alliance, *concordia ordinum*."⁷⁵ This required him to verify his capability while degrading that of Crassus, with whom Pompey might mitigate the confrontation someday. His later compromise with Crassus was also unrelated to friendship, but the result of pressure from Pompey and Caesar.⁷⁶ Considering all this, it is obvious that Cicero was making use of his material treasure to build and maintain certain political affiliations. Political competitions extended into the realm of private life, making one's style of living not only his own affair but also an indicator of his party's reputation. With the display of wealth in his house, Cicero was representing not merely himself but also his political alliance, sending out the message that they were affluent enough, powerful enough, and worthy of following.

These exhibitions in private houses had another function, i.e., offering the background for conversations and debates. In *De Architectura* Vitruvius Pollio illustrates the necessity of certain designs and decor in elite private houses, for the communicative activities of these people:

...item feneratoribus et publicanis commodiora et speciosiora et ab insidiis tuta,

⁷⁴ For the rivalry of the four men, see Allen M. Ward, "Cicero's Fight against Crassus and Caesar in 65 and 63 B.C.," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Bd. 21, H. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1972): 244–58.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ For this reconciliation of the relationship, see Bruce A. Marshall, "Cicero and Sallust on Crassus and Catiline," *Latomus* T. 33, Fasc. 4 (Oct.–Dec., 1974): 804–813.

forensibus autem et disertis elegantiora et spatiosiora ad conventus excipiundos, nobiles vero, qui honores magistratusque gerundo praestare debent officia civibus, faciunda sunt vestibula regalia alta, atria et peristylia amplissima, silvae ambulationesque laxiores ad decorem maiestatis perfectae; praeterea bybliotheas, pinacothecas, basilicas non dissimili modo quam publicorum operum magnificentia habeant comparatas, quod in domibus eorum saepius et publica consilia et privata iudicia arbitriaque conficiuntur.

...For advocates and public speakers, handsomer and more roomy, to accommodate meetings; for men of rank who, from holding offices and magistracies, have social obligations to their fellow-citizens, lofty entrance courts in regal style, and most spacious atriums and peristyles, with plantations and walks of some extent in them, appropriate to their dignity. They need also libraries, picture galleries, and basilicas, finished in a style similar to that of great public buildings, since public councils as well as private law suits and hearings before arbitrators are very often held in the houses of such men.⁷⁷

In these contexts, the well-designed exhibitions constituted the environment for the building of interpersonal relationships. They signified which group was involved, e.g., magistrates, participants of councils, or some kinds of law officers. More importantly, because elite populations of similar ranks shared the same demand for environments “appropriate to their dignity,” the exhibitions offered a chance for them to identify each other. As Hannah Platts points out, they represent “a stable order of status symbols that in turn should reflect society’s equally stable structure”⁷⁸: through the displayed objects, the social position of the exhibition owner was encoded as a series of messages that could be easily understood by the elite viewers. Those viewers, with the feeling of familiarity,

⁷⁷ On Architecture, 6.5.2. The Latin text is from F. Krohn, *Lipsiae* (1912), the English translation is from Morris Hicky Morgan, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1914), <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0072%3Ab ook%3D6%3Achapter%3D5%3Asection%3D2>.

⁷⁸ Hannah Platts, “Keeping up with the Joneses: Competitive Display within the Roman Villa Landscape” in *Competition in the Ancient World*, eds. Nick Fisher and Hans Van Wees (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2011), 239–79.

would thus feel psychologically closer to the owner, which served as the basis for their collaboration.

Material wealth is not the only thing that could be shown off. Another component that defined the elite group, one's good taste in all things, was also displayed here, through the selection and arrangement of exhibited objects. The connection between one's taste and his/her social position can be traced back to Hellenistic Greece. Plutarch, in his description of Aratus of Sikyon (271–213 BCE), highlights the individual's interests in art that motivated him to look for "technical excellence and something out of the ordinary" from his collection of paintings.⁷⁹ In the Roman period this emphasis on the taste transcended the realm of art, being extended to all aspects of one's life. Charles Feldman defines it as "the consciousness that allowed the aristocrat the ability to sort through and find the proper elements essential for a good life."⁸⁰ It signified one's capability to identify the innate character of the mundane, day-to-day affairs, to overcome the triviality of the material world to reach the essence and "truth" of life. If an individual elite could show others his/her extraordinary taste through the arrangement of exhibitions, it would be easier for him/her to find supporters among the viewers, because he/she already persuaded them that he/she deserved the honor as a qualified elite.

(II) Teaching or Advisory Institutions

Teaching institutions provide a range of classes and projects that require the

⁷⁹ Eva Falaschi, "Collecting and Owning Sikyonian Paintings: Aratus of Sikyon and his Interest for Art in Plutarch's Perspective" in *Beyond "Art Collections,"* 77–94.

⁸⁰ See Charles Feldman, "Roman Taste," *Food, Culture & Society* 8, no.1 (2005): 7–30.

participation of knowledgeable recipients, to make sure that these people can be provided with quality information.⁸¹ Most advisory institutions, in contrast, do not require the full participation of their targeted clients. It is mostly determined by the information recipients themselves whether to absorb certain messages or not. Both types of institutions can be identified from ancient materials, though sometimes it is difficult to distinguish them from each other.

Both the Han and Roman empires had state-sponsored school systems.⁸² When it comes to primary sources, however, public and private teaching cannot be entirely differentiated in many situations. Elite individuals sometimes made use of their official privilege to support certain teaching institutions, without the formal permission of the central court, so this distorted the boundary between public and private schools. The earlier mentioned Shu governor, Wen Weng, provides an example. Such people also performed teaching outside of formal schools, and their school meetings were sometimes open to anyone who wished to come, like those held by Plotinus (204/5–270).⁸³ These blurred the boundary of a what constituted a teaching institution.

So, there is a need to explore those private schools and informal teaching organizations. Ban Gu offers a list of scholars who were well-known for private teaching

⁸¹ See L. Harvey and D. Green, “Defining Quality,” *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 18. 1 (1993): 9–34.

⁸² W. Martin Bloomer, “Schooling in Persona: Imagination and Subordination in Roman Education,” *Classical Antiquity* 16, no. 1 (Apr., 1997): 57–78.

⁸³ See Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books*, 1.10–15. *Plotinus: Porphyry on Plotius Ennead I*, trans. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 3.

in his “Biographies of Confucian Intellectuals” (Rulin zhuan 儒林傳). Similarly, when documenting the institutions that taught sophist philosophy, Philostratus provides a long list of scholars’ names—Eudoxus of Cnidus, Leon of Byzantium, Dias of Ephesus, etc.—before moving on to the content of their instruction.⁸⁴ These owners of private schools were the center of such institutions, and all school affairs (e.g., curriculum, budget, and planing) were almost entirely determined by them. In some circumstances, their personal standpoints were even prioritized over imperial doctrines as the basic content of teaching.⁸⁵

In this context, what defines a “teacher” is the person’s dominant position in a group of learners, i.e., authority over the students. What defines a teacher’s institution is not merely the teaching of specific skills, but the imparting of particular ethics that indicate the ideal relationship between tutors and disciples. In the Han private schools, the relationship between a teacher and his students is analogous to that between a ruler and his subject, or between a father and his son.⁸⁶ In both the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu*, the terms *shi* 事 (to serve) and *cong* 從 (to follow closely; to be obedient to) are used to describe the obligations of a student. Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) had closely

⁸⁴ See *Lives of the Sophists*, in *Philostratus: Lives of the Sophists, Eunapius: Lives of Philosophers*, trans. Wilmer C. Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).

⁸⁵ Alison John, “(Mis)Identifying Teachers in Late Antique Gaul: Sidonius’ *Ep.* 4.11, Mamertus Claudianus and Classical vs. Christian Education,” *Mnemosyne* (2021): 1–25.

⁸⁶ See Chin Fa-ken 金發根, “Dong Han Danggu renwu de fenxi” 東漢黨錮人物的分析, *Zhongyan yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中研院歷史語言研究所集刊 34, no. 2 (1963): 505–558.

followed the famous scholar, Yan Junping 嚴君平 when he was young;⁸⁷ Zhuo Mao 卓茂 (d. 28) is recorded as having served an academician Jiang 江, while Huan Rong 桓榮 (ca. 1st century) served another scholar Zhu Pu 朱普.⁸⁸ The same two terms are used in the two historical works to portray one's filial piety to his/her parents or one's loyalty to the ruler.⁸⁹ These actions of following and obedience, performed by individual students personally, were important messages for prospective disciples of the teacher. If they wanted to join the institution, i.e., the school, they must have had a clear knowledge of their own position as the inferior, to maintain the necessary hierarchy and order within the organization. Such behaviors of students were also the content of teaching, making individual males or females fully understand how to obtain and maintain their membership in a group.

But the requirement of obedience was not merely to discipline the behaviors of students. Instead, a strong psychological connection was expected to be formed and displayed, which goes far beyond labeling the teacher as “ruler and father” 君父 (*junfu*). The root of one's willingness to serve a scholar is true admiration. *Mu* 慕 (adoration based on respect) is the typical mindset that motivated an individual to follow a teacher. To express it explicitly, students often devoted their time and money to be close to the teacher, both physically and mentally. When Zhang Ba 張霸 (d. early 2nd century) became widely known for his expertise in the Classics, many junior intellectuals bought

⁸⁷ *HS* 72. 3056–3057.

⁸⁸ *HHS* 25. 869, 37. 1249.

⁸⁹ For instance, “Biography of Kong Fen 孔奮” in the *HHS*: “Serving his mother with piety and caution” 事母孝謹.

houses near him, to attend his school.⁹⁰ His posthumous name, Xianwen 宪文, was also assigned by his pupils.⁹¹ Students also visited the private house of their teachers very often, which is seen from the description, “declining the visit of his students” (*xie qian zhu sheng* 謝遣諸生) that happened when a teacher suffered personal issues. The act showing the highest sincerity of a student is to attend the teacher’s funeral, even to organize it. When Dai Feng’s 戴封 (d. 100) teacher, Mr. Shen 申君, died in the imperial capital, he helped to send the coffin to the teacher’s hometown, though he was only fifteen years old at the time.⁹²

Through such practices, the sincerity underlying the teacher-student relationship was encoded into transmittable messages, which illustrated the nature of a teaching institution: it should be a place where interpersonal bonds, not individuality, are evoked. This emphasis on group identity is also reflected through the operation of informal teaching/advisory institutions, like literary salons, discussion groups, and circles of correspondence. Elite intellectuals gave each other teaching and advice in these groups, with some senior ones acting as others’ mentors. Members of these groups sometimes gathered based on their shared experience in official institutions, like the Imperial University.⁹³ In other cases they followed someone reputable and were grouped

⁹⁰ *HHS* 36. 1241.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *HHS* 81. 2683.

⁹³ Yang Xia 楊霞, “Shiren jiaojie yu wenben shuxie: Dong-Han youxue shiren wenhua huodong kaocha” 士人交結與文本書寫: 東漢遊學士人文化活動考察, *Anqing shifan daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 安慶師範大學學報(社會科學版) 37, no. 2

surrounding that person.⁹⁴ Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78–143), though having not established his own school, was admired by Confucian scholars for his classical studies (“*zhu ru zong zhi*” 諸儒宗之).⁹⁵ Some famous literati, like Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166) and Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), were in his literary circle.⁹⁶

What is shared by these informal institutions and the formal schools is the willingness of the instructors/mentors to recommend their followers for official positions. Some scholars explain this as indicating a mutually beneficial relationship similar to the so-called *guanxi* 關係 (“connections”) nowadays,⁹⁷ but I would argue that the willingness also marks the non-utilitarian side of a relationship, which is one’s deep understanding of someone else, as well as the complete trust that one can partly consign one’s own pursuits—to do good for the state and society—to that person. The famous scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), when teaching Guo Yuan 國淵 (d. 3rd century) and Ren Jia 任嘏 while the two were young, said Guo will be “an important official for the state” (*guoqi* 國器), while Ren “follows moral principles and righteousness” (*daode* 道德). He recommended the two for governmental positions when they grew up, and his

(Apr. 2018): 57–97.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ *HHS* 52. 1722.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ For instance, Hsing I-tien 邢義田 argues that the dominant relationship between disciples and mentors, former subordinate officials and their masters, and the “recommended” and “recommending” ones, is the so-called *guanxi*: “東漢仕宦，‘關係’至重...所謂門生、故吏、孝廉、舉主之間，皆有君父般的關係。” See “Dong Han Xiaolian de shenfen beijing” 東漢孝廉的身份背景 in *Qin Han shi lungao* 秦漢史論稿 (Taipei: Dongda Tushu Gongsi, 1987), 145–215.

words were ultimately verified, as both Guo and Ren became outstanding officials.⁹⁸

Again we see the sense of self-transcendence, which is part of the elite ethics. The mentor, by recommending his disciples to official positions, entitled them to realize his political ideal in the future.

The Roman private teaching shared some features with the Han example just presented. The close relationship between teachers and students can be broadly seen, especially from those instructors who used their private houses as classrooms. Eunapius (4th–5th century) tells in his work how the house of the sophist Julianus (133/137–193) was used for teaching, and how it was passed to his successor Prohaeresius (272–367).⁹⁹ These houses provided both space and chances for further communication, and a background from which trust and emotional connections came to emerge. The mutual trust between instructors and students made the circulation of some significant works possible, as excellent pupils were appointed by the teacher to revise or edit his writings. Plotinus, who appointed Porphyry (ca. 234–305) to edit his works, serves as a good example.¹⁰⁰ The importance of personal attachment is also observable, as is shown in the pupils' written works dedicated to their teachers, e.g., Aelius Aristides' (117–181) funeral oration for his teacher Alexander of Cotiaenum, and the poem of Priscian (fl. 500), which

⁹⁸ *HHS* 35. 1212.

⁹⁹ *Eunapius* VS 9.1, 4–6, 483. For interpretations of the related passages, see Raffaella Cribiore, *The School of Libanius In Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton University Press, 2007), 44.

¹⁰⁰ This trust is illustrate in detail by Koenraad Verboven in “Friendship among the Romans” in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, ed. Michael Peachin (Oxford University Press, 2011), 404–421.

is about his teacher Theoctistus.¹⁰¹

But the information imparted in Roman private schools has its unique content. Generally speaking, Roman schools include the grammarian's school and the rhetorician's.¹⁰² The knowledge taught in such schools was highly formulaic and technical;¹⁰³ even in the early Christian age teachers still maintained such organized methods of instruction, as seen in the case of Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) who “follows the Logos in addressing a wide variety of students and in adapting his teaching to the capabilities and the readiness of each one.”¹⁰⁴ This does not mean that these institutions were only factories producing words and phrases. They produced ethics and values as well, imparting them to generations of young learners. Different from the commonly presumed harmonious relationship of Han instructors and pupils that they treated each other as family members, in a Roman classroom there were supposed to be

¹⁰¹ See *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, 68, footnote 154.

¹⁰² Rodney P. Robinson, “The Roman School Teacher and His Reward,” *The Classical Weekly* Vol. 15, No. 8 (Dec. 5, 1921): 57–61; Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 11. This is a very general categorization, however. According to Aubrey Gwynn, some professions—medicine, engineering, and architecture, demanded a higher standard of education. In the encyclics disciplina Vitruvius includes philosophy and law in his list of school education, and omits rhetoric. See Gwynn, *Roman Education From Cicero to Quintilian* (London: Forgotten Books, 2016), 150.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁴ See J. Kovacs, “Divine Pedagogy and the Gnostic Teacher According to Clement of Alexandria,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001): 3–25; Bogdan G. Bucur, “Hierarchy, Eldership, Isangelia: Clement of Alexandria and the Ascetic Tradition” in *Alexandrian Legacy: A Critical Appraisal*, eds. Doru Costache, Philip Kariatlis and Mario Baghos (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 2–45.

conflicts between teachers and students, and schoolroom punishment, such as beating, was considered a way to obtain conformity in elementary teaching institutions.¹⁰⁵ The only thing students could do was to tolerate it, which caused long-time fear throughout their lives, as observed by Catherine M. Chin.¹⁰⁶ Here we encounter again the earlier mentioned, Roman-style mindset: *always ready to solve confrontations*. It is hard to say whether such violence was also widely inflicted upon adult students, but teachers of such grown-ups developed some methods to avoid the exacerbation of a conflict. In the *Controversiae*, Seneca the Elder cites the admission Cestius Pius (b. after 9 CE) made to his class: “Here I know that I am talking nonsense but I say many things to please my audience, not to please myself.”¹⁰⁷ Tactics could be used by a Roman instructor to please his students, which is rarely seen in Han China. This reveals the compromise made by both sides of a teacher-student relationship, and partly shows that, although there was in fact a difference in their position, that teachers were superior and authoritative while students were inferior and compliant, it should be their responsibility to maintain a balance and a superficial “equality”—this gap should be kept on a acceptable level, rather than being further widened.

Confrontations, usually embodied as competitions, also existed among the students themselves, particularly concerning their intellectual achievements. It is recorded by Porphyry that Erennius, Origen, and Plotinus all followed Ammonius (175–242), and

¹⁰⁵ See Catherine M. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 111–14.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Controversiae* ix. 6.12.

they made an agreement not to disclose any of the doctrines of Ammonius that he had revealed to them; however, “Erennius was the first to break the agreement, and Origen followed his lead; ...Plotinus for a long time continued to write nothing, but began to base his lectures on his studies with Ammonius.”¹⁰⁸ The disclosure—probably even stealing—of one’s teacher’s fruit of study was, undoubtedly, done for the purpose of winning over other scholars. Here the desire for success is prioritized over the agreement based on mutual trust, becoming the major factor that determined the inter-group relationship of students. The factors leading to this pervasive mindset of competition are complicated. They might have derived from the unsafe feeling of these *litterati*: they were latecomers to the Roman upper class, compared with the old senatorial aristocrats. There was always the need to fight for their own benefits.¹⁰⁹ The inclination to compete might also have had its roots in what the students were taught at school, considering that rhetoric is the art of winning over others in a conversation. When technical skills were performed by an agent, they could become internalized as part of one’s own personality.

The atmosphere of competition was less intense in informal discussions wherein people exchanged their advice. As Alison John observes, Sidonius (ca. 430–489) uses the term *consultatio* to describe what he did in the gathering of Claudianus (ca. 370–404), which means “consultation” or “inquiry”—a set of activities that have not appeared in the Latin portrayal of formal school education.¹¹⁰ When the formal structure of the

¹⁰⁸ Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books*, 1. 25–30, page 11.

¹⁰⁹ See Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 54–56.

¹¹⁰ John, “(Mis)Identifying Teachers in Late Antique Gaul,” 1–25.

teacher–student, student–student, or teacher–teacher interplay dissolved, people could find more free space to communicate with each other.

(III) Philanthropic Institutions

Few studies have been published on how philanthropic institutions could serve as information-management organizations, i.e., how they spread messages about their central ethics and core values. What distinguishes a philanthropic/charitable institution from other types of information institutions is the former’s much greater reliance on patronage. Material investments are also needed for ritual/exhibition and teaching institutions, but they are not as significant as in the case of philanthropy. It is also this patronage that links the operation of the entire institution with individual patrons, making the organization (formal or informal) the means through which those people’s status, motivations, and pretensions are publicly expressed.¹¹¹ This makes a philanthropic institution the distribution center of messages that publicize the viewpoint of someone.

The philanthropic institutions in Han times have two important features. They were more or less dependent on the formal bureaucratic system, through which the material investment served to fulfill the obligation of a qualified official. A wide range of materials, including temples, shrines, stone stelae, and so forth, help illustrate the career and contributions of commissioned bureaucrats.¹¹² A specific type of Eastern Han stelae,

¹¹¹ For the relationship between patronage and charitable organizations, see Alicia Simpson, “The Propaganda Value of Imperial Patronage: Ecclesiastical Foundations and Charitable Establishments in the Late Twelfth Century,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 108, issue 1 (2015): 179–206.

¹¹² Yu Xie and Miranda Brown use several tables to summarize the total number and basic information of such materials in Eastern Han. See “Between Heaven and Earth,”

the “stelae to commemorate righteous governors” 德政碑,¹¹³ contains information about the contribution of such people. In an inscription recorded in both the *Lishi* 隸釋 and *Quan Hou Han wen* 全後漢文, Zhou Jing 周憬, who is supposed to be the governor (*taishou* 太守) of Guiyang 桂陽 in the third year of the Xiping 熹平 reign period (174), is honored for his water management projects to control the floods in the local area. All the thirty-one subordinate officials who participated in the project have their names recorded in the inscription, indicating the institutional nature of the project. According to the inscription, the stele was erected by another group of bureaucrats of the Guiyang region:

孔子曰：禹不決江疏河，吾其魚矣。是熹平三年，歲在□□□□□□□提，仲冬之月，曲紅長零陵重安區祉，字景賢，遵承典□□□□□□□，宣揚德訓。帥禮不越，欽仰高山。乃與邑子故吏龔臺郭蒼龔維等，命工擊石。建碑瀧上勒銘公功，傳之萬世，垂示無窮。

Confucius said: ‘If Yu had not dredged the rivers, all of us would be fish right now.’ Considering this, here in the third year of Xiping, during the period of..., in the month of the mid-winter, Ou Zhi, whose given name is Jingxiang, from Chong’an of Lingling, follows traditional [principles?] to publicize the righteous teaching. We will obey the requirement of classical etiquette to honor the extraordinary one, like looking up on a mountain. So I (Ou Zhi), together with my fellows and retired officials of the local area—Gong Tai, Guo Cang, Gong Luo, and so forth, ordered craftsmen to work on stones, to erect a stele to inscribe the accomplishment of the honorable gentleman, to make thousands of generations understand his reputation, showing it to their descendants endlessly.¹¹⁴

56–87.

¹¹³ This category is seen in Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正, “Han dai shike gaishuo (II)” 漢代石刻概說(下), trans. Zhou Changshan 周長山, *Wenwu chungiu* 文物春秋 5 (2002): 66–75.

¹¹⁴ For the interpretation of the text, see also Song Huiqun 宋會群, “Shenhan Guiyang taishou Zhou fujun gongxun zhi jiming bei jijiao he yanjiu” 神漢桂陽太守周府君功勳之紀銘’碑輯校和研究, *Shaoguan xueyuan xuebao* (*Shehui kexue*) 韶關學院學

Both the dedicatee and dedicators belong to the administrator group. It is difficult to figure out to what extent the officials initiated the project simply for the good of the local people, because obviously this act involved the self-serving aim of having their reputation spread among the public. But it should be noticed that the dedicatee, Zhou Jing, appears to have not obtained any official reward for his achievements. Those who erected the stele were also not well-known in their own time, which renders it possible that Zhou, as well as his colleagues, worked on water management for some moral reasons, not entirely for outside recognition. In another stele recorded in the *Quan Hou Han wen*, a Mr. Yang 楊君 who was the local official of Fanyang 繁陽, is commemorated for asking help from the central government to distribute grain among the local population: “For several years he had submitted requests [to the central court], and transported grain to distribute, for tens of thousands of *hu*, to assist the local government to help the poor” 上書歷年, 運穀萬斛, 助官振貧.¹¹⁵ The contribution of the individual official cannot be regarded as simply a self-advertisement, considering the long time he devoted and the potential of bothering the central government with petitions.

Meanwhile, the benefactors of the charitable institution were not necessarily as wealthy as today’s philanthropists. The material resources possessed by them might be limited, but what they devoted to others could be substantial. The Eastern Han official, Fu Zhan 伏湛 (d. 37), distributed his salary grain allowance among the village population,

報 (社會科學) 27, no. 8 (2006): 1–6; Lin Changzhang 林昌丈, “Han Jin mingke yu Jing nan jiazhu” 漢晉銘刻與荊南家族, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 2 (2016): 1–30.

¹¹⁵ For the inscription, see *QHHW* vol. 130. The text is titled “Fanyang ling Yangjun bei” 繁陽令楊君碑.

while sharing coarse food with his family.¹¹⁶ Ma Rong 馬融 had also distributed livestock among his fellows, while keeping an extremely humble lifestyle.¹¹⁷ Here some transmoral elements emerged. By sacrificing their very basic condition of living to help a wider community, elite individuals extended the principles of their in-group relationship to a larger area beyond their circles, without so much considering whether it is worthy enough to do so. There is an attempt to make self-sacrifice a universal law ontologically prior to any creed of altruism. With such a law effective in the entire society, to contribute oneself to others' well being is a way for an individual to become what he/she potentially could be—"a person within a community of persons."¹¹⁸

The public-giving of Roman elites also shared trans-group pursuits similar to their Han counterparts, while having other realistic aspects. The Roman philanthropic institutions, in the pre-Christian period, were significantly shaped by the Greek idea of *philanthropia*, which means "loving humanity."¹¹⁹ These institutions were considered to be required by the intrinsic inclinations, or nature, of human beings. So in many situations the Roman charity was treated as a civic duty, a demand for the rich to "give freely for their cities' needs."¹²⁰ There is also the imperial legislation regarding the dole, especially

¹¹⁶ *HHS* 26. 893.

¹¹⁷ *HHS* 60. 1953.

¹¹⁸ For this concept of moral men, see Maurice Friedman, "The Transmoral Morality," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3, no. 2 (Spring, 1964): 174–80.

¹¹⁹ Leszek Aftyka, "Philanthropy in Ancient Times: Social and Educational Aspects," *Journal of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University* 6, no. 1 (2019): 149–54.

¹²⁰ Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler, "Philanthropy and Religion, Christianity" in *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, 2010 Edition,

for grain distribution, from very early periods. William H. Byrnes observes that Julius Caesar had already made use of such legal codes to publicize the government's contribution to the social welfare.¹²¹ The *Law of Caesar on Municipalities*, 44 BCE, states a requirement to have the names of all those people who were assisted displayed publicly: "The magistrate...shall provide that each person's name, the things which he has declared, and the day on which he has declared them shall be entered in the public records and that all these entries shall be accurately copied on a tablet on the bulletin board in the Forum. Whenever and wherever grain is distributed to the people he shall keep this list displayed daily...."¹²² With all those names listed in public view, the degrees of generosity of the benefactors were revealed to the common population. The distribution of material resources was thus a political gesture. Alms was not only regulated by law but also connected to the image of the political agent, who was the spokesman of the imperial system. Following the lead of rulers who established charitable sectors for political aims, private philanthropy also rose among upper-class citizens, gradually combined with the interpersonal ethics of these people.¹²³ Euergetism, a Greek tradition of elite benefaction

https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-0-387-93996-4_572

¹²¹ William H. Byrnes, "Ancient Roman Munificence: The Development of the Practice and Law of Charity," *Rutgers Law Review* 57, no. 3 (2005), 1043–1110, available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2314731>.

¹²² Translation seen in Allan Chester Johnson et al., *Ancient Roman Statutes: A Translation with Introduction, Commentary, Glossary, and Index* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961); Cf. Yale Avalon Project, *Law of Caesar on Municipalities 44 B.C.*, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/law_of_caesar.asp.

¹²³ For related discussions, see *Bread and Circuses: Euergetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy*, eds. Kathryn Lomas and Tim Cornell (London: Routledge, 2003).

to towns and communities to obtain honor and status,¹²⁴ was widely practiced. According to Jacob Miller, the Greek elites under this tradition, especially around the 4th century BCE, were encouraged to compete in the provision of benefactions to the *demos* of their city.¹²⁵ The passion for competition was then incorporated into the core values of Roman elites, as we discussed earlier, and the euergetic practices associated with it enjoyed further promotion in its social significance. Angela V. Kalinowski has looked into the hundreds of inscriptions from the Roman city Ephesos, which were dedicated to elite benefactors who sponsored the building of public architecture.¹²⁶ These people had their basic information and projects they had undertaken inscribed on stones, much like their Han counterparts. They are different from the Han group, however, in the sense that the content of the inscriptions was much more accessible to local commoners. Here are two instances from the second century:

Hieron Aristogeiton, son of Hieron, grandson of Hieron,
pure, emperor-loving, having built the entrance way
from his own money during his prytany, dedicated it to the *demos*.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ For the definition of euergetism, see Gregg E. Gardner, “Competitive Giving in the Third Century CE: Early Rabbinic Approaches to Greco-Roman Civic Benefaction” in *Religious Competition in the Third Century C.E.: Jews, Christians, and the Greco-Roman World*, eds. N. DesRosiers, J. Rosenblum, and L. Vuong (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 81–92; Matthew Nicholls, “Euergetism: Ancient Greco-Roman Society,” Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/euergetism>.

¹²⁵ Jacob Miller, “Euergetism, Agonism, and Democracy: The Hortatory Intention in Late Classical and Early Hellenistic Athenian Honorific Decrees,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 85, no. 2 (April–June 2016): 385–435. For this competition, also see Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, trans. Brian Pierce (The Penguin Press, 1990), 102–108.

¹²⁶ See Kalinowski, “Patterns of Patronage: The Politics and Ideology of Public Building in the Eastern Roman Empire (31 BCE–600 CE)” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1996).

Aurelius Metrodorus,
emperor-loving,
acted as *ugoronomos*
purely and steadfastly,
and while in office
he contributed generously from the "allotment"
for the paving of the area in the Koressos
Good luck!¹²⁸

Kalinowski has found that the brief information recorded in these inscriptions just focuses on a few major points: the name of the dedicatee who contributed their wealth, their social position, and the exact work they did.¹²⁹ There is no question that the wealthy Romans could afford the production of longer inscriptions, just like the Han elites. Yet considering that most commoners at their time were barely literate, conciseness and briefness could make it possible for elite benefactors to compete with each other in terms of their reputation in the broader society: if one's inscription were shorter but more informative than others', he/she would have been more likely to be remembered by the public. The elite competition for honor was now extended to commoners.

The situation continued as Christianity enjoyed growth. Similar to the Han elites, the seeking after universal/transcendental laws became more explicit, because God came to be seen as the most important benefactor.¹³⁰ Charity is defined in the Old Testament as a sacred practice, and Christian elites were demanded to perform this sacred duty. Under

¹²⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹²⁹ Kalinowski, "Patterns of Patronage," 82–86.

¹³⁰ Marcin Kowalski, "God the Benefactor and His Human Clients in Rome," *The Biblical Annals* 8, no. 1 (2018): 47–69.

this background, to invest in charity meant to get closer to the ultimate principles of God. This is because on the one hand, as Peter Brown observes, the abandonment of secular wealth went against normal human nature and should be considered a chance to go beyond one's limitation as a selfish being.¹³¹ On the other hand, it is a way to practice the central teaching of Christianity to reach out to the public domain where people are in need, because only in this way the very fundamental requirement for Christians, "being inclusive not only vertically but horizontally,"¹³² can be satisfied: all people have the right to be protected and cared for. Such a pursuit of universal protection was significant in the building of elite assemblies in the Christian period, which we will discuss next.

IV. "Tianxia guixin" 天下歸心 and "People of God": New Forms of Coalition and the Elite Propagandistic Culture

It is now clear that these information institutions were formed out of the needs of the elite population, who lacked stability and persistence in terms of their power and status. These institutions functioned a bit differently from many of today's information organizations, for their activities were not secret to outsiders. Instead, a larger audience was targeted, to enlarge the inter-party coalition of all elite individuals. As a consequence of this large-scale "information campaign," a culture of integration propaganda grew, one that promoted the conformity and collaboration of different interest groups on the social level. Those information institutions, by presenting what is well worth pursuing in an

¹³¹ See Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of A Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 76.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 78.

individual elite's life, convinced the elite populations to follow new authorities and thus created "a total environment of persuasion."¹³³

So, a question we must now address concerns the sponsors of such institutions. Which kind of elites did they actually serve, and what are the means through which they served those people? To respond to these questions, we need to first reexamine the elite idea of leadership in both empires. The *Xinlun* 新論 divides ideal rulership into two types, the "Way of kings" (*wangdao* 王道) and the "Way of Hegemons" (*badao* 霸道), stating that both are legitimate means for ruling:

夫王道之治，先除人害，而足其衣食，然後教以禮儀，而威以刑誅，使知好惡去就...此王者之術。霸功之大者，尊君卑臣，權統由一，政不二門，賞罰必信，法令著明，百官修理，威令必行，此霸者之術。

The principle of the way of kings is: first remove damages, and then fulfill the need of people regarding their clothes and food; then teach them [knowledge about] rituals and etiquette, deter them with punishment and legal sentences, to make them understand [what is] right or wrong, [what should be] abandoned or pursued... This is the means through which the Way of kings can be realized. The essential component of the hegemon's power is: to have the ruler honored, while the subordinates, humbled; to make power and rule converged, and avoid the decentralization of policies; to make legal codes and ordinances clarified, and the various officials disciplined, so orders could be followed strictly. This is the means through which the Way of hegemons can be realized.¹³⁴

Huan Tan 桓譚 (23 BCE–56 CE) concludes that both kinds of rulership "could win over all the people under Heaven, govern myriads of commoners [effectively], and impart good examples to following generations; but their practical reality is the same" 俱有天下，而君萬民，垂統子孫，其實一也。 This is not to entirely deny the divine rulership in the

¹³³ Marshall Soules, *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* (Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2015), 8.

¹³⁴ "Wang Ba di'er" 王霸第二.

Zhou period, but to provide another dimension of imperial rule that those who rule the state do not need to build connections with the gods. The ruler is not always a given, fixed authority, but can be a position waiting for qualified ones to fill it. It depends on his/her own preference to use the Ways of kings or hegemons, so long as the aim of “winning all the people under Heaven” can still be achieved.

It was in this context that the idea of a dual-layered rulership developed in Han times. Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) has observed that “Han people called the commandery governors honorably [as a representative of] ‘our dynastic court’... even a county magistrate can be called the [representative of] the court” 漢人有以郡守之尊稱為本朝者...亦有以縣令而稱朝,¹³⁵ figuring out that the imperial ruler was not the only legitimized, high authority in people’s daily lives, since they had more day-to-day contact with lower representatives which became practical substitutes. A regional-based “rulership” practically unchecked by central state power paralleled the palace-based emperorship in elite discourse. Just as with this twofold imperial system, authority also appears to consist of a “formal,” objective, and fixed layer, which is embodied by the Han emperor who had his imperial residence in the imperial capital; and an “informal,” subjective, and changing part, which is incarnated in the various key leaders of local areas who were supported by elite parties in their region. In many cases they were the bureaucratic officials who were appointed to governmental positions or even controlled military forces, but there were also individuals who came to power for their religious

¹³⁵ “Shang Xia tongcheng” 上下通稱. *Ri zhi lu jishi* 日知錄集釋, comm. Huang Rucheng 黃汝成 (Shijiazhuang: Huashan Wenyi Chubanshe, 1990), 1085.

influence, intellectual resources, material wealth, etc.

This layered rulership is also seen in the views of Roman elites. Fergus Millar has argued that the Roman emperor “was what the Roman emperor did”¹³⁶: their power was reactive and functional on the one hand, while self-sustaining and divine on the other. In the words of Jonathan Edmondson, it is better to see the Roman emperor “as simultaneously both an ‘autocrat’ and a ‘magistrate,’”¹³⁷ because the way a ruler actually participated in his state affairs was to *intervene in* them, which could be presented as either his active decision-making, or his relatively passive responding to petitions or other requests. The second kind of job is especially important, because it is the basic way to build a link between the emperor and the provinces. If an emperor failed in dealing with local affairs, his empire, as a whole, might face a series of issues. Millar quotes Dio (ca. 155–235) to illustrate this:

While he (Trajan) was staying in Antioch an extraordinary earthquake occurred; many cities were affected by it but Antioch suffered the worst disaster. For as Trajan was wintering there, and many soldiers had collected there, and many civilians had come for law-suits or embassies, for trade or out of curiosity, there was not a province or a community which escaped unscathed. Thus in Antioch the whole world under Roman rule suffered loss.¹³⁸

From the perspective of Dio, there appears to be no connection between two things,

¹³⁶ Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (Richmond: Gerald Duckworth, 1977), 6.

¹³⁷ “The Roman emperor and the local communities of the Roman Empire” in *Il princeps romano: autocrate o magistrato? Fattori giuridici e fattori sociali del potere imperiale da Augusto a Commodo*, eds. J. L. Ferrary and J. Scheid (Pubblicazioni del CEDANT, 2014), 127–55.

¹³⁸ LXVIII 24, 1–2.

Trajan's presence in Antioch and his failure in dealing with the local disaster. The mere availability of the ruler means almost nothing, which casts doubt on his oft-considered divine nature. The more important role of a ruler is to solve concrete issues. This was based on such views that the leaders of local areas, who had direct contact with local populations, served as a "substitute for central administration."¹³⁹ In the words of Raymond Van Dam the local governors adopted, or were invested by their supporters with the trappings of imperial power.¹⁴⁰

It was thus on the local level that these "quasi-rulers" competed with the emperor regarding their social influence. Trust between such people and other elite populations in their region, which was built upon their daily interactions, offered the basis of their coalitions. The information institutions in local areas that displayed, imparted, and spread elite ethics were, more or less, sponsored by these key leaders of local areas, to generate a broad-based companionship that could facilitate the future development of networking relationships. Here the elite ethics of interaction, encoded as messages via information institutions, were transformed into new slogans that attracted individual elites to collaborate harmoniously for a common agenda: to make the "quasi-ruler" supported by them into the real monarch.

The expression of this collective aim occurred primarily in the discourse sphere. For the Han Chinese, it was mainly through the retelling of historical stories that such practical values were legitimized. History was retold in school teaching, rituals, and other

¹³⁹ Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 8.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

institutionalized practices, to build a general blueprint that could reconcile the boundaries between the different world views of individuals. The reinterpretation of the story of the Duke of Zhou 周公 can serve as a typical example of this kind. The early Han classic *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (authored by Han Ying 韓嬰¹⁴¹) provides the earliest retelling that portrays the Duke of Zhou as a powerful figure beyond the control of the Zhou king, which was then refined by Sima Qian in the *Shiji*:

周公戒伯禽曰：‘我文王之子，武王之弟，成王之叔父，我於天下亦不賤矣。然我一沐三捉發，一飯三吐哺，起以待士，猶恐失天下之賢人。’

The Duke of Zhou enjoined Bo Qin, saying, “I am the son of King Wen, the brother of King Wu, the uncle of King Cheng; my place in the empire is no lowly role. Yet each time I bathe, I am called away three times, wringing out my hair in haste; each time I dine, I rush off three times, spitting out my food in haste, in order to wait upon them. I do so because I am always fearful that I may otherwise fail to gain the service of a worthy man.”¹⁴²

For Han Ying, Sima Qian, and their contemporaries, the Duke of Zhou is not only an advisor of the ruler but more like an ideal leader by nature. He sets himself in the inferior position when welcoming the worthies (*xianren* 賢人), though knowing clearly about his status; he treats gentlemen with his full heart, at the compromise of his personal time and profile. These behaviors reflect the admirable characters of a leader who could win the support of a large group of elites. At the core of the behaviors is the act of “waiting upon” 待, which shows one’s significant patience, wholeheartedness, and humbleness when

¹⁴¹ For discussions about the author of the *Hanshi waizhuan*, see James Robert Hightower, “The Han-shih wai-chuan and the San chia shih,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (Dec., 1948): 241–310.

¹⁴² *SJ* 33. 1518. Trans. Robert Eno, “Indiana University, History G380 – class text readings – Spring 2010.”

interacting with a potential ally. This seeming breakdown of the traditional hierarchy enabled the emergence of a new stratification based on the activeness/passiveness of one's action: for the qualified leaders who positively waited upon their elite guests, they could seize the initiative in the relationship; for those guests who were received, they needed to repay the friendliness by some means.

Various informational institutions helped disseminate this ideal relationship, for the ultimate goal of building a coalition with the new pattern of hierarchy. Since Han Ying was appointed as the official academician in charge of the interpretation of the *Shijing*,¹⁴³ the *Hanshi waizhuan* was very likely to be taught in a Han teaching institution. *Shiji* was not so widely accepted or available as the *Hanshu*,¹⁴⁴ but many Eastern Han elites, like Wang Chong 王充 (ca. 27–97), knew its content very well.¹⁴⁵ The story of the Duke of Zhou, included in such works, was accessible to the upper-class readers at least. Those who made the story well-known among wider populations are the Eastern Han commentators of Confucian Classics, many of whom were also owners of private schools. The commentaries on the Classics by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 were highly systematic and easily comprehensible, with a specific structure that could free readers from

¹⁴³ See Nishimura Fumiko 西村富美子, “Kan uta-gai Tsutō no ichikōsatsu: shiowa o shutai to suru uta Tsutō no motsu igi” 韓詩外傳の一考察: 說話を主體とする詩傳の持つ意義, *Chū kuni bungaku-hō* 中國文學報 19 (1963): 1–16.

¹⁴⁴ See Chen Zhi 陳直 and Ma Zhenglin 馬正林, “Han-Jin ren dui *Shiji* de chuanbo” 漢晉人對《史記》的傳播, *Xibei minzu luncong* 西北民族論叢 18 (Nov. 2018): 1–7.

¹⁴⁵ See Chen Zhi, “Han-Jin ren dui *Shiji* de chuanbo jiqi pingjia” 漢晉人對《史記》的傳播及其評價 in the *Sima Qian yu Shiji lunji* 司馬遷與史記論集, ed. *Lishi yanjiu bianjibu* 歷史研究編輯部 (Xi'an: Shaanxi Renmin Chubanshe, 1982), 41–57.

over-reliance on the instructor.¹⁴⁶ These works were not only used by his own students but also circulated among disciples of other schools.¹⁴⁷ As Zheng Xuan pays particular attention to the Duke of Zhou in his writing, it can be argued that his views about the historical figure greatly influenced many of his contemporaries. In his commentary on the song, “Hewing the Wood” 伐柯 in the *Shijing*, Zheng Xuan claims:

伐柯之道，唯斧乃能之。此以類求其類也。以喻成王欲迎周公，當使賢者先往。

The Way of hewing the wood: only an [wooden-handled] ax could fulfill it. This implies that [if you want something,] you need to borrow the thing of the same kind, which will attract it. The analogy indicates that, if King Cheng wanted to have the Duke of Zhou back to him, he would have to send worthy men to the duke [as they would be appealing to him].¹⁴⁸

The association between the duke and the worthies is reconfirmed, even prioritized over the relationship between the duke and the ruler. It emphasizes the naturalness of the coalition between the ideal leader and his elite followers: they are of the same category of human beings, just like the wood and wooden-handled ax, which share the same origin. Here Zheng Xuan’s commentary provides an institutionalized space where the author tries to persuade his readers. Metaphors are deliberately explained according to the standpoint of an instructor, in the process of which readers were not simply listening to

¹⁴⁶ Xu Jianwei 徐建委, “Zheng Xuan de chuxian: Yongyuan gaige yu Handai xueshu xingtai shi bianqian” 鄭玄的出現：永元改革與漢代學術形態之變遷, *Wenshizhe* 文史哲 1 (2022): 48–63.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Mao Heng 毛亨, *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, comm. Zheng Xuan, Kong Yingda 孔穎達, et al. *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏, eds. Li Xueqin 李學勤 et al. (Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1999).

him, but being inculcated in the value system supported by his institution.

The Duke of Zhou also appears frequently in the funerary arts of Eastern Han, indicating the interests of ritual practitioners in such topics. Previous scholars focused more on the relationship between the Duke of Zhou and King Cheng in pictorial art, arguing that the location and postures of the two indicate the duke's submissiveness to the Zhou king.¹⁴⁹ The evident difference in the size of the two figures, that the king appears small while the duke is much larger (see fig.s 3 and 4), makes this argument questionable. People in the mid- to late Eastern Han often thought that the Zhou king was probably not a child but a capable adult when he was assisted by the duke,¹⁵⁰ the reliability of this statement is even more uncertain. What also remains insufficiently examined is, why it was the Duke of Zhou in such portrayals, and not some other famous minister. The Duke had drawn so much attention from elite sponsors of ritual arts, even given the fact that he might have challenged royal power.¹⁵¹ Here we need to imagine what elite viewers of such images might have had in their minds. Fully trained in Confucian Classics and familiar with the story of the Duke of Zhou, they would have been viewing the images based on not merely the visible elements, but the knowledge they already had, e.g., the duke's charisma as a qualified leader. The ritual image served as a reminder, making the

¹⁴⁹ Gao Er'wang 高二旺, "Hanhua 'Zhougong fu Chengwang' yu Handai zhengzhi" 漢畫“周公輔成王”與漢代政治, *Zhongzhou xuekan* 中州學刊 3 (2017): 110–15.

¹⁵⁰ For related ideas, see Li Jiyan 李紀言, "Xian Qin Liang-Han shiqi Zhou Chengwang de xingxiang bianqian jiqi jiedu" 先秦兩漢時期周成王的形象變遷及其解讀, *Hebei xuekan* 河北學刊 41, no. 6 (Nov. 2021): 215–20.

¹⁵¹ For the debates in pre-Han and Han times, see Qi Liang 啟良, "Zhou gong shiji xinshuo" 周公事跡新說, *Jiangnan luntan* 江漢論壇 5 (1991): 60–66.

audiences recall the information and encourage them to reconfirm it—not to falsify it—from the pictures.



Fig. 3. Stone carving from Wulaowa 五老窪, Jiaxiang 嘉祥, Shandong Province. The small figure is King Cheng of Zhou, the large one on the right is the Duke of Zhou. Shandong Provincial Museum. Photo by Li Xiang.



Fig. 4. Stone carving from Wulaowa 五老窪, Jiaxiang 嘉祥, Shandong Province. The middle figure facing the front is King Cheng of Zhou, the large one on his left is the Duke of Zhou. Shandong Provincial Museum. Photo by Li Xiang.

The message about this particular figure, therefore, was transmitted to elite populations through devices of the information-based institutions. For those who

seriously thought about their future career, a leader or master with similar characteristics would be the best choice. He has all those valuable virtues of a typical elite, which would enable him to understand them, trust them, and fulfill their needs and interests. The meeting of such people with their ideal masters, in the writings of Ban Gu and some other writers, is termed as “*guixin*” 歸心 (one’s heart turns back to its home). The most famous example comes from the warlord Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), who used the term in his *yuefu* poem “A Ditty in the Short-Song Style” 短歌行:

With the Duke of Zhou spitting out his food	周公吐哺
All hearts under Heaven converged toward their home.	天下歸心

Here *guixin* becomes a propagandistic discourse. By placing his audiences in the position of the “worthies” in the story of the Duke of Zhou, the author offers an ideal picture in which everyone could grasp the opportunity to meet the right master, to whom they could devote all their loyalty and intelligence. On the surface it seems like the individual elites, who expected to serve a qualified ruler, could benefit from it, as they finally got the chance to make their lives complete; behind this, however, it was the “masters”—the key leaders of the local area—who actually obtained what they needed, to be surrounded by and supported by capable allies. *Guixin*, in their discourse, was used as a slogan to attract more supporters, to incorporate and integrate more elite partisans and to control them.

As for the Romans, the spreading of their ethics followed a somehow similar logic, and it was also through the informational institutions that such ethics caught the attention of a wider elite population. The difference is that, even though the Han elites put more emphasis on how one should keep connected with others, the Romans concentrated more

on how one should remove those obstacles in interactive activities, and how to enable oneself to be closer to the universal principle. Compared with the Han ideal of “meeting and getting recognized by a master” to whom one could devote one’s whole life, it is better to describe the Roman elite ethic as a pursuit for a protector, someone who could prevent him from being threatened in various confrontations—threats or temptations, both physical or spiritual. In the words of Peter Brown, such an ideal protector should have specific characteristics: “he is a man who would smooth over the thorny issues of village life; he would provide and help distribute the all-important water supply of the village; he could settle disputes among the villagers on the spot,” as he quotes Libanius.¹⁵² This protector is a bit different from a patron. He is omnipotent, but does not always require instant repayment; his connection with the protected is not based on certain contracts but can be permanent. He is much more honorable than a patron.

The metaphor of the protector/guardian often appeared in Roman local rituals in the pre-Christian period. The Demeter worship in the Roman Acrocorinth and Corinth, for instance, confirms the localization of this “cult of guardians.” According to the research of Richard E. DeMaris, the Demeter sanctuary was reestablished in the local area during the period between the mid-first and early fourth century.¹⁵³ Different from the Greek period when the worship was popular among the lower classes, the popularity of

¹⁵² See Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101; Cf. Libanius, Or. Or. XLVII, 19 in L. Harmand, Libanius, *Discours sur les patronages*. Texte traduit, annoté et commenté, 1955.

¹⁵³ “Demeter in Roman Corinth: Local Development in a Mediterranean Religion,” *Numen* 42, no. 2 (1995): 105–117.

this goddess was in the Roman period limited to the upper class who could afford the building of temples, sanctuaries, and the production of expensive funerary objects (see fig. 3).¹⁵⁴ Although the goddess was treated as the symbol of harvest and fertility in the Greek period, as the cult was revitalized by the Romanized Corinthians, she became a protector of the specific region, especially as a guardian of the deceased. Many of the materials about her have been excavated from cemeteries, together with other funerary objects.¹⁵⁵



Fig. 5. Terracotta figurines from the Plate 94, Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on the north slope of Acrocorinth in August 1964. These objects are closely related to the tales of the wanderings of Demeter. Image from Ronald S. Stroud, “The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth: Preliminary Report II, 1964–1965.”

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ See Ronald S. Stroud, “The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore on Acrocorinth: Preliminary Report II, 1964–1965.” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 37, no. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1968): 299–330.

As Christianity permeated Roman society, the ritual practices for these guardian gods were gradually replaced by those for the holy men, who were claimed to be “a gift of God to his or her region.”¹⁵⁶ The localization of ritual and religion became much more explicit here, as such individuals usually had closer connections with a specific geographic area when they were alive. It was the local episcopal group who made use of the cults to direct power towards themselves.¹⁵⁷ The holy men were deliberately articulated as the guardians of the local area, interpreted by Christian elites as the intermediary between God and the earthly world, the divine and humans. Particularly those top elites, like bishops, tended to build an immediate connection between themselves and a certain holy man, to claim themselves as the spokesmen and clients of these figures. Maybe one of the most typical cases is Paulinus (354–431), bishop of Nola, who named Saint Felix “my nurse” and organized festivals in his region to commemorate the holy man.¹⁵⁸ Three parties met here in such a ceremonial context: the individual bishop who located himself as a protégé, his “holy protector” who was believed to carry the Christ, and other local people involved in the festival activities. The interactions between the bishop and the saint appear to have followed the earthly ethics, which required both sides to deal with the danger they faced, i.e., the intrinsic sin that prevents one from getting close to God. It provided exemplary interpersonal relationships that the

¹⁵⁶ Peter Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 1–25.

¹⁵⁷ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, enlarged edition (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

elite group required, which was to draw the attention of more potential companions.

The graves of the saints thus became centers of the ecclesiastical life of their region. Philanthropic institutions sometimes also held their activities in the name of these holy men, stating that it was because of these figures that people could be equally helped. Paulinus' contribution to the construction projects of Nola could help illustrate this. But in more situations, the Christian leaders themselves replaced the holy men in almsgiving practices, claiming that they could also be the guardians and protectors of the local areas. As bishop of Milan, Ambrose (ca. 339–397) used his wealth for local almsgiving and ambitious building projects.¹⁵⁹ For him, it appears that the redistribution of wealth was not only to protect local commoners, but also to safeguard the wealthy against greed, lavishness, and vice. He warned his people about the consequence of such evils: “The resulting picture is not one of beauty but of ugliness, of fraud rather than of simplicity. It is something passing that is spoiled by the rain of perspiration.”¹⁶⁰

The symbol of guardians can also be observed in teaching and advisory institutions. An interesting application of the metaphor can be seen among the Latin grammarians, who claimed themselves to be “*custos Latini sermonis*,” guardians of the Latin language.¹⁶¹ The act of protection was extended to the realm of culture and state ideology, which relied on the instructors' efforts to reshape the minds of their pupils. The job of these instructors and mentors was, furthermore, to help people understand how to

¹⁵⁹ Brown, *Through the Eye of A Needle*, 123.

¹⁶⁰ Hexam 5.27. Cf. Angelo Paredi, *Saint Ambrose: His Life and Times*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, S.J. (University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 322.

¹⁶¹ See Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 17.

safeguard themselves from potential dangers, making them internalize the skill of self-protection. In his *On the Duties of the Clergy* Ambrose points out the importance of the protection of oneself from temptation:

Custodiamus ergo cor nostrum, custodiamus os nostrum; utrumque enim scriptum est: hic, ut os custodiamus, alibi tibi dicitur: Omni custodia serva cor tuum. Si custodiebat David, tu non custodies? Si immunda labia habebat Esaias, qui dixit: O miser ego, quoniam compunctus sum, quia cum sim homo, et immunda labia habeam: si propheta Domini immunda habebat labia, quomodo nos munda habemus?

Let us then guard our hearts, let us guard our mouths. Both have been written about. In this place we are bidden to take heed to our mouth; in another place you are told: Keep your heart with all diligence. If David took heed, will you not take heed? If Isaiah had unclean lips—who said: Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man, and have unclean lips—if a prophet of the Lord had unclean lips, how shall we have them clean?¹⁶²

It is the ideal of becoming a true guardian that connects an individual—one’s inner self—with the nature of God. Through institutionalized teaching and preaching, such connections were expected to be digested by individuals to become part of their thoughts. Some elements of propaganda emerged, just like in the Han case. Ordinary individuals were persuaded that they had the potential to be closer to God, and that it should be their goal to be attached to God forever. They were convinced that they themselves were naturally part of an assembly, “people of God.”¹⁶³ With the presence of the agencies of God, i.e., the local holy men, their elite spokesmen and their institutions, and with their

¹⁶² Ch.3, 10. The Latin text is from Catholic Library, <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=Synchronized-EN/npnf.000794.AmbroseOfMilan.OntheDutiesoftheClergy.html;chunk.id=00000011>. English translation by H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin and H.T.F. Duckworth. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 10, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34011.htm>

¹⁶³ Brown, *Through the Eye of A Needle*, 125.

significance as the center of daily activities in the local area, a new elite coalition was built across different parties, ethnic divisions, and old patron-client boundaries.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the different interactive ethics of Han and Roman elites were expressed through their information institutions, and how such ethics were encoded into propagandistic messages that helped the elite populations ally with more companions. For Han China, the elite ethics of interaction include self-awareness, utmost sincerity, and a willingness for self-sacrifice. These ethics were transformed into an institutional philosophy that emphasized the non-utilitarian, non-individual aspects of human interactions. It was based on this philosophy that key leaders of local areas used the specific term, *guixin*, as their propagandistic slogan to persuade various elite groups to support them. The slogan was pronounced through a wide range of institutional performances, like rituals, teaching, and public giving. By commemorating and resembling ancient sages, like the Duke of Zhou, in such performances, these local leaders fashioned themselves into ideal masters who deserved the support of all elite populations.

The elite ethics of the Romans put more emphasis on the solving of confrontation and the seeking of ultimate truth. Also through organizational practices like exhibition management, teaching, and philanthropic activities, such ethics were transformed into an institutional passion in inter-group competition and transcendental laws. This resulted in the Roman's pursuit of ideal protectors, who could safeguard individuals from threats and temptations, and guide them to divine principles. As Christianity enjoyed growth, local

Christian leaders made use of this elite passion and propagated themselves as secular agencies of God. They named their new alliance “people of God,” uniting local interest groups around them. Such a slogan, similar to *guixin*, integrates private people to make them into a public.

An informal structure of community leadership, partly separated from the bureaucratic system, thus helped generate a new form of imperium that largely relied on the management and exchange of information. Suitable media for the encoding and decoding of messages were required, and those who successfully controlled the media became new authorities. A culture of propaganda pervaded the entire elite community, to ensure that the messages could be encoded and decoded as intended, for the ultimate aim of enlarging the local elite alliance.

CHAPTER TWO

Information Nexuses, Text Production, and the Forming of Local Speech:

The Elite Management of Public Communication in Two Regions

Born in Chenliu 陳留 of the Yan 兗 region, Shi Bi 史弼 (fl. 2nd century) was known to his contemporaries for his forthright words. He was sentenced twice during the Great Proscription (ca. 166–189) for refusing to collaborate with the imperial court. The first happened when he was the Chief Minister of the regional kingdom of Pingyuan 平原, Qing 青 province. He declined to denounce anyone in his region who might have been involved in the protest against imperial eunuchs. In the *Hou Hanshu*, Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) portrays a scene in which Shi Bi rebuts the officers interrogating him and says:

若承望上司, 誣諂良善, 淫刑濫罰, 以逞非理, 則平原之人, 戶可為黨。

If I intended to meet the expectations of the upper officials, falsely accusing those who are righteous and abusing punishments to proclaim unjustifiable principles, any individual household in Pingyuan could have been considered to be a banned clique.¹

Shi Bi was soon released. Years later, he irritated the imperial eunuch, Hou Lan 侯覽, by rejecting Hou's request to build personal connections. When he was imprisoned, the local gentry of Pingyuan offered help by bribing Hou Lan. Tao Qihong 陶丘洪, a native of Pingyuan, commented:

昔文王牖里, 閔散懷金。史弼遭患, 義夫獻寶。亦何疑焉。

When King Wen was imprisoned at Youli, Min [Yao] and San [Yishen] bribed King Zhòu [to free him from punishment]. Nowadays it was Shi Bi who suffered

¹ See Fan Ye, *Hou Hanshu* (hereafter *HHS*), comm. Li Xian 李賢 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1965), 64. 2110.

misfortune, and righteous people offered treasure [to help him]. Is there anything suspect in this behavior?²

By comparing the imperial eunuch with the evil ruler Zhòu 紂 who sentenced King Wen, Tao defended his local companions' seemingly illegal behavior of challenging the imperial palace and of corruption.

Such a locally shared hatred toward a specific opponent is also reflected in another prosecution in the late Roman Gaul. Priscillian (ca. 340–385), the bishop of Ávila who fled from Spain to Gaul, was a victim of the state-wide execution of heretics, with his death—and that of many other so-called sorcerers—being the result of an allied hostility of local church leaders. As they arrived in Bordeaux, Priscillian and his associates were driven out of town by the local bishop Delphinus. Then, under the call of Magnus Maximus (r. 383–388), the Bordeaux council was convened in 384 to gather all parties involved in the discussion of Priscillian's execution. The council determined that Priscillian must be interrogated on charges of *maleficium*.³ Priscillian was beheaded the next year. Native Gallic writer Sulpicius Severus (363–425) commented when recalling the event:

Hoc fere modo homines luce indignissimi, pessimo exemplo necati, aut exiliis multati...ceterum Priscilliano occiso, non solum non repressa est heresis, que illo autore proruperat, sed confirmata, latius propagata est.

In this sort of way, men who were most unworthy of the light of day, were, in order that they might serve as a terrible example to others, either put to death or punished with exile....After the death of Priscillian, not only was the heresy not suppressed, which, under him, as its author, had burst forth, but acquiring strength,

² Ibid., 64. 2111–2112.

³ Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 97.

it became more widely spread.⁴

Priscillian is presented as the vilest kind of person that a Christian could think about. Severus also addressed other people's attitudes toward Priscillian, which are as negative as his own. Another Gallic native, Vincent of Lerins (d. ca. 445), juxtaposed Priscillian with other Christians who insisted on wrong opinions.⁵ Although the Gallo-Roman and Eastern Han elites played distinct roles in these stories, they shared a collective self-recognition when encountering outsiders who had intruded into their communities. People from the province Qing and the region of Gaul expressed their revulsion as unified groups when facing someone from another place who challenged their very notions of "right" and "wrong."

Such a self-aware commitment to locality was expressed as part of a new speech of the elite class that highlighted the connection between these people and their dwelling areas.⁶ For China, the thriving of this speech started in the first half of the Western Han

⁴ The original Latin text is from Sulpicius Severus, *Sulpici Severi presbyteri Opera omnia: cum lectissimis commentariis* (Lugduni Batavor: apud Franciscum Hackium, 1647), 452–53. The English translation is from the *The Sacred History of Sulpitius Severus*, Book 2, Chapter LI. Early Church Fathers Collection, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf211.toc.html>.

⁵ See Chapter 25. 64 in *St. Vincent of Lerins, Commonitorium*, Trans. C.A. Heurtley. *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 11, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3506.htm>

⁶ In this dissertation, the term "speech" has a similar meaning to Saussure's concept of "parole." It refers to the use of language in concrete instances, not only oral expression but also writing activities. Speech is, generally speaking, "the workings of language" (see Napoleon M. Mabaquiao, Jr. "Speech Act Theory: From Austin to Searle," *Augustinian* 19, 1 (2018): 35–45). I use this concept as an analytical tool in the sense of ordinary-language philosophy that mainly concerns the relationship between language and its users, not between language and world (the focus of ideal-language philosophy). The pioneer in speech studies, J.L. Austin, in his *How to Do Things with Words* (1955) defines speech as an act that is performed by the language user to their audiences. He emphasizes the importance of describing the total speech act in the total speech situation in which the language users employ the language (see Etsuko Oishi, "Austin's Speech Act Theory and the Speech Situation," *Esercizi Filosofici* 1 (2006): 1–14). This situational aspect of

(ca. 150 BCE onward). For Rome, the starting point was around the late third century. Historians have considered the localization of words as verifying some extent of “local autonomy” in ideology.⁷ This opinion falls short of explaining the immediate conditions—the technical and institutional circumstances—for the use of speech. In real communication with others, people must ask themselves: How can I make my ideas accepted by others? Will it be dangerous if I openly challenge the views of someone else? These concerns are not entirely related to the sphere of ideology but more likely derived from the concrete principles of public communication, based on which individuals could determine what to pronounce before a wider community.⁸

So, what elements constituted this realm of public communication in ancient empires, and what was the role of local elites in the field? These questions require us to

speech is what I would highlight throughout the present chapter. It includes the circumstantial acts of language users when they are facing outside enforcement or habitual self-checking.

⁷ For instance, Andrea Acri, “Local vs. Cosmopolitan in the Study of Premodern Southeast Asia,” *SUVANNABHUMI* 9, no. 1 (June 2017): 7–52; Christopher Hutton, “From pre-modern to modern: ethnic classification by language and the case of the Ngai/Nung of Vietnam,” *Language & Communication* 18 (1998): 125–32.

⁸ My use of the term “public” is partly based on Mary Backus Rankin, who discusses this concept in the context of premodern world in her *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865–1911* (Stanford University Press, 1986). Rankin argues in her introductory section: “As I use the term here, ‘public’ retains a considerable communal element but refers more specifically to the institutionalized, extrabureaucratic management of matters considered important by both the community and the state. Public management by elites thus contrasted with official administration (*guan*), and with private (*si*) activities of individuals, families, religions, businesses, and organizations that were not identified with the whole community. Public was a working term, used without need of explanation, that implied a different relationship to the government from those of the other two categories. This use of ‘public’ may have evolved from phrases denoting management by the people (*min*) or gentry.” (See pp. 15–16). Since my discussion focuses on ancient periods, I would not entirely exclude state bureaucracy from the public domain. The elements of official administrative and legal procedures, the demands from the imperial court, and the interpersonal ties between local and central officials should still be considered part of the local public life, because the boundary between them and the personal pursuits/interests of local elite individuals was often vague in the existing materials.

draw connections between three domains: information dissemination, text production, and the use of language. They together formed a broad structure in which local elite groups attempted to organize and mediate social voices through their leadership in the public domain. This chapter concentrates on the interplay of these three components as elite individuals extended their activities across various local institutions. The “elite information institutions” discussed in Chapter 1 (functioning as ritual/exhibition-management, teaching/advisory, philanthropic, and other organizations) were interwoven as *information nexuses*—a series of connections among people that guaranteed their access to a complex of ever-changing information⁹—in their actual operation, because the action of elite information producers often transcended a single institution and constituted a complex circuitry of information exchange. The flourishing of textual production facilitated the expansion of these nexuses. Literary authorities in the local community, whose reputation was acknowledged by different elite institutions, attracted more people to participate in the circulation of their speech by manufacturing specific types of texts. These authorities became the centers of intellectual societies, and their discourses became the founding elements of a pool of language materials from which individual elites chose the topics, concepts, and opinions that built up the skeleton of their written

⁹ The concept, information nexus, is first used by historian Steven G. Marks. Marks explained when he invented the concept: “The information nexus...expedites all investment and spending decisions by firms and individuals. It has historically thrived under political systems that value freedom of expression.” (See Marks, *The Information Nexus: Global Capitalism from the Renaissance to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), x) In my discussion, “information nexuses” are somehow different from fully developed information networks, as the former are built within specific social classes (e.g., the educated local elites) and hardly have the potential to be expanded to other classes. They are rarely trans-social-strata. A fully developed information network, on the other hand, has the capacity to attract or force people from various social ranks to engage in its operation, though it might ultimately serve the interests of few people of a particular social class.

communication. Messages were now transformed into communicable words that reflected the stances of text-producing groups.

These better conditions for social interaction did not simply encourage local elites to express themselves. Several other consequences ensued, which in various ways challenged these people's individuality in their communicative behavior. A subtle process of convergence and standardization occurred in the realm of speech, setting the boundaries of "elite language" to ensure that an individual's words were consistent with the shared norms in a local elite community. Elite individuals came to monitor what was expressed by themselves and others, filtering out "unfavorable" elements in their words. A type of speech restricted by regional preferences emerged. Also, the educated elites who were active in literary practices not only intervened in but came to manage the realm of public communication in the two regions. Through their expression of opinions, they contributed specific perspectives and proposals to address public issues. It was based on this that such people came to obtain authority in the field of language use.

I focus on two regions, Qing-Xu-Yan (the provinces of Qing, Xu, and Yan; hereafter QXY) and Gaul, to illustrate this triangular relationship of information, text, and language. There is no need to revisit the significance of the two areas in the studies of the early imperial period, as this was already discussed in the Introduction. As both regions encompassed different units of governmental administration (e.g., commanderies or counties) as time went by, my objective is not to build an immediate connection between the geopolitical conditions and human communication. I would, instead, examine particular features of a region that made communication especially significant to its elite population. I will explore how the culture and history of the two local societies provided elite groups with the necessary resources to disseminate their ideas, and in what sense did they set limits on these people's actions and desires.

My arguments include four major sections. In the first section I focus on the pre-imperial history of the two regions, QXY and Gaul, and how such history showed a tendency of cultural convergence that ultimately formed two specific local civilizations. This made a relatively unified “local speech” possible in each area. The second section is about how the rise of literary authority groups in the two regions led to the appearance of a public-facing concept of writing. People from different information institutions gathered around these authorities, spreading their words by producing texts. The elite information nexuses and text-producing associations came to overlap, which contributed to some levels of unification and standardization of local elite speech. The third section argues that the elite manufacturing of texts in the two regions also gave rise to some intangible forces of censorship in people’s speeches, which filtered out those components in individual writings that might have prevented their authors from being accepted by local elite readers. Exemplary literati and inter-factional accusations were two of these censoring forces. In the fourth section, I suggest that as both regions were deeply involved in state-wide social crises in Late Antiquity, their elite institutions responded to public issues by expressing opinions related to the solving of the problems. The already existing information nexuses now became important opinion outlets and new centers of elite propaganda.

I. Historicizing Locality: The Pre-Imperial Convergence of Subregional Cultures

The extant studies of QXY and Gaul have offered a rich body of literature with regard to each particular place as an integral part of an empire, but they insufficiently explain in what sense this structuralist, top-down framework is valid or invalid. The English word “regional” has a relatively neutral meaning, marking an area or specific

location that is in some way distinctive from other areas.¹⁰ But another term usually used interchangeably with it, “local,” is hardly value-neutral. It is often employed in opposition to the terms “metropolitan” or “center” to indicate the passive status of a place as the recipient of structural changes.¹¹ What I would underline is the constitutive role of local areas in shaping some commonly shared behaviors and mentalities among certain peoples in a state. Locality per se does not produce human action directly but provides a vessel to carry it. All human activities must be performed at “a necessarily local level,”¹² and locality somehow gives boundaries to individual thoughts and behaviors, which then affects their practices in a broader world.

For the two regions analyzed here, “locality” became an important topic in people’s lives, as some subregional cultures gradually converged, became powerful, and defined important features of the whole region. For the QXY area, pre- and early imperial historical accounts leave readers with the impression that this region consisted of a major part which was occupied by two dominant cultures—Qi 齊 and Lu 魯—and a “less important” part controlled by other polities like Wei 衛, Ju 莒, Tan 鄆, and Chu 楚. The extant archaeological sources from the Zhou period onward, on the contrary, indicate the diversity of competing polities within this region.¹³ One method to make a balance between these two distinct groups of materials is to portray the entire QXY area as a cultural topography that includes various parts of territories, and to mark each part with a

¹⁰ Luk Van Langenhove, “What is a region? Towards a statehood theory of regions,” *Contemporary Politics* (December 2013): 1–26.

¹¹ P. Jackson, “Mapping meanings: a cultural critique of locality studies,” *Environment and Planning* volume 23, (A/1991): 215–28.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Anne P. Underhill et al., “Changes in regional settlement patterns and the development of complex societies in southeastern Shandong, China.” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 27 (2008): 1–29.

changing altitude to indicate its influence in the entire region over time. Generally speaking, there are three subregions based on archaeological finds.

A. The Hai-Dai 海-岱 area. This subregion is named by two of its geographical markers, the East China Sea (Dong Hai 東海) and Mount Tai 泰山 (traditionally named Dai 岱). Its territory included the Shandong Peninsula, to the east of the low reaches of the Ji River 濟水, and the north of present-day Bi County 費縣. It witnessed the origin of the Chinese Neolithic cultures of Dawenkou 大汶口 and Longshan 龍山.

B. The Central Plain area. This was to the southwest of Hai-Dai, located within the geographically central region of China. It included the region between the Yellow River and Ji River, and to the east of the Jiang River 絳水, covering present-day northeastern Henan (the east of Xinxiang 新鄉 and the north of Yucheng 虞城). It witnessed the emergence and expansion of the Neolithic culture of Peiligang 裴李崗 from 7000 to 5000 BCE.

C. The Chu 楚 area. This was the region between the Yi River 沂水 and the Huai River 淮水 to the east of the Bian River 汴河, covering present-day northern Jiangsu (north of Huai'an 淮安), a small part of northeastern Anhui, and southern Shandong.

Cultures of these three parts shaped the image of the entire region to different extents from the Zhou period (ca. 1046 BCE) to the Han (220 CE) and onward. The growing influence of a subregional culture, indicated by the increasing number of populations who were attached to it, led to its assimilation of other subregional cultures. Cultural convergence ensued, making these assimilating and assimilated areas appear as a cultural whole.

The consolidation and expansion of the Zhou polity witnessed the earliest documented cultural convergence in the QXY area, which Edward Shaughnessy called

“the Zhou colonialization of the East.”¹⁴ King Wu’s 武王 (r. ca. 1046–1043) brother Kang Shu Feng 康叔封 was given the Wey 衛 area in the southwestern part of QXY, while the descendants of the Duke of Zhou came to rule the later area of Lu 魯. This power rearrangement was accompanied by the Zhou campaigns against the Dongyi 東夷 (“Eastern Barbarians”), indigenous people of present-day Shandong.¹⁵ Inscriptions on the Jin Hou Su-zhong 晉侯穌鐘 from the Tianma-Qucun 天馬-曲村 site offer evidence that King Li 厲王 (ca. 877–841 BCE) of Zhou won over Suyi 宿夷, a branch of the Dongyi, in the region of Han 菡 (present-day Heze 荷澤).¹⁶ The convergence of the Hai-Dai and Central Plain cultures thus began, with the Hai-Dai area somewhat subjected to the much more powerful, inland civilization of Zhou.

The next stage, the Spring and Autumn period (ca. 770–476 BCE), offered the Hai-Dai culture more chances to develop. As the eastern polity of Qi 齊 grew stronger, its connection with the Zhou court was weakened. The rise of a cultural center, Linzi 臨淄, played a significant role in enhancing the prominence of the state of Qi. The excavation of the old city of Linzi revealed that the city had developed a complex of ritual architecture, clusters of craft workshops, hierarchically arranged elite cemeteries, and so on.¹⁷ Because the Qi polity was located at a strategic spot controlling all north–south

¹⁴ “Western Zhou History,” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 292–351.

¹⁵ See Gary M. Feinman et al., “The imprint of China’s first emperor on the distant realm of eastern Shandong,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Natural Sciences of the United States of America* 107, no. 11 (March 2010): 4851–56.

¹⁶ Li Xueqin 李學勤, “Xia Shang Zhou yu Shandong” 夏商周與山東, *Yantai daxue xuebao* 煙台大學學報 vol. 15, no. 3 (July 2002): 332–37.

communication, the interplay of elites from Qi and the Central Plain states was seen in various types of materials.¹⁸ The southwestern Lu state, as the immediate heir of the Zhou lineage, also enjoyed growth, with its capital Qufu 曲阜 developing into a core of regional culture with similar importance as Linzi. With the expansion of these two stronger states, their adjacent polities, like Ju 莒 and Tan 鄆, became subject to them.¹⁹ The *Mozi* 墨子 text, though not entirely a historical source by nature, could illustrate the basic impression people had about the relationship between the two larger regimes, Qi and Lu, and these smaller polities. It says that the Qi and Lu exploited the smaller areas for their resources:

間於大國之間，不敬事於大，大國亦弗之從而愛其利。

[They] existed between mighty states and showed disrespect when serving them. The mightier states also disfavored them but were interested in the profits they could provide.²⁰

The Warring States period saw the rise of the southern Chu culture and its intrusion into the north. In 333 BCE, the state of Chu defeated the Qi power in Xuzhou 徐州 and acquired the Central-Plain areas the Qi had once possessed.²¹ Then, in the eighth year of

¹⁷ See Shandong Sheng Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiu Suo 山東省文物考古研究所, *Linzi Qigucheng* 臨淄齊故城 (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 2013).

¹⁸ For the location of Qi, see Hsu Cho-Yun, “The Spring and Autumn Period” in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 545–87.

¹⁹ Li Xueqin points out that there were at least Teng 滕, Ji 紀, Lai 萊, and many smaller states of the Jiang lineage. See Li, “Xia Shang Zhou yu Shandong,” 337. The inscription of Xiao Chen Lai-gui 小臣速簋 (excavated in Ji County 汲縣, Henan) records the resistance of Ju and Dongyi against the reign of Zhou. Another vessel, Zuo Ce Ce Ling-gui 作冊矢令簋 (excavated in Luoyang), offers an inscription verifying the importance of the state of Tan as the seating of local rulers of the rank of marquis.

²⁰ See the chapter “Fei gong zhong” 非攻中.

²¹ See “Qi ce yi: Chu jiang fa Qi” 齊策一·楚將伐齊, *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 vol. 8.

King Kaolie 考烈王 (255 BCE), the Chu state conquered the once powerful Lu, under the command of Lord Chunshen 春申君 (d. 238 BCE).²² The state expansion brought the spread of Chu-style artifacts. In his research on Eastern Zhou bronzes, Wu Weihua 吳偉華 observes that some popular features of the Chu vessels came to appear in bronzes from the Hai-Dai region during the Warring States period, especially seen from vessels like *ding* 鼎, *hu* 壺, *tiliang hu* 提梁壺 and *yufou* 浴缶.²³ It also deserves attention that excavated remains from the Chu area sometimes shared elements that were originally seen in Qi-Lu artifacts. The Guodian 郭店 manuscripts unearthed in 1993 include a large number of Confucian texts which had their intellectual origin in Lu.²⁴ Paul R. Goldin notices that this body of texts even “provided our earliest editions of two canonical Confucian texts: ‘Ziyi’ 緇衣 (Jet-black robes) and ‘Wuxing’ 五行 (The five forms of conduct)...[which] yielded several previously unknown Confucian texts that shed light on the early history of the Confucian tradition.”²⁵ The overlapping areas between the Chu and Hai-Dai cultures were largely expanded, further connecting the southern and northern parts of QXY.

The region of Gaul, covering the vast territory between the Mediterranean and the Channel and between the Atlantic and the Rhine,²⁶ experienced a similar process of

²² See “Biography of the Lord of Chunshen” 春申君列傳, *SJ*.

²³ See Wu, “Dong-Zhou shiqi Hai-Dai diqu qingtongqi yanjiu” 東周時期海岱地區青銅器研究 (PhD diss., Nankai University, 2014), 239–40.

²⁴ See Hubei Sheng Jingmen Shi Bowuguan 湖北省荊門市博物館, “Jingmen Guodian yihao Chumu” 荊門郭店一號楚墓, *Wenwu* 文物 7 (1997): 35–48.

²⁵ See Paul R. Goldin, “*Xunzi* in the Light of the Guodian Manuscripts,” *Early China* 25 (2000): 113–46.

cultural convergence. The making of the region “Gaul,” too, involved the transformation of territorial borders, the making/unmaking of ethnic identity, the change of religion and cults, and shifts in the forms of material production. Many scholars have articulated the formation of specific local characteristics of the area in the pre-imperial period. Some focus on how a certain, dominant culture constituted an axis around which other cultures unified, within the region that then became *Gallia Comata*. J.F. Drinkwater considers this unity to have resulted from the need to face the Germans from the north and the Romans from the south.²⁷ Greg Woolf points out that researchers tend to divide the whole area into various “ranks” of subregions according to their cultural proximity to the Roman core: “The West is seen as more Romanized than the East; the Mediterranean world more Romanized than temperate Europe, southern Gaul more Romanized than northern Gaul.”²⁸ This focus on a certain core is not incorrect, but if we look back at the formation process of the QXY cultural topography, it would be more justifiable to assume that what happened in the Gallic area was not a unidirectional, centralized transformation in which all subregional cultures were forced to resemble a single exemplar culture. Instead, it might have been a story of constant ups and downs in which some cultures that had once been prominent gradually diminished in their importance, while some other less powerful cultures grew in their influence in later days. It is also necessary to note that authors of not only classical antiquity, but also much more recent times, have all engaged in the making of our current knowledge of “Gaul.” The nineteenth-century Western European historians especially contributed to the making of a Celt-centric narrative, by defining the

²⁶ For the scope of the Gallic territory, see John F. Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul: The Three Provinces, 58 BC-AD 260* (Routledge: 2014), 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸ See Greg Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

Celts as both a pan-European people and the majority of the pre-Roman Gallic populations.²⁹

So, similar to our approach to analyzing the QXY area, it might be better not to presuppose a given core of the region. According to geographical conditions, the area included a part adjacent to the Mediterranean and other parts that were relatively far from the Mediterranean. This general division resonates with the observation of Anthony King that the entire western continental Europe, in physical terms, should be studied based on how the natural conditions vary from inland mountains to farming plains and coastal lowlands, “from the barrier of the high Alps, through rich agricultural plains, to marshy shifting swamps at river mouths.”³⁰ Based on this division, it is arguable that the entire Gallic area could be divided into the following three subregions, with each of them constituting a cultural zone and with their influence upon the whole region varying over time.

A. Mediterranean Gaul, which was the southern coastal area. Its territory extended from the north of the Pyrenees mountain range to the south of the Alps (near present-day Turin), covering the modern French regions of Toulous, Marseille, Valence, Nîmes, Provence, and so forth.

B. Atlantic Gaul which faced the ocean in the west. It included the vast area from the sources of the Seine, Loire (Allier), and Dordogne, to the coastal lands in the west. Cities like Paris, Tours, Nantes, and Bordeaux are in this area.

²⁹ Sophie Collin Bouffier and Dominique Garcia, “Greeks, Celts and Ligurians in South-East Gaul: Ethnicity and Archaeology,” in *From the Pillars of Hercules to the Footsteps of the Argonauts*, eds. Anthoine Hermary and Gocha R. Tsetsckhladze (Leuven-Paris-Walpole: Peeters Publishers, 2012), 21–36.

³⁰ Anthony King, *Roman Gaul and Germany* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 7.

C. Northeastern Gaul which was near Central Europe, adjacent to modern Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland. It covered the Vosges, the northern range of Morvan, and the northern Jura Mountains that constituted a sub-alpine mountain range.³¹

The early cultural convergences, from the Iron Age onward, happened mainly between the northeast and Atlantic parts, which was largely attributed to the westward spread of the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures from the ninth to fifth century BCE. Traditional scholars tended to treat this stage as a process of Celtization, considering the two cultures as a reflection of a larger, Celtic culture in the Late Bronze Age. This view neglects that the Celtic remains of archaeological and philological materials do not perfectly match what we have observed from the two.³² The Hallstatt and the later La Tène cultures originated from the regions bordering the Middle Rhine, with their central area covering the broad territory from the Massif Central in the west to the Sudeten Mountains in the east, and from the Paris Basin in the north to the Alps in the south. Most related materials are from archaeological excavations, which makes our knowledge of this period highly fragmented. Both the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures have been known for their ritual practices, especially funerals that reflected a highly hierarchical social structure. Throughout the Hallstatt–La Tène period, the ruler, members of his court, and

³¹ Here I am not using Greg Woolf’s naming, “inferior Gaul (Comatan Gaul)” and “Gaul of Rhineland,” because these two names were given by imperial rulers and were valid only in certain historical contexts. Other than that, my division of subregions is similar to that of Woolf. See Woolf, “Generations of Aristocracy,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 9 (2002): 2–15.

³² Patrick Sims-Williams, “An Alternative to ‘Celtic from the East’ and ‘Celtic from the West,’” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30, 3 (2020): 511–29; Pierre-Yves Milcent, “The Network Genesis of the La Tène Cultures: A Western Point of View from Part VIII—Changing Symbols, Changing Minds?” in *Eurasia at the Dawn of History: Urbanization and Social Change*, eds. Manuel Fernández-Götz and Dirk Krausse (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 392–406.

other members of the ruling clan enjoyed their own grave spaces while others did not.³³ Later in the fourth century BCE, a “military democracy” emerged to some extent, characterized by the more commonly shared, cheaper weapons in the tomb space of a wider range of populations.³⁴ Funerary remains typically reflecting these features have been found in northwestern France and even southern Britain, indicating the expansion of the culture to the Atlantic Plain. A specific form of La Tène burial space, the Trapezoidal-shaped pits, are highly visible in the Aisne-Marne-Ardennes region, from around the fifth century BCE.³⁵

Meanwhile, it deserves attention that the Mediterranean area and northeastern Gaul were by no means unconnected in this period, especially if we examine how Greek writers of this period used the term “Κελτοί” (*Keltoi*) to refer to a large group of populations including those from the Hallstatt and La Tène cultural zones. The label of “Celts,” somehow overly generalized, was attached to people of the upper Rhine and upper Danube in the fifth century BCE by Hecataeus and Herodotus.³⁶ This served as a proof that the northwestern cultures of continental Europe, to a large extent, shared enough commonalities with the central European civilizations that they could even be treated as a whole. Moreover, the Greek colonization of the northwestern Mediterranean from the seventh to fourth century BCE attests to the possibility that Mediterranean Gaul

³³ Václav Smrcka, “Social evolution in the Hallstatt-La Tène period.” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Medica. Monographia* 156 (January 2009): 27–56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Émilie Vannier, “The Funerary Architecture of the La Tène Period in Northwestern Gaul and Southern Britain,” *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 2000: 1–20.

³⁶ P. Sims-Williams, “The Location of the Celts according to Hecataeus, Herodotus, and Other Greek Writers,” *Études Celtiques* 42 (2016): 7–32.

had witnessed the merging of its native culture and the Greek civilization from the east.³⁷ During this period the Greeks in the Gallic region were mostly Phocaeans, who founded the colony of Massalia around 600 BCE.³⁸ Pseudo-Skymnos (fl. 2nd century BCE) demonstrated in the *Voyage around the Earth for Nikomedes* that the interplay between the Celts and Greeks was often friendly: “The Celts use Greek customs, since they are familiar with Greece through receiving travelers. They conduct their assemblies with music, and are eager for it as a taming influence.”³⁹

The collision and convergence of the Mediterranean civilization and the northern cultures became much more visible in the next stage. Before the fifth century BCE the Etruscans expanded to border Celts in northern Italy, and trade across the Alps began to boom.⁴⁰ In addition, the so-called Celts further expanded further, crossing the Alps to wage war on the classical world.⁴¹ In the fourth and third century BCE, the Celtic peoples dominated northern and central Europe from the Black Sea to Spain.⁴² They settled in northern Italy and attacked Rome in 390 BCE. Their conflicts with the Romans were deepened in the second century BCE, as Roman power extended northward. The consequence of this confrontation was the victory of the Roman Republic that annexed a

³⁷ Daniela Ugolini, “The Greeks West of the Rhone (F). Genesis, Evolution and End of a Greek Area,” *Journal of Greek Archaeology* 3 (2018): 203–244.

³⁸ Michel Bats, “Greeks and Natives in South Gaul: Relationship, Acculturation and Identity,” in *From the Pillars of Hercules to the Footsteps of the Argonauts*, 3–20.

³⁹ See line 167–82, translated by Brady Kiesling. See https://topostext.org/work.php?work_id=130

⁴⁰ See Drinkwater, *Roman Gaul: The Three Provinces*, 10.

⁴¹ Michael Dietler, “Our Ancestors the Gauls: Archaeology, Ethnic Nationalism, and the Manipulation of Celtic Identity in Modern Europe,” *American Anthropologist*, New Series 96, no. 3 (Sep., 1994): 584–605.

⁴² David Rankin, *Celts and the Classical World* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 9–10.

vast area in the north and west. The region called transalpine Gaul—including the lower Rhone, the Cevennes, and the river Tarn down into the center of the Pyrenees—started to pay tribute, while the Ligurian tribes between the Maritime Alps and the Rhone were defeated in 155 BCE.⁴³ Most of these regions were now on their way to becoming Roman provinces.

II. How Literary Authorities Thrived: The Overlap between Information Nexuses and Text-Producing Groups

It was against this background of cultural convergence that the imperial age began. Many scholars agree that the establishment of early mighty empires was accompanied by the organized dissemination of imperial messages, to ensure that legal and administrative codes could be received by local people on a regular basis. A less formal structure of elite information nexuses also developed in both QXY and Gaul, as individual textual production flourished and changed its nature significantly. To many educated people, writing was no longer simply a private domain of creation but a public realm of consumption.⁴⁴ A personally produced text obtained its value through being accepted, commented on, revised, or further circulated by readers. Local literary authorities, with their fame recognized by people from different information institutions, were those whose writing enjoyed the widest circulation and the most intensive reproduction in their regions.

(I) QXY

⁴³ T. Rice Holmes, *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul: An Historical Narrative (Being Part I. Of the Larger Work in the Same Subject)*, Classical Reprint (London: Forgotten Books, 2017), 4.

⁴⁴ Harold Love connects this change to the appearance of ancient “publication” in which textual products were copied in and transmitted through a more popular medium. See Love, *The Culture and Commerce of Texts: Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 36.

For the making of ancient Chinese texts, Mark E. Lewis argues that the promotion of sages in early canons was connected with the ideal of pursuing an overarching wisdom of the universe.⁴⁵ In the Late Warring States and early imperial periods, this philosophical idea of writing coexisted with the real demand of broader readership and public commentary. It was based on these parallel understandings of writing that elite information nexuses and text-producing networks converged through the activities of literary authorities. The “authority” here was hardly an individual but more often a group of people who were associated by their inheritance of the same intellectual tradition or their representation of the same lineage of teaching. These people were active in a variety of information institutions, and their texts provided individual readers with the interpretative frameworks and tentative arguments that enabled them to express ideas reasonably in their own writing practice. In this sense, they redefined the rules of the game of a wide world of written communication and, to a certain extent, contributed to the integration of different types of local speech.

For the QXY area, the text producing activities of educated elites were related to a long tradition of local, institutionalized literary practice, which combined written communication with teaching, commentating, ritual performance, and bureaucratic promotion. An official organization of higher education, the Jixia Academy 稷下學宮, was built under Duke Huan 桓公 (Tian Wu 田午, r. 374–357 BCE) of Qi and was developed by Kings Wei 威王 (r. 356–320 BCE) and Xuan 宣王 (r. 319–301 BCE). The huge agency was sponsored by the Qi government yet governed by individual intellectual authorities who were entitled with official ranks. These personnel worked together to

⁴⁵ See Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 9.

“provide comments and criticism” (*yilun* 議論) on state affairs.⁴⁶ Through its activities, the Jixia Academy made it possible for various types of information institutions—teaching, policy-making, ritual-organizing, and so forth—to collaborate. It operated in at least two forms of elite interaction: regular literary groupings that facilitated the canonization of the Jixia texts, and circumstantial gatherings to recopy and perform the Jixia texts before a broader public.

Both forms can be demonstrated by the making and transmission of the *Xunzi* 荀子 text, which reflected how the intellectual legacy of the Jixia Academy had been preserved and spread through the flourishing of some specific authorities of scholarship. The text has long been considered the work of Xun Kuang’s 荀況 (ca. 316–237 BCE) disciples to document his teaching. As the Head Academician (*jijiu* 祭酒) of the academy, Xun Kuang was probably one of the best-known members of this institution in the early imperial period. On his motivation for academic activities, Sima Qian argues:

不遂大道而營於巫祝，信機祥，鄙儒小拘，如莊周等又猾稽亂俗，於是推儒、墨、道德之行事興壞，序列著數萬言而卒。

[Rulers] did not follow the great Way but gave their attention to magic and prayers and believed in omens and luck. The Confucian scholars [of his generation] were petty and narrow-minded, while thinkers such as Zhuang Zhou were wild and destructive of public morality. So [Xun Kuang] expounded the advantages and disadvantages of practising the Confucian, Mohist and Taoist teachings. By the time of his death he had written tens of thousands of words.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For related information about the Jixia Academy, see *SJ* 46, “The Biography of Tian Wan, Jingzhong” 田敬仲完世家, and Xu Gan 徐幹 (171–218), *Zhonglun* 中論. Some scholars argue that the academy was the official think tank of the state of Qi. For instance, Fang Hui 方輝 and Tian Zhongling 田鐘靈, “Jixia xuegong kao” 稷下學宮考, *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 (Winter 2021): 12–25; Zhao Yichao 趙益超 and Hou Xia 侯霞, “Jixia xuegong xinzheng” 稷下學宮新證, *Guanzi xuekan* 管子學刊 2 (2020): 25–30.

The interaction of various schools was the basis of the production of the *Xunzi*. Xun Kuang's viewpoints were clarified through his debates with members of different intellectual traditions. To promote the genuine teaching of Confucius, he needed to argue against all other knowledge paradigms that might overshadow its importance. Focusing on a fundamental interplay between reality (*shi* 實) and expression (*ming* 名), the *Xunzi* text summarized the principal views of famous intellectuals in Xun Kuang's period, explaining them as together demonstrating the relationship of humans, the cosmos, state politics, rituals, and words.⁴⁸ The text provided a topic map and a "standard" language of philosophical discussion that transcended the factional divides between different schools. (See fig. 6.) It drew lessons from a wide range of academic lineages and in turn bridged the gaps between them. The making of the *Xunzi* text, in this sense, was the fruit of both a trans-school literary association and an information nexus that allowed the inter-factional exchange of messages. Disciples of Xun Kuang made their teacher's knowledge transmittable through a set of concepts that could be easily understood by readers of various parties. Its reemphasis of old Confucian concepts like *li* 禮, *qing* 情, and *xing* 性 safeguarded the preeminent position of Confucius and Mencius, while its innovative explanation of notions from the *Laozi* 老子, *Mozi* 墨子, and *Shenzi* 申子 texts, such as *dao* 道, *ming* 名, and *shu* 術, reflected an attempt to incorporate various intellectual traditions into one single school.

⁴⁷ "Biographies of Mencius and Lord Xun" 孟子荀卿列傳, *SJ* 74. 2343–50. The English translation is by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, from *Selections from Records of the Historian* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2007), 92.

⁴⁸ For Xun Kuang's summary of the stances of various schools, see Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue lishi* 經學曆史 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2004), 29.

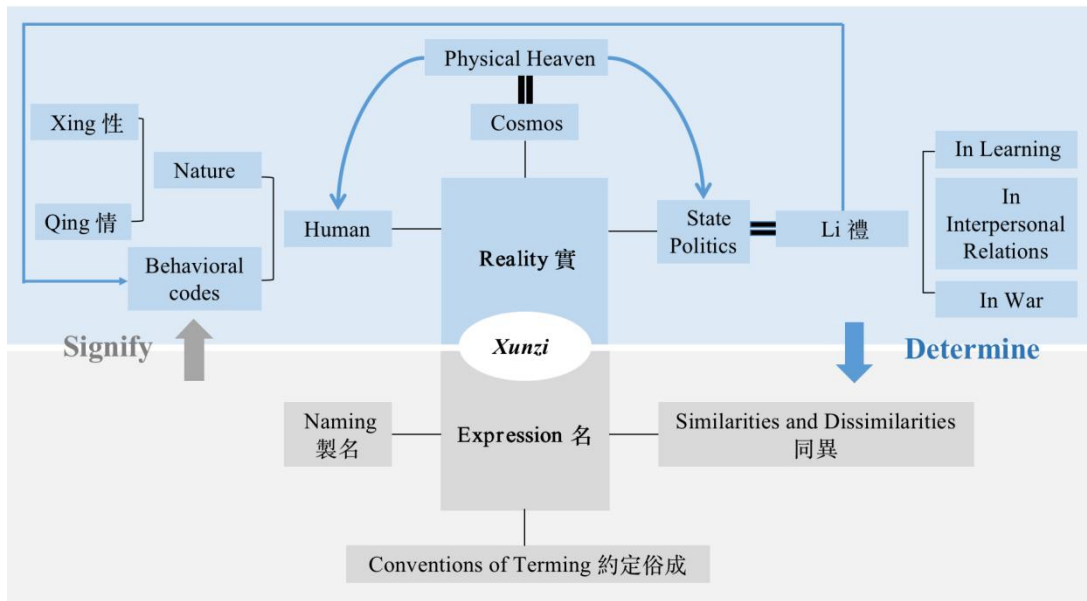


Fig. 6. Part of the topic map of the *Xunzi*. The arrows indicate causative relationships illustrated in the text.

Meanwhile, because of their mentor’s reputation as a key member of the academy, producers of the *Xunzi* text obtained priority to express their views and to publicize these views as superior to other popular opinions. Many of Xun’s disciples and their students acquired more power and tended to broaden their connections with other institutions in the early and mid-Western Han. A great number of Erudites (*boshi* 博士) who served as official scholars in the imperial court were from the QXY area, and many of them proclaimed to have followed Xun Kuang or his disciples in person. The *Hanshu* suggests that Fuqiu Bo 浮丘伯, a Qi native, was the immediate disciple of Xun Kuang. His student Shen Pei Gong 申培公, Erudite of Emperor Wen, had at least ten students serving as the Erudites of Emperor Wu, most of whom were Qi-Lu natives.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For related information about these Erudites, see “Biographies of Confucian Scholars” 儒林列傳, *SJ* 121. 3115–30; “Biographies of Confucian Scholars” 儒林傳, *Hanshu* (hereafter *HS*) (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), 88. 3589–623.

One of these students, Kong Anguo 孔安國 (ca. 156–74 BCE), was also the disciple of Fu Sheng 伏生, the former Erudite of Qin who had probably followed Xun Kuang. (See fig. 7) A series of commentaries on the Confucian classics had been attributed to him in the Han period. These commentaries were called “the Kong commentaries” (*kongzhu* 孔注) and directly borrowed frameworks from the *Xunzi*. Most such commentaries are lost, and are only available in the works of other intellectuals. The Wei scholar He Yan 何晏 (d. 249) partly based his interpretation of the *Lunyu* on the Kong commentary, in which four central categories in the *Xunzi*—*zhiyi* 志意 (mindsets and intentions), *lijie* 禮節 (ritual and etiquette), *faze* 法則 (law and order), and *zhongxin* 忠信 (loyalty and honesty)—served as important pillars.⁵⁰ More importantly, the concepts of the physical world (*wu* 物) and language (*yan* 言) in the *Xunzi* were borrowed directly by the Kong commentary, and were utilized by He Yan to reinterpret the *Lunyu*:

子曰賜也達。孔安國曰：達謂通於物理也。

Confucius said: “[Duanmu] Ci has the character of *da* (literally ‘comprehensive understanding’).” Kong Anguo said: *da* refers to understanding well about the principles of physical things.⁵¹

子所雅言。孔安國曰：雅言正言也。

Confucius used *yayan* (literally ‘elegant dictation’). Kong Anguo said: *yayan* refers to standard language.⁵²

Neither of the concepts are treated with full attention in the *Lunyu*. New perspectives reflected in the Kong commentary, as part of the Jixia tradition of textual production, penetrated the original text and came to reshape readers’ understanding. It is unsurprising

⁵⁰ See He Yan, *Lunyu jijie yishu* 論語集解義疏, comm. Huang Kan 皇侃, eds. Wan Yunwu 王雲五 et al. (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshu Guan, 1937).

⁵¹ Ibid., 105.

⁵² Ibid., 145.

that Kong Anguo was “chosen” by the Han intellectuals as the assumed author of all these commentary texts, considering that he was the hub of a network of various institutions that made political prestige, intellectual credentials, clan power, and local knowledge converge at one point. As the twelfth-generation great-grandson of Confucius, he enjoyed both the reputation of his family and membership in the top layer of the elite society in the local area of Lu 魯.⁵³ His convenient access to local knowledge resources and close ties to powerful figures ensured that he would have a large group of readers in the Lu region. Moreover, as he obtained an influential position in the imperial government based on his intellectual accomplishments, he set a good example for younger generations for how to achieve success through literary production. The privilege of individuals like him made it easier to promote the themes and categories in the *Xunzi*, especially among the local fellows of these people who also wanted to be admitted into the court positions. The speech in the *Xunzi* came to be advertised as a “palace entry ticket” that widely applied among educated men who expected to pursue official careers.

⁵³ For the short biography of Kong Anguo, see “Biographies of Confucian Scholars,” *SJ*.

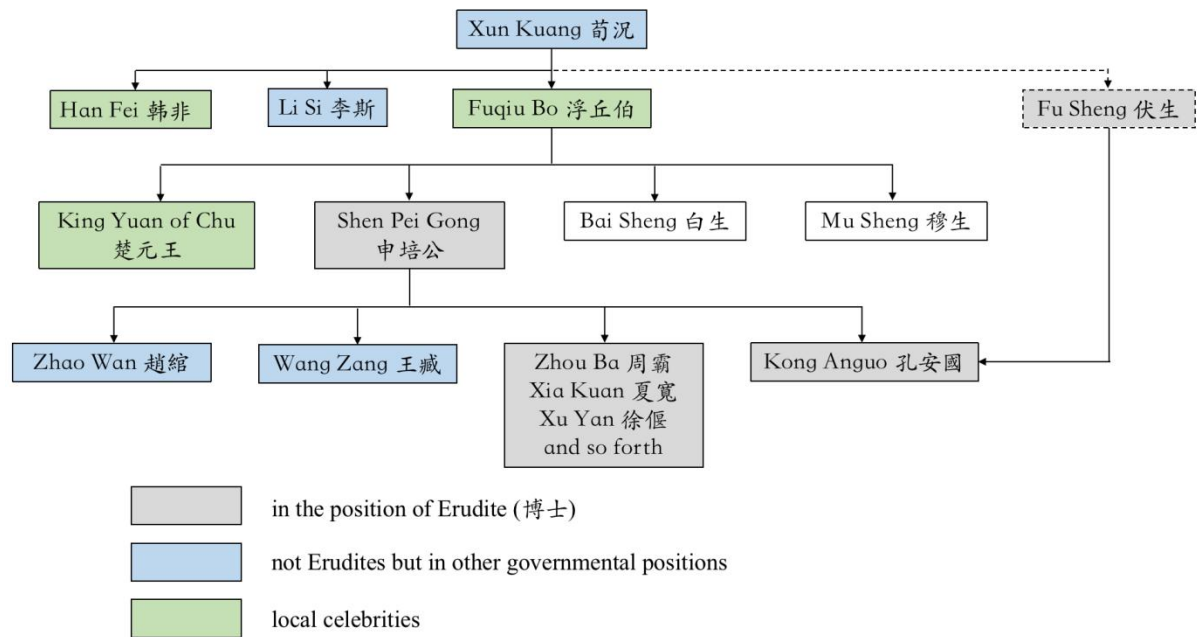


Fig. 7. The network (mainly in the Qi-Lu region) of Xun Kuang’s followers in the early imperial age, hierarchical visualization. The dotted lines indicate “possible connections.”

At the same time, ritual-management institutions contributed to the preservation of the Jixia legacy by making texts function in a subjunctive realm of performance. Excavated from Linyi 临沂 in the former Qi area, writings in the Western Han burials at Yinqueshan 银雀山 have been considered to possibly be the manifestation of the ideas of Jixia scholars.⁵⁴ These writings were found on bamboo slips when unearthed. A group of them, which were under the title “Thirteen Pieces on Following Laws and Orders” (*Shoufa shouling deng shisan pian* 守法守令等十三篇) in the original excavation report, display the overlaps between the fragments of the *Xunzi* text and other writings of Jixia scholars.⁵⁵ Some of the pieces show a strong resemblance to the discussion in the *Xunzi*

⁵⁴ Robin D.S. Yates, “The Yin-Yang Texts from Yinqueshan: An Introduction and Partial Reconstruction, with Notes on their Significance in Relation to Huang Lao Daoism,” *Early China* 19 (1994): 75–144.

text, particularly regarding their concerns about the relationship between rulers and their people.

富民，父母也。有長位毋長道者，匹夫也。

[If someone could] make people rich, [they can be called] the father or mother [of their people]. [If] someone possesses a superior position but does not handle long-term means [to benefit people], [they are] just an ordinary individual. (Yinqueshan 822)⁵⁶

得百姓之力者富，得百姓之死者強，得百姓之譽者榮。三得者具而天下歸之，三得者亡而天下去之。

He who gets the people to work for him will be rich, he who gets the people to die for him will be strong, and he who gets the people to praise him will be renowned. When all three of these achievements are complete, then All under Heaven will side with him, but if these three achievements are lacking, then All under Heaven will abandon him. (*Xunzi* Ch.11)⁵⁷

People's support is regarded as the absolute basis of the ruler's reign. If a ruler fails to make people live better, that individual would be unqualified to be called a "ruler" and would thus be left powerless. Here the concept of "ruler" indicates both a series of real actions and a title/name that signifies a position, and an individual is considered a genuine ruler only if their actions perfectly match their title. The fundamental dynamic in the *Xunzi*, which is between reality and expression, is embodied through the Yinqueshan text translated above.

⁵⁵ For the connections between the *Xunzi* and texts of other schools, see Fu Si'nian 傅斯年, "Zhanguo zijia xulun" 戰國子家敘論, in *Fu Si'nian quanji* 傅斯年全集, vol. 2 (Changsha: Hunan Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 2000), 257; and Bai Xi 白奚, *Jixia xue yanjiu—zhongguo gudai de sixiang ziyou yu baijia zhengming* 稷下學研究—中國古代的思想自由與百家爭鳴 (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1998), 218–19.

⁵⁶ For the original text, see Yinque Shan Han Mu Zhujian Zhengli Xiaozu 銀雀山漢墓竹簡整理小組, "Yinque Shan zhushu Shoufa Shouling deng shisan pian" 銀雀山竹書《守法》《守令》等十三篇, *Wenwu* 4 (1985): 27–37.

⁵⁷ The English translation is seen in "The True King and the Hegemon," in Eric L. Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 113.

The funerary context of these entombed writings makes it necessary to examine the potential use of the texts in a non-academic setting. As the ritual circumstance itself was an information-producing machinery that sent messages to ritual participants, entombed writings helped to construct an image of the deceased that they would want others to remember. They contained the self-expectations of the dead: someone might have wanted to be remembered as a righteous man, a good official, an intelligent public servant, or in another specific way. In some other slips we see significant concern about “state” (*guo* 國) and “managing the state” (*zhiguo* 治國), through which the tomb occupant probably wanted to present himself as a policy maker.

肥六畜者益其食, 肥民人者少其使, 肥國家者飭其道德。

Those who want to make their livestock fat should increase their feeding. Those who want to make their people rich should lessen their burdens. Those who want to make their state stronger should put [people’s] moral issues in order. (Yinqueshan 820–821)⁵⁸

足國之道: 節用裕民, 而善臧其余。節用以禮, 裕民以政。

The way to ensure sufficiency for the state is to keep expenditures frugal, to enrich the people, and to store up well any surplus. One keeps expenditures frugal through ritual, and one enriches the people through government. (*Xunzi* Ch.10)⁵⁹

The Yinqueshan text, again, shared the language pool offered by the *Xunzi* text. The governing of a state appeared similar to the managing of one’s personal life, based on the correlation between state politics and the behaviors of an individual. “To enrich” and “to preserve” are the two primary approaches to achieving a better future, for both an individual and a polity. Carried by funerary writings, these words would have served to impress funeral participants about the wisdom, ambition, and worries of the tomb occupant, through publicizing him as belonging to a group of statesmen who followed the

⁵⁸ Yinque Shan Han Mu Zhujian Zhengli Xiaozu, “Yinque Shan zhushu Shoufa Shouling deng shisan pian,” 30.

⁵⁹ Hutton, “Enriching the State,” in *Xunzi*, 84.

teaching of Jixia scholars, and as part of an information nexus who was always well informed about the authoritative, officially recognized words for discussing socio-political issues.

The collaboration of information nexuses and text-producing organizations continued during the Eastern Han. Literary institutions patronized by the state, such as the state library of the Eastern Pavilion (Dongguan 東觀) and Hongdu Academy 鴻都門學, also shaped the QXY elite discourse to differing extents. Probably none of them, however, were as influential in the QXY area as the Jixia Academy. This was certainly because they were located outside of the region, though some other factors such as policies and the developments of the elite group itself were also responsible for the phenomenon. These will be discussed later in this chapter.

(II) Gaul

The situation of early imperial Gaul was different mainly because of the long-standing multilingualism in the region. Although the graphs of the written language in the polities in the contemporaneous territory of “China” also differed markedly before the Qin unification, skilled scribes could read most of these variants. Oral communication across regions was undoubtedly possible as well, which is proven by the frequent movements of spokesmen like Su Qin 蘇秦 (382–332 BCE) and Zhang Yi 張儀 (d. 309 BCE), probably speaking a Zhou capital dialect as a *lingua franca*, and the regular employment of translators at court. What happened in Gaul was much more complicated. People residing there varied in their ethnic identity, collective memories, and behavioral norms. There were neither stable, classified “language entities”—for example, what would later be called Latin, Greek, Gaulish, Iberian—nor were there official “visitor languages” occasionally applied in trade and settlement, which would have included languages like the Semitic languages (Phoenician and Punic), Celtic languages (Lepontic,

Cisalpine Gaulish, Celtiberian), Italic languages (e.g., Oscan) and Etruscan.⁶⁰ Even when Caesar entered Gaul, the groups he called Belgae, Celte, and Aquitani were each “a medley of different races,” using various languages.⁶¹

What further differentiated Gaul from the QXY region was that, for Gallic people before the arrival of Julius Caesar, there was hardly a large-scale local institution as influential as the Jixia Academy. T. Rice Holmes described the Gauls at that time as losing the strength of barbarism without having gained the strength of civilization.⁶² A much stronger power from above was needed to make local elites of varied origins more unified, which could only be provided through top-down state machinery, no matter whether for military, administrative, or ideological uses. Scholars agree that the presence of a central government was crucial to the making of a relatively unified area of Gaul. Max Radin has argued that to gather the heterogeneous populations in Gaul into a single province, what was needed was only to guarantee “the presence among them of a representative of the sovereign *populus Romanus*, elected for a definite period, and clothed with imperium—which may be characterized as supreme residuary power.”⁶³ Greg Woolf has also argued that, under the Republican empire of Rome that “had little infrastructure, preferring to harness the power of subordinate groups through friendships and alliances,”⁶⁴ it was almost impossible to implant among the Gallic populations a unified idea of Romanness.

⁶⁰ Alex Mullen, *Southern Gaul and the Mediterranean: Multilingualism and Multiple Identities in the Iron Age and Roman Periods* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 25–26.

⁶¹ See Holmes, *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*, 13.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶³ Max Radin, “The International Law of the Gallic Campaigns,” *The Classical Journal* 12, no. 1 (Oct., 1916): 8–33.

⁶⁴ Woolf, *Becoming Roman*, 36.

Although these views are by no means incorrect, they somewhat neglect the technical side of cultural formation. Cultures are founded upon symbols and signs, which require stable tools of expression and communication. These tools, including texts, were introduced before the establishment of governmental infrastructure, to the Gallic nobles who accepted Greek or Roman culture; but the wide participation of elites in textual production was a much later phenomenon. Before the arrival of Julius Caesar, literacy was hardly an important element in native Gauls' lives. This connection between textual production and a military operation made early writing activities in Gaul, to a large extent, a necessity of warfare. Rather than spreading through the operation of academic or bureaucratic organizations, textual products obtained their value mainly from military institutions and their call for security and defense. Josiah Osgood argues that, when Caesar commanded Transalpine Gaul and waged campaigns against other parts of the Gallic region, the Romans' mastery of writing became one of their most significant advantages over the Gauls: writing allowed information to be transmitted, and information was always valuable in wartime.⁶⁵ In the *Bellum Gallicum*, Caesar addresses various forms of writing that had played significant roles in his conquest. Some examples are given in Table 2.

⁶⁵ See Josiah Osgood, "The Pen and the Sword: Writing and Conquest in Caesar's Gaul," *Classical Antiquity* 28, no. 2 (Oct. 2009): 328–58.

	Content related to Writing	Nature of the Written Products
Book 1. 29	<u>Greek documents</u> , found in the Helvetian camp, were brought to Caesar	list of names of people who were able to join the army
Book 2. 35	The Roman Senate received Caesar's <u>dispatches</u> on victory	to inform the imperial capital about the war
Book 4. 38	The Roman Senate received Caesar's <u>dispatches</u> on victory	to inform the imperial capital about the war
Book 5. 11	Caesar wrote a <u>letter</u> to Labienus	asking to build ships for war
Book 5. 40 & 46	Quintus Tullius Cicero wrote a <u>letter</u> to Caesar	seeking help for the ongoing campaign
Book 5. 47	Caesar directed that Crassus should take charge of everything left behind at Samarobriva, including the <u>state papers</u>	to occupy Samarobriva when Caesar was fighting for more lands
Book 5. 47	Labienus wrote a <u>letter</u> to Caesar	to remind Caesar of the danger of leaving his camp
Book 5. 48	Caesar induced his Gallic horseman to convey a <u>letter (written in Greek)</u> to Cicero	to prevent the enemy from knowing the content of the letter
Book 5. 48	Cicero read Caesar's <u>letter</u> in front of Roman troops	to encourage soldiers

Table 2. The various forms of writing that played important roles in Caesar's conquest of Gaul, based on the *Bellum Gallicum*.

Table 2 demonstrates that the functions of text in the early imperial Gaul and the QXY area were very different. The personal letters and documents written by Roman military leaders were for an intelligence use, not an educational one. Likewise, these forms of writing helped build some information nexuses distinct from those of the China side in their operation. At least two factors confirm the difference between these nexuses and the Jixia-style literary circles: how long the messages transmitted through them remained useful, and whether these messages were open or confidential to a wider public. For the first factor, the writing group gathered around Caesar must have had their textual products reflect the most updated situation of the war, and most information produced by

them became useless very fast. Because the identity of intelligence agents, the required sources of information, the mindsets and intentions of commanders, and their command and control structures always changed during wartime, it was difficult for Caesar to build physical headquarters in a given place to organize informants. The establishment of a stable organization like the Jixia Academy was therefore impossible. For the second factor, the Roman generals had much more clearly defined “targeted readers” than the Jixia academicians did, to guarantee that the content of their written documents would not be known by others. When running their informants, Roman commanders used Gallic messengers but wrote in a language they could not understand (like Greek) to avoid unintentional release of information.⁶⁶ The Jixia scholars, instead, had their pieces appear in the tomb of someone unnecessarily related to their institution. With such limited readership, obviously Caesar’s writing activities in Gaul did not lead to an immediate, large-scale convergence and standardization of various groups of local speech.

But Caesar’s “circle of military writing” shared many commonalities with the Jixia literary community. What gathered writers as a group was the power of governmental institutions that endowed these people with official obligations and commissions. While the Jixia intellectuals worked to fulfill the requests of Qi rulers, Caesar’s commanders wrote and received documents for their regime as well. Especially, in later years when Caesar and Augustus had their veterans settle in Gaul, the Gallic noblemen who chose to serve the imperial armies were offered Roman citizenship.⁶⁷ This might have led to the spread of Roman-style speech among elites in Gaul, with the

⁶⁶ See Osgood, “The Pen and the Sword,” 335.

⁶⁷ See Edith Mary Wightman, *Gallia Belgica* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 71.

Roman values of serving the state penetrating into the everyday discourses of these new citizens.

After the first century CE, there was a long blank period in historical accounts regarding collective intellectual activities in this region.⁶⁸ Some writers were addressed as “native Gauls” in transmitted historiography, like Marcus Antonius Gnipho (fl. 1st century BCE) and Valerius Cato (fl. 1st century BCE), but many of them were only born in Gaul yet spent the rest of their lives somewhere else.⁶⁹ Most works produced by Gallic writers in the first two centuries of the imperial period have been lost,⁷⁰ and our current knowledge about the prosperity of Gallic education was largely exaggerated by eighteenth-century writers.⁷¹ It was not until the third century CE that there was large-scale, state-sponsored school education in Gaul, as confirmed by historical accounts, and local literary authorities came to emerge from these schools. One example was the control exercised by the municipal and imperial authority over the schools of Autun, central-east Gaul.⁷² Teachers were appointed by the local senate, though they had some rights to

⁶⁸ This blankness is confirmed by C.E. van Sickle in his “Eumenius and the Schools of Autun,” *The American Journal of Philology* 55, no. 3 (1934): 236–43.

⁶⁹ Though limited in number, there were individuals who received refined education in Gaul before moving to other regions. Philosopher Favorinus of Arelate (ca. 80–150 CE) was educated in Gaul before moving to Greece and the city of Rome, probably at grammarian or rhetorician schools. His life and career are addressed by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus in the *Lives Of Eminent Grammarians And Rhetoricians*. His eloquence impressed Aulus Gellius (125–180 CE), which verified the high quality of literary education in Gaul. For further analysis of the literary career of Favorinus, see Stephen M. Beall, “Homo Fandi Dulcissimus: The Role of Favorinus in the ‘Attic Nights’ of Aulus Gellius,” *The American Journal of Philology* 122, no. 1 (Spring, 2001): 87–106.

⁷⁰ Theodore Haarhoff, *Schools of Gaul: A Study of Pagan and Christian Education in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920), 35.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Van Sickle, “Eumenius and the Schools of Autun,” 240.

determine what to teach.⁷³ Texts produced by these educated men demonstrated how their activities in Gaul helped to shape the elite language there. Eumenius (ca. 260–311), who was born and spent most of his life in Gaul, was sent by Constantius Chlorus (r. 293–306) to manage the local schools in Autun. Around 297 CE he delivered a panegyric at Autun or Lyon to local governors, to highlight the necessity of restoring both local schools and the local teaching of oratory. The panegyric typically reflected the topics, conceptions, and points of view that were transmitted by the imperial authority to the aristocratic Gauls in the late third century:

Ante omnia igitur, uir perfectissime, diuinae imperatorum Caesarumque nostrorum prouidentiae singularique in nos beneuolentiae huius quoque operis instauratione parendum est, qui ciuitatem istam et olim fraterno populi Romani nomine gloriatum et tunc demum grauissima clade percussam, cum latrocinio Batauicae rebellionis obsessa auxilium Romani principis inuocaret, non solum pro admiratione meritorum sed etiam pro miseratione casuum attrollere ac recreare uoluerunt, ipsamque ruinarum eius magnitudinem immoralibus liberalitatis suae monimentis dignam iudicauerunt, ut tanto esset inlustrior gloria restitutorum quanto ipsa moles restitutinis immanior.

Above all, Your Excellency, we should obey our Emperors' and Caesars' divine foresight and singular goodwill toward us in the restoration of this monument too. This city, once proud of the name of brother to the Roman people and later ruined by overwhelming disaster when it was besieged by rebellious Batavian robbers and called upon the aid of the Roman ruler, they wanted to raise up and build anew, not only out of admiration for its services but also from pity for its misfortunes, and they judged the very magnitude of its ruins worthy of undying memorials of their generosity, that the more enormous the difficulty of rebuilding, the more remarkable would be the glory of the things rebuilt.⁷⁴

The fact that the panegyric was recorded and circulated immediately after its delivery verified that Eumenius was not merely an individual speaker, but was part of a writing community to which he offered sources of textual production. A series of traditional

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Eumenii pro instaurantis scholis oratio," 4.1–2. The original text is from C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994): 555–56. The English translation is on page 154–55.

Roman values are emphasized in the paragraph above, just as in the writings of Roman authors under Augustus. The most important component of these values is that of connecting one's personal life with the destiny of the state, the rhetoric of which had been shared by Cicero, Sulla, Julius Caesar, and Augustus.⁷⁵ Eumenius, by locating the history of Autun within Roman history, tried to bridge the gap between the local people and the imperial center: they shared common memories about the past and common fates in the future, so if the people of Autun protected their glorious literary education, they were also protecting the honor of Rome.

In this sense, Eumenius' speech connected the production of rhetorical devices, the imparting of ideological messages, and the fulfilling of government ordinances as a whole. His role was somehow similar to that of Kong Anguo who acted as the axis of a series of elite information institutions: he himself worked in local educational institutions, while being the messenger of the imperial government and probably the founder of a philanthropic institution supporting the running of local schools. Apart from his position as the *magister memoriae* at the court of Maximian and then the professor of rhetoric schools in Autun,⁷⁶ in the panegyric, he expresses his wish to donate his salary to these newly established schools:

Salarium me liberalissimi principes ex huius rei publicae uiribus in sexcenis milibus nummum accipere iusserunt... Hoc ego salarium, quantum ad honorem pertinet, adoratum accipio et in accepti ratione perscribo; sed expensum referre patriae meane cupio, et ad restitutionem huius operis, quoad usus poposcerit, destinare.

⁷⁵ For how these central values are revealed in the works of previous authors, see Emma Dench, "Cicero and Roman Identity" in *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero*, ed. Catherine Steel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 122–38.

⁷⁶ For more information about his official positions, see Caillan Davenport, "Giving Voice to the Late Roman Emperor: Eumenius's For the Restoration of the Schools (Pan. Lat. 9[4]) in Context," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 9–28.

The most generous rulers have ordered me to receive a salary of 600,000 sesterces from the resources of this republic... This salary, as far as concerns the honor, I accept with reverence and enter in to accounts received; but I wish to set the payment down under my native city, and to designate it for the rebuilding of this edifice, as long as necessity requires.⁷⁷

As Caillan Davenport argues, by declaring that he would serve local educational efforts and financially support the local schools, Eumenius proclaimed his newly assigned public role as “the patron of both the people of Autun and the Gallic youth at large.”⁷⁸ What he presented through the text was not only his ties with the Roman imperial court but also his independent position as a manager of social life in the region, a certain type of local leadership that provided him with the authority to intervene in the production of messages by the elite organizations in Autun. His self-representation in the panegyric text was obviously an attempt to polish his public image and to send out positive information about himself and his local allies. A type of speech centering on both Roman identity and local goodness emerged here. Although such speech was also partly rooted in the classical canons produced by prominent authors (e.g., Cicero), like what happened with the elite language in the QXY area, the Gallic elites in this period were far from a unified group who could be identified through their literary activities. It was still too early to use the term “local speech” to describe the product of their communicative behavior, considering the overall lack of advanced education and the very limited number of representative writers in this region. The situation changed later in the early fourth century, as significant Gallic authors—like Ausonius of Bordeaux (ca. 310–395)—grew in their number considerably and started exploring a language that better articulated the central beliefs of the upper class in local society.

⁷⁷ “Eumenii pro instaurantis scholis oratio,” 1.2–3. The original text is from Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 559. The English translation is on page 162–63.

⁷⁸ Davenport, “Giving Voice to the Late Roman Emperor,” 10.

III. Censoring Elite Speech: Two Filters in the Local Production of Texts

What I have discussed above occurred during the first half of the early imperial age in China and Rome, when the gaps between various information-producing agencies were not unbridgeable in local areas. An educated individual could be the leading figure of one interest group while being admired by another, such as Xun Kuang (Xunzi), whose legacy actually blurred the boundaries between different schools of scholarship, and Cicero whose importance was acknowledged by parties with different agendas. This coalescence of knowledge production was partly overshadowed by inter-group conflicts in later days. The function of local information nexuses as a platform of idea collision became more visible, which led to the hierarchization of information producers: some of them were silenced, while the voices of others were too loud to be overcome.

These silences and clamors came hand in hand with the continuous thriving of textual production. When one's speech was recorded and displayed, it became subject to other people's interpretations and judgments. The concern about wider acceptance drove individual elites to ally with more privileged groups who determined the principles of elite speech. To be favored by these potential allies, it was a must for individual elites to satisfy their needs according to varying contexts. The speech of these individuals, therefore, must have contained what Pierre Bourdieu called "linguistic competence," the potential of language to reach the goals given by specific circumstances:

Linguistic competence functions as linguistic capital in relationship with a certain market. Those who seek to defend a threatened capital...are forced to conduct a total struggle, because they cannot save the competence without saving the market, i.e., all the social conditions of the production and reproduction of producers and consumers.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Bourdieu, "The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges," *Social Science Information* 16 (1977): 645–68.

Language is intrinsically a product. Its value is verified by the market and customers.

Languages that are no use to others cannot continue to exist. In an ancient society wherein the desires of most people could not be articulated through written language, the power to define “useful language” and to filter out “useless language” was in the hands of only a few members of society. There were two ways through which a limited group of local elites censored the speech they found worthless or threatening: the promotion of exemplary figures and the use of inter-factional accusations. Both compelled individuals to check their own speech, so as to be compliant with the intangible “filters” from outside.

(I) Exemplary Figures

Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan found that the *Shiji* made clear distinctions between intellectuals who were “exemplars” and other scholars who seemed less important. For the former group of individuals, each of them merited an independent, extended biographical treatment, such as the “Hereditary House of Confucius” 孔子世家. For the latter group, many of them did not have their own biographies.⁸⁰ This hierarchy in historical documentation reflected how the voices of many educated men were silenced. Educated elites were expected to imitate some paragons and avoid “incorrect” trajectories of learning and expression, and the views and sayings of those exemplary figures constituted the orthodoxy of local intellectual life.

In many cases, an individual was entitled as an exemplary scholar by having their viewpoints openly discussed at the imperial court, which created opportunities for their personal opinions to become state ideology. The Shiqu Ge 石渠閣 Conference (51 BCE), initiated by the Han court to clarify the similarities and differences of the Five Classics, had at least thirteen participants coming from QXY and the adjacent area of Pei 沛, which

⁸⁰ See Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” *T'oung Pao* Second Series 89, Fasc. 1/3 (2003): 59–99.

was more than half of all participants.⁸¹ Eleven of them were followers of five prominent Confucian scholars from the Qi-Lu area: Hou Cang 后倉, Wang Shi 王式, Ouyang Gao 歐陽高, Tian Wangsun 田王孫, and someone from the Xiahou 夏侯 clan (see Table 3). The Baihu Guan 白虎觀 (White Tiger Hall) Conference of 79 CE, which was to further combine the Confucian Classics and the *chenwei* 讖緯 (prophetic-apocryphal) ideology, also had more than half of all participants coming from QXY, almost all of whom were important Confucian scholars.⁸² These individuals largely determined what topics were discussed at the conference. The compilation of conference discussions, the *Baihu tongde lun* 白虎通德論,⁸³ later became the source of doctrines of state management.⁸⁴ The prominent Confucian specialists from the QXY area, in a certain sense, dominated the creation and propagation of imperial ideology.

⁸¹ *HS* 88. 3589–623.

⁸² See “Biographies of Confucian Scholars” 儒林列傳, *HHS* 79A. 2569–93. Among these people, Wei Ying 魏應 (d. 90) from Rencheng 任城 (present-day Weishan 微山, Shandong) was in charge of “raising refutations and inquiries” 專掌難問 during the conference, while Chunyu Gong 淳于恭 (d. 80) from Beihai 北海 (present-day Anqiu 安丘, Shandong) collected the scholars’ views and submitted them to the emperor.

⁸³ It is commonly considered that the *Baihu tongde lun* is exactly the transmitted *Baihu tongyi* 白虎通義. See Xu Xingwu 徐興無, “Tongyi de xingcheng: *Baihu Tongyi* de huayu jizhi” 通義的形成: 白虎通義的話語機制, *Zhonghua wenshi luncong* 中華文史論叢 3 (2019): 263–301; Shi Jian, “The Way to the White Tiger Hall Conference: Evidence Gleaned from the Formation Process of the *Baihu Tong*,” *Early China* 45 (2022): 303–339.

⁸⁴ See Zhu Hanmin 朱漢民, “Baihu tongyi: diguo zhengdian he rujia jingdian de jiehe” 白虎通義: 帝國政典和儒家經典的結合, *Beijing daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 北京大學學報(哲學社會科學版) 4 (2017): 15–23; Lin Tsung-Shun 林聰舜, “Diguo yishi xingtai de chongjian—Banyan ‘Guoxian’ jichu de *Baihu tong* sixiang” 帝國意識形態的重建—扮演“國憲”基礎的白虎通思想 in *Handai ruxue biecai: Diguo yishi xingtai de xingcheng yu fazhan* 漢代儒學別裁: 帝國意識形態的形成與發展 (Taipei: Taida, 2013), 213–62.

From these conferences, individuals were able to learn “exemplary types of speech” favored by the policy-making class. The preeminent scholars’ exclusive specialization in Confucian classics focused the attention of individual authors on these texts and the knowledge traditions they were rooted in, and unavoidably lessened these people’s interests in other themes and narratives. In a quantitative study, Liu Yuejin 劉躍進 calculates the total number of Han literary works mentioned in the “Jingji zhi” 經籍志 of the *Suishu* 隋書, and discovers that almost all of the sixty volume-sized works produced in the Qi-Lu region are commentaries on five Confucian classics: *Chunqiu* 春秋, *Zhouyi* 周易, *Shangshu* 尚書, *Yili* 儀禮, and *Lunyu*.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, in the Qi-Lu area, there were clearly fewer transmitted texts of other literary categories—for example, those works following the traditions of the *Hanshu* 漢書 and *Chuci* 楚辭—compared to in regions like He-Luo 河-洛 and Jing-Chu 荊-楚.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See Liu Yuejin, *Qin-Han wenxue dili yu wenren fenbu* 秦漢文學地理與文人分佈 (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2012), 45–47. Among the nearly sixty works from the QXY region, eleven of them focus on the *Chunqiu*, nine on the *Zhouyi*, six on the *Shangshu*, five on the *Yili*, five on the *Lunyu*, and others combine two or more of these classics.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 96. According to Liu’s research, the regions of He-Luo and Jing-Chu witnessed the flourishing of much more various topics and genres in textual production. Not only commentaries on the five classics were made. Attentions were also paid to historiography, poetry and songs, mythology and magics, miscellaneous discussions of social life, and so forth. The compilation of the biographical historiography, *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記, and Wang Yi’s 王逸 (ca. 89–158) literary criticism in the *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句 were especially typical among these works. Similar situations are also seen in other types of textual sources. In his *Hanbei yinjing kao* 漢碑引經考, Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 calculates the number of Han inscriptions (mostly on stelae) which quote the content of the five classics. The inscriptions from the QXY region are especially large in number. For instance, under the entry “*liy*” 黎儀 (meaning “common people”) from the *Shangshu*, three inscriptions quoting the term are all from present-day Shandong: “Stele of Kong Zhou” 孔宙碑 (164), “Stele of Fei Feng, governor of Tangyi” 堂邑令費鳳碑 (177), and “Broken Stele of Mr. Tian, governor of X-zhang” 昌長田君斷碑 (177).

This enthusiasm for certain canons and the devaluation of other literary traditions gradually changed as experts in the Confucian classics lost imperial favor. The *Hou Hanshu* points out that the decline of Confucian scholarship started from the reign of Emperor An 安帝 (r. 106–125), who “paid less attention to arts and letters” 薄于藝文 and weakened the importance of Erudites at court.⁸⁷ As the unquestionable authority of Confucian scholars came to be shaken, the realm of text production became somehow centerless. Yet the imperial government also turned the eyes of writers to the practical field of *realpolitik*, by demonstrating a more tolerant attitude towards critiques on contemporary problems. In one of his edicts in 111, Emperor An declares:

傳曰：顛而不扶，危而不持，則將焉用彼相矣？公卿大夫將何以匡救，濟斯艱危，承天誠哉？

The *Lunyu* says: “If [someone] does not brace [a building when it is] falling, and if [someone] does not assist [others when they are in] danger, is there any reason to use them as the assistants [of rulers]?” How would lords and ministers manage to secure [the state], to provide aid in poor and difficult situations, and to follow the admonition from the Heaven?⁸⁸

“To help with statecraft” is the key expectation expressed here. The less practical Confucian teachings were downplayed, while new literary models arose for their acute discussions of the contemporary politics. Liu Yi 劉毅 (fl. early 2nd century), son of the King of Beihai 北海, was one of them:

毅少有文辯稱。元初元年，上《漢德論》並《憲論》十二篇。劉珍、鄧耽、尹兌、馬融共上書稱其美，安帝嘉之。

When he was young, Yi was well known for his literary crafts and eloquence. In the first year of Yuanchu (114), he submitted [to the emperor] “On the Virtue of Han” and “On Regulations,” including twelve chapters in total. Liu Zhen, Deng

⁸⁷ HHS 79A. 2547.

⁸⁸ HHS 5. 217.

Dan, Yin Dui, and Ma Rong all submitted memorials [to the emperor] to extol the beauty [of his writing]; Emperor An also awarded him.⁸⁹

Liu Yi's life and career were recorded in the "Biographies of Literati" 文苑列傳 in the *Hou Hanshu*, a chapter separated from the "Biographies of Confucian Scholars" 儒林列傳. This division indicates the rise of scholars like Liu as an independent group of exemplary figures. Another factor responsible for the decline of Confucian scholars and canons was the thriving of literary activities in the Yan 兗 and Xu 徐 regions, which even overshadowed that in the Qi-Lu area. A series of imperial archival institutions, such as the previously mentioned Dongguan, were built in the capital Luoyang 洛陽, which was nearer to the Yan region. As Cao Cao's power developed in Xuchang 許昌, the southwest of QXY, many literati from the Xu area came to follow him. Both Luoyang and Xuchang were relatively far from the Qi-Lu region. Scholars, who were supposed to be polymaths with flexible skills, concentrated around these new institutions and authorities and came to build new models of writing. They were adaptable to different aims of writing, not only to the official demands but to the consumption of various groups of members in literate communities.⁹⁰

Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192) was representative among these men. Born in Chenliu, he spent much of his life in the imperial capital as a scholar-official. Cai was a writer with a tremendously wide range of interests. The *Hou Hanshu* says he was "interested in rhetoric and literary skills, math and the occult, and astrology; also good at playing music

⁸⁹ *HHS* 80A. 2616.

⁹⁰ For these people's polymathy in writing, see Mark Laurent Asselin, *A Significant Season: Cai Yong (ca. 133-192) and His Contemporaries* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2010), and Charles Sanft's review for the book in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series 21, no. 1 (Jan 2011): 126–28.

and [composing] rhythms” 好辭章, 數術, 天文, 妙操音律.⁹¹ As one of the key editors of the official historiography, *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記, and the author of a series of shorter memorials, eulogies, and personal letters, he was better known for filial piety and his work of editing and providing the calligraphy for the Stone Classics. His specific efforts to revive the orthodox Confucian Classics, to a large extent, reflected their decline in his time. In a memorial to Emperor Ling 靈帝 (r. 168–189), he says:

陛下即位之初, 先涉經術, 聽政余日, 觀省篇章, 聊以遊意, 當代博弈, 非以教化取士之本。

As Your Majesty just ascended the throne, [you would better] first learn about the classics, and join policy making by listening [to the discussions of your subordinates] for several days. [You may] browse some pieces of literary works for entertainment, as a replacement to playing chess, but [these pieces] cannot be used as the criteria to select officials for the purpose of teaching and civilizing.⁹²

What is implied here is that even the emperor was attracted by “pieces of literary works” and almost forgot the importance of the Confucian Classics. The once extremely popular form of writing, the commentary on the Confucian Classics, lost its appeal to many writers, and pure scholarly analysis partly gave way to those genres more convenient for expressing political opinions. The social position of many Confucian scholars also decreased. Even Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), one of the most reputable among them, had to cover up his own embarrassing situation, saying: “The disciples of [Yan] Hui and [Duanmu] Ci had never shown off their official affiliations” 回賜之徒不稱官閥.⁹³

⁹¹ *HHS* 60B. 1980.

⁹² *HHS* 60B. 1996.

⁹³ *HHS* 35. 1211.

Mentor/Head of Schools	Participants of the Shiquge Conference	Place of Origin
The Xiahou clan 夏侯氏	Zhou Kan 周堪 Jia Cang 假倉 Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之	Qi 齊 Chenliu 陳留 Donghai 東海
Hou Cang 后倉	Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 Dai Sheng 戴聖 Wenren Tonghan 聞人通漢	Donghai 東海 Liang 梁 Pei 沛
Wang Shi 王式	Xue Guangde 薛廣德 Zhang Chang'an 張長安	Pei 沛 Shanyang 山陽
Ouyang Gao 歐陽高	Lin Zun 林尊 Ouyang Diyu 歐陽地餘	Ji'nan 濟南 Qiansheng 千乘
Tian Wangsun 田王孫	Shi Qiu 施讎 Liangqiu Lin 梁丘臨	Pei 沛 Donglai 東萊

Table 3. Major participants of the Shiquge Conference and their mentors

The Gallo-Roman elites also made attempts to create local idols who could offer people guidance on how to think and express their thoughts, but the Gallic provinces could not be compared with QXY with regard to the sufficiency of state-sponsored, knowledge-producing infrastructure, at least in the first two centuries CE. The centralized, governmental apparatus usually appeared as malfunctioning in local areas.⁹⁴ This made the situation of Gaul different from that of the QXY area, as the latter enjoyed more privilege as a region that had long been favored by the imperial court, and shared more human and intellectual resources from the state capital.

This does not mean that Gallic elites found no one to imitate regarding the “correct ways” of speaking and writing. One group of such exemplary personages were those literary masters whose works were canonized throughout the entire Greco-Roman

⁹⁴ As Peter Brown points out, the legal and institutional structures of the Roman Empire “tend to be deliberately excluded from contemporary analysis and from most contemporary expectations of change and decision-making.” See “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* no. 2 (Spring, 1983): 1–25.

world. Even in the last days of the Roman empire, Gallic authors still tended to commend their peers by comparing them to Homer, Pindar, Varro, Virgil, Horace, Pliny, Tacitus, Fronto, and other writers whose works constituted the major body of the classics taught at Roman schools.⁹⁵ Virgil's works were especially popular among the educated, maybe partly due to his identity as a native of Cisalpine Gaul. His epics provided late antique authors with direct inspiration and models. As Catherine Ware has discovered, for those Gallic orators in the schools at Trier, Autun and Bordeaux, Virgil was “the *magnus poeta* or *poeta Romanus* and the model for literary and grammatical excellence.”⁹⁶ Ware has also observed that Virgil's special focus on a “golden age” in which all entities and creatures were united under the Roman imperium, to a certain degree, shaped many Gallo-Roman panegyrics.⁹⁷ These texts appeared to treat “uniformity” as an equivalent to the concept of “empire,” and more or less reemphasized the unequal relationship between “locality” and “the state”: the former should be inferior to the latter. In a panegyric for Constantine composed by an anonymous author from Autun (around 310), most of the symbols that were related to the Roman empire—the emperor, patron gods, and other components of the regime—are all indicators of a universal principle inherent to the cosmos, which is unity:

⁹⁵ See Ralph W. Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul* (Austin: Texas University Press, 2011), 107. Among the classical writers mentioned here, Homer and Virgil were the most widely recognized as the representative figures of the Greek and Latin literature. See Richard Tarrant, “Aspects of Virgil's Reception in Antiquity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 43–62. Especially, Virgil came to be interpreted as containing all of wisdom, in ways similar to how Homer had already been interpreted by Greek authors writing under the Roman empire. See Aaron David Pelttari, “The Reader and the Poet: The Transformation of the Latin Poetry in the Fourth Century” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2012): 35.

⁹⁶ Catherine Ware, “Speaking of Kings and Battle: Virgil as Prose Panegyrist in Late Antiquity,” *Proceedings of the Virgil Society* 9 (2017): 1–30.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Itaque primum illud compendium faciam quod, cum omnes uos, inuictissimi principes, quorum concors est et socia maiestas, debita ueneratione suspiciam, hunc tamen quantulumcumque tuo modo, Constantine, numini dicabo sermonem.

And so I shall make my first abridgment in that, although I esteem you all, invincible rulers, whose majesty is harmonious and united, with the respect that that you're due, I shall dedicate this address, trifling as it may be, to your divinity along, O Constantine.⁹⁸

Di boni, quid hoc est quod semper ex aliquo supremo fine mundi noua deum numina uniuerso orbi colenda descendunt?

Beneficent gods, why is it that new divinities, destined to be worshiped the whole world over, always come from some most remote part of the earth?⁹⁹

Unity is naturally connected to harmony and cosmopolitanism, and the three are portrayed in the text as the key element of a “golden age.” In some other parts of the panegyric the author did portray Constantine’s activities in Gaul, but a romantic illusion about the prosperity of the empire dominated the entire text. Nothing negative could be seen from his narratives. This idealism could probably explain why Gallic literature during this period was not so “Gallic,” but was largely isomorphic with the textual products from Italy and other central areas of the empire. Efforts were made by writers to aggrandize the speech that could best reflect how marvelous their state was, while more or less filtering out the real, diverse, and violent context of the region in their writing practice.

Since Diocletian prompted administrative changes and established imperial residences in Gaul in 284 CE, this region came to have easier access to official resources. Prominent Gallic writers, from whom Gallic elites studied how to compose writings appealing to potential readers, usually had a double identity as both classical authors and local governors. This was similar to QXY, as the coupling of bureaucracy and literacy led

⁹⁸ “VI. Panegyric of Constantine,” 1. 3–5, in Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*. The English translation is on page 218.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9. 4–5. The English translation is on page 232.

to these exemplary authors' interests in a series of themes for bureaucratic advancement. Ausonius of Bordeaux, who was not born as an aristocrat but reached a position of imperial patronage later in his life, offered an example. Hagith Sivan observes that a significant number of Gauls suddenly appeared on the stage of the imperial bureaucracy after Ausonius' elevation in 360–370 CE.¹⁰⁰ This was certainly a fruit of the rise of a new aristocracy in Gaul and the tightened interpersonal relationships among Gallic elites. But, considering the emphasis on literary capability in bureaucratic promotion and the “sudden appearance” of the Gallic officials as Sivan describes, it would be a reasonable assumption that the works of Ausonius served as good samples for individual intellectuals to learn what kinds of writing might attract the attention of the imperial government, and what themes and genres were unworthy of touching upon.

Ausonius re-regulated the Gallic elite writing through performing as both a teacher and an official, connecting the activities in educational institutions with what was happening within government offices. As a teacher he filtered out the non-Greco-Latin components in his writing, especially the Celtic elements indigenous to the Gauls. In Sivan's words, although his family members had names with Celtic roots, Ausonius' works indicate, at best, an Eastern-Greek origin of his family.¹⁰¹ Very few Celtic symbols and dialects are seen in his representative works. Instead, a closer investigation into Ausonius suggests his strong literary resemblance to those early imperial Roman writers. His *Wedding Cento* explicitly imitated Virgil's epic poetry when brutalizing men's sexuality,¹⁰² although the topic was totally different from those Virgilian centos. What

¹⁰⁰ Hagith Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux: Genesis of a Gallic Aristocracy* (London: Routledge, 1993), 65.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

deserves more attention is that, as a man in politics, Ausonius' works largely masked the previous Gallo-Roman conflicts. His portrayal of the local situation of Bordeaux was within the framework of an imperial story, telling the history of an already Romanized Bordeaux rather than a city witnessing cultural collision. In the *Poems Commemorating the Professors of Bordeaux*, all the Bordeaux intellectuals praised in the text are treated naturally as Roman scholars:

Primus Burdigalae columen dicere, Minervi,
alter rhetoricae Quintiliane togae.
inlustres quondam quo praeceptore fuerunt
Constantinopolis, Roma, dehinc patria,
non equidem certans cum maiestate duarum,
solo set potior nomine, quod patria:
adserat usque licet Fabium Calagurris alumnum,
non sit Burdigalae dum cathedra inferior.

You shall be named first, Minervius, chief ornament of Bordeaux, a second Quintilian to adorn the rhetorician's gown. Your teaching in its day made glorious Constantinople, Rome, and lastly our native town; which, though it cannot vie with that pair in dignity, yet for its name alone is more acceptable, because it is our native place: let Calagurris make every claim to Fabius as her son, if the chair of Bordeaux receive no less degree.¹⁰³

When praising his teacher Minervius (fl. early fourth century), Ausonius equates him with the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, and gives Bordeaux a central position in the empire—just like Constantinople and the city of Rome—regardless of the real separation of Gaul from the state, which was caused by the Third Century Crisis and the establishment of a “Gallic Empire” which happened not long before. In another section for the rhetorician Latinus Alcimus Alethius, he identifies the Greek and Latin cultures as the only two sources of the scholar's expertise:

¹⁰² Sigrid Schottenius Cullhed, “In Bed with Virgil: Ausonius' *Wedding Cento* and Its Reception,” *Greece & Rome* 63, no. 2 (2016): 237–50; Richard Tarrant, “Aspects of Virgil's Reception in Antiquity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, 43–62.

¹⁰³ I.1-8. Both the Latin text and English translation are from *Poems Commemorating the Professors of Bordeaux*, Loeb Classical Library, *Ausonius Opuscula*, 96–97: https://www.loebclassics.com/view/ausonius-prefatory_pieces/1919/pb_LCL096.3.xml

Palmae forensis et camenarum decus,
exemplar unum in litteris,
quas aut Athenis docta coluit Graecia,
aut Roma per Latium colit.

You were supreme, you were the Muses' pride and our one model in those letters which learned Greece fostered at Athens, or which Rome fosters throughout the Latin world.¹⁰⁴

What he left unmentioned was whether these cultures were entirely compatible with Bordeaux's local tradition. Like the Qi-Lu authors who devalued writings unrelated to the five Confucian classics, Ausonius filtered out the "barbarian" aspect of local history, i.e., that Bordeaux was not naturally part of the Roman empire but a relatively latecomer. It was also in this way that he consciously or unconsciously erased those conflicting elements between the Gallic and Roman values, by incorporating the former into the latter.

(II) Factional Accusation

Factionalism exists in political parties. The QXY elites were frequently involved in factional conflicts during the Han period. One of the conflicts, the so-called Discourses on Salt and Iron, occurred in 81 BCE. The collection of essays recording the event, *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 completed under the reign of Emperors Xuan 宣帝 (74–48 BCE) or Yuan 元帝 (48–33 BCE), typically reflected how factional accusations were displayed as texts. Two parties, the Prime Minister and the Imperial Secretaries who represented the "Grand Secretary" (Yushi *dafu* 大夫, viz., Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊), and the critics of the government consisting of the "worthy and good persons" (*xianliang* 賢良, hereafter "Worthies") and "literary scholars" (*wenxue* 文學, hereafter "Literati"), are juxtaposed in the text.¹⁰⁵ The Grand Secretary labels their opponents as "the *ru* and *mo* gentry from Qi

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., II. 1–10, see https://www.loebclassics.com/view/ausoniuspoems_commemorating_professors_bordeaux/1919/pb_LCL096.101.xml

and Lu, who drag their gowns—and bear the ritual vessels and classics of Confucius—while surrendering to others’ commands” 齊魯儒墨縉紳之徒, 肆其長衣, 負孔氏之禮器詩書, 委質為臣,¹⁰⁶ which verified the QXY origin of many members of the Worthies and Literati group.

The Literati never deny their local identity but reaffirm it. In the *Yantielun*, they highlight their township by reinterpreting analytical categories used by pre-imperial *ru* and *mo* scholars. According to these interpretative frameworks, a statesman must have the basic virtues of “benevolence and uprightness” (*renyi* 仁義) and “righteousness in behavior” (*dexing* 德行) to engage in political affairs, and his measures to make real changes to social life must be mild, which are “to influence” (*feng* 風) and “to breed/memorialize” (*huai* 懷) the virtues.¹⁰⁷ Moralized speech like this was used as a weapon to bring accusations against the Grand Secretary:

今當世在位者...蔽賢妒能, 自高其智, 訾人之才, 足己而不問, 卑士而不友。

Those who are in power...prevent the worthies from being elevated, and envy those people who are capable. They are so conceited that they overrate their own wisdom and judge other people’s intelligence arbitrarily. They fulfill their own needs and do not ask others’ demands. They look down upon gentlemen and appear to be unfriendly.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ For these different voices in the Discourses on Salt and Iron, see Anatoly Polnarov, “Looking Beyond Dichotomies: Hidden Diversity of Voices in the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論,” *T’oung Pao* 104, Fasc. 5–6 (2018): 465–95.

¹⁰⁶ *Yantielun* (hereafter *YTL*) 4.19. For the original text, see *Yantielun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校註, comm. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1992), 241.

¹⁰⁷ *YTL* 1.1. The original text: “Cultivate benevolence and uprightness and popularize them, spread the righteousness in behavior to further reinforce them. [By using these methods,] those who are close to you would be your allies, and those far from you will be convinced [by your morality].” 畜仁義以風之, 廣德行以懷之。是以近者親附而遠者悅服。 See *Yantielun jiaozhu*, 2.

¹⁰⁸ *YTL* 2.10. See *Yantielun jiaozhu*, 131.

The Grand Secretary and the government men they represented are placed in a position of moral bankruptcy. They are criticized as possessing all the personal qualities of bad governors: near-sightedness, jealousy, arrogance, and narrow-mindedness. Since the imperial officials are such an irrational and unwise group, there is no reason to follow their agendas.

The *Yantielun*, therefore, confirmed the development of specific literary forms that served to challenge the narratives of specific political factions. Essays and memorials arguing against someone else, which have been called “*boyi*” 駁議 (writings of rebuttal), enjoyed development among the QXY intellectuals.¹⁰⁹ Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (d. 46 BCE), coming from the Donghai 東海 area, disagreed with the view of Zhang Chang 張敞 that criminals should donate their grain to redeem themselves. Xiao argues against Zhang in his memorial by pointing out the potential negative impact of Zhang’s proposal:

聞出財得以生活，為人子弟者將不顧死亡之患，敗亂之行，以赴財利，求救親戚。一人得生，十人以喪，如此，伯夷之行壞，公綽之名滅。

[Once they] get to know that they could save [their relatives’] lives by giving out their wealth, the sons and brothers [of criminals] will care nothing about the dangers that might cause death, or about the actions that might trigger failures and chaos. [They will] go and pursue treasure, in order to rescue their relatives. As one man managed to survive, ten people would encounter death [because of him]. [If we acted] in this way, the behavioral principles of Boyi would be ruined, and the reputation of [Meng] Gongchuo would be destroyed.¹¹⁰

Readers would have doubted the stance of Zhang Chang as they saw the text. Compared with earlier writers who questioned opposing parties by using historical metaphors, such as Jia Yi 賈誼 (d. 168 BCE) and Lu Jia 陸賈 (d. 170 BCE), Xiao Wangzhi used much

¹⁰⁹ For related information about the genre of *boyi*, see “Yi dui pian” 議對篇, *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, which points out that the genre came to appear in the Han period: “It was not until the Han period that *boyi* was created.” 迄至有漢, 始立駁議。

¹¹⁰ *HS* 78. 3275–3276.

more straightforward language to directly disclose the dangerous results of supporting his opponent. His rebuttal text, probably too plain and crude to previous writers, was more like a tool for political struggle rather than a product of aesthetic activities.

Another genre, the *fu* rhapsody, also witnessed the interplay between factional conflicts and textual production throughout both the Western and Eastern Han. Tamara Chin correctly noticed the rise of the epideictic *fu* rhapsody (*dafu* 大賦)—a genre famous for its reflection of lavish expenditure—along with the promotion of the Grand Secretary group in the years of imperial expansion.¹¹¹ This genre gradually declined from major literary works of the Han writers after the Debates of Salt and Iron, and it even encountered deeper challenges in another factional conflict, the Great Proscription from 166 to 184. For intellectuals and officials from the QXY region, their opponents were now the imperial eunuchs. What happened was no longer a debate but a riot that allowed violent clashes, and the imperial eunuchs were condemned by Confucian teachings as an avaricious, power-motivated group. Though determining the fate of the empire, they did not deserve the lavish praising words in the epideictic *fu*, which were once used for emperors and high-ranking officials. The lack of users and audiences resulted in the waning of the genre.

At the same time, another form of *fu*, the prose *fu* rhapsody (*xiao fu* 小賦), which was flexible in structure and plain in rhetorical skills, came to replace the epideictic *fu*, because of the convenience it provided for displaying the moral practices of the mid- and low-ranking local elites.¹¹² This genre often appeared in the commemorative texts

¹¹¹ See Tamara Chin, *Savage Exchange: Han Imperialism, Chinese Literary Style, and the Economic Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, Harvard University Press, 2014), 69–141.

¹¹² For the rise of the prose *fu* rhapsody after the mid-Eastern Han, see Wang Fengxia 王鳳霞, “Cong shuzhi daoshuqing—Handai saoti fu he xiaofu de wenhua zhixiang” 從述

produced in QXY, to portray the dedicatee's life story and personal character. In the years during and after the Great Proscription, the description of one's righteousness became a central part of texts written in the form of the *fu* rhapsody, to offer a remarkable contrast to the dishonorable behaviors of imperial eunuchs and their associates. In the "Stele of Lu Jun" 魯峻碑 (ca. 173) for a man from Shanyang, the author highlights the dedicatee's upright character as an official:

不為小威, 以[濟其]仁, 弼中獨斷, 以效其節。案奏□公, 彈劾五卿, 華夏祇肅, 佞穢者遠。

He did not show off trivial prestige, but [added to his] benevolence. He was filled with inner capability to make important decisions, which indicated his commitment to an official's obligation. He submitted [...] to the official agency, and dared to impeach the five highest ministers. [His work made] the state stabilized, and those evil and guilty ones had to leave.¹¹³

The focus on Lu Jun's uprightness indicated his total distinction from the morally incorrect faction, i.e., the eunuchs and others who abused power in the imperial court. His political standpoint was also implied through the portrayal of his connection with Wang Chang 王暢 (d. 169), one of the most important anti-eunuch officials: "He was recommended by Minister of Public Works (*sikong*), Wang Chang" 為司空王暢所舉. Belonging to a morally correct faction appears to be more important than being a powerful figure, at least according to this inscription.

Factional conflicts in Gaul during the early imperial age were hardly disconnected from religious issues, i.e., problems derived from "incongruous aims, methods, theoretical

志到抒情—漢代騷體賦和小賦的文化指向, *Zhongguo zhonggu wenxue yanjiu*: *Zhongguo zhonggu (Han—Tang) wenxue guoji xueshu yantaohui* 中國中古文學研究—中國中古（漢—唐）文學國際學術研討會, August 2014.

¹¹³ For the original text, see Liu Haiyu 劉海宇, *Shandong Haidai beike yanjiu* 山東漢代碑刻研究 (Jinan: Qi Lu Shushe, 2015), 370.

orientations, and institutional fields”¹¹⁴ within or beyond Christianity. From today’s perspective, these conflicts indicated the coexistence of a variety of ideological/theological tendencies. In the context of the early imperial era, however, Gallo-Roman authors tended to represent what they witnessed as party confrontations. Many prominent authors were religious leaders as well, which made it necessary for them to choose a stance when facing a diversity of views. Their speech served the aim of differentiating “correct” and “incorrect” positions, through the use of a series of rhetorical devices and deliberate inquiries. Karen L. King has listed some of the discursive strategies used by Christian authors to attack their opposing factions:

Limiting who was allowed to interpret Scripture to say what it really meant; establishing a rule of faith to regulate interpretation; attacking the character of one’s opponents; calling themselves true Christians and their opponents heretics; arguing that heretics lacked the truth and their own views are theologically superior; devising competing genealogies, e.g., from Christ or from Satan; contrasting the unity of the true Church with the divisiveness of heretics; insisting that adherence to the authority of the established leadership of the one institutional Church constituted orthodoxy...¹¹⁵

Some of these strategies are seen from the *Yantielun* text as well, such as the attack on the character of one’s opponents and the efforts to build a rule of faith based on Confucian morality. By using tools like these, both the Gallic and QXY authors attempted to erase the importance of their competitors and to avoid the thriving of their discourse. Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 130–202 CE), who intended to expand Christian communities in southern Gaul, was an expert in using such factional speech. His works refuted the Gnostics who were subverting the Gospel.¹¹⁶ In his *Adversus Haereses*, he focused on the wrongness of

¹¹⁴ Karen L. King, “Factions, variety, diversity, multiplicity: representing early Christian differences for the 21st century,” *Method & Theory In The Study Of Religion* 23, no. 3–4 (2011): 216–37.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the Valentinian Gnostics:

Vides, igitur, dilectissime, adinventionem, qua utentes seducunt semetipsos, calumniantes Scripturis, fictionem suam ex eis constare annitentes.

You see, my friend, the method which these men employ to deceive themselves, while they abuse the Scriptures by endeavoring to support their own system out of them.¹¹⁷

alterum autem Soterem (id est, Salvatorem) fuisse volunt, et alterum Logon (id est, Verbum) filium Monogenis (id est, Unigeniti), et alterum Christum ad emendationem Pleromatis emissum.

They maintain that there was another Soter (that is, the Saviour), and another Logos (that is, the world), the son of Monogenes (that is, the Only-begotten), and another Christ produced for the re-establishment of the Pleroma.¹¹⁸

Post deinde dictiones et nomina dispersim posita colligentes, transferunt, sicut praediximus, ex eo quod est secundum naturam.

Then, again, collecting a set of expressions and names scattered here and there [in Scripture], they twist them, as we have already said, from a natural to a non-natural sense.¹¹⁹

Three points are indicated in the texts above. One, the Valentinian system is totally different from what is told in the Scriptures. Two, the Valentinian view that the Savior, Logos, and Christ are not unified is entirely wrong. Three, it is essential to be careful about the misleading use of special names in the Scriptures, because those who use them might have immoral intentions. All these points emphasize the unity and uniqueness of Christian teaching, i.e., that it is not open to various interpretations. But such unity and uniqueness, indicating an eternal stability and unchangeability, are largely incompatible with ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, which were part of the classical education in

¹¹⁶ Robert M. Grant, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 1.

¹¹⁷ For the original text, see IX. 1, *Adversus haereses: libri quinque* (Romae: Forzani et Socii), 142. The English translation is from I.9.1.

¹¹⁸ For the original text, see IX 2–3, *Adversus haereses*, p.144. The English translation is from I.9.2.

¹¹⁹ For the original text, see IX 3–4, *Adversus haereses*, p.147. The English translation is from I.9.4.

imperial Rome. Censorship in the traditional educational system thus emerged. What was outlawed were not only heretical sayings; when Christian writers wanted to quote Anaximenes, Heraclitus, or Democritus, they also needed to think twice.

Then there appeared a slowdown in the exploration of natural philosophy.¹²⁰ Dirk Rohmann points out the absence of “materialist philosophy” in Christian authors’ writings, which he explains as due to the Christian attachment to idealistic philosophy, and the similarity between naturalist/materialist views and magic.¹²¹ There are other scholarly explanations for this absence, especially with regard to the situation of Late Antique Gaul. The study of natural philosophy—and physics and other ancient sciences—had little to do with one’s improvement of rhetorical skills, though many Gallic aristocrats came to obtain imperial patronage by showing their talent as rhetoricians.¹²² Regardless of the intellectual value of naturalist philosophy, it was largely filtered out by the canonized Christian speeches.

The elements of intense factionalism were more pronounced in writing of the fourth century, as the conflict between different parties of the church replaced their seemingly peaceful coexistence in earlier days. Exsuperius (d. 410), bishop of Toulouse, was one of the church leaders troubled by inner confrontations within Christianity in his region. What made him unique was his efforts to take a middle position when facing divergent views. Geoffrey Dunn, in his article on the episcopal crisis in the Late Antique Gaul, provides information that Exsuperius was sympathetic with two extremes of a

¹²⁰ For the Christian legislation on this ban, see Dirk Rohmann, *Christianity, Book-Burning and Censorship in Late Antiquity* (Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2016), 144.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹²² For the relationship between one’s rhetoric skills and bureaucratic promotions, see Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 71.

debate: one group intensively questioned the rationality of asceticism, while the other group strongly supported it.¹²³ The representative figure of the former group was the Gallic presbyter Vigilantius (fl. ca. 400), while the spokesman of the latter group was Jerome of Stridon (ca. 342–420), who provided the very direct evidence of the confrontation by writing the treatise *Contra Vigilantium*, making accusations against the anti-ascetic views of Vigilantius:

Sola Gallia monstra non habuit, sed uiris semper fortibus et eloquentissimis abundauit. Exortus est subito Vigilantius immo Dormitantius, qui immundo spiritu pugnet contra Christi Spiritum et martyrum neget sepulcra ueneranda, damnandas dicat esse uigilias et numquam nisi in Pascha alleluia cantandum, continentiam haeresim, pudicitiam libidinis seminarium.

Gaul alone did not have monsters, overflowing instead with invariably brave and very eloquent men. But suddenly there arose Vigilantius, nay, Dormitantius, to fight against the spirit of Christ with his own unclean spirit and criticize the veneration of martyrs' tombs, to claim that vigils are condemnable, that no one should ever sing "Hallelujah" unless it is Easter, that continence is heresy, chastity the breeding ground for desire.¹²⁴

Jerome was not dwelling in Gaul but had great influence among the elites there.

Vigilantius, though active as part of the Gallic literary community and having many readers there, appeared to be less important regarding his position in the circle of high-ranking church leaders that included Jerome, Paulinus of Nola, Sulpicius Severus, Ambrose of Milan, and Rufinus of Aquileia.¹²⁵ Moreover, although his real stance was probably not as extreme as depicted in Jerome's critique, the accusatory words in the *Contra Vigilantium* might have had the actual effect of deterring his potential supporters.

¹²³ See Geoffrey Dunn, "Episcopal Crisis Management in Late Antique Gaul: The Example of Exsuperius of Toulouse," *Antichthon* 48 (2014): 126–43.

¹²⁴ Chapter 1, 5–6. Both the original text and the English translation are from Amy Hye Oh, "A Commentary on Jerome's *Contra Vigilantium*" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 57.

¹²⁵ For more information about this circle, see David G. Hunter, "Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 401–430.

Exsuperius might have been one of them, who did not want to offend Jerome and his preeminent allies from other parts of the empire. The silencing of anti-ascetic speech was therefore accompanied by the pragmatic considerations of choosing the right side and maintaining relationships with those who were powerful. Exsuperius, though once impacted by Vigilantius, did not declare himself to be Vigilantian at the end.

IV. From Information Leadership to Opinion Leadership: The Elite Management of Local Public Communication

The above analysis shows that all the three domains—information dissemination, text production, and the construction of language—enjoyed institutional development in QXY and Gaul by the latter half of the early imperial period. The interplay of the three appears to have reinforced the power of specific local elites who enjoyed fame in both writing and participation in socio-political affairs. This “participation” did not simply refer to the holding of bureaucratic offices and regular service as office holders. Instead, a large group of educated elites engaged in such a field through their expression of opinions. What they contributed to the public domain were often perspectives and proposals to deal with social issues, sometimes combined with the actual practice of removing social problems, such as through financial assistance or legislation.

For both QXY and Gaul, those local intellectuals who were delivering opinions on public issues were usually also active members of literary communities, who were familiar with not only the pragmatic field of text production but also the inner mechanisms of the world of elite language. They knew how certain integrating forces could be introduced into speech, and how some linguistic devices could be used to silence someone. Moreover, as both regions were deeply involved in social turmoil as imperial rule declined, these elite groups came to be sensitive to the immediate transformations faced by the entire society; by identifying these, they could raise sharp arguments directly

related to substantive changes. Such arguments, providing answers to some of the questions faced by the entire elite class, added to the credibility of certain elite institutions and helped them obtain authority in the realm of public opinion. The already existing information nexuses, with their heavy reliance on elite activities of writing, now became centers of both the outpouring of opinions and elite propaganda.

The collaboration of various types of information institutions offered elites the conditions for the expression of these crisis-relevant arguments. In her discussion of the *qingyi* 清議 group in the late Qing dynasty, Mary Backus Rankin identifies three major manifestations of the primary crises during that time: agrarian/economic distress, deterioration in the bureaucracy, and foreign encroachment.¹²⁶ Although similar troubles were seen in the late Han in the interior and peripheral regions, elite populations from QXY had their specifically preferred themes. One of them was the corruption of the imperial court, not only in the sense of bureaucracy but also as the most important symbol of the “fate of the state.” Intellectuals active in advisory institutions and school teaching were among the most expressive ones on this topic; they dared to criticize the top layer of the ruling class sometimes at the cost of their official career. The *Hou Hanshu* notes that Jiang Gong 姜肱 (97–173) from Pengcheng 彭城, as a specialist in the Five Classics, owned a private school with more than three thousand students. When the imperial eunuch Cao Jie 曹節 dominated the imperial court, Jiang was appointed as the local chief governor but refused to accept the offer, saying:

吾以虛獲實，遂藉身價。明明在上，猶當固其本誌，況今政在闔豎，夫何為哉。

I obtain physical benefits based on insubstantial work (viz., literary production), this is where the value of my life is. The [highest] wisdom is [overseeing us] on

¹²⁶ See Mary Backus Rankin, “‘Public Opinion’ and Political Power: *Qingyi* in Late Nineteenth Century China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* XLI, no. 3 (May 1982): 453–84.

the High, which makes it a must to insist on one's true faith; let alone the eunuchs and villains are now controlling the policy. Is there anything worth doing [in a high position right now]?¹²⁷

Jiang then left his governmental career and moved to a coastal area. Just as in the case of Lu Jun, Jiang made a clear division between himself and the “eunuchs and villains” (*yanshu* 閹豎) in the court. By accusing these people of being an immoral faction unworthy of his service, Jiang alerted his audiences to the importance of reevaluating the publicized agenda of this group. Also, by positioning himself as the model of an upright person, he highlighted the significance of “true faith” (*benzhi* 本誌) for a learned man. These words of accusation and exemplarization were then accepted by more people, not only through his activity as the head of an educational institution but through his disciples' commemoration of their teacher. One of his students, Liu Cao 劉操 from Chenliu 陳留, made him a stone inscription to exalt his virtues.¹²⁸ His teaching, the commemorative writing of his disciples, and other knowledge products from his school together constituted a small community of consensus in which all members shared similar opinions and purported to spread them to a wider public.

Another man who was expressive on this topic was Zhong Changtong 仲長統 (180–220), a native of Shanyang 山陽 who served in Cao Cao's advisory institution. His monograph *Changyan* 昌言 was praised by later scholars as “enlightening others by telling the righteous principles, and sharply criticizing contemporary problems” 闡陳善道, 指訶時弊.¹²⁹ The chapter “Li luan” 理亂 especially focuses on various signs of the

¹²⁷ *HHS* 53. 1750.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) also commented in his compilation of the Eastern Han literature, *Quan Hou Han wen* 全後漢文: “[Zhong Changtong's words] are deep in

deterioration of the imperial government.

使餓狼守庖廚，饑虎牧牢豚。遂至熬天下之脂膏，斫生人之骨髓，怨毒無聊，禍亂並起，中國擾攘，四夷侵叛，土崩瓦解，一朝而去。昔之為我哺乳之子孫者，今盡是我飲血之寇仇也。至於運徙勢去，猶不覺悟者，豈非富貴生不仁，沈溺致愚疾邪？

[The imperial governors] made hungry wolves the guardians of a kitchen, and made starving tigers the shepherd of pigs. [They are] reaching such an extent: cooking the fat from the bodies of all people under Heaven, and absorbing the bone marrow of living ones. The complaints about their evil are endless, and calamities and chaos are rising everywhere. The Central Plain is in turmoil, while the Four Barbarians are encroaching; [the state] may collapse quickly, and may disappear in one moment. Those who fed our sons and grandsons in the past now become our enemies who drink our blood. Given that the fortune [of their rule] is declining, if there is anyone who is still ignorant [about the reality], isn't it [the proof of] the fact that 'immortality comes from richness, and foolishness is the fruit of addiction'?'¹³⁰

Zhong Changtong also uses the pattern of “accusation/exemplarization” in the text. The imperial court, controlled by corrupt ones, is explicitly defined as “our enemies who drink our blood” 我飲血之寇仇. Meanwhile, by clarifying that one should not remain ignorant to the decline of the current regime, Zhong implies that those who dare to acknowledge the disappointing truth should be praised as the models of behavior. Although Zhong was often considered a “crazy man” (*kuangsheng* 狂生) and was hardly among the most popular authors in his period, his fame in provinces like Qing, Xu, Bing 並, and Ji 冀 made the spread of his words possible. In addition, since Zhong was a member of both an advisory institution and multiple literary circles, his opinions and speech had been consumed by many people in similar social ranks. His colleague, Xun Yu 荀彧 (163–212) who also served Cao Cao, was greatly impressed by his talent. Another friend of his,

their sincerity, and provoke huge fluctuations [in the minds of readers]. They contain some elements that cannot be erased. He can be compared to prominent writers like Dong Zhongshu, Jia Yi, Liu Xiang, and Yang Xiong; this is not overrating him.” 剴切之忱，踔厲震蕩之氣，有不容摩滅者。繆熙伯方之董、賈、劉、楊，非過譽也。

¹³⁰ HHS 49. 1647.

Miao Xi 繆襲 (186–245), was also a famous writer, who usually extolled Zhong’s literary intelligence.¹³¹ With the participation of these people and their groupings, the expansion of Zhong’s arguments was largely fostered as an institutional phenomenon.

The “Li luan” chapter also reflects another theme favored by QXY elites: the social instability caused by various types of rebellions, such as the uprising of farmers, religious associations, non-Han ethnic groups, and so forth. Stele materials were particularly expressive on this topic, as the dedicatee’s ability to deal with these chaotic situations was treated as an indicator of their virtue. In a stele for a Zhang Qian 張遷 from Chenliu, who had held his office in Gucheng 穀城 and Dangyin 蕩陰, the dedicatee is portrayed as able to protect his county from being ruined by the Yellow Turban Rebellion.

蠶月之務，不閉四門。臘正之祭，休囚歸賀。八月筭民，不煩於鄉。...黃巾初起，燒平城市，斯縣獨全。

In the sericulture season (viz., the time when farmers are busily sowing seeds), the four gates of the town were never closed [to let people move in and out freely]. When the new year came and the festival sacrifice needed to proceed, prisoners were given breaks to go back home and celebrate. In the eighth month [of a year] when the households needed to be registered, [he did] not cause any more burdens to his town... [Therefore,] as the Yellow Turban Rebellion started, and towns and markets were burned and damaged, his county was the only one remaining intact.¹³²

From the surface, it seems that the inscription only tells some “real stories” without pronouncing any opinions. However, since the stories are closely related to the final evaluation of the dedicatee, they themselves represented the stance of the sponsors. The Yellow Turban Rebellion is presented as a test for the dedicatee: it was through his people’s survival of the rebellion that the morality of Zhang Qian could be substantiated. Monumental stelae like this, with their use in ritual circumstances, made it possible for

¹³¹ *HHS* 49. 1646.

¹³² For the original text, see Liu Haiyu, *Shandong Handai beike yanjiu*, 325.

the publicizing of these exemplary figures. Sponsors of the stelae, who were also the main members of the ritual-management institutions, came to manage the voices around them by concentrating the attention of ritual participants to model personages in their local area. Public opinions came to be integrated through their texts and performances.

Another piece of inscribed text, the so-called “Stele of Wu Ban 武斑,” offered an example of how an exemplary elite dealt with external encroachment. Born in Yan province, Wu Ban was praised for his accomplishments as the chief clerk (*zhangshi* 長史) of the peripheral region of Dunhuang. Since the inscription was damaged, we cannot know what exactly Wu did in that position. However, because the fruit of his service is summarized as “the [borderlands] of the state were tranquilized” (*bang yu ji ning* 邦域既寧) in the text, there is enough reason to treat the stele as the evidence of his solution to frontier issues. The moral position of the dedicatee is therefore expressed through his practices. The sponsors of stele materials, by telling related stories, told their readers explicitly what a good official should do when facing a chaotic situation.

Late Roman Gaul witnessed a similar rise of elite demands of managing public opinions. Largely due to the overlap between episcopal and secular powers, key governors of this region—who were both church leaders and overseers of local affairs—often played the role of opinion leaders as well. This is understandable as it was often these people who had connections with a wide range of institutions, and it was again these groups who produced a remarkable number of textual sources during this period of time. Some differences between the Gallic and QXY learned men are thus noticeable. The most active participators in the Gallo-Roman intellectual life were, in many cases, the top tier of the elite population who were traditionally entitled as saints, bishops, or something else, though monks and other members of the church also played important roles (often by building contacts with those who were more privileged); the main actors in the QXY

knowledge production, however, were of more modest prestige. This probably explains why the Gallic materials of elite public communication are usually well-preserved, transmitted texts with relatively longer lengths, compared with the great amount of shorter essays and fragmentary manuscripts of their QXY counterparts. The better social status of the Gallic writers guaranteed the good preservation and wide circulation of their words. At the same time, in contrast to the QXY literati whose actions were confined by the preferences of the key leaders of their region who controlled most of the political and military resources, the greater autonomy of the Gallic intellectuals enabled them to speak for themselves more freely in their circles. The division between the realms of *realpolitik* and intellectual production in the late Roman Gaul appear to have been less clear than in the Eastern Han QXY, though both regions were victims of state division and imperial crises.

Like the QXY writers, the Gallic educated ones were also expressive on the epoch changes and crises faced during their time period, with some of them more sharply criticizing the ruling group, the central court, or even the divine foundation of the regime itself. In particular, a general disappointment towards the total corruption of the empire was seen in Gallic-Roman writings, similar to what we saw from Jia Gong, Zhong Changtong, and their peers. Sulpicius Severus, born in Gallia Aquitania, states in his *Chronica*:

Siquidem cum non ab uno imperatore, sed etiam a pluribus semperque inter se armis aut studiis dissentientibus res Romana administretur. Denique cum miscetur testum atque ferrum numquam inter se coeunte materie...siquidem Romanumsolum ab exteris gentibus aut rebellibus occupatum aut dedentibus se per pacis speciem traditum constet. Exercitibusque nostris, urbibus atque prouinciis permixtas barbaras nationes, et praecipue iudaeos, inter nos degere nec tamen in mores nostros transire uideamus.

For it is not ruled by any one, single emperor, but by many emperors, who are always divided by military confrontations and by conflicts of basic interests...while the soil of the Roman empire has been occupied by foreign or rebellious nations...in such a way that barbarian tribes have come to be mixed up

with us [like fissile clay inserted into the iron of a Roman order] in our armies, in our cities and throughout our provinces.¹³³

The corruption is portrayed as the result of political division and barbarian encroachment. Both had similar manifestations in the writing of QXY writers, but the QXY intellectuals interpreted all of these mostly from a secular perspective. Many Gallo-Roman elites, in contrast, treated these issues as the reflection of the destined perishing of the world as well as the doomed vanishing of glories of all human beings. Their supposed solution to the problems, therefore, had a supernatural, unworldly basis. In his works, Severus often describes a real-world problem together with the theological tools to solve the problem. Christian teachings are implanted into the rhetorical devices of exemplarization and accusation, and are portrayed as the necessary means to deal with pragmatic crises. His documentation of the life of Saint Martin of Tours served as an example of how the image of a model Christian was used to bring order to the chaotic society in which true knowledge and good virtues were damaged. By presenting the intervention of divine power in human affairs through the practice of Martin, a holy man, Severus illustrated one important function of such exemplary personages, i.e., that they could give people a new object of worship:

Unde facturus mihi operae pretium videor, si vitam sanctissimi viri, exemplo aliis mox futuram, perscripsero, quo utique ad veram sapientiam et caelestem militiam divinamque virtutem legentes incitabuntur. in quo ita nostri quoque rationem commodi ducimus, ut non inanem ab hominibus memoriam, sed aeternum a deo praemium exspectemus, quia etsi ipsi non ita viximus ut exemplo aliis esse possimus, dedimus tamen operam, ne is lateret qui esset imitandus.

From this I perceive that it will be worthwhile for me to fully describe the life of that most holy man to serve as an example for others later. This work will spur my readers on to true wisdom, to service in the heavenly army, and divine excellence.

¹³³ Chronica 2.3.2. The original text is seen in *Chroniques/Sulpice Severe; introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire par Ghislaine de Senneville-Grave* (Paris : Editions du Cerf, 1999), 228. English translation by Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 387.

I regard this work as being, to a certain extent, to my advantage, inasmuch as I do not expect a pointless memorial from men, but an eternal reward from God. Even if I have not lived in a manner that would serve as an example for others, I have taken pains in this work to preserve from obscurity a man who should be imitated.¹³⁴

Here Saint Martin is portrayed as “an agent of the transformation of social value.”¹³⁵ His appearance indicates the proliferation of new virtues that must replace the old ones some day: the “eternal reward from God” is displayed as the only thing that can help human beings overcome the real division and calamity, which comes to effect without the presence of old Roman values such as honor, liberty, and resolve. This great transition, in the eyes of Severus, could take place if only all people around the world could follow the teachings of Martin, the individual saint. It was rooted in this aggrandizement of the power of model figures that the late antique hagiography flourished. These materials were, to a certain extent, similar to the Chinese stelae with regard to not only their central idea of extolment, but also their roles in the institutional propagation of elite values. As Lynda L. Coon has argued, these biographies of saints were often recited by priests at mass during holy festivals, read by literate audiences, and depicted in art for illiterate Christians.¹³⁶ When they were read aloud publicly, it was usually in a ritual context in which the saint was commemorated. These contexts, in a certain sense, enabled Christian model figures to replace the classical heroes and rulers, Caesars and generals, in the

¹³⁴ *Vita Santi Martini Episcopi* 1.6. The original text is seen in Sulpicius Severus’ *Vita Martini*, ed. Philip Burton (Oxford University Press, 2017), 95. The English translation is by Richard G. Goodrich, *Sulpicius Severus: The Complete Works* (New York: The Newman Press, 2015), 25.

¹³⁵ John P. Bequette, “Sulpicius Severus’s Life of Saint Martin: The Saint and His Biographer as Agents of Cultural Transformation,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 56–78.

¹³⁶ Lynda L. Coon, “Hagiography and Sacred Models” in *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1–27.

minds of the audiences of hagiographical texts. The institutional filtering of old imperial discourses thus occurred. Christian writers publicly demanded changes by using new idols to challenge old ones, and their efforts toward building a new leadership were now extended from the physical domain to the symbolic realm of language use.

But this was not the whole picture of the Gallic elites' efforts to mediate the voices around them. Not all Gallo-Roman populations believed in the "divine cause" of total corruption, and those who questioned the view were not small in their number. In such cases, accusations were used to direct people's attention to new opinions and perspectives. Salvian of Marseilles (400–490), author of the treatise *De gubernatione Dei*, was one of those Gallic writers who attracted readers with his intensive broadsides on the actual conduct of individual Christians. When witnessing "a wave of barbarian invasions and the traumatic spectacle of the sack of a sequence of cities, including Rome, Carthage and Trier,"¹³⁷ Salvian, as a senior member of the Gallic clergy, warned his readers that it was the action of Roman people that should be corrected, not the Christian teaching per se:

Haec autem omnia ideo copiosus paulo prolata sunt, ut probaremus scilicet omnia quae pertulimus non improvidentia nos dei atque neglectu, sed iustitia, sed iudicio, sed aequissima dispensatione et dignissima retributione tolerasse, neque ullam penitus Romani orbis aut Romani nominis portionem, quamlibet graviter plagis caelestibus caesam, umquam fuisse correctam.

I have treated these even thoroughly, in order to demonstrate that we have suffered all these calamities not by any lack of divine foresight or because the Lord has been neglectful, but rather by his just judgment, according to his impartial governance, and as our merited reward. We have suffered them because no part of the Roman world or Roman people, no matter how heavy the afflictions which heaven has buffeted them withal, has ever been brought to correction.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and Aitor Blanco Pérez, "Salvian of Marseilles and the end of the ancient city" in *Signs of Weakness and Crisis in the Western Cities of the Roman Empire (c.II–III AD)*, eds. Javier Andreu and Aitor Blanco-Perez (Stuttgart, Franz Steiner 2019), 223–32.

Salvian accused the Roman people of two things: the overall lack of awareness about the moral decay in Roman society, and the action of attributing the secular crisis to the injustice of God. It is unknown how wide this text was circulated among his contemporaries, but as Peter Brown argued, there is no doubt that he wrote “certainly for the *sancti*—for the religiously inclined (the clergy, monks and pious lay persons)—of southern Gaul in the late 430s and early 440s.”¹³⁹ Because he had been recorded as being called “*magister episcoporum*”—the teacher of bishops—by someone else, it should be reasonable to assume that he was, at least, the instructor or mentor of some Christian students.¹⁴⁰ To this circle of knowledge consumption, he not only delivered his intellectual products but also his clearly expressed personal stances. For people like him, the main obligation here was no longer simply the creation of local values, but also the effective pronouncing of such values. Such people assigned themselves the new identity of spokesmen of the highest morality.

V. Conclusion

The term “public communication” has long been interpreted from one single perspective of information production, media tools, linguistic devices, and other such angles. In actual circumstances in the early imperial period, however, public communication emerged as the result of the interplay between at least three domains: information dissemination, text production, and the use of language. This can be illustrated by the elite activity in two regions, QXY and Gaul.

¹³⁸ The original Latin text is from Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei VI.16.90*, ed. Halm, pp. 81–2. The English translation is by Jonathan Stutz, seen in “‘When God sees us in the circuses’: Salvian of Marseille’s *De gubernatione Dei* and the critique of Roman society” in *Early Medieval Europe* 31, no. 1 (2023): 3–22.

¹³⁹ Brown, “Salvian of Marseilles: Theology and social criticism in the last century of the western empire,” in *Dacre Lecture* (Oxford University, 2010), 1–20.

¹⁴⁰ For his circles in Gaul, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 4–5.

As the two local areas already enjoyed some levels of cultural convergence in the pre-imperial period, the early imperial age witnessed the emergence of some unified “local speech” among the members of their elite classes. Elite information nexuses, which connected different information institutions, such as ritual-management, teaching, and philanthropic organizations, came to overlap with the main text-producing groups in these two regions. This provided the conditions for the rise of local literary authorities, which greatly enhanced the unification of local elite speech. The starting point of this “localization of speech” was relatively earlier in QXY, which was around the second century BCE. In the Gallic provinces, this started later in the late third century CE.

Meanwhile, some censoring forces of elite text production also appeared in the two areas, which largely defined the collective preferences of local elite readers and filtered out the elements in texts that might have prevented their authors from being accepted. Two of these censoring forces were exemplary figures and factional accusations. They functioned through different mechanisms, but the result was the same: the further standardization of local elite speech. Furthermore, because important writers of the two regions were usually also active participants in public issues, their use of the two textual devices, exemplarization and accusation, penetrated the realm of public communication as well. As both regions suffered state-wide social crises in Late Antiquity, their elite institutions responded to public issues by expressing opinions related to potential solutions for these problems. These opinions were expressed through the deliberate exemplarizing of certain behaviors and personages, and through the intentional accusations made against some other practices and groups. Local elite propaganda was therefore reinforced, as the elite groups who were information leaders now grew into a new force of opinion leaders.

PART II

THE DISCOURSE OF LOCAL ELITE PROPAGANDA

Starting in Chapter Three, I shift my focus from the institutional contexts and principles upon which local elite propagandists acted, to the inner fabric of these people's propaganda acts per se during the early imperial era. In particular, I examine the acts related to the local production and use of propaganda discourse. As noted in the introductory chapter, by "discourse" I refer to three things: 1) the building blocks of language that are consciously created, utilized, and manipulated by human agents to create power and meaning, 2) a "historically contingent social system" where interlocutors exchange their information and build connections with the language, and 3) the concrete individual practice that reflects an interlocutor's competence as a strategic player—the ability to put language resources to practical use and to anticipate the reception of words to gain profit from this. Therefore I am not only continuing my investigation of speech acts in local areas, but also providing speech with an *ideological* context of public consciousness and collective will: I will examine speech that embodies the generality of history and knowledge that is socially recognized, which guarantees its efficaciousness in persuasion.¹

¹ For the relationship between ideology and discourse, Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt argued: "We do not hold out the promise of erecting a neat distinction between them; rather we will argue that they both have a distinguishable theoretical role to play in the analysis of social relations. Concepts of the social are never fully referential, in the sense of identifying a verbal sign that stands for or refers to (and thus comes to represent) some unambiguously identifiable feature of an external reality. Rather what concepts do is to put a handle on, or give emphasis to, some aspect of the complex of interconnections and relations that constitute the social. In this sense ideology and discourse refer to pretty much the same aspect of social life—the idea that human individuals participate in forms of understanding, comprehension or consciousness of the relations and activities in which they are involved." See Purvis and Hunt, "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology..." *The British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (Sept., 1993): 473–99.

The content of the following chapters is therefore based on the conclusion to Chapter Two, that is, local elite speech in two regions—the Qing-Xu-Yan area of Han China and the region of Gaul of the Roman empire—enjoyed some levels of cohesion, which reflected the unification of communicative patterns of specific social strata in a particular region. This cohesion was the fruit of a long history of cultural convergence and the concentration of literary authority. It cannot reflect the activity of every individual elite but can help identify some trends that were widely observed among such people during a given period of time. Starting in Chapter Three, I will look deeper into how these trends became visible, how they were sustained, and by what means their impacts were perpetuated. It is my aim to reveal certain *regularities* in and surrounding speech, from a reservoir of seemingly fragmentary linguistic materials that have been classified into different historical stages, knowledge traditions, and established genres of expression.

My interpretation of discourse as an indicator of the regular, meaningful constituents in social practice owes much inspiration to Michel Foucault, who elaborated on the notion of “discursive regularities” and questioned the view that discourse only contains the simple mixture of ruptured and divided linguistic elements. Foucault writes:

I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define...the ordering of objects. “Words and things” is the entirely serious title of a problem; it is the ironic title of a work that modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals a quite different task. A task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.²

Foucault believed in the existence of the general “rules” and systematic aspects of human discourse. He suggested that discourse offers a logic of its own, a logic that largely

² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 48–49.

defines the criteria of legitimized knowledge and the acceptable patterns of social interaction. This logic makes discourse a long-lasting system that can be perpetuated, immune to many changes surrounding it. Even during a period in which social changes are quite drastic, it is possible to find something stable in social discourse.

This explains why the study of discourse is necessary, especially nowadays, in understanding Late Antiquity. This era has been traditionally treated as the transitional period from the “ancient” to “medieval” ages. A transition is marked by two aspects: *shifts*, which refers to the potential of building structurally new forms of social action, and *stability*, which refers to the degree of adhesion to or continuity with the past. The last several decades have witnessed a thriving tendency in history studies to underline the “movement/dynamics” penetrating every corner of a society. Given this broad interest in the incessant flux and disruption of social factors, the exploration of stability might seem old-fashioned. But is this excessive enthusiasm for endless shifts reasonable in the scholarly discussion of history, especially ancient history? I would say, “No.”

My two reasons are partly built upon Chris Wickham’s study of the historical transition in the early Middle Ages. First, “antiquity” was still one of the key markers of the general social circumstances at that time, which confirmed the entirety of “ancient period” as a whole. As Wickham described, “Its basic elements persisted, century after century, as the structural core of nearly every successful political system...and often further still.”³ Those empires that had already been proved effective in their sociopolitical apparatus, like Han China and the Roman Empire, displayed some levels of rigidity and persistence on the level of political arrangements even when facing internal or external crises. The Great Proscription in Han China and the Visigoths’ sack of Rome did not

³ Chris Wickham, “Historical Transitions: A Comparative Approach,” *The Medieval History Journal* 13, no. 1 (2010): 1–21.

immediately lead to dynastic changes. The empires continued to exist for some time, and many structural tensions within these polities persisted after their successors established their rule.

Second, only by examining the unchanging axis surrounding which other specific changes happen can we look beyond concrete events and touch upon the nature of human history. Wickham suggested that the focus on *different* examples of the *same* type of transition constitute “parallel experiences” of structural change, which can be used to illuminate the real nature of societies.⁴ I would take one step further and concentrate more on Global Late Antiquity. Thus, to investigate stability (or, sameness of things in various spaces and during different time periods) is to understand the *extremity* of many developments—for instance, the “most advanced” stage of some bureaucratic system, or the “latest form” of certain military organizations—within so-called Ancient History. It tests the inclusiveness and tolerance of the concept of “Antiquity,” and explores the boundary between this concept and “Medievalism.” In other words, paying attention to stability helps us discover a certain threshold, or “a sudden leap,” that changed the ancient world to a qualitatively different thing. From this perspective, stability signifies the potential of a system to keep its original nature, and discourse, as one of the indicators of the stability of a social system, demonstrates how a society continued to exist in people’s preferred ways of expression.

Therefore, I use the concept “discourse” as a guide to the history of Late Antiquity, to look into how numerous shifts were tolerated by and subject to the forces of historical totality; however, I would never deny the existence of significant shifts, and will further interpret them in Chapter Four. I will dig into how three different stages of this period were analogous at the two ends of Eurasia in critical aspects: they witnessed some semi-

⁴ Ibid.

paradigmatic shifts in social discourse, but these shifts were gradual and did not actually change the nature of this period as part of “Antiquity.” The three stages were:

1. The early period of Late Antiquity: QXY from the 70s to 140s, and Roman Gaul from around the 280s to 360s.

2. The “High Late Antiquity”: QXY from the late 140s to around the 200s, and Roman Gaul from the late 360s to around the 430s.

3. The closing era of Late Antiquity: QXY from around the 200s to 300 CE, and the Gallic region from the 430s to the late sixth century.

Chapter Three focuses on the first stage. Chapter Four incorporates the other two stages.

CHAPTER THREE

“Meta-Discursive Master” in Elite Textual Expression:

Proclamations of Truthfulness, and the Paradigms of Local Propaganda in the Early Stage of Late Antiquity

In winter 2003, a stone slab was excavated in Xuzhou 徐州 city in northwestern Jiangsu. Its inscription says:

永平十七年十月十五日乙丑淄丘□守士史楊君
德安不寧遭疾春秋四十有六。聞噩耗悲哉哀哉。子尚
叢撫業（養）世幼無親。賢者相之□行喪如禮。起石室
立墳，直萬五千泉，始得神道。

On the fifteenth day (the *yichou* day) of the tenth month, in the seventeenth year of the Yongping reign period (November 22, 74 CE), the [...] Guardian of Ziqiu, gentleman scribe, Mr. Yang, whose courtesy name was De'an, suffered uneasiness and was struck down by illness at the age of forty-six. When people heard about the unfortunate news; Alas! How sorrowful! [Yang's] sons, collectively, were still under fostering care. This generation were all quite young, and now without their parent. With worthy men to assist them....[The funeral] proceeded according to the rules of ritual decorum. A stone offering chamber was built, and a tomb mound was erected. The total cost was five thousand cash, and commenced with the acquisition of a Spirit Path leading to it.¹

The stele was made around 74 CE, during the time when Xuzhou was part of the province of Xu 徐. It was offered to a local official named Yang De'an 楊德安, who died of

¹ I personally could not find the original archaeological report about this stele, but the context of excavation has been recorded in a series of publications, like Nagata Hidemasa 永田英正, *Kandai sekkoku shūsei* 漢代石刻集成 (Tokyo: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1994); Lu Fangyu 盧芳玉, “Xinjian Han dai zhimu keming yanjiu zhaji” 新見漢代志墓刻銘研究札記, *Zhongguo shufa* 中國書法 11 (2004): 39–47; and *Hanbei quanji* 漢碑全集, vol.1, edited by Xu Yuli 徐玉立 et al. (Zhengzhou: Henan Meishu Chubanshe, 2006), 129. A copy of the rubbing is now preserved in Japan, see Wang Lianlong 王連龍, *Riben cang zhongguo gudai shike taben zhumu jimū* 日本藏中國古代石刻拓本著錄輯目, vol. 1 (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2023).

illness, and demonstrated an old tradition of using a physical medium to express commemoration in public. Early traces of stone stelae could be seen from inscriptions by the First Emperor of Qin. In the *Liji* 禮記 text, a “stelae” (*bei* 碑) originally referred to perforated posts near a tomb, that helped to lower in the coffin with ropes.² The extant stelae from the Western Han and the first several decades of the Eastern Han are limited, although the idea they carried was ancient: bringing to mind the memory about an individual. This leads us to a question: Why did commemorative stelae flourish so late in antiquity, with their numbers sharply increasing during the middle Eastern Han period?³

Similar lateness in the re-emergence of the commemorative genre is seen from a Latin text, a prose panegyric delivered by a Gallic orator in 289 CE for Maximian. The age-old theme of extolling the ruler reappeared in this writing, with its rhetoric style resembling Pliny the Younger’s speech to Trajan in 100 CE:

Cum omnibus festis diebus, sacratissime imperator, debeat honos uester diuinis rebus aequari, tum praecipue celeberrimo isto et imperantibus uobis laetissimo die ueneratio numinis tui cum sollemni sacrae urbis religione iungenda est....Iure igitur hoc die quo immortalis ortus dominae gentium ciuitatis uestra pietate celebratur, tibi potissimum, imperator inuicte, laudes canimus et gratias agimus...

O most sacred Emperor, although on every festival day the honor paid to you must equal that paid to things divine, it is especially on this most solemn and (since you are our Emperor) most joyful day that veneratin of your divinity must be joined

² K.E. Brashier, “Eastern Han Commemorative Stelae: Laying the Cornerstones of Public Memory” in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, vol. 1, eds. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1027–1059. The original records about early stelae is from the “Sangfu daji” 喪服大記 chapter of *Liji*.

³ Brashier traced the flourishing of stelae back to the 140s (see “Eastern Han Commemorative Stelae,” 1027). But according to my investigation, the flourishing happened even earlier, at least before the 100s. Han stelae reached the peak of their development after the 140s. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

with the reverence paid annually to the City....It is therefore right that on this day on which the birth of the eternal City, mistress of nations, is celebrated by your piety, we sing your praises, O invincible Emperor, yours above all, and give thanks to you.⁴

C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Rodgers argued that this text was pronounced at court in Trier on the occasion of Rome's birthday.⁵ This partly illuminates why the topics in Horace and Virgil reemerged, but it cannot perfectly account for why such grandiose laudations thrived in the late third century Gaul, when emperors of the unified empire were replaced by the "regional monarchs" of the Tetrarchy. Why did texts of praise bloom once again in this period, and not earlier? Could they still represent the spirit of Roman laudations, attaching themselves to the classical heritage of the early imperial era?

This chapter starts from the observation of this late development in elite public expression. Scholars have attributed this delayed emergence to the purposeful revival of ancient traditions. For Eastern Han China, the wider use of commemorative stelae was probably an outgrowth of revitalized Confucian ideals.⁶ For the Roman west, Latin prose panegyrics were indicators of the resurrection of Cicero's classical styles and Greek rhetorical tactics.⁷ The term "revival" may create the impression that something suddenly

⁴ "X. Mamertini Panegyricus," 1–2, 4. in C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 2015), 523. For the English translation, see page 53, "Panegyric of Maximian."

⁵ Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 42.

⁶ Patricia Ebrey, "Later Han Stone Inscriptions," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40, issue 2 (Dec. 1980): 325–53.

⁷ Sabine MacCormack, "Latin Prose Panegyrics: Tradition and Discontinuity in the Late Roman Empire," *Revue d' Etudes Augustiniennes Et Patristiques* 22 (1-2) (1976): 29–77.

reappeared. The belated expressions of praise under discussion here, however, did not occur all of a sudden and out of nowhere. They happened during Late Antiquity, a period during which the features of “antiquity” continually shaped people’s desires, tastes, and faiths. On the one hand, many phenomena in this period neither resisted nor subverted old norms, but still coexisted with them. On the other hand, this era was pregnant with many factors that would lead to the ultimate disappearance of “ancient society” as a whole. Some social apparatuses that had sustained the system of antiquity could not work as effectively as before, though they were still there.

Historians, especially those who focus on the Roman world, have provided various approaches to the nature and time span of “Late Antiquity.” A.H.M. Jones (1964) marked 284 CE as the beginning of late Rome, based on considerations of dynastic changes.⁸ Peter Brown (1971) then applied the English concept of “Late Antiquity,” to the time period from 200 CE to 700 CE.⁹ In the later edited volume *Interpreting Late Antiquity* (2001), he marked 250 CE as the starting point of that era.¹⁰ For non-Mediterranean areas, Di Cosmo and Maas (2018) created a framework of “Eurasian Late Antiquity” and highlighted the trans-cultural connectivity during the period, using the shorthand term “Silk Road” to characterize this era.¹¹ These works appeared to

⁸ See A.H.M. Jones, *The Late Roman Empire, 284–602*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Jones Hopkins University Press, 1986), v–ix.

⁹ See Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1971), 7.

¹⁰ For related discussions on this volume, see Edward James, “The Rise and Function of the Concept ‘Late Antiquity’,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 20–30.

support a trans-state analogy, that is, there must have been a unified period of “Late Antiquity” which covered a similar span of time in Rome, China, and other Eurasian polities. As a challenge to this synchronic model, Michael Puett (2021) attempted to find a Chinese equivalent to the English term, “Late Antiquity,” from the second-century Daoist text *Classic of Great Peace* (Taiping jing 太平經), to refer to a different temporality.¹² But his textual focus is a religious scripture, which confuses the actual flow of human history with an imagined, idealized chronology. This type of approach could also result in misunderstanding by focusing on the very late years of a dynasty, presenting “Late Antiquity” as something of a moment rather than a continuous process.

So, how to redefine “Late Antiquity”? How to better understand the elite enthusiasm in imitating and recarving the past in their expression? A look into an early, phenomenological perspective would be helpful. When art historian Alois Riegl initially applied the term *Spätantike* (“late antique”) in the *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (*Late Roman Art Industry*, 1901), he was informed by the need to find the *Kunstwollen* (lit., “will of art”)—a socially shared intentionality—behind the daily activities of Roman people.¹³ This intentionality showed itself through the act of conferring meaning to

¹¹ Nicola Di Cosmo and Michael Maas eds., *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹² See Michael Puett, “Formations of Knowledge in Chinese Late Antiquity” in *Wissensoikonomien: Ordnung und Transgression vormoderner Kulturen*, eds. Nora Schmidt, Nikolas Pissis, and Gyburg Uhlmann (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2021), 123–33.

¹³ Jas Å Elsner, “The Birth of Late Antiquity: Riegl and Strzygowski in 1901,” *Art History* Volume 25, Issue 3 (June 2002): 358–379; Henri Zerner, “Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism,” *Daedalus* 105, no. 1 (Winter, 1976): 177–88.

entities, speaking of the togetherness of the Roman state through which individuals lived with and experienced each other (though they did not always engage in face-to-face interactions).¹⁴ Both desires and signs were indicators of the entirety of a society, and the homological link between mindsets and expression happened on the level of civilization that took the appearance of the “state.” These hint at the importance of investigating people’s discourse in a wide range of domains as a whole, if we want to know how their sensory conceptions about or even “emotional commitment” to their general living environment, e.g., a mighty empire, were produced and reproduced.

This perspective provides a lens through which we can revisit the two “belated” texts mentioned earlier. They arose from the pool of signs produced in their authors’ lived environment, i.e., the Eastern Han or Later Roman empire, and could tell us something about how people perceived their environment. What such texts expressed was not the evaluation of individuals; they were more analogous to “epics,” devoid of the motive of analyzing but focusing mainly on how to confer positive meaning to the existence of a person, who could be a local man, a Tetrarch, or someone else.¹⁵ This open pronouncement of the meaningful existence of an individual became a society-wide phenomenon in Late Antiquity, rather than confined within the top tier of the power hierarchy as in the cases of Zhou bronze inscriptions or Augustan poems. It was the fruit of not only an institutional continuity that relied upon old information nexuses (see

¹⁴ Elsner, “The Birth of Late Antiquity,” 370.

¹⁵ For basic features of epics, see Paul Fleming, “Belatedness: A Theory of the Epic,” *MLN (German Issue)* 129, no. 3 (April 2014): 525–34.

Chapter Two), but also an awakening among literate groups who came to offer others new ways of accessing elite knowledge by using highly stylized methods of communication. Efforts were made by the educated to organize a wide variety of information through portraying the meaningful existence of some individuals, the discourses of which were combined with material representations, ritual performances, or cults that made sense to a particular group.

These discourses, representations, performances, and cults spoke of the existence of a “master” or external authority beyond the specific context of expression. Compared with researchers of ancient history, scholars examining modern regimes are more familiar with this concept of a master. In his analysis of Soviet society, anthropologist Alexei Yurchak defines it as the force “who stood outside of ideological discourse, making editorial comments about it from that external position.” Yurchak writes:

This external position enabled the production and wide circulation of a public meta-discourse about all forms of political, artistic, and scientific expression that evaluated them for precision and accuracy against an external canon—the Marxist-Leninist dogma. Stalin’s “external” editorial position vis-à-vis all forms of discourse and knowledge, which provided him with unique access to the external canon against which to evaluate them, was crucial in the emergence of those phenomena that became the trademarks of his regime.¹⁶

Unlike Stalin’s time, the ancient period did not always witness the emergence of a personified master. Such an authority could exist in more abstract forms, such as in emblems that shared the long history of an empire and gave people special access to

¹⁶ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 13.

knowledge about the empire: a specific ceremonial system, an art tradition, a canonized classic, and so forth. Rather than being exhibited as an ideological apparatus, such a master took the form of quotidian customs that had been passed down over generations and confirmed people's everyday status of being-in-this-world. Similar to Michael Billig's "banal nationalism," which signifies the mundane reproduction of the consciousness of nationhood in the everyday world,¹⁷ the master under discussion here indicated the existence of a "banal imperium," the routine, familiar, daily arena that consistently reminded people of their natural belonging to an empire.

Yurchak's framework of the "meta-discursive master" has significantly inspired my structuring of the present and next chapter. This chapter focuses on how this master helped with building and manifesting an almost naturalized sense of imperium among local elites. I concentrate on the "early stage" of Late Antiquity, that is, Han China from the 70s to the 140s CE, and the Later Roman Empire from the 280s to around the 360s. The reason for treating these years as a holistic phase will be given later. Dissimilar from earlier periods when the two empires had just been founded, at this stage, the project of imperialization become a routine construction, both within the elite stratum and in other tiers of society. Also distinct from the past, the agendas of the ruling class were less about declaring the cultural unity of the empire, but more about explaining in what sense the notion of cultural unity was true. The interests in the ontological basis of the regime were partly replaced by a concern about its epistemological foundation. In the eyes of the

¹⁷ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 6.

Eastern Han rulers, “truthful” was largely equivalent to “(politically) efficacious” and “omnipresent.” The counterparts for Roman rulers were “(logically) consistent” and “tangible.” These understandings were reflected through a series of new projects relevant to cultivating qualified members for the empire.

Then there were a complex set of responses from the local elite strata, in the QXY area and in Roman Gaul. Various types of meta-discursive masters, which symbolized cultural unity as daily customs and traditional heritages, dominated these people’s textual production. Two of these masters in particular deserve attention. One was embodied as ritual conventions, which endowed writing activities with the feature of repeatability. The other resided in the long tradition of criticism among the elite class, granting some ancient authors the position of “sages of writing.” Elite textual producers were subject to these masters when producing texts, but they also invented new discourses that represented their own “true knowledge” under the guise of such masters.

A parallel structure of epistemic absolutism therefore obtained its rudimentary form in the two regions. It was held certain that true knowledge had standards, though there were two types of standards that coexisted: the imperial standards and local elite standards. Meta-discursive masters enabled local learned men to imitate what the ruling group was doing: “transforming contingency into destiny, historicity into timelessness, the present into eternity,” in the words of Yannis Hamilakis.¹⁸ They constituted the basic frame of local propagandistic discourses, making public communication subject to certain

¹⁸ See Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 16.

norms that were identical and predictable under varying circumstances. Local elite propaganda in the two regions obtained their early paradigms, which somewhat determined what kind of narratives would be legitimate, what themes would be included, and what rhetorical devices would be utilized in such practices.

I. Review of Scholarship on Elite Textual Expression: From Discourse to

Meta-Discourse

The connection between language and power has been a focal point in the modern scholarship on political regimes.¹⁹ In the research of ancient empires, this connection is often presented as the complicated relationship between the *supposed* existence of a huge machine in the imperial system, and the *real* expressions of individuals/groups preserved in extant materials. In what sense were these expressions an enunciation of how the imperial machine operated? Were such expressions always obsessed with that machine? To what extent did people's expressions constitute an integral part of "ancient empire"? These are the central questions that this relationship might connote.

The Han empire of China and the Roman empire produced a huge amount of materials related to the expression of elite populations. For these two imperial regimes, scholars have offered at least four perspectives to investigate the interplay between the state machine and elite expression. Researchers who have used these perspectives have applied the concept of "discourse" directly in the analysis of elite textual expression,

¹⁹ Some historians, such as Purvis and Hunt who were quoted earlier in this chapter, even used the two words, "discourse" and "power," interchangeably. See "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology," 476.

insinuating that some intricate crafts—aiming at maneuvering the relationship between authors/speakers, their actual or potential interlocutors, and readers—were involved in these utterances. I name the four perspectives as follows and discuss them each in turn below:

—The perspective of government spokesmen;

—The perspective of law and rules;

—The perspective of general attitudes;

—The perspective of meta-textual interplay.

1) The perspective of government spokesmen focuses on the written works of central elites who communicated directly with the imperial court, which justifies the immediate linkage between these people’s expressions and the intentions of the imperial house. In the scholarship on Han China, researchers holding this perspective often employ the concept of discourse to refer to political commentary by central officials. This is seen from the modern English translations of classical writings, such as Lu Jia’s 陸賈 (240–170 BCE) *New Discourses* (Xinyu 新語), Huan Kuan’s 桓寬 (fl. 1st century BCE) *Discourses on Salt and Iron* (Yantielun 鹽鐵論), and Wang Fu’s 王符 (ca. 85–163 CE) *Discourses of a Hidden Man* (Qianfu lun 潛夫論).²⁰ In analytical research, such as Dominik Declercq’s study of Han rhetorics (1998) and Sharon Sanderovitch’s PhD dissertation (2017), the term “discourse” is more often used in the context of building an

²⁰ Some cases are: Paul Goldin and Elisa Levi Sabattini, *Lu Jia’s New Discourses: A Political Manifesto from the Early Han Dynasty* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Anthony Barbieri’s forthcoming *Yantielun* translation; Anne Elizabeth Behnke, “The Discourse of an Obscure Man: a Study of a Han ‘Lun’” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1986).

ideological authority through criticism and self-justification.²¹ Scholars of Roman history have used the term more broadly, investigating the communicative nature and semantic skeleton of concrete texts. The Augustan poets have been a focus of these scholars. Gregson Davis' (1991) and Caroline Kroon's (2015) interpretations of Horace,²² Roman Facundo Espino's (2011) analysis of Virgil,²³ and Kroon's (2007) and Sharrock's (2006) research on Ovid²⁴ all belong to this category. Other periods during which the Roman imperial power was strengthened, such as the Constantine era, are also appealing to modern historians. Lactantius (ca. 250–325), who had advised Constantine directly, has drawn scholarly attention with regard to his “discourse innovation” which led to the building of a new, technical language in political negotiations.²⁵

²¹ See Dominik Declercq, *Writing Against the State: Political Rhetorics in Third and Fourth Century China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Sharon Sanderovitch, “Presence and Praise: Writing the Imperial Body in Han China” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017). Especially, in Sanderovitch's work, the author describes the works of Liu Xiang 刘向 and Cui Yin 崔駰 as containing “intertextual discourse of rulership and bureaucratization” and “discourse of authority” (29–31).

²² See Gregson Davis, *Polyhymnia: The Rhetoric of Horatian Lyric Discourse* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Caroline Kroon, “Miscommunications on the *Via Sacra*: A discourse structural analysis of Horace Satires 1.9” in *Argumenta: Festschrift für Manfred Kienpointner zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds. P. Anreiter, E. Mairhofer, and C. Posch (Wien: Praesens-Verlag, 2015), 215–32.

²³ See Roman Facundo Espino, “*Vir Bonus Dicendi Peritus*: Epic Discourse and Rhetoric in Virgil (Aeneid 2–3),” *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* 97, no. 1 (January 2011): 89–101.

²⁴ Caroline Kroon, “Discourse Modes and the Use of Tenses in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*” in *The Language of Literature: Linguistic Approaches to Classical Texts*, eds. Rutger J. Allan, Michel Buijs (Leiden: Brill, 2007): 65–92; Alison Sharrock, “Ovid and the Discourses of Love: The Amatory Works” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 150–62.

²⁵ See Stephen C. Casey, “The Christian Magisterium of Lactantius” (PhD diss., McGill University, 1972); Laurent J. Cases, Lactantius, “Diocletian, Constantine and

2) The perspective of law and rules focuses on specific genres of materials produced by given organizations, such as administrative annals or legal records, to illustrate the linkage between the doctrinal expressions of certain institutions and the policy of the central government. The core of this perspective is to unravel how certain language in such texts helped reinforce the strength of the materials as part of the state law, and the term “discourse” is applied in the sense of established, publicly announced rules. For Han China, Michael Lüdke’s (2004) study of the literary effectiveness of the *Zouyanshu* 奏讞書 articulated how formulated discourse engaged in the actual proceedings of judicial activities.²⁶ Maxim Korolkov (2011) also used “discourse” loosely to refer to legal expressions on civil rights in Qin-Han China.²⁷ For Roman studies, Michael Frost (1999) and Caroline Humfress (2015) have used the term “discourse” to refer to “legal rhetoric” and responded to an important question: how ancient rules and concepts came to life in institutions.²⁸ Discourse, in this sense, does not simply denote a series of expressions but also signifies an “institutionalized culture of

Political Innovations in the Divine Institutes,” *Interface* Issue 21 (Summer 2023): 69–88; Jason Gehrke, “Lactantius’ Power Theology,” *Nova et Vetera (English Edition)* 17, no. 3 (2019): 683–715.

²⁶ See Michael Lüdke, “Professional Practice: Law in Qin and Han China” (PhD diss., Universität Heidelberg, 2004), 143.

²⁷ See Maxim Korolkov, “Arguing about Law: Interrogation Procedure under the Qin and Former Han Dynasties,” *Études chinoises* 30 (2011): 37–71.

²⁸ See Michael Frost, *Introduction to Classical Legal Rhetoric: A Lost Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2017); Caroline Humfress, “Telling Stories About (Roman) Law: Rules and Concepts in Legal Discourse” in *Legalism: Rules and Categories*, eds. Paul Dresch and Judith Scheele (Oxford University Press, 2015), 79–104.

arguments.”²⁹ Humfress’ interpretation of the *Codex Theodosianus* (2016) illuminated another layer of Roman legal discourse: it provided fragmentary knowledge with some order and thus gave rise to an “‘imperial and archival’ cultural logic and epistemology.”³⁰ This view, to a large extent, transcends the level of discursive analysis and touches upon the dimension of meta-discourse, which will be discussed later.

3) The perspective of general attitudes. The concept of discourse is here used to signify the communicative skills in specific parts of textual/non-textual materials that might have embodied their producers’ attitudes toward the political regime. For studies of Han and pre-Han China, this perspective is seen in the discussion of two problems: the forming of traditional classics (such as the *Xunzi* 荀子 and *Hanfeizi* 韓非子) and the use of textual/non-textual symbols in aesthetic productions. For the first category of scholarship, Paul van Els and Elisa Sabattini (2012), Ori Tavor (2014), Sun Zhenbin (2015), and Zhang Hanmo (2018) used “discourse” interchangeably with “rhetoric,” tracing the formation of a series of classical canons in the pre-imperial and early imperial ages.³¹ In the discussion of the second topic, researchers have used the term more flexibly to refer to the artistic metaphors and techniques in material remains, which is

²⁹ Humfress, “Telling Stories About (Roman) Law,” 80.

³⁰ Caroline Humfress, “Ordering Divine Knowledge in Late Roman Legal Discourse,” *COLLeGIUM* vol. 20 (C 2016): 160–76 .

³¹ Paul van Els and Elisa Sabattini, “Introduction: Political Rhetoric in Early China,” *Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident* 34 (2012): 5–14; Ori Tavor, “Naming/Power: Linguistic Engineering and the Construction of Discourse in Early China,” *Asian Philosophy: An International Journal of the Philosophical Traditions of the East* 24, no. 4 (2014): 313–329; Zhenbin Sun, *Language, Discourse, and Praxis in Ancient China* (Springer, 2014); Hanmo Zhang, *Authorship and Text-making in Early China* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2018).

typically seen in Martin Powers' (1991) interpretation of Shandong stone carvings and K.E. Brashier's (2005) investigation of the birchleaf pear tree (*gantang* 甘棠) in Han art.³²

In Roman studies, the presupposed connection between authors' general attitudes toward the imperial culture and their fragmentary expression has appeared quite often. Two themes deserve special attention. One is the reinterpretation of the works of important rhetoricians like Cicero (ca. 106–43 BCE), Seneca the Elder (ca. 54 BCE–39 CE), and Quintilianus (ca. 35–95). Scholars have connected the eloquence of these authors with the reinforcement of persuasive power, the clarification of personal pursuits, and the charge against a specific rival; all of these tactics were targeted at making one's voice heard by a wider public.³³ The other theme, similar to the situation in studies of Han China, is related to aesthetic productions. Alison Sharrock's (2006) elaboration on the discourse of love in Ovid, and Richard Gordon's (2009) article on the discourse of magic in Augustan poetry, are two examples.³⁴

³² Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Kenneth Brashier, "Symbolic Discourse in Eastern Han Memorial Art: The Case of the Birchleaf Pear," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 65, no. 2 (Dec., 2005): 281–310.

³³ For instance, contributors of the *Brill's Companion to Cicero: Oratory and Rhetoric*, ed. James M. May (Leiden: Brill, 2002); A. Fred Sochatoff's "Basic Rhetorical Theories of the Elder Seneca," *The Classical Journal* 34, no. 6 (Mar., 1939): 345–54; Jeremy David Brightbill's "Roman Declamation: Between Creativity and Constraints" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2015).

³⁴ Alison Sharrock, "Ovid and the Discourses of Love: The Amatory Works" in *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 150–62; Richard Gordon, "Magic as a Topos in Augustan Poetry: Discourse, Reality and Distance," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 11, no. 1 (2009): 209–28.

The three perspectives of scholars above have clarified many points about the relationship between the assumed authority of the state over society and people's real expressions in their day-to-day lives. Yet, although many of the conclusions they reached are reasonable, they only explained half of the relationship, that is, in what sense the expressions contained in extant materials—as a whole—manifested how the ancient imperium operated; they did not look deeper into the other half of the relation, i.e., to what extent these expressions formed an organic part of a system known as “ancient imperium.” They reduced ancient materials to discrete words, sentences, paragraphs, and volumes, treating various kinds of social discourse as no more than footnotes of the powerful machinery of the imperial state. The fourth perspective could largely supplement this insufficiency, presenting discourse as fostering a new sense beyond itself.

4) The perspective of meta-textual interplay. This perspective examines the mechanisms through which textual materials could build interaction with their readers. Scholars using this approach have recognized that there was an entire semiotic spectrum of communication involved in an ancient text, which consisted of the participation of its authors, recipients, predecessors, and addressees; the collaboration of all these components ensured that a textual message could move smoothly from its origin to its arrival point, and finally be digested by its target audiences.³⁵ Researchers also noticed the presence of a force that oriented the flow of textual information and maneuvered the

³⁵ For this description of how textual messages move from one side of the semiotic spectrum (author) to the other side (reader), see Larissa D'Angelo and Stefania Consonni, “A Tale of Three Waves: Or, Concerning the History and Theory of Metadiscourse,” *Ibérica* 40 (2020): 13–34.

text's dialogue with its reader, a "text-external entity"³⁶ that controlled the form and direction of discourse. It openly evaluated the text and told readers whether to praise, criticize, or just neglect a piece of writing.³⁷ This entity has been referred to as "meta-discourse" in modern literary and linguistic studies. Joseph M. Williams defines the concept as:

On the level of meta-discourse, we do not add propositional material but help our readers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react to such material. Meta-discourse, therefore, is discourse about discourse or communication about communication.³⁸

The core of the definition is the communicative function of meta-discourse that bridges the gap between three sides: authors, text, and readers. This dialogue among the three has been widely observed in the making and using of ancient texts, but very few scholars have treated the term "meta-discourse" seriously. Du Heng's dissertation, "The Author's Two Bodies: Paratext in Early Chinese Textual Culture" (2018), made extraordinary efforts to improve the situation. In this project the term "meta-discursive" is applied in a relatively narrow sense, referring to the function of a text when it was created primarily to serve another text.³⁹ Du employed the term to describe the effects of "paratext," i.e., the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Erving Goffman, *In Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 124–59.

³⁸ Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity & Grace* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1981), 198.

³⁹ See Du Heng, "The Author's Two Bodies: Paratext in Early Chinese Textual Culture" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2018): 30.

means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers.⁴⁰

One problem with her survey is that, in specialized studies of linguistic philosophy, paratext has usually been considered a subcategory of meta-discourse, rather than parallel with it.⁴¹ The realm of Roman studies also lacks an appropriate, working definition for meta-discourse. Scholars have often paid attention to a certain type of meta-discourse, without treating the concept as a whole. There is a full collection of essays edited by Laura Jansen, under the title *The Roman Paratext* (2014). The contributors investigated a wide range of paratextual elements, like “titles and intertitles, prefaces, indices, inscriptions, closing statements, decorative and formalistic details.”⁴² Reflections on meta-discourse were not granted enough space in such discussions, however, as the problem of conceptualization per se was not the key point in most of the articles.

What might have hindered scholars of ancient history from reexamining the nature and functions of meta-discourse? An important factor, I would argue, is probably the confusion between this concept and the oft-mentioned “textual authority.”⁴³ The two are

⁴⁰ Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean, “Introduction to the Paratext,” *New Literary History* 22, no. 2, *Probings: Art, Criticism, Genre* (Spring 1991): 261–72.

⁴¹ In specialized linguistic studies, “paratext” is often considered as parallel with “architext” or “hypertext,” and all the three are subcategories of meta-discourse. For related discussions, see Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, 8th edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

⁴² Laura Jansen ed., *The Roman Paratext* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1.

⁴³ In the scholarship of Michael Nylan, Mark Edward Lewis, and some others, “textual authority” is synonymous with “the authority of writing.” See Michael Nylan, “Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han,” *Early China* 25 (2000): 205–258; Mark E. Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). Researchers like James F. Poag and Claire Baldwin claimed that textual authority “may be claimed by its author, but it is granted or refused by an interpretive community and is therefore subject to negotiations between author and reader that leave their mark on the texts.”

comparable in many aspects: both indicate how non-textual powers intrude on the realm of textual production; both could be used to position a certain text, or textual tradition, within the grids of social discourse and written communication; both allow room for the analysis of technical, linguistic strategies with regard to their roles in *realpolitik*; and both expand the realm of “language” as a huge intellectual space. Even so, the differences between them sometimes overshadow their similarities.

I would suggest that there are three major differences between meta-discourse and textual authority. One, textual authority is easier for readers to grasp because it often derives directly from a powerful author or institution, while meta-discourse functions more reflexively and requires a higher level of readers’ self-aware engagement. Two, textual authority reinforces the persuasive power of a textual product, while meta-discourse not only persuades readers but even ultimately alters their established views.⁴⁴ Three, textual authority is more “knowing-oriented,” that is, letting readers know what happens behind a text, while meta-discourse is more “attitude-oriented,” i.e., letting readers interpret and evaluate the text to build up their own attitudes.⁴⁵ These

Textual authority can be constructed in three main methods: through reference to the personal standing of the speaker or author; through reference to other respected texts; through reference to social and cultural authority. For related discussions, see James Poag and Clair Baldwin, *The Construction of Textual Authority in German Literature of the Medieval and Early Modern Periods* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). In this sense “textual authority” is more like the carrier of other more tangible authorities or dominant power, like the power of a strong man, of an organization, or a cultural tradition.

⁴⁴ Moreover, meta-discourse analysis has largely focused on specialized varieties of language, rather than general conversational competencies. See Ken Hyland, “Metadiscourse: What Is It And Where Is It Going?” *Journal of Pragmatics* 113, no. 1 (May 2017): 6–29.

three features of meta-discourse make it possible for us to look beyond the traditionally considered “authoritative texts”—imperial orders, state laws, established canons, and other documents endowed with official power—to reflect on how other categories of textual materials could also impose a sense of uniformity on their readers. They also allow us to test Austin’s speech theory in ancient settings, verifying that utterances “not only state things but also *do* things”: language brings changes to social reality instead of merely describing that reality.⁴⁶

Based on these advantages of the framework of meta-discourse, in later discussions we will look into both anonymous writings and texts ascribed to individual authors, in the areas of QXY and Gaul. First, though, we will examine the historical background from which these texts took form.

II. The Background: How the Notion of “Cultural Unity” is True

Now we need to deal with the unsolved questions about the periodization of this study: Why mark the 70s CE and 280s CE as the beginning of an era, the so-called “Late Antiquity” in China and Rome? Why take the time points of the 140s and 360s as the end of the “early stage of Late Antiquity”? What features of these seventy or eighty years distinguished them as a whole? What contributions did these years make to the creation of new elite discourses?

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁶ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The Williams James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 6.

The time span under discussion—the Han empire from approximately the 70s to 140s and the Roman empire from around the 280s to 360s—overlapped with a period during which many signs of the weakening of state cohesion emerged, while most people did not anticipate that more radical turmoil would follow. Large-scale reforms were initiated by ambitious rulers, giving rise to certain levels of socioeconomic prosperity. Monarchs also showed interest in promoting official projects to improve people’s knowledge related to the state, by taking on the role as “truth makers.” These situations gave later generations the illusion that this era was still characterized by an unchallengeable imperial authority. Through such an authority, the conception of cultural unity—that individual members of the empire who are from different areas and groupings are bound together by the same history, language, faith, customs, system of economic production, and even behavioral codes and metaphors—was not only declared but also justified: by recalibrating certain norms based on the values enshrined in classical literature and the historical memories that represented the “main spiritual treasure of the empire,”⁴⁷ the imperial court spoke of new agendas that concentrated less on moral philosophy and more on the realm of epistemology. These agendas went far beyond just proclaiming the unified values of the state, for they proposed to offer convincing evidence of how these proclaimed values were true.

⁴⁷ Dirk H.A. Kolff, “The Cultural Unity of a Sovereign Civilisation” in *Rethinking the Cultural Unity of India: Papers Read at a Seminar on “The Cultural Unity of India” Held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, India, from 16th to 19th January 2013 to Commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda*, ed. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2014), 18–42.

(I) Han China, 70s–140s: True = Efficacious/Omnipresent

In my definition, the “early stage of Late Antiquity” in China witnessed the reign of four emperors: Emperor Zhang 章帝 (r. 75–88), Emperor He 和帝 (r. 88–105), Emperor An 安帝 (r. 106–125), and Emperor Shun 順帝 (r. 125–144).⁴⁸ In the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) argues that the inauguration of Emperor He marked the arrival of a chaotic era during which the power of the imperial ruler was weakened: “Since the reign of Emperor He, the noble relatives [of the imperial family] came to abuse their power, while servants and eunuchs started to manage [state] politics” 自和帝以降，貴戚擅權，嬖幸用事。⁴⁹ Modern historians, such as Fan Wenlan 範文瀾 and Lü Simian 呂思勉, stated that the death of Emperor Zhang was the start of “the dark age of late Eastern Han.”⁵⁰ Recent scholars have also pointed out that the reforms of Emperor Zhang contributed to the “total prosperity” of the Eastern Han empire, while his tolerance of powerful clans and imperial consort kin was deepened by later rulers.⁵¹ All these views agree that the rule of Emperors Zhang and He during the 70s and

⁴⁸ Emperor Shang 殤帝, son of Emperor He, ascended to the throne in 105 CE and died in 106 at the age of one.

⁴⁹ “Han ji liushi” 漢紀六十. *Zhizhi tongjian*, vol. 68, comm. Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 2174.

⁵⁰ See Fan Wenlan 範文瀾, *Zhongguo tongshi jianbian* 中國通史簡編 (revised edition), vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1988), 264; Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1991), 296.

⁵¹ For instance, Fang Juncheng 方君誠, “Dong Han zhongqi de sixiang zouxiang yu Wang Fu *Qian fu lun zhi zhidao jiaogou*” 東漢中期的思想走向與王符<潛夫論>之治道架構, *Chuanshan xuekan* 船山學刊 3(2008): 90–92; Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮, “Lun

80s marked a momentous transformation in Eastern Han politics such that tensions between the centralized regime and divisive powers gradually became evident. Then, when it came to Emperor An, the imperial rule was described as “its effects could not reach distant areas, and [the reign] started to lose its foundation” 威不逮遠，始失根統。⁵² Upon the reign of Emperor Shun, the empire was facing devastating challenges that directly led to a total collapse, which displayed itself as the devolution of political authority from the house of Liu 劉 to other domestic power centers.⁵³

The reforms initiated by Emperors Zhang, He, An (and the regent Empress Dowager Deng 鄧太后), and Shun (and the regent Liang 梁 family) covered a wide range of realms.⁵⁴ Scholars have already recognized the importance of this period in cultural transformations of premodern China. Michael Nylan, in particular, marked the year 100 CE as “a watershed in the transition toward a more text-based culture.” Three events demonstrated the significance of this point in time: the invention of paper as a popular writing material, the emergence of the dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, which signaled the culmination of the formation of an explicit grammar, and the creation of a

Dong Han waiqi zhengzhi” 論東漢外戚政治, *Beida shixue* 北大史學 (2010): 65–108, 422.

⁵² *HHS* 5. 243.

⁵³ Emperors Chong 冲帝 (143–145) and Zhi 質帝 (145–146) died at very young age. It was during their time that the power of consort kin reached its peak. See Wang Yundu 王雲度, “Dong Han shi fenqi chuyi” 東漢史分期芻議, *Nandu xuetan (Shehui kexueban)* 南都學壇 (社會科學版) 11, no. 1 (1991): 8–13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

rhetorical formulation that favored written texts greatly over oral transmission.⁵⁵ These events indicated a shift in intellectual elites' sense of cultivated identity. Previously these people had thought of music and rites as the breeding ground of this kind of identity, but now they put more emphasis on literary texts.⁵⁶ So, what was the relationship between the new forms of texts, the institutions that produced them, and the gradual change in people's ideas about true knowledge? What were the new criteria the imperial authority set for the "truth" about the empire, by making use of textual tools?

The notion of cultural unity had already been part of "knowledge about the state" when the First Emperor of Qin proclaimed state unification through stone inscriptions, and when the Western Han emperors canonized Confucian Classics as the most authoritative source of state doctrines. What the Eastern Han rulers did was invent new frames to further interpret the truthfulness of this notion, through building an equation: "true" is equivalent to "efficacious" and "omnipresent."

1) Efficaciousness. One measure taken by the imperial court was to impose a connection between the abstract concept of "unity" and the pragmatic notion of "(politically) efficacious/successful," asserting that true knowledge leads to effective consequences in reality. For the seventy years under discussion here, an ethnopolitical identifier, "Han" 漢, which represented a cultural totality, was frequently applied in state-sponsored textual products, with its appearance usually associated with *realpolitik*

⁵⁵ Nylan, "Textual Authority in Pre-Han and Han," 249.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 251.

victories. In the famous “Inscription for Mount Yanran” 封燕然山銘 (dated to ca. 89), which honored Dou Xian 竇憲 (d. 92) who conquered the northern Xiongnu, the identifier appears in the opening sentence:

有漢元舅曰車騎將軍竇憲寅亮聖明⁵⁷

The eldest maternal uncle of the **Han** [Emperor], Dou Xian, General of Chariots and Cavalry, respectfully illuminated the sacred glory [of the imperium]....

“Han” demonstrates the shared identity of the sponsors of this inscription, as opposed to the non-ethnic-Han origin of the Xiongnu populations, who were indigenous to the Yanran area. Another inscription from the northwestern border, “Stele of Pei Cen” 裴岑碑 (dated to 137, excavated from Barkul 巴爾庫爾, Xinjiang), also includes the term “Han” in the first sentence. The stele was inscribed to commemorate Pei Cen’s conquest of Huyan 呼延, a branch of the northern Xiongnu. “Han” indicated the time when the war was waged:

惟漢永和二年八月敦煌太守雲中裴岑將郡兵三千人....⁵⁸

In the eighth month, in the second year of the Yonghe reign period of the **Han**, Pei Cen from Yunzhong, who is Governor of Dunhuang, led three thousand troops from the commandery army....

⁵⁷ For the entire text, see *HHS* 23. 815.

⁵⁸ For information about the text, see Qian Xin 潛心, “Pei Cen jigong bei wen kao” 裴岑紀功碑文考, *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 4 (1986): 101; Xu Yuli 徐玉立 et al., *Han bei quanji* 漢碑全集 (hereafter *HBQJ*) (Zhengzhou: Henan Meishu Chubanshe, 2006), 433. The text is titled as “Dunhuang taishou Pei Ceng jigong bei” 敦煌太守裴岑紀功碑 in the volume.

And the term “Han” also appeared in the “Stele of Ren Shang” 任尚碑 (dated to 93, excavated from Barköl 巴里坤, Xinjiang) which was, too, to memorialize a man who had achieved victory over the Xiongnu:

惟漢永元五年□□□□□□□□任尚□□□□醴□□眾登□□□□山□
□□□□□□□□賊□□匈□....⁵⁹

In the fifth year of Yongyuan reign period of the **Han**... Ren Shang...the Li area (or “alcohol”?)...climbed...mountain with others....The vicious Xiong people...

How, though, should the character “Han” be translated literally? As it appears at the very beginning of the texts, it is reasonable to argue that the term implied some causes or preconditions for the event—military triumphs—recorded in the inscriptions. More importantly, considering the aims of producing such stelae, this term not only referred to the name of the dynastic ruling house, but also embodied a superior political existence which derived from a united, powerful civilization. Knowledge about such a unified core was inscribed in durable texts, not for open discussion but for requiring consent from the public. The use of stone made this knowledge easily recognizable: it appeared to be as natural (and thus substantial) as the material carrier per se, and as venerable (and thus convincing) as this carrier as well. A direction on how to perceive the warfare in the texts was therefore imposed on audiences. A totality of political strategies, attitudes, practices, and traditions synthesized as “Han-ness,” which entailed itself through great military

⁵⁹ For information about the text, see Hu Shunli 胡順利, “Guanyu Dong Han Ren Shang Bei kaozhengde shangque” 關於東漢任尚碑考證的商榷, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古與文物 1 (1985): 102. Ma Liqing 馬利清, “Jigong keshi de wenben chuantong yu Ren Shang Bei fanying de lishi shishi” 紀功刻石的文本傳統與任尚碑反應的“曆史事實,” *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* 中國人民大學學報 31, no. 1 (2017): 11–20.

successes, was presented as a received construct that had already been taken for granted.⁶⁰

The absolute failure this could cause to foreign groups was uncontested, and every single linguistic component in the commemorative inscriptions is referentially connected to the Han cultural superiority, which constituted a consistent semantic order within the text itself.

The reasonableness of unifying all cultures under the rule of Han was thus interwoven with the demonstration of the actual successes the Han people achieved, the myth of the greatness of the Han regime, and the civilizational importance of the Han over other groupings. The Han power, by declaring itself through inscribed texts, was expected to be considered one that could always ensure victory, prosperity, and a splendid future for all people, if only they were subjects of the sole Han emperor.

2) Omnipresent. The ruling group sought to create a new idea of “an empire of learning,” encapsulating the notion of cultural unity in a picture that entailed the omnipresence of a particular behavioral pattern: everyone is working on the same thing, which is studying. Since the reign of Emperor Zhang, the term *xue* 學 (to learn/study;

⁶⁰ Here I feel reluctant to accept Mark Elliott’s view that the term “Han” did not begin to emerge as an ethnonym until the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534) and did not begin to approach its modern meaning until the Ming dynasty (1366–1644). Elliott argues that before the Northern Wei period, “Han” in Chinese classical texts referred to the Han River, to the pre-imperial state of Han, and to the subsequent Han dynastic state (206 BCE–220 CE) but never to a culturally or ethnically defined Han people (*Hanren* or *Hanzu*); therefore, Han and pre-Han dynasties in antiquity plays no part in Han ethnogenesis. See “*Hushuo*: The Northern Other and the Naming of the Han Chinese” in *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China’s Majority*, eds. Thomas S. Mullaney et al. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 173–90. The two texts quoted earlier, the stelae for Ren Shang and Pei Cen, prove that “Han” could be used to indicate how people were united as a group distinguished from others in the sense of ethno-politics.

school; scholarship) appeared more often than before in imperial edicts, which positioned monarchs in the status of “learner-scholar” as other men who commissioned the expansion of wisdom. In an edict in 79 CE, Emperor Zhang makes use of the multiple meanings of the term to describe his ideal:

蓋三代導人，教學為本。...孝宣皇帝以為去聖久遠，學不厭博，故遂立大、小夏侯尚書，後又立京氏易。至建武中，復置顏氏、嚴氏春秋，大、小戴禮博士。此皆所以扶進微學，尊廣道藝也。...至永平元年，長水校尉奏言，先帝大業，當以時施行。欲使諸儒共正經義，頗令學者得以自助。孔子曰：‘學之不講，是吾憂也。’又曰：‘博學而篤誌，切問而近思，仁在其中矣。’於戲，其勉之哉！⁶¹

Therefore, [the way for] Sages of the Three Dynasties to guide people was based on teaching and **learning (xue)**....The Filial Emperor Xuan considered that, because [we are] distant from [ancient] sages, we should never be satisfied when **learning (xue)** as broad as possible. So he established the Office of the Masters of Writing [that disseminated the teachings] of Senior and Junior Xiahou, and later [the ministry responsible for teaching] the *Classic of Changes* of the Jing clan. When it came to the Jianwu period (25–56 CE), [he] again established the position of Erudite specializing in the *Spring and Autumn Annuals* [taught by] the Yan and Yán clans, and in the *Book of Ritual* [taught by] Senior and Junior Dai. All of these were what he did to help improve the waning **scholarship (xue)** [on classics], and [to express his] reverence to the Way and arts [of state management] as well as to expand them....When it came to the first year of the Yongping (58 CE) reign period, Assistant to the Colonel of the Ch’ang River Encampments (Changshui Xiaowei) submitted a memorial [to the emperor], saying that the grand mission of former emperors should be realized on time. This was to gather various Confucian scholars to standardize the classics and their teachings, to enable **learners (xuezhe)**, lit., “people who learn”) to assist themselves [in the learning process]. Confucius said: ‘[People] only **learn (xue)** without elaborating [the content in detail]; this is what I am worried about.’ He also said: ‘**Study (xue)** broadly while consolidating your goal firmly; ask questions genuinely while thinking about problems that are close [to yourself]. This is where *ren* (lit. benevolence) is.’ Alas, [all of you should] encourage yourselves by these!

To highlight the main points of the edict above:

⁶¹ HHS 3. 137–38.

—Learning was one of the guiding principles for the rule of ancient sages;

—For the aim of learning broadly, exemplar monarchs of the Han dynasty established a series of key institutions;

—By emphasizing learning, these monarchs also intended to bring old classics and their philosophy of state management back to life;

—With the common action of learning classics, scholars could help themselves when encountering difficulties;

—Learning is inherently related to morality, and it constitutes a critical part of a virtuous life.

All types of knowledge pertinent to the empire—myths, history, institutions, hierarchy, symbolic codes, and moral values—coalesce in the action of learning. Scholars might consider this interest in learning activities to be rooted in Han rulers’ persistent commitment to reconstructing the authority of Confucian masters (e.g., Kongzi, Mengzi, Xunzi, etc.), who were portrayed in classics as teachers dominating the learning process.⁶² I would argue, however, that the flourishing of the practices of learning indicated the pursuit of a new type of ruling order: an order that could regulate how people recognize, perceive, analyze, and understand the objects surrounding themselves. To put it simply, the court emphasized learning in order to promote a universal emulation of a “state-advocated way of life,” at least for elite populations. This intrusion into the general

⁶² For the image of these masters, see Michael Nylan, “Han Classicists Writing in Dialogue about Their Own Tradition,” *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 2 (Apr., 1997): 133–88.

area of elite life can be traced to the reign of Emperor Wu 武帝 (141–87 BCE) and his immediate successors, whose policies had already intervened in many areas of elite intellectual activities, such as “founding imperial academies, building up but setting limits on access to the imperial libraries, and staffing the bureaucracy with scholar–officials.”⁶³ Rafe de Crespigny has also pointed out that the agendas of Emperors Zhang, He, An, and Shun were continuations of Emperor Ming’s 明帝 (28–75) policies.⁶⁴ Table 4 shows how the four emperors pushed forward the construction of state ideology, partly based on de Crespigny’s summarization.

The table not only exhibits how the state intruded on the various fields in which the ideology about an all-inclusive cultural totality was produced. It also demonstrates a new presumption of the ruling group: qualified members of the empire should be able to learn about this cultural totality and communicate it to others. This explains why the court focused on human resources, relying on which a wide range of textual media of communication were produced: not only educational institutions but also individual teachers, not only libraries but also authors of books, not only professional scholars but also those who had the potential to contribute to scholarly discussions. A shared character of all these people was their outstanding ability and willingness to study, which could

⁶³ Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, eds. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 17–56.

⁶⁴ Rafe de Crespigny, “Scholars and Rulers: Imperial Patronage under the Later Han Dynasty” in *Han-zeit. festschrift für hans stumpfeldt aus anlaß seines 65. geburtstages. hrsg. von micahel friedrich*, ed. Michael Friedrich (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 57–77.

provide them with the position and privilege they wanted. To promote them was to promote a set of universally applicable methods (all of which stemmed from the simple activity of “learning”) for approaching a coherent cultural complex—or a civilization.

Rulers	Activities Related to Academic Gatherings	Activities of Financing Academic Institutions	Activities of Patronizing Scholars and Their Works	Activities of Promoting Scholars	Other Measures
Emperor Zhang (r. 75 – 88)	Held the Conference of White Tiger Hall and a series of other scholarly gatherings, inviting Old Text scholars to make presentations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patronized a New Text scholar Cao Bao's 曹褒 monograph, <i>Xinli</i> 新禮; - Sponsored Ban Gu to compile the official history <i>Hanshu</i> 		
Emperor He (r. 88 – 106)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoted both New and Old Text scholars to key positions; - Showed interests in historiography and appointed Ban Zhao 班昭 to continue editing the <i>Hanshu</i>; - Visited the imperial library of Dongguan 東觀 and selected "experts in various skills and crafts" 術藝之士 to work there 	Ordered Ban Gu and others to compile the <i>Baihu tong</i> 白虎通, which reflected the teachings of the New Text
Emperor An and Empress Dowager Deng (r. 106 – 125)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patronized the compiling of the official history, <i>Dongguan hanji</i> 東觀漢紀; - Initiated many projects beyond the purview of the Imperial Academy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ordered Liu Zhen 劉珍 (d. 126) and Erudites of the Five Classics 五經博士 to re-edit the Five Classics, works of the Various Scholars 諸子, biographies, and pieces on arts 	Adopted new ritual patterns in the <i>Xinli</i>

Table 4. Policies of Eastern Han emperors to promote cultural unity. Partly based on De Crespigny, "Scholars and Rulers" (2006). (To next page)

<p>Emperor Shun and the Liang family as the regent (r. 125 – 144)</p>		<p>Patronized the Imperial Academy</p>	<p>Initiated the project of editing the imperial collections of Confucian classics, together with works on art, mathematics, medicine and divination</p>	<p>Appointed forty-eight scholars of the imperial capital who were over sixty as the Wait-listed Gentlemen 補郎, Members of [the Heir-Apparent's] Suite 舍人, and Gentlemen [who assist the rulers] of the various kingdoms 諸王國郎</p>	<p>that were preserved in Dongguan; - Selected candidates for the position of "Gentlemen of the Three Ministries" 三署郎 specialized in <i>Guwen Shangshu</i> 古文尚書, the Mao Commentary on the <i>Shijing</i> 毛詩, and the <i>Guliang Commentary on the Chunqiu</i> 谷梁春秋</p>	<p>- Invited owners of private schools like Ma Rong 馬融 to join the compiling of the official Five Classics - Ordered commandery states to recommend classists 令郡國舉明經 to fill governmental positions; called classists between fifty and seventy to visit the Imperial Academy</p>
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An intellectualist turn thus took place in the style of state management. To better build up the picture of omnipresent learning, Emperor Zhang and his successors gave themselves a new identity of self-renewers who could actively engage in intellectual training and the betterment of knowledge. In an edict from 85 CE, Emperor Zhang located himself at the position of a “gentleman” (*junzi* 君子), a special category of individuals reputable for their capability of self-improvement through obtaining new wisdom:

《詩》不云乎：‘君子如祉，亂庶遄已。’歷數既從，靈耀著明，亦欲與士大夫同心自新。⁶⁵

Isn’t this what the *Shijing* says? ‘As gentlemen could do appropriate things (viz., to promote righteous ones), all disorders would be ended.’ As [I] recalled all those events in the past, [I felt] illuminated by inspiring and glorious [ideas], and [I felt] the desire to renew myself together with scholars and officials, by sharing the same mind [with you all].

In an edict from 129 CE, Emperor Shun quoted the same sentence from the *Shijing*, and located himself in the same position:

《詩》云：‘君子如祉，亂庶揣已。’三朝之會，朔旦立春，嘉與海內洗心自新。⁶⁶

The *Shijing* says: ‘As gentlemen could do appropriate things, all disorders would be ended.’ When gathering at the beginning of the new year, on the first day of the first month, I would be pleased to renew myself together with all of my people, with my heart [thoroughly] cleaned.

It appears that rulers were no longer satisfied with declaring their current legitimacy to rule. They also wanted to lead the construction of a future-oriented, self-renewing

⁶⁵ *HHS* 3. 150.

⁶⁶ *HHS* 6. 255–56.

community in which everyone would be able to constantly adjust themselves to more “appropriate” patterns of thinking and behaving. A relatively modern notion, “self-governance,” took its rudimentary form. The monarch was supposed to be one of the members of society as well as their leader, managing the state not by verifying his already-held authority but by proving himself as the one who could direct the state to a brighter future.

(II) Roman Empire, 280s–360s: True = Consistent/Tangible

In my definition, the early stage of Roman Late Antiquity covered two important eras: the Tetrarchy (293–324) and the Constantinian dynasty (306–364).⁶⁷ The inauguration of Diocletian in 284 CE brought new forms of continuity to Roman history, some components of which lingered in the society even after the fall of the empire. His political and military reforms significantly changed the map of the state. A much stronger defensive system against external aggression was built, thanks to the augmented frontier fortification on the Rhine and the Danube, as well as the Syrian *limes* that protected the state from the Persian army.⁶⁸ The reorganization of provinces and the reestablishment of provincial governors manifested the presence of imperial bureaucracy in local areas.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ For the Tetrarchy as an imperial dynasty, see Byron Lloyd Waldron, “Diocletian, Hereditary Succession and the Tetrarchic Dynasty” (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2018).

⁶⁸ For related military reforms, see Stephen Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery* (Plymouth: BT Batsford Ltd., 1985).

⁶⁹ M. Hellström, “Diocletian, Roman emperor, 284–313 CE.” Oxford Classical Dictionary, Dec. 2023. Retrieved Mar. 12, 2024, from <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-2187>

Meanwhile, the Great Persecution ultimately transgressed the buffer zone between Roman emperors and the Christian authority, a gray area where the degree of competition between the two could be negotiated. As they put all Christians under the threat of extreme penalty, Diocletian and his associates refused the least opportunity for Christians to keep their hope alive.⁷⁰ Christianity started to be treated as one of the most vital forces that determined the boundaries of the safety zone of the imperial system, though the size of the Christian population remained much smaller than that of the so-called pagans.

The 360s CE can be marked as the ending point of this “first phase” of Roman Late Antiquity. This is mainly because of the conspicuous distinction between rulers of the Constantinian dynasty and Valentinian I (r. 364–375) whose division of the western and eastern courts actually put an end to Roman imperium as a united whole. As R. M. Errington has articulated, after the death of Emperor Julian in 363 CE, political crises that were once masked by an overall prosperity exploded.⁷¹ The rise of the military man, Valentinian, in the local area of Pannonia naturally ensured the new ruler’s political and psychological attachment to a peripheral region. His special attention to defending the frontiers against outsiders, like the Alamanni in Gaul, the Picts and the Scots in Britannia, and the Sarmatians and the Quadi along the Danube,⁷² left the traditional heartland of the

⁷⁰ See G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, “Aspects of the ‘Great Persecution,’” *The Harvard Theological Review* 47, no. 2 (Apr., 1954): 75–113.

⁷¹ R.M. Errington, *Roman Imperial Policy from Julian to Theodosius* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

⁷² Paolo de Vingo, “Changes and Transformations in Late Antique Pannonia: From the Roman Province to the Multiethnic Transit Area of Populations in Movement,” *Acta Archaeologica* (December 2011): 363–79.

state somehow neglected. A “centerless Roman world” was rendered possible in the sense of state bureaucracy and ideological cohesion.

This centerlessness had been unimaginable under the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian dynasty. Just as in China, a series of civilizing projects were initiated in the name of the imperial government, aiming to establish certain levels of epistemic absolutism that justified the ruling group as the only definer of “true knowledge.” Although the new monarchs continued the work of previous rulers who made efforts to clarify what was “Roman” about the Roman empire,⁷³ now the goal was to let people know how to verify such knowledge about Romanness. If we accept the opinion of Clifford Ando that by the reign of Hadrian (117–138), the imperial administration had already explicitly advertised an ideology of cultural unity which propagated the empire as an all-embracing collective,⁷⁴ it is arguable that the late third century witnessed a transformation, a policy shift from reinforcing people’s adherence to imperial symbols, to naturalizing this adherence by concealing its very existence.

Compared to Han emperors, Roman rulers seemed to be less interested in intruding on the area of textual production directly. Their discourse of cultural unity was brought to effect largely through physical operations (e.g., imperial tours or the construction of public architecture), and the target audience of imperial propaganda was hardly confined within the literate population. Though often coinciding with their Chinese

⁷³ Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

counterparts who equated “true” with “efficacious” or “omnipresent,” Roman rulers built another equation, that “*true*” should be understood as equivalent to “(logically) consistent” or “tangible.”

1) (Logically) consistent. No matter what imperial cults the rulers promulgated, a common goal was to direct people to a special logic, i.e., to think and express their ideas by using categories of theology (e.g., testimony, embodiment, wisdom, and doctrines).⁷⁵ Establishing an official religions had been a long tradition, but previous rulers made efforts mostly on the level of deifying various types of entities. For the Tetrarchs and their successors, the question was how to familiarize people with a thinking habit of expecting *revelation*, that is, allowing for the gradual disclosure of truth in the light of supernatural power.

There is no need to reemphasize how the Tetrarchs divinized the collegiate rule. What is to be investigated here is how some imperial documents, though not necessarily related to religious issues, claimed to make revelatory sense. One representative case is the preface of Diocletian’s Edict on Maximum Prices (301 CE), which Simon Corcoran described as “the most striking example of the high rhetoric of late imperial pronouncements.”⁷⁶ The edict was to set fixed prices for goods, which seemed to have nothing to do with theology; but Diocletian and his co-rulers explained the necessity of issuing the edict by portraying themselves as both the ones revealing human nature and

⁷⁵ For these categories, see William J. Abraham and Fredrick D. Aquino eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁶ Simon Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government, AD 284–324* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 207.

the ones whose divine characters were to be revealed. To their audiences, this revelation was supposed to be “prior in the order of knowing”:⁷⁷ before thinking about the reasonableness of the policy per se, it was a must to acknowledge two premises—even the most concealed aspects of human life could be revealed with the action of the Tetrarchs, and even the most difficult transformation could be done once the Tetrarchs had their power revealed.

The Edict starts by listing the honorific titles of all four rulers—Diocletian, Maximinian, Constantius, and Galerius, in the pattern below:

[Imp(erator) Caesar C. Aurel(ius) Val(erius) Diocletian]us P(ius) F(elix) Inv(ictus) Aug(ustus), p[ro]nt(ificus) max(imus), Germ(anicus) max(imus) VI, Sarm(aticus) max(imus) IIII, Persic(us) max(imus) II, Britt(anicus) max(imus), Carp(ianus) max(imus), Armen(icus) max(imus), Medic(us) max(imus), Adiab(en)ic(us) max(imus)....

The Emperor Caesar Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletian, dutiful, blessed, unconquered Augustus, chief priest of the Roman state religion, conqueror of the Germans 6 times, conqueror of the Sarmatians 4 times, conqueror of the Persians 2 times, conqueror of the Britons, conqueror of the Carpi, conqueror of the Armenians, conqueror of the Medes, conqueror of the Adiabeni....⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Sandra Menssen and Thomas Sullivan, “Revelation and Scripture” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, 30–45.

⁷⁸ According to Timothy D. Barnes, three of the many known copies of the text preserve the heading: (1) the copy from Egypt transcribed by I. Mommsen, (2) the copy from Aphrodisias published by K.T. Erism and J. Reynolds, and (3) the copy from Ptolemais, published by G. Caputo and R.G. Goodchild. (See *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982], 18). In this chapter, the original Latin text of the Edict is from the Bibliotheca Augustana, at https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost04/Diocletianus/dio_ep_i.html. The English translation of the Edict is by Antony Kropff, in “An English translation of the Edict on Maximum Prices, also known as the Price Edict of Diocletian.” <https://kark.uib.no/antikk/dias/priceedict.pdf>.

Introductions of the other three monarchs follow the same template. The four paragraphs, taken as a whole, appear like a semi-theogony, a spectrum of the guardians of Romans who hold the authority to explain the Edict, to oversee the issuing of the Edict, and to verify whether the Edict is obeyed. This made the introductions much more than lists of official titles. They were more like the presupposition for the content in the edict, which offered the sound basis of a belief system for the claims of the text that followed.

The text then moves on to a broad picture of the tranquil world. The rulers explicitly present themselves as supported by divine power, endowing themselves with the sacred obligation of keeping the eternal peace. This disclosing of obligation leads to the first step of the revelation: the revealing of the Tetrarchs' supernatural ability to identify the essence of human nature. The rulers claim that it is human greed that has caused the current problems, and it is again human greed that constantly threatens the overall peace:

quibus nullo sibi fine proposito ardet avaritia desaeuens....quaedam religio apud inprobos et inmodestos existimatur in lacerandis fortunis omnium necessitate potius quam voluntate destitui.

Greed raves and burns and sets no limit on itself....Unprincipled and licentious persons think greed has a certain sort of obligation (greed that swells and roils with rapid fires), in ripping up the fortunes of all, to lose the need rather than the will to continue.

The revelatory logic starts to operate as the Tetrarchs show their exceptional wisdom of detecting the intrinsic danger embedded in human lives, which enables them to save people from such threats. Here a strategy is used to win support from readers: setting a clear boundary between those greedy ones and "us," i.e., the Tetrarchs and their audience.

This makes the “protector–protected” relationship between the rulers and the audience a natural thing, because the existence of external evils makes the protection necessary.

Then there comes the second step of the revelation: revealing the power of the Tetrarchic emperors to change the reality.

quamvis difficile sit toto orbe avaritiam saevientem speciali argumento vel facto potius revelari, iustior tamen intellegatur remedii constitutio, cum intemperatissimi homines mentium suarum indomitas cupid[ines] natione quadam et notis cogentur agnoscere.

Although it is difficult to unmask the greed raging in the whole world, by special reasoning or rather act, nevertheless our establishment of remedy may be thought more just, since by some description and marks very immoderate men will be forced to recognize the ungoverned desires of their own minds.

To listen to the rulers is to have oneself be saved by them. This makes the act of reading the Edict a salvific encounter: though the names of traditional Greco-Roman gods do not appear in the text, their roles are played by the monarchic protectors and thus obtain an “as-if” form of being.

This revelatory logic, to a large extent, inspired Constantine. He and his associates also noticed some pitfalls in the Tetrarch theology: imperial rulers themselves cannot be those who are revealed, as they are hardly immune to human weaknesses. Lactantius questioned the validity of Diocletian’s points, arguing that he himself was a greedy one and his greed led to the birth and failure of the Edict.⁷⁹ Monotheism, in which only one supreme god is worshipped and human rulers are treated as his spokesmen, would be a solution to such logical issues.

⁷⁹ Simon Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government, AD 284–324* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 209.

2) Tangible. Historians have offered plenty of discussion on how the Tetrarchs and rulers of the Constantinian dynasty depended on physical presentations and representations to make their power perceivable to the regular population. Much of such scholarship has hinted that an important contribution of rulers in the era under discussion was their combining of “tangible” and “omnipresent” in exhibiting authority: through imperial tours, royal residences, state art, and other programs enhancing the visibility of the individual monarch, the notion of cultural unity was largely personified and further propagated.⁸⁰ In particular, rulers’ change of principal residences and their movements around the state allowed people from different parts of the empire to see and approach them in person. Table 5 is a simplified overview of the main residences and movements of Roman emperors between the 280s and 350s, based on the summary of Timothy D. Barnes.⁸¹

Ruler	Principal Residence	Major Attested Movements
Diocletian	Sirmium Nicomedia Syria and Egypt Antioch	Visits Italy (285) Visits Adrianople, Emesa, Laodicea (290) Visits Heraclea, Tzirallum, Beroea, Philippopolis (293) Visits Viminacium, Cuppae, Ratiaria, Cebrium, and so forth (294) Visits Oxyrhynchus and travels up the

⁸⁰ Jas Elsner argued that the Roman state art was largely redefined in the age of Constantine. See Elsner, “Perspectives in Art” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 255–77.

⁸¹ For details about these residences and movements, see Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 49–87.

		Nile (298)
Maximian	Trier Milan and Aduleia Carthage	Visits Rome (289/290) Visits Lugdunum (290, 293)
Constantius	Trier	Visits Italy (295)
Galerius	Antioch Thessalonica Serдика	Visits Damascus (295) Meets Diocletian at Nisibis (299)
Maximinus	Antioch Caesarea Nicomedia	Meets Licinius at the Bosphorus (311) Visits Stratonicia in Caria (312)
Constantine	Trier Sirmium Nicomedia Constantinople	Visits Britain (307, 310, 313) Visits Autun (310) Present at the Council of Arles (314) Visits Antioch (324) Visits Thessalonica (336) Visits Aquae and Helenopolis (337)
Licinius	Sirmium Nicomedia	Visits Italy (313)
Crispus	Trier	At Serдика (321) At Sirmium (324)
Constantinus	Trier	At Cologne (332) At Pannonia (337)
Constantius	Antioch	Travels to Nicomedia (337) At Viminacium (337)
Constans	Milan Naissus	At Aquileia (337) At Pannonia (337)

Table 5. Change of imperial residence, and rulers' movements to different areas, during the Tetarchy and Constantinian dynasty.

According to the table, Diocletian and Constantine were most interested in intentionally visiting somewhere other than their residential areas. Scholars have noticed the importance of these imperial visits as chances for rulers to be welcomed in grand ceremonies, which attracted people who “would flock from miles around to see the

imperial train pass by.”⁸² But some differences between the two emperors are less often mentioned. Diocletian showed interest in the frontier regions of the empire, while Constantine paid more attention to cities where resources, population, and voices were gathered or had the potential to be gathered. This implied the two monarch’s distinct understandings of the function of imperial visits. For Diocletian, who always cared about state defense, making himself visible and approachable in the border regions was apparently for military purposes. I personally do not think he was welcomed in the same way as in more prosperous, interior cities, when he entered those areas close to external threats (e.g., Emesa and Laodicea, which were near the Eastern boundary). And, for safety reasons, the arrival of the emperor in those areas might have been kept secret, and most residents in those regions probably even had no idea that he was there. Taking all this into account, I would argue that his presence in those distant, marginal areas happened in a small circle, with himself surrounded by only a few inner officials and generals.

But for Constantine, the activity of having himself presented was usually related to the aim of reorganizing local and central resources to restore urban areas damaged in the third-century crisis.⁸³ Thus it was a basic need for him to get to know a variety of the public in the local area, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the situation there.

According to Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, Constantine also wanted to mobilize the church

⁸² Simon Corcoran, “Diocletian” in *Lives of the Caesars*, ed. Anthony A. Barrett (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), 228–54.

⁸³ See Elizabeth Digeser, “Crisis as Opportunity: Urban Renewal and Christianisation in Constantine’s Gaul,” *RRE* 5 (2019): 103–24.

power in regions like Autun to consolidate his reign, so he needed to show himself to important churchmen—like Reticus (d. 334)—when visiting an area,⁸⁴ not solely for the aim of showing up but for also engaging in real negotiations and transactions with them. Therefore, for both Diocletian and Constantine, imperial presence was not always a “royal reward” bestowed by the monarch to local people but a chance to discuss real issues of military, politics, and economy. For Constantine in particular, who even took the occasion of an imperial visit to learn of opportunities for investing in local projects, his intention was apparently not limited to creating an imperial profile but was more connected to the actual need for assessing the development potential of a specific regional society and the capability of certain elite groups there.

III. Ritual Conventions as Meta-Discursive Master (I)—QXY Commemorative Stelae: The Copiable Discourse of Local “Truth Makers”

Considering the abstractness of the idea of “cultural unity” and the general lack of workable apparatuses to explain this idea to local society, it is surprising that the acceptance of this concept in the QXY and Gallic provinces was relatively wide. Textual products from the two regions implied certain levels of familiarity with imperial discourses, which should be attributed to the bonds between local elite institutions and the state bureaucratic system, as discussed in Chapter Two.

But local elites had never been absolutely loyal to the court. In her study of the Qing dynasty, Zhang Ting argues that the ruling class intentionally limited their methods

⁸⁴ Ibid., 116.

of disseminating information to local society, based on the fear that good legal knowledge would lead people to manipulate and abuse the law.⁸⁵ Similar concerns might have arisen in early periods as well. If literate groups had enough knowledge about the mechanisms through which the imperial messages were spread, they would have imitated what the government did to fulfill their self-interest. Unfortunately for the imperial government, some of these “myths of knowledge dissemination” were decoded by QXY and Gallic learned men. Ritual, because of its reliance on conventions agreed upon by the official powers, enabled these people to mask their own agendas.⁸⁶ In his essay “Signature Event Context” (1971), Jacques Derrida argues that the core of conventionality is iterability, which means that a writing act is repeatable and copiable in varying contexts:

In order for my “written communication” to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general. My communication must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the receiver or of any empirically

⁸⁵ See Zhang Ting, *Circulating the Code: Print Media and Legal Knowledge in Qing China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020), 8.

⁸⁶ For the importance of convention to ritual, Roy A. Rappaport explains: “A ritual which has never been performed before may seem to those present not so much a ritual as a charade.” See *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 32. Derrida treated “convention” as synonymous to the context of communication: “A *conventional context*—produced by a kind of consensus that is implicit but structurally vague—seems to prescribe that one propose ‘communications’ concerning communication, communications in a discursive form, colloquial communications, oral communications destined to be listened to, and to engage or to pursue dialogues within the horizon of an intelligibility and truth that is meaningful, such that ultimately general agreement may, in principle, be attained. These communications are supposed to confine themselves to the element of a determinate, ‘natural’ language, here designated as French, which commands certain very particular uses of the word communication.” See Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 2.

determinable collectivity of receivers. Such iterability structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved.⁸⁷

If a text can be copied from one circumstance to another, the context of textual-production would become meaningless.⁸⁸ Ritual conventions, as a system of highly organized practices and fixed discursive forms derived from history, served as a type of force that could erase contexts, which made textual-producing activities predictable. Ritual activities also offered a channel through which the imperial dream of “cultural unity” could be interpreted, which was easily accessible to local populations.

This section looks into how ritual conventions functioned as a meta-discursive master in the QXY region. The relevant primary sources are commemorative stelae from the local area, dated to the period of Emperors Zhang, He, An, and Shun. These texts tell a story about how information in ritual texts, by repeating itself, took the form of patternized discourse that supported the imperial proclamation of “cultural unity,” while blending such discourse with a new concept of “homogeneity within local groupings.”

(I) Materials

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 7.

⁸⁸ Alexei Yurchak describes this process as a performative shift, in his research on Lenin as a symbol in Soviet society. This process was similar to a more general type of discursive transformation, when under certain conditions discourse (political, religious, scientific, etc.) may become increasingly autonomous and citational, resulting in the pressure to reproduce its form intact without paying as much attention to what this form was originally designed to mean. See Yurchak, “The Canon and the Mushroom: Lenin, Sacredness, and Soviet Collapse,” *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no. 2 (2017): 165–98.

It was during Han times that stelae evolved into stone slabs of standardized shape and size, and became a main vehicle for ritual inscriptions.⁸⁹ Frankly speaking, the golden age of the QXY stelae had not arrived until the late 140s, so the total amount of materials under discussion here is not large. Also, for the period between the 70s and 140s, stele texts from the QXY region are short and simple, while those from other areas like central and western Henan, Shaanxi, and Sichuan are usually longer (over 100 characters) and complicated in their rhetorical devices.⁹⁰ But the amount of QXY stele materials is relatively larger. In the four-volume *Hanbei quanji* 漢碑全集 (Complete Compilation of the Han Stelae) edited by Henan Meishu Chubanshe, 21 of the total of 57 commemorative stelae from the period under discussion are from the Qing, Xu, or Yan provinces. Figure 8 shows the distribution of such materials in different regions.

⁸⁹ Dorothy C. Wong, *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2004), 25.

⁹⁰ Many inscriptions from Henan and Shaanxi were dedicated to central elites or imperial relatives, such as “Stele for Yuan An” 司徒袁安碑 (dated to 92 CE) discovered in Yanshi 偃師, Henan. This largely explains why such texts are much longer than most QXY stelae. Some stelae from the Sichuan area are story-telling-oriented, recalling an entire event about how certain public architecture had been constructed. This also explains why some of such inscriptions are long.

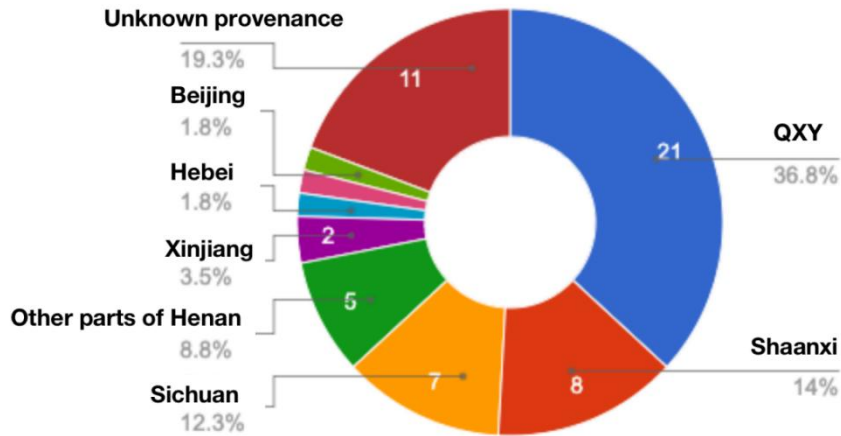


Fig. 8. Distribution of commemorative stelae in different regions, 70s to 140s CE. Based on *Hanbei quanji*.

The extant QXY commemorative stelae can be divided into two categories:

1) The simple description of the cause of erecting the stelae, which constitutes a series of repeatable, semantic blocks that introduce some basic information of the dedicatee (name, age, relationship with the sponsor, etc.). Most of these short inscriptions were sponsored by adult children for their deceased parents, to express filial piety.

2) The relatively lengthy articulation of why the dedicatee should be commemorated, which contains delineations of the dedicatee’s social status and personality traits. These longer inscriptions were often sponsored by friends or colleagues of the dedicatee, who was an official or a reputable individual.

Table 6 shows the discovery contexts and lengths of the QXY stelae collected in the *Hanbei quanji*. Not all of them were scientifically discovered. The “Stele of Mr. Jing, Chancellor of Beihai” 北海相景君銘 (143 CE), for instance, has unclear provenance but

was documented in the *Ji gulu* 集古錄, *Jinshi lu* 金石錄, *Lishi* 隸釋, *Jinxie linlang* 金薤琳琅, *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編, and some other compilations of epigraphy from the Song and post-Song periods. Due to their frequent appearance in those compilations and their semantic resemblance to excavated stelae, I will examine in particular three such pieces, to supplement my discussion of shorter stele texts: the above mentioned stele for the Chancellor of Beihai, the inscription titled “Stele of Qi Bo Zhuo” 戚伯著碑 (ca. 87 CE) in the *Jinshi lu* and *Quan Hou Han wen*, and the “Inscription on the Pillar-Gate for Mr. Jing, Inspector of Tan” 郟令景君闕銘 (ca. 117 CE) recorded in the *Jinshi lu* and *Lishi*.

Reign of Emperors	Title in the <i>Hanbei quanji</i>	Date	Scientifically excavated or not	Location of discovery/ excavation	Number of characters
Emperor Zhang (75-88)	司馬長元墓石題記	81 CE	No (discovered during Qing dynasty)	Wendeng 文登, Shandong	22
	張文思為父造石闕題記	83 CE	Yes	Feicheng 肥城, Shandong	26
	孫仲陽為父建石闕題記	85 CE	Yes	Junan 莒南, Shandong	31
	徐州銅山元和三年畫像石題記	86 CE	Yes	Tongshan 銅山, Jiangsu	28
	南武陽皇聖卿闕題記	86 CE	No (preserved in Pingyi before 1932)	Pingyi 平邑, Shandong	18
	南武陽功曹闕銘記	87 CE	No (preserved in Pingyi before 1932)	Pingyi, Shandong	more than 45
Emperor He (88-106)	路公食堂畫像石題記	89 CE	No	Unclear, preserved in Jinan 濟南	38
	滕州永元十年畫像石題記	98 CE	Yes	Tengxian 滕縣, Shandong	64

	濟寧任城王墓黃腸石	Unclear (after 101 CE)	Yes	Jining 濟寧, Shandong	58 (mostly the names of individuals)
	諸掾造冢刻石	101 CE	Yes	Yishui 沂水, Shandong	27
	兗州刺史洛陽令王稚子闕	105 CE	No (discovered during Qing dynasty)	Only rubbings exist	7
Emperors Shang and An (106-125)	延平元年刻石	106 CE	No	Unclear, preserved in Xuzhou 徐州	53
	陽三老堂畫像石題記	106 CE	Yes	Qufu 曲阜, Shandong	72
	都官是吾殘碑	125 CE	No (discovered during Qing dynasty)	Zhucheng 諸城, Shandong	more than 45
Emperor Shun (125-144)	永建五年食堂畫像石題記	130 CE	No (discovered during Qing dynasty)	Jining, Shandong	more than 30
	陽嘉殘碑	133 CE	No (discovered during Qing dynasty)	Qufu, Shandong	body text: 92, names of individuals: more than 60
	微山永和元年食堂畫像石題記	136 CE	Yes	Weishan 微山, Shandong	39
	微山永和二年畫像石題記	137 CE	Yes	Weishan, Shandong	71
	微山桓彝食堂畫像石題記	141 CE	Yes	Weishan, Shandong	89
	北海相景君銘	143 CE	No (discovered before Song dynasty)	Unclear, preserved in Jining	body text: 561
	文叔陽食堂畫像石題記	144 CE	No (discovered in Qing dynasty)	Yutai 魚臺, Shandong	79

Table 6. Discovery contexts and lengths of QXY stelae, 70s to 140s CE. Based on *Hanbei quanji*.

(II) Analysis

For the QXY stelae produced under the reign of Emperors Zhang, He, An, and Shun, most of them were of the first category mentioned above, that is, short inscriptions for children to commemorate their parents by expressing filial piety. Such texts showed persistent adherence to funerary settings. Scholars have examined the Confucian canon *Liji* 禮記 that interpreted the close relationship between inscriptions (*ming* 銘) and banners that were supposed to be used in the underworld (*mingjing* 明旌) to differentiate a specific individual from other deceased ones.⁹¹ Few researchers, however, have noted how the Eastern Han scholar Zheng Xuan has explained this relationship:

案《司常》云：‘王建大常，諸侯建旂，孤卿建旒，大夫士建物。’則銘旌亦然。
92

Quotation from the “Sichang” chapter: ‘Kings used *taichang* (viz., banners used when offering sacrifice to Heaven). The Various Lords used *qi* (viz., banners decorated with bells and images of dragons). Ministers used *zhan* (viz., banners with bent handles). Gentlemen and lower officials used other materials [in place of these].’ Therefore *mingjing* is used in the same way.

⁹¹ The “Tan Gong Xia” 檀弓下 chapter of the *Liji* says: “‘Ming’ means banners used in the underworld. Because the dead are hard to distinguish, banners have been used to identify [each of them]. Because [the living] love them, the deceased have been recorded. Because [the living] respect them, methods have been exhausted [for commemorating them]” 銘，明旌也，以死者為不可別已，故以其旗識之。愛之，斯錄之矣。敬之，斯盡其道焉耳。Here “*ming*” 銘 is exactly the same as “*jing*” 旌 (banners used in the underground realm).

⁹² “Tan Gong Xia disi” 檀弓下第四. Zheng Xuan, *Liji zhengyi* 禮記正義, Vol. 9. Comm. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe, 1999), 267.

By quoting the *Zhouli* 周禮 text, Zheng Xuan points out the copiable nature of *mingjing*. The use of banners in funerary conventions, traditionally among rulers and high officials, could be legally imitated by lower ranking elites in their own mortuary ritual. This justification of copying made it possible for local learned men to mimic the ritual practices of privileged ones. Such people's familiarity with the *Zhouli* and other canons also resulted in their wide acceptance of the tradition of using inscribed stelae, as well as the high level of resemblance among the discourses in their inscriptions.⁹³ Below are some examples from the QXY area:

建初八年八月成孝子張文思哭父而禮石直三千王次作勿敗□ (張文思為父造石闕題記, 83 CE)⁹⁴

In the eighth month of the eighth year of Jianchu reign period, the filial son Zhang Wensi cried for his father, and carried out the rituals according to the rules of decorum. The value of the stone is [for the pillar-gates] is 3,000 cash. Wang Ci made [this]. Do not ruin it.

元和二年正月六日孫仲陽仲升父物故行[喪][如]禮作石闕價直萬五千 (孫仲陽為父建石闕題記, 85 CE)⁹⁵

On the sixth day of the first month of the Yuanhe reign period, Sun Zhongyang and Zhongsheng's father died. [The filial sons] performed [a funerary ritual] according the rules of decorum, and made this stone pillar-gate, the value of which is 15,000 coins.

⁹³ Another reason for the popularity of these similar stelae has been explained by Kenneth E. Braishier, who argues that the habit of recitation in learning played important roles. See Braishier, *Public Memory in Early China* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 10.

⁹⁴ *HBQJ*, 143.

⁹⁵ *HBQJ*, 147.

元和三年三月七日三十子侯世子豪行三年如禮治冢石室直萬五千 (徐州銅山元和三年畫像石題記, 86 CE)⁹⁶

On the seventh day of the third month, in the third year of Yuanhe reign period, heir of the Marquis of Sanshizi, Hao, conducted three years of mourning according to [the principle of] ritual decorum and built this tomb with stone offering chamber, with a value of 15,000 cash.

永元十三年二月廿九日諸掾造冢嗣子□□□始驕□□□康公寧 (諸掾造冢刻石, 101 CE)⁹⁷

On the twenty-ninth day of the second month in the thirteenth year of the Yongyuan reign period, the various Commandery Clerks constructed this tomb, the heir.... at first, pride.... *kangong* (Duke of Kang?) appeased....

Information about time, personages and their behaviors, and ritual processes had been copied from one context to another, shown as a series of patternized discourses like “in the X (title of reign + number) year, X month, X day” X 年 X 月 X 日, “[performed] according to the rules of ritual decorum” 如禮, “the worth [of the stone inscription] is” 直, and so forth. These formulaic components could certainly be attributed to factors unrelated to literacy, for instance, to common rules followed by the craftsmen who produced such inscriptions, or to the preferences of merchants who knew well about the need of market.⁹⁸ But the status and demands of the sponsors/users of the stelae might have played some kind of roles as well. These people should have, at least, been able to read the regular expressions in ritual writings, for they needed to check ritual tools before applying them. Also, although the high prices indicated on the stelae were not always real, as the stone slabs themselves were often more than 200 cm high and required special

⁹⁶ *HBQJ*, 154.

⁹⁷ *HBQJ*, 239.

⁹⁸ For the roles of craftsmen in the production of Han inscriptions, see Anthony Barbieri-Low, “The Organization of Imperial Workshops during the Han Dynasty” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2001): 53–55.

skills to polish and carve, they could not be afforded by the impoverished. In other words, with a certain amount of wealth, some level of literacy, and maybe some specific types of official affiliations, sponsors or users of such stelae were members of local elite groups or at least property owners, who were subject to certain behavioral codes, educational standards, and habits in expression. Miranda Brown has already pointed out these people's adherence to state values, which was reflected through their declaration of mourning obligations.⁹⁹ The conception of "cultural unity" revealed itself through the shared language and purposes of such materials, as well as the common roots of these textual products in Confucian canons.

The idea of unity was also reflected in the visual components accompanied by the inscriptions, which were patternized as well. Four cases in Table 3 were originally part of the ornamentation in ancestral offering shrines called *xiangtang* 飨堂 (lit., hall for offering; written as 食堂), which provided visible and ritual spaces as the backdrop for textual expression. These spaces were of relatively formalized styles, including walls on three sides, the roof, columns, and so forth.¹⁰⁰ (See fig. 9.) Some stelae had both texts and reliefs, with writings inscribed on the sides or margins of the stone slabs while

⁹⁹ For Brown's discussion of filial piety and its representation in stele materials, see *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Xi Wenqian 郗文倩 suggested that "*xiangtang*" is synonymous to "*shishi*" 石室 (lit., stone rooms) and "*shitang*" 石堂 (lit., stone halls), in the context of Eastern Han funerals. See "Handai citang tiji: yizhong duli de sangzang wenti" 漢代祠堂題記：一種獨立的喪葬文體, *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 中山大學學報 (社會科學版) 63, no 3 (2023): 68–79. According to Xin Lixiang 信立祥, *xiangtang/shitang* could be either above-the-ground or underground, as part of the tomb space. See Xin, *Handai huaxiangshi zonghe yanjiu* 漢代畫像石綜合研究 (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 2000), 322–23.

images appeared on the front, or at the center. Themes of these images included banquets with music and dancers, scenes of deities, offerings to the tomb occupants themselves, and so forth.

In the case of the stone carving for Sun Zhongyang's 孫仲陽 father, the four registers of images—including scenes of dancing, music performances, acrobats, and horse riding—show the typical, luxurious life of noblemen. (See fig. 10.) We have no idea about the actual social position of the dedicatee, but his family's respect for the Han noble aesthetics implied a general recognition of the unified high culture of the empire. The imitation of aristocratic symbols across different ranks indicated a shared understanding of what an appropriate funeral should be: it must be compatible with the officially acknowledged history and tradition of the empire.

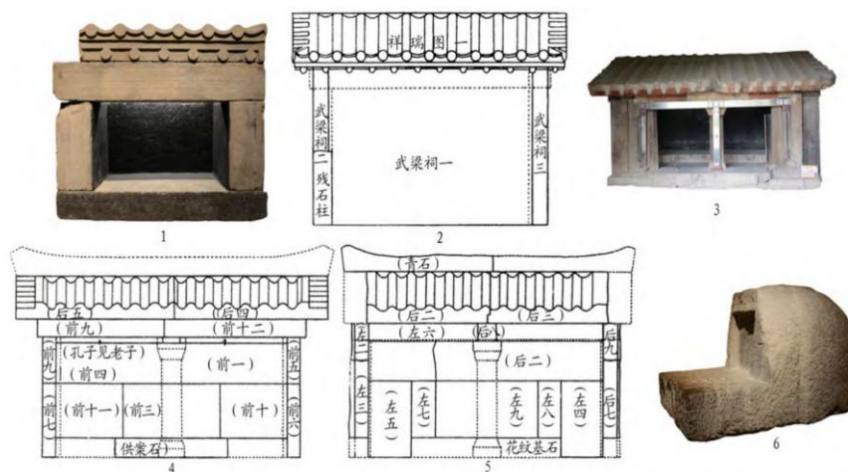


Fig. 9. Some basic patterns of shrines in Eastern Han China. Image from Wang Chuanming 王傳明, “Wanbei diqu Dong Han baogushi citang yanjiu” 皖北地區東漢抱鼓石祠堂研究, *Dongnan wenhua* 東南文化 4 (2023): 76-91.



Fig. 10. Front and right sides of the stela that carries “Inscription on Sun Zhongyang’s Construction of a Stone Gate for His Father” 孫仲陽為父建石闕題記, 85 CE. The inscription is on the right side of the stone slab. Shandong Provincial Museum. Photos by Li Xiang.

But ritual conventions did not merely require strict obedience to classical doctrines. Scholars like Clifford Geertz have identified the generative force underlying ritual performance, a specific form of agency whose emergence cannot be predicted beforehand.¹⁰¹ This agency prevents ritual from “(being) described as particularly thoughtless action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic.”¹⁰² It grew from many components of a ritual that together constituted a logical structure beyond reality. In this

¹⁰¹ For related discussions, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 112.

¹⁰² Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

case, such agency helped the sponsors and users of stelae disguise any of their pursuits that did not perfectly match the imperial agendas of cultural unity. It also left room for such people to claim their own standards of true knowledge.

The semantic sequence of textual components, that is, the recurring order of words, phrases, or sentences that shows “a series of meaning elements that can be demonstrated to occur regularly,”¹⁰³ indicates how this agency came into effect. Such sequences exhibit how composers of stele texts, under the guise of conforming to invariant ritual traditions, engaged in producing new messages and rules. These sequences were useful tools for local elites’ self-expression, as they provided room for “some logically necessary or deliberate variation of conventions” in ritual.¹⁰⁴ In stele texts, identifiers of sequences often took clearly recognizable forms, e.g., markers of time change, location change, development of one’s ability, or transformations of one’s identity; this enabled composers of such writings to discover the sequencing units in a text and transplant them to another piece of writing.

This emphasis on semantic sequences came hand in hand with the development of Han stelae. For the QXY area, the *fengshan* 封禪 ceremony (rendered by scholars as “Sacrifice for Heaven and Earth”) at Mount Tai might have been at least partly responsible for the flourishing of inscribed stelae among local populations. In 56 CE,

¹⁰³ Susan Hunston, “Starting with the Small Words: Patterns, Lexis and Semantic Sequences,” *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 13, no. 3 (2008): 271–95; Davide Mazzi, “Semantic Sequences and the Pragmatics of Medical Research Article Writing,” *IRIS Unimore* 203 (2015): 353–68.

¹⁰⁴ Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 36.

Emperor Guangwu was persuaded by a memorial submitted by Ren Mo 任末 and Cao Yuan 曹元, and determined that he would hold a ceremony to commemorate his political success.¹⁰⁵ The memorial by Ren and Cao provided the framework for the formal stele inscription for the imperial ritual, with both texts demonstrating a *chenwei* 讖緯 ideology that portents for the rise of someone widely exist in natural and sociocultural domains. Emperor Guangwu’s inscription included four parts that together built a logical chain matching the narrative order in the memorial.¹⁰⁶ Table 7 shows the coupled semantic sequences in both texts, which verifies that Emperor Guangwu’s stele copied the structure of the memorial. Narrative blocks that play the same role are marked with the same type of lines (see red text).

Types of semantic sequences	The original texts	
	Memorial by Ren and Cao	The Stele for Emperor Guangwu
<p><i>Tracing back to ancestors</i> (<i>Semantic sequence A</i>): <u>Ruler/lineage in the past + the passing down of their political heritage + the mission of their successors</u> To situate the</p>	<p>“<u>The lineage of Yin had never perished</u>; someone from the masses <u>inherited it</u>. The High Emperor (King Wen of Zhou) labored for a long time, which was like making a mid-dynastic revival. Like King Wu of Zhou <u>inherited the Mandate of Heaven from his</u></p>	<p>“<u>In the past, Emperor Yao was intelligent, wise, heedful, and considerate. He passed down [his position] to Shun, a regular man, [therefore] his descendants could master the secret [of his success].</u>” 昔在帝堯，聰明密微，讓與舜庶，後裔握機</p>

¹⁰⁵ The memorial was originally recorded in the “Jiaosi zhi” 郊祀志 of the *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢紀. Yan Kejun 嚴可均 recorded the text in the *QHHW* vol. 29, titling it “Fengshan yi” 封禪議.

¹⁰⁶ For Emperor Guangwu’s inscription, see *HHS* 101. 3166.

<p>emergence of the addressee within the broader backdrop of history, with a sense of continuity; Indicating that events about the addressee will be further explored in the text</p>	<p>father....Your Highness...had the mission of reviving [the legacy of] your ancestors.” 殷統未絕，黎庶繼命。高宗久勞，猶為中興。武王因父受命之列....陛下...興復祖宗。</p>	
<p><i>Contributions to political unification (sequence B):</i> <u>Gather people + initiate reforms among them</u> To emphasize the basic methods the addressee used that made him successful; To help readers relate the methods used by the addressee with the purpose underlying in his choice</p>	<p>“<u>United</u> [all people] under Heaven, <u>making them prepared</u> [for reforms]” 集就天下</p>	<p>“The sacred Heaven looked upon the Emperor with favor, [so he] obtained mandate to revive [the empire] as an ordinary individual, <u>started his martial career</u> in the year of twenty-eight, and <u>attacked</u> [subversive powers]. It took over a decade for those people with crimes to obtain what they deserved. The masses <u>got to reside</u> in their own land and <u>dwelt peacefully</u> in their own houses. Documents used <u>the same</u> language, chariots ran on paths of <u>the same</u> widths, and people followed <u>same</u> values.” 皇天矚顧皇帝，以匹庶受命中興，年二十八載興兵，以次誅討，十有餘年，罪人斯得。黎庶得居爾田，安爾宅。書同文，車同軌，人同倫</p>
<p><i>Protection of peoples and community (sequence C):</i> <u>Emphasis on the intactness of territory + projects to consolidate this intactness + general evaluation of achievements</u> To illuminate the consequence of using</p>	<p>“<u>[All territory] surrounded by the sea was [perfectly] managed and peaceful</u>. [His] <u>accomplishments and virtuous are even more glorious than that of the King Wen or King Wu of Zhou.</u>” 海內治平，功德盛於高宗武王</p>	<p>“<u>All those areas</u> where ships and chariots could go and the footsteps of men could reach, offered tributary goods, <u>without any exceptions</u>. [He] <u>built [divine architecture like] Mingtang, Biyong, Lingtai, and created educational institutions</u>. [He] visits his peoples in person, treats deities with reverence, takes care of and protected senior ones, manages</p>

<p>the addressee's methods; To imply that more features of the addressee's contribution will be introduced</p>		<p>the mass by following ancient teachings; <u>he is intelligent, rational, wise, and wide-minded.</u> 舟輿<u>所通</u>，人跡<u>所至</u>，靡不貢職。建明堂，立辟雍，起靈臺，設庠序。親巡黎元，恭肅神祇，惠恤耆老，理庶遵古，聰允明恕</p>
<p><i>Immediate reasons for erecting the stele (sequence D):</i> <u>Tell the fact that the ritual was/would be held + the immediate aim of the ritual</u> To point out the cause-effect relationship between the text and the upcoming/ongoing ritual</p>	<p><u>“It is better to hold the fengshan ceremony, to pray for blessings on behalf of the common people”</u> 宜封禪為百姓祈福</p>	<p><u>“[He] held fengshan ceremony at the back of the hill Liangfu, to receive divine blessings, for [the good of] the masses. [His virtue] will exist in the universe forever, and will be passed down to later generations.”</u> 禪於梁陰，以承靈瑞，以為兆民，永茲一字，垂於後昆</p>

Table 7. Similar semantic sequences in the memorial submitted by Ren Mo and Cao Yuan and the stele for Emperor Guangwu.

Here we see traces of the previously mentioned equation: “truthful” is equivalent to “politically successful” and “omnipresent.” Using a typical *chenwei* discourse, writers of the texts told such a story: the accomplishments of Emperor Guangwu, and the universal rule he established, together made the foundation of his regime quite certain and unquestionable. A series of semantic sequences (A, B, C, D in the table above) was used to illustrate how this *chenwei* philosophy extended itself through an individual’s life story, with each of the sequences consisting of several narrative blocks that oriented readers to different steps of “verifying” the rationality of Guangwu’s reign. As a consequence there

appeared a flow of textual information akin to the proceeding of the real ceremony: the mood expressed by the writer/speaker rose to increasingly higher levels, step by step, which facilitated the arrival at the final conclusion that all praise for the addressee is justifiable.

As in the case of the memorial, packaging the whole story of the addressee into different semantic sequences guaranteed the readability of the stele text. Readers of the Guangwu stele were directed from one topic to another, and ultimately came to build a holistic image about the emperor. Authors of the text not only set an “aim of understanding” for readers to reach but also applied a chain of theme clusters to enable readers’ fast and manageable synthesis of the textual messages. They moved from the past (A) to the present (B and C), shifted from abstract notions (A) to real social domains (B and C), and finally convinced readers that to hold a grand ceremony under the name of the addressee was reasonable in the sense of both idea and practice (D).

This kind of discursive structure flourished in the QXY area after only a few decades. Semantic sequences were mostly used in stele texts dedicated to a local official or reputable man who was commemorated for virtues and achievements. Such sequences, with their simple forms, appeared to be highly copiable. Some of them were borrowed from earlier royal writings, while others were inventions among the locals. Three local stelae, “Stele of Qi Bo Zhuo” (hereafter Q), “Inscription on the Stone Gate for Mr. Jing, Inspector of Tan” (hereafter J1), and “Stele of Mr. Jing, Chancellor of Beihai” (hereafter J2), can help to demonstrate this point.

Table 8 shows the semantic sequencers identifiable in these stelae. Narrative

blocks that played the same role are marked with the same type of lines.

Semantic sequences	Emperor Guangwu's Stele	Stele of Qi Bo Zhuo (Q) 戚伯著碑	Inscription for Mr. Jing, Inspector of Tan (J1) 郟令景君闕銘	Stele of Mr. Jing, Chancellor of Beihai (J2) 北海相景君碑
Tracing back to ancestors <u>Lineage in the past + the passing down of their heritage + the mission of their successors</u>	昔在帝堯，聰明密微，讓與舜庶，後裔握機	漢□□□之□□ <u>王舅，是時寵特進朝侯大僕光祿侍中監登持節□□□笏充列王室，遇謗於呂，委位捐爾，調官沛土。考卜罔營，安措東山。子孫孝弟篤學，應鄉舉止選，位至屬都尉、京兆府丞、勃海太守，功德渙彰。伯著，勃海君玄孫，季景長子也</u>	惟元初四年三月丙戌，郟令景君卒。以五季二月□□□序君存時，恬然無欲，樂道安貧，信而好古，非法不言，治歐陽尚書傳。 <u>祖父河南尹，父步兵校尉。</u>	
Professions within the unified regime <u>Gather people + initiate reforms among them + political affiliation</u>	皇天睠顧皇帝，以匹庶受命中興，年二十八載興兵，以次誅討，十有余年，罪人斯得。黎庶得居爾田，安爾宅。書同文，車同軌，人同倫	二七府召	□司聘請流化下邳，未極考績，續毋□之子無隨沒。俯就禮畢， <u>故府復請司空大常博士並舉高經，君為其元</u>	遵考孝謁， <u>假階司農</u> 。流德元城，興利惠民。強銜改節，微弱蒙恩。咸立澤宣，化行如神。 <u>帝嘉厥功，授以符命。守郡益州，路遐攀親。躬作遜讓，夙宵朝廷。建策忠讜，辨秩東衍。璽追嘉錫，據北</u>

				<u>海相。</u>
Behavioral patterns <u>Respect of hierarchy and ritual principles</u> <u>+ self-restriction and pure heart</u> <u>+ intellectual talent</u>		<u>禮性仁知，約身學事，七略胥通，筆墨敏捷，儀容茂盛</u>	<u>恬然无欲，乐道安貧，信而好古，非法不言，治欧阳尚书传</u>	<u>受質自天。孝弟淵懿，帥禮蹈仁。根道核藝，抱淑守真。白白清才，剋己治身。寔揉寔剛，乃武乃文</u>
Protection of people and community <u>Civilize the public + eliminate local evils</u>	<u>舟輿所通，人跡所至，靡不貢職。建明堂，立辟雍，起靈臺，設庠序。親巡黎元，恭肅神祇，惠恤耆老，理庶遵古，聽允明恕</u>		<u>□司聘請流化下邳...假涂邾□，奸邪洗心</u>	<u>流德元城，興利惠民。強銜改節，微弱蒙恩。威立澤宣，化行如神...部城十九，鄰邦歸向。分明好惡，先以敬讓。殘偽易心，輕黠逾竟。鴟梟不鳴，分子還養。元元鰥□□，蒙右以寧</u>
Social relations <u>The reaction of students and fellows to the death of the dedicatee + the reaction of other local people to his death</u>			<u>諸生服義百有余人，乃□屯石紀□。行□。見□。懷德聞自嘆吟，千秋萬世</u>	<u>故吏諸生相與論曰...民□思慕，遠近搔首。農夫醒耒，商人空市。隨輿飲淚。奈何朝廷，奪我慈父</u>

Table 8. Comparisons between the Guangwu stele and three QXY stelae with regard to their semantic sequences.

Four important aspects can be noted from Table 5.

First, the first semantic sequence, [*lineage in the past + the passing down of their political heritage + the mission of their successors*], is not fully manifested in the three

local stelae. Stele Q does not include the last narrative block (the mission for successors), and J1 does not include two narrative blocks (the passing down of heritage, or the mission of successors). J2 does not include this semantic sequence at all. This probably illustrates the decreasing importance of lineage and collective tradition in the eyes of QXY learned men.

Secondly, for the second semantic sequence, [*gather people + initiate reforms among them*], both narrative blocks are not reflected in the three local stelae. The three texts also include a new narrative block: political affiliation of the dedicatee, which is not seen in Emperor Guangwu's text. This might have been an indicator of the dedicatees' "political successes," as they had successfully obtained positions in the state bureaucratic system.

Thirdly, compared with Emperor Guangwu's stele, there are two new semantic sequences in the local texts: behavioral patterns and the social relationships of the addressee. For behavioral patterns, the three local texts do not especially emphasize the political behavior of their dedicatees; probably the producers and sponsors of the texts considered the dedicatees' private life to deserve the same kind of commemoration as their public life did. For social relationships, the three stelae put emphasis on the connection between the dedicatee and two groups from the local population: his students and followers, who had direct contact with him when he was alive; and other regular members of the population, who had probably only heard about his reputation but came to commemorate him.

Fourthly, for the semantic sequence indicating the addressee's protection of community, a new narrative block appears in the three local texts: eliminating local evils. J1 and J2 illustrate how this new part was typically inserted into the text. Composers of the texts also highlighted the name of the regions where the addressee removed evil people and immoral activities: Xiapi 下邳 and Yuancheng 元城. This emphasis on locality built close ties between the identity of the addressee and the specific region where he had extended his career. Rather than spreading benevolence, it was the practice of healing social diseases—those of specific local areas, in particular—that won the dedicatee a good name.

All these four aspects illustrate how literate members of the population from the QXY area came to establish a new criterion for true knowledge. These people transplanted the conceptions of “political success” to the contexts of local rituals, while replacing the notion of “omnipresence/universality” with “locality/regionality.” They copied many of the semantic sequences of imperial discourse, but also added new types of sequences and narrative blocks, according to local needs, when using texts to declare new knowledge compatible with regional circumstances.

IV. Ritual Conventions as Meta-Discursive Master (II)—*Panegyrici Latini*: Mimesis of Greco-Roman Speeches, and the Personified “Cultural Unity”

(I) Materials

The production of another group of texts was also subject to the power of ritual conventions. Similar to the QXY stelae, Gallo-Roman panegyrics, as speeches of praise

delivered in ceremonial circumstances, witnessed how local educated members of the population showed respect for the imperial agenda of cultural unity while making efforts to make themselves creators of new knowledge. According to D.S. Levene, four speeches formed the total surviving corpus of the “classical Latin panegyric”: Pliny’s Panegyric for Trajan, and Cicero’s *Orationes Caesarianae* that included three speeches dedicated to Caesar (*Pro Marcello*, *Pro Ligario*, and *Pro rege Deiotaro*).¹⁰⁷ All these pieces belonged to the large body of Roman imperial encomiums, indicating the intrinsic connection between panegyric production and the need to extol the ruler.¹⁰⁸ The Greek tradition of eulogy writing also played a significant role in the making of Late Antique panegyrics. The biography of Evagoras, king of Salamis in Cyprus, which was written by the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates (436–338 BCE), has been considered an important prototype of later Latin panegyrics. Laurent Pernot argued that this biography was innovative as a praise text, for it was extolling an individual, a contemporary figure, and was written in prose.¹⁰⁹ Pernot also noticed that these innovations were reflected in the funerary eulogy of Gryllus, son of Xenophon, which was dated to 362 BCE.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ See D.S. Levene, “God and Man in the Classical Latin Panegyric,” *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* no. 43 (1997): 66–103.

¹⁰⁸ Catherine Ware, “Speaking of Kings and Battle: Virgil as Prose Panegyrist in Late Antiquity,” *Proceedings of the Virgil Society* 29 (2017): 1–29.

¹⁰⁹ See Laurent Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

This section focuses on a body of panegyrics titled *XII Panegyrici Latini* in extant compilations. This body of manuscripts has had several branches. The earliest of them, known as M, was discovered in 1433 in a library in Mainz. This copy itself is missing, there are several sub-branches that derived from it.¹¹¹ The twelve panegyrics in this collection include Pliny’s Panegyric to Trajan and eleven later orations dated to 289–389 CE, whose authors appear to have been natives of Gaul.¹¹² Almost all the orations were addressed to Roman rulers, except for Eumenius’ *For the Restoration of the Schools* (297/298 CE), which was discussed in Chapter Two.

This section examines the eight panegyrics under the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian dynasty. All of them are praise texts dedicated to Roman emperors (see Table 9).

Periodization	Title in the <i>Panegyrici Latini</i>	Producer	Possible date of delivery	Possible city of delivery	Occasion of delivery
The First Tetrarchy	X. Mamertini Panegyricus Maximiano Augusto Dictus (Panegyric of Maximian)	Anonymous orator	289	Trier (chief abode for rulers of the west)	Celebrates Rome’s birthday, April 21
	XI. Genethiacus Maximiani	Anonymous orator	291	Trier	Honors the birthday of Maximian,

¹¹¹ Roger Rees, *Layers of Loyalty in Latin Panegyric: AD 289-307* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 19.

¹¹² Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, 4–5.

	Augusti (Genethliacus of Maximian Augustus)				addressed jointly with Diocletian
	VIII. Incerti Panegyricus Constantio Caesari (Panegyric of Constantius)	Anonymous orator	297?	Trier	Congratulates Constantius for his recovery of Britain
	IX. Eumenii pro Instaurandis Scholis Oratio (For the Restoration of the Schools)	Eumenius	297/298	Autun	A public speech combining praise of Autun, and of the emperors, with a specific program for future endeavor of building local schools
The Second Tetrarchy and Constantine	VII. Incerti Panegyricus Maximiano et Constantino (Panegyric of Maximian and Constantine)	Anonymous orator	307	Trier	Celebrates the marriage of Constantine to Fausta, Maximian's daughter, and Constantine's promotion to the rank of Augustus by Maximian
	VI. Incerti Panegyricus Constantino Augusto (Panegyric of Constantine)	Anonymous orator	310	Trier	Celebrates the anniversary of the foundation of the city of Trier
	V. Incerti Gratiarum Actio Constantino Augusto (Speech of	Anonymous orator (from Autun)	311	Trier	Celebrates Constantine's <i>quinquennalia</i>

	Thanks to Constantine)				
	XII. Incerti Panegyricus Constantino Augusto (Panegyric of Constantine Augustus)	Anonymous orator	313	Trier	Celebrates Constantine's victory over the Franks

Table 9. Basic information about eight of the eleven Gallic panegyrics in the collection, *Panegyrici Latini*. Based on Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors* (2015).

Three general features of Gallo-Roman panegyrics differentiate them from stele materials in the Eastern-Han QXY area. One, rather than being produced for rituals of local men, panegyrics during the time under discussion were mostly used for monarchical rituals in Gaul, composed when rulers were traveling around the empire and presenting themselves to the public. They were a bit similar to the genre of *fu* 賦, or epideictic rhapsodies in Western Han times, with regard to their functions. Two, extant evidence does not support that these Latin texts were originally carved on durable materials like stone. As mentioned earlier, they were preserved as a medieval collection of manuscripts that had several textual lineages. The dissimilar physical carriers led to different circumstances in terms of the circulation of such texts among their contemporaries and later people.¹¹³ Three, regardless of their impressive length and the rhetorical skills used,

¹¹³ For the circulating methods of panegyrics, Sabine MacCormack argued that Pliny expanded and improved his panegyrics and recited them to a select group of literary friends, after delivering them to a particular Senate. It is this expended version that has survived. See MacCormack, “Latin prose Panegyrics: Tradition and Discontinuity in the Later Roman Empire,” 29–77.

the information provided in panegyrics is less biographical, focusing less on introducing all aspects of the life and career of the dedicatee. These texts are more topic-focused, praising the accomplishments and attributes of rulers while proclaiming the eternalness of their reign.

Despite these differences, some other features of panegyrics from Gaul are comparable with those of QXY stelae and therefore justifies the present comparison between the two groups of texts. On the one hand, the production of both categories of texts were the fruit of school education. Scholars have already explored the extent to which Latin panegyrics derived from the teaching of oratory skills at Roman schools.¹¹⁴ Sabine MacCormack has offered interpretations on how Greek rhetorical traditions were incorporated into Roman education and thus acted as a significant force shaping the formation of Latin panegyrics.¹¹⁵ This process of imparting knowledge, relying on the existence of information institutions (e.g., teaching organizations), was similar to the way in which the literate men from QXY came to understand the intrinsic principles of mortuary practice. Both Chinese and Roman writers first obtained somewhat standardized training, and then came to practice writing skills in ritual circumstances, based on what they had learned.

On the other hand, although the Gallo-Roman panegyrics under discussion here were not for mortuary uses, the history of this genre could be traced back to funeral

¹¹⁴ See D.S. Levene, "God and Man in the Classical Latin Panegyric," 66–103.

¹¹⁵ MacCormack, "Latin Prose Panegyrics," 29–77.

practices. Mary Whitby, using evidence from Thucydides, has suggested that prose panegyrics emerged in Greece during the fifth century BCE by taking the form of funeral speeches.¹¹⁶ If her statement is right, it appears that Chinese stelae developed from celebratory texts (e.g., the stone inscriptions dedicated to the First Emperor of Qin) to funerary writings, while Greco-Roman panegyrics witnessed the reverse process, developing from a funerary genre to texts for celebration.

(II) Analysis

The above-mentioned similarities between the Chinese and Roman materials illustrate the significance of information institutions and nexuses in the making of such texts. Both types of writings obtained their fundamental components from the content of school teachings, and were brought into practice in ritual settings. In particular, for Gallo-Roman elites, the ritual environment often appeared to concern “the key moments in the rulers’ rise to power”¹¹⁷ and functioned as an intersecting point where the Roman enthusiasm for tangible representations and theological logics converged.

First, let us consider the notion of tangibility. Except for the panegyric by Eumenius, almost all pieces in the corpus of *Panegyrici Latini* were delivered in the physical presence of Roman emperors: some of the texts were intended to celebrate their military successes, some for their birthdays, some for state festivals, and some for the building of political alliances. The phenomenon of intertextuality—the copying, recycling,

¹¹⁶ Mary Witby, “Introduction” in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 1998), 1–13.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Ware, “Panegyric and the Discourse of Praise in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 109 (2019): 291–304.

and drawing on elements from a shared pool of textual materials—is widely seen from these writings, exhibiting the picture that imperial rulers were physically shown in local ceremonies. A rhetorical strategy shared by the orators was to “negotiate” with the addressee (i.e., the emperor) to intentionally omit some “mundane glories.”¹¹⁸ Speaking in a humble mode, orators explained to their addressees that they would not spend time detailing certain achievements of these powerful men. Some cases of such “negotiations” are listed in Table 10.

Location of the text in <i>Panegyrici Latini</i>	Original Latin text	English translation	Both sides of “negotiation” (who says to whom)	Aim of the “negotiation”
X. 3.1-2 <i>(In Praise of Later Roman Emperors, p. 57, 524)</i>	<u>Omittam</u> cerera, et potissimum illud arripiam quod multis fortasse mirum uidebitur et tamen <re> ipsa uerissimum est: te, cum ad restitendam rem publicam a cognato tibi Diocletiani numine fueris inuocatus....	<u>I shall omit</u> the rest and seize above all upon what perhaps will seem astonishing to many, yet which is absolutely true, namely, that when you were summoned to restore the State by your kindred divinity Diocletian....	The orator and Maximian	To leave room for later descriptions of the emperor’s merits in his collaboration with Diocletian
X. 6.1-3 <i>(In Praise, p. 63, 526)</i>	<u>Transeo</u> innumerabiles tuas tota Gallia pugnans atque	<u>I pass over</u> your countless battles and victories all over Gaul. For what	The orator and Maximian	To emphasize the much more important

¹¹⁸ Nixon and Rodgers noted this rejection of mundane accomplishments in *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, footnote 39, p.90.

	uictorias. Quae enim tot tantisque rebus sufficiat oratio? Illum tamen primum consulatus tui auspicalem diem <u>tacitus praeterire nullo modo possum.</u>	speech could do justice to so many great exploits? I can in no way, however, <u>pass over in silence</u> the day which inaugurated your consulship.		event, the emperor's inauguration
XI. 5.3-4 <i>(In Praise, p. 88, 535)</i>	<u>Non</u> <u>commemor</u> o igitur uirtute uestra rem publicam dominatu saeuissimo liberatam, <u>non dico</u> exacerbatas saeculi prioris iniuriis per clementiam uestram ad obsequium redisse prouincias, <u>mitto etiam</u> dies festos uictoriis triumphisque celebratos.... nouam mihi propono dicendi legem ut, <u>cum omnia uidear silere quae summa sint,</u> ostendam tamen inesse laudibus uestris alia maiora.	<u>I do not, therefore, bring to mind</u> the State liberated by your valor from savage despotism, <u>I do not speak of</u> the provinces, provoked by the injustices of the preceding era, returned to obedience through your clemency, <u>I omit</u> even the holidays celebrated with your victories and triumphs....I propose for myself a new mode of speaking to show that, although <u>I seem not to speak of all the greater things,</u> there are nonetheless among your praises other things which are greater.	The orator and Maximian	To leave room for the discussion of "greater things" about the emperor: his piety and facility
VIII. 9.5	Quid faciam, Caesar? Ignosce	What am I to do, Caesar? Forgive me	The orator and Constantius	To emphasize the

(In Praise, p. 122, 547)	si moror, ignosce si propero; multa enim illius temporis, quo transitus in Britanniam parabatur, admirabilia uirtutum <u>tuarum</u> <u>facta praetereo</u>	if I linger; forgive me if I hurry; for <u>I am passing over</u> many of your marvelous deeds of your marvelous deeds of courage at that time when preparations were afoot for the expedition to Britain....		remarkable victory of the emperor by which the entire State was at last liberated
XII. 4.4 (In Praise, p. 596)	ut haec, inquam, <u>omittam</u> , te, Constantine, paterna pietas sequebatur, illum, ut falso generi non inuideamus, impietas....	I repeat, <u>to omit</u> these things, Constantine, you were attended by respect for your father, but he (viz., Maxentius), not to begrudge him his false paternity, by disrespect....	The orator and Constantine	To highlight the difference between Constantine and Maxentius, which made the former's success a natural result

Table 10. “Negotiations” between orators and their addressee on the need to omit some of the ruler’s glories, in *Panegyrici Latini*. Based on *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*.

Negotiation could happen only when the other side of the interlocution—the emperor addressed in the panegyric—was present, tangibly and visibly. These individuals are mentioned using the second-person “you,” which implies that the ruler was sitting/standing within a visible distance from the orator. The selected paragraphs in Table 7 seemed to be gestures of begging for the monarch’s understanding. Their function was to clarify that the “new mode of speaking” would leave room for the later delineation of more splendid accomplishments, in order to excuse the orator from being blamed for

omitting anything. On the surface, such gestures look like the embodiment of a continuing submission to imperial ceremonial conventions: the ruler showed himself as the sole axis surrounding whom various performances happened, which made it necessary for ritual performers to continue to communicate with him. In Cicero's speeches to publicly thank Caesar, the negotiation between the orator and the powerful addressee helps to frame the entire text, as the speeches focused on what kinds of glories are worth mentioning:

Tantum enim mansuetudinem, tam inusitatam inauditamque clementiam, tantum in summa potestate rerum omnium modum, tam denique incredibilem sapientiam ac paene divinam tacitus praeterire nullo modo possum.

For I cannot by any means pass over in silence such great humanity, such unprecedented and unheard-of clemency, such moderation in the exercise of supreme and universal power, such incredible and almost godlike wisdom.¹¹⁹

Parumne, inquires, magna relinquemus? immo vero aliis quamvis multis satis, tibi uni parum. quicquid est enim, quamvis amplum sit, id est parum tum cum est aliquid amplius.

"Is it then," you will say, "but small glory that we shall leave behind us?" It may, indeed, be sufficient for others, however many they may be, and insufficient for you alone. For whatever it is, however ample it may be, it certainly is insufficient, as long as there is anything greater still.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Cic. Marc. 1, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0020%3Atext%3DMarc.%3Asection%3D1>. Both Latin and English texts are originally from M. Tullius Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, literally translated by C. D. Yonge (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891).

¹²⁰ Cic. Marc. 26 <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0020%3Atext%3DMarc.%3Asection%3D26>. Both Latin and English texts are originally from M. Tullius Cicero, *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*.

Negotiations served as an intermission between the orator's (seeming) self-restriction on extolling the addressee and his announcement of an even higher compliment. Passed down from the time of Cicero or earlier, the conventions of using them in ritual discourses provided Gallo-Roman panegyrics with canonical senses. Literate audiences could grasp the copying of old styles, understanding the texts as reflecting the lingering Greco-Roman traditions of laudatory ceremonies wherein the heroic *persona* of the ruler was represented. The official ideal of cultural unity was therefore reaffirmed, being personified as the sole ruler and his undividable identity as an epic hero.

This does not mean that the language of Gallo-Roman orators was totally mandated by the meta-discursive master of ritual conventions. As Neil W. Bernstein has stated, a declamatory *persona* of these speakers was constructed as they delivered texts to the public: such a *persona* designated the speaker as holding a higher status than others, as both the creator and performer of texts who had the authority to make sense from them.¹²¹ In texts analyzed in Table 7, orators, who referred to themselves using the first-person singular "I," displayed themselves as the only ones who could have direct interlocutions with the ruler (who were referred to as "you," the other side of the dialogue) in the ceremonial setting. This seeming equality between the two sides endowed orators with the role of epic tellers. It was through their pens and mouths that the physical being of the emperor, which could be seen by all participants of the ceremony, was intertwined

¹²¹ Neil W. Bernstein discussed *persona/personae* in the context of Roman declamation. For related discussions, see "Persona, Identity, and Self-Presentation in Roman Declamation" in *Self-Presentation and Identity in the Roman World*, ed. Andreas Gavrielatos (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1–16.

with his textual being, which positioned him in the lineage of heroes whose myths constituted the basis of Roman civilization. In this sense the orators, who originated from the local area of Gaul, became distributors of the knowledge about cultural unity in their region. Their words were the medium through which the *persona* of the sole ruler came to be represented as something communicable.

Apart from reconfirming the tangibility of monarchical power, Gallo-Roman orators were also familiar with the logic of imperial theology that the revelation of divine blessings dominates the running of the entire universe. This served as another aspect that made panegyrics appear to be somehow context-independent, subject to an already-existing authority outside of the act of textual production. Few researchers have explicitly mentioned the underlying logic of determinism in such texts, though many have acknowledged that these writings implied the constant intervention of divine power in the fate of individuals. A series of terms that epitomized the quality of Roman rulers, like *felicitas* (felicity) and *fortuna* (fortune), are seen quite often in the *Panegyrici Latini*, with their meanings associated with metaphors of heavenly protection and salvage:

iam, inquam, fortunatissimi imperatores, felicitate uincitis sola. Ecquid umquam Romani principes de felicitate sua praedicari laetius audierunt quam cum diceretur hostes quiescere, otiosos esse, pacem colere.

Now I say, most fortunate Emperors, you conquer by felicity alone. Is there anything which Roman leaders have ever been happier to hear when praised for their felicity than that their enemies are said to be quiet and idle, keeping the peace?¹²²

¹²² “XI. Genethliacus of Maximian Augustus,” 18. 1–2. For the Latin text, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, p.101. For English translation, see p. 541.

Tam innumeros uobis, tam nouos ex omin hostium genere successus Fortuna suppeditat, ut iam mihi necesse sit illa quae initio separaueram rursus hic communi laude coniungere, dum tantorum euentuum quaero rationem: felicitem istam, optimi imperatores, pietate meruistis!

Fortune has lavished on you successes so novel and innumerable over every sort of enemy that now I must rejoin here in common praise what I distinguish at the beginning, which I seek the explanation of such great events: you have earned, best of Emperors, that felicity of yours by your piety!¹²³

Adeo, Caesar, etiam hoc rei publicae tribuit uestra felicitas, ut nemo fere Romanus occiderit imperio uincente Romano.... Enimuero, Caesar inuicte, tanto deorum immortalium tibi est addicta consensu ominum quidem quos adortus fueris hostium sed praecipue internecio Francorum...

And furthermore, Caesar, such an asset to the State was your good fortune that almost no Roman died in this victory of the Roman Empire.... Certainly, invincible Caesar, such was the unanimity of the immortal gods which granted you the massacre of all the enemy you engaged, but particularly the Franks...¹²⁴

It had long been a tradition since the Republican Period to offer cult dedications to the personifications of felicity and fortune, the goddesses Felicitas and Fortuna, in grand ceremonies that celebrated military successes.¹²⁵ This old convention of ritual performance partly explained the highly patternized discourse in Gallo-Roman panegyrics. The copying of forms and content of a “standardized language” from one text to another, regardless of the changing addressee in real ritual settings, made the revelation of an all-encompassing authority possible. Orators treated the Roman cultural heritage, which was manifested as the ubiquitous presence of the Greco-Roman pantheon, as producing

¹²³ “XI. Genethliacus of Maximian Augustus,” 18. 4–5. For the Latin text, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, pp.101–102. For English translation, see p. 541.

¹²⁴ “VIII. Panegyric of Constantius,” 16. 3–17. 1. For the Latin text, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, p.137. For English translation, see p. 550–51.

¹²⁵ For related discussions, see Samuel Pierre Sigere, “*Rei publicae (in)felix est*: Felicitas and the Romans’ relationship with the divine (PhD. diss., University College London, 2023).

the formula based on which they could polish and adjust their discourse; they spoke to meet the demands of gods and goddesses, rather than simply praising rulers. In this sense the Gallic panegyrics pronounced their inheritance of the Roman legacy, by associating Roman deities with the predetermined destiny of their addressee, i.e., the individual monarch. Such rulers thus became the divinized incarnations of “Rome” as a cultural tradition: where these figures *are*, the empire *is*.

This is not to deny the possibility that Gallic orators had made use of their words for other purposes. Through their speech, they manifested themselves as revealers possessing the agency to disclose how divine blessing occurred for individual rulers. Scholars might argue that this was still the fruit of an old literary tradition: when Isocrates composed a prose *encomium* to eulogize the virtues of Evagoras I, he praised the ruler’s divine mission by spending several paragraphs describing how the heritage of Zeus and his descendants were transmitted to Evagoras (“τὰ μὲν οὖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς Εὐαγόρα παρὰ τῶν προγόνων ὑπάρξαντα τηλικαῦτα τὸ μέγεθος ἐστίν....”).¹²⁶ What differentiated Gallo-Roman panegyrics from such old writings was the proclamation of Gallic orators that they were not only witnesses of the sacred ties between rulers and gods, but also the ones who could reveal the organic structure of the vast universe. In a panegyric for Constantius (ca. 297 CE), the orator delineates a huge picture of the correspondence between the Tetrarchs and the natural world:

¹²⁶ Isoc. 9. 12–19. For the original Latin text and English translation, see George Norlin, *Isocrates with an English Translation in three volumes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1980), <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0144%3Aspeech%3D9%3Asection%3D12>

Et sane praeter usum curamque rei publicae etiam illa Iouis et Herculis cognata maiestas in Iouio Herculioque principibus totius mundi caelestiumque rerum similitudinem requirebat. Quippe isto numinis uestrinnumero summa omnia nituntur et gaudent, elementa quattuor et totidem anni uices et orbis quadrifariam duplici discretus Oceano et emenso quater caelo lustra redeuntia et quadrigae Solis et duobus caeli luminibus adiuncti Versper et Lucifer.

And, of course, in addition to the interests and concerns of the State, that kindred majesty of Jupiter and Hercules also required a similarity between the entire world and heavenly affairs in the shape of Jovian and Herculan rulers. For indeed all the most important things depend upon and rejoice in the number of your divinity, for there are four elements and as many seasons of the year; a world divided fourfold by a double Ocean, the lustra which return after four revolutions of the sky, the Sun's team of four horses, and Vesper and Lucifer added to the two lamps of the sky.¹²⁷

The number “four” does not simply indicate the collaboration mode among the rulers, but also illustrates the operating principle of the entire cosmos. By highlighting this twofold structure of universal reign, the orator positioned himself in the status of a proclaimer of the highest will, a wiseman who knew everything about what constituted the DNA of a Roman monarch: the inner fabric of the universe that could turn divine ancestry into one's identity.

Moreover, throughout their narratives, Gallic orators never forgot the local settings in which they were giving their speeches. The Rhine, as both an important military frontier and a major river in Gaul that formed an integral part of the local geocultural landscape, was mentioned quite often in the *Panegyrici Latini*. It was described as the glorious area where Gaul was safeguarded and salvaged, sharing the emperor's blessed fortune:

¹²⁷ “VIII. Panegyric of Constantius,” 4. 1–3. For the Latin text, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, pp.113–14. For English translation, see p. 545.

Inde igitur est, imperator, pax ista qua fruimur. Neque enim iam Rheni gurgitibus, sed nominis tui terrore munimur. Quamlibet ille aut arescat aestu aut resistat gelu, neutro hostis audebit uti uado.

Hence this peace, Emperor, which we now enjoy. For we are protected now not by the boiling waters of the Rhine, but by the terror aroused by your name. Let this river dry up with the heat of summer or freeze with the cold as it will, the enemy will dare to exploit neither opportunity to cross.¹²⁸

Rhenum tu quidem toto limite dispositis exercitibus tutum reliqueras, sed hoc maiores pro te suscepimus metus quod nobis potius quam tibi consulebas, nostramque pacem magis quam bellum quod aggrediebare firmaueras.

You did leave the Rhine secure with armies stationed along the whole border, but for this reason we were prone to greater fears on your behalf because you took counsel for our interests rather than for your own, and reinforced our security rather than the war which you were undertaking.¹²⁹

These descriptions of the Rhine provided Gallo-Roman panegyrics with a sense of the local folkloric expressions which derived from the very early days of the regional civilization, just like the Volga River in Russian literature and the Mississippi River in American literature. The notion of a local community spirit appeared. People inhabiting the area were represented as a group of chosen ones who were deemed to be protected by the river, and were bound to be sheltered by the divine ruler who had great interest in the area. The notion of determinism recurred here. It appears that there was a triangular relationship of mutual nourishment between the ruler, the Rhine, and the people there: the emperor's activity helped to deify the river as an honored place witnessing how the empire was finally kept intact, and built direct connections between local inhabitants and those in the center of power; the river provided the ruler with a platform to fully exhibit

¹²⁸ "VI. Panegyric of Constantine," 11.1. For the Latin text, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, pp. 233–34. For English translation, see p. 577.

¹²⁹ "XII. Panegyric of Constantine Augustus," 2.6. For the Latin text, see *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors*, p. 296. For English translation, see p. 595.

his heroism, and guaranteed local inhabitants their basic living environment; the local people in Gaul, in turn, constituted the broad audiences of the ruler and his court, and those who had the most intimate ties with the Rhine such that the river had already become their interior experience. The orator, as a member of the local community, positioned himself at the intersecting point of the three. He took the image of a coordinator who continued to negotiate with each of the three sides, and finally integrated all of them in his speech. In other words, the orator expected to display himself as the one who could decide what could be incorporated into the territorial and ideological domain of Roman people, by producing and pronouncing his texts.

Here a comparison can be made. When the QXY stelae borrowed their forms from royal inscriptions—stelae for the First Emperor of the Qin and for Han rulers, and even earlier bronze inscriptions in Zhou times—they also borrowed the fatalist core penetrating such texts that one’s future is determined by eternal principles, which might have grown from ancestry and kinship, the Mandate of Heaven, or the everlasting Way of Nature; these texts somewhat submitted to the narrative order that one’s virtue was manifested when he reacted to his “heaven-given” fortune.¹³⁰ Similarly, for Gallo-Roman panegyrics, considering their origin in eulogies and prose encomiums which were used in rituals tracing one’s life story, and the “destined” connection between local landscapes and imperial rule, it is reasonable to pay special attention to how the theme of fatalism was

¹³⁰ This determinism was not apparently displayed in some stele materials from other regions, like Sichuan, where construction of roads and secure people from disasters were important themes in the early period of Late Antiquity. In the era of High Late Antiquity, determinism became a much more popular theme in areas other than the QXY region.

revealed in these sources. The faith in unbroken ties between writing acts and a priori supernatural forces outside of human life per se, therefore, marked an important feature of “the early stage of Late Antiquity.”

V. Master Residing in the Tradition of Criticism: The Lingering Spirits of Sage-Like

Authors

Another type of meta-discursive master could be found in a territory that seemed distant from imperial conventions. It related to the real concerns of the highly literate about the future of serious writing and where it would be located. In Chapter Two we encountered the learned men in QXY and Gaul who engaged themselves in events of the state by criticizing/judging specific parties, through the activity of which specific genres of writing gradually took form. In the early stage of Late Antiquity, this culture of criticism continued to penetrate a wide range of literary forms. Some of them, like political treatises and memorials submitted to the court, made their authors seem less local but more associated with the center of power. Yet, if we look deeper into how these authors articulated the truthfulness of their statements, how they blended the officially proclaimed criteria of “true knowledge” with a set of new standards, and how they consciously or unconsciously questioned the epistemic absolutism established under the monarchical authority, it would be possible to detect an inclination underlying the practices of such populations to fulfill their groups’ interests in certain regions.

(I) Materials

Unlike the last two sections that analyzed the textual works of anonymous producers, this section pays attention to transmitted texts that have been ascribed to named authors. For the QXY area, our extant sources are mainly from biographies in the *Hou Hanshu*, records in Yuan Hong's 袁宏 (328–376) *Hou Hanji* 後漢紀 (Annals of the Later Han), and the later compilation by the Qing scholar Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843), *Quan Hou Han wen* (Complete Compilation of Writings of the Later Han) in the *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han sanguo liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Complete Compilation of Writings in the Three Dynasties of High Antiquity, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms, and Six Dynasties). For Roman Gaul, there is hardly a comprehensive compilation of writers of the period under discussion. Our primary sources are mainly from Saint Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 310–367), the famous Trinitarian theologian who spent most of his life in Gaul. Very few Gallic writers from the early stage of Late Antiquity have their works preserved as well as those of Hilary;¹³¹ as mentioned earlier in this dissertation, many Gallo-Roman literati during this era only had their names recorded by later generations but left no written works.¹³²

¹³¹ It should be noted that Christian intellectuals in the west were largely involved in debates over Arianism in the 340s and 350s, and some writers, like Lucifer of Cagliari (d. 373), Gregory of Elvira (d. 392), Phoebadius of Agen (d. 392), Marius Victorinus (d. 360), did leave written works. But few of these writers had spent much of their lives in Gaul. For details, see Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 8–9. In this dissertation, quoted paragraphs from Hilary are copied from “De Ecclesiae Patribus Doctoribusque,” *Documenta Catholica Omnia*, https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/20_40_0315-0367-_Hilarius_Pictaviensis,_Sanctus.html.

¹³² See Chapter Two.

Drawing conclusions from these materials is not easy. First of all, apparently, transmitted sources from the two local areas during the “early stage of Late Antiquity” (China from the 70s to 140s, Rome from the 280s to 360s) are relatively limited and understudied, compared with those of the periods immediately after. Many QXY authors who were well known to later generations were very young or hadn’t even been born yet in the 140s, like Cai Yong 蔡邕, who was only eight in 140, and Kong Rong 孔融, who was born in the early 150s. The situation was similar in Roman Gaul. Many Gallo-Roman writers known to later literati built their intellectual authority during or after the 370s. Ausonius was a *grammaticus* and professor in Bordeaux whose works were unknown to many, until his talent was acknowledged in the late 360s by Valentinian I.¹³³ Paulinus of Nola, born in the 350s, was not even baptized until the 380s, after which he contributed most of his Christian writings.

Secondly, the existing transmitted materials that are completely “local” to the two regions are rather limited in amount. Though these authors were natives to QXY or Gaul, the areas in which they lived were sometimes uncertain, as their occupations/official positions kept changing over time. These people also had relatively close connections with the ruler, as many of their writings were letters to the throne. Were they more like central elites, or still sharing behavioral and communicative patterns with their local fellows?

¹³³ For the life and career of Ausonius, see Hagith Sivan, *Ausonius of Bordeaux: Genesis of a Gallic Aristocracy* (London: Routledge, 2003).

It is still necessary to study such materials and to treat their authors as at least semi-local to QXY and Gaul. Due to their interpersonal networks in their hometowns, they set examples for local learned men whose goal was to serve the government, and thus played significant roles in building specific intellectual lineages in the area. The famous Confucian scholar Ouyang Xi 歐陽歛 (fl. mid-1st century), who served as the governor of several regions throughout his official career, was a native of Qiansheng 千乘 (present-day Gaoqing 高青, Shandong). Most of his students who left written works were natives of Shandong and northern Jiangsu as well, like Li Zhen 禮震 (fl. mid 1st century) from Pingyuan 平原 and Huan Rong 桓榮 (fl. mid to late 1st century) from the region of Pei 沛.¹³⁴ Huan Rong was the mentor of another important scholar Ding Hong 丁鴻 (d. 94), a Yingchuan 潁川 man, and Ding was the teacher of QXY natives like Yang Lun 楊倫 (d. 130s) from Chenliu 陳留.¹³⁵ Many of these people obtained official positions at the court after receiving education in their hometowns, which means that they were constantly shaped by discourses of “local literati circles” dominated by voices of intellectuals whose expertise was acknowledged by a larger world, i.e., the state. Meanwhile, for the region of Gaul, it must be acknowledged that the land per se was the breeding ground for many thoughts and practices of those local writers who then moved to somewhere else, and the later lives of these individuals were inevitably shaped by their previous experience in the Gallic provinces. Saint Hilary was exiled in early 356 CE as

¹³⁴ *HHS* 79A. 2556.

¹³⁵ *HHS* 79A. 2564.

Bishop of Poitiers, and then spent four years in the eastern region of Phrygia (central Anatolia). During his exile he wrote his most important works, including the *Liber I adversus Valentem et Ursacium*, *De Synodis*, and *De Trinitate*.¹³⁶ In this sense the concept of being a “local elite” was relatively fluid during the period under discussion, indicating the status of having influence over others rather than a stable identity tied to a specific region. A man’s status of being a “local” could be sustained even when he had already become a central official, as his thoughts and language continued to affect younger generations who were still in his hometown. He could also keep being a “local intellectual” of his hometown even after moving to another region, because his thoughts and writing had their very rudimentary forms derived from those areas. Such fluidity gradually decreased as “local” became a fixed label in later periods, which further divided the central and local elites into two separate groups. This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

(II) Analysis

Such a permeable concept of “locality” was seen in the shared interest in particular literary paragons from pre-imperial history, among local and central elites. Many researchers have elaborated on the role played by Wang Yi 王逸 (89–158), Emperor An’s collator (*jiaoshu lang* 校書郎), in publicizing the image of Qu Yuan 屈原 (d. 278 BCE), legendary poet-minister of Chu who criticized evil ones surrounding his

¹³⁶ For Hilary’s life and career, see Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 4–10; C.F.A. Borchardt, *Hilary of Poitiers’ Role in the Arian Struggle* (Springer Science & Business Media, 1966), Chapter Two.

ruler and committed suicide for moral faith.¹³⁷ According to the research of Michael Schimmelpfennig, Wang Yi's *Chuci zhangju* 楚辭章句 (Section and Sentence Commentary to the Songs of Chu) put an end to the Han controversy on who Qu Yuan was and the context in which he had composed the poem *Li sao* 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow).¹³⁸ Wang's commentary therefore marked a peak in the long-term intellectual interest in Qu Yuan which involved the discussions of a group of Han literati, such as Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–169 BCE), Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE), Sima Qian (145–86 BCE), Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), and Ban Gu (32–92). One of his contributions was assigning Qu Yuan a meta-textual position out of the specific historical context wherein the *Li sao* was composed, arguing that the author represented a universal “sense for the appropriate” for all poets (*shiren zhiyi* 詩人之義). A renowned paragraph from the *Chuci zhangju* illustrates how Wang Yi thought about the imparting of this sense from the author to the reader:

《離騷》之文，依《詩》取興，引類譬諭，故善鳥香草，以配忠貞；惡禽臭物，以比讒佞；靈脩美人，以媲於君；宓妃佚女，以譬賢臣；虬龍鸞鳳，以托君子；飄風雲霓，以為小人。其詞溫而雅，其義皎而朗。凡百君子，莫不慕其清高，嘉其文采，哀其不遇，而潛其誌焉。

The literary pattern of *Li sao* relies on the classical *Shijing* in selecting evocative juxtapositions and draws from natural categories in making figural comparisons. Thus, auspicious birds and fragrant herbs go together with the loyal and steadfast,

¹³⁷ For instance, Vincent S. Leung, “*Chuci* and the Politics of Space under the Qin and Han Empires” in *The Exercise of the Spatial Imagination in Pre-Modern China: Shaping the Expanse*, ed. Garret Pagenstecher Olberding (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022), 77–102; Michael Schimmelpfennig, “The Quest for a Classic: Wang Yi and the Exegetical Prehistory of His Commentary to the Songs of Chu,” trans. Ma Bai, *Early China* 29 (2004): 111–62.

¹³⁸ Schimmelpfennig, “The Quest for a Classic,” 113.

evil birds and stinking things are compared to slanderers and toadies, “spiritually distant” and “fair one” are matched to the ruler, the goddesses Fufei and Jiandi are compared to worthy ministers, dragons and phoenixes convey noble men, and whirlwinds and rainbows are used for petty men. Its words are gentle and elegant, its meaning is transparent and clear. As for all gentlemen [in the world], none of them would not admire the author’s lofty spirit, adore his intellectual talents, sigh over his untimely meeting with his ruler, and feel mournful about his ambitions.¹³⁹

Such an appropriateness in writing, as described in the paragraph above, emerges when the author—a minister—offers the ruler sincere warning, even criticism, to protect him from vicious advice. Qu Yuan, in the words of Laurence A. Schneider, was portrayed as the patron saint of *loyal dissent* who should be emulated by all educated ones who want to serve the state.¹⁴⁰ Wang Yi’s commentary reveals at least two markers of meta-discourse in the *Li sao*, which demonstrate how Qu Yuan communicated his loyal dissent to readers:

—The frame of the text. The entire framework of the poem was built upon metaphorical connections between the natural and human worlds, which enabled readers to predict what would be told next.

—The certainty of the meaning of the text. Since the analogies in the *Li sao* are easily identifiable to readers familiar with the classic *Shijing*, the connotations of the

¹³⁹ For the original Chinese text, see Hong Xingzu 洪興祖, *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補註 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1983), 2–3. My English translation is largely based on Monica E. M. Zikpi, “Wanton Goddesses to Unspoken Worthies: Gendered Hermeneutics in the *Chuci Zhangju*,” *Early China* 41 (2018): 333–74.

¹⁴⁰ For related discussions, see Schneider, *A Madman of Chu: The Chinese Myth of Loyalty and Dissent* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).

metaphors are certain and unquestionable (“its meaning is transparent and clear” 其義皎而朗).

An obsession with Qu Yuan’s loftiness, and with effective methods of showing one’s similar moral commitment, was shared by QXY writers contemporaneous with Wang Yi. These people’s extant writings were mostly formal letters to top-ranking nobles, or “memorials and arguments” (*zouyi* 奏議) submitted to the emperor.¹⁴¹ Liu Xie 劉勰 (ca. 465–522) pointed out the connection between the blooming of memorials in this period and the bureaucratic promotion system of *chaju* 察舉, which involved examinations of one’s ability to draft official documents: “When the *chaju* system [enjoyed growth] during the Later Han, it became necessary to test [whether a candidate could write] memorials” 及後漢察舉, 必試章奏.¹⁴² Scholar Han Tuanjie 韓團結 has pointed out that, although these documents were largely confidential before being submitted, the emperor’s edict (*zhao* 詔) to respond sometimes included the original memorial.¹⁴³ If this was the case, the memorial texts—or at least their central ideas—might have had the potential to be circulated among some people after they were returned by the court, under the cover of imperial responses.

The real content of these documents also indicated that their intended readers were probably not just rulers or governors but other educated ones who knew the stories of

¹⁴¹ This English translation of *zouyi* is offered by Enno Giele, in *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong’s Duduan* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 115, 184.

¹⁴² “Zhang biao” 章表. *Wenxin diaolong*, Vol. 5.

¹⁴³ See Han, “Han dai zouyi yanjiu” 漢代奏議研究 (PhD diss., Shaanxi Normal University, 2020): 75–80, 91.

sage-like intellectuals. Authors tended to emulate the paragon writer and truehearted criticizer Qu Yuan when building their self-image as loyal dissidents through memorial texts and official letters. Their narratives echoed Wang Yi in terms of how to use meta-discursive markers as in the *Li sao* text. One of the most popular themes of these documents was *jian* 諫 (lit., “remonstrance” “to admonish”), sometimes called *jie* 戒 (lit., “warning”), which directly alerted the immediate recipients of the documents to dangers they might suffer.¹⁴⁴ In a text titled “Jian guo xiang” 諫國相 (Admonishing the Chancellor of the Kingdom) by Gao Shen 高慎 (fl. 80s–100s), clerk of taxation in the regional kingdom of Chen 陳 (eastern Henan, part of the Yan 兗 region),¹⁴⁵ the author warns his superior that the pursuit of luxury is more than harmful:

諸侯射豕，天子射熊。八开六樽，禮數不同。昔季氏設朱干玉戚以舞大夏。左傳曰：唯名與器，不可以假人。奢僭之漸，不可聽也。

The Regional Lords [could only] shoot boars [in the ritual of hunting]; the Son of Heaven [was the only one who could] shoot bears. Eight rows of performers [for rulers] and six vessels of alcohol [for ministers], they were used by different ranks in ritual practice. In the past, the Ji clan used red shields and jade axes, and performed the dance of “Grand Xia” [in rituals]. *Zuozhuan* said: “Only titles and ritual vessels [which mark one’s identity] cannot be lent to others.” The increasing tendency of [pursuing] extravagance and overstepping the bounds of one’s status, is the thing to which you should not turn a blind eye.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Wang Qicai 王啟才 categorized these documents as “*fengjian wen*” 諷諫文 (lit., documents for criticizing and admonishing). See Wang, “Han dai zouyi de wenhua yiyun yu meixue chanshi” 漢代奏議的文化意蘊與美學闡釋 (PhD diss., Fudan University, 2004), 181.

¹⁴⁵ Gao Shen was then appointed as the Grand Administrator of Donglai 東萊.

¹⁴⁶ *QHHW* vol. 49. Yan Kejun quoted the text from the “Biographies of Chen Jing and Wang Xian” 陳敬王羨傳 in the *HHS*.

Gao Shen communicates with his chancellor in the tone of both a subordinate and a dissident. Negative imperatives are used directly, telling the recipient of the document that he should not—or even must not—do something, if he wants to avoid disaster. Gao does not point out what kind of extravagance the chancellor had allowed, but draws analogies between ancient ritual hierarchies and the current situation. The natural connection between history and the present thus constitutes the basic *frame* of the text, making its reader(s) immediately understand what the author refers to: it must be related to the readiness with which many of the elite misused their privilege in the Kingdom of Chen. At the same time, the author makes his claims appear to be *certain*, correct, and valid, by quoting from the Confucian classics. Just as with the claims in the *Li sao* that were justified by the *Shijing* text, Gao Shen’s declarations are supported by the widely acknowledged doctrines in the *Zuozhuan* and other canons. A meta-discursive master thus derives as a legacy of the legendary poet Qu Yuan, the founding father of admonishing texts, who made the scenario of a meeting between a moral minister and his ruler/leader a popular leitmotif.

Recurring words and phrases in the official letters by QXY authors further illuminate their self-assigned role as loyal dissidents and critics. The terms “*yi*” 宜 (lit., “it would be more fitting to”; i.e., had better do/ought to do...) and “*wei*” 惟 (lit., “if you would only” “I hope you could...”), though having already shown up in earlier texts, appeared much more often than before, portraying the author as a serious but patient advisor for the superior:

陛下**宜**修聖德，慮此二者而已 (Kong Jiyan 孔季彥, fl. 90–120s)

Your Majesty **had better** refine your sagely virtues, and just carefully consider these two issues.¹⁴⁷

宜因其時隆先王之道 (Chen Chong 陳寵, fl. 80s–100s)

[Your Majesty] **had better** enhance the Way of former kings, in accordance with the situation.¹⁴⁸

誠**宜**簡練卓異，以厭眾望 (Chen Zhong 陳忠, son of Chen Chong)

[Your Majesty] really **ought to** select excellent ones, to fulfill the expectation of many.¹⁴⁹

宜開聖德，考行所長 (Yu Xu 虞詡, fl. 100–120s)

[Your Majesty] **had better** reveal your sagely virtues, and examines what [each one] is good at.¹⁵⁰

惟陛下留神省察 (Yang Lun 楊倫, d. 130s)

Hope Your Majesty **could** pay attention to, reflect on, and carefully investigate [this].¹⁵¹

伏**惟**陛下躬以昃之聽，溫三省之勤 (Lang Yi 郎顛, fl. 130s)

[I] respectfully **hope** that Your Majesty **could** listen to [my trivial advice, which is like] the setting sun, and frequently remind yourself to have self-reflection several times a day.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ *QHHW* vol. 31. The original text is titled “Yu bao dui” 兩雹對 by Yan Kejun.

¹⁴⁸ *QHHW* vol. 32. The original text is titled “Xing xing shu” 省刑書 by Yan Kejun.

¹⁴⁹ *QHHW* vol. 32. The original text is titled “Jian Liu Kai shu” 薦劉愷書 by Yan Kejun.

¹⁵⁰ *QHHW* vol. 56. The original text is titled “Qing fu sanjun shu” 請復三郡書 by Yan Kejun.

¹⁵¹ *QHHW* vol. 49. The original text is titled “Shangshu an zuo Ren Jia juzhu zui” 上書案坐任嘉舉主罪 by Yan Kejun.

¹⁵² *QHHW* vol. 60. The original text is titled “Yi que bai zhang” 詣闕拜章 by Yan Kejun.

The copying of these discursive patterns from one context to another demonstrated a new way of announcing the truthfulness of specific knowledge. Rather than emphasizing the efficacy and universal acceptance of an opinion, what was highlighted was the earnest and devoted posture of the speaker that made his personal integrity indisputable. His opinion per se might be unimpressive, but because of the moral ground of the writer, listeners/readers would find it necessary to consider its underlying rationality. The subtle process of a conceptual shift therefore occurred. “Epistemological reliability” was replaced by “moral reliability,” and readers, though they might have noticed this replacement, tended to trust the speakers, whose behaviors so much resembled those of the sage minister Qu Yuan.

Though the authors were in the modest position of providing suggestions, the fact that they could write to and criticize the top of the power hierarchy could enhance their own reputation. The above quoted Lang Yi 郎顛, a Confucian scholar from Beihai 北海, was called several times by the imperial court. He declined the offer from the imperial palace, living as a regular man throughout his life. Even so, he had been known to local men and was finally killed by one of them.¹⁵³ In his letter to Emperor Shun, we see an interesting blend of two extremities: the bald, nearly harsh criticism over imperial policies, and the author’s intensive self-deprecation through which he presented himself as almost uncultured.

¹⁵³ For the biography of Lang Yi, see *HHS* 30B. 1053–1075.

今選舉牧守，委任三府，長吏不良，既咎州郡。州郡有失，豈得不歸責舉？而陛下崇之彌優，自下慢事愈甚。所謂大綱疏，小綱數。三公非臣之仇，臣非狂夫之作。所謂發憤忘食，懇懇不已者，誠念朝廷欲致興平，非不能面譽也。臣生長草野，不曉禁忌，披露肝膽，書不擇言。伏鑽鼎鑊，死不敢恨。謹詣闕奉章，伏待重誅。¹⁵⁴

When it comes to the selection of Governors and Regional Inspectors, the Three Ministries are assigned [with such tasks]. If senior officials [of local areas] behaved inappropriately, it should be attributed to [the misconduct of] provincial and commandery leaders. If there is anything wrong with [the governing of] provinces and commanderies, shouldn't it be attributed to institutions that selected [those governors]? Your Majesty, the better positions you promote them to, the more negligent they are when working. This is why we say: 'If the larger blueprint is loosely designed, there would be numerous versions of smaller proposals.' The Three Dukes are not my enemies, and I am not writing as a mad man. [I told you this because,] for those who devote themselves [to the state] extremely and sincerely, what they bear in mind is the aspiration for the imperial court to achieve prosperity, rather than their own lack of chances to be praised. I grew up in a rustic area, and know nothing about what is allowed or banned [in the imperial palace]. [So I] exposed my liver and gall (viz., inner heart), and wrote without choosing my words. [If I were punished for my words,] I would submit to harsh penalty like having my kneecaps cut off, or being boiled alive in a cauldron; and I would not have any regret, if I had to die. Therefore I visited the imperial gate and submitted my petitions with respect, and lie prostrate, waiting for my severe punishment.

Lang Yi portrayed himself as a man totally detached from the pursuit of personal benefits.

The harsh criticism over court politics made it possible for him to irritate the emperor, while his intensive self-deprecation made it a natural consequence that his opinion would be neglected; both would lead to the danger of harming his own interests. But it seemed that Lang Yi had never cared about these potential risks. He told the ruler that his only concern was about the future of the state: "For those who devote themselves [to the state] extremely and sincerely, what they bear in mind is the aspiration for the imperial court to

¹⁵⁴ "Yi que bai zhang" 詣闕拜章, *QHHW* vol. 60. The letter is also seen in *HHS* 30B. 1054–1057.

achieve prosperity” 所謂發憤忘食，懇懇不已者，誠念朝廷欲致興平。 The reputation he wanted was not created by praise from others, but by the real achievements of state politics. In this sense he appeared to separate himself from the material world wherein everyone seeks earthly gains and worldly prestige; what he wanted was a transcendental reputation that could only be recognized by those who understood him, possibly at the cost of all secular profits or even his personal life.

We also have examples of literary criticism on the Roman side. The debate on the nature of written works, especially drama, took place among many important critics including Evanthius of Constantinople (d. ca. 358) and Aelius Donatus (d. ca. 380). Like Wang Yi’s interest in the legendary poet Qu Yuan, Evanthius’ *De fabula* (On Drama) also gives special attention to important writers like Terence (fl. 190s–150s BCE). What he emphasized in the commentary, similarly to Wang Yi, were the “*mos*”—laws, customs, and traditions—that writers must follow:

haec cum artificiosissima Terentius fecerit, tum illud est admirandum, quod et morem retinuit, ut comoediam scriberet, et temperavit affectum, ne in tragoediam transiliret. quod cum aliis rebus minime obtentum et a Plauto et ab Afranio et *appio* et multis fere magnis comicis invenimus. illud quoque inter Terentianas cirtutes mirabile, quod eius fabulae eo sunt temperamento, ut neque extumescant ad tragicam celsitudinem neque abiciantur ad minicam vilitatem.

While Terence accomplished these things (i.e., introducing *bonae meretrices* contrary to the prescriptive norms of comedy) most artfully, it must also be admired that he preserved the *mos*, such that he wrote comedy, and he restrained the *affectus*, so that he didn’t cross over into tragedy. We find that that, along with other things, was not achieved at all by Plautus, Afanius, *appio*, and many other important comic poets. It is also remarkable among Terentian virtues that his

plays are of such moderation that they neither puff themselves up to the loftiness of tragedy, nor lower themselves to the vulgarity of the mime.¹⁵⁵

On the surface, just as Wang Yi had done, it seems that Evanthius also highlighted the appropriateness of writing which derives from the sociocultural tradition of the empire. Henriette van der Blom interpreted the Latin *mos* as a force that continued to guide social norms: it is “an unwritten yet central part of Roman society....The ancestors were regarded as the creators of *mos*, and the collective actions and customs of the ancestors was termed *mos maiorum*.”¹⁵⁶ It naturally operated as an authority outside of the concrete act of textual production, as writers could not be detached from the imperial history that had cultivated them.

There is yet another layer of Evanthius that largely transcended the discussion on Terence. As Alex Preminger et al. pointed out, his intention was not to comment on the genre of comedy at all, but to imitate the ancient critic who set fundamental principles for all future writers: Aristotle.¹⁵⁷ The parallelism between *De fabula* and Aristotle’s *Poetics* is apparent, especially regarding their shared focus on the supremacy of *pure order* over all kinds of writing activities. For Aristotle, what is important for writers is not what has happened but what shall happen; poets should have their works dictated by practical

¹⁵⁵ *De fabula* 3.5. The Latin text and English translation are from Jarrett T. Welsh, “Evanthius, “*De fabula* 3.5 and Varro on ἦθη and πάθη,” *Hermes* 139. Jahrg., H. 4 (2011): 485–93.

¹⁵⁶ For the interpretation of the Latin *mos*, see Henriette van der Blom, *Cicero's Role Models: The Political Strategy of a Newcomer* (Oxford University Press, 2010): 12.

¹⁵⁷ Alex Preminger, O.B. Hardison, and Jr. Kevin Kerrane, *Classical and Medieval Literary Criticism: Translations and Interpretations* (New York: Fredrick Ungar Publishing Co., 1974), 301.

reason (*phronèsis*), to ensure that the gap between their virtuous will and virtuous action can be bridged.¹⁵⁸ The work of poets should be a continuation of that of natural scientists who continue to explore the innate purpose of nature.¹⁵⁹ Likewise, Evanthius' emphasis on the ought-to-be balance between *mos* and *affectus* was a reflection of his belief in the existence of a given order that should mandate the realm of writing. The degree of balance between the two—one derives from cosmos and history (*mos*), the other from one's selfness (*affectus*)—embodied the organic relationship between the universe and the individual human being, and determined the visible form of a piece of writing: comedy or tragedy.

This enthusiasm for giving pure order to all things in the world and revealing it to readers largely made up the epistemic basis of Christian writings of Gallo-Roman intellectuals, who were roughly contemporaneous with Evanthius. Since many of these writers were actively engaged in debates over heresy, in particular Arianism, they were also critics in the sense of party politics, not only in the realm of literary activities. Saint Hilary, as a representative of the fourth-century Trinitarian theologians, was a typical example. Scholars might argue that his "invention" and interpretation of the world order served religious aims and was not simply for literary/textual production. I would suggest, however, that Hilary's language, his structuring of analysis, and his sequencing of

¹⁵⁸ For the analysis of how Aristotle instilled the notion of pure order into the *Poetics*, see Klaas Tindemans, "The Politics of the *Poetics*: Aristotle and Drama Theory in 17th Century France," *Foundations of Science* November (2008): 1–15.

¹⁵⁹ Natalie Crohn Schmitt, "Aristotle's *Poetics* and Aristotle's Nature," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* I, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 3–15.

argumentation all largely subscribed to the frame initially built by Aristotle that literary creation should follow the rules of discussing physics and metaphysics: “seeking to determine the principles, causes and attributes of all beings—including natural substances—insofar as they are beings.”¹⁶⁰ Compared with earlier theologians, Hilary had a much clearer notion about how he should expand his discussion. The *De Trinitate*, in particular, shows how he applied the Aristotelian rules when illustrating the nature of God. In the beginning of the text, after a review of how people in the past understood God, he introduces to readers the general perspectives he will use as the precondition to explain the nature of the Father and the Son, which significantly resemble Aristotle’s methods of observing a certain being:

Novis enim regenerati ingenii sensibus opus est, ut unumquemque conscientia sua secundum cœlestis originis munus illuminet. Standum itaque per fidem ante est, ut sauctus Jeremias admonet, in substantia Dei: ut de substantia Dei auditurus, sensum suum ad ea quæ Dei substantiæ sint digna moderetur; moderetur autem non aliquo modo intelligendi, sed infinitate. Quin etiam conscius sibi divinæ se naturæ participem, ut beatus apostolus Petrus in epistola sua altera ait, effectum fuisse. Dei naturam non naturæ sum legibus metiatur, sed divinas professiones secundum magnificentiam divinæ de se protestationis expendat.... Cum itaque de rebus Dei erit sermo, concedamus cognitionem sui Deo, dictisque ejus pia veneratione famulemur. Idoneus enim sibi testis est, qui nisi per se cognitus non est.

The new faculties of the regenerate intellect are needed; each must have his understanding enlightened by the heavenly gift imparted to the soul. First he must take his stand upon the sure ground of God, as holy Jeremiah says, that since he is to hear about that nature he may expand his thoughts till they are worthy of the theme, not fixing some arbitrary standard for himself, but judging as of infinity. And again, though he be aware that he is partaker of the Divine nature, as the holy apostle Peter says in his second Epistle, yet he must not measure the Divine nature

¹⁶⁰ Shane Duarte, “Aristotle’s Theology and its Relation to the Science of Being qua Being,” *Apeiron* 40, no. 3 (2007): 267–318.

by the limitations of his own, but gauge God's assertions concerning Himself by the scale of His own glorious self-revelation.... Since then we are to discourse of the things of God, let us assume that God has full knowledge of Himself, and bow with humble reverence to His words. For He Whom we can only know through His own utterances is the fitting witness concerning Himself.¹⁶¹

Three basic principles of understanding God are proclaimed in the above paragraph. One, it is necessary to acknowledge his "sure ground," that is, his infinite being in the world. Two, he must be gauged according to certain criteria, not external standards by human beings but "interior standards" rooted in the ways he reveals himself. Three, God himself is the source of knowledge about himself and thus the cause of himself. The three principles together constitute an Aristotelian logic chain that characterizes God as an eternal being, causally independent from all other beings. Hilary appeared to be familiar with how Aristotle defined the objective of metaphysics, that is, to investigate the thing that is explanatory prior to all other beings; his contribution was to transplant it to Christian theology, replacing Aristotle's "unmoved mover" with God. Thus his "God" is not only a religious figure, but the first cause of everything and the first antecedent in all kinds of logic. Maybe we could say that Hilary was among the earliest Christian writers who made theology a quasi-philosophy by giving it a series of technical terms for analysis. Later Christian theologians, like Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274), based their methodologies on Hilary to a large extent.

It also deserves attention that Hilary was very different from the Eastern Han writers who defined themselves as loyal dissidents. Although the commitment to a

¹⁶¹ *De Trinitate* Book I, 18.

meta-discursive master existed in the works of both of them, the master existed in different literary traditions: for the Chinese authors, it resided in the long-time intertwining between textual production and moral politics. Standards of morally right or wrong dominated the act of literary production, and the expression of righteous emotion was usually considered to be an indicator of one's inner conscience. For Hilary (and probably also his contemporaries whose works are not known to us), writing was not actually a matter of moral goodness or blameworthiness; neither was it the fruit of an outpouring of emotion. Rather, a text should be informative enough, in the sense of delivering an idea by using all means that are available. It should have a subject matter, which is often a concept, and guarantee that this subject matter can be dissected in the right way in front of readers. Moral values seem to occupy quite limited space in Hilary's writing, and the expression of emotion is somewhat restrained as well. This situation changed later during the period of High Late Antiquity, when Christianity became a daily topic, pervasive in writings of a wide range of genres.

VI. Conclusion

This chapter looked at the period of "early Late Antiquity," that is, Han China from the 70s to the 140s, and the Roman Empire from the 280s to the 360s. This period was marked by the widespread existence of meta-discursive masters in the discourse of local elite propaganda, an authority outside of the act of textual production that helped shape the relationship between an author and the intended readers. Scholars have already applied the English concept of "discourse" in their research of elite textual expressions in

ancient times, and have touched upon the meaning of “meta-discourse,” but they have used the term “meta-discursive” quite loosely. This requires researchers nowadays to reflect on the intension and extension of the concept, especially with regard to how it differs from another concept, “textual authority.”

Compared with earlier periods when the two empires had just been established, in the early stage of Late Antiquity the two empires, Han China and the Later Roman Empire, witnessed the new development of ancient imperium such that the project of imperialization was initiated not only by the ruling house but also by the elite stratum of local society. The imperial court, rather than only proclaiming the unity of the state and her culture, now made efforts to explain in what sense the notion of cultural unity was true. For Eastern Han monarchs (Emperors Zhang, He, An, and Shun), “truthful” was equivalent to “efficacious” and “omnipresent”; for Roman rulers under the Tetrarchy and the Constantinian dynasty, “truthful” meant “(logically) consistent” and “tangible.” These new standards of truthfulness were embodied as a series of meta-discursive masters that penetrated the textual communication of local elites. In both QXY and Gaul, these masters embodied themselves as customs and traditions that molded the content and form of elite writing. One of the masters was incarnated as ritual conventions that provided the act of writing with the features of repeatability and copiability. Another master derived from the literary and political traditions of criticism, which encouraged writers to imitate some “sages of writing” in history. The language of local elite propagandists appeared to adhere to these masters and the notion of cultural unity they

implied, but these propagandists also created new criteria of truthfulness that was rooted in the concrete situation of their local community.

Therefore the existence of meta-discursive masters was significant to the formation of basic paradigms of local propaganda. On the one hand, these masters guaranteed that local propaganda agents and institutions had some principles to follow when producing textual information. They provided a series of “authoritative models” that elite individuals could learn and mimic in discourse production. On the other hand, because they often took the form of state-advocated traditions or customs, these masters helped local elite propagandists to conceal what they actually intended to express. The norms of local elite propaganda therefore derived from the tension between the tendency to imitate official discourse and the impulse to create a new, localized style of expression.

CHAPTER FOUR

Cultural Crises, Discursive Shifts, and the Formation of Classical Aesthetics:

The Role of Texts in Perpetuating Local Elite Propaganda

This chapter follows the discussion in Chapter Three on the role of elite propaganda discourse in the making of local societies in the QXY area and Roman Gaul. As mentioned earlier, our attention turns now to how transformations occurred within the seemingly stable realm of language. The sources used in Chapter Three suggested that the “early stage” of Late Antiquity—Han China from around the 70s to the 140s, and the Roman Empire from around the 280s to the 360s—witnessed the wide application of a specific elite discourse in local communities, a form of textual expression dominated by an external, meta-discursive master that constantly associated elite speech with the already proven “cultural unity.” Such a master resided in ritual conventions and the elite tradition of criticism, which constituted a repository of textual materials that sometimes blurred the distinction between state and locality.

This distinction then became more and more evident. After Emperor Shun of Han and the Constantinian dynasty in Rome, the weakening imperial authority appeared to many of the educated population as a visible fact. Many scholars have been reluctant to use the term “imperial decline” in describing this period of time, and have argued that the decay of regimes often concurred with new developments and possibilities.¹ I would still use this concept to refer to the overall situation of the Han and Roman societies, as it precisely reflects how local elites thought about their daily lives, their community, as well as their future and ambitions. In other words, “decline” might not be a good term for

¹ A typical case of such studies is Ralph W. Mathisen, “The Theme of Literary Decline in Late Roman Gaul,” *Classical Philology* 83, no. 1 (Jan., 1988): 45–52.

modern researchers whose perspectives are entirely from the outside, but could have been a somewhat correct description for those participants of late antique events and crises who were actually in the middle of historical changes. The elite confidence in establishing a culture founded upon a unified set of principles and values apparently decreased, even in local areas. Enthusiasm for following a certain canon external to textual production began to wane.

This leads us to another aspect that differentiated such a later period from the “early stage of Late Antiquity.” Readers of elite writings from this era might find among local writers a much more intensified outpouring of emotion, which largely eclipsed the rational, knowledge-based meditation on how to prove the truthfulness of one’s arguments. Concerns about what was true and how to prove its truthfulness, of course, did not disappear entirely from the self-designated commission of QXY and Gallic writers, but such concerns gradually departed from the pre-determined elite value that a literate person must do something to meet the expectations of their status as a member of the empire. The act of writing, to a certain extent, aimed less at fulfilling this demand of being a qualified member of the elite group, and more at producing an applied art. Tokens of an idealistic world of aesthetic values were popularized. After a period of centerlessness—during which a collective subservience to traditional textual canons was overshadowed by local intellectuals’ declarations of individual pursuits and desires—writers in QXY and Gaul were once again unified under one goal: making textual production a poetic arena for nostalgia through which the fading culture of the empire could be restored.

The discussion in this chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I investigate how “imperial decline” exhibited itself in the Eastern Han and Roman empires as a crisis in the cultural domain. The metaphoric basis for the notion of cultural unity

was intensively questioned. The Han imperial court was no longer the symbol of political successes and the incarnation of universally acknowledged charisma, while Roman rulers faced counter-charges which grew from their own theological constructions. What accompanied this crisis was a social movement of elite populations in different social domains who claimed to be the legitimate heirs of the imperial legacy. By the late-second century CE in China and late-fourth century in Rome, educated elites had already somewhat replaced imperial rulers as the major spokespersons of the state culture and civilization.

The second section looks into how the previously discussed “meta-discursive master” lost its dominant status in the textual expression of elite populations in QXY and Gaul, during the period when state division was a reality beyond question. Attention is paid to the era of “High Late Antiquity”: China from around the 140s to 200s, and Rome from around the 360s to 430s. The third section provides case studies, focusing on two native writers who witnessed how the two regions transitioned from “High Late Antiquity” to the closing era of Late Antiquity. Kong Rong 孔融 (ca. 151–208), who is among the most renowned writers in Chinese history, and Sidonius Apollinaris (ca. 430–485), who was among the most important authors whose works survive from Roman Gaul, are the focus of investigation. As the axis of various types of information nexuses, they provided good examples of how literary goals broke with their political past, how those old literary patterns had been nurtured by this past, and how the entire domain of elite textual production demonstrated a quasi-aesthetic turn in its basic pursuit.

The last section looks into the age after the collapse of the Han and Roman regimes. The pursuit of a new “meta-discursive master” now became clear: an aesthetic pursuit of giving things new forms or order, which required writers to be honest in terms of tastes, obtained favor among local elite writers. QXY and Gallic writers who survived

from the fall of the state now made efforts to construct a textual utopia based on a purely aesthetic order. A new form of local elite propaganda arose here, which depended heavily on new genres of textual discourse.

I. To Restore the Han and Roman Heritage: Cultural Crises after the 140s and 360s

It has long been acknowledged that the reigns of Emperors Huan 桓帝 (146–168) and Ling 靈帝 (168–189) marked the turning point in Han history that brought the empire to her ultimate collapse. In the *Zizhi tongjian*, Sima Guang used the term “witlessness and brutality” (*hun’niè* 昏虐) to describe how the two rulers relied on eunuchs while executing loyal officials. But he also portrayed the period as a glorious age for righteous individuals, who not only followed traditional customs but also dared to fight against enemies of the state, even if these enemies were from the imperial palace itself:

然猶綿綿不至於亡者，上則有公卿、大夫袁安、楊震、李固、杜喬、陳蕃、李膺之徒，引廷爭，用公義以扶其危，下則有布衣之士符融、郭泰、範滂、許邵之流，立私論以救其敗。是以政治雖濁而風俗不衰，至有觸冒斧鉞，僵僕於前，而忠義奮髮，繼起於後，隨踵就戮，視死如歸。²

Yet the reason the state continued and did not fall into destruction was that on the one hand there were excellencies, ministers and high officials such as Yuan An, Yang Zhen, Li Gu, Du Qiao, Chen Fan, and Li Ying, who would argue in the imperial presence and struggled to support the state with justice and honor in its time of danger. And at the same time there were scholars of plain clothing such as Fu Rong, Guo Tai, Fan Pang, and Xu Shao, who held private discussions to help in that time of chaos. And so, although the government was corrupted Custom was not in decline. Those officials and scholars went forward to face the axe and the halberd, and even when the first of them was killed, the example of their loyalty and honor was so great that others followed in their footsteps on the road to execution. They saw death as the necessary and natural path to follow.³

² “Han ji liushi” 漢紀六十, in *Zizhi tongjian*, vol. 68, comm. Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 2148.

³ The English translation is seen in Rafe de Crespigny, *Emperor Huan and Emperor Ling: Being the Chronicle of Later Han for the years 157 to 189 AD as recorded in*

Sima Guang offered a standard template for writing about heroes who devoted their lives to the state. Nearly six hundred years later, similar speech patterns were still seen in Zhang Pu's 張溥 (1602–1640) “Epitaph for the Grave of Five Men” (*Wuren mu beiji* 五人墓碑記), which commemorated five Suzhou citizens who died in the struggle against imperial eunuchs. The highest honor for the late Ming literati, “invigorated by righteousness, and died for it” (*jiyu yi er'si* 激於義而死), was thus the echo of those Eastern Han men who lost their lives for the state.

This eagerness for a righteous death was the signal of an ongoing cultural crisis during the late Han period. On the one hand, the imperial palace was desacralized in the minds of elite individuals, as it was confirmed to be no more than the abode of incapable rulers and their vicious, self-serving assistants, rather than the physical embodiment of sagely virtues. In other words, elite populations now needed to rely on themselves to pursue such virtues; they could no longer depend entirely on the monarch's decisions, initiatives, and his virtuous policies, because it was his irrationality and partiality that allowed eunuchs to interfere in realpolitik. The ruler himself was a wrongdoer. The *Hou Han ji* documented that Dou Wu 竇武 (d. 164), Grand General during the reign of Emperor Huan, told the ruler directly that he was violating the traditional principles of promotion: “Your Majesty is going against the old canonical precedents of the Han, saying that [your policies] must be carried out. [Your Majesty] is creating new institutions and rules, frivolously endowing noble titles upon wrongdoers” 陛下違漢舊典, 謂必可行, 自造制度, 妄爵非人.⁴

Chapters 54 to 59 of the Zizhi tongjian of Sima Guang (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1989), xiii–xiv.

⁴ Yuan Hong 袁宏, *Hou Han ji* vol. 22, *Qinding siku quanshu (Shibu)* 欽定四庫全書 (史部) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Daxue yingyinban 浙江大學影印版, 2009), 102–103.

The constant wrongdoing of the imperial court therefore made the emperor unable to represent the once-glorified Han state and her culture. His charisma disappeared, as officials and gentry intellectuals found it justifiable to protest against imperial eunuchs who were among those closest to the ruler. Historians like Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990) tended to attribute the Great Proscription to the power struggle between the *shi* 士 group and the monarch.⁵ However, considering the civilizational implications of the protest in which elite intellectuals claimed to be the guardians of the moral principles inherited from the ancient past, it is arguable that the protesters were fighting to be the guardians of a specific culture, not simply for the expansion of their group’s interests and authority. Based on this understanding, scholar Cao Shenggao 曹勝高 traced the starting point of the Great Proscription to 130 CE, the year when students of the Imperial University together submitted a memorial to the emperor. In this memorial, the students declared that they would like to have themselves sentenced if only Zhu Mu 朱穆 (100–163), an official harshly accused by imperial eunuchs, could be released from prison.⁶ Apparently, what mattered here was not political power, but an insistence on the moral heritage found in classical canons. The emperor was not treated as the highest, divinized protector of the state, but was forced to make a choice between two options: to renounce his support for the eunuch group, or to betray the traditional ideal of justice represented by intellectual elites.

Here we could make a comparison between those emperors in the “early stage of Late Antiquity” and Emperors Huan and Ling who were mired in the tension between the

⁵ Qian Mu 錢穆, *Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱 (Beijing: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 2011), 180–84.

⁶ Cao Shenggao 曹勝高, “Junzi zhiyi yu liang Han shiren de zhengzhi jiyu” 君子製義與兩漢士人的政治際遇, *Gudai wenming* 古代文明 10, no. 2 (April 2016): 85–114.

court and other elite groups. As illustrated in Chapter Three, the reigns of Emperors Zhang, He, An, and Shun exhibited a picture of cultural unity in which monarchs and their people were working together on what was “correct”—learning, self-renewing, and seeking a virtuous life—collaboratively and harmoniously. For Emperors Huan and Ling, this picture was replaced by the rulers’ reluctance to reform their conduct and elite intellectuals’ disappointment in this reluctance. The division of the state was not simply on the level of a power struggle, but was related to people’s faith in a civilized way of living. Monarchs were now considered to be departing from this faith, devoting themselves to executing those who were upright while tolerating the a weakness in virtue of the royal house. Officials and intellectuals, who claimed to still insist on the right Way, portrayed themselves as being misunderstood and having been incorrectly accused. In his memorial to Emperor Huan, Chen Fan 陳蕃 (d. 168) directly pointed out the growing gap between the ruler and his officials:

以忠忤旨，橫加考案，或禁錮閉隔，或死徙非所。杜塞天下之口，聾盲一世之人，與秦焚書坑儒，何以為異？

[Those protesters] challenged the order [of Your Majesty] by their loyalty, but they were harshly investigated and accused. Some [of them] are sentenced in prison, isolated [from the outside]; some [of them] were killed, or were exiled to places that are inappropriate [for them]. Gagging the mouths of all people under Heaven, and making an entire generation deaf and blind. If comparing [such practices] with those of the Qin court who burned books and buried scholars, are there any differences? ⁷

Once again, we see an image of the loyal dissidents (Chapter Three), who dared to openly question the behavior of emperors based on moral considerations. But what Chen Fan highlighted was obviously not only the loyalty of the intellectual elite group. To him, these people were more significant in their ability to secure “all under Heaven” from the status of being deafened and blinded. They assumed themselves to be the enlighteners of

⁷ *HHS* 66. 2166.

a broader public who could bring civilization to their society, rather than compliant servants of the royal house. In this sense the division between educated elite groups and the imperial government centered more on the question of who were the ones actually protecting the codes of civilized conduct and governance, and less on a pure power struggle.

On the other hand, since putting an end to one's life was regarded as a possible approach to maintain one's honor, the traditionally considered "political successes," i.e., being awarded for military triumph or civil management, were hardly the most crucial criteria to judge someone. In Chapter Three we examined how rulers in the early stage of Late Antiquity exhibited their political achievements to demonstrate the power of the unified Han culture, and how the enthusiasm for achieving similar accomplishments penetrated the daily life of local men. When it came to the reign of Emperors Huan and Ling, the elite keenness for getting an official position was not as intense as before. An already existing behavioral pattern, "pure conduct without obtaining an official post" (*qingxing bushi* 清行不仕), became more appealing to the educated population. In the *Hou Hanshu*, records about people's refusal to enter the bureaucratic system (*bujiu* 不就 / *bu'ying* 不應) are widely seen during this period of time. The late Eastern Han scholar Xiang Kai 襄楷 (fl. 160s), known for his expertise in omens and portents, was recommended by Chen Fan to the imperial court, but declined the offer and died in his hometown.⁸ A member of the powerful Yuan 袁 clan, Yuan Hong 袁弘 (fl. late second century), was documented as having "felt shameful about the status and power of his family, and changed his surname....and did not respond to the call from the imperial court"

⁸ *HHS* 30B. 1085.

恥其門族貴勢，乃變姓名....不應征辟。⁹ Zheng Xuan was also recorded as having declined an invitation to serve from He Jin 何進 (d. 189), Emperor Ling's brother-in-law.¹⁰ In the *Hou Hanshu*, Wei Huan 魏桓, a recluse living under the reign of Emperor Huan, explained his lack of interest in an official career as follows:

桓曰：“夫幹祿求進，所以行其誌也。今後宮千數，其可損乎？廄馬萬匹，其可減乎？左右悉權豪，其可去乎？”皆對曰：“不可。”桓乃慨然嘆曰：“使桓生行死歸，於諸子何有哉！”¹¹

Wei Huan said: ‘People pursue official careers and promotions, because they want to have their ambitions actualized. Now there are thousands of imperial concubines, would the number be cut down [if I were to serve as an official]? There are thousands of horses in the imperial stables, would the number be reduced [if I were to served as an official]? [The emperor] is surrounded by powerful men on his left and right, would these people be removed [if I were to serve as an official]?’ They all responded: ‘No.’ Huan therefore sighed: ‘Even if I live or die, would it make any difference to anyone?’

Wei Huan, as with many others, chose to live a secluded life because of disappointment over the court. Imperial institutions, due to their lack of charismatic inner virtue (*de* 德) as an agency of a virtuous and civilized state, somewhat lost their appeal to learned men. It was with such a background that much more stable coalitions of elite individuals came to increase, as substitutes for state-sponsored institutions, by relying on which elite people could have their voices heard and their moral or intellectual goals realized.

“Men of factions” (*dangren* 黨人) therefore became a formal name for those who were involved in the protest against imperial eunuchs and their associates. Zhong Changtong 仲長統 explains the term in his collection of treatises, *Changyan* 昌言, by contrasting it with another term, “evil eunuchs” (*huanshu* 宦豎). According to Zhong

⁹ *HHS* 45. 1526.

¹⁰ *HHS* 35. 1208.

¹¹ *HHS* 53. 1741.

Changtong, the *huanshu* group included vicious men who “caused chaos upon chaos, government decrees to be issued from multiple sources, simultaneously pursued political power and commercial profit, misled and deluded the emperor, and threw the world into confusion” 以亂承亂, 政令多門, 權利並作, 迷荒帝主, 濁亂海內.¹² In contrast, the *dangren* group were “ones with lofty commissions” (*gaoming shi* 高命士) who “hated such as this [i.e., the practices of *huanshu*], spoke in upright ways and admonished [the emperor] by their integrity, discussed with each other and contemplated [what was right or wrong], but were wrongly accused and entrapped” 惡其如此, 直言正論, 與相摩切, 被誣見陷.¹³ So, the image presented of *dangren*, as a continuation of the spirit of those previous loyal dissidents who had imitated Qu Yuan, is impressive for its core of patriotism, which derived from struggles against a concrete enemy (i.e., *huanshu*), rather than only focusing on the inner sincerity of the elite ones themselves.

Similar to the Chinese ruling house who failed to continually uphold Han cultural heritage, after the relatively prosperous Constantinian dynasty, Roman emperors also came to lose their status as the personification of Roman intellectual ideals, in the period of “High Late Antiquity” from the 360s to around the 430s. Valentinian I (r. 364–375) divided the empire into two parts and ruled the west, paying much of his attention to defending military frontiers. Although his success in warfare and diplomacy over the Rhine and Danube has been acknowledged,¹⁴ it has been correctly pointed out by Andreas Alföldi that Valentinian encountered considerable opposing voices from the

¹² *QHHW* vol. 89.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court AD 364–425* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 33; Andreas Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire: The Clash between the Senate and Valentinian I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 48.

senate group. As the emperor “had been bound by every tie to the soldier class,” he must have found no favor among the average senator group who enjoyed luxury lives and were proud of their privileges as spokesmen of public morality; he even neglected the obligation as a Roman ruler to visit the city of imperial ancestors.¹⁵ Unlike the case we saw with the Han, what triggered the conflict between the Roman ruler and his elite subordinates was not actually the emperor’s incompetence or his lack of traditional virtue. Valentinian was still adhered to exemplary ideals, with his policies emphasizing a close relationship between high military posts and the senatorial institutions that embodied the old imperial conventions.¹⁶ However, there was no doubt that the military was much more important to him, more so than culture or customs. Valentinian’s son Gratian (r. 375–383), whose relationship with the senatorial group was better than that of his father, received words of praise from important literati like Ausonius.¹⁷ This does not mean that he was successful in representing the Roman cultural tradition. Instead, Gratian obtained support from part of the elite class mainly for his willingness to partly abdicate his status as the most important spokesmen of Roman civilization and let Christian nobles occupy this status. His reign actually offended the interests of the powerful pagan nobles. He determined to remove the Altar of Victory from the Senate house in Rome, which, according to Alan Cameron, verified his neglect of the maintenance of temples and religious architecture as a state issue.¹⁸ After removing the altar, he also repudiated the

¹⁵ Andreas Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire*, 52–53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁷ See Anna Mleczek, “Gratian as Optimus Princeps: The Literary Image of ‘An Ideal Emperor’ in *Gratiarum actio ad Gratianum Imperatorem* by D.M. Ausonius and the Laudatio in Gratianum Augustum of Q.A. Symmachus,” *Classica Cracoviensia* 26 (2023): 357–405.

traditional title of Roman rulers, *pontifex maximus*.¹⁹ Meanwhile, he built a close relationship with Saint Ambrose of Milan, who then had a great impact on him regarding church policies. In his letters to Ambrose, the emperor often portrays himself as a true believer, not only in the Christian God but also in the specific bishop himself:

Festina igitur ad me, religiose Dei sacerdos, ut doceas doctrinam vere credentem: non quod contentioni studeam, aut velim magis Deum verbis quam mente complecti; sed ut magis aperto pectori revelatio divinitatis insidat.

Hasten then, holy Bishop of God; come and teach me, who am already a sincere believer; not that I am eager for controversy, or seek to apprehend God in words rather than with my mind, but that the revelation of His Godhead may sink more deeply into an enlightened breast.²⁰

The ruler spoke as a real student totally submissive to his mentor, not as someone of superior status who had the confidence to speak in the name of his state. Rather, it appeared that he thought he must take suggestions from a Christian bishop, who seemed to have a mind more enlightened than his. This submissiveness and lack of confidence, to a certain extent, demonstrated that the emperor might have been reluctant to call himself the sole representative of the state and her culture. He was aware that he needed someone's assistance, to clarify for him how the supreme being—God—reveals himself. James J. Sheridan has attributed this devolution of authority, from the imperial center to church leaders, to the fact that the Christian senators outnumbered the pagan ones during this period.²¹ Ralph W. Mathisen has also stated that a large number of senators converted

¹⁸ Alan Cameron, "Gratian's Repudiation of the Pontifical Robe," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 58, parts 1 and 2 (1968): 96–102.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁰ 751 *Gratiani ad Ambrosium Epistola*, 0875B. The Latin and English texts are from The Catholic Library Project, <https://catholiclibrary.org/library/view?docId=Synchronized-EN/Ambrose.Letters.en.html;chunk.id=00000003>.

to Christianity in the early fifth century, and some even obtained high church office.²² If these scholars are correct, we might be able to argue that Christians had already occupied a large part of the noble class, wherein political power, intellectual resources, and material wealth converged, which made it necessary for rulers to negotiate with them.

At the same time, the establishment of the cults of holy figures in High Late Antiquity demonstrated that church men had already become a powerful group who brought diverse voices, and thus had the potential to challenge the emperor's role as the most authoritative figure to explain what was "Rome" and what was "Romanness." One of the commonalities between the "men of factions" during the late Han and these Christian elites in late Rome was their insistence on the perfectionism of human nature, declaring that a good life is rooted in transcending one's unchecked, perhaps inappropriate, status of living. For the *dangren* group of the late Eastern Han, those who were successful in self-transcendence were regularly capable of protecting the value of the empire and making themselves "men of the state." In contrast, the notion of empire was increasingly less appealing for Roman Christians. As Julia M. H. Smith pointed out, the late antique idea of holiness was often "in opposition with dominant political formations and ideology of power."²³ It appeared that the activity of the holy men—though operating around established political coalitions (e.g., the church) and not being entirely detached from the administrative system inherited from the Constantine dynasty—indicated the use of a series of new motifs to attract public attention. These new

²¹ James J. Sheridan, "The Altar of Victory: Paganism's Last Battle," *L'Antiquité Classique* T. 35, Fasc. 1 (1966): 186–206.

²² Ralph W. Mathisen, "Petronius, Hilarius and Valerianus: Prosopographical Notes on the Conversion of the Roman Aristocracy," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Bd. 30, H. 1 (1st Qtr., 1981): 106–112.

²³ Julia M. H. Smith, "Saints and Their Cults" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 3, eds. Thomas Noble and Julia Amith (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 581–605.

symbols directly led to the gradual erasure of individual emperors from the newly developing “Roman-Christian” theological system, that is, a monolithic system of belief that did not leave room for multiple deities. Chapter Three illustrated how rulers under the Tetrachy and Constantinian dynasty implanted a theological logic into the minds of their people, a logic that highlighted the revealing/disclosing of these rulers’ divine power in their military and state-managing activities. Now this revealing process was less connected to those emperors, but more often related to God and his spokesmen in the earthly world: saints, martyrs, bishops and other churchmen, and so forth. These people were different from Christian leaders from the early stage of Late Antiquity, as they were more indifferent to their identity as Roman citizens but were emphasized more for their status as outsiders, who always keep their distance from the banal, quotidian life of/within the earthly state.

One of the motifs these people favored was that of the holy death. Just as in the Eastern Han, expressions of death became popular among Christian elite populations in late Rome mainly for their potential connection with the route not only to actualizing one’s personal value but also to securing communal welfare. Christian martyrs, with their early traces dating back to the mid-second century,²⁴ had their reputation greatly expanded in the Roman society after the mid-fourth century. The research of Peter Gemeinhardt and Johan Leemans shows that, since this point of time, the hagiographical texts about martyrs and theological writings showed a tendency toward convergence.²⁵ If this argument is correct, martyrs, as dead victims of anti-Christian persecutions, were

²⁴ Peter Gemeinhardt and Johan Leemans, “Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity: Some Introductory Perspectives” in *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity: History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity*, eds. Gemeinhardt and Leemans (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 1–14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

entitled as new spokesmen of the theoretical foundations of Roman Christianity. An illustrative example was provided by the work of Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339–397). His treatise *De Jacob et vita beata* (Jacob and the Happy Life) was written between 386 and 388 CE.²⁶ Writing in a tone of meditation, Ambrose re-exhibited the lives of a group of Old Testament patriarchs, among whom Jacob was an exemplar. Death was portrayed as both an end and a starting point, in the sense that it offered people with a chance to communicate with the Lord and learn about their sin:

Nam certum est quod mors mihi accessit, dum quod facio agnosco peccatum, sicut ipse Dominus ait: ‘Si non venissem, et locutus fuisset his, peccatum non haberent.

Indeed, it is certain that death came to me as long as I knew the sin that I did, just as the Lord Himself says, ‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin.’²⁷

Death is redefined as coexisting with sin, and both occur to human beings as God himself reveals. Because death provides a way for God to exhibit himself to the earthly world, those who have experienced death in person must have a more intimate relationship with the supreme, heavenly power. Martyrs were exactly the group of people who distinguished themselves from others by confronting holy death. With the wide presence of these figures in literary works, Christianity gradually became a “religion about being,” and was considered to have the potential to intervene in the starting, continuing, and closing of an individual’s life.

²⁶ Archim Ambrose Bitziadis-Bowers, “Ambrose of Mediolanum ‘*De Jacob et Vita Beata*: A Textual Analysis,” *ΚΟΣΜΟΣ/Cosmos* 7 (2020): 183–206.

²⁷ *De Jacob et vita beata*, 1, 4.15; 1, 4.16. The Latin text is from M. McHugh, *The Fathers of the Church: Saint Ambrose: Seven Exegetical Works: Jacob and the Happy Life. Text and Translation* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 129; English translation is from another edition of the book, published by the Catholic University of America Press, Inc. (1972), 130.

In another paragraph Ambrose further explains what individuals should try to seek for the status of “being”:

Perfecta autem vita non sensibilis ista, sed illa rationabilis secundum tractionem rationis et mentis vicacitatem: in quā non est portio hominis, quam in operatione. Ea enim beatum facit.

Now the perfect life is not that of the senses, but the life of reason, lived according to management exercised by the reason and natural vigor possessed by the mind. In this there is found, not a part of man, but his completion, which appears not so much in his status as in his actions, and these, after all, make a man happy.²⁸

To be a “reasonable being” is the goal he sets for humans. Compared with the logic of Roman theology discussed in Chapter Three, which focused more on the making of a series of specific concepts, the narrative of Ambrose displays concerns about how to guide one’s daily practice, providing guidelines as clearly as possible. This, to a certain extent, corroborated the theoretical development of Christianity per se such that it gradually came to show some rudimentary forms of medieval philosophy, which centered on how ideas come to be formed through the empirical life of humans.

II. New Roles of QXY and Gaul to the Empire: The Disappearing Meta-Discursive Master

It was under the contexts discussed above that the two regions, QXY and Gaul, came to play new roles as part of the empire. Generally speaking, these two areas experienced different processes of transformation in their roles during the period of High Late Antiquity. The QXY region changed from the hometown of Confucius, tightly adhering to the ideals of Western Zhou times, to a battlefield of various interest groups including officials, committed scholars and literati, military men, and so forth. The Gallic provinces shifted from one of the core areas of state politics and military affairs—as the

²⁸ *De Jacob et vita beata* 1, 7. 29. The Latin text is from McHugh, *The Fathers of the Church* (2003), 118. English translation is from the 1972 edition, 138.

seat of emperors and the western border of the empire—to a center of ideology that embraced the coming of saints, martyrs, members of monastic orders, and their knowledge legacies.

(I) QXY

Because of the detailed documentation of the voices of “men of factions,” or *dangren*, in standard historiography, researchers have often neglected the complicated negotiation between different power groups behind such overly loud pronouncements, in the QXY area. The Qing scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 (1727–1814) attributed the rise of the *dangren* group to two factors: 1) the less formal system of internal recommendation (*zhengbi* 征辟) for recruiting officials, which judged a man’s qualification to be a civil servant based on his personal reputation in the local area; and 2) the intimate relationship between recommenders (i.e., eminent officials) and recommendees, in which the latter treated the former as not only patrons but also their mentors or even pseudo-parents.²⁹ He then argued that those recommendees, motivated by the desire to do anything for the recommenders, would devote themselves to difficult tasks, or even give their lives when needed:

蓋其時輕生尚氣已成習俗，故志節之士好為苟難，務欲絕出流輩，以成卓特之行。

This is because, at that time, it had already been a routine and custom, to put less emphasis on one’s [biological] life but more on one’s courage. Therefore men who were ambitious and upright tended to deal with difficult [work], with the intention to make themselves outstanding among the same generation, and to make their conduct appear to be remarkable and unique.³⁰

²⁹ Zhao Yi 趙翼, *Nian'er shi zhaji jiaozheng* 廿二史札記校正, comm. Wang Shumin 王樹民 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984), 102.

³⁰ Ibid.

The special behavioral pattern of the newly elevated officials made it easier for their voices to be heard. Since they were recommended from local areas, these people largely represented the interests of a huge network of men from their town: clans of central officials, distant relatives of the imperial house, lineages of Confucian scholars, individual intellectuals who were patronized by them, their colleagues, mentees, vandeeds, and so forth. As scholar Chin Fa-ken 金發根 stated, most leaders of the protest against the imperial eunuchs were from the families of powerful central elites, and shared similar politico-economic backgrounds and mindsets.³¹ Scholar Sun Ya'nan 孫亞男, in her Master's thesis, further noted that among the government officials who were involved in the Great Proscription (around 160 people in total), forty-eight were from the provinces of Qing, Xu, and Yan, with almost all of them coming from powerful clans.³²

This highly influential position of mighty clans enjoyed continuation, or even elevation, after the breaking out of the Yellow Turban Rebellion in the 180s. In order to suppress the rebellion and prevent the elite class from allying with the group behind the uprising, Emperor Ling decided to end his intensive conflict with governmental officials, gentry communities, and their associates. His decision was verified by the sudden amnesty in 184 CE for those involved in the Great Proscription, after which a great number of *dangren* were released and re-obtained their official positions. Those clans of *dangren* that had once been charged with anti-governmental activities also regained their reputation in local areas.³³ Meanwhile, since military men were highly involved in the

³¹ Chin Fa-ken 金發根, "Dong Han danggu renwu de fenxi" 東漢黨錮人物的分析, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 34, no. 2 (1963): 505–558.

³² Sun Ya'nan 孫亞男, "Qi-Lu shiren yu danggu shihuo yanjiu" 齊魯士人與黨錮之禍研究 (MA thesis, Shandong Normal University, 2020), 4.

suppression of the rebel army, they were provided with more chances to further engage in local affairs. One typical case was Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220), who was active in the Ji’nan 濟南 area of the Qing province when confronting the Yellow Turban army. In his commentary on the *Sanguo zhi*, Pei Songzhi 裴松之 quotes the *Weishu* 魏書 (Book of Wei) as proof that Cao Cao intervened in local religious issues in the name of suppressing the revolt:

皆毀壞祠屋，止絕官吏民不得祠祀。及至秉政，遂除奸邪鬼神之事，世之淫祀由此遂絕。

[Cao’s people] destroyed shrines and related architecture, stopping officials and commoners from offering sacrifice in shrines. As [Cao] rose to power [in the region], he eliminated those evil, heretical activities related to [beliefs in] ghosts and deities. The practices of unorthodox sacrifices were therefore put to an end.³⁴

The interplay between powerful clans, military men, scholar communities, and other elite groupings made textual production in QXY a somewhat self-governing domain, and the existing frames of textual expression founded upon “meta-discursive masters” could not remain intact. In other words, the imperial government faced obstacles when binding its physical presence and operational mechanisms to those moral and intellectual tenets embraced by local elites; conventions inherited from the history of the state, and exemplary conduct borrowed from sagely writers, were still present in QXY people’s textual expression, but usually served as the exterior form of texts and had less to do with the core of their content. The content was largely determined by individual authors themselves, who used a variety of methods to exhibit how they were guarding the Han cultural heritage without the intervention of the imperial power, and how they separated

³³ Wang Yukun 王煜焜, “Han lingdi moqi difang zhoumu zhidu de chongjian yu xiaoguo” 漢靈帝末期地方州牧制度的重建與效果, *Tangdu xuekan* 唐都學刊 39, no. 5 (Sep. 2023): 24–31.

³⁴ Chen Shou, *SGZ* 1. 4.

the “essence of the state” from the unsuccessful, corrupted system of governmental politics. They did not openly challenge the meta-discursive master and the idea of cultural unity it represented, but displayed an effort to shake their basis: the belief in the possibility of a trans-contextual text. The new generations of QXY writers believed that writing should be attached to its background story; a text could hardly be copied from one context to another, even though it was compliant with ritual conventions. Every specific circumstance deserved a particular piece of writing, to record, describe, and declare its uniqueness.

Local commemorative stelae from the QXY area could help to demonstrate this point. The design and use of these inscribed texts were partly based on traditions from preceding periods but revealed fundamentally new features. According to the study of Patricia Ebrey, the period between the 150s and 200s CE witnessed the peak of Eastern Han stele production, with over two-thirds of all such materials dated to that time.³⁵ In the region of QXY, some stele inscriptions from this era included a short or long list of “contributors” or sponsors, who were not relatives of the dedicatee but the former subordinates (*guli* 故吏) or students (*mensheng* 門生) of the dedicatee. Among the QXY stelae collected in the *Hanbei quanji*, five of them explicitly list the names of contributors: the “Stele of Wu Ban” (ca. 147 CE), “Fragmentary Stele for Tao Luo” 陶洛殘碑 (ca. late 2nd century), “Stele of Kong Zhou” 孔宙碑 (164 CE), “Stele of Kong Biao, Governor of Boling” 博陵太守孔彪碑 (171 CE), and “Stele for Yang Shugong, Prefectural Governor of Yanzhou” 沅州太守楊叔恭碑 (171 CE). The total number is not large, which might

³⁵ Ebrey calculated the number of stone inscriptions produced throughout the entire Eastern Han, between 25 and 220 CE. The period between 150 and 200 saw the emergence of 101 examples of extant inscriptions, with the entire dynasty produced 146 extant pieces. See Patricia Ebrey, “Later Han Stone Inscriptions,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40, no. 2 (Dec., 1980): 325–53.

indicate that although an awareness of locality had already emerged, some individuals were unwilling to categorize themselves as a stable member of a “local faction,” while some others were excited to be part of a small circle. The idea of factionalism had been spread in the region, but was far from becoming a mainstream, universally embraced notion.

Also different from the preceding period, now the QXY stelae were a category of serious literary product that could be ascribed to certain writers. These authors, like Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192), enjoyed an identity different from the “contributors” or sponsors: there was no question that they were the inventors of the texts, rather than only providing the conditions for their invention. In the case of Cai Yong, the stele inscriptions he composed were no less esteemed than his other works, and were passed down to later generations together with those other writings. Anecdotes about how he wrote inscriptions for Guo Tai 郭泰 (ca. 128–170) and other “upright ones” are collected in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語.³⁶ The creation of such texts was thus connected to the names of reputable elite men, rather than only serving as one step of a complicated ritual process. This indicated the interplay between the cultural pursuit of local individual authors and the self-assigned mission of the Eastern Han elite class, illustrating the relationship between the change of Late Antique ritual narratives and the efforts made by individual learned men to pronounce their own understanding of the Han heritage.

All these factors were responsible for a feature of many QXY stelae, which was that they could only be understood contextually, being located within a story that happened amid a specific temporality, space, and stream of thoughts. We have already

³⁶ For transmission of the stele for Guo Tai, see Lian Haochen 廉皓晨, “Beike wenxian liuchuan de duozhong xingtai: Cai Yong zhuan Guo Tai bei kao” 碑刻文獻流傳的多種形態: 蔡邕撰郭泰碑考, *Gudian wenxian yanjiu* 古典文獻研究 25, no.1 (2022): 156–66.

encountered the stele for Wu Ban in Chapter Two. As one of the earliest stelae from the “High Late Antiquity” under discussion here, it tells the life story of an individual which differs from those we saw in previous inscriptions. Wu Ban held the position of Chief Clerk to the Governor of Dunhuang 敦煌長史 when he died, without getting a last chance to return to his hometown in the region of Yan 兗. He died at a young age, but his experience was rich: he was first known in the local community for his knowledge and virtue (“His erudition....He enjoyed collecting ancient texts....pure. He sought the good without deviation” 博兼□□, 耽綜典籍...清聲美行, 闡形遠近); then recommended to serve the central court (“invited at...years of ages to serve in the purple [imperial] palace” 歲舉□翼紫宮), in charge of ancient texts (“He was put in charge of the department of ancient texts” 掌司古□); then appointed as an official in Dunhuang, working hard to protect the border and people there; and he then returned to the capital (“After hard labor on the borders he returned to court to discuss promotions for his subordinates” 當還本朝, 以敘左右).³⁷ Earlier stelae, to a certain extent, portrayed the life of the dedicatee as an unmoving panorama that directly showed his heroic or righteous conduct. But in Wu Ban’s case, what we see is the shifting of circumstances and a journey through time and space. The addressee appears to have traveled from his hometown to a broader world, even to the border of the empire. He also experienced the whole process of a man’s growth, with each stage of his life associated with the image of an exemplary persona imitable for a male of that age: a young and earnest scholar–student; a loyal assistant for

³⁷ My discussion here is based on Anthony Barbieri’s English translation of the stele text, in “Computer Reconstruction of the Wu Family Cemetery,” which was in turn based on Jean James’ dissertation and Edouard Chavannes’ French translation: <https://barbierilow.faculty.history.ucsb.edu/Research/WuzhaishanRemastered/index.htm>

the emperor; a courageous, devoted local official; and finally, a tragic hero who died at a young age and therefore deserved much sympathy.

Another case, an inscription excavated in Yanzibu 燕子埠, Pizhou 邳州 (northern Jiangsu), dated to 155 CE, provides more complex information about how the dedicatee had extended his life as an upright man. The addressee, whose name is Yu 紆, had been renowned in the area of Xu 徐 at a young age, and then became a local official. A special aspect of this stele is its documentation of Yu's family life, not only recording his kinship ties but also hinting at the intimacy between him and his wife. Yu died at seventy-one; when his funeral neared, his wife, who was of the same age, fell ill (夫人亦七十一....丁巳不起, 假疾), possibly from extreme sorrow. Before Yu's death, his wife was also the one who listened to his last will, and was responsible for arranging the funeral according to his wishes:

□□□舍棺貼掩身衣服因故
□□□之物亦不得葬丁寧夫人勿□
□□瓦為藏器不飭雕文³⁸

XXX...The coffin and clothing items [to cover the body] should be arranged according to old conventions. Items for...should not be buried. [He] urged his wife not toUse tiles to make the vessels buried [in the tomb], without ornamentation or carved patterns.

What is the role of Yu's wife in this funerary writing? Clearly, she was the one who accompanied Yu throughout his life, until the last moment. Her age was emphasized, and her response to the death of her husband was recorded in the inscription. Not every dedicatee of QXY commemorative stelae was so lucky to share such a long life journey with their beloved partner. She was, in a certain sense, the most important witness and

³⁸ For the original text, see *HBQJ*, 773. The stele is titled “Pizhou Yanzibu Yongshou yuannian huaxiang shi tiji” 邳州燕子埠永壽元年畫像石題記.

participant in the life of Yu, who could tell how he was different from people. In other words, she constituted part of the contextuality and particularity of his entire story.

Female individuals also obtained chances to be the dedicatee of a stele. The great author Cai Yong had composed at least three commemorative inscriptions for QXY elite figures: “Stele for Hu Shuo, Governor of Chenliu” 陳留太守胡碩碑, “Stele of Jiang Gong from Pengcheng” 彭城姜肱碑, and “Eulogy for Wife of Mr. Cui, Chancellor of Jibei” 濟北相崔君夫人誄.³⁹ In the inscription for the wife of Mr. Cui, the female addressee is portrayed as having each phase of her life embodying a key demand of the Han cultural tradition, and as finally establishing her reputation as the “paragon of a dignified woman” (*yun nü zhiying* 允女之英). The text is also an example of how the author attempted to fill the minds of readers with different kinds of emotions, as they encountered different parts of the writing.

As Cai Yong portrayed step by step, Mrs. Cui was highly cultured in the Confucian Classics when she was a girl, and then married to Mr. Cui, serving as a virtuous and sincere assistant (“*Yu he Cuijun, ying zi zhi lu*” 於赫崔君, 膺茲祉祿). She devoted her life to directing the Cui family toward righteous behaviors and thoughts, and was entitled by the emperor as a court lady. However, death came when she ascended to the highest honor of her life. The last several lines of the text are filled of juxtapositions between distinct scenarios, to deepen the sense of regret:

—The juxtaposition between the supposed long life of the lady (“Benevolent people [like her] are supposed to enjoy a long life, and they should enjoy longevity which lasts forever” 仁者壽長, 宜登永年) and her sudden death (“This disaster suddenly arrived, [making her] heavily ill and near her death” 降此殘殃, 寢疾彌留);

³⁹ For the three stele inscriptions, see *QHHW* vol. 75.

—The juxtaposition between the vanishing of the lady from this world (“Her figure and shadow are invisible” 形影不見), and the still vivid memory about her honored life (“[But memory about her is still] glorious and splendid” 榮烈有章);

—The juxtaposition between the wish of her relatives to know about her afterlife from occultism (“Therefore [her relatives] planned [to ask help from] divination” 乃謀卜筮) and the fact that she had already disappeared in darkness (“[The underworld is] dark and boundless, no time for it to enjoy any light” 冥冥窅窅, 無時有陽).

All these scenarios indicated that the author, rather than taking his act of writing as entirely subject to the “meta-discursive master” of ritual conventions, started to instill his personal feelings and experience into his organization of ritual discourse. His regret and commemoration was, to a large extent, “transitive,” when compared with the expression of writers from the earlier stage. His emotions had a direct object: the specific woman, Mrs. Cui, whose story caused the fluctuation of his mindset and his narratives. Those commemorative writings we saw in Chapter Three, however, were more like a series of intransitive verbs that did not have a particular object: their narratives could be copied from one context to another, which somewhat made the entire category of ritual discourse appear to be highly repetitive and iterative.

(II) Gaul

The changing role of Gaul in the Later Roman Empire was also related to the diminishing importance of Roman emperors in representing the state and civilization. Compared with the periods before the mid-fourth century, the presence of the imperial authority was now a routine for Gallic aristocrats, but military activities and the triumphs of rulers were mentioned less in elite writings. Compared with the age of the Tetrarchs and Constantinian rulers, much fewer projects promoted Roman intellectual traditions, as rulers like Valentinian did not take it as his main obligation to be a big patron of the

literati. Meanwhile, as Ralph W. Mathisen and other scholars have noted, Gallo-Roman aristocrats who considered themselves as the legal inheritors of Roman legacies managed to “find aspects of Christian beliefs and practices that were consistent with their own ideologies.”⁴⁰ The expansion of Christian leadership in Gaul and the rise of local intellectual elitism were thus the two sides of one phenomenon, that is, the quest of Gallo-Roman elites to rebuild a “minimized Roman empire” based on their understanding of how the once-splendid civilization should have operated.⁴¹

A bit dissimilar to their Chinese counterparts, Gallic intellectuals in High Late Antiquity did not fully engage in violent movements like the Great Proscription. This was partly because similar types of violence, e.g., the Great Persecution initiated by Diocletian, had already happened in the preceding period and were soon stopped by the imperial court itself, which soothed the relationship between the court and other forces (Christianity in particular) that might have constituted a threat to it. Another factor that made Gallic Christians appear to be different from QXY intellectuals was that many churchmen seemed far from active as normal social members. Richard J. Goodrish has noted that, after the bloody suppression of the usurpers and their supporters during the divisive period (late-fourth century onward), many Gallic aristocrats would have been less inclined to participate in the Roman administrative structure.⁴² The decreasing imperial interest in Gallic provinces was also responsible for the ebbing of elite passion in being involved in bureaucratic issues, as emperors after Valentinian II (r. 375–392)

⁴⁰ Ralph W. Mathisen, “The Ideology of Monastic and Aristocratic Community in Late Roman Gaul,” *POLIS. Revista de ideas y formas políticas de la Antigüedad Clásica* 6 (1994): 203–220.

⁴¹ See Merle Eisenberg, “Building Little Romes: Christianity, Identity, and Governance in Late Antique Gaul” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2018), iii.

⁴² Richard J. Goodrish, *Contextualizing Cassian: Aristocrats, Asceticism, and Reformation in Fifth-Century Gaul* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2007), 19.

stopped taking Trier as the imperial seat.⁴³ Meanwhile, asceticism arose as a popular trend among educated Christians, which brought many of them to geographically remote areas and a secluded style of life.

These do not mean that Gallic elites cared nothing about the fate of the empire. Rather, these people declared themselves as the intermediaries between different realms—gods and human beings, Heaven and Earth, spiritual and secular life, the living and the dead, and so forth. They now expected to have authority as versatile “middlemen” who could reach out to various social domains that were originally separated from each other. The old notion of “state,” once centered on sovereignty, somewhat dissolved in this multifaceted understanding of power. Meta-discursive masters, as the embodiment of this old concept, gradually became rootless as well. Just as with the QXY textual products in High Late Antiquity, Gallo-Roman writings during this stage stepped beyond the framework of the meta-discursive master by reemphasizing contextuality and circumstantiality. Texts were produced when individual elites communicated with each other through literary circles or interest groups. Those individuals at the middle of such information nexuses, therefore, appeared to be especially productive in writing, as their interlocutors and audiences were much broader than those of other writers. Authors like Sulpicius Severus (ca. 363–425), Eucherius of Lyon (ca. 380–449), and Hilary of Arles (ca. 403–449) all serve as illustrative cases with regard to this overlapping between activeness in network building and fruitfulness in textual production.

Letters or other correspondence were among the most representative materials to shed light on how Gallo-Roman intellectuals experienced significant transformations in their written discourse. Two authors mentioned in Chapter Three, Ausonius (ca. 310–395) and Paulinus of Nola (354–431), now came into their golden age of production. One of

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

them was unknown to many in the early stage of Late Antiquity, while the other was far from mature as a writer at that time. When it came to the era of High Late Antiquity, however, their reputation as important authors and intellectuals became widely acknowledged. The two individuals became the center of some elite circles of correspondence, and their words could be used to ascertain how certain information flowed among a group of intellectuals and how such information was wrapped as patterned discourses in the process of textual communication. One difference between the two authors is related to their enthusiasm for Christianity. Ausonius, in the words of Walter A. Edwards, appeared to be “the intimate friend both of the Christian monk Paulinus and of the pagan controversialist Symmachus”;⁴⁴ he seemed to have no particular interest in paganism or Christianity, and showed a tendency to combine the two in his writing practice. Paulinus, in contrast, was a faithful Christian. He was baptized in around the 380s and then served as a true follower of Christ throughout the rest of his life. These disparities between the two individuals allow us to determine the complicated relationship between paradigmatic changes of the elite discourse and shifts in social ideology. Discursive transformations in late antique Gaul, as we will see, did not always result from the spread of Christian ideals, but might have been free from religious causes. However, changes in language would in turn give rise to the consolidation of Christian ideals on the societal level, which made it somewhat an autonomous force that could trigger larger shifts in the area of faith in relatively independent modes.

According to R.P.H. Green’s calculation based on the *Opere di Decimo Magno Ausonio* edited in 1971, a large part of Ausonius’ extant letters were to Paulinus of Nola (eight letters) and a rhetor, Axis Paulus (seven letters). The rest were written to the orator

⁴⁴ Walter A. Edwards, “Ausonius, the Poet of the Transition,” *The Classical Journal* 4, no. 6 (Apr., 1909): 250–59.

Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, a landowner named Theon, his own son Hesperius, a grammaticus named Ursulus, and some others who were teachers or officials who had connections with the area of Gaul.⁴⁵ A number of scholars have observed how Ausonius inherited the legacy from the earlier period and insisted on using Greco-Roman metaphors in his writing.⁴⁶ This might lead to the argument that he was still in favor of symbols related to cultural unity and acted as a supporter of old values of the empire. Though his role as an occasional imitator of Virgil and Ovid can hardly be questioned, it must be noted that what dominated his metaphors—the appearance of which was sporadic in most of his letters, rarely organized in planned ways—was often the temporal need to communicate with specific individuals in given circumstances, not entirely the lasting impulse to proclaim imperial glories or his pride as a Roman citizen. In a letter to Paulinus of Nola, he mentions a man who served as the bailiff of his estate:

videbis ipsum, qualis adstet comminus,
 imago fortunae suae,
 canus, comosus, hispidus, trux, aribux,
 Terentianus Phormio,
 horrens capillis ut marinus asperis
 echinus aut versus mei.

...
 non cultor instans, non arator gnaruris,
 promusque quam condus magis,
 terram infidelem nec feracem criminans
 negotiari maluit
 mercator quo <libet> foro venalium,
 mutator ad Graecam fidem,
 sapiensque supra Graeciae septem viros

⁴⁵ R. P. H. Green, “The Correspondence of Ausonius,” *L'Antiquité Classique* T. 49 (1980): 191–211.

⁴⁶ For instance, R. P. H. Green, “Ausonius' Use of the Classical Latin Poets: Some New Examples and Observations,” *The Classical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1977): 441–52; Chiara Di Serio, “Mythological References in Ausonius' Epistolary,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* (October 2023): 177–213; Ian Fielding, “Ovid Recalled in the Poetic Correspondence of Ausonius and Paulinus of Nola” in *Transformations of Ovid in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 22–51.

octavus accessit sophos.

You shall see the man himself as he stands close by me, the very image of his class, gray, bushy-haired, unkempt, blustering, bullying, Terence's Phormio, with stiff hair bristling like a sea-urchin or my lines.... No diligent husbandman, no experienced ploughman, a spender rather than a getter, abusing the land as treacherous and unfruitful, he preferred to do business as a dealer in any sale-market, bartering for "Greek credit," and, wiser than the Seven Worthies of Greece, has joined them as an eighth sage.⁴⁷

The quoted text above looks like a playful chat with someone close. Greco-Roman metaphors appeared twice: the first time was to describe the bailiff's appearance in a satirical mode ("Terence's Phormio"), the second time was to continue the entertaining tone, comparing the man to ancient sages ("Seven Worthies of Greece"). Neither of the two metaphors was used for serious purposes. They were out of the intention to amuse a young friend, Paulinus, who always looked formal, devoted, and somewhat lacking in humor; at the same time, they were also useful tools to embellish the author's own language and show off his intelligent wit. The personal, circumstantial need to elicit certain responses from the interlocutor therefore took priority over the traditional notion of writing. What was expected by the author was the real-time reaction of his audience/listener, rather than the self-satisfaction that he himself had fulfilled the requirement of a certain tradition or custom.

In other letters Ausonius cited early imperial writers directly, borrowing complete sentences from them. In a letter to Paulus he invited the recipient to join him in spending time out of town, by quoting the *Odes* of Horace:

ad quae si prperas, tota cum merce tuarum
veni Camenarum citus:
dactylicos, elegos, chroriambum carmen, epodos,
socci et coturni musicam....

⁴⁷ *The Epistles*, 7–12, 19–26. The Latin text is from *Ausonius* Volume II (Books 18–20), trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1921), 96. English translation is on p. 97.

If you haste after these joys, come quickly with all the wares of your Camenae:
dactyls, elegiacs, choriambics, lyrics, comedy and tragedy....⁴⁸

The letter was a simple invitation, but Ausonius used hundreds of words to compose a poem. There was no real need to quote any important authors, as he did not intend to express anything conceptual or theoretical. The appearance of Horace here, to a large extent, was for the creation of an atmosphere of decent, civilized communication. What mattered here was not the quality of expression (i.e., preciseness and effectiveness) but the style of it. Quotations of classical authors served as the pure form of this communication that contributed to the making of a special vibe of the “chatting of intelligentsia,” while contributing almost nothing to the content per se.

This concern about creating an aura of literariness was shared by Paulinus of Nola, although his zeal for pure literary production was not as strong as that of Ausonius. For Paulinus, letters were means through which his love for Christ could be effectively delivered. It seemed that he somewhat borrowed discourse patterns from ritual texts during the early stage of Late Antiquity, to proclaim his devotion and commitment to a specific divine figure (i.e., God). But under the guise of such semi-ritualized expression, Paulinus attempted to create an atmosphere of “conversation between the learned” which was founded upon the tone of a teacher. He spoke in a way quite different from Ausonius, who loved delicate playfulness. He presented himself as a strict mentor who continued to instruct and interpret, emphasizing the need for everyone to study very hard to reach God and the ultimate truth manifested by him. In a letter to Ausonius, it appears that Paulinus dared to protect his strong faith in Christ in front of the senior interlocutor, probably because the latter showed less interest in true Christian beliefs but more in the appreciable,

⁴⁸ “An Invitation to Paulus,” 35–38. The Latin text is from *Ausonius* Volume II, 18. The English translation is on page 19.

exterior style of traditional literature, which was largely rooted in the Greco-Roman system of theology.

negant Camenis nec patent Apollini
decata Christo pectora
....
nunc alia mentem vis agit, maior deus,
aliosque mores postulat
sibi repositens ab homine munus suum,
vivamus ut vitae patri.
vacare vanis, otio aut negotio,
et fabulosis litteris
vetat; suis ut pareamus legibus
lucemque cernamus suam,
quam vis sophorum eallida arsque rhetorum et
figmenta vatum bubillant,
qui corda falsis atque vanis imbuunt
tantumque linguas instruunt,
nihil adferentes, ut salutem conferant,
quod veritatem detegat.

Hearts consecrate to Christ give refusal to the Camenae, are closed to Apollo....
Now 'tis another force governs my heart, a greater God, who demands another
mode of life, claiming for himself from man the gift he gave, that we may live for
the Father of life. To spend time on empty things, whether in pastime or pursuit,
and on literature full of idle tales, he forbids; that we may obey his laws and
behold his light which sophists' cunning skill, the art of rhetoric, and poets'
feigning overcloud. For these steep our hearts in things false and vain, and train
our tongues along imparting naught which can reveal the truth.⁴⁹

What Paulinus presented was a writer who deeply believed in the organic connection between words and faith, who took the chance of speaking to a senior intellectual to express such a belief. Reverence for the elder, more reputable interlocutor was replaced by an intention to pronounce his own understanding of what a proper, civilized life should be: it must be closely tied to the teaching of Christ. Paulinus declared a total break with the Greco-Roman pantheon and metaphors related to them. He determined the irreconcilable relationship between pagan deities and Christian beliefs, and directly

⁴⁹ *The Epistles*, 20–21, 29–42. The Latin text is from *Paulinus Pellaeus (Eucharisticus)*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn White (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1921), 124, 126. English translation is on pages 125 and 127.

refused to continually praise Camenae or even Apollo. To him, the aura of literariness grew from the concrete circumstance of educating others or having oneself educated: an ideal should be clarified in front of an interlocutor, so that it can be used to enrich more people and to cultivate new human beings. When he mentioned “sophists’ cunning skill, the art of rhetoric, and poets’ feigning overcloud,” he must have been aware of the possibility that Ausonius might feel offended, because the latter was a deep lover of such literary conventions from the Greco-Roman past. In this sense Paulinus deliberately exhibited himself as a courageous man who could protect his own faith in front of another writer, and made his writing an embodiment of spiritual authority that could even empower the individual author himself.

III. Generations amid the Aesthetic Turn: Kong Rong and Sidonius Apollinaris

We cannot, however, take the diminishing of meta-discursive masters as an indicator of the total victory of personalized expression that entirely depended on an author’s individual feelings and special circumstances of written communication. As this dissertation has highlighted, when discourses were used for propaganda purposes, they could be anything but personal: propaganda is inherently an institutional activity, with its mechanisms and principles founded upon a series of established organizations, groupings, and the norms that sustained them. But what was behind the descriptions of the engagement of individual authors? Did they have any impulses to transcend the circumstantiality of writing practices, to reach some meta-textual goals that went beyond the transience of their personal existence?

I argue that as the two regions, QXY and Gaul, witnessed the arrival of a new century (for QXY it was the third century CE; for Gaul it was the fifth century CE), educated elites in these regions who were actively involved in written communication experienced a new transformation that continually prevented them from completely

turning back to their individuality. They were pushed away from always immersing themselves in atomic, interior monologues that captured nothing about the fate of the regime and society: the pronouncement of private sentiments, the recalling of empirical experience, and the description of trifling pieces in quotidian lives. A new master that would dominate elite discourse was in the process of formation. It required individual writers to correspond to the order of aesthetics, which derived from an urge to engage in the act of writing per se, as the existence and spread of a text needs appreciation from outside.⁵⁰ A piece of writing cannot be preserved intact and passed down, unless people appreciate (not simply evaluate) certain qualities of it. It should meet the demand of human beings to sense entities in the surrounding world, to like or dislike them in particular ways.

Two writers, one from QXY and one from Gaul, are discussed below, to illuminate how this new master came to penetrate local elite discourse that had the potential for propaganda. The two men were active in the transitional period from “High Late Antiquity” to the closing era of Late Antiquity, and helped to demonstrate how the new master of aesthetics was involved in an interplay with the authors’ inclination to be preoccupied by their own individuality, while gradually replacing the old masters of imperial traditions and state history.

(I) Kong Rong 孔融 (153–208)

Kong Rong was hardly a revolutionary figure, for he did not make a total break with the past. Although a poet, an official, and a social activist, he has traditionally been considered as a Confucian scholar. He is also known as the eldest of the seven most famous writers of the Jian’an 建安 (196–220) period, the last reign title of the Eastern

⁵⁰ For appreciation as a central component of aesthetic order, see Ruth Lorand, *Aesthetic Order: A Philosophy of Order, Beauty, and Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 97–98.

Han emperors. Born in the Lu 魯 region, he was the twentieth-generation great-grandson of Confucius and the third son of Kong Zhou 孔宙, the local governor of Taishan 泰山.⁵¹ The *Hou Hanshu* documented that he enjoyed a great reputation as a child in his hometown, for his rich knowledge and quick wit. Once grown up, he was appointed as the Imperial Clerk in Attendance (*shiyushi* 侍禦史) and moved to the capital Luoyang 洛陽, in around 185. Then, in 190, he irritated the powerful warlord Dong Zhuo 董卓 (d. 192) and was forced to move to the province of Qing, taking the office as the local governor of Beihai 北海 until Liu Bei 劉備 (161–223) recommended him to be the Inspector of the province in 195. Two years later, he was attacked by the army of Yuan Tan 袁譚 and escaped to the east of Mount Tai. In his late years, he moved to the new capital, Xuchang 許昌, and served the powerful Cao 曹 family. He was finally killed by Cao Cao in 208.

Kong Rong's extant works include epistolary materials, treatises, and poems. The *Hou Hanshu* recorded that he was also the author of a series of works in other genres.⁵² Considering that he enjoyed a great reputation among the educated population during his time, it is possible that the writings were circulated beyond his small circles when he was still alive, with their content known to a wider group of intellectuals. It should also be noted that Kong Rong was among those privileged authors of the late Han whose works were collected immediately after their death. Cao Cao's son, Cao Pi 曹丕 (Emperor Wen of Wei 魏文帝, 187–226), was impressed by Kong Rong's literary talent. He compared Kong with the most famous writers in earlier Han times, Yang Xiong 揚雄 and Ban Gu 班固, and rewarded all the people in his kingdom who provided him with Kong Rong's

⁵¹ For Kong Rong's life and career, see *HHS* 70. 2261–2280.

⁵² *HHS* 70. 2279.

works.⁵³ In the commentary to the *Sanguo zhi*, Pei Songzhi frequently mentions the compilation of Kong's works, which proves that the compilation was already accessible to literary groups at least in the fourth century.⁵⁴ Kong Rong's role in spreading certain information among elite circles is thus substantiated.

Scholars have often cited Cao Pi's comment on Kong Rong in his "Discourse on Literature" (Lunwen 論文), to argue that Kong's writing had been reputable among his contemporaries mainly for the "loftiness and mysteriousness in its *ti* and *qi*" 體氣高妙.⁵⁵ The concept of *ti* 體 (lit., body/form) has usually been treated as synonymous with the style of a piece of writing, while *qi* 氣 (lit., wind/air) has been translated as the inner character and natural endowment of the author.⁵⁶ Both understandings, I would argue, do provide more knowledge about Chinese literature per se, but are insufficient in their level of structural sophistication in terms of how these concepts, though portrayed by Cao Pi as always existing in the act of writing, signified momentous changes in the relationship between textual production and epistemology around 200 CE. Moreover, few scholars have offered detailed discussion on the terms "loftiness and mysteriousness" (*gaomiao* 高妙) referred to in Cao Pi's comment. Kong Rong was the only one who obtained such a

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ For Pei Songzhi's discussion of Kong Rong's works, see Yi Lan 易蘭, "Kong Rong bieji liuchuan yu banben kaolun" 孔融別集流傳與版本考論, *Sichuan tushuguan xuebao* 四川圖書館學報 5 (2021): 91–94.

⁵⁵ For the "Lunwen" text, see Yan Kejun, *Quan Sanguo wen* 全三國文 in the *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, vol. 8.

⁵⁶ Wang Yu 王宇, "Kong Rong ti-qi kaobian: jianlun Dianlun Lunwen shenmei qingxiang" 孔融體氣考辨——兼論〈典論·論文〉審美傾向, *Xibu xuekan* 西部學刊 no. 134 (Mar. 2021): 83–87; Ming Dong Gu, "From *Yuanqi* (Primal Energy) to *Wenqi* (Literary Pneuma): A Philosophical Study of a Chinese Aesthetic," *Philosophy East and West* 59, no. 1 (Jan., 2009): 22–46.

comment in the “Discourse on Literature,” but this does not mean that he was totally different from authors who received other comments from Cao Pi. Kong Rong’s writing style, like those of his contemporaries and many others who lived in the transitional period, represented “a chip of the collapsing regime and of its point of view but yearning in a new environment.”⁵⁷

One point that marked Kong Rong’s importance as a writer amid the transformation of the times was his fetish related to the indefiniteness of writing and self, and the intrinsic correspondence between the two. Compared with writers from the past and even the generation immediately before (like Cai Yong), Kong had a clear awareness that writing begins where an individual interacts with the entire universe, and that therefore the source of an author’s creativity is his special way of grasping the past and the present—which indicates his unique spirit—rather than his status of being cultured by his society as a member of a certain class. On the one hand, for Kong Rong, the proclamation of “truthfulness” was hardly the most critical pursuit of a writer; an author needed to fully demonstrate his prosperity in literary cleverness, satisfy his own desire for boasting of his skills in grasping the world, and exhibit his deep frustration with reality and his dreamed utopia to readers to the largest extent, so that he could be seen and appreciated by people who could understand him. To put it simply, to him a piece of textual composition has three functions: to fulfill the author’s own thirst to reorganize everything through words, to honor himself for his artistic construction of a new world, and to attract those potential comrades who could sense his soul. All three lead to the appreciative experience of both the authors themselves and their readers.

⁵⁷ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 40.

One factor that could trigger this appreciative experience, as reflected through Kong Rong, was a delicate mind that senses the world through compassion. Kong Rong's framing of a piece of textual composition was different from that of Cai Yong and the earlier QXY writers analyzed in Chapter Three. He cared less about the certainty of the meaning of words and sentences, but focused more on having himself and his readers be touched by the world, being emotionally invigorated based on one's inner sympathy as a human. He exhibited history and the present not as a series of stories, but as some bright spots—similar to screenshots—that only denote “who did what/who is doing what.” Readers, however, could easily sense the power of his words, as each of his “screen captures” tells of a shining moment when a man's specific personality, the most touching part of his life, is unfolded to the largest extent. This makes the writing accessible to all those with human emotions. In the treatise “Discourse on the Good and Bad of Men from Ru'nan and Yingchuan” (*Ru-Ying youlie lun* 汝穎優劣論), he captures those moments when two groups of literati had to encounter state issues, and makes comparisons between them:

汝南戴子高，親止千乘萬騎，與光武皇帝共揖於道中。穎川士雖抗節，未有頡頏天子者也。汝南許子伯，與其友人共說世俗將壞，因夜起舉聲號哭。穎川士雖頗憂時，未有能哭世者也。汝南府許掾，教太守鄧晨圖開稻陂，灌數萬頃，累世獲其功，夜有火光之瑞。韓元長雖好地理，未有成功見效如許掾者也。汝南張元伯，身死之後見夢范巨卿。穎川士雖有奇異，未有鬼神能靈者也。

Dai Zigao from Ru'nan, stopping thousands of chariots on the road, bowed before Emperor Guangwu [to stop him]. For literati from Yingchuan, though [they were able to] protest in defense of their moral integrity, none of them could challenge and defy the Son of Heaven. Xu Zibo from Ru'nan, having talked with his friends on the decaying society, woke up at night and burst into tears. For literati from Yingchuan, though they worried about the [chaotic] period [they were facing], none of them could cry for the current age. Commandery Clerk Xu of Ru'nan, having advising the Governor Deng Chen to open land for rice planting, and then irrigating thousands of *qing* of farm lands, had his accomplishments benefit generations [of people]; [his achievements] led to the auspicious portent that fire appeared during the night. Han Yuanchang, [a man from Yingchuan,] though interested in land management, has not achieved such efficacious [results] as

Commandery Clerk Xu did. Zhang Yuanbo from Ru'nan, after his death, appeared in the dream of Fan Juqing. For literati from Yingchuan, though there are extraordinary ones, none of them have had their spirit revealed through divine forces.⁵⁸

Few of the events mentioned by Kong Rong are seen in other historical materials, and we, therefore, might be unable to verify their authenticity. But what Kong Rong cared about was not the truthfulness of these stories. Each of his sentences manifests a climax of a man's life (and even his afterlife): resisting the emperor, bursting into tears over the tragic future of his state, opening new land for the benefit of his people, or even appearing in the dream of someone else. For all those who were educated and had the experience of reading Han history, they would have shared the same feeling that Kong Rong revealed the most glorious part of an individual's life that makes this person appear as a historic hero, a man who dared to fight, to criticize, and to die. It was largely based on this shared sensitivity to a specific culture that Kong Rong came to express himself.

In another treatise titled "Discourse on Corporal Punishment" (Rou xing yi 肉刑議), Kong Rong uses the same strategy of juxtaposing a series of historical moments, not to highlight the glory of some personage but to emphasize the torture they had suffered:

不能止人遂為非也，適足絕人還為善耳。雖忠如鬻拳，信如卞和，智如孫臏，冤如巷伯，才如史遷，達如子政，一離刀鋸，沒世不齒。

[Corporal punishments] cannot stop people from inappropriate behavior, but could prevent people from returning to doing good. Even though [there were people who were] as loyal as Yu Quan, or as faithful as Bian He, or as intelligent as Sun Bin, or as pitiful as Xiangbo, or as talented as Scribe Qian (viz., Sima Qian), or as broad-minded as Zizheng (viz., Liu Xiang), once they departed from the knives and saws [that had mutilated them], they were despised for the rest of their lives.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ The Chinese text is from *Kong Beihai ji pingzhu* 孔北海集評註, comm. Sun Zhicheng 孫至誠 (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1935), 133.

⁵⁹ The Chinese text is from *Kong Beihai ji pingzhu*, 72.

Kong Rong selected some of the most representative victims of mutilating punishment in the historical record. All these people—Yu Quan, Bian He, Sun Bin, Sima Qian, Liu Xiang, and so forth—had been known for their careers as important officials, some even for their writings; but Kong Rong focused on the commonality between them that they had all suffered severely from physical punishment, putting all these people together to enhance the tragic nature of their shared experience, which was to cause sympathy, or even anger, among his readers. Punishment itself could not be the object of aesthetic appreciation, but tragedy could. Scenes of punishment now became constructive forces that brought about chances for readers to “enjoy” the process of reconfirming the value of one’s life, the justification for this one to exist in the world, and the reasonability of feeling gloomy when seeing his or her misery.

(II) Sidonius Apollinaris (ca. 430–481)

As Bishop of Clermont and one of the best-known poets of fifth-century Gaul, Sidonius shared surprising commonalities with Kong Rong. First, both were born in an era when their state was moving towards her end, and they thus obtained the chance to see how guardians of their country suffered while divisive forces and opportunists prospered. While Kong Rong lived in an age when the Eastern Han court had itself become controlled by powerful military men and officials, Sidonius lived in a period when the Roman West gradually fell under the control of non-Roman groups. He witnessed the final decline of a once-mighty regime just as Kong Rong did, and even the ultimate collapse of it, which Kong Rong did not have the chance to see. When he was born, the Vandals were conquering North Africa, while the Burgundians and Visigoths had already invaded his home region of Gaul.⁶⁰ Among the personal letters of Sidonius

⁶⁰ Finley Hooper and Matthew Schwartz, *Roman Letters: History from a Personal Point of View* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 271.

there are some devoted to Theodoric II, ruler of the Visigothic kingdom of Aquitaine (r. 454–466), which verified his reluctant submission to the newly established regime on the old land of the Roman Empire.⁶¹ This specific social background made his mindset as an intellectual quite similar to that of Kong Rong. In the words of Philip Rousseau, he and his educated friends “continued to value, the common experiences, [and] the ‘*vincula caritatis*’ that held this circle together: their birth, their education, their professional expertise, the way they amused themselves, their service of the emperor.”⁶² They intended to maintain an old, dignified style of Roman life, but had to make expedient efforts to secure favor from the new rulers, at the cost of their self-assigned identity as the inheritors of the Roman heritage.

Secondly, Sidonius’ interpersonal relationship and daily expressions shared many commonalities with those of Kong Rong as well, as both men were the center of a circle of noble correspondents which operated towards a specific literary discourse. In the research of Ralph W. Mathisen, Sidonius is exhibited as a man surrounded by some of the most reputable literati in his time: Ruricius (ca. 440–510), Bishop of Limoges; Alcimius Ecdicius Avitus (ca. 450–518), Bishop of Vienne; and Magnus Felix Ennodius (ca. 473–521), Bishop of Ticinum in northern Italy.⁶³ It appeared that this circle was not only based on shared literary interests and inclinations, but was also founded upon its members’ monastic careers and pursuits. With this common background of officially assigned,

⁶¹ For details about the letters, see H. S. Sivan, “Sidonius Apollinaris, Theodoric II, and Gothic-Roman Politics from Avitus to Anthemius,” *Hermes* 117. Bd., H. 1 (1989): 85–94.

⁶² Philip Rousseau, “In Search of Sidonius the Bishop,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Bd. 25, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1976): 356–77.

⁶³ Ralph W. Mathisen, “Epistolography, Literary Circles and Family Ties in Late Roman Gaul,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association (1974–2014)* 111 (1981): 95–109.

ecclesiastical positions, both Sidonius and Kong Rong sometimes appeared self-contradictory when expressing their ideas. On the one hand, they had to make compromises to their already obtained positions and privilege, as well as the new ruling group who provided these, and they continued to display themselves as diligent civil servants whose life was dominated by purely transcendental commissions. On the other hand, when spending time with members of their literary circles, they sometimes intentionally made themselves look “appealing” to a group of learned men who loved traditional customs, noble entertainment, and secular happiness. In this sense Sidonius largely served as an intermediary between the newly growing Christian bureaucratic aristocrats and the waning senatorial class, while Kong Rong appeared to be a middleman between the empowered group of local military strongmen and the disappearing Han government officials.

Thirdly, both writers displayed a new tendency in which literary works of a learned elite individual could be made “classics” of their time. The meaning of classics transformed significantly as the two empires came to their end. For a long time, the concept had only referred to a particular body of texts, the production of which was rooted in the long-time transmission and circulation of ancient pieces from hundreds of years before. For the Han Empire they mainly referred to the “Five Classics” and to other works that served to support the ideas in such works, for instance, the *Hanshu*. For the Roman Empire the Greco-Roman literature, philosophy, and historiography occupied the major part of the old classics, which represented the dominant position of rhetoric, theology, and history training in the education of Roman citizens. But now, the works of two individual writers qualified as classics. Kong Rong’s works were collected and edited by the new ruling house immediately after his death, with the possible aim of uniting the old group of Confucian intellectuals; Sidonius even had many of his works published

when he was still alive, providing the “legal patterns” of nostalgia writings for Romans who recalled their old state. According to J.D. Harries, Sidonius published the last eight books of his letters after the final collapse of the western government (476 CE), in order to “explain and justify his actions to his fellow Gallo-Romans.”⁶⁴ The intertwining of textual production, the creation of memory, and the elite proclamation of political standpoints therefore became evident in the very last days of Late Antiquity, making elite propaganda a continually developing realm that responded to the natural mournfulness among Romans when their old state, as well as the once prosperous civilization she had developed, became part of the past.

Such similarities between the two men justified our comparison between them, with regard to how they represented a new meta-discursive goal among local writers in late antique China and Western Europe. Scholars have already provided plenty of discussion on why Sidonius was enthusiastic about themes like villas and rural estates, with some arguing that this enthusiasm showed his sensitivity to the change of domicile of late Roman elites.⁶⁵ But few researchers have looked deeper into what the domicile meant to him, and why the detailed descriptions of material life occupied a large part of all his literary compositions. I would suggest that this passion for the living environment indicated Sidonius’ new understanding of writing: one goal of producing a text is to make readers dive into a man-made utopia that could satisfy some of their desires. Sidonius made efforts to satisfy his readers’ wish to be immersed in a dream filled with the light and color of the collapsed empire. To him, his work became meaningful mainly because it

⁶⁴ J.D. Harries, “Sidonius Apollinaris, Rome and the Barbarians: a Climate of Treason?” in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity*, eds. J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 298–308.

⁶⁵ David Frye, “Aristocratic Responses to Late Roman Urban Change: The Examples of Ausonius and Sidonius in Gaul,” *The Classical World* 96, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 185–96.

provided something appreciable to audiences, rather than something serving to discipline others' life. Just like Kong Rong, he exhibited an intention to build a paradise isomorphic with the Roman world, with its vivid shape and color—rather than its moral/epistemological basis or its relationship with the imperial tradition—entirely shown to readers. This utopia was portrayed by Sidonius as a realm of two levels: one level is entirely spiritual, where deities from the classical period reside; the other level is an artistic one, where people can see material representations of these divine powers, especially in architecture—“the columns, the baths, the arcades,”⁶⁶ and so forth. In other words, this romanticized world consisted of both a theological dimension and a visual dimension. In a poem on the castle of Pontius Leontius he described the arrangement of statues of Greco-Roman deities in the house, but did not tell readers that he was actually portraying a series of figurines. This (probably deliberate) omission of information left readers the illusion that he was delineating a world inhabited by real gods:

Forte sagittiferas Euan populatus Erythras
vite capistratas cogebat ad esseda tigres,
intrabat duplicem qua temo racemifer arcum.
marcidus ipse sedet curru; madet ardua cervix
sudati de rore meri, caput aurea rumpunt
cornua et indigenam iaculantur fulminis ignem

....

Bassaridas, Satyros, Panas Faunosque docebat
ludere Silenus iam numine plenus alumno,
sed comptus tamen ille caput; nam vertice nudo
amissos sertis studet excusare capillos.

It chanced that Bacchus, having laid waste Erythrae, the famed haunt of bowmen, was subjecting vine-bridled tigers to his chariot where a pole that bore elustering grapes entered the double arch. In the car sat the god himself, all languorous; his proud neck sweated with exuded wine; from his head sprang golden horns, which hurled forth his native levin-fire....Bassarids, Satyrs, Pans and Faus were being taught to frolic by Silenus; he was now filled with the divinity that he had reared,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 191.

but his head was in orderly array; for on his bare pate he took pains to palliate the loss of hair with a garland.⁶⁷

The way in which Sidonius engaged his readers through his making of a text appeared to be very different from the methods used by Ausonius and Paulinus. He was not simply creating an aura of literariness; he was luring his audiences into a fabricated fairyland and making them intoxicated. Bacchus, the Roman god of viniculture, and Silenus, tutor of the wine god Dionysus, were described as continuing to fulfill their responsibility as guardians of the Greco-Roman world, although the Roman state had already fallen into pieces. As pointed out by Jelle Visser, Sidonius appeared to “invite” readers to his world of writing,⁶⁸ not to teach them. Being attracted by metaphors and symbols related to the ancestry, birth, and belonging of a Roman citizen, readers were led by Sidonius to a piece of land where barbarians, wars, and endless social conflicts do not exist. It is a small island of civilization that “still clung to the concept of Romanitas.”⁶⁹ In this sense Sidonius played the role of not only a dream maker but also a dream fulfiller. He found an idealized place for Roman people to take a rest, but in a way different from that of writers from the golden age, like Virgil and Ovid. What he did was let readers know that they should enjoy the ephemeral happiness given by a fabricated Garden of Eden, rather than constantly reminding themselves of their duty as good members of society.

From other works of Sidonius we can also see delineations of the Greco-Roman pantheon. Some of his poems directly imitated the old genre of the epic, placing gods in

⁶⁷ “XXII. Castle of Pontius Leontius,” 21–27, 37–40. The Latin text is from W.B. Anderson, *Sidonius: Poems and Letters*, vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 264. The English translation is on page 265.

⁶⁸ Jelle Visser, “Sidonius Apollinaris, *Ep.* II.2: The Man and His Villa,” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 8 (2014): 26–45.

⁶⁹ Frye, “Aristocratic Responses to Late Roman Urban Change,” 195.

the position of heroes and heroines. But these “epics” by Sidonius were more like combinations of pastoral poetry and classical theater, which largely focused on tangible, visual representations, instead of storytelling. In a poem titled “Epithalamium,” he describes a temple of Venus by using a series of words and phrases that portray the unique color and shape:

hic lapis est de quinque locis dans quinque colores
Aethiops, Phrygius, Parius, Poenus, Lacedaemon,
purpureus, viridis, maculosus, eburnus et albus.
postes chrysolithi fulvus diffulgurat ardor;
myrrhina, sardoniches, amethystus Hiberus, iaspis
Indus, Chalcidicus, Scythicus, beryllus, achates
attollunt duplices argenti cardine valvas....

Here is stone from five regions, giving forth five hues, Aethiopian, Phrygian, Parian, Punic, Spartan—purple, green, mottled, ivory, white. The yellow glow of topaz flashes through the doorpost; porcelain, sardonyx, Caucasian amethyst, Indian jasper, Chalcidian and Scythian stones, beryl and agate, form the double doors that rise upon silver pivots....⁷⁰

Readers might have thought that Sidonius would not stop at the level of portraying the appearance of a beautifully made temple, and he might go ahead to focus on how this temple served as a significant space for the operation of divine powers. But the quoted paragraph is only a small part of his entire description of the architecture. He seemed to be immersed in the physical being of the temple itself, its rich colors and decorations, as well as the integration of these elements. Although the colors and materials are organically connected with the variety of resources and culture of important regions in Greco-Roman history, what mattered to Sidonius was their very existence, i.e., that their exterior appearance itself deserved the attention of readers. His imitation of Ovid was obvious, but Sidonius tended to expand his idealized world horizontally, not vertically. He did not pursue to reveal the deep meaning embedded in the activity of gods and other

⁷⁰ “XI. Epithalamium,” 17–24. The Latin text is from *Sidonius: Poems and Letters*, 200, 202. The English translation is on pages 201 and 203.

heavenly powers, but more to display the world's physical richness, its visual complicity, and its independence as something appreciable which should be separated from the intervention of humans or non-humans. He was actually generating an artistic landscape.

IV. A Look back at History: From Propagandists to Restorers of Taste

This aesthetic turn of local elite discourse, to a large extent, indicated the transformative role played by QXY and Gallic elite groups in building a new realm of “late antique public communication.” Although continually relying on those information institutions and nexuses which were formed in the early imperial period, these people came to attach their individuality not to the languishing political regime that had once constituted the source of their power and wealth, but to a set of shared aesthetic experiences that revealed the spirit of the old state by “capturing, enchanting, and binding”⁷¹ the memory of the learned men. The mechanism for them to produce, transmit, and receive information somewhat changed. Being gathered not entirely by common interest or agendas but more by sensuous and imaginary impulses, elite populations in the two areas gradually became sensitive to the function of certain information in that it could be *directly witnessed* by other people and trigger specific feelings in them. Such information does not need to be digested by information recipients based on their social status and historical awareness, but is *shown* directly to them, catering to their taste for the beautiful forms of things.

For the QXY area, this new attention to taste has been described by modern scholars as the local version of a larger-scale shift at the level of the state, a transformation of mainstream philosophical ideas during the transition from the late Han to the early Western Jin period. It has been conceptualized as a change in theoretical

⁷¹ For how memories could be “captured, enchanted, and bounden,” see Ole Thyssen, *Aesthetic Communication* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

orientations from “promoting Confucian classics” (*zongjing* 宗經) to “centering on artistic expression” (*shangyi* 尚藝).⁷² I would argue that this conceptualization does not clarify how the “mainstream” knowledge in a certain period obtained its basic form from fragmentary messages produced by different social groupings. From my point of view, this change happened as educated elites understood textual information in new ways, turning it into a kind of medium for the creation of a “very remarkable pleasure”—in the words of Kant—among people when they find themselves able to give form to the exterior world.⁷³ In previous sections we have already seen how writers like Cai Yong and Kong Rong directed readers from one circumstance to another, and how they gathered potential companions through human sympathy shared by all individuals. As both the Han and Roman governments had already fallen, the central question of elite textual production was not totally about sympathy; it was related to all the powers of one’s mind to generate form, to redefine the world with one’s subjective eyes.

A typical case of an educated elite employing these new mechanisms was Ruan Ji 阮籍 (210–263), a native of Chenliu and the leading member of a literary circle, Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢, who were active during the Three Kingdoms period. Ruan Ji has been known as both a historian and a poet. He engaged in the compilation of the official historiography of the Kingdom of Wei, *Weishu* 魏書, together with Wang Chen 王沈 (d. 266) and Xun Yi 荀顗 (205–274).⁷⁴ According to the studies of

⁷² For related discussions, see Liu Chengji 劉成紀, “Han Jin zhijian: Zhongguo meixue cong Zongjing xiang Shangyi de zhuanjin” 漢晉之間: 中國美學從宗經到尚藝的轉進, *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 中國社會科學 11 (2019): 127–48.

⁷³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 20.

⁷⁴ Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 et al., *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 1143.

Liu Rulin 劉汝林 and Yuan Yazheng 袁亞錚, Ruan Ji dropped this official job in 256 CE mainly because of the failure of the Cao 曹 family, the ruling clan of the Wei kingdom, in its power struggle with the newly developed Sima 司馬 family.⁷⁵ This chaotic social background could partly explain why Ruan Ji constantly mentioned the lack of order in human history in his literary compositions. But he did not stop at the level of describing this orderlessness. He re-portrayed the world as a chain of scenes from different historical periods described in traditional classics, not in Kong Rong’s way of listing those scenes to articulate a concept or principle, but organizing them mainly according to the free flow of his emotions. His poem suite, “Singing My Cares” (*Yonghuai* 詠懷), provides an example. One of the poems demonstrated his sighing over the lack of understanding from others:

鮑子傾蓋，仲父佐桓。
回濱嗟虞，敢不希顏。
志存明規，匪慕彈冠。
我心伊何，其芳若蘭。

Master Bao halted his carriage,
“Father Zhong” assisted Huan.
dare one not admire her countenance?
My sense of purpose keeps the bright mirror of right,
I do not yearn to brush off my cap.
How is my mind?—
its fragrance is like eupatorium.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Liu Rulin 劉汝林, *Han-Jin xueshu biannian* 漢晉學術編年 (Shanghai: Huadong Shifan Daxue Chubanshe, 2010), 542. Yuan Yazheng 袁亞錚, “Lun shixue dui Ruan Ji wenxue chuanguo de yingxiang” 論史學對阮籍文學創作的影響, *Hebei shifan daxue xuebao* (*Zhexue shehui kexue ban*) 河北師範大學學報 (哲學社會科學版) 45, no. 2 (Mar. 2022): 81–89.

⁷⁶ The Four-syllable-line Poems, III. *The Poetry of Ruan Ji and Xi Kang*, Translated by Stephen Owen and Wendy Swartz (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 144–45.

At least three historic scenes are mentioned in the quoted text above: the friendship between Guan Zhong 管仲 and Bao Shuya 鮑叔牙, the comradeship between the Han officials Wang Ji 王吉 and Gong Yu 貢禹, and Qu Yuan's love of herbs and flowers as reflected in the *Chuci*. Before describing them, Ruan Ji appeared to be as sad as many other poets: "There is no herb of forgetting in this age, which makes me heave a mournful sigh" 世無萱草, 令我哀嘆. But as the historic scenes changed from one to another, his mindset seemed to be oscillating between three different statuses: envy before the companionship of ancient sages, self-awareness of his own ambition, and self-admiration as an individual with a fragrant heart. This made the whole poem look like a relatively rudimentary form of multiple-screen montage, as each image is moving towards the next one but is separated from one another, existing automatically as an independent story that involved both backgrounds and the author's self-expression. What drove the movement of these images and organized them as a whole was the mind of the author, who knew well that the cycle from self to history and then back to self could give readers a feeling of totality, integration, and unity. If we say that Kong Rong's works exhibited the indefinite self of writers themselves that would enable them to bridge the gap between the past and the present, Ruan Ji's poems displayed another type of indefiniteness, i.e., the boundlessness of mind that would free both writers and readers from conceptual limits set by the imperial past. A world of free-flowing emotions thus appeared.

The Gallic writers also made efforts to satisfy certain tastes of their potential readers, and their methods were quite similar to those of the QXY learned men. The aesthetic engagement of readers was taken into account, as many authors appeared to focus more on the question of how to give theological narratives a more empirical form that could be easily grasped by readers and trigger among them specific emotional responses. They attempted to make textual information operate through readers' senses,

and senses are not responsive to abstractions. Abstract pronouncements, i.e., the effort of “explaining to readers,” thus gradually decreased in their appearance in the works of many Gallic authors. What increased was the use of techniques of “showing to readers,” especially the technique of exhibiting something truly glorious in lively ways. As most Gallic writers from the closing period of Late Antiquity have been known for their Christian writings, hagiographical literature became one of the most representative realms that can provide us with relevant evidence.

Gregory (538–593), who was appointed to the bishopric of Tours by King Sigibert I and had been active during the Merovingian period, deserves special attention.⁷⁷ He shared many commonalities with Ruan Ji, including the reality that both lived in an age when a powerful empire—the Han for Ruan Ji; Rome for Gregory—had already become part of the past. Both men, as reputable historians in their time, endeavored to further challenge the dichotomic concept of historiography and literary composition, by casting the two into a whole. This whole manifested as a beautiful form of text that 1) could be echoed by readers based on their shared emotional experience with the writer, and 2) could imbue emotion with the transcendental importance of helping readers speak to their inner self. This form demonstrated a new world, running according to a man-given order. Different from Ruan Ji who built this order largely upon a free mind, Gregory, particularly in his hagiographical writings, tended to give order to things by ensuring a “happy ending” for all things he described, which was to make his readers surprised and believe in the inner justice of the universe. Scholars in the past have attributed this pattern of narrative to the old tradition of “advertising the shrines of saints” or “teaching Christians how they should behave and inculcating an appropriate deference to the church

⁷⁷ For Gregory’s appointment and his early career as a bishop, see Tamar Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth-Century Gaul: Rethinking Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 29–30.

and the clergy,”⁷⁸ and acknowledged the propagandistic nature of Gregory’s miracle writing. But their opinions failed to point out what made Gregory differed from those previous Gallo-Roman “propagandists” of Christianity (like Paulinus), that is, he not only reconfirmed his personal connection with those saints—which made him a legitimate protégé and spokesman of them in the earthly world—but also focused his eyes largely on the surprising, miraculous deeds of the saints themselves.⁷⁹ Compared with Ruan Ji who built links among several scenarios to create a “multiple-screen montage” to cater to readers’ need of obtaining a sense of totality and personal freedom, Gregory often paid attention to a single “screen” that could disclose the efficacy of the power of saints to the greatest extent, to fulfill the need of his Christian or semi-Christian readers who were expecting something delightful enough. A short story from the *Gloria martyrum* (Glory of the Martyrs) could shed light on this point, revealing the spiritual power of the saints Nazarius and Celsus of Embrun:

Verum cum poma iuxta morem tempore debito ferret, quicumque exinde infirmus, qualibet aegritudine detentus, pomum mordicus decerpisset, mox ablata infirmitate convaliscebatur. Unde magnum quaestum pauper ille habebat.

But, in truth, when the tree bore fruit at its accustomed time, any sick person, possessed by some illness, who then plucked and bit the fruit, soon after recovered, with his sickness having departed. From this, that pauper made a great profit.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Lisa Bailey, “Within and Without: Lay People and the Church in Gregory of Tours’ Miracle Stories,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 119–44.

⁷⁹ This interest in miraculous deeds per se is also seen in Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth-Century Gaul*, 39.

⁸⁰ Gregory’s works are cited from *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum (MGH SRM)* 1.1–2, ed. Bruno Krusch (Hanover, 1969). The English translation is by Bailey, in “Within and Without,” 120.

According to scholar Lisa Bailey, this piece of writing was composed mainly for the taste of lay peoples in the local society of Gaul.⁸¹ It told a story about how a pear tree had grown over the tombs of the two saints and how it saved the lives of a group of impoverished ones. In addition to these, I would argue that Gregory, by telling such a story and similar ones, redefined the order of a text as something making direct reference to the notion of gaze: it should be something that can be “looked at” by audiences, and its meaning is formed through this process of looking. Once readers had a glance on a text, they could immediately capture the essential idea the author intended to express. To put it simple, the order of a text must be “visible/seeable,” not simply understandable.

V. Conclusion

This chapter examines the periods that we call “High Late Antiquity” and “the closing era of Late Antiquity,” and the propaganda discourse reflected through local elite writings in QXY and Gaul. The coming of High Late Antiquity was marked by a series of cultural crises in both the Eastern Han and Roman empires, which were embodied as the failure of imperial rulers in continuing to represent the cultural heritage of the two states. By the late-second century CE in China and late-fourth century in Rome, the educated elite population had already proclaimed themselves as the new spokesmen of the Han and Roman civilizations. It was with this background that the previously discussed “meta-discursive master,” which once incarnated itself as ritual conventions and literary traditions, came to disappear in textual products in QXY and Gaul. Writers came to pay more attention to circumstantiality and contextuality, and made efforts to instill their personal experience into the making of a text. In the late period of “High Late Antiquity,” the elite textual expressions in the two regions exhibited an aesthetic turn with regard to

⁸¹ Bailey, “Within and Without,” 119.

their aims and the methods through which they interacted with readers. Two famous writers, Kong Rong and Sidonius, whose works had been widely circulated, or even edited, in the closing era of Late Antiquity, helped to illustrate this point. This aesthetic pursuit became even more evident after the collapse of the Han and Roman government, as a new meta-discursive master came to take shape. It was founded upon the common taste of a society that people wanted to see the beautiful forms of things. This largely changed the mechanism of information dissemination among local elite populations, as well as the logic of propagandistic practice of these people, as visibility somewhat replaced certainty to be the source of meaning of a text which enhanced its power of persuasiveness.

CONCLUSION

The present study has argued that in ancient societies, “propaganda” should be defined as an institutionalized activity that depended on the regular existence of specific human groupings and their norms. It entailed the strategic promotion of a certain agenda among group members, and the significance of centralized indoctrination in spreading this agenda. In the actual operation of ancient propaganda there were three factors that enabled this activity to continue: institutional leadership, institutionalized media, and the institutional displays of the leadership and the media. In order to discover those institutional elements that might have constituted ancient propagandistic phenomena, it is necessary to look into certain cultural landscapes in which people formed a certain tradition, a common history, an experience and special language, and therefore came to generate specific types of regional community wherein shared norms of information management were required. Two such local areas are the Qing-Xu-Yan 青-徐-兖 area from the Eastern Han period to the Western Jin, and the broad area of Gaul from the latter half of the Roman empire to the early Medieval period. Both regions witnessed the growth of local elite groupings and their institutions. They shared other commonalities as well, such as the combination of a certain level of cultural homogeneity which also allowed some heterogeneity, the coexistence of seemingly high levels of provincial loyalty to the imperial court and its official ideology, and the increasing autonomy of local elite populations. These commonalities of the two ancient regions enable us to compare them with regard to their exhibition of the phenomenon of “local elite propaganda” in ancient Eurasia.

This dissertation has investigated local elite propaganda by examining two realms: its institutions and its discourse. As for the institutional basis of local elite propaganda,

the Han and Roman empires provided illustrative cases of how three major types of institutions, i.e., ritual/exhibition-management institutions, educational/advisory institutions, and philanthropic institutions, became the centers of local elite propaganda. Elite populations instilled their practical ethics into the running of such institutions, and produced two slogans for propagandistic purposes: “*guixin*” 歸心 and “people of God.” An informal structure of community leadership thus helped generate a new form of imperium that largely relied on the management and exchange of information. A culture of propaganda also permeated the entire elite community, becoming part of the daily lives of such populations. The two local areas under our discussion, Qing-Xu-Yan and Gaul, provided illustrative cases of how these informational institutions converged as a series of information nexuses, how such nexuses came to overlap with the main text-producing groups in the local community, and how this overlapping brought the prosperity of local literary authorities that greatly enhanced the unification of local elite speech. The localization of elite speech started in the Qing-Xu-Yan area from the latter half of the Western Han dynasty, and in Gaul it began in the late third century. What accompanied the convergence of local elite speech were the censoring forces to filter such speech. Two of these censoring forces were exemplary figures and factional accusations. As time went by, such forces were also borrowed by writers’ groups to reshape the realm of elite public communication. In the late period of the two empires, these populations responded to public issues by expressing opinions related to potential solutions for these problems. Local elite propaganda was reinforced through these expressions of opinion.

As for the discourse of local elite propaganda, it referred to three aspects: the building blocks of the elite propagandistic language that are consciously created, utilized, and maneuvered by human agents; a historically contingent social system where elite interlocutors exchange their information and build connections with the language; and the

concrete individual practice that reflects an interlocutor's competence as a strategic player of propaganda. The discourse of local elite propaganda in the Qing-Xu-Yan area and Gallic provinces experienced two quasi-paradigmatic shifts during Late Antiquity, which appeared as three stages of development surrounding the emergence and disappearance of a "meta-discursive master," that is, an external authority beyond the specific context of discourse production and usage. The three stages were: the "early stage of Late Antiquity" that witnessed the sustaining of a meta-discursive master, the period of "High Late Antiquity" that saw the disappearance of such a master, and the "closing period of Late Antiquity" that witnessed the emergence of a new master.

The first stage covered the eras of Emperors Zhang, He, An, and Shun of the Eastern Han, and the periods of the Tetrarchs and the Constantinian emperors of the Roman empire. The imperial court of the two empires was not satisfied with only proclaiming the unity of the state and her culture, but made more efforts to explain in what sense the notion of cultural unity was true. In front of this background, in both the Qing-Xu-Yan area and Gaul, the meta-discursive master embodied itself as a set of traditions that intervened in the making of elite textual expression. On the one hand it was incarnated as ritual conventions that provided the act of writing with the features of repeatability and copiability. On the other hand, it could also derive from the literary and political traditions of criticism, which encouraged writers to imitate some "sages of writing" in history. The language of local elite propagandists appeared to adhere to these masters, to verify the certainty of cultural unity. At the same time, these propagandists also created new criteria of truthfulness that were rooted in the concrete situation of the local community itself.

The second stage concurred with the cultural crises happening in the period of "High Late Antiquity" of the two empires. For the Han side, Emperors Huan and Ling

failed to continually represent the cultural heritage of the empire, which led to the growth of elite factions called “*dangren*” who proclaimed themselves as the true guardians of Han values. For the Roman side, Valentinian I and his successors constantly encountered opposing voices from the senatorial group, as the government came to pay more attention to military issues rather than sustaining the state’s values. A larger group of senators converted to Christianity, and holy men in local areas obtained more authority. Under this context, the two regions, Qing-Xu-Yan and Gaul, came to play new roles in the empire, which should be largely attributed to the active elite movements in these areas. Writers came to focus more on circumstantiality and contextuality, and they endeavored to instill their personal experience into the making of a text. This, to a large extent, made the field of local elite propaganda discourse somehow centerless.

In the late period of “High Late Antiquity” a new tendency came to emerge. The elite textual expressions in the two regions exhibited an aesthetic turn, typically shown as local writers’ enthusiasm for interacting with their readers by creating a new realm of literary/artistic appreciation. Two authors, Kong Rong and Sidonius, with the former dying immediately before the collapse of the Eastern Han government while the other witnessed the ultimate fall of the Roman court, represented a generation of local literati amid the aesthetic turn. After the failure of the two empires, a new meta-discursive master of aesthetic taste became even more evident. It reflected the common desire of elite populations, even some non-elite ones, to create and see the beautiful forms of things. This new master changed the mechanism of elite information production and dissemination, as messages were now required to be “shown directly,” rather than “digested gradually.” The logic of elite propagandistic practice also somewhat changed, as visibility partly replaced certainty as the source of persuasiveness in public communication.

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