

The Rhetoric and Ritual of Celestial Signs in Early Imperial China

By

Jesse James Chapman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Chinese Language

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Chair

Professor Robert Ashmore

Professor Michael Nylan

Fall 2015



**Abstract**

The Rhetoric and Ritual of Celestial Signs in Early Imperial China

by

Jesse James Chapman

Doctor of Philosophy in Chinese Language

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Mark Csikszentmihalyi, Chair

*The Rhetoric and Ritual of Celestial Signs in Early Imperial China* investigates the circulation of signs such as planets in retrograde motion, comets, oddly-shaped clouds, inclement weather, and rainbows in the Western Han (206 BCE–8 CE) and Eastern Han (25–220 CE) dynasties. Building on scholarship in the history of science and previous historical studies of omenology, the present work focuses on the rhetorical and ritual dimensions of celestial signs within broader political, literary, and technical networks. It examines technical treatises in the standard histories, manuscripts on astro-omenology from the tombs of the ruling family of Dai at Mawangdui (*terminus ad quem* 168 BCE), memorials to the throne, liturgical repertoires, poetic celestial journeys, and early exegetical works to illuminate how celestial signs both created discursive possibilities and were themselves shaped by generic contexts and performative goals. The dissertation argues that celestial signs became meaningful always in relation to surrounding contexts, as they were read against the constellations in which they appeared, historical circumstances, present conditions in the empire, and through the voices of the deities, supplicants, rulers, and ministers that invoked them. By examining a broad range of contexts in which celestial signs appeared, this dissertation contributes to a fuller and more balanced appreciation of the variegated roles celestial signs played in the shifting culture of early imperial China.

Dedicated to My Necessary Companion, Amy Kate

## Contents

### Chapter 1

<b>Introduction: Celestial Signs, Culture, and the Cosmos</b>	1
Celestial Signs in the Culture of Early China	3
Notions of <i>Tianwen</i> : Celestial Patterns, Astrology, and Astronomy	4
The Division Between Calculable and Incalculable Signs	9
Models of Contact: Causality, Participation, and Resonance	11
Outline of the Present Study	16
Appendix A: Terminology and Translation	21
Appendix B: The Bibliographic Category of <i>Tianwen</i>	26

### Chapter 2

<b>Celestial Signs at the Local Court of Dai: The Mawangdui Manuscripts</b>	32
Part I: Bifurcating Readings	36
What's in a Name?	36
A Chart of Comets?	38
Part II: Signs and Strife	42
The Five Planets Prognostications	42
Tracking the Quelling Star	43
Tracking the Dazzling Deluder?	48
The Fog of War: Punishment and Favor	49
Miscellaneous Prognostications	55
The Syntax of Celestial Signs: Eclipses and Other Encounters	59
The Celestial Signs Manuscripts and the <i>Changes</i> in the Dai Corpus	63
Conclusion	70
Appendix A: "Five Planets Prognostications," Zodiacal Risings of the Queller	71
Appendix B: "Five Planets Prognostications," The Dazzling Deluder	73
Appendix C: "Five Planets Prognostications," Planetary Taxonomies	75
Appendix D: Figures	76

### Chapter 3

<b>Celestial Signs in the Writing of History</b>	82
Part I: Readers of Celestial Signs in History in the <i>Shiji</i>	84
From the Yellow God to the Benighted King of Zhou	88
Part II: Classicism, Prognosis, and Hermeneutics in the "Five Resources"	103
A Chronicle of Comets, or The Decline and Fall of the Western Han	112
Part III: Etiology, Chronology, and Classicism in the "Celestial Patterns"	120
Linking Signs to the Classics in the "Celestial Patterns"	122
The "Celestial Patterns" as a Dynastic History	126
Conclusion	129
Appendix A: Technical Materials in the "Celestial Offices" and "Celestial Patterns"	130

Clouds, <i>Qi</i> , and Comets	130
Eclipses, Halos, and Inclement Weather	136
The Fuzzy Boundaries of the Category of Celestial Signs	141
Appendix B: Tables of Planetary Correspondences	144
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Etiology, Contingency, and Textual Authority: The Suasive Power of Celestial Signs</b>	146
Part I: A Synoptic View of Suasion and Celestial Signs	149
Authoritative Theories: From Etiology to Contingency	155
Authoritative Exemplars: Turning Calamities into Good Fortune	160
King Wuding and the Pheasant in “The High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice”	161
King Cheng and the Violent Winds	164
The Integrity of Duke Jing of Song	167
From Distant Reading to Close Reading	171
Part II: Three Moments in the Rhetoric of Celestial Signs	173
Arguments from Absence	173
Dong Zhongshu	176
Gongsun Hong	180
Etiology and Contingency in the End Times	183
Gu Yong	184
Liu Xiang	189
The Earthquake of 133 CE as a Celestial Sign	195
Zhang Heng	197
Ma Rong	199
Li Gu	204
Conclusion	208
<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Celestial Signs, Ritual, and the Performance of Voice</b>	210
Part I: The Pre-Imperial Legacy	214
The Suppliant and the Deity in the “Nine Songs”	214
The Exemplary Voice of the Frustrated Minister in “Encountering Sorrow”	223
Part II: Celestial Signs in the Multiple Voices of Emperor Wu	229
The Ruler as a Deity: Sima Xiangru’s “ <i>Fu</i> on the Great Man”	229
The Ruler as the Ideal Suppliant: “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices”	236
Part III: The Celestial Journey of the Frustrated Minister in Han Times	243
A Journey in Search of Justice: “Vanishing in the Distance”	243
The Celestial Journey as a Textual Journey: “Holding Fast to My Will”	250
The Journey through the Classics: “Contemplating the Mystery”	256
Conclusion: Reading, Writing, and Performing Voice	264
Appendix: Mapping Celestial Journeys	268

**Chapter 6**

<b>Conclusion and Supplement: “Cloudy River” and the Problem of Ritual Failed</b>	271
Disjunction and Failure	272
Celestial Signs in “Cloudy River”	275
Prognostication and Ritual	280
Failure as Supplement	284
The Cloudy River and the Comet in the West	285
<b>Works Cited</b>	287

## Acknowledgments

It has been a long road, but the journey has been a pleasure, thanks to the kindness, generosity, and good company of those I have encountered along the way.

This project would never have been conceived, much less actually taken shape as a dissertation, without an incredible investment of time, energy, and effort on the part of my dissertation committee. My deepest thanks go to my mentor and advisor Mark Csikszentmihalyi, for pushing me to pay attention to the smallest details of excavated texts and to ask big questions, engaging anthropology, religious studies, and the history of science; to Michael Nylan, who taught me both to employ a rigorous historical methodology and to find friends in history; and to Robert Ashmore, who showed me how to work backwards and trained me to imagine texts being performed. Conversations and coursework with Francesca Rochberg, Paula Varsano, Andrew Jones, Terry Kleeman, Patricia Berger, William Schaefer, Alex Cook, Robert Sharf, Nicholas Tackett, Robert Alter, and Massimo Mazzotti all contributed to the development of ideas in this dissertation. Daniel Morgan graciously read and commented on its first two chapters. An ongoing collaboration with Ralph Neuhäuser, Professor of Astrophysics at the University of Jena, aided me in developing the technical skills needed to work on premodern astronomical phenomena.

I was also most fortunate to present parts of this work at three conferences at UC Berkeley over the last two years: “Pre-industrial Technologies of Knowledge,” “Between the Invisible and the Visible: Cosmology, Ritual, and Hermeneutics in Historical and Contemporary Chinese Worlds,” and “Technical Arts and Historical Writing in Early China.” I would like to acknowledge the participants and guests of these three conferences for their comments and criticism, with special thanks to Michael Loewe for his interest and encouragement. The first two of these conferences were the culmination of two year-long graduate student groups supported by the Walter and Elise Haas Fund. I would like to acknowledge my fellow writers Scott McGinnis, Trenton Wilson, Sharon Sanderovitch, Wang Yun-ling, Yueni Zhong, and Benjamin Saltzman for their support and criticism. The composition of this dissertation was also funded with support from the Center for Chinese Studies, including the Joseph R. Levenson Chinese Studies Award and the Liu Graduate Research Fellowship; from the UC Berkeley Graduate Division in the form of the Dean’s Normative Time Fellowship, the Fellowship for Language and Area Studies, and the Parent Grant; and from the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures in the form of both stipends and teaching fellowships.

I would also like to thank Stephen Wadley, Sharon Carstens, and my undergraduate advisor, Jonathan Pease, who taught me Classical Chinese and introduced me to the *Yanzi Chunqiu* (Annals of Master Yan), sparking my interest in the interpretation of celestial signs in early China. I owe an incalculable debt to the many indefatigable and passionate public school teachers I had the good fortune to encounter in my formative years, especially John Hoover, Serna Teixeira, and Normetta Muir.

I thank my family: including my parents, Jim and Patti, my brothers Rob and Michael, my wonderful in-laws, my three daughters, Ellie Mae, Lola James, and Katy Lou—who have beautifully transformed earlier drafts of this dissertation into snowflakes, paper airplanes, and other fine works of art—and my amazing wife Amy Kate, who in addition to providing constant love and support, also read through the entire manuscript and spotted more than a few typos.



I have had a great deal of help. Those errors and omissions that remain are my responsibility alone.

Finally, I wish to thank the reader for joining me in conversation. Questions, comments, and criticism are welcome.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Celestial Signs, Culture, and the Cosmos

The *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (Annals of Master Yan) relates a dialogue between the bumbling Duke Jing of Qi 齊景公 (r. 547–490 BCE) and his wise chief minister, Yan Ying 晏嬰 (6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), following the appearance of a baleful sign in the western skies:

日暮，公西面望，睹彗星，召伯常騫，使禳去之。晏子曰：「不可！此天教也。日月之氣，風雨不時，彗星之出，天為民之亂見之，故詔之妖祥，以戒不敬。今君若設文而受諫，謁聖賢人，雖不去彗，星將自亡。」

At sunset, the Duke gazed westward and saw a comet. He summoned Bo Changqian to exorcise it. Master Yan said, “You must not do so, for this is the Teaching of Heaven. The *qi* around the sun and the moon, unseasonable wind and rain, and the appearance of comets are all produced by Heaven due to rebellions among the populace. Inauspicious portents are sent down to warn those who are not sufficiently reverent! Now, if you were to delight<sup>1</sup> in elegance, accept admonitions, and call on sage, worthy men, then even if you did not banish the comet, it would disappear on its own.”<sup>2</sup>

To Duke Jing, the comet was a harbinger of disaster that appeared for unknown reasons, while for Master Yan, it was a direct result of ritual and political lapses on the part of the ruler. Master Yan aims to replace the Duke’s understanding of the etiology of the comet with his own, continuing in his characteristically acerbic style:

今君嗜酒而并于樂，政不飾而寬于小人，近讒好優，惡文而疏聖賢人，何暇在彗！

<sup>1</sup> I read *yue wen* 說文 (delight in elegance) for *she wen* 設文 (establish elegance) on analogy with *e wen* 惡文 (detest elegance) below.

<sup>2</sup> *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (Annals of Master Yan) in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Collected Works of the Many Masters), vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1952): 1.18.26. NB: While the dialogue occurs in the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE, the *Yanzi chunqiu* was compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–8 BCE) in circa 27 BCE. The text likely represents an early imperial idealized speech of Master Yan, rather than a speech delivered by the historical figure himself. A fragment from Liu Xiang’s “Catalogued Records” (Bie lu 別錄) discussing the process of editing a text titled the *Yanzi* 晏子 (Master Yan) states that Liu had employed four collections of writings to produce his edition. The respective lengths of these collections were highly variable: one, five, eleven, and thirteen *pian* 篇 (chapters). Altogether the thirty *pian* contained 838 *zhang* 章 (entries). After removing duplicates, Liu produced a recension in eight *pian* or 215 *zhang*. See Wu Zeyu 吳則虞, *Yanzi chunqiu jishi* 晏子春秋集釋 (Collected Commentaries to the Annals of Master Yan), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962): 49–50. A text titled *Yanzi* likewise appears in the Classicist 儒者 subsection of the Masters 諸子 category in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han) bibliographic treatise. See Ban Gu 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) et al comp., Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) comm., *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962): 30.1724.

彗又將見矣。

Now, you have a taste for wine and music. Your administration is crude, and you tolerate petty men. You befriend toadies and delight in clowns, detest elegance, and keep your distance from sages and worthy men. What leisure do you have to banish a comet? Even if you exorcise it, it will appear again!<sup>3</sup>

There are several aspects of this brief conversation that illustrate differences between the cultural significance of celestial signs in Early China and in modern scientific contexts. First, phenomena that modern readers would separate into two separate categories, astronomic and meteorological, were equally treated as part of a broader category of celestial signs. Along with comets, Master Yan cites atmospheric phenomena: *qi* around the sun and moon and unseasonable wind and rain. Second, the dialogue shows that different actors interpreted the same signs in different ways. The proper response to baleful signs was open to debate. Duke Jing and Bo Changqian interpreted the comet in one way, and Master Yan interpreted it in quite another. Duke Jing proposes that a ritual be performed to drive the comet away. Master Yan claims that the ritual will ultimately fail if the underlying conditions that brought the comet into being are not addressed. Claims regarding why baleful signs came into being underscored arguments regarding the proper response to such signs. Duke Jing is fundamentally unconcerned with what, exactly, brought the comet into being, whereas Master Yan implicitly claims to know its precise source. This indicates that to understand how the debates over celestial signs in early China played out, and to gain a sense of the stakes involved, we must ask questions of rhetoric. How did one construct an authoritative argument as to what a given sign meant and what should be done about it? What sort of tropes did effective arguments involve? What authorities did they appeal to? By what means did they seek to convince? Finally, signs of all types were read against other signs. Groups of constellations called celestial fields (*fenye* 分野) corresponded to terrestrial domains. Though the anecdote does not explicitly mention the particular constellation in which the comet appeared, Duke Jing and Master Yan share the assumption that the location of the comet in the sky corresponds to the domain of Qi.<sup>4</sup> Master Yan, more importantly, reads the comet in conjunction with signs in the human realm: the Duke's indulgent behavior, his poor governance, his failure to recognize good men, and the starving and rebellious populace. Comets, like other celestial signs, were not understood in objective terms as natural phenomena

<sup>3</sup> *Yanzi chungqiu* 1.18.

<sup>4</sup> A similar anecdote in the same chapter specifies that the Dazzling Deluder (Yinghuo 熒惑), Mars, appears in a constellation corresponding to Qi. Master Yan explains: "The Barrens constellation corresponds to Qi. Moreover, the calamity sent from Heaven will fall for certain on the rich and powerful. You do no good and your administration does not function. You distance yourself from worthy men, yet you praise toadies. Ordinary folk are sick and angry, yet for your own benefit you summon auspicious portents. The idle and the lazy rob the [ordinary folk] of their food. What harm will it do if they go to their deaths? This is why the constellations do not proceed in order, the aberrant stars twinkle, and the Dazzling Deluder turns back against its course, the Bane Star at its side! If there are worthies yet you do not employ them, how can you avoid destruction" 虛、齊野也。且天之下殃，固于富彊，為善不用，出政不行，賢人使遠，讒人反昌，百姓疾怨，自為祈祥，錄錄彊食，進死何傷！是以列舍無次，變星有芒，熒惑回逆，孽星在旁，有賢不用，安得不亡 (*Yanzi chungqiu* 1.21.29–30)?

separate from subjective interpreters in the human world. We cannot hope to appreciate what comets, clouds, planetary motion, or eclipses meant in early China by focusing our inquiry solely on questions of the extent to which early actors' views of these phenomena matched our current understanding of their objective, material reality. To understand their significance in early China, we must recognize that celestial signs, like all other signs, circulate in culture.

### **Celestial Signs in the Culture of Early China**

Whether or not Master Yan and Duke Jing ever actually saw the comet in the west, the story of their conversation regarding it was told and retold, written and re-written, copied and copied again by those who found it edifying, entertaining, or worthy of emulation. While studies of the stars, planets, and comets in early imperial times often employ the methods and carry the concerns of the history of science, the best studies of both signs and the sciences have treated signs as objects that circulate within cultures, and sciences as social and cultural practices undertaken by human actors, rather than as transparent lenses through which a universal and objective reality may be viewed.

As opposed to a set of questions concerning how far science had progressed in accurately observing and describing objective reality in early China,<sup>5</sup> the present study is concerned with the processes by which celestial signs were thought to have been brought into being, the claims celestial signs allowed historical actors to make, and the ways in which those claims influenced and were influenced by other types of knowledge, political interests, ritual concerns, and historical circumstances. As actors at early courts observed, recorded, and interpreted celestial phenomena, the lives of those courts shaped the meanings of celestial signs. While objectivist<sup>6</sup> accounts may leave the political claims regarding the meaning of celestial signs in the margins, dismissing such connections as superstitious and therefore beyond the pale of the history of science, we cannot hope to understand the role celestial signs played in the culture of early imperial courts without accounting for their political, religious, and rhetorical dimensions.

Astronomical anomalies did not remain neatly contained in a secular and rational discourse of astronomy. Celestial signs—astronomical or meteorological—did not even stay within the technical discourse of celestial patterns (*tianwen* 天文). Astronomy is a modern frame. Celestial patterns, a bibliographic category, is a late Western Han 漢 (206 BCE–8 CE) frame. “Celestial signs” is a custom frame, purposefully constructed to avoid both the anachronism of “astronomy” and the narrow constraints of the bibliographical categories in the imperial archives, and to account for signs both in the specific sense of portents, and in the general sense of objects in the heavens, the sun, moon, stars, planets, comets, strange clouds, rainbows, and so forth, in terms of their cultural valences.

No frame, including this one, can completely exhaust the relevant cultural phenomena.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 of the present work.

<sup>6</sup> *Pace* Ayn Rand, the term “objectivist” is employed throughout the present work to designate scholarly works or lines of investigation concerned with identifying how well historical actors understood astronomical or meteorological phenomena in objective terms. Practically speaking, this means comparing what those actors said about comets, stars, and so forth, with modern scientific descriptions of the same phenomena. Because objectivist readings presuppose a divide between subject and object, culture and nature, the observer and the observed, the cultural valences of the phenomena fall outside the frame of inquiry, and in some cases are labeled superstition, and therefore, unworthy of investigation.

We draw lines, build fences, that divide up the materials we study to make our conversations intelligible and to structure our arguments. We will adhere to the *ad hoc* category of celestial signs as the object of inquiry here, yet will often peek through the fences to consider what lies immediately beyond them. We will reflect not only upon signs that appear *in* the heavens, but signs that our sources tell us represent the will *of* Heaven: a pheasant on a cauldron; a strange white fish; an earthquake in the capital. It goes almost without saying that much is left out. This will not be a total study covering every aspect of the ritual and rhetoric of celestial signs in the Western (206 BCE–8 CE) and Eastern Han 漢 (25–220 CE). The period is far too rich for any single study to do so. I have limited my inquiries in excavated texts almost exclusively to a single tomb at Mawangdui (*terminus ad quem* 168 BCE), set aside the role of celestial signs in the rich, but highly fragmentary, body of apocryphal literature, and examined only a small fraction of the poetry, memorials, and technical texts that are available in the received literature. There is a tension between disciplined inquiry and a desire to describe things in all their messy and unbounded interconnectedness, even if we know that the latter is ultimately impossible to complete. I have attempted to strike a balance by employing a broad frame that allows me to investigate how celestial signs circulated through disparate genres and to examine the connections between them, following the threads of those narratives that seem to be most immediately revealing, or most complementary to the growing body of scholarship on *li* 曆 (calendrics or mathematical astronomy; see below) and *tianwen*.

### Notions of *Tianwen*: Celestial Patterns, Astrology, and Astronomy

Comets, planets in retrograde motion, constellations, meteors, strange clouds, rainbows, and unseasonable weather formed a discursive cluster of related signs that included both observed phenomena and rhetorical figures. In early imperial times, the category of *tianwen* 天文 (celestial patterns) did not distinguish between meteorological phenomena and astronomical phenomena, all of which, from the point of view of the observer, occurred upon the surface of the celestial sphere. While some of these signs can be and have been studied under the aegis of the history of astronomy, strange clouds, rainbows, and unseasonable weather are left out of the scope of such studies. If the field of inquiry is narrowly defined by objectivist criteria as the “history of astronomy” *per se*, it inevitably brings with it particular sorts of questions and particular objects of analysis. It looks beyond the curved surface of the heavens upon which the people of early imperial China observed the shapes of passing clouds by day and the movements of the planets by night, discarding the former phenomena as being irrelevant, and examining only the latter—those phenomena that occurred beyond that surface, out in space. The history of astronomy is, so long as we understand “astronomy” according to its modern definition, not concerned with meteorological phenomena. However, the same institution, the Minister of Ceremonial or the Taichang 太常, was responsible for observing and recording both meteorological and astronomical phenomena, and moreover, made no sharp distinction between them.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the notion of “astronomy” carries with it an overdetermined sense of purpose,

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed yet succinct description of the responsibilities of the Taichang and its subordinate offices, see Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). 17–23.

an assumption that the aim of the practice of astronomy is the discovery of natural laws. However, the assumption that the primary purpose of the observation of astronomic and meteorological phenomena was the discovery of natural laws does not hold in early imperial times.<sup>8</sup> Celestial signs were part and parcel of a more complex set of social practices: political persuasion, prognostication, poetic representations of the self, the writing of history, and the reading of the Classics.

*Tianwen*, the modern Chinese word for astronomy, literally means “celestial patterns” or “celestial writing.” In early imperial and medieval times, *tianwen* concerned a different set of phenomena than modern astronomy and carried a different purpose. While recognizing their considerable overlap in practice, Nathan Sivin treats *tianwen* in premodern contexts as “astrology,” reserving the rendering “mathematical astronomy” for *li*.<sup>9</sup>

In imperial China, astrology (*t'ien-wen* 天文) and mathematical astronomy (*li* 曆, *li-fa* 曆法) were based on the observation and prediction of actual phenomena in the sky. Both were primarily governmental functions, and were interdependent. These complementary arts evolved from the responsibilities of early scribes<sup>10</sup> who kept records and divined to determine whether courses of action were propitious or disastrous.<sup>11</sup>

*Li* defined regularities, whereas *tianwen* interpreted anomalies. Under the subcategory of *tianwen* in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han) bibliographic treatise, we find works concerning the movements of the sun, moon, and stars such as: *Prognostications and Verifications Concerning the Motions and Events of the Five Planets and Comets in the Han* [i.e. the Milky Way] (Han wuxing huikexingshi zhanyan 漢五星彗客行事占驗). Yet we also find titles such as *Guo Zhang's Observations Concerning Rainbows, Clouds, and Rain* (Guo Zhang guan ni yun yu 國章觀霓雲雨), and the *Oceanic Account of Various Prognostications Concerning the Sun, Moon, Comets, and Rainbows* (Haizhong ri yue hui hong zazhan 海中日月彗虹雜占).<sup>12</sup> A complete list of *tianwen* texts in the *Hanshu* bibliographic treatise is given in Appendix B. *Tianwen* texts concern a wide variety of celestial objects and phenomena: stars, the Five Planets, the twenty-eight lunar lodges, eclipses, halos, rainbows, clouds, rain, and *qi* around the sun, moon, and stars. Many of the entries in the bibliographic category of *tianwen* were, moreover, of a distinctly prognostic character. Where the complementary art of calendrics sought to establish a precise description of the regularities of the movements of the heavens,

<sup>8</sup> No concept corresponding to modern notions of nature, or Greek notion *physis* φύσις, existed in early China. See Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002): 200. Early imperial cosmology included human beings, and especially rulers, as active participants in cosmological processes.

<sup>9</sup> Sivin's distinction is apt. However, in an effort to avoid evoking modern notions of secularity and objectivity some readers will inevitably associate with the term astronomy, I adopt the somewhat more common rendering “calendrics” for *li*.

<sup>10</sup> Scribes in the sense used here are no mere copyists, but high level officials charged with prognostication and record-keeping.

<sup>11</sup> Nathan Sivin, *Granting the Seasons: The Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280, With a Study of its Many Dimensions and a Translation of its Records* (New York: Springer, 2009): 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Hanshu* 30.1763–65.

*tianwen* was concerned with identifying anomalous phenomena and explaining what they portended.

The bibliographic category of *tianwen* is a useful point of departure for an inquiry into celestial signs in early imperial China, but, as noted above, the uses of such signs were not limited to narrow technical problems of prognostication. By defining the central category of our inquiry as the celestial sign, we may examine both observed phenomena *and* rhetorical figures in Classics, histories, poetry, persuasive dialogues, and memorials, in addition to technical manuals. The field of inquiry of “celestial signs” allows us to compare texts that would not ordinarily be compared, such as the highly technical prognostic “Xingde” 刑德 (Punishment and Favor) manuscripts discovered at Mawangdui, and the alternately lyrical and liturgical *Chuci* 楚辭 (Lyrics of Chu) corpus. Several of the same gods, including Feng Long 豐隆, the Earl of Wind (Feng Bo 風伯), and the Legions of Rain (Yu Shi 雨師), appear in both the *Chuci* and the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts. By investigating celestial signs, rather than limiting our materials to “technical *tianwen* texts” or “poetry,” for example, we may ask how these signs are configured in both genres, and raise the question of the extent to which these configurations reinforce or are in tension with one another. Moreover, in the few instances where it is possible, we will examine celestial signs in the works of particular individuals who wrote in several genres, such as Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (79–8 BCE) retrospective interpretations of earlier omens in the Western Han and in the Chunqiu 春秋 (722–481 BCE) period, his poems of frustration in the style of the *Chuci*, and his memorials to the throne, as well as the *fu* poetry, technical work, and memorials of the polymath and statesman Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139).<sup>13</sup> By drawing attention to differences in the rhetorical use of celestial signs in various genres, we will investigate how formal, ritual, and political considerations shaped the presentation of celestial signs at the textual level, often in documents prepared for the court.

While the present study eschews the category of astronomy, it is built upon a number of extremely important contributions to the field that have employed this category. Joseph Needham (1900–1995) and Wang Ling 王玲 (ca. 1917–1994) in their account of “Astronomy” (1959) in the series *Science and Civilization in China*<sup>14</sup> created an excellent introduction to the technical developments that allowed early observers to monitor the movements of the planets, identify precession, and predict eclipses. Writing at a time when pseudo-scientific theories of racial superiority still held considerable sway, Needham and Wang showed that the technical achievements of the ancient and medieval Chinese equaled or outstripped their contemporaries in the Mediterranean world. Nonetheless, their tendency to read writers such as Zhang Heng primarily with an eye to his technical achievements meant overlooking his writings on cosmogony, his poetry, and the political stakes involved in his technical work. The telos of modern astronomy continues to define the nature and scope of inquiry in major scholarly works. Chen Meidong’s 陳美東 recent comprehensive description of astronomy in premodern China,

<sup>13</sup> For a historically nuanced study of the highly diverse corpus of Zhang Heng’s works, including fragments of his technical writings, see Yeong–Chung E. Lien, “Zhang Heng, Eastern Han Polymath, His Life and Works” (Phd Diss, University of Washington, 2011), UMI (3452743).

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Needham (in collaboration with Wang Ling), “Astronomy” in *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 3 “Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1959).

*Zhongguo gudai tianwenxue sixiang* 中國古代天文學思想 (Astronomical Thought in Ancient China; 2008)<sup>15</sup> makes an enormous contribution to the field, tracing technical developments from early China through late imperial times. It seems, however, to understand *tianwen* primarily according to its modern sense as astronomy rather than its ancient sense as celestial patterns. Chen works to uncover premodern Chinese equivalents to modern astronomical ideas, such as the theory of an expanding universe, rather than focusing on the position and value of the discourse surrounding *tianwen* in premodern times. Other works in the field suggest that a shift is underway toward reading technical practices with respect to the social, religious, and political concerns that surround them. Feng Shi's 馮時 *Zhongguo tianwen kaoguxue* 中國天文考古學 (Archaeoastronomy in China; 2001)<sup>16</sup> pays closer attention to the mythic elements of *tianwen*, arguing that it is better to treat *tianwen* as early religion than early science, despite the precision of measurements astronomic practice sometimes involved. Insisting that archaeoastronomy is a discipline within the humanities rather than the sciences, Feng encourages his readers to treat both excavated and received *tianwen* texts as products of human practices, rather than more-or-less accurate attempts to represent natural laws. The astronomer-physicist team Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker devote the final chapter of their otherwise highly technical *The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (1997)<sup>17</sup> to explaining the nomenclature used for the stars in terms of early imperial daily life, myth, and political structures.

Art historian Lillian Tseng's *Picturing Heaven in Early China* (2011),<sup>18</sup> breaks the mold of the history of astronomy, analyzing celestial signs always with respect to culture. Tseng avoids the problem of excising material related to astronomy, or embodying scientific value, from its broader context partly by emphasizing visual evidence over textual evidence in her chapter on poetic celestial journeys, as well as in her discussion of excavated images of the four grand constellations into which all the stars in the ecliptical fall: the Blue Dragon (Canglong 蒼龍), the Vermilion Bird (Zhuque 朱鵲), the White Tiger (Baihu 白虎), and the Dark Warrior (Xuanwu 玄武). In "Engraving Auspicious Omens," Tseng examines five signs in the "Hymn of the Western Passage" (Xi xia song 西狹頌): a Yellow Dragon (Huanglong 黃龍), a White Deer (Bailu 白鹿), two trees growing together (*mu lian lili* 木連力理), a fine sprout (*jia he* 嘉禾), and the descent of sweet dew (*gan lu jiang* 甘露降)—engraved on a cliff side in 171 CE to commemorate the achievements of Li Xi 李翕, governor of Wudu 武都 Commandery. In a study that derived its notion of what it means to "picture Heaven" from the modern science of astronomy, a writer would never have included these five omens. Tseng shows, however, that in Li Xi's time these omens were signs of celestial favor. In Tseng's work, celestial signs are inscribed into and inseparable from the broader cultural landscape.

In *The Way and the Word* (2002), a comparative study of the sciences in classical China and Greece, Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin bring the problem of the relationship between technical practices and social circumstances to the forefront, identifying the object of their

<sup>15</sup> Chen Meidong, *Zhongguo gudai tianwen xue sixiang*. (Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Feng Shi, *Zhongguo tianwen kaoguxue*. (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).



investigation as a “manifold” composed of not only “intellectual, social, and institutional dimensions but also the interaction that unites all of these aspects into a single whole.”<sup>19</sup> Unsatisfied with merely describing technical practices or intellectual concepts, Lloyd and Sivin ask “how people make a living, what their relation is to structures of authority, what bonds connect those who do the same work, how they communicate what they understand, and what concepts and assumptions they use.”<sup>20</sup> Drawing on Lloyd and Sivin’s exemplary theoretical model, we will investigate how celestial signs circulate across discursive modes and interact with social and political structures, and in doing so, broaden our understanding of the cultural manifold within which such signs become meaningful.

Finally, one older work is particularly important for the cultural study of the heavens, a major source of inspiration for the present study, and an absolute pleasure to read. Edward Schafer’s *Pacing the Void: T’ang Approaches to the Stars* (1977) begins with an account of the work of “The T’ang Astronomers,” but works through the sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, and the planets as cultural objects. In his introduction Schafer described the work in modest terms:

It makes no significant contribution to the history of science, and very little to our understanding of medieval folklore or to literary criticism. It seems to me to be mostly about images. The most I can hope for is that it will serve as a set of stepping stones to the now almost unimaginable shore where the imagery of the poets of T’ang will be clearly visible in all of its cunning and fantastic workmanship.<sup>21</sup>

Schafer succeeded in addressing many of the technical, religious, ritual, and literary roles the stars played in Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907) culture in part because he did not limit himself to any single, established field of inquiry. Observation of the stars, narratives of descending deities, and poetic production all intermingle. Schafer aimed, in my view, to treat Tang approaches to the stars as part of what Lloyd and Sivin later would call the “cultural manifold” of Tang society, concerning himself with what most concerned Tang actors, rather than applying the pre-fabricated categories of his own time and place. He writes:

[T]he general trend of my text is far from “systematic” in the best sense of the word. It is based on a selection of ingredients—literary, folkloristic, and astrological—from which I could blend a reasonably rich goulash whose flavor might be distinguished as *a la T’ang*... I propose to correct, in some degree, prevailing tendencies to see the T’ang world through European or American eyes—the fallacy of stressing what we stress, of painting with the colors available on our palettes, of fusing only those amalgams which we regard as reasonable or useful.<sup>22</sup>

The early imperial period with which the present work is concerned was a very different time

---

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd and Sivin 3.

<sup>20</sup> Lloyd and Sivin 3.

<sup>21</sup> Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T’ang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): 1.

<sup>22</sup> Schafer 2–3.

from the Tang dynasty. By the Tang, abundant paper had allowed for the production and circulation of more numerous and lengthy literary texts among a far greater number of people. Even in the late Eastern Han (25 CE–220 CE), texts remained rare and precious. Many of the writers whose works are discussed in the chapters that follow occupied highly privileged positions that allowed them to gain access to the palace archives. In contrast to the case of the Tang, early imperial texts on celestial signs were almost exclusively compiled, employed, and transmitted at court, and therefore reflect the concerns of actors at court. Nonetheless, Schafer's largely culturalist approach would also have been suited to a study of earlier materials. Approaches to the stars were always conditioned to some extent by broader cultural practices. The goal of the present work is to some extent analogous to that of *Pacing the Void*, but the materials with which it engages are quite different both in content and in form.

### The Division Between Calculable and Incalculable Signs

Schafer largely eschewed questions of mathematical calculation in *Pacing the Void*, focusing instead on a textured analysis of rhetoric. Calculating the precise position of stars and planets was, however, a major goal of celestial observation in early China, and retrospective calculation has proved an indispensable tool for modern scholars. At the same time, phenomena that cannot be retrospectively calculated have received somewhat less attention. Modern science allows us to look back and see a great deal of what observers in the early empires might have seen. We know when the sun set, when the moon rose, when each and every eclipse occurred, when the planets were in retrograde motion, and when they gathered together in clusters. We can measure the accuracy of the calculations of each calendar early imperial courts produced against our own calculations. We can evaluate the precision of the figures for the synodic cycles of the planets or formulae for predicting eclipses against our own precise knowledge.

Studies of calculative methods in premodern China have flourished over the last several decades. As early as 1969, building on the work of scholars such as Wolfram Eberhard (1909–1989), Joseph Needham, Chen Mengjia 陳夢家 (1911–1966), Nôda Chûryû 能田忠亮 (1901–1989), and Yabuuti<sup>23</sup> Kiyoshi 藪内清 (1906–2001), Nathan Sivin detailed the methods by which celestial cycles were calculated and addressed the vital question of what, precisely, was at stake in producing an accurate calendar in his now classic study, “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy.”<sup>24</sup> Good general histories of premodern Chinese mathematics are available to an increasingly wide audience.<sup>25</sup> Excellent studies of foundational texts on

<sup>23</sup> Contemporary romanization would read Yabuuchi rather than Yabuuti.

<sup>24</sup> Nathan Sivin, “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy,” *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, 55, Livr. 1/3 (1969): 1–73. Sivin's citations include: Wolfram Eberhard, “Index zu den Arbeiten über Astronomie, Astrologie, und Elementenlehre,” *Monumenta Serica* 7 (1942): 242–66; Chen Mengjia, “Han jian nianli biao xu” 漢簡年曆表叙 (Prolegomena to Chronological Tables Based on the Han Wooden Tablets), *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 (Bulletin of Archaeology), no. 36 (1965): 103–149; Nôda Chûryû and Yabuuti Kiyoshi, *Kansho riturekishi no kenkyû* 漢書率曆志の研究 (Researches in the Treatise on Harmonics and Calendrical Astronomy of the Han history; Kyoto: Zenkoku, 1947).

<sup>25</sup> Yabuuti's history of mathematics has been translated from Japanese into French, while Jean-Claude Martzloff's work is now available in English. See Kiyoshi Yabuuti, Kaoru Baba, Catherine Jami, *Une Histoire des mathématiques chinoises* (Paris: Belin, pour la science, 2001); Jean-Claude Martzloff, *A History of Chinese Mathematics*, Stephen S. Wilson trans. (Berlin and New York: Springer, 1997).

mathematics in early China are now available, including Christopher Cullen's work on the *Writings on Reckoning* (Suan shu shu 算數書; 2004) and the *Zhou Gnomon Mathematical Classic* (Zhou bi suan jing 周髀算經; 1996)<sup>26</sup> and Karine Chemla and Guo Shuchun's *Les neuf chapitres: Le classique mathématique de la Chine ancienne et ses commentaires* (The Nine Chapters: The Mathematical Classic of Ancient China and Its Commentaries; 2004).<sup>27</sup> Sivin returned to study of the calendar in *Granting the Seasons: The Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280* (2009). Most recently, Daniel Morgan's dissertation, "Knowing Heaven: Astronomy, the Calendar, and the Sagecraft of Science in Early Imperial China" (2013), begins with the same historical point of departure as the present work: the excavated text of the Five Planets Prognostications (Wuxing zhan 五星占) discovered at Mawangdui in 1973. Carefully working through the mathematics of the "Five Planets Prognostications," as well as calendrical treatises and debates into the medieval period, Morgan points to an abiding empiricism and progressive drive in the observation of the heavens and the development of mathematical tools to describe the movements of celestial bodies.<sup>28</sup>

Our capacity to calculate the precise location of a given planet at a particular moment and to determine when eclipses occurred has also been a tremendous boon to the study of omenological texts. In 1937, William Hung (Hong Ye 洪業, 1893–1980) showed that the *Annals* (Chunqiu 春秋) Classic could not be a whole-cloth retroactive production.<sup>29</sup> The terse chronicle, which includes major military and political events, along with a host of baleful signs such as fires, droughts, floods, swarms of locusts, summer frosts, and comets between 722 and 481 BCE, gave accurate dates for many of the thirty-six eclipses it recorded. These could not have been the product of a later hand. Hans Bielenstein, in his 1950 article on omens during the Western Han, showed that records of omens are not a sound basis for statistical claims regarding the actual number of occurrences of a given type of event; specifically, under Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 73–49 BCE) eclipses were relatively frequent, though relatively few eclipses were actually recorded. Instead, Bielenstein argues, the frequency of baleful signs recorded for a given reign indicates the volume of indirect criticism offered by court officials.<sup>30</sup> Retroactive calculation remains an

<sup>26</sup> Respectively, Christopher Cullen, *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China: The Zhou bi suan jing* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge, 1996) and Christopher Cullen, *The Suàn shù shū = 'Writings on Reckoning': A Translation of a Chinese Mathematical Collection of the Second Century BC, with Explanatory Commentary* (Cambridge U.K.: Needham Research Institute, 2004). For a succinct introduction to mathematics and calendrics in early imperial times, see Christopher Cullen, "Numbers, Numeracy and the Cosmos," in Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe eds., *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 323–38.

<sup>27</sup> Karine Chemla and Guo Shuchu, *Les neuf chapitres: Le classique mathématique de la Chine ancienne et ses commentaires* (Paris: Dunod, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Daniel Morgan, "Knowing Heaven: Astronomy, the Calendar, and the Sagecraft of Science in Early Imperial China," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), ProQuest (3606338).

<sup>29</sup> Hong Ye 洪業 (William Hong, 1893–1980), "Chunqiu jingzhuàn yinde xu" 春秋經傳引得序 (Preface to the Harvard-Yenching Index to the Annals Classic and Commentaries) in *Chunqiu jingzhuàn yinde* 春秋經傳引得 (Harvard-Yenching Index to the Spring and Autumn Annals Classic and Commentaries), vol. 1 (Beijing: Hafa Yanjing xueshe, 1937): i–iv.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Bielenstein, "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien Han Shu," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 127–43.

important tool in scholarship on omenology. David Pankenier's 2013 monograph, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven*,<sup>31</sup> employs retroactive calculation of conjunctions of the Five Planets in 1953 BCE, 1576 BCE, and 1059 BCE to propose precise dates for the conferral of Heaven's Charge (*tianming* 天命) on the Xia 夏 (trad. ca. 2070–1600 BCE), Shang 商 (trad. ca. 1600–1047 BCE), and Zhou 周 dynasties (trad. 1046–256 BCE). In the absence of contemporary textual evidence, Pankenier's conclusions remain necessarily speculative, but his meticulous reconstructive work would not have been possible without the calculative technologies of modern astronomy.

There is much, however, that remains beyond the limits of the calculable. We cannot look back and see when it was cloudy, rainy, sunny, or when a rainbow might have appeared. We do not know, save when our sources explicitly tell us, when a cloudy day might have prevented contemporary observers from seeing an eclipse. We cannot calculate when atmospheric conditions might have caused halos to appear about the sun and moon, or when ice crystals in the upper atmosphere might have caused multiple suns to seem to appear in the sky, a phenomenon known in the West as “sun dogs.”<sup>32</sup> With the exception of Halley's comet, the single visible comet with an orbital period short enough that we can safely say when it would have been visible in the past, we have no means of knowing when comets might have appeared in the night sky beyond what our historical sources tell us.<sup>33</sup>

Incalculable signs, usually for understandable reasons, are often left out of the picture. Unseasonable weather and long-period comets take no place in scholarly works on mathematics or calendrical computation, which are, after all, largely concerned with the calculation of regular cycles. Bielenstein could not have contrasted actual occurrences of signs with recorded occurrences without a clear basis for claiming how many times eclipses had actually occurred, the admitted vagaries of weather aside. Pankenier's study of astro-omenology, delving as it does into lives of pre-historical peoples who left no written documents, depends on the certainty of calculation. Yet, incalculable signs—unseasonable winds and rains, strange clouds, comets, rainbows—were as much a part of the discourse of celestial patterns and general omenology in early imperial times as calculable signs. A complete account of the rhetoric of celestial signs must account both for those signs that are calculable and those that incalculable. The present work will act as a supplement to those that have preceded it, paying particular attention to those incalculable signs that lie just beyond the frame of inquiry of previous scholarship, integrating them into a broader discussion of celestial signs in the rhetoric and ritual of early imperial China.

### **Models of Contact: Causality, Participation, and Resonance**

Calculable signs may be described in mathematical terms and fit into a sort of clockwork. Modern views place calculable signs out in space, devoid of contact with the human world,

<sup>31</sup> David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> A succinct modern scientific explanation of sun dogs may be found at National Aeronautics and Space Administration, “SDO Sundog Mystery,” accessed July 1, 2015, [http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/11feb\\_sundogmystery/](http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/11feb_sundogmystery/).

<sup>33</sup> The orbital period of Halley's Comet is extremely short. Most comets issue from regions in the outer solar system including the Kuiper Belt and the Oort Cloud. Because of the great size of their orbits, the orbital periods of these comets generally measure in the thousands of years.

treating them as objective phenomena that can be described but never influenced by human observers. Any anomaly suggests an imperfect mathematical description. While experts in calendrics worked over the centuries to develop descriptions that produced fewer and fewer anomalies, experts also read anomalies that did arise in relation to developments at court. The political and ritual center of the early imperial world, the court, was in contact with the heavens. Describing the nature of that contact, and distinguishing it from modern models, is crucial to understanding how and why celestial signs came into being. The anthropologist Stanley Tambiah identifies “two orientations to the world,” participation and causality:

Causality is quintessentially represented by the categories, rules and methodology of positive science and discursive mathematico-logical reason. The scientific focus involves a particular kind of distancing, affective neutrality and abstraction to events in the world...Participation can be represented as occurring when persons, groups, animals, places, and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities...<sup>34</sup>

Put another way, the mode of causality presupposes a separation between the observer and the observed. At least under ideal circumstances, the scientist can watch an experiment play out, confident in the connections she sees between one variable and another, assured that her own presence as an observer has no impact upon those variables once the experiment has been set into motion. In the mode of participation, there is no such division between subject and object; the observer necessarily becomes part of the phenomenon she observes.

The question of causality is further complicated by the problem of deciding what, precisely, constitutes a causal relationship. In “Divine Causality and Babylonian Divination,” Francesca Rochberg points to the problem of importing modern constructions of causality to the Babylonian context. Rochberg cites Wesley Salmon’s critique of the view of David Hume (1711–1776):

[W]e seem unable to identify the *connection* between causes and effect, or to find the *secret power* by which the cause brings about the effect. Hume is able to find certain *constant conjunctions*—for instance, between fire and heat—but he is unable to find the connection. He is able to see the spatial contiguity of events we identify as cause and effect, and the temporal priority of the cause to the effect—as in collision of billiard balls, for instance—but still no *necessary connection*. In the end he locates the connection in the human imagination—in the psychological expectation we feel with regard to the effect when we observe the cause.<sup>35</sup>

While Rochberg readily concedes that there is nothing like the connection between “fire and heat

<sup>34</sup> Stanley Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 105 and 107.

<sup>35</sup> Francesca Rochberg, “Divine Causality and Babylonian Divination,” in *In the Path of the Moon: Babylonian Celestial Divination and Its Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 411–412 citing Wesley C. Salmon et. al, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999): 35.

or the collisions of billiard balls” in her cuneiform sources, Rochberg does not surrender the notion of a causal connection between signs and portents in Babylonian divination. Raising the example of a star appearing within a lunar halo that signifies, by way of analogy, a besieged king and his army, Rochberg argues that the problem emerges when we expect Babylonian causality to be contingent upon an identifiable necessary connection:

Connections made by analogies between some aspect of the sign and its consequent lack the dimension of necessity that connects cause to effect according to our way of thinking. We therefore would rather say the omens reflect a system of correlation not causation. But this is because we define a “cause” as something that directly and necessarily produces an effect, that is, that the antecedent should be directly, physically, and necessarily responsible for the consequent.”<sup>36</sup>

Like writers in early imperial China, the ancient Babylonians referred to the movements of the stars and planets as a kind of “heavenly writing.” Causality in the Babylonian context centered on the notion that celestial signs were readable pronouncements of divine judgment, and thus, of the fate of the judged. Rochberg concludes: “Fate is attached to divine will, which, when pronounced or decreed, is responsible for (causes) the signs and portents, as well as for the magical means to dispel them. Divine will trumps physical necessity and determinism.”<sup>37</sup> Celestial signs in early imperial China were also sometimes described in juridical terms as Heaven’s Punishment (Tianfa 天罰), though Heaven was seldom described as an anthropomorphic deity. The processes by which signs came into being were often ascribed to resonance between the imperial court and the heavens, particularly through the actions of the cosmic stuff of *qi*.

In a world where sympathy—simply put, the notion that “like affects like”—is the dominant mode of understanding the relationships and interactions between things, positioning two objects in the same category means that those objects are mutually influential. We now live in a world where objects are related to one another by a constellation of forces—gravity, electromagnetism, and so forth; we know, intuitively if not scientifically, that “like has no particular effect on like” and we no longer see such effects in operation. However, in *What Did the Romans Know?* (2012), Daryn Lehoux reminds us that Western writers into the 16<sup>th</sup> century accepted the notion that a magnet would lose its power if rubbed with garlic. This was perfectly reasonable, even obvious, Lehoux shows, according to then current theories of sympathy and antipathy, where magnets attract iron due to sympathy, and lose their efficacy upon meeting garlic due to antipathy. While the relationship between garlic and magnets no longer makes sense in a system that does not operate according to principles of sympathy and antipathy, the relationship between magnets and iron continues to work in a world of forces; magnetism explains why magnets attract iron. Our reasons for disbelieving the relationship between garlic and magnets, Lehoux argues, are no more empirical than those of premoderns for accepting it; as Plutarch (ca. 45–120 CE) wrote: “We have palpable experience of these things.”<sup>38</sup> Lehoux

<sup>36</sup> Rochberg 413.

<sup>37</sup> Rochberg 289.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Daryn Lehoux, *What Did the Romans Know? An Inquiry into Science and World Making* (Chicago:

explains that Plutarch did not need to subject the relationship between magnets and garlic to an actual empirical test, for much the same reason that we do not need to test the relationship between magnets and iron:

We know exactly where the disproof lies—in experience—and we know that so powerfully as to simply leave it at that... Our experiences of magnets, and our experiences of garlic, are quietly but very firmly mediated by our understanding of magnets and our understanding of garlic, just as Plutarch's experiences of those things were mediated by his own understanding. But this is exactly where we hit the big epistemological snag: our argument against the garlic-magnet antipathy is no stronger, and more importantly no more or less empirical, than Plutarch's argument for it.<sup>39</sup>

Sympathy and antipathy describe two kinds of resonance, one attractive and one repulsive, both borne out by experience. No less than those of the ancient Greeks, accounts of cosmology in early imperial China were built on the experience of resonance.

Models of resonance between the human realm, the heavens, and the earth became highly complex and increasingly central to the interpretation of baleful signs immediately prior to and during the early imperial period. Lloyd and Sivin have shown that, by the Warring Domains (480–222 BCE) period, the fundamental concepts of resonance-based cosmology were already in place. These included:

- 1) Enumerated groups of concepts: Four Directions, Five Flavors, Five Colors, Five Resources, Five Powers, Five Tones, Three Ages, and so forth.
- 2) *Qi*. Even prior to 300 BCE, Lloyd and Sivin point out, the word *qi* was used to describe many different things: “[A]ir, breath, smoke, mist, fog, the shades of the dead, cloud forms, more or less everything that is perceptible but intangible; the physical vitalities, whether inborn or derived from food and breath; cosmic forces and climatic influences...that affect health; and groupings of seasons, flavors, colors, musical modes and much else.”<sup>40</sup> *Qi* was present in the world, yet abstract and multivalent enough that it could, by the early Western Han at latest, be described in dual aspects: *yin* and *yang*.
- 3) *Yin* and *yang*. The most basic senses of these two words respectively refer to sunlit and shaded locations. The *yang* side of a mountain is its south, while the *yang* bank of a river is its north, and vice versa. By the early Western Han, *yin* and *yang* were in use as an abstract, complimentary pair respectively corresponding to Earth and Heaven, female and male, minister and ruler. *Yin* and *yang* would prove a highly productive set of concepts useful for generating all manner of binary, complimentary oppositions. Opposed types of *qi* engaged in dynamic processes, especially seasonal cycles and the

---

University of Chicago, 2012): 143.

<sup>39</sup> Lehoux 148.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyd and Sivin 196.

workings of the body, were identified as *yin* and *yang qi*.<sup>41</sup>

In the context of the Qin 秦<sup>42</sup> and Western Han empires, these concepts began to converge. Lloyd and Sivin point to the Lü Buwei's 呂不韋 (d. 235 BCE) *Lü shi chungqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Annals of Master Lü; compiled 239 BCE), Liu An's 劉安 (d. 122 BCE) *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master of Huainan; submitted to the throne before 139 BCE), and Dong Zhongshu's (ca. 198–ca. 107 BCE)<sup>43</sup> memorials to the throne early in the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140–87 BCE) as major works that integrate *qi* and *yinyang*, both at the level of the macrocosm and at the level of the political microcosm, the court. The *Lü shi chungqiu*, compiled nearly two decades before the Qin unification in 221 BCE, presents a series of monthly ordinances that integrated the movements of the stars, the days of the ten-day week, and various five-fold correspondences into an annual cycle of ritual and administrative prescriptions. By assiduously adopting these prescriptions, the ruler could emulate Heaven and maintain his harmony with it. The *Huainanzi* frequently links *qi* to *yinyang*, but only in a single instance associates *qi* with the Five Resources. Dong Zhongshu's memorials propose a Triple Concordance cycle, with three phases rather than five. The cosmological synthesis came to maturity only when the Five Resources and *yinyang* were both integrated as processual aspects of *qi* in Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) *Taixuan jing* 太玄經 (Canon of Supreme Mystery) and the *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (Inner Canon of the Yellow God).<sup>44</sup>

The notion of resonance underscored many of the fundamental truths actors at the early imperial courts knew about the relationship between the human realm and the cosmos. The court, the body of the emperor, and the body politic were microcosms. The body and the empire not mere models of the cosmos, but each was a miniature cosmos in itself. The reverse was also true. The cosmos was both a body and an empire. Long before the cosmological synthesis in the late Western Han, resonances between the body, the body politic, and the cosmos lent authority to Lü Buwei and Liu An's visions of imperial power fully in harmony with the regularities of the cosmos.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in keeping with dynamic theories of *qi* and technical discourses on medicine and physiognomy, as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, texts such as the “Wuxing pian” 五

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE), *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959): 25.1246–48; 105.2804.

<sup>42</sup> By Qin, I refer to pre-imperial domain that, in 221 BCE, would ultimately found the Qin dynasty (221–207 BCE).

<sup>43</sup> I follow Michael Loewe's dating for Dong Zhongshu. Loewe notes Dong Zhongshu's dates are most typically given as ca. 179 BCE–ca. 104 BCE (See his *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 43. Sarah A. Queen gives Dong Zhongshu's dates as ca. 195–ca. 104 BCE and provides a detailed discussion of why Dong Zhongshu was likely born earlier than is generally presumed. See her *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 241–46.

<sup>44</sup> Lloyd and Sivin 253–71. For a study and complete translation of the *Canon of Supreme Mystery* see Michael Nylan, *The Canon of Supreme Mystery: A Translation with Commentary of the T'ai Hsüan Ching* (Albany: SUNY, 1993). For the *Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor*, see Paul U. Unschuld and Hermann Tessenow in collaboration with Zheng Jinsheng, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: An Annotated Translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic*, 2 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Lloyd and Sivin 214–26.



行篇 (Five Kinds of Action), discovered at both Guodian 郭店 (ca. 300 BCE) and Mawangdui, suggested that sagely virtue was a material substance in the body.<sup>46</sup>

Causality, participation, and resonance are not mutually exclusive models of contact, but each emphasizes a different perspective. Participation emphasizes the position of human beings within the cosmos, as part of Heaven and Earth rather than as objective observers. Causality emphasizes sequence and process. However, given its strong associations with billiard-ball models of the cosmic interactions in which observers play no role, it is perhaps better to speak of etiology than causality in the context of the early imperial court.

The model of resonance includes aspects of both participation and causality. The ruler and his court may only be said to *cause* celestial signs to come into being because they are active participants in the cosmos. The nature of that participation is not always explicitly spelled out, but the resonances between the court and cosmos become more systematic (though there are multiple systems) and synthetic over time. From the interplay between the models of participation, causality, and resonance, a number of fundamental questions emerge: What causes signs to appear? What mechanisms do the texts propose? Are baleful signs issued by a willful Heaven? If so, is Heaven responding to events in the human realm, or acting out of capricious whims? Or are the signs caused by some cosmological process, such as emanations of *qi* from the earth? If *qi* issues from the court, or the broader human realm, what can be done to ensure that the emperor and his court do not bring about cosmic imbalances? The answers to these questions, and the questions themselves, vary between contexts and change over time. Models of the relationships between things, we will see in the chapters that follow, shaped what historical actors could say, but were themselves shaped by historical circumstances.

### Outline of the Present Study

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2, “Celestial Signs at the Local Court of Dai: The Mawangdui Manuscripts,” re-examines a series of manuscripts discovered in tomb 3 of the Mawangdui excavation site which have generally been distilled for their scientific value. The process of identifying scientific value in the manuscripts comes with an unfortunate corollary, as noted above: even as scholars praise some parts of manuscripts for their scientific value, they denigrate other parts of the same manuscripts as superstitious, and by implication, scientifically worthless. This has in some cases led to bifurcating readings of certain manuscripts in which a single manuscript is treated as if it were two distinct texts, or ignoring large parts of a manuscript and focusing attention only on a single section. Hence, the omenological manuscript labeled the “Wuxing zhan” 五星占 (Five Planets Prognostications) is sometimes divided from the table at its conclusion, which is given the separate title “Wuxing xing du biao” 五星行度表 (Table Measuring the Movements of the Five Planets). The “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 天文氣象雜占 (Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and *Qi* Phenomena), a chart giving prognostic statements paired with images of strange clouds, halo phenomena, rainbows, and comets, becomes simply, a chart classifying different types of comets. While recognizing the mathematical precision and observational acuity the manuscripts do display, the chapter argues

<sup>46</sup> See Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004): esp. 202–16.

that in order to fully situate the manuscripts within the political and religious context of the court of the Marquises of Dai, we must look beyond both the modern category of astronomy and modern notions of scientific value. By avoiding subdividing the manuscripts on the basis of anachronistic categories and taking each manuscript as a unit of analysis, the fundamental concerns of the manuscripts themselves emerge: anxiety regarding the ever-present threats of intrigue at court, famine, war, and the instability of the broader political order. The chapter proposes an alternate framework for examining the manuscripts, reading them against both the historical circumstances of local courts in the fledgling and yet unstable early empire, and against the texts related to the *Changes* (Zhouyi 周易) Classic found in the same lacquer box in the tomb. The *Changes*-related manuscripts explicitly comment on the vagaries of prognostication, pointing toward its unreliability, the danger of performing unnecessary prognostications, and the importance of the character of the person performing the prognostication.

Chapter 3, “Celestial Signs in the Writing of History,” turns from excavated to received texts, from the unstable days of the early empire to times when it had become well-established, and from the context of the local court to the imperial center. The chapter focuses on three treatises that transmitted technical information regarding the interpretation of celestial signs and historical instances of their occurrence. The first, Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) “Tianguan shu” 天官書 (Treatise on the Celestial Offices) in his *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist) frames the technical information it contains with a concluding essay that argues for the essential role observers and interpreters of celestial signs played in effecting sagely governance from high antiquity into his own historical moment. The second and third treatises under review here, the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (Treatise on the Five Resources) and the “Tianwen zhi” 天文志 (Treatise on Celestial Patterns) are both found in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han). The “Five Resources,” put in its final form by Ban Gu 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) but almost certainly largely based on Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (79–8 BCE) “Hongfan wuxing zhuan lun” 洪範五行傳論 (Discourse on the Five Resources Tradition of the “Great Plan”), chronicles various types of celestial signs, eclipses, comets, meteors, and so forth during the Chunqiu and Qin-Western Han (221 BCE–8 CE) periods. Basing its omenological categories and interpretations on traditions associated with the “Hong fan” 洪/鴻範 (Great Plan) chapter of the *Documents* (Shu 書) Classic, and employing the chronological structure of the *Annals* to read omens within those categories, the “Five Resources” invests the technical practice of interpreting celestial signs with the authority of these two Classics. Each chronicle within it presents a series of signs which ultimately gravitate toward the end of the dynasty and the rise of the vilified usurper, and only emperor of the short-lived Xin 新 dynasty (9–23 CE), Wang Mang 王莽. The “Celestial Patterns” was compiled after Ban Gu’s death by his sister, who also served as tutor to the empress in Classics, mathematics, and celestial patterns,<sup>47</sup> the Lady Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 49–ca. 120 CE), along with the mathematician Ma Xu 馬續 (ca. 79–after 141 CE), and the poet,

<sup>47</sup> Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) comp., Li Xian 李賢 (651–684) comm., *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965): 10.424.. Technical treatises (*zhi* 志) in the *Hou Hanshu* are compiled by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306) with commentary by Liu Shao 劉昭 (fl. ca. 502–ca. 519).

statesmen, and classicist, Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE).<sup>48</sup> Their treatise largely corresponds to the “Celestial Offices,” yet in many ways must be read through the “Five Resources” to be fully understood. While the “Celestial Patterns” presents many of the same technical passages as the “Celestial Offices” it frames them in a very different manner, placing emphasis on the responsibility of the ruler for the appearance of all manner of baleful celestial signs. Moreover, in the technical passages that do not correspond to the “Celestial Offices,” it frequently uses quotations from authoritative texts, especially the *Documents*, *Odes* (Shi 詩) Classic, and *Changes*, as proof-texts. It re-writes sections of the “Celestial Offices” dealing with the Five Planets, placing them in taxonomies drawn from traditions surrounding the “Great Plan.” Finally, like the “Five Resources,” it presents a chronicle of celestial signs in the Chunqiu and Qin-Western Han periods that ends with the rise of Wang Mang. The “Celestial Patterns” is not simply a sometimes unfaithful copy of the “Celestial Offices,” but is better understood as a hybrid combining the technical texts of the “Celestial Offices” with the newly-developed classicist omenological framework of the “Five Resources.”

Chapter 4, “Etiology, Contingency, and Textual Authority: The Suasive Power of Celestial Signs” moves from treatises and annalistic accounts of historical appearances of celestial signs to roles played by such signs in arguments regarding ritual and policy at Western and Eastern Han courts. Drawing on memorials included in the standard histories and other Han sources, the first portion of the chapter shows that memorialists from the late Western Han through the late Eastern Han consistently relied on two rhetorical strategies: First, they made claims regarding how signs had come into being, identifying the conditions that produced the signs in the first place. Second, they claimed that both the occurrence of the baleful events the signs presaged and the appearance of the signs themselves were contingent upon the maintenance of the conditions that produced the signs. In other words, should the ruler respond to a given sign in the right way, heeding the warning from on high as it was interpreted by the memorialist, the sign would vanish and the baleful events it presaged would not come to pass. These two strategies, the trope of etiology and the trope of contingency, were lent credence through citations of the Classics. The former drew on claims in the “Xici zhuan” 繫辭傳 (Tradition of Appended Statements) to the *Changes* and the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Documents*, while the latter drew on historical precedents of sage rulers who responded correctly to baleful signs, thereby averting potential disaster. Narratives surrounding three exemplary figures are cited with particular frequency: King Wuding 武丁 (trad. r. 1250–1192 BCE) of Shang, who changed his sacrificial practices when a pheasant lit on the cauldron during a sacrifice; King Cheng 成 (trad. r. 1042–1021 BCE) of Zhou, who honored the Duke of Zhou (11<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), following a series of violent winds that blew down grain crops and trees; and Duke Jing of Song 宋景公 (r. 517–452 BCE), who refused to sacrifice his highest minister, his subjects, or the harvest to avoid bringing the baleful influence of the Dazzling Deluder, Mars, upon himself.

While the first part of the chapter presents a general theory of the rhetoric of celestial signs, the second part turns to three groups of memorials on celestial signs delivered at different historical junctures: Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong’s 公孫弘 (ca. 200–121 BCE)

<sup>48</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 84.2785.

memorials in response to edicts decrying the absence of auspicious signs early in the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140–87 BCE); Gu Yong 谷永 (fl. 36–9 BCE) and Liu Xiang’s respective treatments of Halley’s Comet and a host of other signs late in the reign of Emperor Cheng; and the respective responses of Zhang Heng, Ma Rong, and Li Gu 李固 (ca. 94–147 CE) to the earthquake of 133 CE. While these memorials display certain key features of rhetoric that were consistent across time and place, they likewise show that the reading of celestial signs never became entirely systematic, but remained a highly flexible process, subject to the particular memorialist’s understanding of underlying conditions in the world and of their own political situation. Readings of celestial signs were predicated on readings of conditions in the human world.

Chapter 5, “Celestial Signs, Ritual, and the Performance of Voice,” turns from the observation and interpretation of celestial signs to the composition and performance of liturgical poetry that brings signs into being. Just as the meanings of celestial signs in other genres are articulated against their position in the stars, against historical events, and against current conditions in the empire, the meanings of celestial signs in song and ritual are colored by the character of the voice that pronounces them. The ostensibly pre-imperial liturgical repertoire of the “Jiu ge” 九歌 (Nine Songs) in the *Chuci* presents two major types of voices that engage in dialogue: a supplicant and a deity. Supplicants seek to bring celestial deities down to the terrestrial site of the performance of the ritual, engage in a kind of sexual union, and express longing to return with the deities into the heavens. The arrival of the deities, figures such as the Greater and Lesser Masters of Fate (Siming 司命), the Lord in the Clouds (Yunzhong jun 雲中君), and the sun god, the Lord of the East (Dongjun 東君), is exactly the sort of celestial sign human courts seek to bring into being: regular, auspicious, and emblematic of the approval of the gods for the present terrestrial regime. The songs of the court of Emperor Wu would employ both the voices of the supplicant and of the deity as the voice of the emperor. In Sima Xiangru’s 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE) “Da ren fu” 大人賦 (*Fu* on the Great Man), Emperor Wu speaks as an all-powerful deity who yokes celestial signs from comets to clouds into his procession and establishes his dominion over the heavens and their gods. In the liturgical suite, “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices” (Jiaosi ge 郊祀歌), however, Emperor Wu is voiced as an ideal supplicant, so perfect in conducting the sacrifices that the auspicious signs he seeks always come. It was not only rulers who adopted the dual voices of the “Nine Songs,” however, but frustrated ministers. Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 347–ca. 277 BCE), the loyal but unrecognized minister of Chu and persona of “Lisao” 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow), shifts between the voice of the deity and the supplicant as he journeys across the sky, only to be jilted by the gods just as he was rejected by men. Writers in the Western and Eastern Han, including Liu Xiang, Zhang Heng, and Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. 89–158 CE) in turn echoed Qu Yuan’s voice as they wrote their own poems of protest in the form of wanderings through the heavens.

The dissertation as a whole emphasizes the deep and multi-valent significance that celestial signs had in early imperial culture, fleshing out those areas that are ignored when the discourse is reduced to proto-astronomy. The final chapter, “A Conclusion and Supplement: ‘Cloudy River’ and the Problem of Ritual Failed,” turns to a problem that has proved particularly difficult to incorporate into proto-science models of discussing astronomical and meteorological

phenomena: the role inefficacious ritual and inaccurate prognostication played within the broader discourse. The manuscripts on the *Changes* found in the tombs of the ruling clan of Dai showed unambiguously that early imperial actors realized that prognostication did not always produce reliable results, while the ode “Yun Han” 雲漢 (Cloudy River), Mao 258, in relating King Xuan of Zhou’s 周宣王 (r. 827–782 BCE) prayers during the years of drought that ravaged his realm, showed that the supplications of even the most earnest and virtuous of rulers sometimes seemed to fall upon deaf ears. Inefficacious supplication and unreliable prognostication did not weaken the discourse, however, but strengthened it, for occasions when ritual failed created a discursive space in which how and why ritual works could be elaborated. The question does not become whether ritual in general is efficacious, but why a specific performance of a ritual might have failed in a particular instance. Moreover, the eventual prosperity of King Xuan’s reign, though never mentioned in the ode “Cloudy River” itself, underscored the sense that the ideal supplicant’s prayers were eventually answered, even though they at times seemed to have gone unheard.

### Appendix A: Terminology and Translation

Translation is always imperfect. In moving from one language to another, something is often gained and something is often lost, for words in different languages do not neatly correspond to each other. Though we may search for hypothetical equivalents, once a given word comes into use in the language into which it is translated, it takes on a life of its own.<sup>49</sup> The technical vocabulary surrounding celestial signs is difficult for a number of reasons. First, there are many words that might simply be rendered as “sign” or “omen” if they occurred in isolation. Second, words often have more than one sense. Third, a standard of consistency must be maintained for those readers who cannot access the primary texts in the source language. Let us examine the renderings employed here in turn.

*Zhan* 占: Prognostication.

*Zhan* refers both to the process of conducting a ritual of prognostication and the information that results from it. Rendering *zhan* as “divination” or “divine” implies a consultation with a deity. The rendering of *zhan* as “prognostication” is itself potentially problematic insofar as prognostication refers to clear foreknowledge of fixed future events. Instead, the sense of prognostication as it is used here should be understood as a sort of prognosis one might receive in a medical context. It does not deliver information about anything bound to happen at a future time, but evaluates current conditions so as to make a suggestion regarding future outcomes should current conditions persist. Prognosis is an evaluative statement based upon diagnosis.

*Xiang* 象: Sign; image

*Xiang* tend to be stable, visually recognizable signs. They are not normally disasters, omens, or deviations from the constant order of things. The sixty-four hexagrams of the *Changes* are *xiang*. The sun, moon, and stars are *tian xiang* 天象, celestial images. NB: The sense of “sign” in celestial signs, as the phrase is used in the present work, is meant to encompass a much broader range of phenomena than *xiang*.

*Rui* 瑞: Auspicious Emblems

*Rui* are the most auspicious of signs: the sweet dew that falls from the heavens, the unicorns that appear in the realm, the ancient tripods that emerge from the river.<sup>50</sup> Such events signal the legitimacy of the sitting ruler. In its most literal sense, a *rui* is a jade tally that authorizes its possessor to perform certain actions, such as raising troops. The implication of the appearance of *rui* is that the sitting ruler has been granted authority by Heaven, his ancestors, or the gods.

<sup>49</sup> Writing with regard to the admittedly very different context of the mass influx of loan translations for concepts in European languages in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lydia Liu shows that when the translation of new ideas from a guest language to a host language occurs, ready-made exact equivalent terms are not available. Thus begins a process through which hypothetical equivalents must be discovered or invented. These in turn become meaningful in the host language (i.e. the language into which the terms or ideas are being translated) in a manner that may be largely independent of the original meaning of the term or idea in the guest language (i.e. the language from which translation occurs). See her *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 3–40.

<sup>50</sup> See the discussion of the memorials of Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong in Chapter 4, pp. 173–83.

*Zai* 災: Disaster

*Yi* 異: Anomaly

*Zai* and *yi* often appear together in the phrase *zaiyi* 災異 from the late Western Han onwards.<sup>51</sup> They include many different types of baleful omens: fires, floods, droughts, plagues of locusts, comets, eclipses, and more. *Zai* and *yi* are particularly prominent as ways of referring to omens in the traditions surrounding the *Annals*. The *Gongyang* tradition refers to *yi* some thirty-three times and *zai* sixteen times, and the two terms refer to overlapping types of phenomena.<sup>52</sup>

*Hua* 化: Transform/transformation

*Bian* 變: Aberrate/aberration; alternate/alternation

*Hua* and *bian* both signify changes in state and may at first glance appear to be synonymous. However, their respective connotations are very different. *Hua* is a process by which the sage ruler and his court transforms the empire and its subjects, creating a foundation for harmony and prosperity throughout the realm. *Bian*, in omenological discourse, signifies the appearance of a baleful sign, a deviation from the regular, constant state of things, and also sometimes specifically refers to an actual or potential change in the ruling house. In the context of the discourse surrounding the *Changes*, *bian* also signifies the alternation of *yin* and *yang* lines<sup>53</sup> and has a neutral connotation.

*Zheng* 徵: Proof

*Xiao* 效—Verify; verification, event that verifies

The terms *zheng* and *xiao* are largely synonymous in the texts under review here. Both terms refer to events that verify or corroborate the significance of earlier signs. Hence, the civil war that broke out in the capital in 91 BCE is labeled a *xiao*, a verifying event that confirms the interpretation of a sign that occurred two decades earlier: a comet appearing in the constellation Eastern Well in 110 BCE.<sup>54</sup> *Zheng* likewise signals that an earlier sign, or sometimes an earlier statement, is meaningful. When Zhang Heng's seismograph was triggered for the first time, officers in the capital complained that there was no *zheng* (proof) until a messenger arrived,

<sup>51</sup> The phrase *zaiyi* becomes much more common in the late Western Han. In the whole of the *Shiji*, there are only seven occurrences of the phrase. In the *Hanshu*, by contrast, it occurs eighty-eight times. Cf. Wang Qicai 王启才, *Handai zouyi de wenxue yiyun yu wenhua jingshen* 漢代奏議的文學意蘊與文化精神 (The Literary Meaning and Cultural Spirit of Han Dynasty Memorials; Beijing: Renming daxue, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Mark Csikszentmihalyi, "The Social Roles of the *Annals* Classic in Late Western Han," in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen eds., *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2014): 466.

<sup>53</sup> For "alternation" as the sense of *bian*, see Nathan Sivin, "Change and Continuity in Early Cosmology: *The Great Commentary to The Book of Changes*" in Yamada Keiji 山田慶兒 ed., *Chugoku godai kagakushi ron zoku hen* 中国古代科学史論統編 (Essays on Ancient Chinese Science; Kyoto: Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1989): 3–43.

<sup>54</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 115–16, for details.

several days later, reporting an earthquake in the direction that the seismograph indicated.<sup>55</sup>

Baleful signs may also be *zheng*. Gu Yong points to proofs of blame (*jiu zheng* 咎徵) that are likely to occur should Emperor Cheng fail to follow his policy recommendations: there will be eclipses of the sun and moon; planets will stray from their paths; mountains will crumble. Referring to these events also as *zaiyi*, Gu Yong treats *jiu zheng* as disasters and anomalies that occur in response to identifiable conditions.<sup>56</sup> *Zheng*, however, can also be quite auspicious. The “Great Plan” chapter of the *Documents* identifies the Many Proofs as rain, sunshine, warmth, cold, and wind. When these occur out of order or out of balance, then they are inauspicious. When they occur in sequence and in moderation, they lead to agricultural bounty, and act as emblems of the legitimacy of the ruler.<sup>57</sup>

*Wuxing* 五行: Five Courses; Five Resources (later Five Phases)

*Wushi* 五事: Five Duties

As they appear in the present work, the phrases *wuxing* and *wushi* are generally used in the sense in which they appear in the “Great Plan.” *Wuxing* in the “Great Plan,” the text from which the structure of the *Hanshu* “Five Resources” is derived, indicates types of materials the ruler possesses and must deliver to his subjects to maintain the prosperity of the realm as a whole, and therefore, his own power.<sup>58</sup> The *wushi* are points of conduct that the ruler must maintain in ritual, and presumably at court, which is itself a ritual context. These include maintaining a reverent and proper manner in his bearing (*mao* 貌), sight (*shi* 視), speech (*yan* 言), listening (*ting* 聽), and maintaining a deliberative mind (*sixin* 思心). In some instances, *wuxing* appears to refer to the courses of the Five Planets, and is translated as Five Courses in those cases.

*Jiu* 咎: Sign of blame

*Fa* 罰: Punishment; penalty

*Ji* 極: Extreme manifestation

*Nie* 孽: Bane

*Huo* 既: Calamity

*Sheng* 眚: Pestilence

*Xiang* 祥: Omen

<sup>55</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1909.

<sup>56</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3467. See Chapter 4, p. 186, for details.

<sup>57</sup> Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞 comm., *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 尚書校釋譯論 (Notes, Explanation, Translation, and Discussion of the Venerable Documents), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005): 1186–7.

<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the most central thesis of the “Great Plan” is the notion that “the ruler must give away in order to retain and increase.” Michael Nylan, *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1992): 25. With regard to *wuxing*, Nylan explains: “According to the earliest commentary [that of Fu Sheng 伏生 (d. after 156 BCE)], the *wu-hsing* appear here simply as resources of the empire, but as their exact connection with government policy is unclear, their inclusion is somewhat puzzling. Perhaps they are to remind the ruler of his obligation to regulate certain material elements in order to provide the minimum economic base necessary for successful rule” (*Shifting Center*, 15).



This group of terms occurs repeatedly in Fu Sheng's 伏生 (d. after 156 BCE) *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (Great Tradition of the Documents) for the "Great Plan" recorded in the *Hanshu* "Five Resources." Each of them, taken independently, might be rendered "omen" or "portent." In context, we can see how they are related to one another:

The tradition says: When in looking one does not see, this is called 'not distinguishing.' Its sign of blame is laxity; its penalty constant warmth; and its extreme manifestation is disease. At times there are grassy monstrosities, at times the bane of sprout-eating insects, at times misfortunes involving sheep, at times ailments of the eye, at times red pestilences or red omens. Water dislocates fire.<sup>59</sup>

傳曰：「視之不明，是謂不愆，厥咎舒，厥罰恆奧，厥極疾。時則有草妖，時則有羸蟲之孽，時則有羊旤，時則有目痲，時則有赤眚赤祥。惟水沴火。」

The first three terms, sign of blame (*ji*), penalty (*fa*), and extreme manifestation (*ji*), are a string of signs ordered by their increasing intensity. The sign of blame is the least severe. Without adequate response, the penalty comes, and if the penalty too is ignored, the extreme manifestation occurs. The sequence ends there. The entry next lists a variety of types of signs that might occur: banes (*nie*), calamities (*huo*), pestilences (*sheng*), and omens (*xiang*). These different general types of signs account for the myriad varieties of specific signs found in the "Five Resources." Under the heading of lapses in the ritual duty of sight, we find a lack of ice in spring, the unearthing of a terracotta pot containing the remains of a creature similar to a sheep, and blood rains. Some might be present, some absent, and they will not necessarily appear according to a fixed order. The renderings of the terms for these types of signs in English is, admittedly, somewhat arbitrary. Calamity is a common rendering for *huo*; *nie* and *sheng* could be rendered in any number of ways so long as their inauspicious sense comes through in translation. *Xiang* elsewhere means auspicious or auspicious sign; however, in the context of the *Great Tradition* it is a type of inauspicious omen.

*De* 德: Suasive Power/Character; Favor

*De* is most often translated as virtue based on the sense of the Latin *virtu*, a word signifying the power inherent in a given person or object, rather than the moral-ethical sense the word virtue has acquired in contemporary English. Arthur Waley, as early as the 1930s, suggested "charismatic power" as a more faithful translation. While *de* suggests the moral qualities of the ruler, it directly refers to the power derived from those qualities rather than those qualities in and of themselves. Moreover, *de* can describe a power that is anything but moral in early imperial and pre-imperial texts, as in the phrase *xiong de* 凶德 (baleful suasive power).<sup>60</sup> Where *de* is used with reference to an individual other than the ruler, the rendering "character" will be employed here. This is fundamentally the same sense of *de* as suasive power, but of a lesser

<sup>59</sup> *Hanshu* 27C.1405.

<sup>60</sup> This phrase appears twice in the *Documents*, twice in the *Hanshu*, and four times in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Tradition).

magnitude.

*De* is used in a second sense in opposition to *xing* 刑 (punishment) in which case it is rendered as “favor.” *De* and *xing* are two basic means the ruler possesses to influence and control his subject, the proverbial carrot and the stick. The *xing-de* opposition plays a major role in calendrics and administrative arguments tied to the calendar. Dong Zhongshu argues, for instance, that punishment should only be employed during times of year when *yin* permeates the cosmos so that the administration in the human realm will match and follow along with the cycles of the heavens.

### Appendix B: The Bibliographic Category of *Tianwen*

An annotated translation of the section on *tianwen* texts in the *Hanshu* bibliographic treatise is presented below.<sup>61</sup> While all of the texts included in the *tianwen* bibliographic category are now lost, the treatise's description of the purpose of *tianwen* texts and the titles of the texts in the imperial archives produce a rough picture of what kind of materials might be labeled *tianwen* texts and a clear picture of what sort of signs *tianwen* texts were used to read. In addition to the sun, moon, stars, planets, and comets, *tianwen* texts were used to read meteorological phenomena including rain, clouds, rainbows, and various types of *qi*. Yao Zhenzong's 姚振宗 (1843–1906) excellent annotated version of the treatise is an invaluable source for information on the titles and the basis of the notes presented below.<sup>62</sup>

#### Description of *Tianwen* Texts:

As for *tianwen*, it uses the order of the twenty-eight lunar lodges and the trajectories of the sun and moon, to calculate auspicious and inauspicious signs. It is the means by which sage-kings evaluate governance. The *Changes* states: "He observes celestial patterns, in order to examine the changes of the times." This being so, when the stars are inauspicious, those who are not profound and perspicacious cannot follow them. And thus, as for observing shadows to take stock of the forms that cast them, if one is not a perceptive king, one cannot hope to heed them. When a minister who cannot follow [the movements of celestial bodies and celestial *qi*] advises a king who cannot heed them, both then come to harm.<sup>63</sup>

天文者，序二十八宿，步五星日月，以紀吉凶之象，聖王所以參政也。《易》曰：「觀乎天文，以察時變。」然星事凶悍，非湛密者弗能由也。夫觀景以譴形，非明王亦不能服聽也。以不能由之臣，諫不能聽之王，此所以兩有患也。

#### *Tianwen* Texts in the Bibliographic Treatise to the *Hanshu*:

*Supreme Unity and Various Masters on the Stars*, 28 j.

《泰壹雜子星》二十八卷。

Yao Zhenzong notes that there is also a "Supreme Unity" text in the military methods (*bingfa* 兵法) section of the bibliographic treatise and suggests that this text may also have been used for military divination.

*Five Remnants, Various Stellar/Planetary Aberrations*, 21 j.

《五殘雜變星》二十一卷。

<sup>61</sup> *Hanshu* 30.1763–65

<sup>62</sup> Yao Zhenzong, *Hanshu yiwenzhi tiaoli* 漢書藝文志條理 (Explanation of Items in the History of the Han Bibliographic Treatise), in Wang Chenglüe 王承略 and Liu Xinming 劉心明 eds., *Ershiwu shi yinwen jingji zhi kaobu cui bian* 二十五史藝文經籍志考補萃編 (Assorted Collection of Supplements and Investigations into the Bibliographic Treatises of the Twenty-Five Standard Histories; Beijing: Qinghua daxue, 2011–12): 374–85. Citations included here are generally drawn from those collected in this work.

<sup>63</sup> *Hanshu* 30.1765.

According to the “Celestial Offices” when the Five Remnants are at an altitude of six to seven *zhang* 丈, this portends crop failures. Ma Guohan 馬國漢 (1794–1857) has a collection of fragments from this text based on Meng Kang’s 孟康 (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE) *Shiji* commentary.

*Yellow God and Various Masters on Qi, 33 pian*

《黃帝雜子氣》三十三篇。

Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) notes that there are numerous citations of a text known as *Prognostications of the Yellow God* (Huangdi zhan 黃帝占) cited in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 (Classic of Prognostication of the Kaiyuan Reign [713–741]), and has collected the fragments in three *juan*.

*Chang Cong’s Qi of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, 21 j.*

《常從日月星氣》二十一卷。

According to an anecdote in Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (79–8 BCE) *Garden of Stories* (Shuo yuan 說苑), Chang Cong was a teacher of Laozi 老子. Yao suggests that Chang Cong was also associated with works on the Five Resources, based on citations of “the Significance of Numbers” (Shu yi 數義) attributed to Chang Cong in Xiao Ji’s 蕭吉 (d. 614) *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義 (Grand Significance of the Five Resources). However, given that Chang Cong is unlikely to have actually composed either text, it is equally unlikely that *Qi of the Sun, Moon, and Stars* was composed by the same individual (if indeed it was composed by a single individual) as the “Significance of Numbers.”

*Duke Huang and Various Masters on the Stars, 22 j.*

《皇公雜子星》二十二卷。

Yao cites Ying Shao’s 應劭 (ca. 140–before 204) *Feng su tong* 風俗通 (Comprehensive Account of Customs) suggesting that these stars are associated with the scions of the Huang clan of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE) domain of Song.

*Various Masters of Huainan on the Stars, 19 j.*

《淮南雜子星》十九卷。

Citing a passage from Liu An’s biography stating that in addition to the twenty-one inner chapters collected by Liu An’s court, a figure that matches the number of *pian* in the received *Huainanzi*, there were also numerous “outer chapters” not included in the received text. Yao suggests it is possible that this text may have belonged to the outer chapters.

*The Supreme Unity and Various Masters on Clouds and Rain, 34 j.*

《泰壹雜子雲雨》三十四卷。

Yao notes that the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* contains citations of a *Prognostications of Clouds and Rain*, suggesting that such citations may in part be derived from this text.

*Guo Zhang's Observations of Rainbows, Clouds, and Rain*, 34 j.

《國章觀霓雲雨》三十四卷。

Yao suspects that Guo Zhang is a personal name. I have not been able to locate any additional evidence to corroborate this, but it does seem to be the best explanation of the title. Yao also suggests the possibility that *Guo Zhang Guan* may be the name of an observation platform.

*The Six Tallies of the Grand Stairway*, 1 j.

《泰階六符》一卷。

Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE) received a promotion to the rank of Grand Counsellor of the Palace (Taizhong dafu 太中大夫) after submitting a text of this title in 138 BCE. According to Li Qi 李奇 (n.d.), the *Grand Stairway* refers to the *Three Platforms* (San tai 三台), a constellation formed by three asterisms, each of which includes two proximate stars to form a single platform, all of which correspond to parts of Ursa Major. By observing the color of the six stars, it was possible to determine whether they indicated auspicious or inauspicious portents, and thus, Li Qi claimed, they were called “tallies.” Apparently referring to the same stars as the *San neng* 三能 or Three Capacities, the “Celestial Offices” explains that when their colors match, it indicates that lords and ministers will be in harmony, but when they are at variance, it indicates that there will be dissension in the ranks.

Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) cites the following quotation from Ying Shao, attributed to the *Yellow God's Classic of the Six Tallies of the Grand Stairway* (Huangdi taijie liufu jing 黃帝泰階六符經):

泰階者，天之三階也。上階為天子，中階為諸侯公卿大夫，下階為士庶人。上階上星為男主，下星為女主。中階上星為諸侯三公，下星為卿大夫。下階上星為元士，下星為庶人。三階平則陰陽和，風雨時，社稷神祇咸獲其宜，天下大安，是為太平。三階不平，則五神乏祀，日有食之，水潤不浸，稼穡不成，冬雷夏霜，百姓不寧，故治道傾。天子行暴令，好興甲兵，修宮榭，廣苑囿，則上階為之奄奄疏闕也。

The Grand Stairway consists of the Three Stairways in the heavens. The upper stairway corresponds to the Son of Heaven, the middle stairway the local lords, great ministers, and noblemen, and the lower stairway, warriors and commoners. The upper star in the upper stairway corresponds to the male lord, and the lower star, the female lord. The upper star in the middle stairway corresponds to the local lords and the Three Excellencies, and the lower star corresponds to the [Nine]<sup>64</sup> Ministers and the noblemen. The upper star in the lower stairway corresponds to His Majesty's warriors, and the lower star corresponds to the common people. When the Three Stairways are tranquil then *yin* and *yang* are in harmony and winds and rains are timely, the altars of earth and grain and

<sup>64</sup> “Nine” is not included in the text, but is implied due to the association between the Three Excellencies (*san gong* 三公) and the Nine Ministers (*jiu qing* 九卿).

their gods all receive their appropriate offerings, and the world is in a state of great repose, this is what is called “Great Tranquility.” When the Three Stairways are not tranquil, then the Five Gods want for offerings, the sun is eaten away by eclipses, waters do not bring moisture, crops do not ripen, there is thunder in winter and frost in summer, and the Hundred Families are not secure, it is because the way of order is askance. When the Son of Heaven puts forth brutal ordinances, is fond of raising the weapons of war, building palaces and towers, and broadening his gardens and hunting grounds, then the upper stairway is dark and distant because of it.<sup>65</sup>

Ying Shao goes on to contextualize the fragment by explaining that such events had occurred in the time of Emperor Wu, and that Dongfang Shuo was writing in response to those events.

*Golden Measure and Jade Crossbar: The Rise and Setting of the Five Planets, Guest Stars, and Flowing Stars in the Han*

《金度玉衡漢五星客流出入》八篇。

The “Han” in the title refers not to the name of a dynasty, but to River in the Sky, i.e. the Milky Way. Yao associates this text with the gathering of the Five Planets in Eastern Well, which corresponds to the eastern portions of Gemini, in 205 BCE, an event which the *Hanshu* “Celestial Patterns” treatise claims was the “Tally of Receiving the Mandate” (shou ming zhi fu 受命之符) in the case of the Western Han. However, Yao also argues that we are to understand “Golden Measure” as referring to the stars Celestial Pearl (Tianji 天璣) and Celestial Jade (Tianxuan 天璇), corresponding to  $\gamma$  and  $\beta$  Ursae Majoris, respectively. Jade Crossbar corresponds to  $\epsilon$  Ursae Majoris, and all three stars are located in the Northern Dipper constellation. It is difficult to see how this text, if its title is concerned specifically with stars in Northern Dipper, could also be centered on celestial events that took place in Eastern Well, which is approximately 20 degrees south and two hours east of the former constellation.

*Prognostications and Verifications Concerning the Motions and Events of the Five Planets and Comets in the Han*, 8 j.

《漢五星彗客行事占驗》八卷。

*Prognostications and Verifications Concerning the Motions and Events of the Qi around the Sun in the Han*, 3 j.

《漢日旁氣行事占驗》三卷。

*Prognostications and Verifications Concerning the Motions and Events of Meteors in the Han*, 8 j.

《漢流星行事占驗》八卷。

*Prognostications and Verifications Concerning the Motions and Events of the Qi around the Sun in the Han*, 13 j.

---

<sup>65</sup> *Hanshu* 65.2851, n. 4.

《漢日旁氣行占驗》十三卷。

Concerning the four texts above detailing “prognostications and verifications concerning the motions and events” of various celestial bodies, Yao reminds us of the institutional framework in which these texts were used. The “Ling Tai” 靈臺 or “Numinous Platform” employed, according to a fragment of the *Hanguan* 漢官 (Han Offices) some fourteen Observers of the Stars (*hou xing* 候星), two Observers of the Sun (*hou ri* 候日), three Observers of the Winds (*hou feng* 候風), and twelve Observers of *Qi* (*hou qi* 候氣). Yao also cites Sima Qian’s “Tianguan shu” which states that Han standards for observing the stars, *qi*, and prognosticating the year (*zhan sui* 占歲) were established by Tang Du 唐都 (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE), Wang Shuo 王朔 (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE), and Wei Xian 魏鮮 (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE) respectively.

*Prognostications and Verifications Concerning the Motions and Events of Solar Eclipses, Moon Halos, and Various Aberrations in the Han*, 13 j.

《漢日食月暈雜變行事占驗》十三卷。

*Oceanic Account of Prognostications and Verifications Concerning Stars/Planets*, 12 j.

《海中星占驗》十二卷。

*Oceanic Account of Various Matters Concerning the Procession<sup>66</sup> of the Five Planets*, 22 j.

《海中五星經雜事》二十二卷。

*Oceanic Account of the Forward and Retrograde Motion of the Five Planets*, 28 j.

《海中五星順逆》二十八卷。

Sima Qian notes in the “Celestial Offices” that while the Pre-Qin astronomers Gan De 甘德 and Shi Shen 石申 only noted the retrograde motions of the Mars, during the Han, retrograde motions of all five visible planets had been observed.

*Oceanic Account of the Domains Corresponding to the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges*, 28 j.

《海中二十八宿國分》二十八卷。

*Oceanic Account of Ministerial Roles Corresponding to the Twenty-Eight Lunar Lodges*, 28 j.

《海中二十八宿臣分》二十八卷。

*Oceanic Account of Various Prognostications Concerning the Sun, Moon, Comets, and Rainbows*, 18 j.

《海中日月彗虹雜占》十八卷。

According to Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682), the phrase “haizhong” 海中 should be understood as referring to the central domains—i.e. *zhongguo* 中國. Gu supports this reading by

<sup>66</sup> While it is tempting to read “Wuxing jing” as “The Classic of the Five Planets,” I have not found other references to a text of this title. Translation is tentative. It may also be the case that the text discussed appearances of the Five Planets in the Classics.

citing the phrase “the celestial stems *jia* and *yi* correspond to places beyond the seas, so there is no prognostication” 甲乙海外不占. However, we might be skeptical of Gu’s reading for two reasons. First, it does not seem necessary to specify that prognostication corresponds to the central domains. Second, the term directly opposing *haiwai* is generally not *haizhong*, but *hainei* 海內—within the seas.

The term “haizhong” 海中, roughly translatable as “in the middle of the ocean,” at first glance suggests that the texts were used for nautical purposes. However, “haizhong” is frequently associated with the Three Spirit Mountains (*san shen shan* 三神山) and the isles of the immortals in the *Shiji*.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the initial portion of a given title in the *Hanshu* bibliographic treatise usually states the geographic provenance of a text or attributes it to compiler, composer, or patron. In calling these texts “haizhong,” their titles suggest that they issue from the isles of the immortals.

*Secret Records Concerning the Yellow River Chart and the Luo River Writings*, 17 pian.

《圖書祕記》十七篇。

I follow Yao Zhenzong in reading *tu* and *shu* as references to the “Yellow River Chart” (He tu 河圖) and “Luo River Writings” (Luo shu 洛書), both of which were the subjects of numerous weft texts, or apocrypha, during the late Western Han, Xin 新 (9 CE–23 CE), and Eastern Han dynasties.

---

<sup>67</sup> See, e.g., *Shiji* 6.247; 12.455; 28.1367; 108.3086. Numerous examples of “haizhong” as a region inhabited by immortals are also found in *Hanshu* 25A, *passim*.



## Chapter 2

### Celestial Signs at the Local Court of Dai: The Mawangdui Manuscripts

In the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Wen (168 BCE), the ruling family of Dai buried an honored kinsman, perhaps identifiable as the second Marquis, Li Xi 黎豨 (r. 185–165 BCE).<sup>1</sup> At the time of his death, the Western Han 漢 (206 BCE–8 CE) dynasty was on relatively weak footing; the clan of Empress Lü 呂 (r. 187–180 BCE) had threatened to overturn the dynasty a dozen years earlier, and the imperial court would not consolidate its power over the kingdoms until the Seven Kingdoms Rebellion of 154 BCE, over a decade later.<sup>2</sup> The tomb occupant's kinsmen lavishly appointed his tomb with luxury goods, a three-layered coffin, and a large lacquer box. They filled the box with neatly folded silken manuscripts on an array of subjects as important to the living as to the dead, a corpus of literature useful to any ruling family in uncertain times. They included manuscripts on effective governance loosely corresponding to the received *Laozi* 老子. They included the *Changes* (Zhouyi 周易) Classic and traditions attached to it. Moreover, they included models of rhetorical excellence in the form of various suasive dialogues, many of which

<sup>1</sup> A bamboo slip in the tomb indicates that its occupant was interred in 168 BCE, the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Emperor Wen (r. 179–157 BCE). Archaeologists have generally agreed that the occupants of tombs one and two, respectively, the first Marquis of Dai 韋 李倉 (r. 193–186 BCE) and his wife, Lady Li 李, were the parents of the occupant of tomb three. Because the early historians Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) and Ban Gu 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) both give Li Xi's dates as 164 BCE, there is some doubt as to whether or not the second Marquis should be identified as the occupant of the third tomb. See Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959): 19.978 and Ban Gu comp., Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) comm., *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962): 16.618. He Jieju 何介鈞 further notes that the tomb occupant had only a three-layer coffin, rather than a seven-layer coffin befitting a Marquis (*hou* 侯) or Marquise. See his *Changsha Mawangdui er san hao Han mu* 長沙馬王堆二三號漢墓 (Han Dynasty Tombs 2 and 3 at Mawangdui, Changsha; Beijing: Wenwu, 2004): 237–40. Fu Juyou 傅舉有 argues that the abundance and high quality of the goods in the tomb indicate that its occupant was none other than the second Marquis, and that we should conclude that the date given for his death in received sources is in error. See his “Han dai liehou de jiali—jian tan Mawangdui san hao mu muzhu” 漢代列侯的家吏——兼談馬王堆三號墓墓主 (The Family Servant of a Han Dynasty Marquis—A Thorough Discussion of the Tomb Occupant of Mawangdui Tomb 3) *Wenwu* 文物 (Cultural Relics) 1 (1999): 96. More recently, Li Shisheng 黎石生 has argued that in the absence of compelling evidence for the identity of the tomb occupant, the theory that he was a younger brother of Li Xi is the most likely to be true. See his “Changsha Mawangdui sanhao muzhu zaiyi” 長沙馬王堆三號墓主再議 (A Re-evaluation of the Identity of the Occupant of Tomb No. 3 at Mawangdui, Changsha), *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 (Palace Museum Journal), no. 3 (2005): 150–55, 162. Regardless of the precise identity of the tomb occupant, we can infer from his surroundings and from the kinship relations of the occupants of tombs one and two that he was a wealthy, high status member of the household of the Marquis of Dai. While it is not certain that he personally ruled Dai, it is nearly certain that he had personal access to the ruler. As a high status member of the ruling clan, indeed high enough to be buried in close proximity to the founding Marquis and his wife, the occupant of tomb three may have played an active role in governing the territory, and certainly had a vested interest in maintaining the power of his clan over their fiefdom.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael Loewe, “The Former Han Dynasty,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 135–44.

were attributed to the famed Warring Domains era (480–222 BCE)<sup>3</sup> persuader, Su Qin 蘇秦 (4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), texts on the cultivation of ethical virtue such as “Wuxing pian” 五行篇 (Five Kinds of Action)<sup>4</sup>, and medical and procreational texts that would have provided for the health of the ruling family, and most importantly, ensured that it would continue to produce heirs.<sup>5</sup> Finally, they placed in the tomb a series of technical manuscripts that interpreted various types of celestial signs, ranging from eclipses and planets in retrograde motion to the appearance of oddly shaped clouds, comets, and rainbows as harbingers of military victories<sup>6</sup> and defeats, bumper crops and famines, the rise and fall of kings. The central aim of this chapter is to attain a plausible understanding of what the celestial signs manuscripts might have meant in the context of the local court of Dai *circa* 168 BCE. How did these manuscripts work as manuals for prognostication? In what manner are the relationships between the signs and events within them constructed? What political, economic, and social concerns do they reflect?

Three major texts on four manuscripts in the Dai corpus are devoted in whole or in part to the interpretation of celestial signs. These include:

1) The “Wuxing zhan” 五星占 (Five Planets Prognostications), 221 x 48 cm, on silk.<sup>7</sup> The bulk of the somewhat tattered manuscript consists in prognostic statements corresponding to the retrograde motion, apparent color, or scintillation of each of the Five Planets. The concluding section, which presents calendrical data and charts the zodiacal risings of Saturn, Jupiter, and Venus between the first year of the reign of Ying Zheng 嬴政 as King of Qin (246 BCE) through the third year of Emperor Wen 文 (177 BCE) of the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE)<sup>8</sup> has sometimes been treated under a separate title, the “Wuxing xing du biao” 五星

<sup>3</sup> Various dates are cited for the beginning of the Warring Domains period. I define the period as the time between the end of the Chunqiu period (481 BCE) and the beginning of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221 BCE).

<sup>4</sup> For a study of this text and its position in the broader philosophical and cosmological discourse, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> We cannot rule out the possibility that the particular manuscripts found in the tomb were produced with the express purpose of being used as funerary objects. Even if this is the case, however, the manuscripts almost certainly would have been modeled after, and representative of, texts that were used at court for purposes related directly to their contents—medical texts being used to practice medicine, prognostic texts being used for prognostication, and so forth. Such texts may not have been used by the tomb occupant alone, but may have constituted the corporate property of his clan, and been used by clients of the court who were experts in the observation of celestial signs and in interpreting their meaning.

<sup>6</sup> Prognostication was a critical skill for commanders as they are described in military texts from early China. Albert Galvany writes: “[T]he commander as described in the ancient literature might be seen as a master of signs and, by extension, the art of warfare can also be represented as a form of knowledge that requires, among other virtues, semiotic aptitudes and techniques that can provide accurate prediction of events to come through correct interpretation of the signs and even, in some cases, their adroit manipulation on the battlefield.” See his “Signs, Clues and Traces: Anticipation in Ancient Chinese Political and Military Texts,” *Early China* 38 (2015): 1–43, (DOI: 10.1017, Published online May 2015). I am grateful to Dr. Galvany for kindly sending me the pre-publication proofs of this article.

<sup>7</sup> For a concise English language summary of the contents and dating of tomb 2 and tomb 3, see He Jieju 382–87. The image of the manuscript is drawn from Wang Shujin 王樹金, “Mawangdui Hanmu boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ yanjiu pingshu” 馬王堆漢墓帛書五星占研究評述 (A Commentary on the Researches on the ‘Five Planets Prognostications’—A Book on Silk Unearthed from the Han Tombs at Mawangdui,” *Hunan sheng bowuguan guankan* 湖南省博物館館刊 (Journal of the Hunan Provincial Museum), no. 7 (2010): 20. Figures are presented in Appendix D.

<sup>8</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 五星占 (Five Planets Prognostications) in Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, *Mawangdui tianwen shu kaoshi*

行度表 (Table Measuring the Courses of the Five Planets).<sup>9</sup> For images of the full manuscript and the table, see figures 1a–b in Appendix D to this chapter.

2) “Xingde” 刑德 (Punishment and Favor), A and B, both on silk. “Punishment and Favor B,” the most complete of the two manuscripts and the basis for Kalinowski’s discussion of the text and Liu Lexian’s partial transcription, measures 84 x 44 cm.<sup>10</sup> Both manuscripts contain a Nine Palaces diagram (Jiugong tu 九宮圖), a sexagenary grid, a meteoromantic section of text, and a section of text pertaining directly to the annual cycles of Punishment and Favor.<sup>11</sup> The meteoromantic sections of these manuscripts are sometimes treated as if they were entirely separate texts under the title “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 日月風雨雲氣占 (Prognostications on the Sun, Moon, Wind, Rain, Clouds, and *Qi*). This title will be abbreviated to “Meteoromantic Prognostications.”<sup>12</sup> For images and line drawings of “Punishment and Favor B,” see figures 2a–c in Appendix D.

3) The “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 天文氣象雜占 (Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and *Qi* Phenomena), 150 x 48 cm, on silk. The “Miscellaneous Prognostications” is sometimes treated as if it consisted only in a chart of comets, but in fact includes images of clouds, rainbows, eclipses, and halos, coupled with prognostic statements. Like the “Five Planets,” the manuscript is somewhat damaged, but many portions of it, including twenty-nine entries on comets, survive intact. The main body of the chart consists in six horizontal ranks, each of which contains between twenty-two and fifty-two distinct entries. The first rank consists primarily of images of clouds, while the second through fifth ranks consist primarily in images of various sorts of halos, often in conjunction with the sun or the moon. The third and fourth ranks are badly damaged. Rainbows, with a single exception, occur at the

---

馬王堆天文書考釋 (An Examination and Interpretation of the Mawangdui Texts on Celestial Patterns; Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue, 2004): 87–99. Liu’s transcription is based in large part on the earlier transcription of the Mawangdui archaeological team. See their “Mawangdui Hanmu boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” 馬王堆漢墓帛書<五星占>釋文, *Zhongguo tianwenxue shi wenji* 中國天文學史文集 (Beijing: Kexue, 1979): 1–13, hereafter, “‘Wuxing zhan’ shiwen.” This material is also reprinted in Liu Lexian 229–37.

<sup>9</sup> An extensive English language discussion of both the physical features of this manuscript and its mathematical and calendrical aspects is found in Daniel Morgan, “A Second-Century B.C. Guide to the Planets” in his “Knowing Heaven: Astronomy, the Calendar, and the Sagecraft of Science in Early Imperial China,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013): 100–82, ProQuest (3606338). For a complete translation, see Christopher Cullen, “*Wu Xing Zhan* 五星占 ‘Prognostics of the Five Planets,’” *SCIAMVS: Sources and Commentaries in the Exact Sciences* 12 (2011): 193–249.

<sup>10</sup> Chen Songchang 陳松長 transcribes both manuscripts, and a third, badly damaged manuscript labeled “Xing-De bing” 刑德丙 (Punishment and Favor C) in his *Mawangdui boshu “Xing-De” yanjiu lungao* 馬王堆帛書《刑德》研究論稿 (Summary of Research on the Mawangdui Silk “Punishment and Favor” Texts; Taipei: Taiwan guji, 2001). Due to the questionable correspondence between “Punishment and Favor C” and the other two “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts, it is not included in the present discussion.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Kalinowski, “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui,” trans. Phyllis Brooks, *Early China* 23–24 (1998–99): 130.

<sup>12</sup> Liu Lexian employs this title and does not discuss other parts of the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts in his volume on Mawangdui Celestial Patterns texts. Chen Songchang notes that several different titles have been applied to the “Meteoromantic Prognostications” including “Xingzhan shu” 星占書 (Text on Planetary/Stellar Prognostications); “Jun zha zhan” 軍雜占 (Miscellaneous Prognostications on Military Matters); and “Tianxiang zazhan” 天象雜占 (Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Images) in addition to his preferred “Yunqi zhan” 雲氣占 (Prognostications on Clouds and *Qi*) (58).

beginning of the sixth rank. Images of constellations and comets occur in the sixth rank.<sup>13</sup> Finally, at the end of the chart, there is a separate section consisting in three ranks containing twelve, eighteen, and twenty-six entries, respectively. These do not directly employ images, but refer the user to similar images presented earlier in the chart. For images of this manuscript, see figures 3a–b in Appendix D.

Readings of these manuscripts have in many cases been marred by bifurcating analytical criteria that would have made no sense in context of the Dai court. Questions of the scientific value of the manuscripts loom large in scholarly discussions, so that those portions of the manuscripts that deal in figures or seem to present data have received a great deal of attention, whereas portions of the manuscripts labeled “superstitious” have been dismissed by some scholars as unworthy of attention. Passages detailing the synodic periods of the planets are highlighted, while passages in the same manuscript pointing to the military, agricultural, or political implications of the same planets in retrograde motion are dismissed or ignored. Images of comets found on one manuscript are routinely reprinted, while images of the beast-like clouds and rainbows on the same manuscript are rarely reproduced. Different parts of single manuscripts are referred to by two different titles so that, like ancient ACE paperbacks, they appear to be two separate texts.

To gain a sense of what these materials might have meant for the ruling family of Dai, an integrative methodology is needed. First, insofar as manuscripts can be identified as physical units, we should read them as textual units. We should not assume that two separate texts have arbitrarily been inscribed together on the same piece of material, but rather, should assume that a relationship exists between all parts of the manuscript, that it was used by the same people, and that it was a component of the same practice or set of practices. Second, we should avoid anachronistic framing criteria such as “scientific value” and “superstition” in theorizing archaeologically discovered materials, and more importantly still, we must avoid ignoring or focusing on particular parts of manuscripts based on how well they adhere to such criteria. Third, manuscripts interred in the same tomb belong to the same historical moment and the same textual community. Manuscripts belonging to a single discursive and physical space can and should be read intertextually.<sup>14</sup> Courtiers of Dai who had access to any of the materials in the tomb likely had access to the full corpus, or a large part of it. We may look to other materials included in the tomb itself as a source for an alternative framework for understanding the celestial signs manuscripts.

Re-positioning the Dai corpus as part of the cultural manifold<sup>15</sup> of the local court demands that we review existing scholarship, ask questions that have been ignored, and read

<sup>13</sup> Xi Zezhong 席澤宗, “Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhong de huixingtu” 馬王堆漢墓帛書中的彗星圖 (The Chart on Comets among the Silk Texts at the Han Tombs at Mawangdui), *Wenwu* 2 (1978): 5.

<sup>14</sup> We can understand a great deal about individuals and textual communities by examining the texts they keep, even if they are not the authors or compilers of those texts. The historian of science Massimo Mazzotti effectively employs such a technique in *The World of Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Mathematician of God* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007). In his chapter “A List of Books,” Mazzotti produces a textured picture of the range of intellectual and spiritual interests of Maria Gaetana Agnesi by analyzing the books she held at the time of the death of her father, in April 1752, by systematically reading through a notary record composed to facilitate their sale (93–104).

<sup>15</sup> For the term cultural manifold, see Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002): 3 and 240, discussed in Chapter 1, pp. 14–15, of the present work.

against other texts found in the same tomb. First, we will consider how reading the celestial signs manuscripts through the evaluative lens of scientific value has produced anachronistic and bifurcating readings. Second, as we re-examine these manuscripts, we will ask what signs they engage with, what events those signs presage, and how those events might have reflected the concerns of local courts in the early Western Han. Third, turning to the *Changes* related materials in the tomb that point to the difficulties, dangers, and potential benefits of using prognostic technologies, we will develop an initial framework for reading signs at the local court of Dai.

### **Part I: Bifurcating Readings**

Efforts to isolate parts of particular manuscripts in the Dai corpus which contain scientific value, and to quarantine off those parts that contain superstitious ideals, has led to bifurcating readings of those manuscripts. While this problem may be traced to the necessarily Marxist scholarship of the 1970s, it persists in major studies published since the turn of the century. The “Five Planets” becomes, on the one hand, an example of nonsensical magical thinking characteristic of a backwards and feudalistic society, and on the other, a paragon of mathematical precision and objective measurement. The “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts are split into one portion dealing directly with calendrical models and, under a separate title, another portion engaged with meteoromantic prognostication. The “Miscellaneous Prognostications” becomes a taxonomical chart of comets to be celebrated for its scientific prescience, while its less scientifically palatable portions languish in relative obscurity. Before re-reading these manuscripts as integrated units, we must first come to grips with the problematic practice of reading them in bits and pieces.

#### **What’s in a Name?**

A title is a name given to a text. Names contain a sense of wholeness. To give something a name is to imply that we cannot divide that thing up into smaller pieces without somehow damaging its integrity, and that we cannot expect to understand that thing by looking at only one part of it. In the absence of compelling evidence that a given piece of silk really does contain two distinct texts, we should refer to each manuscript by a single name and read each manuscript as a single, integral text.

The “Five Planets Prognostications” manuscript contained no title and no character count, and so, a decision had to be made, if only for heuristic purposes: What was the text to be called?<sup>16</sup> Archaeologists made a decision that continues to influence the way in which the text is written about and understood today. The first half of the manuscript articulated the meanings of observable changes in the planets, their tendency to rapidly advance or move in retrograde fashion, to scintillate, to grow larger or smaller, redder or whiter, and what those phenomena portended for the terrestrial political order. They called this half of the text the “Five Planets Prognostications” and they called the second half of the text the “Table Measuring the Courses of the Five Planets.” Despite the fact that the table and the prognostic passages were inscribed in the same calligraphic style, upon the same piece of silk, and engaged with the same general subject matter, this would allow the two parts of the manuscript to be treated separately, as two

---

<sup>16</sup> For a review of the questions surrounding how the text was to be titled, see Wang Shujin 17–19.

texts rather than one. Seekers of scientific value in the ancient text could make claims about one part of the manuscript without applying them to or checking them against the other. Further complicating matters, the division would be employed inconsistently. The title “Five Planets Prognostications” sometimes referred to the section of the text explicitly dealing with prognostication and, at other times, to the manuscript as a whole. This produced a certain ambiguity that allowed declarations of scientific value to be applied to the whole of the manuscript even as the section on prognostication was discounted, so that scholars could hail the scientific value of the “Five Planets Prognostications,” while in fact referring solely to the table and a brief calendrical passage that follows it.

In addition to its aesthetic value as calligraphy and its philological value as a text that can be read to supplement our understanding of closely corresponding passages in received texts, the value of the manuscript has been primarily constructed in terms of scientific and technological development. Writing of the scientific value of the manuscript, Bai Guangqi 白光琦 argues that it represents a highly accurate account of the synodic period<sup>17</sup> of the Five Planets, giving for instance, the synodic period of Venus at 584.4 days, a figure only slightly at variance with the modern figure of 583.92 days, and moreover, that it is the earliest known text to use the Five Planets as a means of creating a highly accurate calendar.<sup>18</sup> The historian of astronomy Xu Zhentao 徐振韜 (1936–2004)<sup>19</sup> extrapolates from the precision of measurements in the manuscript the existence of an armillary sphere used to take those measurements and argues that the manuscript evinces not only careful observational practices, but a heretofore unknown level of technological development. While Joseph Needham and Wang Ling in their examination of literary references to the armillary sphere suggest that such a device may have been constructed by Luoxia Hong 落下宏 (fl. 104) as early as the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE,<sup>20</sup> Xu posits a much earlier date for its invention. Xu notes that the precision of measurement implied by the use of the term *fen* 分, defined in the manuscript as 1/240 degrees, would have been meaningless in a context of naked eye observation. Arguing that this unit was likely developed as part of the reforms

<sup>17</sup> The synodic period refers to the amount of time it takes for the planet to return to the same position in the sky. Note that in contrast to the sidereal period, which is equivalent to the time it takes the planet to orbit the sun, the planet will be located in a different position with respect to the stars.

<sup>18</sup> Bai Guangqi, “Boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ de jiazhi ji bianzhi shidai” 帛書五星占的價值及編制時代 (The Value and Compilation Date of the Silk ‘Five Planets Prognostications’), *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊 (The Yindu Journal), no. 3 (1997): 42–3. For a review of Bai’s views, see Wang Shujin 24.

<sup>19</sup> Xu Zhentao made major contributions to the use of historical records from China to study astronomical phenomena and his work in English is sometimes cited by scholars beyond the early China field. See Xu Zhentao, David W. Pankenier, and Jiang Yaotiao, *East Asian Archaeoastronomy: Historical Records of Astronomical Observations of China, Japan, and Korea* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers on behalf of the Earth Space Institute, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Needham (in collaboration with Wang Ling), “Astronomy” in *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 3 “Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1959): 354, 358–59. The view that Luoxia Hong constructed such a device is based on a passage in Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) *Fayan* 法言 (Exemplary Figures) in which an unnamed party asks Yang Xiong about *huntian* 渾天 or “the Spherical-Heaven theory of celestial movements.” Yang Xiong replies that Luoxia Hong “laid it out” (*ying zhi* 營之), and thus, commentators have read *huntian* as referring to *huntian yi* 渾天儀, or the armillary sphere. However, as the character *yi* is not given in the text itself, the text may refer only to the theory, and not specifically to the instrument. See Michael Nylan trans., *Exemplary Figures / Fayan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013): 10.3.154–55.

instituted in the Qin domain under Shang Yang 商鞅, Xu concludes that the Qin had developed the armillary sphere no later than c. 350 BCE.<sup>21</sup>

The manuscript continues to be evaluated for the extent to which it corresponds not only to the facts and figures, but also to the implicit worldview of modern scientific astronomy. In a 2010 review article, Wang Shujin 王樹金 of the Hunan Provincial Museum apologizes for the omenological quality of the “Five Planets” and states that scholarly consensus admits that it is a repository of “feudal superstition” (*fengjian mixin* 封建迷信). At the same time, he points out the redeeming scientific value of the second half of the text, which is more accurate in its observations than either the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master of Huainan) “Tianwen xun” 天文順 (Teachings on Celestial Patterns; submitted to throne 139 BCE) or Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) “Tianguan shu” 天官書 (Treatise on the Celestial Offices). Wang claims that its value is as a document for understanding the history of astronomy, or “Tianwen shi” 天文史.<sup>22</sup> The search for scientific value effectively removes the manuscript from the context of the court of Dai and places it in a teleological context of development towards the objective standards of modern astronomy.

While readings of the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts do not emphasize scientific value to the extent that readings of the “Five Planets” do, the splitting of the manuscript into two pieces does fall along the lines of calendrics vs. omenology. The passage referred to by the title “Meteoromantic Prognostications” occurs on the same manuscripts as the charts and texts generally referred to as “Punishment and Favor.” It is therefore preferable to refer to the entirety of the two manuscripts, including the meteoromantic passage, under the single title “Punishment and Favor,” distinguishing between the two closely corresponding texts with the labels A and B. Given that both “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts contain the “Meteoromantic Prognostications,” the case against dividing the manuscripts into multiple, disparate texts is especially strong. It is highly unlikely that copyists arbitrarily placed two unrelated texts on the same manuscripts and included both in the same tomb.<sup>23</sup>

### A Chart of Comets?

Scholarly accounts of the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” have, like the majority of writings on the “Five Planets,” tended to ignore the character and historic context of the text in their preoccupation with questions of scientific or astronomic value. Prominent scholars have treated the manuscript as if it focused on comets alone and have ignored all other types of signs appearing on the chart. More troublesome still has been the tendency to ignore the prognostic texts included in the manuscript and to project modern concerns onto its compilers by treating the chart as if it were an objective–scientific scheme intended to describe comets in the same terms as modern physics.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Xu Zhentao 徐振韜, “Cong boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ kan ‘Xian-Qin hunyi’ de chuang zhi’ 從帛書《五星占》看“先秦渾儀”的創制 (An Examination of the Invention of the Armillary Sphere in the Pre-Qin Era through the Silk “Five Planets Prognostications”), *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) (Feb. 1976): 84, 89–94.

<sup>22</sup> Wang Shujin 22–23.

<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts are not composite texts or that various components of the manuscripts could not have circulated independently from one another, but to divide them from one another when they have been put together thus creates a potentially misleading schism.

<sup>24</sup> A notable exception to this general tendency is Michael Loewe’s “The Han View of Comets” in his *Divination*,

Chen Meidong 陳美東, former head of the Institute for the History of Natural Sciences, a branch of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, largely focuses on comets in received texts from the Six Dynasties (220–589) and Tang 唐 (618–907) periods in his monograph, but also briefly addresses the “Miscellaneous Prognostications.” He refers to the manuscript not by its conventional title, but simply as “an extremely valuable chart about comets” 一幅十分珍貴的關於彗星的畫圖. This is misleading because it suggests that the chart depicts only comets. Chen does not mention that the “chart about comets” contained images of or information on anything other than comets, nor does he inform his readers that the comets were paired with prognostic statements. Instead, Chen focuses on the remarkable clarity of the images of the comets themselves, noting their variations in terms of length, breadth, relative curvature, and number of tails. Moreover, Chen highlights the apparent recognition by observers of the heavens in ancient Chu of the structure of the comets, citing the clear depiction of the nucleus, coma, and tail.<sup>25</sup> The basic questions of what the manuscript meant to those who produced, transmitted, or employed it, or to the court of the Marquises of Dai, are never addressed. Instead, the problem of accurate measurement, indicative of the manuscript’s scientific value, dominates Chen’s discussion.

Feng Shi 馮時, Assistant Editor of *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 (Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology) and professor at the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Zhongguo shehui xueyuan yanjiu shengyuan 中國社會科學院研究生院教授) offers a more extensive and balanced treatment of the manuscript. Feng mentions that the manuscript contains images and discussion of “clouds, *qi*, the moon occluding the planets, stars, etc.” 雲、氣、月掩星、恆星等 and that it contains prognostic statements. However, despite Feng’s contention that *celestial patterns* are better treated as early religion than early science, his treatment of the manuscript revolves around the trope of accuracy of measurement, and moreover, is greatly concerned with the question of what scientific achievements the Chinese and their European counterparts were able to achieve when.

The “Miscellaneous Prognostications” is subsumed under the broader goals of Feng Shi’s section on “the observation and measurement of comets” (*huixing guance* 彗星觀測). Feng Shi judiciously begins by reminding the reader that it is a matter of controversy whether or not the oracle bones refer to observations of comets in Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BCE) times, and by pointing to the appearance of a comet in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Duke Wen of Lu (613 BCE) as the earliest unambiguous reference to such an observation in any Chinese text. Feng claims that the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” is a document well ahead of any European counterpart, for it demonstrates that by the Warring Domains period observers in China had already achieved the “categorical divisions pertaining to comets of modern astronomy” 現代天文學對於彗星的分類.<sup>26</sup> Feng continues this line of reasoning, reiterating a series of comparisons between comets

---

*Mythology, and Monarchy in Han China*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 61–84. Reading the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” against received historical texts, Loewe produces a balanced view of the manuscript that both recognizes its scientific qualities and its prognostic function. Loewe writes that the “*T’ien-wen ch’i-hsiang tsa chan* remains in the middle ground between science and divination, allowing scope both for the fruits of systematic observation and the intuitive messages of the seer” (81).

<sup>25</sup> Chen Meidong 陳美東, *Zhongguo gudai tianwenxue sixiang* 中國古代天文學思想 (Ancient Chinese Astronomical Thought; Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu, 2008): 388.

<sup>26</sup> Feng Shi 馮時, *Zhongguo tianwen kaoguxue* 中國天文考古學 (Archaeoastronomy in China; Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2001): 255.



represented in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” and the ideas of modern astronomers such as Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel (1784–1846) and Alexander Yakovlevich Orlov (1880–1954) first articulated by Xi Zezong 席澤宗 (1927–2008) in a 1978 article for *Wenwu* 文物 (Cultural Relics).<sup>27</sup> Both Feng and Xi present claims that manuscripts found at Mawangdui anticipate Bessel’s Jet Theory of the comet, known in Chinese as the *Penshe lilun* 噴射理論,<sup>28</sup> but these prove to be the result of an accident of translation.<sup>29</sup> While Feng Shi and Xi Zezong correctly note that both the compilers of the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” and Alexander Orlov divided comets into different types based on their tails and comas, the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” does not characterize these differences as the result loss of gaseous matter occasioned by repeated journeys close to the sun, as Orlov does.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Xi Zezong 5–9.

<sup>28</sup> Tofigh Heidarzadeh summarizes this aspect of Bessel’s theory as follows: “According to Bessel, the action of a body on another can be divided into two steps. While in the first step all parts of the other body are affected equally from a long distance, in the second step (when the distance between them decreases), different effects of the first body on the different parts of another become appreciable. In the case of a comet, in the first step evaporated particles of it polarized in such a way that they move away from the sun. However, in the second step, the comet itself becomes polarized and an emanation towards the sun takes form. Such an emanation, which appears as a rocket having its jet towards the sun, must have the same effect on the comet’s motion.” See his *A History of Physical Theories of Comets, From Aristotle to Whipple* ([United States]: Springer, 2008): 214–15.

<sup>29</sup> Seizing on the word *pen* used in close proximity to a mention of comets in the Mawangdui “Wushier bingfang” 五十二病方 (Prescriptions for Fifty-Two Maladies), Feng suggests that ancient astronomers in Chu had developed Bessel’s Jet Theory more than 2000 years before the Prussian latecomer. Feng Shi and Xi Zezong cite the phrase: *pen zhe yu pen, shang ru hui xing* 噴虞者噴，上如彗星 in the “Fifty-two Maladies” which might be generously translated “The jet happily jets, above like a comet.” Examined in context, however, it is not clear that *pen* even refers to the comet. *Pen* might refer to an action on the part of the patient, as it occurs in an imperative incantation to be read over a dose medicine for an infant suffering from convulsions (*Ying’er chi* 嬰兒癇). Donald Harper renders the whole of the incantation as follows: “Spouter, spout ferociously. On high be like the sweeper star. Down below be like congealed blood. You will be seized left of the gate. You will be cut apart right of the gate. Should you not desist, you will be quartered and exposed in the marketplace.” See his *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (London: Kegan Paul, 1998): 233. The Chinese text reads: 「噴者虞（劇）噴，上口□□□□□如彗星，下如脍（𧄸）血，取若門左，斬若門右，為若不己，礫薄（膊）若市」 (*Wushier bing fang*, Beijing: Wenwu, 1979): 42. The manuscript uses an orthographic variant for *hui* 彗 (broom-star). *Pen* or “Spouter” seems to refer to the medicine itself, which is directed to move through the body in a certain way. To apply *pen* to the comets would entail applying it to congealed blood as well, with which the comet is in parallel. On the basis of syntax alone, we might understand the first three phrases of the incantation: “Spouter, spout ferociously on high like the comet, down below like congealed blood.” Alternatively, if we read *ru* 如 here in the sense of the verb “go,” then these two lines might be rendered “Go to the comets above, and go to the congealed below.” “Spouting” would then be a means of reaching the lowest places in the body below, and heights beyond the body above. In either case, the spouting occurs both above and below. Even if we do accept that *pen* is used with reference to the comet itself, this hardly constitutes a version of Bessel’s theory, which is dependent on notions of magnetism and polarity.

<sup>30</sup> See Feng Shi 255–56. It is not as if Feng Shi or Xi Zezong did not know that the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” was used for omen reading, or that the clouds, rainbows, and halos discussed in it were in the same ontological class as comets for ancient observers. Immediately preceding Xi Zezong’s article in *Wenwu*, Gu Tiefu 顧鐵符 had noted that ancient *tianwen* encompassed both astronomy and meteorology, both *tianwen* and *qixiang* (*qi* images), and he had argued that both types of phenomena were closely related to the activities of human beings in the minds of early observers. At the same time, Gu argued that while *tianwen* had in very primitive societies been a useful tool for agriculture, manuscripts such as the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” were repositories of superstition, tools of the powerful elite used to deceive the masses. Writing in the

The demonstrated capacity to measure astronomic phenomena in the celestial signs manuscripts found at Mawangdui has captivated scholars over the last four decades. Xi Zezong, Feng Shi, and Chen Meidong looked at the manuscripts to see how they classified comets and the degree to which their observations of the movements of the planets had been accurate. And so, the manuscripts became known as repositories of scientific information about comets and planets. The reader may object that these three writers did not address clouds, rainbows, halos, or the prognostic statements in the texts simply because those aspects of the manuscripts lay outside the scope of their respective fields of inquiry. However, this is precisely the problem. Electing to read through the lens of a teleological question that asks in what ways the manuscripts anticipated the ideas of modern astronomy or later European astronomers, all aspects of the text that do not fit into modern schema of what it means to be astronomical, or more broadly, scientific, are summarily dismissed as superstitious or simply ignored. The “Five Planets” and the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” have been appropriated by modern scholars and made to participate in a high stakes discussion concerning the progress of science in ancient China and the medieval and modern West. As important as this question may be to those who believe that culture is an essence that runs through a people, the discussion meant nothing to the compilers of the manuscripts, nor to those at the court of the Marquises of Dai who employed the manuscripts prior to their interment in 168 BCE.

While bifurcating readings of certain manuscripts in the Dai corpus have continued to be produced even in the last fifteen years, a critical mass of Mawangdui scholarship now renders it possible to take an integrated approach to the tomb as a whole. A conference volume, or perhaps even a monograph, might offer a thick description of the local culture of the court of the Marquises of Dai based on the multiple tombs of Mawangdui. A new seven volume set, the *Changsha Mawangdui Hanmu jianbo jicheng* 長沙馬王堆漢墓簡帛集成 (Collected Bamboo and Silk Texts from Han Tombs at Mawangdui, Changsha; 2014)<sup>31</sup>, conveniently gathers together the materials in the Dai corpus. Large portions of the corpus have now been translated in Edward Shaughnessy’s *I Ching* (1996), Robin Yates’ *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao, and Yin-yang in Han China* (1997),<sup>32</sup> Robert G. Henricks’ *Lao-tzu: Te-tao ching* (1989),<sup>33</sup> and Donald Harper’s *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (1998). Other works have pushed the field to consider the Dai corpus within the broader intellectual and religious traditions of early China. In addition to presenting a detailing philological study of the manuscript itself, Mark Csikszentmihalyi’s *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China* (2004) contextualizes the “Wuxing Pian” 五行篇 (Five Kinds of Action) and its commentary within the virtue discourse tradition of Kongzi 孔子 and Mengzi 孟子, bridging a

---

immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), Gu self-consciously writes of a dual set of imperatives: On the one hand, one must criticize those aspects of ancient texts that are superstitious, and on the other, one must confirm those aspects that possess scientific value. The place to begin bringing out the scientific value of this particular manuscript is in its account of comets. See Gu Tiefu, “Mawangdui boshu ‘Tianwen qixiang zazhan’ neirong jianshu” 馬王堆帛書天文氣象雜占內容簡述 (Brief Description of the Content of the Mawangdui Silk Text ‘Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and Qi Phenomena), *Wenwu* 文物 (Cultural Relics) 2 (1978): 1–4.

<sup>31</sup> Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 ed., *Changsha Mawangdui Hanmu jianbo jicheng* (Shanghai: Fudan, 2014).

<sup>32</sup> Robin D. S. Yates trans., *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao, and Yin-yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Robert G. Henricks trans., *Lao-tzu: Te-tao ching* (New York: Ballantine, 1989).

gap between medical and physiognomic discourses centered on *qi* in the body and a moral psychology built around virtue ethics. Csikszentmihalyi both exposes the sense of a formerly opaque aspect of the received tradition and concludes his study by opening up a conversation between the virtue ethics of early China and ethical theories from other times and places. Liu Lexian invites readers to consider the “Five Planets,” the “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” and the meteoromantic portion of the “Punishments and Favor” as a mutually interrelated group. Christopher Cullen has both provided the field with a complete and heavily annotated translation of the “Five Planets” and considered both omenological and calendrical aspects of the texts.<sup>34</sup> The present chapter takes a step in the direction of a more integrated understanding of the Dai corpus by considering the celestial signs manuscripts in light of the *Changes* materials.

## Part II: Signs and Strife

Knowing what sort of claims have been made about the Dai corpus, we now may turn in earnest to the claims that corpus itself made. We find in the manuscripts a wide range of celestial signs, planetary anomalies, *qi* phenomena, inclement weather, clouds, comets, and rainbows. The events these signs presage reflect the concerns of local rulers whose power depended upon agricultural bounty, whose realms were under threat of military incursions, and whose lives were under threat of assassination at the hands of nefarious ministers. Following readings of the “Five Planets,” “Punishment and Favor,” and “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” we consider the questions of how multiple signs within the texts interacted with one another.

### The Five Planets Prognostications

A full reading of the “Five Planets” must take into account both the table and the text and consider the relationship between the two parts of the manuscript. We may gain a broad sense of the valences of each of the Five Planets in the manuscript by summarily examining the broad taxonomical correspondences attached to each planet.<sup>35</sup> While taxonomic correspondences make up only a small portion of the text, they nonetheless provide a useful entry point for exploring how each planet is positioned within the broader political and cosmological spheres. Following a brief summary of the correspondences attached to all of the Five Planets, we turn to the contrasting examples of the most auspicious and inauspicious among them, the Quelling Star and the Dazzling Deluder,<sup>36</sup> constant Saturn and inconstant Mars.

Each entry for a planet in the “Five Planets” begins by giving a direction and a material, followed by the possessive particle *qi* 其, and the name of a god, the god’s assistant, and finally a spirit. The spirit is, acts as, or becomes (*wei* 為) the planet itself. The opening for Venus is typical: “The West corresponds to metal. Its God is Shao Hao. His Assistant is Ru Shou. Its spirit above is Great White” 西方金，其帝少昊[皞]，其丞蓐收，其神上為太白。<sup>37</sup> The direction, rather than the planet itself, is the initial subject of the taxonomy. Moreover, Great White is not simply presented as the spirit of that particular direction, or of the god associated

<sup>34</sup> See his “Understanding the Planets in Ancient China: Prediction and Divination in the *Wu xing zhan*,” *Early Science and Medicine* 16 (2001): 218–251.

<sup>35</sup> For the taxonomic correspondences of all Five Planets, see Appendix C.

<sup>36</sup> I borrow the rendering Dazzling Deluder from Cullen, “Five Planets,” *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 57, l. 17.

with it, but as a function of the spirit, an identifiable trace of its movements. With the exception of Jupiter, each of the planets includes a second taxonomic passage near the end of its section.<sup>38</sup> Again, the entry for Venus is typical of the second set of correspondences: “Its season is autumn. Its days are *geng* and *xin*. Its moon position is westering.<sup>39</sup> The western domains possess it. It is the Master of Celestial Sacrifices” 其時秋，其日庚辛，月立(位)失，西方國有之。司天獻。<sup>40</sup> Each of the Five Planets is embedded in such a taxonomy, associated with directions, materials, times, deities, and mastery over some celestial domain: music, rites, suasive power, or sacrifices.<sup>41</sup> The most powerful proclamations of impending disaster or incipient advantage come, however, in between the taxonomic sections that bookend the prognostic passages and emerge from the dynamic relationship between the table and the text.

### Tracking the Quelling Star

The table detailing the movements of Saturn, Jupiter, and Venus, respectively known in early China as the Quelling Star, the Year Star (Suixing 歲星), and Great White are responsible for much of the buzz surrounding the “Five Planets” concerning its scientific value. By referring to the table as if it were a separate document, as the “Table Measuring the Courses of the Five Planets,” it has effectively been divorced from the prognostic functions of the former half of the manuscript. To understand the manuscript as a whole, we must ask what sort of relationship might have existed between the table and the prognostic text. To what extent did the prognostic texts derive their authority from the table of the celestial locations of the planets? How might the table and the prognostic texts have informed one another? What do the prognostic texts tell us concerning the purpose of the table?

The table on Saturn consists of thirty columns and four rows.<sup>42</sup> The first of the four columns in each case begins with a phrase such as “The Quelling Star rose at dawn in the east in House,” House being one of the twenty-eight lunar lodges.<sup>43</sup> Generally speaking, the first row of each column contains a different lunar lodge, steadily moving westward. However, as Saturn is presented as taking thirty years to complete its movement through the sky, it remains in two of the lodges for two years. This occurs during the first two years of the cycle in House, and during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> years of the cycle, in Eastern Well.<sup>44</sup> The remaining three rows list years. The

<sup>38</sup> It is likely the case that the “Five Planets Prognostications” was compiled from multiple texts; we might speculate that the compilers of the “Five Planets Prognostications” were working with a damaged or incomplete manuscript of the text from which the second set of taxonomies was drawn. The order of presentation of the planets likewise implies the composite nature of the text; while the correspondences in the second set of taxonomies include associations with seasons, the position of the moon in the heavens, masters of celestial activities or domains, directions, and days in the ten-day Heavenly Stem cycle, the days of that cycle occur out of order, and Mercury and Venus are inverted with respect to the standard sequence. Moreover, the second presentation of correspondences to directions is redundant within the context of the “Five Planets Prognostications,” though it probably was not in source manuscripts.

<sup>39</sup> Reading *shi* 失 as *die* 跌. following Liu Lexian (“Wuxing zhan”: 86, n. 1).

<sup>40</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 86, lines 75–76.

<sup>41</sup> Portions of the taxonomy surrounding Jupiter are lost.

<sup>42</sup> Due to the orthographic convention of writing English horizontally rather than vertically, I have had to present the columns as if they were rows, and the rows as if they were columns in the translation of the chart in Appendix A. For this reason, I refer to “ranks” rather than columns or rows.

<sup>43</sup> The twenty-eight lunar lodges are the zodiacal constellations. House is located in a region corresponding to part of Pegasus.

<sup>44</sup> Eastern Well corresponds to part of Gemini.

second row begins with “The First Year of Qin Shihuang” and corresponds to his first year as King Zheng 政 of Qin, 246 BCE. The third row is punctuated with political events. The eighth column of the third row reads “Zhang Chu” 張楚 and corresponds to the year 209 BCE. While scholars disagree on the question of whether this was the name of a political entity or simply meant “the expansion of Chu,” there is general agreement that it refers to the rebellion of Chen Sheng 陳勝 (d. 208 BCE), in one way or another.<sup>45</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> column in the row marks the “First Year of the Han” 206 BCE, the 23<sup>rd</sup> column the First Year of the Filial Emperor Hui (194 BCE), and the final column the “First Year of the Empress Dowager” (187 BCE). The final row marks an additional eleven years, the 9<sup>th</sup> of which is marked *yuan* 元 or “The First.” As it marks the inauguration of the currently reigning emperor, no posthumous title is given. The last year included in the manuscript, the third year of Emperor Wen, corresponds to 177 BCE.

The table itself is, according to modern calculations, more accurate for the later years than for the earlier years. Bai Guangqi notes that in the first month of the first year of King Zheng of Qin (i.e. Qin Shihuang, prior to becoming emperor), Saturn would have risen not in House, but in Barrens (*xu* 虛), two lodges further east, in Pegasus Minor.<sup>46</sup> We have less a record of observations beginning with the first year of King Zheng’s reign, than a projection backward in time, mapping the location where Saturn *was thought to have been* onto changes in the political order.

Appended to the table is a brief section that describes the movements of Saturn, and is generally treated as a component of the table, even by those scholars who advocate a division between the “Five Planets” and the “Table Measuring the Movements of the Five Planets.” It reads:<sup>47</sup>

秦始皇帝元年正月，填星在營室，日行八分，卅日而行一度，終歲行[十二度卅二分]，[見三百四十五]日，伏卅二日，凡見三百七十七日而復出東方，卅歲一周于天，廿歲與歲星合為太陰之紀。

In the first month of the first year of Qin Shihuang, the Quelling Star was in House. Each day it proceeds eight *fen*, and in thirty days it proceeds a single degree. In a full year<sup>48</sup> it proceeds [twelve degrees and forty-two *fen*].<sup>49</sup> [It appears for 345] days, and it lies below the horizon for thirty-two days. After appearing for 377 days it again rises from the east.

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of scholarship concerning this question, see Wang Shujin 29–30. Michael Loewe supports the view that Zhang Chu refers to a “royal title.” See his *A Biographic Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han, and Xin Periods: 221 BC–24 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 38.

<sup>46</sup> Bai Guangqi 43.

<sup>47</sup> Transcriptions and punctuation of the “Five Planets Prognostications” follow those in Liu Lexian’s transcription, except where otherwise noted. Square brackets are used to indicate text that Liu adds, either on analogy with other parts of the text or drawing on closely corresponding received sources, both in the transcription and the translation. Liu’s work is largely, though not entirely, based on the “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen.” Parenthesis are used in the translation to indicate phrases that have been added for clarity. In the transcription, characters within parenthesis are read for the characters which precede them.

<sup>48</sup> The Mawangdui team brackets this instance of the character *sui* 歲 (a full year). See “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” 11.

<sup>49</sup> While these figures are not visible due to damage to the manuscript, they tally precisely with both the figure given for the daily movements and with the thirty-year sidereal cycle.

In thirty years it completes the circuit of the heavens. In twenty years it comes into conjunction with Jupiter, and this consists in a cycle of Taiyin.<sup>50</sup>

For all the apparent precision of measurement this passage may suggest, the precision is mathematical rather than observational. One *fen* equaled 1/240 of a degree in the “Five Planets.” The exact figure of 12 42/240 degrees of movement of Saturn in a year, multiplied by 30 equals exactly 365.25, the total number of days in the sidereal year, and thus, the total number of degrees a celestial body traverses to complete the celestial circuit. Likewise, the incredible precision of the figure eight *fen* is the result not of observation, but of calculation:  $8/240 * 365.25 = 12 \frac{42}{240}$ .<sup>51</sup>

While these figures do not constitute evidence of the use of an armillary sphere, their precision creates an air of mathematical authority in the text. To the layman, the observations appear as if they could not be the product of the observations of the normal human eye, but that they must be the product of the greatest expertise or the most extraordinary perspicacity. To the mathematically-inclined expert, who would recognize the numbers for what they were, they construct the movements of the heavens as belonging to an ideal order, a mathematically precise, regular system of movements, rather than the rough and inconstant picture of rapid advance, slowing, and retrograde motion that emerges in actual observation.<sup>52</sup>

The tension between these two pictures creates the space within which prognostication becomes possible. The table and its brief appendix invoke the authority of some seventy years of (imagined) observation and mathematically precise technical description, and more importantly still, both establish a notion of regularity against which irregularities can be read. The prognostic section on Saturn reads:<sup>53</sup>

A. 中央[土]，其帝黃帝，其丞后土，其神上為填星。

The center [corresponds to soil.] Its God is the Yellow God. His Assistant is Lord Soil. Its spirit above is the Quelling Star.

B. 實填州星，歲[填一宿]，[其所居國吉，得地]既已處之，又(有)[西]東去之，其國凶，土地口<sup>54</sup>（淫），不可興事用兵，戰鬥不勝。

<sup>50</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 91, lines 120–21.

<sup>51</sup> John S. Major makes a similar observation concerning figures given in the passage on Saturn in the “Teachings on Celestial Patterns” chapter of the *Huainanzi*. See his *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993): 75.

<sup>52</sup> Joachim Gentz has argued that Gongyang exegesis, calendrical texts and omenological texts, like ritual, are concerned with adherence to and deviation from “an invisible ideal order.” See “The Ritual Meaning of Textual Form: Evidence from Early Commentaries of the Historiographic and Ritual Traditions,” in Martin Kern ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 2005): 124–148, esp. 125.

<sup>53</sup> Citations for the prognostic sections on Saturn and Mars give the subsection identifications as they appear in the main text and Appendix B below, along with Liu Lexian’s page and line numbers.

<sup>54</sup> This character consists in *yin* 媪 with the element *yue* 月 in place of *nü* 女.

It is<sup>55</sup> the star that quells the various regions.<sup>56</sup> In a year [when it quells a single lodge, the domain to which it corresponds will enjoy good fortune and acquire land]. But once it has dwelt in a place, and then leaves it going to the [west or] east, that domain shall experience ill fortune, and its lands [shall be invaded]. (That domain) should not take action using military means, for in battle it will not win.

C. 所往之野吉，得土。

(The domain corresponding to) the celestial field to which it proceeds shall enjoy good fortune and acquire land.

D. 填之所久處，其國有德、土地，吉。

As for the place in which the Queller long dwells, its corresponding domain will be possessed of suasive power, land, and good fortune.

E. 填星司天口<sup>57</sup>（禮），□□□□□□□隋丘，[不可]大起土攻，若用兵者，<sup>58</sup>攻伐填之野者，其咎短命亡，孫子毋處。

The Quelling Star is the Master of Celestial [Rites]...following the mound,<sup>59</sup> [it should not] undertake major earthworks. If those who take up arms attack the domain (corresponding to) the celestial field occupied by the Queller, their guilt (will result in) a short lifespan and death, and their progeny will be without a dwelling place.

F. 中央分土，其日戊己，月立（位）正中，中國有之。

The center is the division of the soil. Its days are *wu* and *ji*. The moon occupies the perfect center.<sup>60</sup> The capital possesses it.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> The “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” (6) has *bin* 賓 for *shi* 實. I follow Liu in reading *shi* as a demonstrative pronoun equivalent to *shi* 是. See “Wuxing zhan” 49, n.a1.

<sup>56</sup> The meaning of the phrase *zhouxing* 州星, as Liu notes, is unclear. He hazards two possibilities: it may refer to the stars corresponding to the various regions, or perhaps, if we take *zhou* 州 as an orthographic variant for *zhou* 周, it could mean *zhouxing* 周星, the stars that circumnavigate the heavens. A CHANT (*Chinese ANcient Texts*) database (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1998), <<http://www.chant.org>>, search reveals only a single instance of the phrase *zhouxing* in any Eastern Han or earlier received text. It occurs in the term “An Zhou Xing” 安周星 or “The Star Resting in Its Circuit,” one of seven names for Mercury listed in *Shiji* 27.1330. As the second reading involves both proposing a phrase that is not attested in any early received text and making an orthographic change, I have adopted the former interpretation. Cullen, “Five Planets,” reads, “It garrisons the circuit of stars” (227).

<sup>57</sup> This character consists in *li* 禮 with the *yue* 月 element in place of the element *shi* 示.

<sup>58</sup> I break with Liu Lexian’s punctuation here, substituting a comma for a period.

<sup>59</sup> The translation of this phrase, coming at the end of a missing section of text, is highly doubtful.

<sup>60</sup> This may refer to the time when the moon is at the zenith. Cullen, “Five Planets,” reads: “the positions of the moon is on the meridian” (228).

<sup>61</sup> I have designated the six subsections of the passage A through F, following Liu Lexian’s sentence breaks. The full prognostic section appears in “Wuxing zhan” 48–51, lines 51–3.

Subsection A, like the opening subsections for each of the Five Planets, couches the Quelling Star within a network of cosmological correspondences. Subsection F makes a similar move, positioning Saturn and the center as corresponding to earth, and to particular days within the sexagenary cycle, *wu* and *ji*. Such correspondences between the center, soil, the Yellow God, and the *wu* and *ji* branches circulated widely in early texts, from the “Ji xia ji” 季夏紀 (Late Summer Regulations) chapter of the *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Annals of Mr. Lü)<sup>62</sup> to the “Yueling” 月令 (Monthly Ordinances) chapter of the *Record of Rites* (Liji 禮記).<sup>63</sup>

The introduction of a wandering star into these otherwise ideal sets of regular correspondences produced a sort of creative instability. Ironically, while the table given at the end of the “Five Planets” posits a regular set of motions for Saturn, the places where it should appear year after year, its actual tendency to deviate from those stipulated regularities is how it apparently produced meaning. Subsections B through E define in specific terms what such irregularities signified. Wherever Saturn happens to be should enjoy good fortune, but if it guards Barrens when it should be in Roof, that means good fortune for the domain corresponding to Barrens, and bad fortune for the domain corresponding to Roof. Better yet or worse still, should it return to Barrens after having already gone to Roof, the domain corresponding to Roof will likely be invaded, and is certain to lose if it engages in warfare. To the extent that the lore surrounding Saturn figured into real military action or non-action, the presence of Saturn in the celestial field corresponding to a given domain may indeed have improved its fortunes. For those who would attack such a domain are warned that their actions might well result in not only their own death, but also in the exile of their progeny.

The “Five Planets” offers little in the way of explanation as to what causes Saturn to go astray in the first place. It does not say that the Quelling Star is attracted by the suasive power of one domain, nor repelled by abhorrent practices or neglect of ritual in another. Its deviations from its regular path seem to be capricious, attributable to no reason in particular. It is likewise unclear whether Saturn itself quells the domains over which it lingers, or whether it simply represents some other unseen force, such as the Yellow God or perhaps Lord Millet, who are in fact responsible for the good fortunes of the corresponding domain. Should the rulers of Dai have found themselves contemplating violence against a neighboring region corresponding to an adjacent lodge, they perhaps would have consulted the “Five Planets” before making a decision to take an aggressive stance or a conciliatory one, to engage in battle or to engage in diplomacy. Yet, the fact that the text does not create a causal link between the activities of the court prior to the appearance of the sign and the sign itself, may have limited its utility to some extent for those who would argue that long-standing political policies or ritual practices needed to be reformed. A ritual expert might say what course should be taken after the sign appeared, instructing the ruler to make certain sacrifices, or to avoid going to battle. In contrast to technical treatises developed later in the Western Han and in the Eastern Han (25 CE–220 CE),<sup>64</sup> the “Five Planets” provided little in the way of rhetorical tools to authorize a claim that the ruler had caused the signs to appear in the first place, or that practices already underway prior to the appearance of the

<sup>62</sup> In Lü Buwei 呂不為 (d. 235 BCE) comp., Gao You 高誘 (fl. 205–212 CE) comm., *Lü shi chunqiu* 6.54–64 in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Collected Works of the Many Masters), vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1952).

<sup>63</sup> In Wang Wenjin 王文錦 ed., *Liji yijie* 禮記譯解 (Translation and Interpretation of the Record of Rites), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001): 6.214–17.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 3 of the present work, *passim*.



sign should be abandoned or reformed.

### Tracking the Dazzling Deluder?<sup>65</sup>

One of the most curious features of the table at the end of the “Five Planets” is the fact that it does not include an account of Mars. Of the Five Planets, only Mercury and Mars are not included in the table. The absence of Mercury is easy enough to account for; the Watch Star is rarely visible and is always in close proximity to the sun.<sup>66</sup> The same is not true of Mars.

In contrast to Saturn and Jupiter, which move through the stars at a relatively slow pace, so that the two planets respectively seemed to travel through approximately one of the twenty-eight lunar lodges and one of the twelve terrestrial branches each year, Mars has a far shorter sidereal period. It would have required much more complex calculations to determine where the Dazzling Deluder might rise in the first month three years hence than was the case with either of the other outer planets. And while Venus has a shorter year even than Earth, it is at the very least always relatively near the sun.<sup>67</sup> Mars could be anywhere, it seemed, at any time: “[Its advance and regression] are without constancy” [進退]無恆。<sup>68</sup>

Where an unexpected visit from the Quelling Star meant good fortunes, the presence of the Dazzling Deluder portended war and disaster. The prognostications around Mars mirror the language of those on Saturn: “When it rises in the east, and reverses its course moving retrograde by one lodge, (the domain corresponding to the celestial field) from which it has departed will enjoy good fortune, while the domain to which it moves will suffer military incursions” 其出東方，反行一舍，所去者吉，所之國受兵口口...<sup>69</sup> In contrast to the case of Saturn, this portends good fortune for the domain corresponding to the location where Mars ought to have been, and bad for the domain corresponding to the location where Mars actually is. And it is especially inauspicious for any domain into which Mars might loop-the-loop back, and worse still if it twinkles and reddens: “If it has already departed and again circles<sup>70</sup> back to dwell in it, the calamity will be [...] When it cycles around and enters into it, the calamity will be severe. When it is red and its spikes flicker and are enlarged, the calamity will be severe” 漑（既）已去之復環（還）居之央（殃）口。其周環繞之入央（殃）甚。其赤而角動大；央（殃）甚。<sup>71</sup> Indeed, any deviations from the ecliptic portend disaster for the domain corresponding to the celestial field where they occur: “When the Dazzling Deluder strays from the path,<sup>72</sup> the lot of the domain corresponding to its (celestial) field [will suffer calamities]” 熒

<sup>65</sup> For a complete translation of the “Five Planets” section on Mars, see Appendix B.

<sup>66</sup> Mercury has a maximum elongation of roughly 27 degrees, elongation referring to the relative angle of the planet with respect to the sun as observed from Earth. See Mark R. Chartrand (Astronomical charts by Wil Tirion), *National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Night Sky* (New York: Knopf, 1991): 43–44.

<sup>67</sup> The maximum elongation of Venus is approximately 48 degrees (Chartrand 44).

<sup>68</sup> Subsection B; “Wuxing zhan” 45, line 45. The “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” does not provide the characters *jintui* 進退 (advance and retreat).

<sup>69</sup> Subsection D; “Wuxing zhan” 45, line 46.

<sup>70</sup> Because the apparent retrograde motion of planets appears to form a ring rather than a simple reversal, I do not adopt the reading, originally proposed by the Mawangdui team and later accepted by Liu Lexian, of *huan* 環 (ring) as *huan* 還 (return). Instead, I render *huan* as “circles back.” For an image of Mars in retrograde motion over a period of weeks, see figure 4 in Appendix D.

<sup>71</sup> Subsection F; “Wuxing zhan” 45, lines 46–47.

<sup>72</sup> I.e. the ecliptic.

惑絕道，其國分當其野[受殃].<sup>73</sup>

In formal terms, the section on Mars shares the same features as Saturn and the other planets, constructing a system of correspondences between the planet, the Four Directions, Gods and their Assistants, and certain days. These are articulated in the opening and closing subsections of the passage. It begins: “The south corresponds to fire. Its God is the Red<sup>74</sup> God. His Assistant is the Zhurong. Its spirit above is [the Dazzling Deluder]” 南方火，其帝赤帝，其丞祝庸（融），其神上為[熒惑].<sup>75</sup> The section on Mars claims that the planet is the “Master of the Celestial Music” 主司天樂<sup>76</sup> just as the Quelling Star is the Master of the Celestial Rites. The final subsection positions Mars with respect to time, including the season, the sexagenary cycle of days, and the position of the moon, as well as reiterating the earlier correspondence with the southern direction: “[Its season is] the summer. Its days are *bing* and *ding*. Its moon position is the corner of the center.<sup>77</sup> The south possesses it” [其時] 夏，其日丙丁，月立（位）隅中，南方之有之.<sup>78</sup>

In a time of great political uncertainty, the “Five Planets” constructed the Dazzling Deluder as a powerful sign that mirrored the instability of the political order. Should Mars ever rise from the Western horizon, this would portend far reaching consequences for the empire and for local lords such as Marquises of Dai: “When it emerges from the west, this is called ‘The Reversal of Illumination.’ The world will change its King” 其出西方，是胃（謂）反明，天下革王.<sup>79</sup> For the Marquises of Dai, this passage perhaps provoked powerful, recent memories: first, the Qin conquest of much of the known world, and then, the dynasty’s precipitous fall and the rise of the Han.

### The Fog of War: Punishment and Favor

Celestial signs are not limited to what we now consider to be astronomical phenomena. Many celestial signs are meteorological in nature. These include halos about the sun and the moon, oddly-shaped clouds, unseasonable weather, rainbows, hazes, and mirages that in early China would have been called *qi*. The “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts are concerned with identifying the meaning of such signs and often read them against the particular time in the sexagenary calendar when they occur. These signs presage military conflict, but do not always clearly indicate victory or defeat.

“Punishment and Favor” makes predictions based on the appearance of certain kinds of weather at particular times. When troops are in the field and lightning or rain occurs on certain days, this portends that those armies will “enter” (*ru* 入) something or some place within a certain period. Liu Lexian suggests that this refers to the time when the troops will return to their city. The meaning of “enter” here is, to be sure, under-determined. It might also refer to

<sup>73</sup> Subsection E; “Wuxing zhan” 45, line 46.

<sup>74</sup> The “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” (6) suggests reading *Yan* 炎 for *Chi* 赤 on analogy with received texts.

<sup>75</sup> Subsection A; “Wuxing zhan” 43, line 45.

<sup>76</sup> Subsection K; Liu 47, line 49. The Mawangdui team has the character *zhu* 主 (master) as part of the antecedent sentence. See “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” 6.

<sup>77</sup> Liu explains that this likely refers to the time when the moon is near the zenith (48).

<sup>78</sup> Subsection L; “Wuxing zhan” 83–84, line 50. Liu suggests that “the south” refers to the domains of the south (Liu 84, n. a3).

<sup>79</sup> Subsection C; “Wuxing zhan” 44, line 45.

entering the city of an adversary, or perhaps, simply engaging in battle, as I have rendered *ru* below:

兵在野，甲子雷，不出百日兵入；丙子雨，不出八旬兵入；戊子雨，不出六旬兵入；庚子雨，不出四旬兵入；壬子雨，不出二旬兵入。

When troops are in the field, should there be lightning on a *jiazi* day (day 1), then in no more than one hundred days the troops will engage in battle. If it rains on a *bingzi* day (day 13), then in no more than eighty days, the troops will engage in battle. If it rains on a *wuzi* day (day 25), then in no more than sixty days, the troops will engage in battle. If it rains on a *gengzi* day (day 37), then in no more than forty days, the troops will engage in battle. If it rains on a *renzi* day (day 49), then in no more than twenty days, the troops will engage in battle.<sup>80</sup>

The appearance of lightning and rain here are tied into the sexagenary cycle and become meaningful in conjunction with it. It may be the case that *ru* means “return” when troops return within the appointed time, or means “lay siege” or “engage in battle” when the troops enter a walled city or rush into battle within the appointed time. While what exactly happens with the troops who “enter” is perhaps open to different interpretations as the occasion demands, the status of rain and lightning as signs within this system is quite clear, even if precisely what they signify is not.

Like rain and lightning, fierce winds predict different outcomes based on when they occur, according to the meteoromantic section of the “Punishment and Favor”:

夏三月有疾風，折木發屋；四月有此，兵秋起；五月有此，兵東起；六月有此，兵明春起。

If in summer, in the third month, there is fierce wind, then it will break trees and blow over houses. If this occurs in the fourth month, war will arise in autumn. If this occurs in the fifth month, war will arise in winter. If this occurs in the sixth month, war will arise the next spring.<sup>81</sup>

Violent winds and rains throughout the year may produce similar results, or at least predict similar events. “Should there be no such winds in the third month, but violent wind and rain throughout the year, warfare will arise. As for the rain, those who follow it will be victorious” 禁三月毋此風，而終歲暴風雨俱至，兵起，雨所從者勝。<sup>82</sup> Wind and rain operate primarily as portents of war.

The portion of the manuscripts Kalinowski refers to as the “Punishment and Favor” text associates military and agricultural prognostications with a set of deities who “emit *qi*” (*fa qi* 發氣) at particular times, and with certain weather events or lack thereof. The gods Lord Thunder

<sup>80</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 187, lines 43–44.

<sup>81</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 188, lines 48–49. Punctuation modified.

<sup>82</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 188, line 49.

(Lei Gong 雷公), Feng Long 豐隆, Earl of Wind (Feng Bo 風伯), Legions of Rain (Yu Shi 雨師), and Great Sound (Da Yin 大音) in both the text of the manuscripts and the Nine Palaces diagram are tied to two of the twelve earthly branches each.<sup>83</sup> Through their association with this set of deities, Punishment and Favor come to appear as deities themselves. They appear together in each of the *zheng Gong* 正宮 (regular palaces) in the Nine Palaces diagram, but Punishment alone appears in the *jigong* 奇宮 (odd palaces), so that Punishment alone is associated with *jiazi* (1), *bingzi* (13), *gengzi* (37), and *renzi* (49) days, and the Punishment-Favor pair is associated with *gengwu* (7), *renwu* (19), *jiawu* (31), and *bingwu* (43) days. The inscription in the Central Palace is no longer legible, but the pattern suggests that Punishment would also have been associated with the *wuzi* (25) day, and both Punishment and Favor with the *wuwu* (55) day.

The precise technical details of how this manuscript was used in practice remain unknown, yet the emissions of *qi* by the various gods were likely associated with positions in the sexagenary calendar. What did it mean for a deity to emit *qi*? One possibility is that on a day associated with a deity an observable phenomenon identifiable as an emission of *qi* might or might not occur. Another possibility is that emissions of *qi* were considered to be regular events occurring on the days associated with each deity. What follows when these deities emit *qi* hinges on our understanding of how the passage uses the word *zhi* 至, which we may take as either a transitive verb meaning ‘bring about,’<sup>84</sup> or as a preposition, meaning ‘until.’ The former reading would indicate that the emission of *qi* has a causal relation to the event that follows on a different day. The latter reading suggests that the two events mark two endpoints of a period of time when certain conditions prevail. The first event is the emission of *qi*, and the second event is violent wind, rain, or thunder occurring on a day associated with a particular deity. Thus, the first line of the passage on the release of *qi* might be rendered in two ways:

雷公發氣，[鄉有雷]死者，暴風雨，至[大音毋雨，尉有央(殃)]。

When Lord Thunder releases *qi*,<sup>85</sup> in that direction someone will die from thunder, and there will be violent winds and rains, and this will *cause* Great Sound not to rain, and the

<sup>83</sup> The sexagenary days associated with them are as follows: Great Sound: *dingmao* (4), *guiyou* (10), *jimao* (16), *yiyao* (22), *dingyou* (34), *guimao* (40), *yiyao* (46), *yimao* (52); Fenglong: *yichou* (2), *xinwei* (8), *dingchou* (14), *guiwei* (20), *yiwei* (32), *xinchou* (38), *dingwei* (44), *guichou* (50); Lord Thunder: *wuchen* (5), *jiayu* (11), *gengchen* (17), *bingxu* (23), *wuxu* (35), *jiachen* (41), *gengxu* (47), *bingchen* (53); Legions of Rain: *jisi* (6), *yihai* (12), *xinsi* (18), *dinghai* (24), *yihai* (36), *yisi* (42), *xinhai* (48), *dingsi* (54); Earl of Wind: *bingyin* (3), *renshen* (9), *wuyan* (15), *jiashen* (21), *bingshen* (33), *reyan* (39), *wushen* (45), *jiayan* (51). In what appears to be a simple transcription error, Kalinowski has the *wushen* (45) day here in his drawing of the chart (178). Both the “Xingde A” and “Xingde B” have *bingyan* here. For a transcription of the chart, see Chen Songchang 51–52; for images, refer to Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 et al., *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu* 馬王堆 (Cultural Relics from the Mawangdui Han Tombs; Changsha, Hunan, 1992): 133 and 135. For the passages within the manuscripts referred to as “Xingde A” and “Xingde B,” see the images and transcriptions in Cheng Songchang 139–87 and 189–221.

<sup>84</sup> In standard orthography, this sense of *zhi* is written *zhi* 致.

<sup>85</sup> Kalinowski understands the phrase *fa qi* 發氣 (release *qi*) as referring to the appearance of clouds (193). While this makes perfect sense given the appearance of rain in the later part of the entry, *fa qi* might also refer to wind, or to visual phenomena. When ascribed to human agents, *fa qi* may refer to vocalization. If we understand the gods as the agents of *fa qi*, it follows that they are issuing a sign analogous to human speech.

commandant to suffer calamity.<sup>86</sup>

Alternatively, the same passage might be read:

When Lord Thunder releases *qi*, and in that direction someone dies from thunder, and there are violent winds and rains, *and* [on a day associated with] Great Sound it does not rain: the commandant will suffer calamity.

In practice, the text may have been read in both of these ways, depending on the circumstances in which it was used. Predictions that were not born out might have been explained as the result of misreading of the text, failing to perform a ritual in the proper way, or some fault in the prognosticator. The second reading, however, has the advantage of allowing for the possibility of a causal relationship, but leaving room for the ambiguity of the passage itself, and for this reason, I have followed it below:

豐隆發氣，至大音不雨，司空起土功，雨吉。  
風伯發氣，至刑德不雨，歲有暴亂，疾風傷歲。  
雨師發氣，歲又(有)米，至刑德不雨，歲乏毋(無)實。

When Fenglong releases *qi* and by Great Sound it does not rain: If the Minister of Works engages in projects involving raising earth, there will be auspicious rains.

When Earl of Wind releases *qi* and by Punishment-Favor it does not rain: During the harvest it will be violent and chaotic, and fierce winds will damage the harvest.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> “Xingde B” 200, line 33. The physical form of both “Xingde B” and “Xingde A” suggests that the word *zhi* (至 in “Xingde B” and 之 in “Xingde A”) is the end of a syntactic unit. In “Xingde B,” the end of a syntactic unit is sometimes indicated, as it is here, with a large black dot, while in “Xingde A,” this entry, and the several entries that follow it, are given on single lines ending with long section of blank space. Read in isolation, line 131 of “Xingde A” reads “Lord Thunder emits *qi*, and in the appointed direction someone dies from thunder” 雷公發氣，鄉有雷死者，暴風雨之。 Line 132 is an entirely separate sentence: “Great Sound does not rain, and the commandant will suffer calamity” 大音毋(無)雨，尉有央(殃). However, given the strong parallelism with the entries that follow, in which *zhi* may mean “until” or “cause” and leads into the following clause, I read lines 131–32 in “Xingde A” and the corresponding text in “Xingde B” as a single syntactic unit. I suspect that the copyist of “Xingde A” included *zhi* at the end of the phrase *bao feng yu* 暴風雨 (violent winds and rain) to preserve the tetrasyllabic rhythm of the prose and to avoid a three character unit, thus splitting the entry. Moreover, the final character of line 131 is damaged. What remains of the character consists in two horizontal strokes. Its appearance is more consistent with the character *zhi* 至, to which it corresponds in “Xingde B” than with *zhi* 之, as Chen Songchang has transcribed it. The remains of this character indeed seem quite inconsistent with unambiguous instances of *zhi* 之 in the manuscript such as those that occur in line 126 and line 113. It comes as no surprise that “Xingde B” is consistent with “Xingde A”; Kalinowski explains that “Xingde B” appears to be an updated copy of “Xingde A”: “Since most of the variants concern factual data such as the dates entered in the sexagenary grid and the description of the diurnal rotations of Xing-De for the eleventh year of Gaozu, there is every reason to think that copy B is an updating of copy A redacted some twenty years later by a specialist in calendrical techniques” (128).

<sup>87</sup> While Kalinowski does not give a detailed discussion of this passage, he does translate this particular line: “When the clouds appear on the Fengbo (day) and by the Xing-De (day) there still is no rain, irregularities will arise during the year and storms will ravage the harvests” (193). His interpretation of *zhi* does not differ

When the Legions of Rain release *qi*, in a year when there is abundant rice, and by Punishment-Favor it does not rain: The harvest will be poor.<sup>88</sup>

Each of the first four deities<sup>89</sup> who emit *qi* are paired with a second deity, who in a literal sense “does not rain.” While English convention pushes us toward a rendering where the subject of the verb “rain” is necessarily the dummy pronoun *it*, a more faithful, if awkward, rendering would have “until Great Sound does not rain,” and so on, in the sense that the deity causes it to rain or physically manifests as rain. When the passage comes to the final three deities, however, its neat order breaks down to some extent. Great Sound rains rather than failing to do so, and Favor appears without Punishment.<sup>90</sup>

德發氣，大音雨之，嫁(稼)稅(穡)，雨吉。不雨，兵起，不軍(暈)，單(戰)。  
刑發氣，至德不雨，兵起。在軍，單(戰)。雨，吉。

When Favor releases *qi* and by Great Sound rain comes: In planting and harvesting, rain is auspicious. If it does not rain, war will arise. If there is no halo,<sup>91</sup> there will be battle.

When Punishment releases *qi* and by Favor it does not rain: War will arise, and where there are troops, there will be battle. Rain is auspicious.<sup>92</sup>

The last two entries in the passage omit any mention of an endpoint at all:

大音發氣，不雨，兵起。在軍，軍益。雨，吉。  
大音之日奪田兵穀，必有死亡之將。

When Great Sound releases *qi*, if it does not rain, war arises. Where there are troops, there will be more troops. Rain is auspicious.

On a day of Great Sound, if one should seize fields to provide grain for troops, there will certainly be a dead general.<sup>93</sup>

Regardless of the causal relationship or lack thereof between the emissions of *qi* associated with each of the deities and the events that follow, the passage shows a shared concern with the dual problems of agricultural production and military threats seen throughout the Dai corpus.

---

substantially from my own.

<sup>88</sup> “Xingde A” 184, lines 133–35. Each entry occurs on an individual line. The same text, minus two lacunae, occurs in “Xingde B” 200, lines 33–36. “Xingde B” does not, however, separate the sections into individual lines.

<sup>89</sup> For the purposes of the present discussion, I treat “Legions of Rain” as a single deity.

<sup>90</sup> Oddly, Favor never occurs without Punishment on the chart.

<sup>91</sup> Where “Xingde A” has *bu jun (yun)* 不軍(暈) ([if] there is no halo); “Xingde B” has *zai jun* 在軍 (where there are troops). See “Xingde B” 202, line 37.

<sup>92</sup> “Xingde A” 184, lines 136–37. A closely corresponding section, with some variants and lacunae, occurs in “Xingde B” 200–2, lines 36–37.

<sup>93</sup> “Xingde A” 184–86, lines 138–39. The same text occurs in “Xingde B” 202, lines 37–38, where the two entries are separated by a punctuation mark.

The meteoromantic portion of “Punishment and Favor” presents a series of prognostications regarding the sun, moon, wind, rain, clouds, and *qi*. As is the case throughout the manuscript, these signs reflect an abiding concern with warfare. Military woes dominate the discussion of halos about the sun and the moon. One passage suggests that not only generals, but average troops on some level perceived the dangers associated with certain types of halo phenomena. “When halos around the sun come into contact, the troops are afraid” 日交軍 (暈), 軍畏.<sup>94</sup> Another passage suggests that the color of the halo is the operative factor in determining its meaning. “When the sun has linked halos, the lord of men will have a great encounter. If it is entirely white, there will be great harmony. If it is entirely red, warfare will arise. If one attacks a domain that is in trouble,<sup>95</sup> whoever arrives first will gain more land” 日連軍 (暈), 人主大遇。盡白, 大和; 盡赤, 兵起, 攻憊國, 先者得地多.<sup>96</sup> Observation of halos thus could potentially be used to argue against warfare, or to urge a ruler to seize military opportunities. At the same time, certain signs involving halos could suggest global political change, such as the establishment of a new order of feudal lords. “When the sun is surrounded by nine layered halos, the world will establish dukes and earls” 日軍 (暈)九重, 天下有立公[伯].<sup>97</sup> Halos about the moon portend military conflict. “When halos around [the moon] come into contact, and are entirely red, two lords meet, and warfare arises” [月]交軍 (暈), 盡赤, 二主遇, 兵起.<sup>98</sup>

Military concerns and the criteria of color and height are also paramount in the observation of *qi*:

[軍在]野, 軍氣[青白]而高, 軍戰, 勝。軍氣赤而高, 軍大搖(搖); 軍氣黑而卑, 沒戟。

[When the armies are in] the field, and the *qi* of the armies is blue-white and high, should the armies do battle, they will be victorious. If the *qi* of the armies is red and high, the armies are wavering greatly. If the *qi* of the armies is black and low, they will bury their halberds.<sup>99</sup>

*Qi* is relevant not only to military strategy, but to broader political developments as well. One passage suggests that by examining the color of the ground after sunset, conquest can be predicted: “Look at the land. If the sun has already set and one looks upon it, and in a given direction there is no cloud *qi*, yet it is a ruddy red color, the hearts of the people have wandered, and another lord will possess them” 望地, 日已入而望之, 其鄉(向)無雲氣而康赤者, 民移心, 它主有之.<sup>100</sup> In this case, the presence of *qi*, in the particular form of clouds, is given as a

<sup>94</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 170, line 8.

<sup>95</sup> Chen Songchang transcribes *you* as 憂 (fine, superior) rather than *you* 憊 (fretful) (142). In the manuscript, *you* does not have the heart radical.

<sup>96</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 170, lines 8–9. Punctuation is slightly modified for clarity.

<sup>97</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 174, line 13.

<sup>98</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 168, lines 6–7.

<sup>99</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 182, lines 27–28.

<sup>100</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 185, line 38. Where Liu Lexian has *min yi* 民移 (the people will migrate), Chen Songchang has *min yi xin, ta zhu you zhi* 民移心, 它主有之 (The hearts of the people wander, and another lord will possess them) in “Xingde A” 152. I follow Chen in the transcription of this line. However, this reading is

negative condition for the prognostic statement. *Qi* normalizes and nullifies the significance of an after sunset glow, a meaningful sign only when cloud *qi* is not present. In the immediately following passage, however, multiple appearances of odd *qi* phenomena at dusk portend devastation:

晦日望氣若明而未明，兵聚；其鄉(向)若明若日者，其鄉(向)乃矍百軒。三見，乃留(流)血苦(枯)骨。

If at dusk one should observe *qi* that is as if it were bright, but is not bright, then the soldiers will gather. If in a given direction it is as bright as the full sun,<sup>101</sup> then in that direction one hundred houses will shudder in fear. Should it appear three times, then blood will flow and bones will bleach in the sun.<sup>102</sup>

The celestial signs of wind, rain, thunder and lightning, and *qi* in the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts presaged events that would have deeply concerned local courts in both the pre-imperial period and in the early Western Han. The threat of war yet remained, and agricultural production would always be contingent upon the whims of the weather.

### Miscellaneous Prognostications

The “Miscellaneous Prognostications” is concerned with many of the same sorts of problems that appear in “Punishment and Favor” and the “Five Planets.” However, whereas the “Five Planets” depends upon an established pattern of regularity in the movements of the planets, which provides a standard against which meaningful deviations may be judged, the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” depends upon the visual identification of clouds, rainbows, comets, and other signs with particular characteristics. In the case of color, these are sometimes spelled out at the textual level. However, the identification of a given sign generally requires matching its shape or other features with the images in the manuscript.

The text of the chart is nearly meaningless independent of the images. The second through fourteenth entries in the first column comprise a list of clouds associated with various polities in the pre-imperial world. Entries 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4 respectively read “Zhao cloud” 趙云, “Zhongshan cloud” 中山云, and “Yan cloud” 燕云, while 1.5–1.14 follow the same pattern for

---

highly tentative. Examining the manuscript, while the character *xin* is fairly clear, a single curved downward line seems to indicate the character *ta* 它, meaning “other.” Moreover, there is no separation between this line and the character *Chen* reads as *xin* above it; Liu’s decision to read a single graph here may well be correct. However, in my view, it much better resembles a *xin* graph than *ta*. For the image, see Chen Songchang 153. “Xingde B” unfortunately cannot be used to arbitrate between the two transcriptions as the relevant portion is missing (219).

<sup>101</sup> Liu Lexian suggests that *ri* 日 (sun) is a mistranscription for *bai* 白 (white), and thus he places *bai* in triangular brackets <白> following the character *ri*. See “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 186, n. 3. Chen Songchang simply transcribes the character as *bai* 白. The manuscript has *ri*, however, and I have transcribed and translated the text as it stands. For an image, see “Xingde A” 153.

<sup>102</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 185–86, lines 37–39. Chen separate *nai ju* 乃矍 and *baixuan* 百軒 with a comma and omits the period before *sanjian* 三見 (“Xingde A” 152). Following his reading the last sentence and a half might be rendered: “...then in that direction there will be fear. If it should appear three times about the hundred houses, then blood will flow and bones will bleach in the sun.”



the realms of Qin, Rong, Shu, Han, Wei, Wey,<sup>103</sup> Zhou,<sup>104</sup> Song, Qi, and Yue. In each case, the caption and image stand in a reversible subject-predicate relationship. To “Zhao cloud” or to “Yan cloud” the user must mentally add to the image: “This cloud is a Zhao cloud; that cloud is a Yan cloud” or “a Zhao cloud looks like this; a Yan cloud looks like that.” The deictic relationship in some instances is made explicit in the syntax of the captions: “If the cloud is like this, then in battle, you will be victorious” 云如此，戰勝。<sup>105</sup> Elsewhere, the manuscript compares the shapes of clouds to otherwise familiar patterns such as images of birds or oxen.<sup>106</sup> While the “Five Planets” required careful observations over time, charting the movement of a planet against the celestial surface, the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” requires immediate observation of what were largely ephemeral phenomena.<sup>107</sup> Even in the final portion of the manuscript, which contains no images, the entries refer back to earlier images. The manuscript states this explicitly in its final entry: “These entries, which are not positioned beneath images, in each case should be matched with the images of the same kind<sup>108</sup> that have already been presented” 此書不才（載）其圖下者，各已從其等矣。<sup>109</sup>

Despite the differences in referential logic between the “Five Planets” and the “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” the latter text is concerned with many of the same problems as the former. The constellation of harvest, hunger, funerals, war, and weather runs through the text, along with concerns regarding dangerous ministers, the political fate of particular domains, and the large-scale political and military developments in the realm.

War, weather, hunger, and harvest, are closely intermingled topics in the manuscript. The prediction of one often entails the prediction of another, and they are often presented in juxtaposition. The rise of a red sun predicts a fully ripened harvest,<sup>110</sup> but when red clouds cap the sun, the harvest will be poor.<sup>111</sup> War, motivated perhaps by civil unrest and the need to gather resources to feed the population of a famine stricken area, follows from poor harvests: “When

<sup>103</sup> I follow the convention of distinguishing Wei 魏 from Wey 衛 by a distinction in Romanization.

<sup>104</sup> The manuscript is damaged here. I follow Liu Lexian’s conjecture that Zhou is likely the domain that would fill the lacuna. “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 1.11, n. 11. Citations of the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” refer first to the column, then to the entry number. The portion of the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” that contains images is divided into six columns, respectively referenced as 1–6, from top to bottom. The latter portion of the “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” which does not contain images, is divided into three columns, labeled A, B, and C, from top to bottom. In Liu Lexian’s transcription, these are labeled *shang* 上, *zhong* 中, and *xia* 下—upper, middle, and lower registers. The same holds true in Gu Tiefu’s earlier transcription on which Liu’s work is largely based. See his “Mawangdui boshu ‘Tianwen qixiang zazhan’” 馬王堆帛書天文氣象雜占 (The Mawangdui Silk Text ‘Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and Qi Phenomena’) in Gu Tiefu, *Xiyang chugao* 夕陽芻稿 (Rough Manuscripts from My Later Years; Beijing: Ziji cheng, 1988): 202–31.

<sup>105</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.4. See also 2.3 and 2.5.

<sup>106</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 1.52; 2.1.

<sup>107</sup> Clouds, rainbows, and *qi*, if not comets, could vanish or change form in moments.

<sup>108</sup> I read *deng* 等 in the sense of *lei* 類 (kind) following Liu Lexian. See C 26, n. 2. The transcription of this passage follows Dong Shan 董珊 “Tan Mawangdui boshu ‘Tianwen qixiang zazhan’ de xingcheng” 談馬王堆帛書《天文氣象雜占》的形成 (A Discussion of the Formation of the Mawangdui Silk Text: “Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and Qi Phenomena”), accessed July 23, 2013, <http://www.jianbo.org/admin3/2005/dongshan002.htm>.

<sup>109</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C26.

<sup>110</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C6.

<sup>111</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C7. I read *wan* 完 as an orthographic variant of *guan* 冠 following Liu Lexian. Gu Tiefu, *Xiyang chugao*, has a lacuna here (230).

red clouds vertically bind the sun, there will be a poor harvest, and war will arise” 赤云從(縱)滅(緘)日，惡歲，兵興。<sup>112</sup> A blackened sun likewise is associated with both war and weather conditions affecting agriculture: “When the black sun rises, arms will be raised and there will be great floods. Do not engage in battle” 黑日出，興兵，大水，不戰。<sup>113</sup> Certain types of comets predict not only a hungry populace, but unfed armies. One caption reads: “These are mugwort broom-stars. War arises, and the troops go hungry” 是是蒿彗，兵起，軍饑。<sup>114</sup> And in at least one instance, the familiar relationship between famine and war is upset. Certain comets predict both bumper crops *and* civil war: “These are sweeping broom-stars. There will be civil war (*nei bing*). The year will have a great harvest” 是是帚彗，有內兵，年大孰(熟)。<sup>115</sup>

Like the “Five Planets” and “Punishment and Favor,” the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” does not merely predict war, but makes more specific statements regarding the time within which battles will occur and their outcomes, as well as broader political changes. A typical passage reads: “In no more than five days, there will be a great battle. The host will be victorious” 不出五日，大戰，主人勝。<sup>116</sup> Other passages predict the death of a general, or the ruler of a domain. One caption to a bushy comet reads: “This is called a Red Bush. There will be dead among the great generals” 是謂赤灌，大將軍有死者。<sup>117</sup> A caption to an image of a rainbow announces the death of the ruler: “If a white rainbow appears, the ruler of the domain will die” 白虹出，邦君死之。<sup>118</sup>

While many of the entries in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” seem to pertain specifically to the concerns of smaller warring polities, the notion of a world with a single ruler does appear in the text. The most consequential of the entries predict a united world, or a world falling into fragments. The entries in the opening of the fourth column present the establishment of a new political order:

“The Son of Heaven is established” 天子立.

“There are elders” 又(有) 柏(伯) 者.

“There are kings” 又(有) 王者.

“Within a month, an emissary will arrive” 不出一月，又(有) 使至。<sup>119</sup>

While the organization of the chart does not generally present chronological sequences of events, the fourth entry in this column, coincidentally or otherwise, presents the likely consequence of a new political order in which power is stabilized and centralized. While the precise dating of the chart has not been definitively established, the experts who consulted it lived in a world where the position of the Son of Heaven was precarious. A new sovereign might establish himself and

<sup>112</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C8. For an alternate way of punctuating this line, see Gu Tiefu, *Xiyang chugao* 23.

<sup>113</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C9.

<sup>114</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.28.

<sup>115</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.24.

<sup>116</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 1.24.

<sup>117</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.19. See also C23 for the predicted death of a general when a “great star” 大星 suddenly appears.

<sup>118</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.3. The first line of this entry is fragmentary and omitted here.

<sup>119</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 4.1–4.4. Gu Tiefu interprets *bo* 柏 as referring to *ba* 霸, a hegemon (*Xiyang chugao* 220).

soon thereafter create domains as spoils of war for his clansmen and his most loyal supporters. At the same time, local lords in such a world stood to lose a great deal, even if they had supported victorious armies. Indeed, Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing reduced the sizes of, and in some cases eliminated altogether, the kingdoms that made up the eastern portions of their empire.<sup>120</sup> The arrival of emissaries from the central court would almost certainly have provoked anxieties for those in the periphery among the uncertain and shifting political climate of the early Western Han. The Marquises of Dai, who had been enfeoffed as recently as 193 BCE,<sup>121</sup> would have been well aware that their power could be stripped away by a new emperor, or even a new dynasty, just as easily it had been given.

Just as certain signs predicted the stabilization and centralization of the political order, others predicted fragmentation, strife, and regicide. One entry reads, “The army splits into four”<sup>122</sup> 軍分為四 while the next reads, “The world loses its master, and splits into thirty” 天下王其主，分卅。<sup>123</sup> Another entry points to the Dazzling Deluder as a harbinger of deceit and strife: “Heaven brings forth the Dazzling Deluder. Those in the world delude one another, brandishing all of their weapons and armor” 天出熒惑(惑)，天下相惑，甲兵盡出。<sup>124</sup> And as one tattered fragment positioned adjacent to what seems to be a moon halo shows, the chart could predict the death of the Son of Heaven and the actions of the local lords thereafter: “The Son of Heaven dies. The local lords... Mr. Ren. Another reading says: ‘The loss of territory.’ [Mr.?]”<sup>125</sup> Zhao” 天子崩，者(諸)侯口口。任氏。其一曰亡地。趙口。<sup>126</sup> The remains of the chart do not tell us what actions the local lords might take upon the death of the Son of Heaven. However, this information could have guided the Marquises of Dai during the periods of uncertainty that almost always followed the death of a sitting emperor. Yet the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” is a self-consciously composite text which provides multiple readings, in this instance and others, of the same sign. The different readings of Mr. Ren and Mr. Zhao do not so much compete for validity, but might be applied in a complementary manner based on the particular question at hand.

Political strife, whether at the level of the locality or the central court, could likewise issue from internal disorder. The problem of ministers who usurp the power of their lords occupies a prominent position in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications.” One caption, the image to which is lost, speaks of “a petty person acting in place of the king” 小人代為王。<sup>127</sup> Another speaks of the reversal of status between minister and ruler in direct terms: “Minister and lord

<sup>120</sup> See, for example, Michael Loewe’s description of the divestment of the kings during the reigns of Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing (“The Former Han Dynasty” 139–144).

<sup>121</sup> *Shiji* 19.978.

<sup>122</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 4.41.

<sup>123</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 4.42. The last character *sa* 卅 (thirty) might also be read as *ce* 冊 (strips). Thus, the full sentence would read, “The world loses its master and the strips are divided.”

<sup>124</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.11.

<sup>125</sup> Liu Lexian suggests that this lacuna might be filled with the character *shi* 氏, indicating Zhao’s surname. However, he presents this as a likely possibility, and does not go so far as to emend the text. “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.38, n. 3.

<sup>126</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.38. In place of the two lacunae, Gu Tiefu has the character *ru* 如 (*Xiyang chugao* 218). What *ru* would mean in this context is not clear.

<sup>127</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.34.

exchange<sup>128</sup> positions” 臣主貿處。<sup>129</sup> The following entry points to the violent conditions under which such an exchange might take place: “The minister attacks the lord” 臣攻主。<sup>130</sup> One particularly powerful entry, paired with an image of the clouds obscuring the sun, uses the modal particle *jiang* 將 to explicitly mark the incipience of the action of assassination: “The minister is about to assassinate the ruler”<sup>131</sup> 臣將弑其君。As frequently as the sun is, in fact, obscured by the clouds, this entry must have provided to the wary ruler quick confirmation of his suspicions regarding ministers of questionable loyalty. At the same time, the chart might give the ruler cause to take action against in-laws, particularly those related to his heir, who had ample motivation to hope for his early death.<sup>132</sup> One entry, which appears to depict the sun surrounded by *qi*, reads: “There will be an outsider who assassinates the ruler” 有外弑君。<sup>133</sup> “An outsider” (*wai* 外) might indicate soldiers or assassins from an adjacent polity, but might also mean *waiqi* 外戚, the relatives of the ruler’s consort. Perhaps the single most powerful and direct statement regarding the effect of broom-stars comes in the final passages of the chart. Simply and memorably put, “From wherever a comet emerges, the corresponding domain perishes” 彗星出所, 其邦亡。<sup>134</sup>

The basic claims of the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” and the problems with which it was concerned show us that, however remarkable and precise its representations of celestial bodies were, those measurements were directed at more immediately terrestrial concerns—gaining territory, avoiding defeat, maintaining the power of the local ruler, and anticipating broader changes in the political landscape, such as the death of the Son of Heaven. The observation of comets, clouds, halos, and other celestial signs, the manuscript suggests, would allow the Marquises of Dai to predict such changes. At the very least, the manuscript would serve those at court who exploited moments of doubt to argue that such changes were coming, and that appropriate political, ritual, or military actions should be taken.

### The Syntax of Celestial Signs: Eclipses and Other Encounters

The simplest objection to the practice of prognostication (in our modern and secular parlance “prediction”) is that it does not always work. Those seeking a one-to-one correspondence between a sign and the event it supposedly presages (or predicts) are bound to be disappointed. We do not give up consulting the weather forecast because it is sometimes wrong, nor do we quit going to the doctor because misdiagnosis, and consequently invalid prognosis, sometimes occurs. We understand that meteorologists and physicians are faced with myriad signs and symptoms by which they attempt to understand the phenomena before them, and make

<sup>128</sup> I follow Liu Lexian’s gloss of *mao* as *yi* 易 (exchange), see “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.1, n. 1.

<sup>129</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.1.

<sup>130</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 6.2.

<sup>131</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 4.15. Alternatively, *jiang* might be read as the noun, “general.” The full sentence would then read, “The ministers and generals assassinate the ruler.”

<sup>132</sup> For an excellent, early analysis of the dangers of palace life, see the Hanfeizi’s 韓非子 (c. 280–233 BCE) “Bei nei” 備內 chapter of the *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Collected Commentaries to the Hanfeizi) (17.82–85) in *Zhuzi jicheng* vol. 5. Burton Watson translates the piece under the title of “Precautions within the Palace” in *Basic Writings of Han Fei Tzu* in the omnibus volume *Basic Writings Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963–1964): 84–9.

<sup>133</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 4.31.

<sup>134</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C22.

valid assessments of both what is happening and what will happen. Future events are contingent upon present conditions. Those conditions are numerous, complex, and mutually interrelated. Signs occur not one-by-one but in groups that interact with one another. For every one sign that is actually meaningful, there are many red herrings. The Marquises of Dai would have consulted multiple signs, for they lived in a complex world. The readings of encounters between multiple celestial bodies in the Dai corpus reflects that complexity and evinces that signs were read in conjunction with one another rather than in isolation.

The “Five Planets” contains numerous passages that explain the portents associated with encounters between the planets. Almost all of them predict warfare—whether in the form of an invasion, the victory of one domain or another, the death of a general, or the destruction of an army. One passage near the end of the section on Great White gets to the heart of the matter: “When the Great Stars make haste to violate one another, there will be battle” 凡大星趨相犯也，必戰。<sup>135</sup> When another planet meets with the Dazzling Deluder, disaster ensues: “When it encounters another planet...both those to the south and those to the north all will die” 其與它星遇，口口口口 [在]其南，在其北，皆為死亡。<sup>136</sup> The manuscript describes at length encounters that occur between Great White and Lesser White (Xiaobai 小白), an alternate name for Mercury. When the two planets rise at the same time, Lesser White represents those who “use military means” (*yong bing* 用兵). Should Lesser White “enter into” (*ru* 入) Great White, and emerge from the top of Great White, “armies will be destroyed, generals killed, and the guest victorious” 破軍殺將，客勝。<sup>137</sup> A passage that refers to Venus and Jupiter respectively as Yin 殷 and Xiang 相 puts the two planets on more equal footing. When an encounter between the two occurs in which Venus is the guest, the domain corresponding to the brighter planet (*nu zhe* 怒者) will be victorious in battle.<sup>138</sup> Encounters between the moon and the planets, sometimes characterized as *shi* 蝕 or “eclipses,” are also prominent in the manuscript. The arrangement of elements again proves critical: “When the moon and a planet pass one another, if the moon rises to the south of Great White, *yin* domains will suffer military incursions, but if the moon rises to its north, then *yang* domains will suffer military incursions” 月與星相過也，月出大白南，陰國受兵；月出其北，陽國受兵。<sup>139</sup> Another somewhat fragmentary passage describes what is portended when the moon eclipses each of the Five Planets, and the star Great Horn, Arcturus:

月蝕歲星，不出十三年[國饑亡]；[蝕填星，不出口]年其國伐而亡；蝕大白，不出九年國有亡城，強國戰不勝；[蝕熒惑，其國以亂亡]；[蝕晨星，不出]三年國有亂兵；蝕大角，不三年天子口口口口

If the moon eclipses the Year Star, then in no more than thirteen years, [the corresponding domain will perish from hunger]. [If it eclipses the Quelling Star, in no more than...] years the corresponding domain will perish in a punitive campaign. If it eclipses Great

<sup>135</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 81, line 67.

<sup>136</sup> “Wuxing zhan,” Mars Subsection H, 46, line 47.

<sup>137</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 68, line 27.

<sup>138</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 77, line 62. The unusual designation for these two planets suggests that the passage may once have belonged to a tradition separate from other parts of the manuscript.

<sup>139</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 75, line 37.

White, then in no more than nine years, the corresponding domain will lose its walls, or if it is a powerful domain, it will lose in battle. [If it eclipses the Dazzling Deluder, the corresponding domain will perish due to disorder.] [If it eclipses the Watch Star, then in no more than] three years there will be rebellious troops<sup>140</sup> in the corresponding domain. If it eclipses Great Horn, it will be not three years before the Son of Heaven...<sup>141</sup>

While much of Liu Lexian's transcription of this passage, presented just above, is reconstructed on the basis of various received texts, even without taking into account the questionable bracketed lines, we can see that the notion of an "eclipse" encompassed interactions between the moon and certain bright stars. In each case, encounters between the moon and a planet portended disastrous results for the corresponding regions. The moon's eclipse of the star Great Horn was meaningful with respect to the central figure of the Son of Heaven. While we cannot be certain what the sign portended for him, if the pattern in the passage continues, it could not have meant anything good.

Planetary omens, too, operated in a kind of syntax, as they had to be read against the constellations in which they occurred. The twenty-eight lunar lodges corresponded to different geographic locations, in what is commonly referred to as the "Celestial Field" (*fen ye* 分野) system. While the table at the end of the "Five Planets," identified the constellation in which three of the Five Planets should be located at a given time, the manuscript contained no account of the regions corresponding to those constellations. Curiously, this information is instead included in the meteoromantic section of the "Punishment and Favor" manuscripts:

婺女，齊南地也。虛，齊北地也。危，齊西地也。營宮，魯。東壁，衛。縷(婁)，燕。

The lodge Lovely Maiden corresponds to the southern lands of Qi. The lodge Barrens corresponds to the northern lands of Qi. The lodge Roof corresponds to the western lands of Qi. The lodge Palace<sup>142</sup> corresponds to Lu. The lodge Eastern Wall corresponds to Wey. The lodge Harvester corresponds to Yan.<sup>143</sup>

Thus, Duke Jing of Qi 齊景公 (r. 547–490 BCE) was stricken with fear when the Dazzling Deluder lingered long in Barrens because Barrens corresponded to his own domain.<sup>144</sup> Had the Dazzling Deluder lingered in Palace, more commonly known as House (Shi 室), he might have seen an opportunity to invade Lu instead. The inclusion of correspondences between

<sup>140</sup> The "Wuxing zhan' shiwen" has *neibing* 內兵 (civil war) for *luanbing* 亂兵 (rebellious troops) (5).

<sup>141</sup> "Wuxing zhan" 40, lines 39–40. The "Wuxing zhan' shiwen" fills the lacuna following *Tianzi* (The Son of Heaven) with the characters *you, lao yu kong* 優，牢獄空 (5). The final line would read: "The Son of Heaven is anxious and the prisons are empty." They appear to be filling in the text on the basis of Qutan Xida's 瞿曇悉達 (fl. 718 CE) *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 (Prognosticatory Classic of the Opening Epoch Reign [713–741]) 13.3 in *Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 (*Complete Books of the Four Chambers*), Wenyuange edition, Intranet version, (2007).

<sup>142</sup> Liu Lexian notes that this is most likely an alternate name for the lodge House (*shi* 室).

<sup>143</sup> "Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan" 189, lines 55–56.

<sup>144</sup> See Chapter 1, p. 2, n. 4 in the present work for details.

constellations and domains in the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts rather than the “Five Planets” itself further supports the view that the manuscripts were used in conjunction by the same group of experts at court.

Elsewhere in the “Punishment and Favor” manuscripts, syntactic relationships between the involved signs occur along the temporal rather than the spatial axis. One examines the position of a sign within the sexagenary cycle to determine when lightning is a meaningful sign and when it is just weather. While the “Punishment and Favor” does not emphasize encounters between celestial signs to the extent that other manuscripts under discussion here do, it does include some examples of such signs: “When the Dazzling Deluder enters the moon, there is domestic disorder in the domain corresponding to the lodge where it occurs” 營（熒）械（惑）入月中，所宿其國內亂。<sup>145</sup> While we saw in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications” an instance where the moon pierced by clouds presaged the murder of the ruler, the “Punishment and Favor” meteoromantic passage glosses the eclipsed sun as the ruler, and the eclipsed moon as his queen-consort: “An eclipse of the sun occurs on account of the King, and an eclipse of the moon occurs on account of the Queen” 日食，為王；月食，為后。<sup>146</sup> The meteoromantic text, moreover, contains, as we saw above, an extensive discussion of halos, which are read in relation to the object that they encircle. The structure of the halos in concentric circles is homologous to the political structure of the empire. Nine halos around the sun portends that local lords will be established anew.<sup>147</sup>

The “Miscellaneous Prognostications” likewise is concerned with various types of eclipses. Eclipses of the planets were powerful portents. “When the moon eclipses a planet, there will be a domain that perishes, a planet that does not rise from the earth” 月食星，有亡邦，不出地之星。<sup>148</sup> The manuscript contains entries on “eclipses of *wu* days” 戊食, “eclipses of land” (*di shi* 地食), “eclipses of *yin*” 陰食, “eclipses of those who are not victorious” (*bu sheng shi* 不勝食), “eclipses of the year” (*sui*<sup>149</sup> *shi* 歲食), and “great eclipses” (*da*<sup>150</sup> *shi* 大食).<sup>151</sup> What precisely is meant by these terms is not always clear. Are “eclipses of *yin*” occasions when *yin* is eclipsed or when *yin* causes an eclipse? Or does *yin* refer metonymically to some other object referred to by its *yin* qualities, rather than some abstracted notion of *yin* in itself? Liu Lexian notes that there is no consensus regarding whether these refer to solar or lunar eclipses, but as mentioned above, the notion of an eclipse in early China was not limited to eclipses of the sun and moon, but also included eclipses of the planets and certain stars. The striking oddity of these signs suggests that the notion of an eclipse may have had a much wider valence in the early traditions surrounding celestial signs than we might expect.

Clouds too figure prominently in the encounters between celestial signs that occur in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications.” We have already seen that the manuscript associates an image of clouds obscuring the sun with ministers slaying their lord. Clouds around the moon may have military implications or, like clouds obscuring the sun, portend the murder of the ruler.

<sup>145</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 175, line 15.

<sup>146</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 174, lines 13–14.

<sup>147</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 174, line 13.

<sup>148</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.22. Gu Tiefu has *wu* 屋 (room) for *xing* 星 (planet) (*Xiyang chugao* 217).

<sup>149</sup> *Sui* might also be read as “harvest” or “The Year Star.”

<sup>150</sup> *Da* 大 here might also be an abbreviated form of *Dajiao* 大角, Great Horn.

<sup>151</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 1.39–43, 1.46.

Yellow clouds beneath the moon suggest that an invading army will lose in battle.<sup>152</sup> Another entry suggests an analogous relationship between the shape of a cloud and a murder weapon: “Wherever there is a cloud that stabs the moon, the lord of the domain will be murdered” 有雲刺月，當者邦君式(弑)死。<sup>153</sup>

Encounters between the sun, moon, and planets are included in the notion of the eclipse in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications.” Such encounters spell disastrous consequences for the corresponding domains: “When the moon eclipses a planet, there will be a domain that perishes. If the planet emerges, then the domain will be re-established. If the planet does not emerge, then the domain really will perish” 月食星，有亡邦。星出，復立；不出，果亡。<sup>154</sup> One eerie entry describes a planet seeming to sap the sun of its light. “When a great star [i.e. a planet] enters the sun, and the sun does not shine forth, in the domain corresponding to where this occurs, there will be death and destruction” 大星入日，日不光，邦當者死亡。<sup>155</sup> There are occasions when the text presents images that, on first reading, sound as if they could not possibly describe actual astronomic or meteorological events. The seeming impossibility of such images gives them an extraordinary power, which is further imbued with the specific significance articulated in the captions. Two entries involve the appearance of multiple moons. “When two moons emerge at the same time, a domain will be lost” 兩月並出，有邦亡。<sup>156</sup> Four moons are a still more ominous portent. “When four moon emerge at the same time, this is called disordering... [The world] will greatly...gives rise to warfare” 四月並出，是胃(謂)亂口，[天]下口口口興兵。<sup>157</sup> One particularly strange and disturbing entry involves the reversal of the course of celestial bodies. “When the sun and the new moon both rise in the West, the world will flow [with blood]” 日、朔皆出于西方，天下流[血]。<sup>158</sup>

The sun, moon, and planets did not produce meaning in and of themselves, as entities in isolation, but were read against that which surrounded them—halos, constellations, clouds, days in the sexagenary calendar. The process of making meaning was syntactic rather than symbolic, produced through juxtaposition rather than the identification of one-to-one correspondences. Just as celestial signs produced meaning in relationship to other signs around them, the celestial signs manuscripts would have produced meaning in relation to other texts that surrounded them.

### The Celestial Signs Manuscripts and the *Changes* in the Dai Corpus

Manuscripts related to the *Changes*, complete with numerous supplementary materials, were placed in the same lacquer box that contained the celestial signs manuscripts. These included a text closely corresponding to the “Xici zhuan” 繫辭傳 (Tradition of the Appended

<sup>152</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.26.

<sup>153</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” B16.

<sup>154</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C16. *Xing* 星 should not be read as “star” here, as even a half-moon appears to “eclipse” numerous different stars over the course of an evening under reasonably dark skies.

<sup>155</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” C14.

<sup>156</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.27.

<sup>157</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 2.23. Due to the fragmentary state of this entry, the translation is very tentative. Gu Tiefu gives the first character of the longer series of lacunae as *da* 大 (great) (*Xiyang chugao* 217). These entries may in fact describe the optical phenomena known as “moon dogs,” in which multiple moons seem to appear in the sky.

<sup>158</sup> “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” B7.



Statements)<sup>159</sup> and several heretofore lost essays and dialogues, including the “Yao” 要 (Essentials),<sup>160</sup> the “Er san zi wen” 二三字問 (Inquiries of Two or Three Disciples),<sup>161</sup> and the eponymously titled “Muhe” 繆和<sup>162</sup> and “Zhaoli” 昭力.<sup>163</sup> The celestial signs manuscripts do not refer to these materials in any explicit way. However, just as the celestial signs manuscripts and the *Changes* materials occupy the same physical space in the tomb, they once occupied the same discursive space—the court of the Marquises of Dai. Both sets of materials were available to the same group of people at the same time; their very proximity makes them relevant to one another.<sup>164</sup> The discussion of prognostication in the Dai *Changes* materials constitutes an excellent alternative to questions of scientific value as a framework for contextualizing the celestial signs manuscripts within the broader Dai corpus. What sort of light, then, did the Dai *Changes* materials cast upon the celestial signs manuscripts and the practice of reading celestial signs? Scattered among the fragments, a picture emerges in which the *Changes* itself appears to be based on sagely emulation of celestial signs, even the best diviners often produce inaccurate results, and both auspicious and inauspicious portents demand immediate action.

While the celestial signs manuscripts do not appeal to narratives of sagely origin, read against the Dai *Changes* materials the interpretation of celestial signs might have seemed to be a sagely enterprise. The opening of the text corresponding to the “Appended Statements” reads:<sup>165</sup>

天奠(尊)地庠(卑), 鍵(乾)川(坤)定矣。庠(卑)高已陳, 貴賤立(位)矣。動靜有常, 剛柔斷矣。方以類取(聚), 物以羣[分, 吉凶生[矣。在天成象], [在]地成刑(形), [變]化見矣。是[故]剛柔相摩, 八卦[相盪, 鼓之以雷旬, 潤之以風雨, [日月]運行, 一寒[一暑]。

<sup>159</sup> The version of the “Appended Statements” found at Mawangdui does not have a title and differs substantially from the received text. Much of the material now found in the second *juan* of the received text corresponds to passages in other *Changes* related texts found at Mawangdui (Shaughnessy 20).

<sup>160</sup> The title “Yao,” along with a character count, is given at the end of this text. I borrow Shaughnessy’s apt translation of the title of this piece (Shaughnessy 24).

<sup>161</sup> This title is not included in the manuscript but is used as a matter of convenience by scholars (Shaughnessy 19).

<sup>162</sup> The title “Muhe” appears following this text (Shaughnessy 25).

<sup>163</sup> The title “Zhaoli” appears following this text, along with a character account, which apparently includes both “Muhe” and “Zhaoli” (Shaughnessy 26).

<sup>164</sup> The extent to which the *Changes* materials bore on the readings of celestial signs is not absolutely clear; we have no memorials or court proceedings through which we might say, for certain, that readers of celestial signs at court cited the classic or its commentaries in their interpretations of celestial signs. Yet, those who knew the celestial signs manuscripts likely knew the *Changes* materials as well.

<sup>165</sup> I have adopted Zhang Zhenglang’s 張政烺 transcription for the base text for the Mawangdui “Appended Statements” and “Inquiries of Two or Three Disciples,” cited as “Xici zhuan” and “Er san zi wen.” Zhang’s handwritten notes are reproduced, along with photographs of the relevant manuscripts, in the posthumously published volume *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi jingzhuan jiaodu* 馬王堆帛書周易經傳校讀 (A Text-Critical Reading of the Mawangdui Silk Zhou Changes Classic and Its Commentaries; Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008), hereafter as Zhang Zhenglang. For the transcription of the “Essentials,” I have employed Chen Songchang 陳松長 and Liao Mingchun 廖名春, “Yao shi wen” 《要》釋文 (Transcription of the “Essentials”), *Daojia wenhua* 道家文化 (Daoist Culture) 3 (1993): 434–35. I have consulted and sometimes borrowed certain renderings from Edward Shaughnessy’s translation of these materials.

Heaven exalted and Earth humble, Key and River are fixed. Low and high<sup>166</sup> set forth, noble and base take their places. Movement and stillness abundant in constancy, the firm and the supple are clearly distinguished. The [Four] Quarters gather together things of the same kind, animals divide themselves into groups, and good fortune and ill-fortune are born. [In the heavens signs form, and on] the land shapes form, so that the alternations<sup>167</sup> appear. For this [reason] the firm and the supple grind against one another, and the Eight Trigrams jostle into one another, drumming them forth with lightning and thunder-claps, moistening them with wind and rain, [the sun and moon] revolving along their courses, one cold, the other hot.<sup>168</sup>

The text fittingly begins with an account of the differentiation of the cosmos. Mutually opposed yet complementary aspects of the cosmos, Heaven and Earth, low and high, movement and stillness, settle and produce stable patterns of difference: the pure *yang* hexagram Key and the pure *yin* hexagram River,<sup>169</sup> the noble and the base, the hard and the supple. In each of the cardinal directions materials and living beings of the same kind gather, just as birds of a feather gather together into flocks, and beasts of the same kind gather into herds and packs. Good and ill fortune, images in the firmament, and the topography of the land emerge from this process. The Eight Trigrams, the most fundamental signs in the *Changes*, produce celestial signs: thunder and lightning, wind and rain. The sun and moon both oppose and complete one another and serve as emblems of constant, dynamic regularity.

The sage himself attaches verbal meaning to the signs and thereby renders them intelligible. “The sage set forth the hexagrams by observing the images, and he attached the line statements to them so as to make good fortune and ill-fortune clear” 口<sup>170</sup>(聖)人詆(設)卦觀馬(象), 口<sup>171</sup>(繫)辭焉而明吉凶.<sup>172</sup> The hexagrams thus become a perhaps more convenient means of observing the signs that are already out there in the world, a simulacrum of images in the firmament.<sup>173</sup> The “Appended Statements” frames the *Changes* as a powerful tool for understanding developments in the human realm, but one that is ultimately predicated on sagely observation of both celestial patterns and earthly contours (*dili* 地理):

<sup>166</sup> I do not adopt Zhang Zhenglang’s emendation of *yi* 己 to *yi* 以 (110).

<sup>167</sup> For alternation as the sense of *bian* 變 in the “Appended Statements,” see Nathan Sivin, “Change and Continuity in Early Cosmology: *The Great Commentary to The Book of Changes*” in Yamada Keiji 山田慶兒 ed., *Chugoku godai kagakushi ron zoku hen* 中国古代科学史論続編 (Essays on Ancient Chinese Science; Kyoto: Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1989): 3–43.

<sup>168</sup> “Xici zhuan” l. 1 in Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi*, 110–11.

<sup>169</sup> These two hexagrams are better known by their names in the received *Changes*, respectively Qian 乾 and Kun 坤. Zhang Zhenglang’s marginal emendations suggest that he views these as orthographic variants.

<sup>170</sup> This character is a *sheng* 聖 without the *wang* 王 element.

<sup>171</sup> This character is a *xi* 繫 without the silk radical (*mi* 糸).

<sup>172</sup> “Xici zhuan” l. 3 in Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi*, 110.

<sup>173</sup> As Willard Peterson has argued, one of the most basic claims of the “Appended Statements” is that the mantic technique of the *Changes* “duplicates relationships and processes at work in the realm of heaven–and–earth.” See his “Making Connections: ‘Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations’ of the *Book of Change*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 1 (Jun., 1982): 85.

印(仰)以觀於天文，口<sup>174</sup>(俯)以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反(返)冬(終)，故知死生之說。

Raising their heads they observed the celestial patterns, and lowering their heads they inspected the contours of the land, and thus, they knew the reasons for obscurity and illumination. They traced things back to their beginnings and returned to their ends, and thus knew the explanations for life and death.”<sup>175</sup>

The Dai *Changes* materials, moreover, cast the sage ruler as one who is equally mindful of the state of the heavens and hearts of his subjects. One passage in the “Inquiries of Two or Three Disciples” reads:

聖人之立正[政]也，必尊天而敬眾，理順五行，天地無菑(災)，民口不折，甘露時雨眾降，粟(飄)<sup>176</sup>風苦雨不至，民心相觴以壽，故曰番[蕃]庶。]

When a sage establishes his administration, he will for certain revere Heaven and be attentive to his subjects. He patterns himself on and follows the Five Courses, so that there are no disasters in Heaven nor Earth. The people...are not harmed, so that sweet dew and timely rains fall in abundance, and whirlwinds and bitter rains do not arrive. The people in their hearts toast to his long life, thus [the *Changes*] says “They prosper.”<sup>177</sup>

The sage continually observes and is responsive to both the heavens and his subjects, and both the heavens and his subjects respond in kind to him. Auspicious signs appear above, which serve not only to promise good fortune, but to make for successful agriculture and a well-fed, content populace. The sage pays particular attention to the Five Courses, the paths of the Five Planets.<sup>178</sup>

The Dai *Changes* materials likewise draw attention to the need to take timely action in response to signs, regardless of whether they appear in the firmament or as the result of milfoil divination. In another passage in the “Inquiries of Two or Three Disciples,” Kongzi claims that the initial six line of the hexagram River, “treading on frost, the hard ice arrives” 履霜堅冰至，

<sup>174</sup> Shaughnessy transcribes this character as *fu*, consisting in *fu* 甫 adjacent to *ye* 頁 (190).

<sup>175</sup> “Xici zhuan” line 6 in Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi*, 110.

<sup>176</sup> For this character and its suggested equivalent, I give Shaughnessy’s transcription. Zhang has this character as *piao* 飄 with a grass radical (*cao* 艹) on top.

<sup>177</sup> “Er san zi wen” lines 12–13 in Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi*, 95–96.

<sup>178</sup> Alternatively, at the court of Dai *wuxing* might have been read in terms of the “Five Kinds of Actions” elaborated in the “Wuxing pian” (See Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue*). In this context *wuxing* should not be understood as the Five Resources, which would not be integrated into the *yinyang* and *qi* cosmology of the *Changes* until the time of Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE). No known text prior to Yang Xiong’s *Taixuan jing* 太玄經 (Canon of Supreme Mystery, ca. 4 BCE) fuses *yinyang*, *qi*, and the *wuxing* into “single unified theory of *qi*” in which all three of the following conditions, originally proposed by Nathan Sivin, are met: A) *wuxing* and *yinyang* “describe relations rather than element or entities”; B) they represent “aspectual” or “overlapping” designations; and c) they “refer to ‘processual’ modes of *qi*.” See Michael Nylan, “Yin–yang, Five Phases, and *qi*” in Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe eds., *China’s Early Empire: A Re-appraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 399. For the *Taixuan jing*, see Michael Nylan, *The Canon of Supreme Mystery: A Translation with Commentary of the T’ai Hsüan Ching* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

refers to “the timely admonitions of Heaven” 天時譖.<sup>179</sup> In the opening of “Muhe,” the otherwise unknown disciple of Kongzi asks the master about the meaning of a certain line in the *Changes*. The master’s response points to the exigency of immediately capitalizing on good fortune: “Muhe asked his teacher: ‘Might I inquire about the *Changes*? In the second nine line of the hexagram Dispersion, where it says ‘Dispersion is to run up the stairs, regret vanishes.’ I am in doubt regarding its meaning” 繆和問于先生曰：請問《易》？渙之九二曰「渙賁其階，悔亡」，此辭吾甚疑焉。<sup>180</sup> After a modest and perfunctory initial refusal, the Master explains the sense of the name of the hexagram in terms of the need to seize opportunities:

子曰：渙者，散也。賁階，幾也，時也。古之君子時福至則進取，時亡則以讓。夫時至而能既焉，散走其時，唯恐失之，故當其時而弗能用也，至于其失之也……無千歲之國，無百歲之家，無十歲之能……聖人知福之難得而賁也。

The Master said: To disperse is to scatter. To run up the stairs is to approach it, and to be timely. The lords of antiquity gathered prosperity unto themselves in times when it came along, and let it go at times when there was none to be had. In times when it came along, they were able to take full advantage of it, and in times when it scattered, they only feared losing it, because those who are not able to use it at the opportune time, end up losing it. ...There are no domains that last a thousand years, no households that last a hundred, and no opportunities that last even ten....The sage knows that prosperity is hard to come by and runs toward it...<sup>181</sup>

In the Master’s response, prosperity (*fu* 福) is highly contingent, subject to circumstances beyond the control of any individual. It carries the sense of good fortune to the extent that it is a product of chance. Yet, at the same time, they do have the power to seize or squander whatever opportunities to obtain prosperity might come along, even if neither an individual person nor an entire domain can create those opportunities. The Marquises of Dai lived in chaotic and uncertain times. The Master’s emphatic statement that all families and all domains are bound to perish is as prescient as it is fatalistic. Prognostication, whether in the form of reading celestial signs, casting milfoil stalks, or employing some other method, would have served as a means of assessing the times and recognizing not only dangers but opportunities before the opportune moment had passed.

The Dai *Changes* materials, however, express a certain ambivalence toward prognostication. The “Essentials” amounts to an apology for milfoil prognostication; it admits both the potential for spiritual corruption arising from prognostic practices and the high level of inaccuracy prognostication involves. The famous disciple of Kongzi, Zigong 子貢 (d. 5<sup>th</sup> cent.

<sup>179</sup> “Er san zi wen” line 18 in Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi*, 97–8. While this character is relatively clear on the silk manuscript, Zhang Zhenglang nonetheless pencils in a question mark next to it, perhaps due to the odd word usage. I follow Shaughnessy’s (177) understanding of the word *zen* 譖 as “warning,” though it generally means “slander.”

<sup>180</sup> “Muhe” line 1. I have consulted and borrowed from Richard John Lynn’s translation of the hexagram Dispersion in the received text. See his *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 513.

<sup>181</sup> “Muhe” lines 2–4.

BCE), recalls his master's earlier admonitions in which he had compared milfoil prognostication with a dangerous proximity to spirits and gods: "Those who fail to act with character hurry off toward spirits and gods, and those who keep their distance from knowledge and forethought practice milfoil prognostication" 愆(德)行亡者，神靈(靈)之趨；知(智)謀遠者，卜策之察。<sup>182</sup> Zigong, following his teacher's earlier remark, sees milfoil prognostication as a lazy and potentially dangerous substitute for patient deliberation, a deviation from his master's teachings. Kongzi clarifies himself, however, explaining that consulting the *Changes* does not necessarily constitute such a deviation, pointing to its antiquity and its complete state, all without retracting his earlier statement:

君子言以口<sup>183</sup>(槩)方也。前羊(祥)而至者，弗羊(祥)而好(?)<sup>184</sup>也。察其要者，不口<sup>185</sup>(詭)其德。尚書多於(闕)周易未失也，且又(有)古之道言焉。予非安其用也。

The words of the exemplary individual are straightened with the carpenter's square. It is not the good auspices that I delight in, but that which precedes such auspices. Those who clearly understand the essentials do not turn their backs on character. There are numerous barriers in the *Venerable Documents*, but the *Changes of Zhou* has yet to be lost. Moreover, it contains the way and the words of antiquity. But it is not the case that I am at ease in using it.<sup>186</sup>

Kongzi maintains that he meant what he said; his words were as straight as the carpenter's square. Moreover, he openly expresses a sense of distress in using the *Changes*, despite its antiquity and its value. Even for the most exemplary person, prognostication is a matter of grave caution. The crux of the problem is the relationship between the results of a prognostication, or the auspices, and that which precedes the auspices. Kongzi does not deny that one may deviate from good character in using the *Changes* if one fails to grasp its essentials. What precedes the auspices, when the *Changes* is used properly, is the correct mindset of the individual performing the prognostication. As the text says elsewhere "...without character, one cannot understand the *Changes*, and so, the exemplary individual is reverent towards it" 無德，則不能知易，故君子奠(尊)之。<sup>187</sup> Its potential dangers notwithstanding, the "Essentials" treats the *Changes* itself as a work that is invested with the virtue of King Wen. "King Wen was humane. He did not obtain a position through which he could put his ideals into effect. Zhou then lost the Way, and King Wen arose. He concealed himself and avoided blame, and only thereafter, the *Changes* began to flourish" 文王仁。不得其志以成其慮，紂乃無道，文王作，諱辟(避)咎，然後易始興也。<sup>188</sup> King Wen is elsewhere known for constructing the Sixty-four hexagrams of the *Changes* from

<sup>182</sup> Chen and Liao, "'Yao' shiwen," line 13.

<sup>183</sup> This character is not absent from the text, but because it appears not to be included in Unicode, I am unable to enter it. It consists in the element *ju* 巨 over *mu* 木.

<sup>184</sup> This question mark is included in the Chen Songchang and Liao Mingchun transcription.

<sup>185</sup> This character too, also apparently non-Unicode, consists in the element *yan* 言 on the left and the element *zou* 走 on the right.

<sup>186</sup> Chen and Liao, "'Yao' shiwen," lines 13–14.

<sup>187</sup> Chen and Liao, "'Yao' shiwen," line 8.

<sup>188</sup> Chen and Liao, "'Yao' shiwen," lines 15–16

the existing Eight Trigrams.<sup>189</sup> The “Essentials” locates the rise of the *Changes* with the rise of a figure imbued with suasive power. If King Wen engaged in prognostication, it could not be all bad. At the conclusion of his reply to Zigong, Kongzi quips: “How could anyone say that I serve [the wicked King] Zhou?” 予何曰(?)事紂乎?<sup>190</sup> While at least the hexagrams themselves are of sagely origin, Kongzi remains ambivalent concerning the results of any particular casting. Prognostication is to be performed in moments of uncertainty, but its results are highly uncertain in themselves. Kongzi explains to Zigong: “Out of one hundred prognostications, I get it right seventy times. Even when Liangshan of Zhou performed his prognostications, he had to go with the majority! That’s all there is to it” 子曰: 吾百占而七十當, 唯周梁山之占也, 亦必從其多者而已矣!<sup>191</sup>

The question of in what manner and to what extent the discourse around prognostication in the *Changes* entered into the minds of those at the court of the Marquises of Dai who engaged in prognostication using the celestial signs manuscripts is perhaps unanswerable, but is nonetheless a question that we must ask. In contrast to the case of technical treatises from the time of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han, ca. 100 CE) on, the *Changes* is not a ubiquitous source of Classical authority in the Dai celestial signs manuscripts. We do not, moreover, possess any absolute means of proving that court experts, or the rulers themselves, considered milfoil prognostication to be related to or analogous with prognostication based on celestial signs. We do know, however, that both sets of texts belonged to the same textual community. Even if we cannot say definitively that they were ever brought into dialogue at court, we know that there was at least the potential for such a dialogue to occur. In light of the inclusion of the *Changes* materials, several claims might be made about the celestial signs and their interpretation that are not directly supported within the celestial signs manuscripts themselves.

1. Successful prognostication depends on the *de* (character or suasive power) of the practitioner.
2. At least some prognostic texts are of sagely origin.
3. A good ruler seizes opportunities in good time.
4. Even the best practitioners often produce inaccurate prognostications.

The first of these claims casts readers of celestial signs as more than mere technicians, but as individuals whose particular suasive power was essential to the correct interpretation of the signs before them. Not just anyone could identify the position of Great White in a given celestial field and know what that portended for the corresponding domain simply by examining the “Five Planets.” It took a particular kind of person with a particular kind of mindset. The second claim might vest the celestial signs manuscripts with greater authority, if these too were thought to have originated with a sage author. It is open to question, however, whether King Wen’s authorship of the *Changes* hexagrams could have been generalized to a claim for sagely authorship of a broad range of technical prognostic texts.<sup>192</sup> The third claim underscores the

<sup>189</sup> *Shiji* 4.119.

<sup>190</sup> Chen and Liao, “‘Yao’ shiwen,” line 16. King Zhou is the last Shang ruler, whose regime was toppled by King Wen’s son, King Wu 武 (r. 1046–1043 BCE). See Chapter 3, pp. 92–94; 98–99.

<sup>191</sup> Chen and Liao, “‘Yao’ shiwen,” lines 16–17.

<sup>192</sup> The Dai celestial signs manuscripts do not, unlike Sima Qian’s “Celestial Offices,” establish a lineage of readers

relationship between prognostications and the willingness of the ruler to act on them. The celestial signs manuscripts more often suggest disengagement than action; negative injunctions to avoid military confrontation abound. However, in the rare case where opportunity does emerge, the third claim would suggest that rulers must not only recognize it, but seize it before it passes. The final claim is perhaps the most powerful, for it justifies error. Experts in prognostication at the court of the Marquises of Dai must have encountered at least some occasions where their prognostications were not borne out. They might have, in many instances, reasoned that the court had taken appropriate actions to ward off misfortune, or failed to act in a timely enough manner to take advantage of opportunities. However, the notion that even Kongzi could only get prognostication right seventy percent of the time, suggested that, even for the most skilled practitioners using the best of methods, inaccurate prognostications were a matter of course.

### Conclusion

We know little of the Marquises of Dai and their courts. We have no speeches, memorials, treatises, or poems they composed. We can understand them only by examining the texts and objects they interred with their dead, and by considering the historical circumstances of the times in which they lived. Yet we can tell a lot about a person by looking at her bookshelf, even today when books have become a cheap, expendable, almost disposable commodity. How much more so would this have been true in a world where texts were rare and precious? The texts interred in tomb 3 tell us a great deal about the anxieties that faced the unknown tomb occupant and his clansmen. The Marquises of Dai lived in a complex and unstable world where the bounty of their next harvest, the strength of their military defenses, and the loyalty of their courtiers were all uncertain. In moments of doubt, the celestial signs manuscripts were most likely one type of authority among many they might have consulted. They knew, from the *Changes* related materials they kept, that prognostication could lead them astray. Unwise they would have been to march into battle on account of an auspicious prognostication without first checking their supplies of grain and weapons, considering the level of training and number of troops in their armies, and reflecting on the loyalty of their generals. They might never have made decisions based solely on a single celestial sign, but instead, would have read multiple signs against what they knew of those who surrounded them at court, the circumstances of their neighboring polities, the level of training and numbers of their troops, the opinions of their trusted advisers, and even their own gut instincts.

**Appendix A: “Five Planets Prognostications,” Zodiacal Risings of the Queller**

[The Queller] rose at dawn in the east with House <sup>193</sup>	The First Year of Qin Shihuang	1	2	Line 91
House	2	2	3	92
Eastern Wall	3	3	4	93
Straddler	4	4	5	94
Harvester	5	5	6	95
Stomach	6	6	7	96
Rushes <sup>194</sup>	7	7 (210 BCE)	8	97
Net	8	8 Zhang Chu	First (179 BCE)	98
Beak <sup>195</sup>	9	9	2	99
Campaign <sup>196</sup>	10	40	3	100
Eastern Well	1	First Year of Han (206 BCE)		101
[Eastern] Well	2	2		102
Cart Ghost	3	3		103
Willow	4	4		104
Seven Stars <sup>197</sup>	5	5		105
Spread	6	6		106
Wing	7	7		107
Axletree	8	8		108
Horn	9	9		109
Gullet	20	10		110
Base	1	1		111
Chamber	2	2		112

<sup>193</sup> The phrase “rose at dawn in the east with” is repeated in the first row of each column, along with the name of a lunar lodge. For the names of the twenty-eight lunar lodges, I have generally followed Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: Tang Approaches to the Stars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977): 76.

<sup>194</sup> The manuscript has *mao* 茅 rather than *mao* 昴, or “Rushes” rather than “Mane.”

<sup>195</sup> Liu Lexian’s transcription of the manuscript has *cigui* 此齋 rather than *zui* 觜 for “Beak.” The “Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” has *zuijiao* 觜角 (10).

<sup>196</sup> The manuscript refers to *fa* 伐 rather than Triaster, *can* 參. Whereas *can* probably refers to the stars corresponding to Orion’s Belt, along with Betelgeuse and Bellatrix, *fa* likely refers to the stars in his sword.

<sup>197</sup> The manuscript has *qixing* 七星 rather than simply *xing* 星 or “Star.”



Heart	3	First Year of the Filial Emperor Hui (194 BCE)	113
Tail	4	2	114
Winnower	5	3	115
Dipper	6 (221 BCE)	4	116
Oxherd <sup>198</sup>	7	5	117
Lovely Maiden <sup>199</sup>	8	6	118
Barrens	9	7	119
Roof	30	First Year of the Dowager Empress (187 BCE)	120

---

<sup>198</sup> The manuscript has *qianniu* 牽牛 rather than *niu* 牛 or “Oxherd.”

<sup>199</sup> The manuscript has *wunü* 婺女 rather than 女, or “Lovely Maiden” rather than “Woman.”

### Appendix B: “Five Planets Prognostications,” The Dazzling Deluder

A. 南方火，其帝赤帝，其丞祝庸（融），其神上為[熒惑]。

The south corresponds to fire. Its God is the Red God. His Assistant is the Zhurong. Its spirit above is [the Dazzling Deluder.]

B. [進退]無恆，不可為[極]所見之□□兵格出二鄉反復一舍□□□年。

[Its advance and regression] are without constancy. One must not..which are seen...When troops emerge from the two directions; it again moves retrograde by one lodge...year.<sup>200</sup>

C. 其出西方，是胃（謂）反明，天下革王。

When it emerges from the west, this is called “The Reversal of Illumination.” The realm will change its king.

D. 其出東方，反行一舍，所去者吉，所之國受兵□□。

When it rises in the east, and reverses its course moving retrograde by one lodge, (the domain corresponding to the celestial field) from which it has departed will enjoy good fortune, while the domain to which it moves will suffer military incursions.

E. 熒惑絕道，其國分當其野[受殃]。

When the Dazzling Deluder strays from the path, the lot of the domain corresponding to its (celestial) field [will suffer calamities].

F. [居]之久 [殃]大；其發者央（殃）小；□□□央（殃）大。漑（既）已去之復環（還）居之央（殃）□。其周環繞之入央（殃）甚。其赤而角動大；央（殃）甚。

[If it dwells] in a place for a long period of time, [the calamity] will be great. If it springs into motion<sup>201</sup> the calamity will be minor...the calamity will be great. If it has already departed and again circles back to dwell in it, the calamity will be...When it cycles around and enters into it, the calamity will be severe. When it is red and its spikes flicker and are enlarged, the calamity will be severe.

G. 營（熒）或（惑）所留久者，三年而發。

Where the Dazzling Deluder dwells for a long period, after three years it will go on its way.

<sup>200</sup> As Liu Lexian notes, the meaning of this fragmentary section of text is not clear (“Wuxing zhan” 44, n. 3). Translation of all but the first four characters is doubtful.

<sup>201</sup> My rendering of *fa* 發 as “springs into motion” is based on the verbal sense of *fa* as “to shoot an arrow.”

H. 其與它星遇，口口口口 [在]其南，在其北，皆為死亡。

When it encounters another planet...both those to the south and those to the north all will die.<sup>202</sup>

I. 赤芒，南方之國利之；白芒，西方之國利之；黑芒，北方之國利之；青芒，東方之國利之；黃芒，中國利之。

When its spikes are red, the domains in the south will benefit. When its spikes are white, the domains in the west will benefit. When its spikes are black, the domains in the north will benefit. When its spikes are blue, the domains in the east will benefit. When its spikes are yellow, the domains in the center will benefit.

J. 口口營（熒）或（惑）于營室、角、畢、箕。

...when the Dazzling Deluder is in House, Horn, Net, or Winnower.

K. 營（熒）或（惑）主司天樂，淫于正音者，口駕（加）之央（殃），其咎。

The Dazzling Deluder is the Master of the Celestial Music. When there is error with regard to the upright tones...adds to the calamity. Its sign of blame...

L. [其時]夏，其日丙丁，月立（位）隅中，南方之有之。

[Its season is] the summer. Its days are *bing* and *ding*. Its moon position is the corner of the center.<sup>203</sup> The south possesses it.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Cullen, “Five Planets,” reads: “When it meets with another Star [sc. Planet], ... in the south, or in the north, in each case there will be death and destruction” (226).

<sup>203</sup> Liu explains that this likely refers to the time when the moon is near the zenith (“Wuxing zhan” 48, n.a2). Cullen, “Five Planets,” reads: “when the moon’s position is just before the meridian” (227).

<sup>204</sup> Liu suggests that “the south” refers to the domains of the south (“Wuxing zhan” 48, n.a3).

### Appendix C: “Five Planets Prognostications,” Planetary Taxonomies<sup>205</sup>

Planet	Direction	Resource	God 帝	Assistant 丞	Spirit 神	Season 時	Days 日	Moon Position 月位	Direction	Celestial Master
Jupiter	East 東方	Wood 木	Tai Hao 太浩 [皞]	Gou Mang 句芒	The Year Star 歲星					
Mars	South 南方	Fire 火	Red God 赤帝	Zhu Rong 朱庸[融]	The Dazzling Deluder 熒惑	Summer 夏	<i>bing</i> and <i>ding</i> 丙丁	Corner of the Center 隅中	The Southern Domains 南方之有 之	Master of Celestial Music 司天樂
Saturn	Center 中央	*Earth 土	Yellow God 黃帝	Lord Soil 后土	The Quelling Star 鎮星	The Center <sup>206</sup> 中央 分土	<i>wu</i> and <i>ji</i> 戊己	The Exact Center 正中	The Central Domains 中國有之	Master of Celestial Rites 司天禮
Mercury	North 北方	Water 水	Zhuan Xu 端玉 [顛頊]	Xuan Ming 玄冥	The Watch Star 晨[辰]星	Winter 東	<i>ren</i> and <i>gui</i> 壬癸	The West 西方	The Northern Domains 北方國有 之	Master of Celestial Power 司天德
Venus	West 西方	Metal 金	Shao Hao 少浩 [皞]	Ru Shou 蓐收	Great White 太白	Autumn 秋	<i>geng</i> and <i>xin</i> 庚辛	Moving West 失[眈]	The Western Domains 西方國有 之	Master of Celestial Sacrifice 司天獻

<sup>205</sup> For the information included in this table, see “Wuxing zhan” 29, line 1; 43, line 45; 48, line 51; 50, line 53; 51, line 54; 56, line 59; 57, line 17; 86, lines 76–77. The order of presentation of the planets is not entirely clear due to the fact that the manuscript was discovered in four distinct pieces. I have adopted the views of Liu Lexian, presented in “‘Wunxing zhan’ de pinzhui ji xianguan wenti” 五星占的拼綴及相關問題 (Putting Together the ‘Five Planets Prognostications’ and Associated Problems) in Liu Lexian 205–10. Designating these four pieces A, B, C, and D, Liu notes that they respectively contain lines 1–16; 17–38; 39–60; and 61–81. Line 60 is a hypothetical missing section of the text. Liu reverses sections B and C in his transcription on the basis of inconsistencies in the content of the sections in the earlier transcriptions. The earlier transcription of the Mawangdui team has the order as Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Saturn, and Mercury, followed by a more general section on the Five Planets. For their view, “‘Wuxing zhan’ shiwen.”

<sup>206</sup> This correspondence occupies the same position within the text where we would expect a season.

## Appendix D: Figures

### List of Figures

Figure 1a. “The Five Planets Prognostications,” manuscript.<sup>207</sup>

Figure 1b. “The Five Planets Prognostications,” table<sup>208</sup> (detail).

Figure 2a. “Punishment and Favor B,” layout.<sup>209</sup>

Figure 2b. “Punishment and Favor B,” manuscript.<sup>210</sup>

Figure 2c. “Punishment and Favor B,” Nine Palaces diagram (detail).<sup>211</sup>

Figure 3a. “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” clouds, *qi*, halos, and eclipses (detail).<sup>212</sup>

Figure 3b. “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” comets in context (detail).<sup>213</sup>

Figure 4. “Retrograde Mars.”<sup>214</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup> Wang Shujin 20.

<sup>208</sup> Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu*, 161.

<sup>209</sup> Kalinowski 130.

<sup>210</sup> Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu*, 132-33.

<sup>211</sup> Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu*, 135.

<sup>212</sup> Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu*, 155.

<sup>213</sup> Zhang Zhenglang, *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu*, 160.

<sup>214</sup> Tunc Tezel, “Retrograde Mars,” NASA, Astronomy Picture of the Day, December 16, 2003, accessed May 7, 2013. [http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/image/0312/retrogrademars03\\_tezel.jpg](http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/image/0312/retrogrademars03_tezel.jpg).

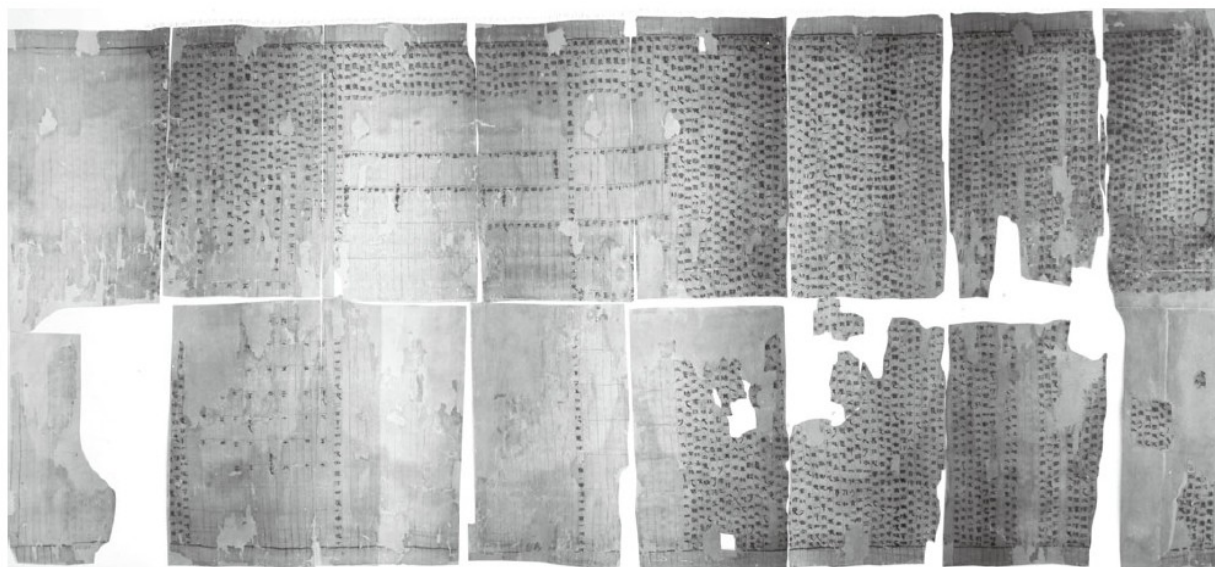


Figure 1a. “The Five Planets Prognostications,” manuscript.



Figure 1b. “The Five Planets Prognostications,” table (detail).

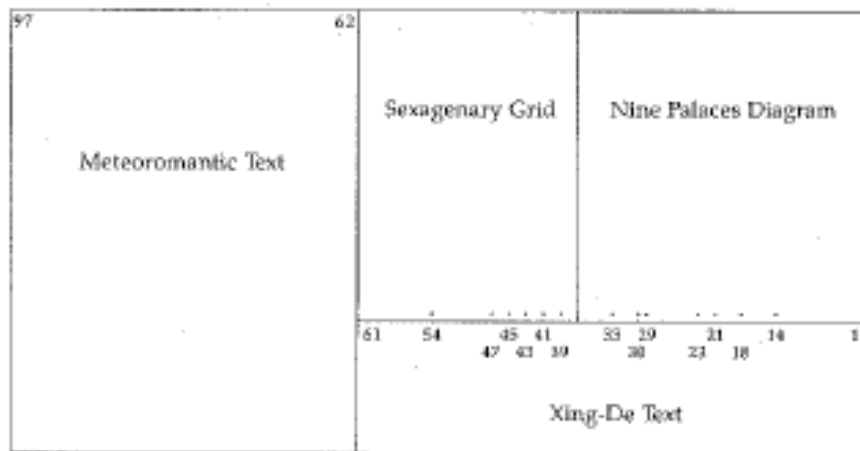


Figure 2a. "Punishment and Favor B," layout.

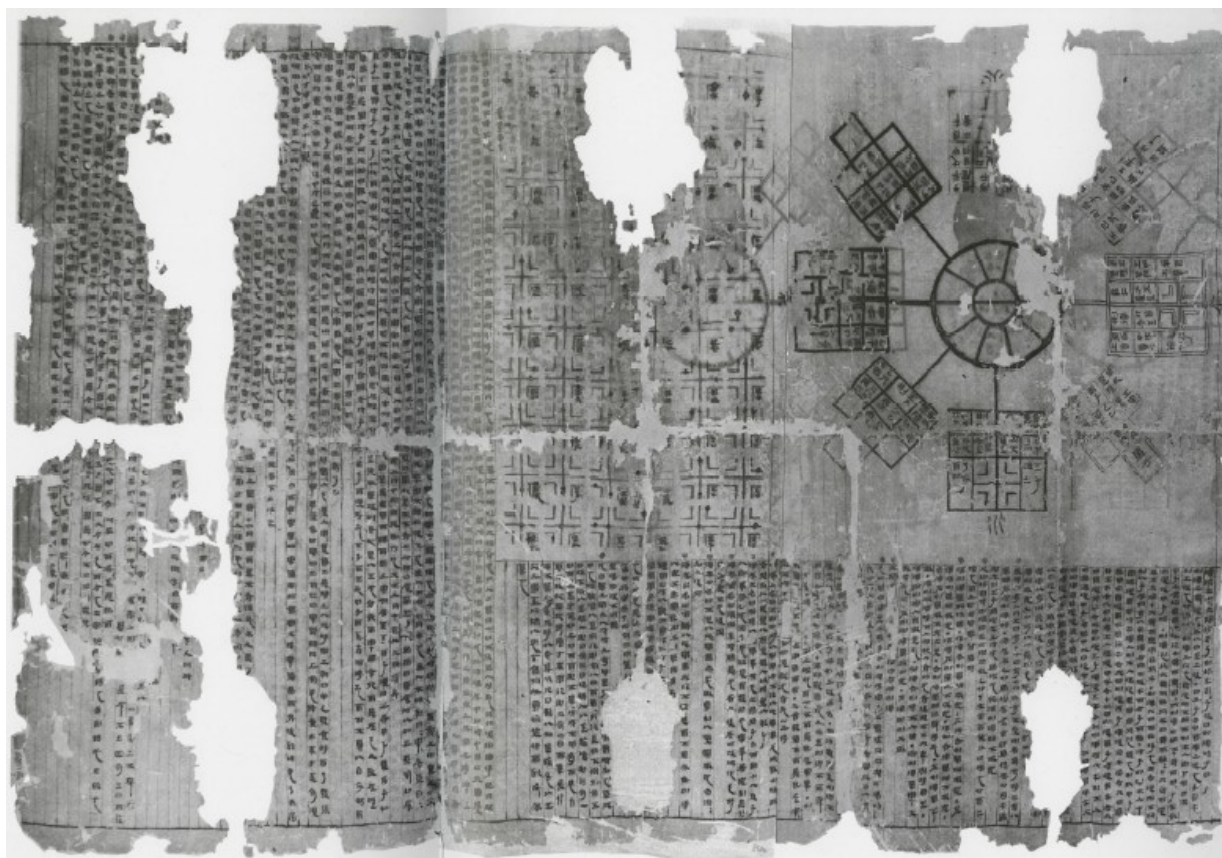


Figure 2b. "Punishment and Favor B," manuscript.



Figure 2c. "Punishment and Favor B," Nine Palaces diagram (detail).





Figure 3a. “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” clouds, *qi*, halos, and eclipses (detail)



Figure 3b. “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” comets in context (detail).



Figure 4. "Retrograde Mars."

## Chapter 3

### Celestial Signs in the Writing of History

By the early Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE), officials had been meticulously recording the appearance of celestial signs for a very long time. The officials were called *shi* 史,<sup>1</sup> a term notoriously difficult to translate, variously rendered as scribe, archivist, historian,<sup>2</sup> but perhaps primarily a diviner. The *shi* kept records of the births and deaths of rulers, assassinations, punitive campaigns, and all manner of signs: eclipses, comets, summer frosts, plagues of locusts, fires, floods, and droughts. Our sense of how these records worked is based primarily on the *Annals* (Chunqiu 春秋), a chronicle of the reigns of twelve dukes of Lu 魯 from 722–481 BCE, a work that became a Classic in Han times. In the Dai corpus we find technical texts that position celestial signs with respect to spatial dimensions, such as particular domains and their corresponding celestial fields, and temporal dimensions, such as the sexagenary calendar, but without respect to the axis of historical time. In contrast, celestial signs in the *Annals* were historical events. Han historians, often technical experts themselves, inherited two types of discourses surrounding celestial signs: one technical and one historical. In their histories, they would combine these two discourses into a unity.

From 100 BCE to 100 CE, the technical discourse on celestial signs shifted toward reliance on Classical authority. Treatises in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist) and the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han) position the technical discourse on celestial signs within a historical framework. Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) "Tianguan shu" 天官書 (Treatise on the Celestial Offices) consists largely in a detailed technical description of the stars, planets, inclement weather, and various types of celestial signs, but frames these with a closing essay that draws attention to the critical role men like himself and his father, Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE), had played at court since time immemorial. Sima Qian, as *Taishi ling* 太史令, a position under the Superintendent of Ceremonial (Taichang 太常) which has been variously rendered as Director of Astronomy, Prefect Grand Astrologer, and Senior Archivist,<sup>3</sup> was himself a *shi* 史. He was not just an astronomer, astrologer, or archivist, and certainly not a mere scribe, but a reader, recorder, and interpreter of omens past and present.<sup>4</sup> In his "Basic Annals," Sima

<sup>1</sup> For the role of the *shi* in Zhou 周 (1046 BCE–256 BCE) times, see Constance Cook, "Scribes, Cooks, and Artisans: Breaking the Zhou Tradition," *Early China* 20 (1995): 241–77, esp. 250–55.

<sup>2</sup> *Shi* does not acquire the sense of "Court Historian" until the Tang 唐 (618–907) dynasty.

<sup>3</sup> For Director of Astronomy, see Michael Loewe, *A Biographic Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han, and Xin Periods: 221 BC–24 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 762; for Prefect Grand Astrologer, see Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 223; for "Senior Archivist," see Michael Nylan, "Sima Qian: A True Historian?" *Early China* 23/24 (1998–99): 203.

<sup>4</sup> The *Shiji* was a private work, initiated by Sima Qian's father, that included much more than omens: 1) "Benji" 本記 (Basic Annals) that chronologically narrate major events from high antiquity through the reign of the sitting emperor; 2) "Biao" 表 (Tables); 3) "Shu" 書 (Treatises) on subjects ranging from rituals to canals; 4) "Shijia" 世家 (Hereditary Houses) chapters that told the stories of powerful families; 5) "Lie zhuan" 列傳 (Arrayed

Qian narrates the rise and fall of dynasties as a story of perspicacious reading, foolish misreading, and willful ignorance of signs. The greatest of rulers, Yao 堯, Shun 舜,<sup>5</sup> and King Wen 文 (d. 1046 BCE) of Zhou are responsible for producing technologies that render signs readable; good rulers, such as King Wu 武 (r. 1046–1043 BCE) read signs accurately when others misread them; and particularly poor rulers, such as King Zhou 紂 (r. 1075–1046 BCE), ignore them altogether. From the combined force of the treatise and the “Basic Annals,” the would-be sage ruler learns of the critical import of employing men capable of interpreting baleful celestial signs. While Sima Qian drew upon narratives included in the *Documents* (Shu 書) Classic and texts like it, the authority of those narratives rested not in their status as Classics *per se* but in their status as records of the activities of the ancient sages.

In the late Western Han, the authority of the *Annals* and the “Hongfan” 洪/鴻範 (Great Plan) chapter of the *Documents* would become the basis for reading all manner of baleful signs, as we see in Ban Gu’s 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (Treatise on the Five Resources). The “Five Resources,” based in part on the late Western Han statesmen Liu Xiang’s 劉向 (79–8 BCE) “Hongfan wuxing zhuan lun” 洪範五行傳論 (Discourse on the Five Resources Tradition of the “Great Plan”) and his son Liu Xin’s 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) possible emendations to it, systematically read historical signs over the course of the Chunqiu 春秋 period (722–481 BCE), the Qin 秦 (221–207 BCE), and the Western Han to construct a latter day mirror of the *Annals* Classic. Just as the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (Gongyang Tradition) for the *Annals* gravitated toward Kongzi’s 孔子 (trad. 551–479 BCE) famous declaration that his way was at an end,<sup>6</sup> the final version of the “Five Resources” developed teleologically toward the rise of Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9 CE–23 CE) and the fall of the Western Han. Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 48–ca. 116 CE), Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE), and Ma Xu’s 馬續 (ca. 79–after 141 CE) “Tianwen zhi” 天文志 (Treatise on Celestial Patterns) written in the years following Ban Gu’s death ca. 100 CE, incorporated verbatim most of the technical materials that made up Sima Qian’s earlier treatise, but placed those materials in a framework that derives its authority from the Classics.<sup>7</sup>

---

Biographies) that related the lives of prominent people, and in many cases, preserved their writings. Though Sima Qian’s duties as *Taishi ling* certainly did not entail the composition of such a history; it could not have been composed without access to imperial archives.

<sup>5</sup> Yao and Shun are legendary pre-dynastic sage kings traditionally dated to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.

<sup>6</sup> Kongzi, better known in the West as Confucius, realized that his sagely method of governance would not be instituted in his own lifetime and declared “My way is at an end” 吾道窮矣 when the mythic unicorn (*lin* 麟) was captured by a firewood collector in 481 BCE. The legendary event, recounted in the final passages of the *Annals*, marks the conclusion of the Chunqiu period. See He Xiu 何休 (129–182 CE) comm., Xu Yan 徐彥 (Tang) subcomm., *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏 (Commentary and Sub-commentary to the Gongyang Tradition of the Annals; Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999): 28.624.

<sup>7</sup> Most probably because it appears in the same historiographical project as the “Five Resources,” much material that otherwise fits into the “Celestial Patterns” is left out; the two *Hanshu* treatises are complementary.

## Part I: Readers of Celestial Signs in History in the *Shiji*

The concluding essay in Sima Qian's "Celestial Offices" couches the technical discourse on the interpretation of celestial signs within a broader discourse on effective governance. First come sections which respectively enumerate the constellations throughout the entire sky, describe the movements of the Five Planets and the prognostic significations of aberrations in those movements, explain what is portended by various sorts of halos and eclipses, detail the significance of changes in color in particular stars, discuss the appearance of various sorts of *qi*, and finally, detail the practice of divining the fortunes of the year to come. Sima Qian's treatise concludes with an essay on the relative value of the observation of the heavens and its position at court since time immemorial:

太史公曰：自初生民以來，世主曷嘗不曆日月星辰？及至五家、三代，紹而明之，內冠帶，外夷狄，分中國為十有二州，仰則觀象於天，俯則法類於地。天則有日月，地則有陰陽。天有五星，地有五行。天則有列宿，地則有州域。三光者，陰陽之精，氣本在地，而聖人統理之。

The Venerable Senior Archivist said: Since the very birth of the people,<sup>8</sup> who among the lords of the ages has not calculated the movements of the sun, moon, stars, and constellations? With the advent of the Five Experts<sup>9</sup> and the Three Dynasties, the practice continued and was further illuminated. In the inner lands were those who wore caps and belts, and in far off places were the Yi and Di peoples. They divided the central domains into twelve regions, and "they lifted their heads to observe the signs in the heavens, and lowered their heads to emulate them in kind upon the earth."<sup>10</sup> Heaven has the sun and moon, and Earth has the *yin* and the *yang*. Heaven has the Five Planets and Earth has the Five Resources. Heaven has its arrayed lodges, and Earth has its regions. The Three

<sup>8</sup> "Shengmin" 生民 (Birth of the People) is the title of an ode, Mao 245, that describes the trials and tribulations of Lord Millet (Hou Ji 后稷), the ancestral founder of the Zhou people. See Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al., *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Correct Meanings of the Mao Odes), 3 vols., (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999): 17.1.1055–78.

<sup>9</sup> Two interpretations of the term *Wujia* 五家 obtain: First, according to Sima Zhen's 司馬貞 (early 8<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) *Shiji suoyin* 史記索隱 (Commentary on the Records of the Senior Archivist), these are experts in the Five Cycles (*wuji* 五紀) outlined in the "Great Plan" chapter of the *Documents*: the cycles of Jupiter (*sui* 歲), the moon (*yue* 月), the sun (*ri* 日), the planets and the constellations (*xing chen* 星辰), and calendrical calculations (*lishu* 曆數). Zhang Shoujie's 張守節 *Shiji zhengyi* 史記正義 (The Correct Meanings of the Records of the Senior Archivist; preface dated 737 CE) identifies five sage-kings as the Five Experts: The Yellow God 黃帝, Gaoyang 高陽, Gaoxin 高辛, Tang Yao and Yu Shun 唐虞堯舜也. (Sima Qian 司馬遷 [ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE], *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Senior Archivist; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959]: 27.1343 n. 1–2). I have followed Zhang Shoujie's interpretation.

<sup>10</sup> These two lines are a quotation from the "Tradition to the Appended Statements" (Xici zhuan 繫辭傳) to the *Changes*. Huang Shouqi 黃壽祺 and Zhang Shanwen 張善文 eds., *Zhouyi yizhu* 周易譯注 (A Modern Translation and Annotation of the Zhou Changes; Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2001): 535.

Luminaries<sup>11</sup> are the essence of *yin* and *yang*. *Qi* originates in the Earth, and the sages unify it and put it to order.<sup>12</sup>

Sima Qian's essay opens by creating a powerful sense of the historical position and sagely character of the technical practices the rest of the treatise has already laid out in so much mundane detail. Whereas the technical prognostic texts from the court of Dai derive their significance from the role they might play in preventing disaster at the local level, or at least allowing the Marquises to prepare for it, within the frame of Sima Qian's treatise, planetary observation and celestial observation in general is part of a much grander enterprise, the existence of which is attributed to the technological acumen and perspicacity of the sage-kings of antiquity.

Moreover, Sima Qian would construct a lineage of practitioners of the arts of celestial observation and calendrical calculation, a lineage in which both he and his father, Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE), who had served as *Taishi ling* from ca. 140–110 BCE,<sup>13</sup> implicitly belonged:<sup>14</sup>

昔之傳天數者：高辛之前，重、黎；於唐、虞，羲、和；有夏，昆吾；殷商，巫咸；周室，史佚、萇弘；於宋，子韋；鄭則裨竈；在齊，甘公；楚，唐昧；趙，尹皋；魏，石申。

Those who have transmitted the arts of celestial calculation from times gone by include Chong and Li before Gaoxin, Xi and He of the time of Yao and Shun; there was Kunwu in the Xia; Wuxian in the Yin; Shiyi and Chang Hong at the Zhou court, Ziwei in Song; in Zheng, Pei Zao; in Qi, Gan Shi; in Chu, Tang Mei; in Zhao, Yin Gao; and in Wei, Shi Shen.<sup>15</sup>

The lineage continues into the early Western Han: “As for those who have conducted the arts of the celestial calculations since the beginning of the Han, Tang Du did so for the stars, Wang Shuo for *qi*, and Wei Xian for the prognostication of the year” 夫自漢之為天數者，星則唐都，氣則王朔，占歲則魏鮮。<sup>16</sup> There is an element of creativity in the work of Tang Du, Wang Shuo, and Wei Xian, who not only received and transmitted knowledge, but presumably adapted that knowledge to suit the particular circumstances of the Western Han empire. Tang Du, Wang

<sup>11</sup> The Three Luminaries are the sun, moon, and stars.

<sup>12</sup> *Shiji* 27.1342. For a complete annotated translation of this treatise, see David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 444–511.

<sup>13</sup> Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 486.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Nylan has previously argued that Sima Qian sought to commemorate his own family line by composing the *Shiji*. She writes “...Sima Qian in completing the *Shiji* planned it to be an effective double commemoration of his ancestors: the power of the monumental text attesting to the Central States achievements would win the blessings of the highest members of the heavenly court; their eternal favor would be confirmed through the repeated sacrificial offerings made to the Simas, father and son, over the ages by reverent proponents of the Central States order” (“Sima Qian: A True Historian,” 245).

<sup>15</sup> *Shiji* 27.1343.

<sup>16</sup> *Shiji* 27.1349.

Shuo, and Wei Xian occupy a dual position as conservative transmitters of sagely knowledge and as innovators who kept that knowledge relevant and useful in the contemporary world. While Sima Qian does not explicitly name himself as an heir to this lineage, in compiling the “Celestial Offices” he effectively summarizes and puts to order the sum total of knowledge needed to continue to transmit the sagely enterprise. Sima Qian’s treatise not only encompasses the fields of expertise of Tang Du, Wang Shuo, and Wei Xian but surpasses them, powerfully juxtaposing political history with the appearance of celestial signs:

蓋略以春秋二百四十二年之間，月蝕三十六，彗星三見，宋襄公時星隕如雨。天子微，諸侯力政，五伯代興，更為主命。自是之後，眾暴寡，大并小。秦、楚、吳、越，夷狄也，為彊伯。田氏篡齊，三家分晉，並為戰國。爭於攻取，兵革更起，城邑數屠，因以饑饉疾疫焦苦，臣主共憂患，其察機祥候星氣尤急。

In the 242 years of the Chunqiu era, there were thirty-six lunar eclipses, three appearances of comets, and in the time of Duke Xiang of Song (r. 650–637 BCE), meteors fell like rain.<sup>17</sup> The Son of Heaven had little power, and the local lords took power over the administration. The Five Hegemons<sup>18</sup> arose in turn, and issuing their own commands in place of those of the ruler.<sup>19</sup> From this time forth the many did violence to the few, and the large absorbed the small. Qin, Chu, Wu, Yue, and the Yi and Di tribes became powerful hegemons. The Tian ministerial clan usurped power in Qi.<sup>20</sup> The Three Clans divided the domain of Jin.<sup>21</sup> All became Warring Domains, struggling for glory and gain, repeatedly raising the weapons of war, again and again slaughtering entire cities, and thus inaugurating a period of starvation, pestilence, burning, and bitterness. Lords and ministers alike feared calamities, and thus they considered the examination of fortune and the observation of planets and *qi* to be of great urgency.<sup>22</sup>

Sima Qian portrays the value of the observation of celestial signs, the movements of the planets and *qi*, as an art inextricably linked to the prognostication of political fortunes. The eclipses, appearances of comets, and meteors that “fell like rain” during the Chunqiu period appear in tandem with the decline in power of the Zhou rulers and presage the increasing tendency toward

<sup>17</sup> This event occurred in the 16<sup>th</sup> year of Duke Xi of Lu (644 BCE) (*Shiji* 27.1345, n.4).

<sup>18</sup> I follow the view of Zhao Qi 趙岐 (d. 201) who in his commentary on the *Mengzi* 孟子 identifies the *Wubo* as the Five Hegemons: Duke Huan of Qin 齊桓 (r. 685–643 BCE), Duke Wen of Jin 晉文 (r. 636–628 BCE), Duke Mu of Qin 秦穆 (r. 659–621 BCE), Duke Xiang of Song 宋襄 (r. 650–637 BCE), and King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊 (r. 613–591 BCE) (See *Shiji* 27.1347, n.6).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918) who translates this phrase as “substituèrent leurs ordres à ceux du souverain” (substituted their own orders for those of their sovereign), *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts’ien* (The Historical Records of Sima Qian), vol. 3 (Leroux: 1895–1905): 404. Available in electronic form through “Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales,” Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. [http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/sema\\_tsien/sema\\_tsien.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/sema_tsien/sema_tsien.html). Accessed May 2013.

<sup>20</sup> This occurred in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of King An of Zhou (379 BCE) (*Shiji* 27.1345, n. 8).

<sup>21</sup> In the 26<sup>th</sup> year of King An of Zhou (376 BCE), Jin was divided into three domains: Wei 魏, Han 韓, and Zhao 趙 (*Shiji* 27.1345, n. 9).

<sup>22</sup> *Shiji* 27.1345.

violence and fragmentation that would characterize the Warring Domains (480–222 BCE)<sup>23</sup> period, a time when the work of observing the heavens for celestial signs became an increasingly grave task.

While Sima Qian notes that the appearances of celestial signs of bygone centuries “cannot be verified in the present” 未有可考于今,<sup>24</sup> such signs continued to appear during moments of political crisis in the Qin and Han. Following the appearance of numerous comets during the time of Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. as emperor 221–210 BCE), “with the rise of the Han, the Five Planets gathered in Eastern Well” 漢之興，五星聚于東井.<sup>25</sup> However, within a generation of this auspicious portent, ill-omens appeared once the relatives of Empress Lü 呂 (r. 187–180 BCE) declared themselves to be kings, and again during the Seven Kingdoms Rebellion: “Members of the Lü clan rebelled, and there was a solar eclipse, causing daylight to darken. Wu, Chu, and the remaining Seven Kingdoms engaged in treason, and a comet several *zhang*<sup>26</sup> in length [appeared]” 諸呂作亂，日蝕，晝晦。吳楚七國叛逆，彗星數丈.<sup>27</sup> Sima Qian deploys vivid, macabre language to present the consequential relationship between the celestial sign and the political events that follow it: “Heaven’s Hound passed over the celestial field corresponding to Liang, and warfare arose. Soon thereafter, corpses fell, blood gushing beneath them” 天狗過梁野；及兵起，遂伏尸流血其下.<sup>28</sup>

Sima Qian’s essay, by discussing the appearance of celestial signs in conjunction with pivotal events in history, underscores the value of technical knowledge of celestial signs. Moreover, through the construction of a tradition of experts extending back to the reigns of the ancient sage-kings, the essay constitutes a powerful argument for the pragmatic political value of those capable of properly observing celestial signs. Sima Qian concludes the essay with a claim that implicitly applies to his own treatise, modestly presented in the subjunctive mood, concerning technical knowledge of celestial prognostication. “From the end back to the beginning, from antiquity up to the present, if we deeply examine the changes of the times, fathoming their finest points and broadest forms, then the Celestial Offices will be made complete” 終始古今，深觀時變，察其精粗，則天官備矣.<sup>29</sup> The “Treatise on the Celestial Offices” presented the technical materials needed to interpret celestial signs and asserted the great value of experts capable of putting them to use. It was in the “Basic Annals,” however, that Sima Qian examined high antiquity and made the “Celestial Offices” complete.

<sup>23</sup> That is, the Warring States period, as it is more commonly called.

<sup>24</sup> *Shiji* 27.1344.

<sup>25</sup> *Shiji* 27.1348.

<sup>26</sup> A *zhang* is equivalent to ten Chinese degrees, or slightly less than ten Babylonian degrees.

<sup>27</sup> *Shiji* 27.1348.

<sup>28</sup> *Shiji* 27.1348.

<sup>29</sup> *Shiji* 27.1351. Pankenier, however, understands the treatise itself as bringing completion to the Celestial Offices. He renders these lines: “[Having explored events] from beginning to end, from ancient times to the present, [we have] looked deeply into the vicissitudes of the times, examining the minute and the large scale, [so that exposition of] the Celestial Offices is now complete” (510).



### From the Yellow God to the Benighted King of Zhou

In his “Basic Annals,” Sima Qian presents a series of ideal rulers and ministers who prove to be effective readers of signs, perspicacious courtiers and kings who know whether those signs call for action or restraint. The ideal ruler responds to Heaven, just as Heaven responds to him. The greatest of rulers, Yao, Shun, and King Wen, are not just readers of signs, but responsible for the development of technologies through which those signs are rendered legible. The ideal rulers, often but not always dynastic founders, are vested with Heaven’s Charge and the responsibility for implementing Heaven’s Punishment (*Tianfa* 天罰). Yet decline always follows, though it may be interrupted with a period of restoration under the odd good king, such as King Wuding 武丁 (trad. r. 1250–1192 BCE) of Shang 商 (trad. 1600–1046 BCE) or King Xuan 宣 (r. 827–782 BCE) of Zhou. In the end, however, a ruler always comes along who shows contempt for Heaven or complacency in his possession of its Charge (*ming* 命). No matter how clear the warnings, the worst of rulers fail to yield to the will of Heaven.

Many passages in the “Basic Annals” that pertain to the Western Zhou period and earlier correspond, closely or loosely, to passages in the received *Documents*. Sima Qian, to be certain, must have had access to much more material similar to that included in the *Documents* than we do now; even a passing glance at the bibliographic treatise to the *Hanshu* reminds us that we have only the smallest fraction of the materials that were once gathered in the Imperial Archives. Indeed, even before the time of Yao, whose words and deeds are commemorated in the first chapter of the *Documents*, sage rulers in the “Basic Annals” are closely associated with celestial signs. In the aftermath of his defeat of the nefarious Chi You 蚩尤, the Yellow God (Huangdi 黃帝)<sup>30</sup> surveys his empire, promotes his best ministers, arrays the sun, moon, planets, and stars, and even names his officials after the names of the winds.<sup>31</sup> He follows the course of the cosmos, yielding to the results of prognostications, thereby ensuring his own survival: “He went along with the cycles<sup>32</sup> of Heaven and Earth, the prognostications dark and bright, the explanations of life and death, and the difficulties of survival and destruction” 順天地之紀，幽明之占，死生之說，存亡之難.<sup>33</sup> The mythic Yellow God initiates a practice of reading and following along with the patterns of the cosmos that would continue down to Sima Qian’s own time.<sup>34</sup>

Sima Qian’s first fleshed out portrait of a cosmic king, however, is that of Yao. That portrait appears to draw extensively on the “Yao dian” 堯典 (Canon of Yao) chapter of the

<sup>30</sup> For an account of the Chi You myth in various sources, see Bernhard Karlgren, “Legends and Cults of Ancient China,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (1946): 283–86.

<sup>31</sup> *Shiji* 1.6.

<sup>32</sup> This rendering of *ji* 紀 is based on the phrase *wuji* 五紀 in the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Documents*.

<sup>33</sup> *Shiji* 1.6. For an alternative translation, see William H. Nienhauser Jr. et al. trans., “The Basic Annals of Pre-Han China” in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, vol. 1, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994): 4.

<sup>34</sup> The practice of the observation and emulation of celestial patterns continues with the Yellow God’s immediate successors. His grandson Zhuan Xu “follows the course of the seasons so as to emulate Heaven” 載時以象天. Zhuan Xu’s successor Diku 帝嚳, a perspicacious ruler whose humaneness is matched only by his awesome majesty, likewise “submits to the will of Heaven” 順天之義 and “calculates the movements of the sun and moon so as to greet them and send them off” 曆日月而迎送之 (*Shiji* 1.13).

*Documents*, though the *Shiji* version differs from the received text in certain ways.<sup>35</sup> The most immediate, and perhaps most important, distinction between Sima Qian's portrayal of Yao and that of the "Canon of Yao" comes in a series of similes through which Sima Qian introduces the sage-king: "His humanity was like that of Heaven, and his wisdom was like that of the spirits. If one approached him, he was like the sun, and if one gazed at him from afar, he was like a cloud" 其仁如天，其知如神。就之如日，望之如雲。<sup>36</sup> None of these lines correspond to the *Documents* version of the "Canon of Yao." Sima Qian's Yao shines forth as the celestial bodies themselves do. To look upon him is to look upon the most auspicious and awesome of celestial signs. Yet both the "Canon of Yao" and the *Shiji* passage describe Yao as an incredibly effective ruler who brings harmony not just to his people, but to the whole of humanity: "He was able to see clearly and cause others to yield<sup>37</sup> to his power, and thus he drew close to the Nine Clans. Once the Nine Clans were in accord, he shed his light upon the Hundred Families. Once the Hundred Families had received his illumination, he brought harmony to the Myriad Domains" 能明馴德，以親九族。九族既睦，便章百姓。百姓昭明，合和萬國。<sup>38</sup> Yao himself was a visible, manifest sign of the regularities of the heavens.

After bringing harmony to the world, Yao begins his cosmic labors. He creates order in the heavens and models himself on that order. Yao both follows the perfect regularity of celestial bodies, and brings that perfection into being:

乃命羲、和，敬順昊天，數法日月星辰，敬授民時。分命羲仲，居郁夷，曰暘谷。敬道日出，便程東作。日中，星鳥，以殷中春。其民析，鳥獸字微。申命羲叔，居南交。便程南為，敬致。日永，星火，以正中夏。其民因，鳥獸希革。申命和仲，

<sup>35</sup> While much of Sima Qian's description of Yao matches that in the "Canon of Yao" chapter, we will not engage here, in any extensive way, with the received *Documents* text, as we do not have a clear sense of the extent to which the set of texts and/or oral traditions surrounding Yao known to Sima Qian correspond to those in the received *Documents*. It will suffice to keep in mind a few basic points regarding the relationship between the *Documents* and Sima Qian's "Basic Annals." First, up through the Warring Domains period, and arguably into the Han, the *Documents* was not a fixed text. While Fu Sheng's 伏生 (d. after 156 BCE) twenty-eight or twenty-nine chapters had been established a few decades before Sima Qian was born, the sense remained that much of the material that should have been included in the *Documents* was in fact missing. The "Basic Annals" records the composition of many chapters of the *Documents* during the Three Dynasties period, but makes no distinction between what are now modern script and ancient script chapters. We cannot say to what extent the "Canon of Yao," nor any other chapter or fragment of the *Documents* known to Sima Qian, corresponded to that which we now possess. Third, Sima Qian knew of traditions surrounding figures in the Three Dynasties that are now lost to us, or survive only through his work. Fourth, Sima Qian produces a remarkably continuous and readable narrative that leaves no gaps between his own time and that of the divine farmer, Shennong 神農, whose reign preceded even that of the Yellow God. Whatever the materials Sima Qian had available to him, the "Basic Annals" is not simply a compilation of earlier records and traditions. Rather those records and traditions are tied together by Sima Qian's unique voice into a coherent, chronologically organized narrative.

<sup>36</sup> *Shiji* 1.15.

<sup>37</sup> I follow Sima Zhen's explanation of *xun* 馴 as "referring to the capacity of sagely virtue to cause people to yield" 言聖德能順人也 (*Shiji* 1.16 n. 9).

<sup>38</sup> *Shiji* 1.15. For the closely corresponding passage in the "Canon of Yao" see Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞 comm., *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 尚書校釋譯論 (Notes, Explanation, Translation, and Discussion of the Venerable Documents), vol. 1, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005): 2.

居西土，曰昧谷。敬道日入，便程西成。夜中，星虛，以正中秋。其民夷易，鳥獸毛毳。申命和叔，居北方，曰幽都。便在伏物。日短，星昴，以正中冬。其民燠，鳥獸毳毛。歲三百六十六日，以閏月正四時。信飭百官，眾功皆興。

Thereupon Yao commanded Xi and He to reverently follow the course of August Heaven, to take account of and emulate the sun, moon, planets, and stars, and to reverently give unto his people their seasons.

In turn, Yao commanded Xi Zhong to reside at Yuyi, which is called the Valley of Dawn. Reverently, he leads forth the rising sun, and sets in motion the eastern work. At the spring equinox, the star Bird is the means of rectifying the second month of spring. The people disperse, and the birds and beasts nurture their young and mate.

Yao then commanded Xi Shu to reside in the Southern Wilds. He sets in motion the southern work. He is solemn to the utmost. At the summer solstice, the star Fire is the means of rectifying the second month of summer. The people send additional labor to the fields, and the birds and beasts thin their hides.

In turn, Yao commanded He Zhong to reside in the west, which is called the Valley of Dusk. Reverently, he sends off the setting sun. He sets in motion the western harvest. At the autumn equinox, the star Barrens is the means of rectifying the second month of autumn. The people are tranquil and happy, and the birds and beasts thicken their feathers and fur.

Yao then commanded He Shu to reside in the northern quarter, which is called the Dark Capital. He causes [the people] to store their goods. At the winter solstice, the star Mane is the means of rectifying the second month of winter. The people are warm, and the birds and beasts grow new feathers and fur.

A year consists in 366 days, and by means of intercalary months the Four Seasons are rectified. The Hundred Offices are faithfully set in order so that all of their many works flourish.<sup>39</sup>

Yao appears in the *Shiji*, as he does in the *Documents*, as a sovereign who both sets the cosmic order in motion above and reproduces the cycles of that motion in his governance below. Xi and He are told to “take account of” or “enumerate” (*fa shu* 法數) the motions of the various celestial bodies in the opening of the passage, just as they are told to “perform the calendrical calculations and create images” (*li xiang* 麻象)<sup>40</sup> of those bodies in the “Canon of Yao.” Giving the people their seasons makes agricultural work possible, causing them to engage in the correct labors at the correct times. The seasons revolve for the benefit of human beings and other creatures; the birds and beasts grow or shed their feathers or fur in a natural cycle that mirrors the human rhythms of agriculture. Time operates as microcosm and macrocosm; times of day, marked out by the movements of Yao’s demigod officials from the Valley of Dawn to the Valley of Dusk and beyond, replicate in miniature the seasons of the year. Under Yao, the ideal ruler, perfect order obtains throughout the cosmos. Long after his rule, however, Xi and He would grow corrupt in

<sup>39</sup> *Shiji* 1.16–17.

<sup>40</sup> “Canon of Yao” in *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 1, 32.

times when a sage-king no longer reigned, and the cosmic clockwork would no longer keep good time.

Despite Yao's impressive command of the cosmos, and his almost ontological identity with the celestial bodies themselves, he would never grow arrogant. Even after passing over his own son in favor of the self-sacrificing and deeply filial Shun, he was careful always to follow the will of Heaven. In his old age "he commanded Shun to serve as a regent and take charge of the administrative powers of the Son of Heaven, so as to observe Heaven's Charge" 命舜攝行天子之政，以觀天命。<sup>41</sup> When it comes time to elect a successor, Yao is neither hasty nor willful, but circumspect and deferential to Heaven. Shun, duly attentive to celestial signs, proves up to the task: "Shun thereupon made inquiries concerning the Agate Orb and the Jade Crossbar, and so, regulated the Seven Administrators" 舜乃在璿璣玉衡，以齊七政。<sup>42</sup> By the time of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), the Agate Orb and Jade Crossbar were understood as components of an armillary sphere, and the Seven Administrators as the sun, moon, and Five Planets.<sup>43</sup> Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (8<sup>th</sup> cent), the Tang 唐 (618–907 CE) dynasty *Shiji* commentator, explains that Shun, like Yao before him, was a careful observer of Heaven who did not dare violate its will:

舜雖受堯命，猶不自安，更以璿璣玉衡以正天文。璣為運轉，衡為橫簫，運璣使動於下，以衡望之，是王者正天文器也，觀其齊與不齊。今七政齊，則已受禪為是。

Though Shun had received Yao's charge, he nonetheless could not put himself at ease. And so, he newly created the Agate Orb and Jade Crossbar so as to rectify the celestial patterns. The orb rotated, and the crossbar served as an indicator, so that the revolving orb caused it to move below, and so that one could gaze upon [the celestial patterns.] This was an instrument to rectify celestial patterns that was fit for a king, and Shun examined whether [those patterns] were in order or whether they were not. Now, only when he found that the Seven Administrators were in order, did Shun believe that accepting the throne would be right.<sup>44</sup>

While Zhang's commentary was composed more than eight centuries after the composition of the *Shiji*, it nonetheless presents a revealing reading of Shun's relationship to Heaven and the signs through which the will of Heaven was to be understood. In light of Zhang's comments, Shun appears as not only an ideal reader of celestial signs, but also as a technological innovator who creates a means for rendering those signs legible.

The *Shiji*, reminds us, however that Heaven's will is not solely articulated against the backdrop of the firmament. Heaven sometimes speaks not through celestial patterns, but in the voices of ordinary people. Following the death of Yao, Shun offers to yield the throne to Yao's son, the wicked Dan Zhu 丹朱:

<sup>41</sup> *Shiji* 1.24.

<sup>42</sup> *Shiji* 1.24.

<sup>43</sup> *Shiji* 1.24, n.1.

<sup>44</sup> *Shiji* 1.24, n. 1. The quotation is found in Zhang Shoujie's *Shiji zhengyi* 史記正義 (The Correct Meanings of the Records of the Senior Archivist, preface dated 737 CE).

堯崩，三年之喪畢，舜讓辟丹朱於南河之南。諸侯朝覲者不之丹朱而之舜，獄訟者不之丹朱而之舜，謳歌者不謳歌丹朱而謳歌舜。舜曰「天也」，夫而後之中國踐天子位焉。

After Yao died, once the three year mourning period was completed, Shun yielded to Dan Zhu and went off south of the Southern River. Those among the local lords who came to court did not come to Dan Zhu but came to Shun. Those who engaged in lawsuits did not come to Dan Zhu, but came to Shun. Those who sang songs did not sing of Dan Zhu, but sang of Shun. Shun said, "It is Heaven's doing," and thereafter took the throne as the Son of Heaven in Central Domains.<sup>45</sup>

Signs in the heavens were not the only signs that could pronounce the will of Heaven. The tendency of human beings to gravitate toward Shun, despite his far off wanderings in the southland, to sing his praises, and to come to him seeking resolution of their disputes is as powerful as, or perhaps even more so than, any narrowly construed celestial sign.

There are a number of parallels between these episodes in the life of Shun and certain events in the life of the Earl of the West, King Wen of Zhou:

西伯蓋即位五十年。其囚羸里，蓋益《易》之八卦為六十四卦。詩人道西伯，蓋受命之年稱王而斷虞芮之訟。後十年而崩，謚為文王。

The Earl of the West was on the throne for some fifty years. While he was imprisoned at Qiuli, he added the Sixty-four Hexagrams to the Eight Trigrams in the *Changes*. When poets speak of the Earl of the West, they speak of the year when he received the Charge and was called a king, and then resolved the litigation between Yu and Rui. After ten years he died, and was given the posthumous title, King Wen.<sup>46</sup>

Like Shun, King Wen created a new technology for reading signs, the Sixty-four Hexagrams of the *Changes* (Zhouyi 周易) Classic. King Wen waited most of his life, as Shun did, before claiming the title of the highest ritual and political office. King Wen's authority, like that of Shun before him, was articulated through his juridical power. Those who brought their lawsuits to Shun and King Wen recognized their sagely authority to pass binding judgments and, equally important, believed that those judgments would be just.

Another account of the lawsuit between Yu and Rui places particular emphasis on the transformative power King Wen had on the people of his domain and those who submitted to his rule, even at a time when the wicked King Zhou was still in power. King Wen did not need to deliver an actual judgment; his transformative influence was such that the case could be settled easily out of court:

---

<sup>45</sup> *Shiji* 1.30.

<sup>46</sup> *Shiji* 4.119.

西伯陰行善，諸侯皆來決平。於是虞、芮之人有獄不能決，乃如周。入界，耕者皆讓畔，民俗皆讓長。虞、芮之人未見西伯，皆慚，相謂曰：「吾所爭，周人所恥，何往為，祇取辱耳。」遂還，俱讓而去。諸侯聞之，曰「西伯蓋受命之君」。

The Earl of the West did good works in concealment, and the local lords all came to him to resolve their differences. At that time, men of Yu and Rui had a lawsuit that they could not resolve, and so they came to Zhou. As soon as they crossed its frontier, they saw that farmers all yielded the edges of their fields, and the people customarily yielded to their elders. Before the men of Yu and Rui had even had an audience with the Earl of the West, they were all stirred to shame, and said to one another: “The men of Zhou would be ashamed to argue about the things that we do! How can we go to them and do this? We will only humiliate ourselves!” Thereupon, they returned. Both parties yielded and went off. When the local lords heard this, they said “The Earl of the West is the lord who has received the Charge.”<sup>47</sup>

King Wen’s transformative influence on the people of his domain, and anyone who crossed the threshold of its borders, proves to be the pivotal sign of his legitimacy. It is the sign that he has received its Charge. His suasive power is based on yielding rather than force. Yet when one ruler receives Heaven’s Charge, with the exception of the very few cases of abdication in high antiquity, another ruler must be subjected to Heaven’s Punishment. In the founding of the Zhou dynasty, the dirty work would be left up to King Wen’s son, the Martial King, King Wu.

King Wu ultimately winds up with bloodied hands in the *Shiji* narrative.<sup>48</sup> Yet he shows remarkable restraint in the face of his own bellicose generals, waiting until he is absolutely sure that he has received Heaven’s Charge before he dares to execute Heaven’s Punishment.

Following the death of his father, King Wu was, nonetheless, a man prepared for war. He promises the local lords who are about to follow him into battle that they will be rewarded for their achievements, and at the same time, his chief adviser, Lü Shangfu 呂尚父 (11<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), promises that whoever lags furthest behind when they cross the Covenant Fords will be beheaded (*zhan* 斬). As they prepare to cross the fords, the mood among King Wu and his ministers is grim and warlike. However, King Wu’s understanding of what he must do changes profoundly

<sup>47</sup> *Shiji* 4.117.

<sup>48</sup> In at least one version of the story recounted in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master of Huainan), however, King Wu’s armies defeat the Shang without drawing their swords. “When King Wu attacked Zhou, he faced east and welcomed the year. When he reached the Si River, there was a flood; when he reached Gongtou, [a mountain] collapsed. A comet appeared and presented its tail to the men of Yin. During the battle; ten suns rioted above; wind and rain struck below. Yet, in front there were no rewards for braving danger; and at the rear there were no punishments for flight. Clean blades were never fully drawn, yet the world submitted to him.” (Modified from John S. Major, Sarah Queen, Andrew Meyer, and Harold D. Roth trans., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010): 15.9.592). The Chinese text reads: 武王伐紂，東面而迎歲，至汜而水，至共頭而墜，彗星出而授殷人其柄。當戰之時，十日亂於上，風雨擊於中，然而前無蹈難之賞，而後無遁北之刑，白刃不畢拔而天下（傳）（傳）矣。D.C. Lau, *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引 (A Concordance to the Huainanzi), Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies of Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992): 15.9. Citation for this text give chapter and entry numbers.

when he encounters a strange, white fish:

武王渡河，中流，白魚躍入王舟中，武王俯取以祭。既渡，有火自上復于下，至于王屋，流為烏，其色赤，其聲魄云。是時，諸侯不期而會盟津者八百諸侯。諸侯皆曰：「紂可伐矣。」武王曰：「女未知天命，未可也。」乃還師歸。

King Wu forded the river, and in midstream, a white fish leaped into his royal boat, and he knelt down, selecting it to be used in a sacrifice. Once he had forded the river, a fire descended from on high, reaching the top of the Royal Chamber. It transformed into a crow, its color vermillion, and its call was steadfast.<sup>49</sup> At this time, eight hundred of the local lords, without having made prior arrangements to do so, gathered at the Covenant Fords. The local lords all said, “Zhou can be punished!” But King Wu responded, “You do not understand Heaven’s Charge. It is not yet permissible.” And so, he sent the armies home.<sup>50</sup>

King Wu responds to the appearance of the white fish by performing a ritual, perhaps because the white fish in its original form was unreadable. But through the transformative act of sacrifice the fish becomes a pyrotechnic sign that morphs into a vermillion crow. The eight hundred bellicose local lords see the crow as an unambiguous message from Heaven that King Wu could, and should, immediately carry out a campaign against the Zhou ruler. Yet, King Wu himself proves a more perceptive and cautious reader. These signs meant not that he should go to war, but that he should lie in wait. Admonishing the men who would follow him into battle for their failure to understand Heaven’s command, he sends them home. It is only two years later, after King Zhou murders Bi Gan 比干, imprisons Jizi 箕子, and drives his elder half-brother Weizi 微子 to flee to Zhou,<sup>51</sup> that King Wu makes the speech known to Sima Qian as the “Tai shi” 太誓 (Great Oath)<sup>52</sup> and promises to “carry out the Punishment of Heaven” 行天罰.<sup>53</sup>

The “Basic Annals” tells the stories of not only the best, but the worst of rulers. The stories of the sage and reverent men who found dynasties, and the miscreant and impudent men who bring about their downfall, are knit together by lengthy genealogies and punctuated with brief periods of restoration. In the end, however, the histories of the Xia 夏 (trad. ca. 2070–ca. 1600 BCE), Shang, and Western Zhou are histories of decline and dissolution. The worst rulers ignore or show open contempt for both celestial signs and for the welfare of their people.

In the Xia, problems arise almost immediately. Qi 啟, the son of the dynastic founder Yu 禹, is himself a good ruler, who despite the peaceful circumstances under which his father

<sup>49</sup> The rendering above follows Ma Rong’s 馬融 (79–166) gloss of *poran* 魄然 as *anding* 安定, “secure and steady” (*Shiji* 4.122, n.7). Ma was apparently working with a text that had *poran* for *poyun* 魄云. The Nienhauser et al. translation suggests that this is onomatopoeia, rendering it “P’o–p’o–p’o.” See Nienhauser et al. 60.

<sup>50</sup> *Shiji* 4.120.

<sup>51</sup> *Shiji* 4.122 and 3.108.

<sup>52</sup> *Shiji* 4.121.

<sup>53</sup> *Shiji* 4.122.

received the throne from Shun, is nonetheless forced to execute the Punishment of Heaven against Youhu shi 有扈氏, the clan in possession of the lands of Hu. Qi cites his reasons for campaigning against Youhu shi in a battlefield speech that corresponds to the *Documents* “Ganshi” 甘誓 (Oath at Gan): “I swear before you: The clan in possession of Hu has imperiously humiliated the Five Resources, and has neglected and abandoned the Three Rectifications. Heaven has employed me to destroy and cut off their charge. Now, I wish to carry out the Punishment of Heaven with you”<sup>54</sup> 予誓告女: 有扈氏威侮五行, 怠棄三正, 天用勦絕其命。今予維共行天之罰。<sup>55</sup> Qi concludes his speech with a grim warning that those who fail to show bravery and discipline in battle will be slaughtered or enslaved along with their wives and children.<sup>56</sup>

As the Xia wore on, things got worse. The cosmic order Yao put in place eventually went awry, as the Xia produced less worthy rulers. A pivotal moment occurred during the reign of Di Zhongkang 帝中康: “In the time of Di Zhongkang, Xi and He, drunken and indulging in licentious behavior, abandoned the seasons and let the movements of the sun fall into disorder” 帝中康時, 羲、和湎淫, 廢時亂日。<sup>57</sup> Yao’s great ministers, with the decline of the Xia, would be subjected to a punitive campaign, carried out to once again set them aright.<sup>58</sup> Yet within only a few more generations, the local lords would rebel against the Xia ruler Di Kongjia 帝孔甲 on account of his licentious behavior and his fondness for ghosts and spirits. His great-grandson, Jie 桀, would turn his weapons against his own subjects and himself suffer the Punishment of Heaven at the hands of the Shang founder, Tang 湯.<sup>59</sup>

Sima Qian’s account of the Shang dynasty is structurally similar to his account of the Xia. It begins with a narrative of conquest in which the founder must enforce the Punishment of Heaven, but a narrative of decline follows the initial triumph. In a speech much like that Qi had delivered at Gan centuries earlier, Tang would explain that he had not decided, of his own volition, to wage war against the last of the Xia. Heaven had commanded him to do so, and he did not dare disobey:

<sup>54</sup> *Shiji* 2.84.

<sup>55</sup> While the Five Courses, or *wuxing*, might be understood here as referring to Five Resources, Five Kinds of Action, or even the Five Planets themselves, Zheng Xuan’s reading of the passage understands both the Five Courses and the Three Rectifications in cosmic terms. He writes: “‘The Five Courses’ are the means by which the abundant power of the Four Seasons carry out their administration. ‘To imperiously humiliate them’ is to violate and run counter to them. ‘The Three Rectifications’ are the Rectified Ways of the Celestial, Terrestrial, and Human Realms” 五行, 四時盛德所行之政也。威侮, 暴逆之。三正, 天、地、人之正道 (*Shiji* 2.84, n. 5). While Sima Qian does not offer explicit clues regarding how we should understand the Five Courses and the Three Rectifications, Zheng Xuan’s reading shows at least the possibility of interpreting the crime of the clan in possession of Hu as a violation of the basic order of the cosmos. To the extent that we may understand the Five Courses as the courses of the Five Planets, that order is articulated through celestial signs.

<sup>56</sup> *Shiji* 2.84.

<sup>57</sup> *Shiji* 2.85.

<sup>58</sup> This campaign is presumably the subject of the “Yin Zheng” 胤征 (Campaign of Yin) text. A work under this title is included among the archaic script chapters of the received *Documents*, but it is difficult to know how much, if indeed any, material included in the chapter would have been familiar to readers prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE when the archaic script chapters were compiled.

<sup>59</sup> *Shiji* 2.85–66 and 3.95.



匪台小子敢行舉亂，有夏多罪，予維聞女眾言，夏氏有罪。予畏上帝，不敢不正。今夏多罪，天命殛之……爾尚及予一人致天之罰，予其大理女。女毋不信，朕不食言。

It is not that I, your Humble Son, would dare rise up in rebellion. He who possesses the Xia is guilty of many crimes. I have heard you all say that the House of Xia is rife with guilt. I am in terror of the High God, and I do not dare to fail to set things right. Now, the Xia has committed many crimes, and Heaven's Charge has been rescinded... Come with me, the one man, and bring the Punishment of Heaven upon him, and I will greatly reward you. Do not fail to believe me, for I will not eat my words!<sup>60</sup>

Tang concludes his speech, as did Qi, by warning those who fail to show bravery that there will be dire consequences for their families as well as themselves. Such was the gravity of the matter of punishing the last king of Xia. Jie was a tyrant who threatened to reign forever, to last as long as the sun reigned in the sky. In the “Basic Annals” version of the speech, Tang alludes to a somewhat enigmatic rhymed couplet attributed to Jie: “O sun when at last shall you decay? In the moment when you and I both pass away.” 是日何時喪？予與女皆亡！<sup>61</sup> Jie believes his power is eternal; no sign, celestial or otherwise, could dissuade him of this. And that is precisely why, Tang reasons, he must be overcome.

Continuing the *Shiji* narrative, Tang's victory over the Xia would initiate a new dynasty, but that dynasty would have problems of its own. Tang's son, Taijia 太甲, proved a violent and cruel ruler, and would be sent into exile for three years by the worthy minister Yi Yin 伊尹. Taijia would eventually be reformed, and Yi Yin would yield the reins of government to him, but within a few generations, the Shang would begin to decline. Periods of restoration would occur under three rulers, King<sup>62</sup> Taiwu 太戊,<sup>63</sup> King Pangeng 盤庚, and King Wuding. An omen

<sup>60</sup> *Shiji* 3.95. This passage corresponds in part to the received “Tang shi” 湯誓 (Oath of Tang) chapter of the *Documents*. See *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 2, 883–84.

<sup>61</sup> There is a slight incongruity between the *Shiji* passage and a quotation of Jie's speech in a fragment of the *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (Great Tradition of the Documents) quoted in Pei Yin's 裴駘 (fl. 438 CE) *Shiji jijie* 史記集解 (Collected Commentaries to the Records of the Senior Archivist). The *Shiji* version analogizes Jie to the sun, while in the *Great Tradition* version, Jie is analogous to Heaven, and the sun is analogous to the people: “Jie said, ‘Heaven has dominion over the sun, just as I have dominion over my subjects. Will the sun ever pass away? Only when the sun passes away shall I pass away’” 桀云『天之有日，猶吾之有民，日有亡哉，日亡吾亦亡矣』 (*Shiji* 3.95, n. 7). In the *Great Tradition* version of Jie's speech, only when Heaven no longer holds dominion over the sun will Jie lose dominion over his people. Both versions indicate that Jie intends to rule forever.

<sup>62</sup> The names of the Shang kings are preceded by the character Di 帝, which I elsewhere render as “god,” or in the context of the imperial period as “emperor.” For an analysis of the possible prehistorical meanings of the word *di*, see David Pankenier's chapter “Looking to the Supernal Lord,” in *Astrology and Cosmology*, 101–13.

<sup>63</sup> An omen prompts the dynastic restoration that occurs under King Taiwu. When a strange hybrid of a grain-producing plant and a mulberry tree grows to full size in a single day, Yin Zhi 伊陟 asks King Taiwu: “I have heard that monstrosities do not trump suasive power. Could it be that there is any fault in your governance?” 臣

appears in the time of Wuding that prompts the restoration that occurs during his reign. Zuji 祖己,<sup>64</sup> whose name suggests that he might be a deceased ancestor rather than a living adviser, counsels Wuding on the best course of action when a pheasant lights on a cauldron during a sacrifice. His speech constitutes a powerful argument against the notion that Heaven is a capricious, willful entity whose commands and punishments are the products of mere whims. Heaven observes the human realm, cutting short the lives of individuals and the lives of dynasties, based on what it sees. Heaven is configured as a just, and juridical, actor:

唯天監下典厥義，降年有永有不永，非天天民，中絕其命。民有不若德，不聽罪，天既附命正厥德，乃曰其柰何。嗚呼！王嗣敬民，罔非天繼，常祀毋禮于棄道。

Lo, Heaven watches the world below to rectify you in your duties. It is not Heaven that causes men to die young, cutting their lives (*ming*) short while they are still in their prime. But there are many among the people who do not yield to your suasive power, who refuse to acknowledge their crimes. Heaven bestows its charge (*ming*) on those who rectify their own suasive power—what more can be said about it! Alas, as you sit upon the throne you must be reverent toward your subjects, for there are none among them who are not the scions of Heaven. In the constant sacrifices, do not engage in ritual to the point where you abandon the Way.<sup>65</sup>

While in English we must choose between rendering *ming* as “decreed lives” or “lifespans” as opposed to “command” or “charge,” the slippage between the two senses of the word is of critical importance in this particular passage. Zuji’s speech moves from discussing the death of individuals to the figurative death of a ruling clan, the loss of Heaven’s Charge.<sup>66</sup> It is by no means a matter of fate, Zuji explains, if the Charge is lost; those who fail to correctly interpret and pay heed to the signs through which Heaven speaks, can blame only themselves for their own destruction. Convinced, King Wuding pays heed to the signs, avoids excessive indulgence in ritual, “cultivates his administration, puts his suasive power into action, brings joy to the world, and restores the Way of Yin”<sup>67</sup> 修政行德，天下咸驩，殷道復興。<sup>68</sup> King Wuding’s proper response to the baleful sign of the pheasant on the cauldron made him a great ruler. But

---

聞妖不勝德，帝之政其有闕與？ King Taiwu responds by cultivating his suasive power, and the inauspicious tree soon withers and dies (*Shiji* 3.100).

<sup>64</sup> Zuji could equally be rendered “Ancestor Ji.”

<sup>65</sup> *Shiji* 3.103. This passage and the narrative surrounding it correspond to parts of the “Gaozong rong ri” 高宗彤日 (High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice) chapter of the received *Documents*. See *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 2, 992–1046.

<sup>66</sup> Zuji’s speech, moreover, draws into sharp relief a peculiar quality of signs that appears frequently in early accounts of omen reading: Prognostication does not indicate what is fated to happen, but simply, how things appear to be developing at a given moment, much as we understand the modern medical term prognosis. A prognostication, like a prognosis, gives us a sense of what the future might be like, but at the same time, gives us a sense of what steps we might take to achieve a better outcome.

<sup>67</sup> Alternatively, we might read “Way of Yin” as “Great Way,” as *yin* 殷 is both a name for the Shang dynasty and a common adjective meaning “great” or “large.”

<sup>68</sup> *Shiji* 3.103.

he would be the last great ruler in the Shang.

Two generations later, King Jia (trad. d. 1148 BCE) would prove both licentious and violent, and the Way of Yin would once again begin to decline. King Wuyi 武乙 (trad. r. 1147–1113 BCE) would prove to be the worst ruler so far, as he engaged in vile acts of blasphemy against Heaven. Like Shun and King Wen, Wuyi was a creator of signs, but his creations were perverse and monstrous:

帝武乙無道，為偶人，謂之天神。與之博，令人為行。天神不勝，乃僂辱之。為革囊，盛血，印而射之，命曰「射天」。

King Wuyi did not possess the Way, and he constructed a puppet, which he called the Spirit of Heaven. He played chess with it, ordering men to form ranks.<sup>69</sup> When the [so-called] Spirit of Heaven lost, he then butchered and humiliated it. King Wuyi also constructed a leather bladder, which he filled with blood, raised up high, and shot with an arrow. He called this “Shooting Heaven.”<sup>70</sup>

In stark contrast to the careful readers of signs, celestial and otherwise, we have encountered thus far—Yao, Shun, King Wen, King Wu, and King Wuding of Shang—Wuyi has no fear whatsoever of Heaven. Even Jie, who analogized himself to Heaven, did not go out of his way to denigrate it. King Wuyi expresses open and obvious contempt for Heaven, ritually murdering it. He is not a careful reader of celestial signs, but rather, creates celestial signs for his own perverse amusement. But he does not go unpunished. Heaven maintains the power to produce celestial signs of its own, and in King Wuyi’s case, these signs prove deadly: “When King Wuyi was hunting between the Yellow River and the Wei River, there was a violent thunderbolt, and King Wuyi was jolted to death” 武乙獵於河渭之間，暴雷，武乙震死。<sup>71</sup>

The case of King Wuyi’s great-grandson, King Zhou (trad. r. 1075–1046 BCE) is mundane by comparison, but somehow more horrific. King Zhou was a clever and talented young man, but those very qualities led him to become arrogant. “His intelligence was great enough to refute admonitions, and his eloquence great enough to tart up lies” 知足以距諫，言足以飾非。<sup>72</sup> Always fond of women and wine, Zhou became truly vicious under the influence of his consort Daji 妲己, whom he obeyed without question. He indulged in licentious forms of music and raised taxes to build ever more luxurious palaces and an ever lusher garden. Along with Daji, he went to greater and greater excesses. “He constructed a lake of wine, and a forest of trees from which meat hung [like fruit], and ordered men and women to chase one another naked in it, while he drank the whole night through” 以酒為池，懸肉為林，使男女裸相逐其間，為長夜之飲。<sup>73</sup> King Zhou fashions a cosmos in miniature that reflects his unmoored

<sup>69</sup> That is, the men form ranks like chess pieces. This interpretation is based on the *Shiji zhengyi* phonetic gloss of *hang* 行 as the noun “ranks” rather than the verb “move.” See *Shiji* 3.105, n. 2.

<sup>70</sup> *Shiji* 3.104.

<sup>71</sup> *Shiji* 3.104.

<sup>72</sup> *Shiji* 3.105.

<sup>73</sup> *Shiji* 3.105.

desires. Like King Wuyi, King Zhou is a creator of signs.

The signs of Zhou's incipient downfall were more human than celestial. When greater and greater numbers of local lords flocked to the Earl of the West, King Wen, Zhou's loyal servant, Zuyi 祖伊, saw the domain of Zhou as a source of blame (*jiu* 咎), and warned Zhou of its rise to power. His speech bears much in common with that delivered by Zuji to Wuding earlier in the dynasty:

天既訖我殷命，假人元龜，無敢知吉，非先王不相我後人，維王淫虐用自絕，故天弃我，不有安食，不虞知天性，不迪率典。今我民罔不欲喪，曰『天曷不降威，大命胡不至』？今王其柰何？

Heaven has rescinded its Charge from Our Yin. None among the readers of the great tortoise shells dares acknowledge an auspicious result. It is not that the former kings do not succor us, their descendants, but rather that His Majesty has cut off the Charge by means of his violent and licentious behavior. Thus, Heaven has abandoned us, and we have neither a secure supply of food, nor means to predict Heaven's inclinations, nor to guide the people to follow the norms. Now, there is none among our subjects who does not wish for our demise. They ask, "Why does not Heaven send down its punishments? Why does not [another] Great Charge arrive?" Now, Your Majesty, what are you going to do?<sup>74</sup>

King Zhou's reply shows that, unlike King Wuding but like the Tyrant Jie, he blithely believes that he will always possess the Charge: "Was I not born vested with the Charge from Heaven"<sup>75</sup> 我生不有命在天乎! He was certain he would always possess the charge, and so, he lost it.

For King Wu, at least according to the *Shiji*, it was not the white fish or the vermilion bird that prompted him to execute Heaven's Punishment against Zhou, but rather, the signs of Zhou's own fashioning. In murdering and mutilating the bodies of his most loyal ministers, Zhou created the signs that led King Wu to conclude that the Shang had truly lost its legitimacy. But the Zhou dynasty would no more last forever than its predecessor. Following initial skirmishes during King Wu's brief reign, only the first several generations of Zhou rule, according to the "Basic Annals," represent a time of peace and prosperity. The Zhou declines, like the Shang and the Xia before it, reaching a low point under King Li 厲 (r. 877–841 BCE), a ruler who was profoundly uninterested in examining indicators of the effectiveness of his own administration. He suppresses criticism of his regime and conducts surveillance on his people, against the good advice of the Co-Chancellor, the Duke of Shao 召公. Cruel and profligate, King Li leaves the people with no means of venting their anger against him. With no one daring to alert him as to his endangerment, his allies among the local lords desert him. When open rebellion against the obnoxious king finally occurs, he has no means to defend his position, and

<sup>74</sup> *Shiji* 3.107. The speech largely corresponds to that in the "Xibo kan li" 西伯戡黎 (The Earl of the West Conquers Li) chapter of the *Documents*. See *Shangshu jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 2, 1047–70.

<sup>75</sup> *Shiji* 3.107.

so, he dies in exile.<sup>76</sup> The crown prince, the future King Xuan 宣 (r. 827–782 BCE), is left in the care of Duke of Shao. When men of the capital surround his home, the Duke of Shao sacrifices his own son to the blood-thirsty mob at his gates in exchange for the life of the young prince. Raised under the tutelage of the Co-Chancellors, the Duke of Shao and the Duke of Zhou 周公 during their period of shared regency (r. 841–828 BCE),<sup>77</sup> King Xuan proves to be a good ruler, notwithstanding two major military defeats late in his reign, who relies extensively on the two former regents, and invokes a renewal of the “remnant airs of King Wen, King Wu, King Cheng, and King Kang (r. 1020–996 BCE)” 文、武、成、康之遺風.<sup>78</sup> The reign of King Xuan’s son is, however, an unmitigated disaster.

After his father’s long reign, King You 幽 (r. 781–771 BCE), the Benighted King, assumes power. In contrast to the worst rulers that preceded him, Heaven’s disfavor toward King You is apparent even before his misdeeds begin: “In the forty-sixth year of his reign, King Xuan died. His son, the Benighted King, Gongsheng, took the throne. In his second year, the Three Rivers in Western Zhou all suffered earthquakes” 四十六年，宣王崩，子幽王宮涅立。幽王二年，西周三川皆震。<sup>79</sup> Even before King You is led astray by the *femme fatale* Bao Si 褒姒, the end of the Zhou as the known world’s reigning power appears to be inevitable. The Court Diviner Bo Yangfu 伯陽甫 explains the situation in terms that smack of Western Han *yin-yang* dynamics:

伯陽甫曰：「周將亡矣。夫天地之氣，不失其序；若過其序，民亂之也。陽伏而不能出，陰迫而不能蒸，於是地震。今三川實震，是陽失其所而填陰也。陽失而在陰，原必塞；原塞，國必亡。夫水土演而民用也。土無所演，民乏財用，不亡何待？」

Bo Yangfu said: “Zhou is about to perish. The *qi* of Heaven and Earth does not [of its own accord] lose its order. If its order goes astray, [it is because] the people have caused it to become disordered. *Yang* hides away and cannot emerge, and *yin* pushes against it but cannot rise up, and so, earthquakes occur. Now the Three Rivers have quaked indeed, for the *yang* has lost its position and filled in that of *yin*. When *yang* is lost and is in *yin*, the water source must be blocked up, and when the sources are blocked up, the domain will perish for certain. Water moistens the soil and the people make use of it. When the soil is not moistened, then the people lack resources. How can we hope not to perish?<sup>80</sup>

Bo Yangfu’s prediction occurs even before King You commits the grave error of lighting signal fires, falsely sounding an alarm, as if the Zhou domain were under attack, so as to summon the local lords to court, and make fools of them in the process, all in order to make Baosi laugh.

<sup>76</sup> *Shiji* 4.141–42.

<sup>77</sup> The two Co-Chancellors are not to be confused with their better known predecessors, the Duke of Shao and the Duke of Zhou, at the beginning of the dynasty.

<sup>78</sup> *Shiji* 4.144.

<sup>79</sup> *Shiji* 4.145.

<sup>80</sup> *Shiji* 4.145.

Even in the first years of his reign, before he had jilted the daughter of the Marquis of Shen 申侯 in favor of Bao Si, the Benighted King was doomed. Bo Yangfu's speech lends itself well to the cosmological framework of Sima Qian's "Celestial Offices," in which the cosmos is fundamentally well-ordered, but can be made disorderly if there is disorder at court. Moreover, as we saw repeatedly in the Dai corpus, cosmological disorder has palpable consequences for agriculture. Bo Yangfu continues by citing historical examples of instances in the past when similar cosmological conditions had prevailed, the last days of the Shang and of the Xia:

昔伊、洛竭而夏亡，河竭而商亡。今周德若二代之季矣，其川原又塞，塞必竭。夫國必依山川，山崩川竭，亡國之徵也。川竭必山崩。若國亡不過十年，數之紀也。天之所棄，不過其紀。

Long ago, the Yin and Luo rivers ran dry and the Xia perished, just as the Yellow River ran dry and the Shang perished. Now the suasive power of Zhou is akin to the suasive power of those two dynasties in their last ages. The sources of its rivers are blocked, and if they are blocked, they run dry. A domain must always rely on its mountains and rivers. When its mountains crumble and its rivers run dry, these are the signs that the domain will perish. When the rivers run dry, the mountains must crumble. Such domains perish in no more than ten years, judging from the chronicles. As for those who have been abandoned by Heaven, there is no error in the chronicles.<sup>81</sup>

Bo Yangfu points to the value of historical records themselves in understanding what given signs portend. While earthquakes do not strictly belong under the umbrella of celestial signs; they work in much the same way, issue from the same source, and portend the same sort of consequences. Just as late Western Han writers such as Liu Xiang and Liu Xin would do in the "Five Resources," Bo Yangfu employs the annals of a by-gone age to elucidate how omens that occurred in the distant past informed his understanding of omens that occurred in his own time. Bo Yangfu, we learn following his speech, hit the mark precisely. "In that very year the Three Rivers ran dry and Qi Mountain<sup>82</sup> crumbled" 是歲也，三川竭，岐山崩。<sup>83</sup> King You loses the faith of his local lords, and when the Marquis of Shen 申侯, the Western Yi 西夷, and the Quan Rong 犬戎, really do lay siege to his court, no one comes to his aid. He is murdered. Bao Si is taken. The Zhou ruler is never again any more powerful than the domains of his local lords. King You's reign is the end of not only the Western Zhou, but for all practical purposes, it is the end of the Three Ages (*sandai* 三代).

In the "Celestial Offices," Sima Qian claimed that the observation of celestial signs was a hallowed enterprise within a sagely lineage that maintained, in his own day, great pragmatic political value. *Qi* rose up into the skies from the human realm, and reading celestial signs was a

<sup>81</sup> *Shiji* 4.145–46. Nienhauser et al. understand *ji* to refer to "complete cycle" of numbers (75).

<sup>82</sup> Qi Mountain is especially significant to the Zhou as the site to which Gugong Danfu 古公亶父 escaped with his people to avoid war with the Xunyu 薰育, Rong 戎, and Di 狄 groups that had laid siege to their ancestral homeland, Bin 邠. See *Shiji* 4.113–14.

<sup>83</sup> *Shiji* 4.146.

means by which the ruler could understand Heaven's response to developments within the empire itself. The rise of Liu Bang 劉邦 (206–195 BCE), the Western Han founder, had occasioned a gathering of the Five Planets in Eastern Well, while rebellion among members of the Lü clan had produced an eclipse, and the Seven Kingdoms Rebellion had been presaged by a comet. Historical examples in the treatise itself are relatively sparse, however, and primarily concern events that occurred in the Qin and Han. The "Basic Annals" very effectively supports Sima Qian's claims regarding the ancient status of the practice of interpreting celestial signs, though it makes no distinction between celestial signs and other types of signs. An earthquake or a river changing course is no less damning to a sitting ruler than is a celestial body straying from its path. The "Basic Annals" is not dominated by celestial signs of the precise types we see in the "Celestial Offices," but is populated by a motley array of signs—strange birds, the white fish, earthquakes, and the perfect or imperfect movements of celestial bodies. Rulers who claim to have attained Heaven's Charge, or who would carry out Heaven's Punishment, often cite human signs as authoritative proofs, for signs in the human world convey Heaven's will just as effectively as signs in the heavens. Shun determines that Heaven has chosen him, rather than Yao's nefarious son Dan Zhu, when he finds that various nobles come to his court, sing his praises, and trust in his sound juridical judgments. And when Zuyi warns Zhou that Yin has lost Heaven's Charge, he does so not on the basis of an obvious omen, but rather, on the basis of King Wen's conquest of Li.

Needless to say, the "Basic Annals" does not discount the importance of signs in the heavens. Yao's greatest achievement, matched only by his selection of Shun, lay in putting the heavens in order and emulating that order in his governance of the empire. Shun created new technologies allowing more precise observation of celestial signs. King Wu proves no less an able reader of Heaven's will than Yao or Shun, though he deciphers its intent in the white fish and vermilion bird, signs that would have no place in Sima Qian's "Celestial Offices." The "Basic Annals" lends sagely authority to the discourse surrounding celestial signs, though it is not concerned with signs in the heavens alone. In terms of their ontological quality and their rhetorical value celestial signs were not fundamentally different from other types of signs. They authorized those who could interpret them to make claims about the will of Heaven, just as other kinds of signs did. The difference between celestial signs and other kinds of signs consisted in the technical expertise needed to read them.<sup>84</sup>

Reverent attention to and the correct interpretation of all kinds of signs is a central theme in the "Basic Annals." The "Basic Annals" does not employ the *Documents* primarily as a source of Classical proof-texts, but as a source of exemplary models of rulership, as a source of images of tyrants and sage-kings. Sima Qian marshals hallowed, sagely support to authorize a historical narrative in which acts of creating, reading, revering, denigrating, and ignoring signs prove pivotal to historical development. In the "Basic Annals," narratives closely corresponding to passages in the received *Documents* abound, though they are often not explicitly marked as such, and are scattered among various other materials. The "Basic Annals" infrequently pulls individual lines from the *Documents* in an axiomatic fashion, but draws heavily on *Documents*

<sup>84</sup> E.g. the techniques of prognostication required precise measurement of the movements of celestial bodies over time, a thorough understanding of the correspondences between celestial fields and locations within the terrestrial realm, and the particular taxonomic properties of various celestial bodies.

materials, and materials similar to but not included in the *Documents*, for their narrative content and for their hoary, antique language. The *Documents* materials are included less because they are part of an established Classic, than because they tell us something about the best and worst rulers of the mythic and historical past.

## Part II: Classicism, Prognosis, and Hermeneutics in the “Five Resources”

Materials corresponding to parts of the received *Documents* are integral to the narratives in Sima Qian’s “Basic Annals,” and the Classics constitute authoritative proof-texts in certain “Celestial Patterns” passages. In the case of the “Five Resources,” however, one Classical text provides the basic structure of the treatise, and another, its secondary inspiration. Ban Gu’s introduction to the “Five Resources” positions the treatise both as an extension of the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Documents* and as a sort of Han expansion of the *Annals*. While the “Five Resources” records comets and eclipses in far greater numbers than even the “Celestial Patterns,” it is not concerned with celestial signs alone, but omenology writ large—the role omenology can play not only in prognostication, but in the post-mortem historiographical analysis of the fall of a dynasty.<sup>85</sup>

The opening passage analogizes the invention of the Eight Trigrams to the development of the “Great Plan.” Citing language that would have been familiar to the Marquises of Dai centuries earlier, Ban Gu begins with a quotation from the “Tradition of the Appended Statements”:

《易》曰：「天垂象，見吉凶，聖人象之；河出圖，雒出書，聖人則之。」劉歆以為虞羲氏繼天而王，受《河圖》，則而畫之，八卦是也；禹治洪水，賜《雒書》，法而陳之，《洪範》是也。聖人行其道而寶其真。

The *Changes* says, “Heaven suspended the images, so as to make visible good and ill-fortune, and the sages made images of them. The Yellow River gave forth the Chart. The

<sup>85</sup> The “Five Resources” is built to a considerable extent on the work of Liu Xiang. However, the critical teleological aspect of the treatise could not have issued from Liu Xiang, given his death nearly two decades prior to the rise of Wang Mang, though entries after 8 BCE could perhaps have been added by Liu Xin. Liu Xiang’s biography explains Liu Xiang’s motivation for composing the “Discourse of the Five Resources Tradition of the ‘Great Plan’” (Hongfan Wuxing zhuan lun 洪範五行傳論), the probable prototype for Ban Gu’s “Five Resources.” “Liu Xiang saw that in the ‘Great Plan’ chapter to the *Documents* Jizi sets forth audulatory and condemnatory responses of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Resources for the benefit of King Wu of Zhou (r. 1046–1042). Liu Xiang thereupon collected and collated a record of auspicious signs, disasters, and anomalies from high antiquity, through the Chunqiu period, up until the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Western Han. He traced back actions and events and connected the tradition to calamities and good fortune. He arranged them according to category so that they followed one another, and each had its own discrete position within the text. In total, it included eleven chapters (*pian*). He called it the “Discourse on the Five Resources Tradition of the ‘Great Plan’” and submitted it to the throne” 向見《尚書》《洪範》，箕子為武王陳五行陰陽休咎之應。向乃集合上古以來歷春秋六國至秦漢符瑞災異之記，推迹行事，連傳禍福，著其占驗，比類相從，各有條目，凡十一篇，號曰《洪範五行傳論》，奏之 (*Hanshu* 36.1950).



Luo River gave forth the Writings. The sages drew their principles from these.”<sup>86</sup> Liu Xin took this to mean that Fu Xi as king was the successor to Heaven. He had received the Yellow River Chart and drawn up a chart modeled upon it; this was the Eight Trigrams. Yu had set to order the flooding waters and been given the Luo Writings, and produced a model emulating it; this was the “Great Plan.” The sages followed its way and treasured its perfection.<sup>87</sup>

Ban Gu proceeds to tell the story of the hallowed lineage of the Luo Writings, the basis of the “Great Plan.” Long ago, Heaven had given the Diagram to Yu. Sage kings, and perhaps the best of their ministers, had transmitted the “Great Plan” from the time of Yu, and it had survived through the end of the Shang. In the time of the wicked King Zhou, his once loyal minister Jizi came to the Zhou and delivered the “Great Plan” to an anxious King Wu, a figure determined to get rulership right. Ban Gu proceeds to quote a passage from the “Great Plan” that maps out the Nine Divisions, which the chapter as a whole concerns:

初一日五行；次二曰羞用五事；次三曰農用八政；次四曰協用五紀；次五曰建用皇極；次六曰艾用三德；次七曰明用稽疑；次八曰念用庶徵；次九曰嚮用五福，畏用六極。

First, there are the Five Resources; Second, humbly<sup>88</sup> employ the Five Duties; Third, diligently employ the Eight Tasks of Administration; Fourth, harmoniously employ the Five Cycles;<sup>89</sup> Fifth, establish and employ the Sovereign’s Standard;<sup>90</sup> Sixth, set to order<sup>91</sup> and employ the Three Powers; Seventh, perspicaciously employ the means of investigating that which is in doubt; Eighth, examine and employ the many auspices; Ninth, take pleasure in the Five Blessings and fear the Six Extremes.

Immediately following the citation, Ban Gu effectively interweaves the text of the “Great Plan” with the basis of the *Changes*, the Eight Trigrams:

此六十五字，皆《雜書》本文，所謂天乃錫禹大法九章常事所次者也。以為《河圖》、《雜書》相為經緯，八卦、九章相為表裏。

<sup>86</sup> “Xici zhuan” A in *Zhouyi yizhu* 556.

<sup>87</sup> *Hanshu* 27A.1315.

<sup>88</sup> The received “Great Plan” has *jing* 敬 (reverently) for *xiu* 羞 (humbly). See *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1148.

<sup>89</sup> These are identified later in the “Great Plan” as the sun, moon, stars, planets, and calendrical systems.

<sup>90</sup> My rendering follows Michael Nylan, *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1992), *Monumenta Serica Monograph Series*. This rendering is supported by the explanation of the phrase in the “Five Resources” treatise: “Huang is the sovereign. Ji is the standard. Jian is establish” 皇，君也。極，中；建，立也 (*Hanshu* 27D.1458). Nylan would now revise to “Sovereign’s Highest Standard” for clarity (Personal Communication, July 2015).

<sup>91</sup> The received “Great Plan” has *yi* 乂 for *ai* 艾 (*Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1148). I have followed the received text in my interpretation of this phrase.

These sixty-five words are all original to the Luo Writings, which provide a grand method in Nine Divisions for putting the constant affairs [of governance] in their proper sequence, which is said to have been given to Yu by Heaven. I/They take (*yi wei*) the Yellow River Chart and the Luo Writings to relate to one another as warp and weft (*jing wei*), and the Eight Trigrams and the Nine Sections to mutually encompass one another.<sup>92</sup>

The Eight Trigrams of the *Changes* and the Nine Divisions of the “Great Plan” are both the products of sages who emulated sets of signs that were produced directly by celestial agency, the Yellow River Chart and the Luo Writings. The core of the *Changes* and the “Great Plan,” the passage suggests, are intimately and inextricably related to one another. Ban Gu uses language that simultaneously evokes both the Classics and their commentaries as well as the image of threads woven together; the phrase *jing wei* equally means “Classics and apocrypha” and “warp and weft.” But unlike the usual relationship ascribed to Classics and apocrypha, in which there is no question of which texts constitute the Classics themselves and which are secondary, there is no subordination between the *Changes* and the “Great Plan.” At the same time, Ban Gu obscures the agents who establish the relationship between the two traditions, omitting any subject for the verbal phrase *yiwei*. Ban Gu does not directly claim that he himself is establishing the relationship, and leaves open the possibility that the bonds between the two texts were thus understood by the ancient sages. Ban Gu continues by describing how certain sages of the past, namely King Wen and Kongzi, produced extensions of the Eight Trigrams and the “Great Plan” during moments of historic decline:

凡昔殷道弛，文王演《周易》；周道敝，孔子述《春秋》。則《乾坤》之陰陽，效《洪範》之咎徵，天人之道粲然著矣。

Long ago, when the Way of Yin slackened, King Wen expanded the *Changes*, and when the Way of Zhou grew tattered, Kongzi composed the *Annals*. By taking *yin* and *yang* in *Qian* and *Kun* as a model, and verifying events against the proofs of blame in the “Great Plan,” the Way of the Celestial and Human Realms grows brilliantly clear.<sup>93</sup>

Ban Gu creates here a symmetry between King Wen and Kongzi. King Wen, as we saw in our discussion of the “Basic Annals,” expanded the *Changes* by producing the Sixty-four Hexagrams from the initial Eight Trigrams. Kongzi’s composition of the *Annals* is, in the context of the structure articulated here, an extension of the “Great Plan.” Both the creation of the Sixty-four Hexagrams and the composition of the *Annals* constitute sagely responses to desperate times, profound and marvelous expansions of works whose origins may ultimately be traced to Heaven itself. King Wen and Kongzi lived in times when the will of Heaven seemed to have been ignored or forgotten, yet they both produced means by which Heaven, and its relationship to this human world, could once again be properly understood. Ban Gu, writing nearly a century after the collapse of the Western Han, places the “Five Resources” within the lineage of the *Annals*,

<sup>92</sup> *Hanshu* 27A.1316.

<sup>93</sup> *Hanshu* 27A.1316.

and thus, within the lineage of the “Great Plan” and the Luo Writings:

漢興，承秦滅學之後，景、武之世，董仲舒治《公羊春秋》，始推陰陽，為儒者宗。宣、元之後，劉向治《穀梁秦秋》，數其禍福，傳以《洪範》，與仲舒錯。至向子歆治《左氏傳》，其《春秋》意亦已乖矣；言《五行傳》，又頗不同。是以攔仲舒，別向、歆傳載，眭孟、夏侯勝、京房、谷永、李尋之徒所陳行事，訖於王莽，舉十二世，以傳《春秋》，著於篇。

At the beginning of the Han, on the heels of the Qin destruction of classical learning, in the ages of Emperor Jing (r. 156–141 BCE) and Emperor Wu, Dong Zhongshu studied the *Gongyang Annals*, was the first to employ *yin* and *yang* [in reading the *Annals*], and was the father of the classicists. After the time of Emperor Xuan (r. 73–49 BCE) and Emperor Yuan (r. 48–33 BCE), Liu Xiang studied the *Guliang Annals* and, accounting for calamity and prosperity within it, composed a tradition for the *Great Plan*, with which he interwove Dong Zhongshu’s writings. When Liu Xiang’s son, Liu Xin, studied the *Zuozhuan*, he found that its reading of the *Annals* was quite different, and the *Tradition of the Five Resources* he produced, was also far from being the same. For this reason, I have gathered together and differentiated the traditions recorded by Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin, as well as the statements put forth by Sui Meng (d. 78 BCE), Xiahou Sheng (fl. 74 BCE), Jing Fang 京房 (77–37 BCE), Gu Yong (d. ca. 10 CE), and Li Xun 李尋 (d. a. 5 BCE) regarding various court affairs, up until the time of Wang Mang, for a total of twelve generations, to serve as a supplement to the *Annals*, and thus compiled this chapter.<sup>94</sup>

The “Five Resources” is at once an expansive set of assorted commentaries to the “Great Plan” and an *Annals* for Han times. It employs and distinguishes between the interpretations of omens, during both the Chunqiu period and the Han, from the most prominent Han omenologists and experts on the *Annals*, the *Documents*, and the *Changes*. The macrostructure of the “Five Resources” is derived from three of the Nine Divisions in the “Great Plan”: the Five Resources, the Five Duties, and the Sovereign’s Standard, respectively. All of the materials included in these major sections might be read as commentary to the “Great Plan” itself. The first major subsections deal with events associated with each of the Five Resources: wood (*mu* 木); fire (*huo* 火); earth (*tu* 土); metal (*jin* 金); and water (*shui* 水). The second major section includes each of the Five Duties: bearing (*mao* 貌), speech (*yan* 言), sight (*shi* 視), listening (*ting* 聽), and deliberation (*si* 思). These are further subdivided into specific kinds of disasters and anomalies, some of which seem to fit into their categories according to a relatively transparent logic, while in other cases, the relationship between a specific kind of phenomenon and the Duty under which it is categorized is quite obscure. The subsection under the Duty of Speech, for instance, includes such likely suspects as “speech that is not congenial” (*yan bu cong* 言不從) and “rhymed monstrosities” (*shi yao* 詩妖), but also includes strange occurrences that bear no

<sup>94</sup> *Hanshu* 27A.1317. Punctuation has been altered.

obvious relationship to speech, such as “constant sunshine” (*heng yang* 恒陽), “calamities involving dogs” (*quan huo* 犬禍), and “white omens” (*bai xiang* 白祥).

The “Five Resources” uses the motley assortment of signs associated with each of the Five Resources, each of the Five Duties, and the Sovereign’s Standard, as the basis for its organization. Each subsection is introduced with a quotation from the *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (Great Tradition of the Documents) detailing the sort of problems associated with the particular resource or duty under discussion. The subsection of the Duty of Speech, for example, begins:

傳曰：「言之不從，是謂不艾，厥咎僭，厥罰恆陽，厥極憂。時則有詩妖，時則有介蟲之孽，時則有犬禍，時則有口舌之痾，時則有白眚白祥。惟木沴金。」

The tradition says: “When speech does not follow the course, this is called being unregulated. Its sign of blame is overstepping, its penalty constant *yang*, and its extreme manifestation is anxiety. At times there are monstrosities in poems, at times reptilian banes, at times calamities involving dogs, at times ailments of the mouth and tongue, and at times there are white pestilences and white omens. Wood dislocates metal.”<sup>95</sup>

The citation of the tradition is immediately followed with a sub-commentary, sometimes introduced as an “explanation” (*shuo* 說) that glosses difficult terms in and interprets the broader meaning of the quotation from the tradition. The explanation serves to break down the complex taxonomic relations between the various signs described under the Duty of Speech.

說曰：凡草物之類謂之妖。妖猶天胎，言尚微。蟲豸之類謂之孽。孽則牙孽矣。及六畜，謂之禍，言其著也。及人，謂之痾。痾，病貌，言口<sup>96</sup>深也。甚則異物生，謂之眚；自外來，謂之祥。祥猶禎也。氣相傷，謂之沴。沴猶臨莅，不和意也。每一事云「時則」以絕之，言非必俱至，或有或亡，或在前或在後也。

The explanation says: Whenever [a manifestation occurs] in the category of grassy things, it is called a monstrosity. A monstrosity is akin to something that dies in the womb. It refers to the fact that the manifestation is as yet incipient. Whenever [the manifestation occurs] in the category of beasts with and without legs it is called a bane. The bane begins to grow. When it reaches the Six Domestic Beasts, this is called a calamity, which refers to the fact that it is readily apparent. When it reaches human beings, it is called an ailment. Ailments are sicknesses visible in one’s outward appearance, which refer to increasing profundity. When it grows severe, then strange things are born, and these are called pestilences. When they come from external sources, they are called omens. Omens are like prodigies. When two kinds of *qi* mutually harm one another, this is called

<sup>95</sup> *Hanshu* 27B.1376. A second, abbreviated citation of this statement appears on *Hanshu* 26.1311.

<sup>96</sup> This rare character, glossed by Yan Shigu as meaning *jian* 漸, consists in a *xue* 穴 radical over the character *jin* 浸 (*Hanshu* 27B.1353, n. 3).

dislocation. Dislocation is like overbearing, and means not to be in harmony with something. For each of the affairs it says “at times” in order to delimit them. This speaks to the fact that they will not necessarily all occur, that some will be present and others absent, and that some might occur earlier, and others later.<sup>97</sup>

Much of what is said in the explanation to the Duty of Speech applies broadly to other sections of the “Five Resources” and general discourse on omenology. The explanation first sets up a detailed structure in which early signs of disorder have an embryonic quality, but later signs are amplified in both severity and visibility, until finally, certain signs manifest in human bodies, and omens and pestilences appear. Yet the explanation creates this structure only to immediately undermine it; in practice some signs we might expect to come do come, while others do not. According to the amplificatory logic of the underlying etiological theory, signs should appear in a sort of linear sequence as a problem grows increasingly severe, but the explanation reminds the reader that this is not the case in practice.

Following the explanation, in each subsection the “Five Resources” lists records of signs and their interpretations. Any given subcategory might include several different types of signs, as the tradition and explanation for the Duty of Speech suggest. At the level of individual types of signs, the organization of the “Five Resources” is derived from the *Annals*. First, the “Five Resources” lists entries in the *Annals* that record appearances of a given type of sign. Each entry is followed by the interpretations of Western Han exegetes. Second, the treatise lists instances of appearances of the same kinds of signs in the Qin and Western Han, likewise followed by the interpretations of Western Han exegetes. The “Five Resources” effectively creates a sort of Han mirror of the *Annals* of the Chunqiu period.

Celestial signs, along with certain human signs, such as people growing horns or spontaneously changing sexes, occur almost exclusively in the final major division of the “Five Resources,” the section on the Sovereign’s Standard, *huang ji* 皇極:

傳曰：「皇之不極，是謂不建，厥咎眊，厥罰恆陰，厥極弱。時則有射妖，時則有龍蛇之孽，時則有馬禍，時則有下人伐上之癘，時則有日月亂行，星辰逆行。」

The tradition says, “When the sovereign does not attain the standard, this is called failing to establish it. Its sign of blame is the loss of vision, its penalty constant *yin*, and its extreme manifestation is weakness. At times there are archery monstrosities, at times dragon and snake banes, at times calamities involving horses, at times ailments in which the lower portion of the body attacks the upper portion, and at times the sun and moon stray from their courses, or the planets move retrograde against the stars.<sup>98</sup>

The lengthy explanatory section that follows positions the appearance of celestial signs, and other signs included in the same section, as the product of lapses in all of the Five Duties. Taken as a group, these lapses constitute a failure to attain the standard. Cloudy *qi* rises from the

<sup>97</sup> *Hanshu* 27B.1353.

<sup>98</sup> *Hanshu* 27D.1458.

mountains, covering the heavens, so that the “*qi* of Heaven is disordered” 天氣亂. The ruler is like the arrogant high-flying dragon in the line statements to the first hexagram in the *Changes*, Qian 乾 (Pure Yang):

《易》曰「亢龍有悔，貴而亡位，高而亡民，賢人在下位而亡輔」，如此，則君有南面之尊，而亡一人之助，故其極弱也。

The *Changes* says: ‘For the arrogant dragon there is much humiliation. He is noble but without a position, exalted but without subjects. Worthies dwell in low level positions and he has no support.’<sup>99</sup> In the same way, the ruler has the revered status of facing south, but does not have the support of a single person. And thus, he is extremely weak.<sup>100</sup>

Because, as it says in the *Changes*, “clouds follow dragons” 雲從龍<sup>101</sup> dragon and snake banes are born. Calamities involving horses occur, for the hexagram Qian corresponds to both rulers and horses. The explanatory section proclaims that the *Great Tradition*, on analogy with the *Annals*, in fact conceals a powerful critique of the ruler, while at the same time reinforcing a *qi* based cosmological framework for understanding celestial signs:

凡君道傷者病天氣，不言五行沴天，而曰「日月亂行，星辰逆行」者，為若下不敢沴天，猶《春秋》曰「王師敗績于貿戎」，不言敗之者，以自敗為文，尊尊之意也。

As for those cases in which the way of the ruler has come to harm, and sickened the *qi* of Heaven, and the text does not say that the Five Resources have disordered Heaven, but says “the sun and moon stray from their courses, or the planets move retrograde against the stars,” this is much like where the *Annals* says, “The King suffered defeat at Maorong.”<sup>102</sup> It does not say who defeated him, but uses language suggesting that he is defeated of his own accord. The meaning of doing so is to exalt those who are worthy of exaltation.<sup>103</sup>

Like the “Celestial Patterns,” the “Five Resources” places responsibility for the appearance of celestial signs squarely on the head of the ruler. While it claims that the *Great Tradition* avoided, out of ritual respect, any indication of the ruler as the source of disorder in the cosmos, it suggests that disorder in the heavens issues from disorder at court. The idea that celestial signs

<sup>99</sup> The phrase “For the arrogant dragon there is much humiliation” is from the line statement to the upper nine in the *Qian* hexagram. The remainder of the quotation is the Master’s comment on that phrase in the “Xici zhuan.” (See *Zhouyi yizhu* 4 and 544).

<sup>100</sup> *Hanshu* 77D.1458.

<sup>101</sup> This phrase is found in the *Wenyan* 文言 (“Commentary on the Words”) comment to the fifth nine in the *Qian* hexagram (*Zhouyi yishu* 15).

<sup>102</sup> This event occurred in the first year of Duke Cheng (590 BCE).

<sup>103</sup> *Hanshu* 27D.1458–59.

are rooted in ongoing processes in the human world colors the interpretation of such signs both in the Classical text of the *Annals* and in the omenology of the Western Han.

The “Five Resources,” even more so than the “Celestial Patterns,” is the primary treatise concerned with historical eclipses and comets in the *Hanshu*. It contains entries for all of thirty-six eclipses recorded in the *Annals*, fifty eclipses in the Qin and Western Han, detailed Western Han commentaries on the three comets that appear in the *Annals*, and an exhaustive list of comets in the Qin and Western Han. Both eclipses and comets in the *Annals* portend major political events, events that had already been set into motion by the time the signs occur. The “Five Resources” entry for the very first eclipse in the *Annals* shows that Western Han experts in the *Annals* built on, rather than dogmatically drew from, existing traditions to create powerful arguments regarding the meaning of celestial signs in the Classic:

隱公三年「二月己巳，日有食之」。《穀梁傳》曰，言日不言朔，食晦。《公羊傳》曰，食二日。董仲舒、劉向以為其後戎執天子之使，鄭獲魯隱，滅戴，衛、魯、宋咸殺君。

In the third year of Duke Yin (720 BCE), it says “On the *yisi* day of the second month, there was an eclipse of the sun.” The *Guliang Tradition* says, “It speaks of the sun, but not of the first day of the month, because it occurred on the last day of the month.” The *Gongyang Tradition* says, “The eclipse occurred on the second day.” Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang held it to have occurred because thereafter the Rong would seize the messenger of the Son of Heaven, Zheng would capture Duke Yin of Lu (r. 722–712 BCE) and destroy Dai, and Wei, Lu, and Song would all murder their rulers.<sup>104</sup>

Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang, experts in the *Gongyang* and *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (*Guliang Tradition*), respectively, had little to work with in terms of received tradition attached directly to the Classic. Liu Xin, examining the same entry, would give a somewhat more elaborate cosmological explanation for the occurrence of the eclipse, while also focusing the reader’s attention on the value of prognostication. If one correctly interprets the signs and takes the right course of action, Liu Xin suggests, disaster *can* be averted:

燕、越之分野也。凡日所躔而有變，則分野之國失政者受之。人君能修政，共御厥罰，則災消而福至；不能，則災息而禍生。故經書災而不記其故，蓋吉凶亡常，隨行而成禍福也。

It occurred in the celestial field corresponding to Yan and Yue. Whenever an aberration occurs, then those who err in the governance of the domain corresponding to the celestial field where the sun treads will suffer for it. But if the Lord of Men is able to refine his administration, and he is able to prevent the punishment, the disaster will vanish and prosperity will arrive. But if he is not able to do so, then the disaster will go dormant and calamity will be born. Thus, the Classic speaks of the disaster, but does not record the

<sup>104</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1479.

reason for its occurrence. Good fortune and ill-fortune are without constancy. Calamities and prosperity come into being according to one's actions.<sup>105</sup>

Liu Xin's view, while not unique, reminds us that those who performed prognostications in early imperial China, largely did so not to discover what was fated to occur in the future, but to understand the trajectory of the current state of affairs, and to change course if they were headed for disaster. It is this view of prognostication that makes it appear to be a valuable, useful practice rather than an exercise in futility.

The "Five Resources" chronicle of Western Han eclipses shows that, no less than those in the Chunqiu period, these signs were intimately tied to developments in the political realm. Circumstances in which women, and in the late Western Han, eunuchs, attained high levels of political power, were particularly apt to produce eclipses. When an eclipse occurs in the seventh year of Empress Lü, she declares "This is for me" 此為我,<sup>106</sup> predicting her own death the next year. When an earthquake and an eclipse occur in the third year of Emperor Cheng's reign (29 BCE), it prompts memorials from Gu Yong and Du Qin 杜欽 (fl. 29–25 BCE), recorded in the "Five Resources," that attack both the Empress Xu 許 (d. 8 BCE) and Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕 (d. ca. 1 BCE), warning that the succession is likely to be cut off. Gu Yong and Du Qin describe the omens in terms that are causally related to activities at court. Gu Yong baldly explains: "This month both the Empress and the concubines have committed extreme lapses in decorum. *Thus*, Heaven has manifested aberrations *on account of* both of them" 是月后妾當有失節之郵，故天因此兩見其變。<sup>107</sup> Du Qin, for his part, points to the capacity of the court to correct its course of action. An appropriate response to the signs will avert disaster:

此必適妾將有爭寵相害而為患者。人事失於下，變象見於上。能應之（司）（以）德，則咎異消；忽而不戒，則禍敗至。應之，非誠不立，非信不行。

This calamity must be the result of the primary wife and the concubines harming one another as they struggle for the affections of the Emperor. When human affairs go astray below, aberrant images appear above. If [Your Majesty] is able to respond to them with suasive power, then the signs of blame and anomalies will vanish, but if you do not take heed, calamity and destruction are nigh. If you do not respond to them with integrity you will not stand, and if you do not respond to them with faithfulness then you cannot move forward.<sup>108</sup>

Du Qin's response to the comet suggests that action on the part of the ruler or his court to remove the source of the baleful signs might prove effective. The chronicle within which it appears, however, gravitates teleologically toward the end of the dynasty.

<sup>105</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1479.

<sup>106</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1501.

<sup>107</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1504.

<sup>108</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1504.



### A Chronicle of Comets, or The Decline and Fall of the Western Han

The “Treatise on the Five Resources” tells two stories over and over again. One is the story of the Chunqiu period, the slow descent toward the increasingly chaotic world of the Warring Domains period. The second has a somewhat different arc, beginning with the triumph of Liu Bang over Qin Ershi 秦二世 (r. 209–207 BCE) and over his rival Xiang Yu 項羽 (232–202). Yet, the second story, which always ends with the rise of the usurper Wang Mang, is likewise a narrative of decline. Most any chronicle of most any sign can serve in the “Five Resources” as a chronicle of the decline and fall of the Western Han. It is within these chronicles where the “Five Resources” proves to be a true supplement to the *Annals*, an *Annals* for Han times.

We will examine in detail only one part of these chronicles, that pertaining to records of comets in the Western Han. There had been only three records of comets transmitted in the *Annals* for the Chunqiu period. The chronicle of comets includes detailed readings of these records attributed to Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin, as well as relevant passages from the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Tradition). The *Xingzhuan* 星傳 (Tradition of Stars and Planets)<sup>109</sup> is cited several times within Liu Xiang’s commentary. With only three instances of comets in the *Annals*, the story of the Chunqiu period, as it is punctuated by comets, is ridden with gaps. Yet, even in the *Annals* Classic, as it is read in the “Five Resources,” comets appear at crucial moments. The comet that sweeps through Northern Dipper in the 14<sup>th</sup> Year of Duke Wen (613 BCE), presages the murders of the lords of Qi 齊, Song 宋, Lu 魯, Ju 莒, and Jin 晉 over the next twenty-eight years. A comet near the Great Star 大辰 (Antares) prompts one reader of celestial signs, whose words are reproduced from the *Zuozhuan*, to make the memorable and often repeated claim: “Broom stars are the means by which the old is eliminated<sup>110</sup> and the new is proliferated” 彗所以除舊布新也.<sup>111</sup> Many once glorious houses do indeed appear to be swept away in the wake of the final comet in the *Annals*, which occurs in the 13th year of Duke Ai (482 BCE). In its entry for this event, the “Five Resources” records but does not differentiate between the interpretations of Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang: “Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang thought as follows: The reason it does not speak of the name of the lodge is because it was not imposed on a lodge. When an asterism rises following the sun,<sup>112</sup> disorderly *qi* occludes the brightness of the lord. The next year, the events in the *Annals* came to a conclusion” 哀公十三年「冬十一月，有星孛于東方」。董仲舒、劉向以為不言宿名者，不加宿也。以辰乘日而出，亂氣蔽君

<sup>109</sup> The *Tradition of Stars and Planets* is cited a total of seven times in the *Hanshu*. Six citations occur in the “Celestial Patterns,” and one occurs in the “Five Resources.” No text under the title *Xingzhuan* appears in the *Hanshu* bibliographic treatise.

<sup>110</sup> Here, *chu* 除 might also be rendered “swept away.” The image of sweeping is implied by the word for the comet —i.e. “broom star.” See Yang Bojun’s 楊伯峻 note in his *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jizhu* 春秋左傳集注 (Collected Commentaries to the *Zuo Tradition* of the *Annals*), vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981): 1390.

<sup>111</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1515.

<sup>112</sup> Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang suggest that the comet could be seen during the day, a time when the sun, a celestial body identified with the ruler, should be the only visible celestial object in the sky. We should perhaps understand the comet as partially eclipsing the sun, in an effect similar to that which occurs when Mercury or Venus passes between the earth and the sun.

明也。明年，《春秋》事終。<sup>113</sup>

The chronicle of comets during the Western Han presents an arc that might be heuristically divided into five stages: The founding of the dynasty; early rebellions; military conquests; strife at court; and the rise of Wang Mang. The first stage, which includes a single comet appearing in 204 BCE, announces the rise of Liu Bang, the first Han emperor:

高帝三年七月，有星孛于大角，旬餘乃入。劉向以為是時項羽為楚王，伯諸侯，而漢已定三秦，與羽相距滎陽，天下歸心於漢，楚將滅，故彗除王位也。一曰，項羽阬秦卒，燒宮室，弑義帝，亂王位，故彗加之也。

In the seventh month of the third year of the High Emperor of Han (204 BCE), a comet appeared in the Great Horn,<sup>114</sup> and only after more than ten days did it set. Liu Xiang thought as follows: At that time Xiang Yu (232–202 BCE) was the King of Chu, and was hegemon over<sup>115</sup> the local lords, but the Han had already settled the three districts of Qin,<sup>116</sup> and was distant from Xiang Yu, in the city of Xingyang. But the hearts of the whole world belonged to the Han, and Chu was about to be destroyed. Thus, the broom-star cleared the Royal Position. One source says: “Xiang Yu was defending against Qin troops, and burned the palaces, murdered a dutiful emperor, and brought disorder to the Royal Position. Thus, the broom-star was imposed upon him.”

The comet here proves a baleful omen, but not for Liu Bang. A series of bad omens can be auspicious indeed for one who is bent on toppling the ruler of an existing regime. The “Five Resources” gives two possible interpretations of the comet, both of which are bad news for Xiang Yu. While Xiang Yu, never having founded a dynasty, is not usually identified as such a figure, he is named in the first interpretation as a king. Occupying the Royal Position, he is swept away. In the second interpretation, which issues from an unknown Western Han source, Xiang Yu brings disaster on himself by murdering the last Qin emperor, Ziying 子嬰 (r. 207 BCE), whose forty-six day reign is all but forgotten.<sup>117</sup>

The second stage consists of comets that seem to mark rebellion, and respectively occur in 157 BCE and 135 BCE, only a few years prior to the Seven Kingdom’s Rebellion and the rebellion of Liu An 劉安 (d. 122), the King of Huainan. Liu Xiang’s interpretation of the 157 BCE comet, which appeared soon after the death of Emperor Wen 文 (r. 179–157 BCE), points

<sup>113</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1515–16.

<sup>114</sup> Great Horn corresponds to  $\alpha$  Boötis.

<sup>115</sup> Translation follows Yan Shigu’s suggestion that *bo* 伯 be read *ba* 霸 (*Hanshu* 27E.1516 n.1).

<sup>116</sup> *San Qin*, or the three districts of Qin, is the collective name given to Yong 雍, Di 翟, and Sai 塞, areas roughly corresponding to modern western, northern, and eastern Shaanxi respectively, following the destruction of Qin in 206 BCE. See *Shiji* 6.275.

<sup>117</sup> The most important event of Ziying’s reign, prior to the destruction of the Qin capital and his death at the hands of Xiang Yu, is his own assassination of the notorious eunuch Zhao Gao 趙高 (d. 207 BCE), who lay behind the worst excesses and purges of the reign of the second Qin ruler, Qin Ershi (See *Shiji* 6.275). Ziying’s action against Zhao Gao makes him appear poised to change the course of the Qin dynasty, and thus, he is here referred to as a dutiful emperor.

to both the coming rebellion and the ultimate victory of Emperor Jing:

文帝後七年九月，有星孛于西方，其本直尾、箕，末指虛、危，長丈餘，及天漢，十六日不見。劉向以為尾宋地，今楚彭城也。箕為燕，又為吳、越、齊。宿在漢中，負海之國水澤地也。是時景帝新立，信用鼂錯，將誅正諸侯王，其象先見。後三年，吳、楚、四齊與趙七國舉兵反，皆誅滅云。

In the ninth month of the seventh year of the latter reign period of Emperor Wen (157 BCE), a comet appeared in the west. Its body extended to the lodges Tail and Winnower, and its tail pointed toward Barrens and Roof. Longer than a *zhang*, it reached the River in the Sky [i.e. the Milky Way]. On the sixteenth day it could no longer be seen. Liu Xiang thought as follows: Tail corresponds to the land of Song, which is now Pengcheng in Chu. The Winnower corresponds to Yan, as well as Wu, Yue, and Qi. Their lodges are in the River in the Sky, these domains are by the sea, and they are watery, marshy lands. At this time, Emperor Jing had recently been established. He trusted and employed Chao Cuo (d. 154 BCE), and was about to punish the local lords and kings. Prior to this, the sign appeared. Three years later, Wu, Chu, the four kingdoms of Qi,<sup>118</sup> and Zhao, seven kingdoms in all, raised arms in rebellion, and all were punished and destroyed.<sup>119</sup>

The second comet in this stage seems to blend intrigue at court with rebellion. Both culprits are effectively suppressed:

武帝建元六年六月，有星孛于北方。劉向以為明年淮南王安入朝，與太尉武安侯田蚡有邪謀，而陳皇后驕恣，其後陳后廢，而淮南王反，誅。

In the sixth month of the sixth year of the Jianyuan reign period (135 BCE) of Emperor Wu, a comet appeared in the north. Liu Xiang thought as follows: The next year, the King of Huainan, Liu An, would come to court, and along with Tian Fen (d. 131 BCE), the Supreme Counselor and the Marquis of Wu'an, would engage in a devious plot. Empress Chen (fl. 130 BCE) was haughty and self-indulgent.<sup>120</sup> Later, Empress Chen was deposed, and the King of Huainan rebelled and was punished.<sup>121</sup>

While the first stage of the chronicle is a familiar enough narrative of appropriate response to the baleful signs that accompany a falling dynasty, the second stage emphasizes the capacity of early Western Han rulers to effectively respond to challenges. Comets announce rebellion and, in the case of Empress Chen, potentially destructive influences within the palace walls. Having

<sup>118</sup> These include Liaodong 膠東, Liaoxi 膠西, Zichuan 菑川, and Jinan 濟南 (*Hanshu* 27E.1517, n. 1.)

<sup>119</sup> These events refer to the Seven Kingdoms Rebellion of 154 BCE (see *Hanshu* 5.142–43). *Yun* 云 appears to be a tone word and is not translated.

<sup>120</sup> Empress Chen was demoted in status in 130 BCE, due to the fact that she had not born a son, and owing to accusations that she had committed imprecations against Wei Zifu 衛子夫, who was to become Emperor Wu's second empress. See Loewe, *Bibliographic Dictionary*, 31–32.

<sup>121</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1517.

attained internal stability by successfully overcoming this series of challenges, the Han is poised for a third historical stage: decades of expansionism.

The next comet occurs only two months after the last comet of the previous stage:

八月，長星出于東方，長終天，三十日去。占曰：「是為蚩尤旗，見則王者征伐四方。」其後兵誅四夷，連數十年。

In the eighth month<sup>122</sup> a long star emerged in the east. Its length extended across the sky.<sup>123</sup> After thirty days it departed. The prognostication said: “This is the Banner of Chiyou. When it appears, the King will march in conquest on the Four Directions.” After this, arms were raised to punish the Four Yi for several decades in a row.<sup>124</sup>

This comet appears to herald, and may once have been used to justify, the expansionist policies of Emperor Wu. It is not Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang, or Liu Xin who claims that the Banner of Chiyou appears when the King is poised to march in conquest, but an anonymous prognostication.<sup>125</sup> The “Five Resources” does not explicitly approve of the prognosis, nor does any identifiable Western Han writer who had lived to see the fiscal and political consequences of Emperor Wu’s military adventures. The second comet of this stage, which occurs some sixteen years later, is accompanied by a comment without any identified source, which might in fact issue from Ban Gu himself: “In the fourth month of the fourth year of the Yuanshou reign period (119 BCE), a long star again emerged in the northwest. At this time, the campaigns against the Hu grew especially extreme” 元狩四年四月，長星又出西北，是時伐胡尤甚。<sup>126</sup> Whereas the prognostication accompanying the first comet supported an expansionist campaign, the comment on the latter comet points to the excessive and potentially dangerous point the expansionist policies had reached. The second comment is not a prognostication, or even an explicitly marked interpretation of a celestial sign. It works through a simple act of juxtaposition, artlessly bonding the trajectory of the history of the Western Han to the appearance of celestial signs.

The fourth stage marks in earnest the decline of the Western Han, but that decline is punctuated by a restoration under Emperor Xuan. The three comets in this stage all accompany strife at court. The first of these comets occurs in 110 BCE, but announces the disastrous fighting that would occur near the end of Emperor Wu’s reign, during which the Crown Prince would be executed and Empress Wei 衛 (d. 90 BCE) condemned for witchcraft:

元封元年五月，有星孛于東井，又孛于三台。其後江充作亂，京師紛然。此明東

<sup>122</sup> Only the month is given, as this entry refers to the same year as in the previous entry.

<sup>123</sup> Translation follows Tomiya Itaru 富谷至 and Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫 eds., *Kanjo gogyōshi* 漢書五行志 (The History of the Han “Treatise on the Five Resources”; Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1986): 345.

<sup>124</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1517.

<sup>125</sup> For a discussion of the Banner of Chiyou in both excavated and received texts, see Michael Loewe, “The Han View of Comets” in *Divination, Mythology, and Monarchy in Han China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 61–84.

<sup>126</sup> This refers to campaigns initiated by Wei Qing 衛青 (d. 106 BCE) and Huo Qubing 霍去病 (ca. 140–ca. 117 BCE) against the Xiongnu (Tomiya and Yoshikawa 346, n. 2).

井、三台為秦地效也。

In the fifth month of the first year of the Yuanfeng reign period (110 BCE), there was a comet in Eastern Well,<sup>127</sup> and there was also a comet in Three Stairways.<sup>128</sup> Following this, Jiang Chong 江充 (d. 91 BCE) fomented disorder,<sup>129</sup> and there was strife in the capital. This is a verification that clearly shows that Eastern Well and Three Platforms correspond to the lands of Qin.<sup>130</sup>

A second comet in this stage appeared during the last year of the life of Huo Guang 霍光 (d. 68 BCE), who had been the *de facto* ruler of China since the death of Emperor Wu eighteen years earlier:

宣帝地節元年正月，有星孛于西方，去太白二丈所。劉向以為太白為大將，彗孛加之，掃滅象也。明年，大將軍霍光薨，後二年家夷滅。

In the first month of the first year of the Dijie reign period (69 BCE) of Emperor Xuan (r. 73–49 BCE), a comet appeared in the west. It was two *zhang* distant from Great White. Liu Xiang thought as follows: Great White is the Supreme General. When broom-stars and comets are imposed upon it, this is a sign of sweeping away and destruction. The next year, the General-in-Chief Huo Guang died, and two years later his entire family was destroyed.<sup>131</sup>

Without attempting to answer the difficult and complex question of how effective a ruler Huo Guang actually was, from the standpoint of dynastic legitimacy, Huo Guang's rule marks a period in which power did not rest in the hands of a Liu clan emperor. Like Wang Mang, Huo could not be a legitimate ruler, though unlike Wang Mang, Huo never dared to declare himself emperor. The death of Huo Guang, however, would return legitimate rulers to power for the next three generations. As did the reign of King Xuan of Zhou, Emperor Xuan's reign ushers in a mid-dynastic renaissance. For three generations the line of succession would be uninterrupted. But with the coronation of his grandson, Emperor Cheng 成 (r. 33–7 BCE), the process of decline would begin once again, when a comet appeared that would be read, by the end of the

<sup>127</sup> Eastern Well is often simply referred to as Well (*jing* 井).

<sup>128</sup> Three Stairways refers to a group of six stars in Ursa Major. For a detailed description, see Chapter 1, Appendix B, pp. 28–29 in the present work.

<sup>129</sup> Jiang Chong led investigations into allegations of witchcraft that led to widespread violence in Chang'an in 91 BCE. For an account of Jiang Chong's involvement in these events, see Michael Loewe, "The Case of Witchcraft in 91 BC" in *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC–AD 9* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974): 40–48.

<sup>130</sup> The Western Han capital was located near the area that had once been the political center of the Qin domain.

<sup>131</sup> See Michael Loewe, "The Fall of the House of Huo—68–66 BC" in *Crisis and Conflict* (113–53) and Liu Pakyuen (Liao Boyuan) 廖伯源, Part I: "Les luttes pour le pouvoir politique au milieu de la dynastie des Han Antérieurs" (Struggles for Political Power in the mid-Western Han dynasty) of *Les institutions politiques et la lutte pour le pouvoir au milieu de la dynastie des Han antérieurs* (Political Institutions and the Struggle for Power in Western Han Dynasty; Paris: Collège de France, 1983): 36–170.

young emperor's reign, as a sign that no heir would survive him:

成帝建始元年正月，有星孛于營室，青白色，長六七丈，廣尺餘。劉向、谷永以為營室為後宮懷任之象，彗星加之，將有害懷任絕繼嗣者。一曰，後宮將受害也。其後許皇后坐祝詛後宮懷任者廢。趙皇后立妹為昭儀，害兩皇子，上遂無嗣。趙后姊妹卒皆伏辜。

In the first month of the first year of the Jianshi reign period (32 BCE) of Emperor Cheng, a comet appeared in the lodge House. It was blue-white in color, six or seven *zhang* long, and over a *chi* wide.<sup>132</sup> Liu Xiang and Gu Yong thought as follows: House is the sign of a pregnant woman in the rear palace. When a broom-star is imposed upon it, then the pregnant woman will be murdered. If the pregnant woman is murdered, then the line of succession will be cut off. One source says, "In the rear palace, someone is about to be murdered." Later, following Empress Xu's (d. 8 BCE) act of imprecation, the pregnant woman in the rear palace was disposed of. Empress Zhao (d. ca. 1 BCE) established her sister, titled Zhaoyi (d. 7 BCE), who murdered the two imperial sons, so that the emperor was left without an heir. The Zhao sisters ultimately were punished for their crimes.<sup>133</sup>

In terms of its structure, the final entry in this stage of the chronicle may be divided into three parts: 1) technical details regarding the time of appearance, location, color, and size of the comet; 2) the respective interpretations of Western Han experts; and 3) connective tissue, perhaps provided by Ban Gu himself, which serves both to position the occurrence of the comet with respect to later events and to verify the accuracy of the interpretations of the cited Western Han experts. Ban Gu moves from the occurrence of the comet itself to the events it portends.

Emperor Cheng would, in the end, be left without an heir. And while Emperor Ai 哀 (6–1 BCE) would prove no friend to Wang Mang, his early death without issue would set the stage for Wang Mang to become regent, and ultimately, to take the throne himself.

The final stage in the chronicle consists in a single, lengthy entry narrating an appearance of Halley's Comet<sup>134</sup> near the end of Emperor Cheng's reign. This entry, too, consists of three main components: a description of the spectacular trajectory of the celestial sign, the views of Gu Yong and Liu Xiang, and finally, a description of the events portended by the comet up to the rise of Wang Mang.

The technical details of the comet are extraordinary:

元延元年七月辛未，有星孛于東井，踐五諸侯，出河戍北率行軒轅、太微，後日

<sup>132</sup> As Michael Loewe notes in "The Han View of Comets," precisely what *zhang* and *chi* indicate as measurements of comets is not clear (70). It is significant, however, that figures for the dimensions of comets were recorded, even if we do not know exactly what those figures mean in quantitative terms or understand the process by which they were derived.

<sup>133</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1517–18.

<sup>134</sup> For the identification of this entry as an appearance of Haley's Comet, see Wen Shiou Tsu, "The Observations of Halley's Comet in Chinese History" *Popular Astronomy* 42 (1934): 193–94.

六度有餘，晨出東方。十三日夕見西方，犯次妃、長秋、斗、填，蠡炎再貫紫宮中。大火當後，達天河，除於妃后之域。南逝度犯大角、攝提，至天市而按節徐行，炎入市中，旬而後西去，五十六日與倉龍俱伏。

On the *xinwei* day of the seventh month of the first year of the Yuanyan reign period (12 BCE), there was a comet in Eastern Well, that tread over the Five Local Lords.<sup>135</sup> It emerged from north of River Ramparts and went past Xuanyuan<sup>136</sup> and Grand Tenuity. Following the sun at a distance of slightly more than six degrees, it rose at dawn in the east.<sup>137</sup> For thirteen days it appeared in the west in the evening, transgressing into Secondary Consort, Long Autumn,<sup>138</sup> the Northern Dipper,<sup>139</sup> and over the Queller, and the tips<sup>140</sup> of its flame twice penetrated the Purple Palace.<sup>141</sup> With Great Fire behind it, it reached the River in the Sky, and was eliminated from the walls of the Queen Consort. It went off to the south, transgressed into Great Horn and Assistant Conductors,<sup>142</sup> arrived at the Celestial Market, and slowly and steadily proceeded. Its flames entered into the Market,<sup>143</sup> and after ten days it went away into the west. For fifty-six days it set with the Azure Dragon.<sup>144</sup>

The “Five Resources” records a remarkable verbal chart of the comet’s movements over time. It would have been difficult indeed to identify all possible implications of such a comet, using materials such as the Dai corpus or the technical sections of the “Celestial Offices.” It could not be easily tied to one particular part of the empire using the celestial field system, though its movements around the polar constellations may have made it amenable to identifying with the court. In any case, its encroachment on Saturn must have been ominous. Gu Yong identifies its appearance with treachery in the rear palace, and widespread revolt, while Liu Xiang reminds us of the celestial signs that accompanied the fall of the previous dynasty:

谷永對曰：「上古以來，大亂之極，所希有也。察其馳騁驟步，芒炎或長或短，所歷奸犯，內為後宮女妾之害，外為諸夏叛逆之禍。」劉向亦曰：「三代之亡，攝提易方；秦、項之滅，星孛大角。」

<sup>135</sup> Five Local Lords (Wu zhuhou 五諸侯) is the name of a constellation adjacent to Eastern Well.

<sup>136</sup> Xuanyuan is an alternate name for the Yellow God.

<sup>137</sup> Translation of this line is particularly tentative.

<sup>138</sup> Tomiya and Yoshikawa note that these two stars or constellations can no longer be identified (348 n. 4).

<sup>139</sup> Translation follows the identification suggested by Wang Xianqian (HSBZ 27E.23a), as well as Tomiya and Yoshikawa (347). This accords with the trajectory of the comet much better than would identifying it with the lodge Dipper in the southern sky.

<sup>140</sup> *Feng* 蠡 is a common variant for *feng* 鋒 in the *Hanshu* (HSBZ 27E.23b).

<sup>141</sup> This is a set of constellations around the north pole.

<sup>142</sup> I follow Pankenier’s rendering for *Sheti* 攝提 (463).

<sup>143</sup> Punctuation is slightly modified from the Zhonghua edition of the *Hanshu*, which places the comma before, rather than after, *zhong* 中 (27E.1518).

<sup>144</sup> Azure Dragon is one of four major conglomerations of constellations each associated with a cardinal direction. It includes Horn, Gullet, Base, Chamber, Heart, Tail, and Winnower. (Edward H. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T’ang Approaches to the Stars* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977]: 76).

Gu Yong said in response to it: “Since high antiquity, such extremes of great disorder have rarely been present. Examining the pacing of its gallop, the flames, which have sometimes been long and sometimes short, and the places through which it has passed and into which it has transgressed, it corresponds to the violence among the women and concubines of the rear palace at court, and the calamity among the many lands of Xia that engage in treachery and revolt abroad.” Liu Xiang also said, “When the Three Ages each came to an end, Assistant Conductors changed positions. When Qin and Xiang Yu were destroyed, there was a comet in Great Horn.”<sup>145</sup>

Gu Yong’s response to these celestial signs points toward a set of circumstances of which he was already aware. As we saw in his response to the eclipse and earthquake that had occurred on the same day in 29 BCE, Gu Yong had long been deeply concerned about the activities of powerful women in the palace. Here, he presents a picture in which the danger is doubled, coming from abroad as well as within the palace walls. The appearance of the spectacular comet, which had traversed the sky and marched through the celestial correspondents of the palace itself, could only confirm what Gu Yong already knew to be true. The dynasty was in dire straits. Liu Xiang’s comment appears to go even further, suggesting that the dynasty was about to be overturned, swept away just as the dominion of Xiang Yu once had been.<sup>146</sup>

In the final section of the entry, Ban Gu confirms both Gu Yong’s claims regarding the state of affairs at the time of the appearance of the comet and Liu Xiang’s apparent prediction of the fall of the Western Han. Again, the problem of succession is paramount. Had Emperor Cheng kept his house in order, he might well have left an heir. Had an heir survived, the ultimate decline of the dynasty might have been averted. After three successive emperors who left no successor, Wang Mang would finally seize power:

是歲，趙昭儀害兩皇子。後五年，成帝崩，昭儀自殺。哀帝即位，趙氏皆免官爵，徙遼西。哀帝亡嗣。平帝即位，王莽用事，追廢成帝趙皇后、哀帝傅皇后，皆自殺。外家丁、傅皆免官爵，徙合浦，歸故郡。平帝亡嗣，莽遂篡國。

During this year, Zhao Zhaoyi murdered the two imperial princes. Five years later, Emperor Cheng died and Zhaoyi committed suicide. Emperor Ai ascended to the throne, and the members of the Zhao clan were stripped of their official posts and orders of

<sup>145</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1518.

<sup>146</sup> We must, however, exercise caution in reading the comment as having been intended by Liu Xiang to address this particular comet. Whereas Ban Gu introduces Gu Yong’s statement with the quotative *dui yue* 對曰 (said in response), a phrase that suggests Gu Yong was responding to the appearance of this particular comet, Liu Xiang’s statement is introduced with the quotative *yi yue* 亦曰 (also said). This leaves open the possibility that Ban Gu is quoting a statement in Liu Xiang’s work that was not directed at this particular comet at all, at least not explicitly. To be certain, it would have been a dangerous, potentially treasonous act to compare the status of Emperor Cheng to the short lived Qin dynasty, or to Xiang Yu. Ban Gu, however, living in the Eastern Han, could use Liu Xiang’s writings about celestial signs that appeared under ill-fated earlier rulers as a powerful explanation of historical development toward the rise of Wang Mang.



honor, and exiled to Liaoxi. Emperor Ai had no heir. Once Emperor Ping (r. 1 CE–5 CE) ascended to the throne, Wang Mang was in power, and banished Emperor Cheng's Empress Zhao and Emperor Ai's Empress Fu (d. 1 BCE). Both women committed suicide. The consort families Ding<sup>147</sup> and Fu were both stripped of their official posts and orders of honor, and exiled to Hefu, returning to their old commandery. Emperor Ping had no heir, and Wang Mang consequently usurped the realm.<sup>148</sup>

The chronicle of comets ends, as do the chronicles of so many types of signs in the “Treatise of the Five Resources,” with the rise of Wang Mang and the fall of the Western Han.

### Part III: Etiology, Chronology, and Classicism in the “Celestial Patterns”

Ban Zhao, Ma Rong, and Ma Xu synthesized aspects of the “Celestial Offices” with aspects of the “Five Resources” in their “Treatise on Celestial Patterns.” Most of the technical materials presented in Sima Qian's treatise they appropriated wholesale; large parts of the “Celestial Patterns” correspond very closely to the “Celestial Offices.” However, the “Celestial Patterns” distinguished itself from its predecessor in three important ways. First, the introduction to the “Celestial Patterns” replaces Sima Qian's essay. Where Sima Qian's closing comments framed the technical materials of the treatise as the patrimony of a lineage of experts, the opening of “Celestial Patterns” emphasizes the etiology of celestial signs, declaring them to be direct reflections of events in the human realm. Second, “Celestial Patterns” draws directly and explicitly on Classical authority. It includes several technical passages that cite the Classics as proof-texts. The classicism of the “Celestial Patterns,” moreover, plays a vital role in the network of taxonomic correspondences within which it positions planetary signs. In contrast to Sima Qian's treatise, it ties each of the Five Planets to one of the Five Duties in the “Great Plan” and to the “Monthly Ordinances” of the *Record of Rites* (Liji 禮記). Finally, as does the “Five Resources,” the “Celestial Patterns” closes with a chronicle of celestial signs that tell the story of the rise and fall of the Western Han.

Where the *Shiji* treatise speaks to the pragmatic value of celestial observation to the court, linking it to the traditions of high antiquity and to some extent borrowing the authority of the Classics, the “Celestial Patterns” explicitly constructs inauspicious celestial aberrations as signs that the ruler has endangered himself and his court due to his own ritual failures. Before launching into a description of the constellations of the Five Palaces nearly identical to the first section of the “Celestial Offices,” the “Celestial Patterns” introduces the treatise and its value:

凡天文在圖籍昭昭可知者，經星常宿中外官凡百一十八名，積數七百八十三星，皆有州國官宮物類之象。其伏見蚤晚，邪正存亡，虛實闊陔，及五星所行，合散犯守，陵歷鬪食，彗孛飛流，日月薄食，暈適背穴抱，珥虹蜺迅雷風祲，怪雲變氣：此皆

<sup>147</sup> Emperor Ai's mother, Ding Yi 丁姬 (d. 5 BCE), had been stripped of the title of empress following the death of her son. In 5 CE, she was disinterred and reburied as a commoner. See Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 65; *Hanshu* 97B.4002.

<sup>148</sup> *Hanshu* 27E.1518.

陰陽之精……

As for those celestial patterns that may be quite clearly known in the charts and texts, these include 108 named constant stars<sup>149</sup> in the enduring lodges and the central and outer offices. Altogether the stars number 783, and all consist in signs of regions, domains, offices, palaces, and other objects. As for the late or early rising or setting [of the planets],<sup>150</sup> the extent to which [celestial bodies]<sup>151</sup> stray from or adhere to the path,<sup>152</sup> and the emptiness or fullness, narrowing or broadening [of celestial bodies],<sup>153</sup> and the paths tread by the Five Planets, their conjunctions, dispersals,<sup>154</sup> transgressions,<sup>155</sup> and guardings, their mutual transits, struggles and eclipses, halos, dark ringlets<sup>156</sup> and earhoop shapes [on the sun], male and female rainbows, sudden lightning, wind demons, strange clouds, and aberrations in *qi*: all of these are the essences of *yin* and *yang*...<sup>157</sup>

Having duly set forth the myriad phenomena discussed in the treatise, the introduction continues to make a strong claim regarding the resonances between such celestial signs and the court:

其本在地，而上發于天者也。政失於此，則變見於彼，猶景之象形，鄉之應聲。是以明君觀之而寤，飭身正事，思其咎謝，則禍除而福至，自然之符也。

Portents originate in the earth and erupt above into the heavens. When governance fails (down) here, then aberrations appear (up) there, just as shadows are images of their forms, and echoes are responses to sounds. This is why the clear-sighted ruler sees them and awakens, putting himself in order and rectifying his affairs. Should he set his mind to repenting his crimes, then calamity can be avoided and blessing brought forth. This is the tally that comes about on its own.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>149</sup> The term *jingxing*, rendered here as “constant stars,” denotes stars that are fixed in relationship to one another, as opposed to planets (*weixing* 緯星). Quite literally, the two terms might also be rendered “warp stars” and “weft stars.”

<sup>150</sup> This insertion is made following the views of Meng Kang 孟康 (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE), who writes that “‘late or early rising’ refers to the Five Planets” 伏見蚤晚，謂五星也 (*Hanshu* 26.1273, n.1).

<sup>151</sup> Meng Kang believes the subject of this line to be the sun, moon, and planets (*Hanshu* 26.1273, n.1).

<sup>152</sup> The ‘path’ refers in all probability to the ecliptic.

<sup>153</sup> Meng suggests that “emptiness or fullness” may refer to the presence of certain *xing* in particular asterisms, such as the Celestial Gallows (Tianlao 天牢) asterism corresponding to a group of six relatively southern stars in Ursa Major. However, due to the distance from the ecliptic, *xing* should not mean ‘planet’ in this instance, but might indicate the presence of comets or other such inconstant bodies (*Hanshu* 26.1273, n. 1).

<sup>154</sup> Meng Kang glosses the term *san* (dispersal) as follows: “When an aberration among the Five Planets occurs, its essence disperses and becomes a demon star” 五星有變則其精散為祿星也 (*Hanshu* 26.1273, n. 2).

<sup>155</sup> Meng Kang explains that a “transgression” occurs when two planets come within seven degrees (*cun* 寸) of one another (*Hanshu* 26.1273, n. 2).

<sup>156</sup> I read *jue* 鑄 for *xue* 穴 following *Hanshu* 26.1274, n. 4.

<sup>157</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1273.

<sup>158</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1273.

While the “Celestial Patterns” contains much of the same information as the “Celestial Offices,” it frames that information in a very different way. Sima Qian’s treatise moves directly into the technical details of which constellations are called what and located where. The “Celestial Patterns” contains the same information, but prefaces it by claiming that whatever celestial signs we might observe, whatever fortunes they portend, are the ultimate responsibility of the ruler and his court. An inauspicious sign is not something that simply occurs for no reason. Such signs are the result of faults in governance or in ritual. Moreover, the “Celestial Signs” immediately suggests that actions can be taken to avoid the calamitous outcomes associated with signs that have already appeared; prognosis is not to be conflated with fate. The same technical information, presented in another context, might have an air of inevitability about it. The “Celestial Patterns” emphasizes that bad fortune can be turned into good, and that the appearance of auspicious signs does not simply mean that the court has the favor of the heavens, but that the court has earned it.

The “Celestial Patterns” tells much the same story as the “Celestial Offices”; the passages it includes on Chunqiu-era portents and the political events that accompany them correspond closely to those in the *Shiji*. The “Celestial Patterns” tells of many of the same events in the Qin and early Han as does Sima Qian’s treatise. Yet at the local level, when we examine particular turns of phrase, the appearance of celestial signs as evidence that Heaven vested authority in the ruler is articulated far more explicitly in the “Celestial Patterns” than in the “Celestial Offices.” Where the “Celestial Offices” reports the conjunction of the Five Planets that accompanied the “rise of the Han,”<sup>159</sup> the “Celestial Patterns” alone refers to this sign as the “Tally that the Founding Emperor had received the charge” 高皇帝受命之符也.<sup>160</sup> The “Celestial Offices” argued for the value of the sagely enterprise of the observation of the heavens and its pragmatic value to the court. The “Celestial Patterns” claimed that celestial signs could indicate that a particular individual had received the right to rule from the heavens, but much more often, celestial signs indicated a failure of one kind or another on the part of a sitting ruler.

### Linking Signs to the Classics in the “Celestial Patterns”

Despite the high level of correspondence between the main body of the “Celestial Patterns” and the “Celestial Offices,” the “Celestial Patterns” contains far more numerous references to Classical texts than does its predecessor. Classical texts are used as proof-texts which underscore the authority of the technical materials the “Celestial Patterns” presents. Moreover, as is the case in the “Five Resources,” the *Great Tradition* for the “Great Plan” shapes the manner in which planetary omens are interpreted, taxonomically linking them to specific types of ritual or political failures on the part of the ruler.

While the “Celestial Patterns” borrowed extensively from the “Celestial Offices,” unlike its prototype, the Eastern Han treatise directly invokes a number of texts by name. While the “Celestial Offices” no doubt drew from a variety of textual materials, it tended to efface rather than highlight its relationship to its textual antecedents. Technical passages included in the “Celestial Patterns” are engaged with other traditions on celestial bodies and draw extensively

<sup>159</sup> *Shiji* 27.1348.

<sup>160</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1301. Cf. Ban Biao’s 班表 (3–54 CE) “Wang ming lun” 王命論 (Discourse on the Charge of Kings) (*Hanshu* 100A.4211–12).

on, what were by the mid-Eastern Han, established Classics.

Whereas Sima Qian claimed a sagely lineage for the practice of reading celestial signs, the “Celestial Patterns” vests the reading of celestial signs with the authority of the Classics. One technical passage in the “Celestial Patterns,” but not the “Celestial Offices,” integrates the movements of the moon into a spatial schema built on the *Changes* and bolstered by citations from the *Odes* (Shi 詩) Classic and the *Documents*:

箕星為風，東北之星也。東北地事，天位也，故《易》曰「東北喪朋」。及《巽》在東南，為風；風，陽中之陰，大臣之象也，其星，軫也。月去中道，移而東北入箕，若東南入軫，則多風。西方為雨；雨，少陰之位也。月去中道，移而西入畢，則多雨。故《詩》云「月離于畢，俾滂沱矣」，言多雨也。《星傳》曰「月入畢則將相有以家犯罪者」，言陰盛也。《書》曰「星有好風，星有好雨，月之從星，則以風雨」，言失中道而東西也。故《星傳》曰「月南入牽牛南戒，民間疾疫；月北入太微，出坐北，若犯坐，則下人謀上。」

The stars in Basket manifest wind. They are the stars of the northeast. Northeast serves Earth, and it is Heaven’s Position. Thus the *Changes* says: “In the northeast a friend is lost.”<sup>161</sup> The trigram *Yielding* lies in the southeast and manifests wind. Wind is the *yin* in the middle of the *yang*, and is the image of the Great Minister. Its stars are those in Axletree. When the moon deviates from the ecliptic, moves northeast and enters Basket, or if it moves southeast and enters Axletree, then there is much wind. The west manifests rain. Rain is the position of lesser *yin*. When the moon deviates from the ecliptic, and moves west to enter Net, then there is much rain. Thus when the *Odes* says, “The Moon is caught in Net! How it makes the waters run,”<sup>162</sup> it speaks of there being much rain. And when the *Tradition of the Stars and Planets* says, “When the moon enters Net, there will be those among the generals and great ministers that commit crimes on account of their households,” it speaks of the overabundance of *yin*. When the *Documents* says, “In the stars there is fine wind; in the stars there is fine rain; the moon follows the stars...”<sup>163</sup> it speaks of [the moon’s] deviation from the ecliptic as it moves from east to west. Thus, the *Tradition of the Stars and Planets* says, “The moon enters the Ox Herder and the south is warned that there will be a plague among the people; when the moon enters Grand Tenuity and emerges to the north of the throne, then if it transgresses against the throne, the men below will plot against those above.”<sup>164</sup>

<sup>161</sup> This phrase is from the judgment to the *Kun* 坤 hexagram (*Zhouyi yizhu* 24).

<sup>162</sup> Mao 232. Trans. modified from Arthur Waley, trans. and Joseph R. Allen ed, *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1996): 221.

<sup>163</sup> This is a citation of the “Great Plan.” Part of the received text is not included in the citation. The received text reads: “In the stars there is fine wind; in the stars there is fine rain. Because the sun and moon have their courses, there is winter and summer. When the moon follows the stars, there is wind and rain” 星有好風，星有好雨。日月之行，則有冬有夏。月之從星，則以風雨 (*Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1187).

<sup>164</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1295–96. Immediately following this passage, the “Celestial Patterns” presents another alternative, which it introduces with the somewhat neutral quotative phrase “*yi yue*” 一曰, “one [text, person, or tradition] says”: “The moon manifests wind and rain; the sun manifests cold and heat. At the winter solstice the sun is at

By citing the *Changes*, the *Documents*, and the *Odes*, the “Celestial Patterns,” moreover, reinterprets the Classics themselves. Fragmentary though these citations may be, their use in this context makes it so that the Classics seem to speak directly to the issues with which the treatise is concerned.<sup>165</sup> The discourse of celestial signs, cobbled together from sundry technical texts, the “Celestial Offices,” and only a few other traditions worthy of mentioning by name, thus obtains a hoary, Classical authority.

The “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” contrast sharply in their respective treatments of the planets, and this contrast issues in part from the classicism of the *Hanshu* treatise. The “Celestial Patterns” introduces several planetary correspondences linked specifically to the Classics that do not appear in the “Celestial Offices.” Though we have lost far too many materials from Han times to speak with any certainty about whether a given text represents an actual innovation, the “Celestial Patterns” shows that the discourse on celestial patterns was intimately tied to the Classics by Ban Zhao, Ma Rong, and Ma Xu, if not by their predecessors or contemporaries. In addition to the familiar correspondences with direction, season, and material, the “Celestial Patterns” ties each of the Five Planets to one of the Five Constants (*wu chang* 五常) and to one of the Five Duties.<sup>166</sup> Failure in these duties, we see in the “Five Resources,” is liable to produce all manner of baleful signs. The “Celestial Patterns,” but not the “Celestial Offices,” claims that planetary aberrations take place when the ruler fails to sufficiently adhere to the ritual norms surrounding the Five Duties. Moreover, the “Celestial Patterns” posits basic correspondences with the “Monthly Ordinances” (Yue ling 月令) of the *Record of Rites*<sup>167</sup> and with the *qi* of the materials corresponding to the planets, in the cases of each of the Five Planets, save Saturn. While the “Celestial Offices” suggested that failures in certain fields of governance could result in planetary aberrations, the “Celestial Patterns” identifies specific actions that the governing body must take by associating planetary aberrations

---

its southern extreme, and the shadow of the gnomon is at its longest. If it does not reach the southern extreme then heat causes harm. At summer solstice the sun is at its northern extreme, and the shadow of the gnomon is at its shortest. Thus the *Documents* says: ‘Because of the movements of the sun and the moon, there is winter and summer.’ Political aberrations occur below, and the sun and moon revolve above. When the moon emerges north of House, it manifests rain and manifests *yin*, manifests revolt and manifests warfare, and when it emerges south of House, it manifests drought and manifests early death. Floods and droughts rush against one another and respond, and the aberrations of the Five Planets are their necessary verifications” 月為風雨，日為寒溫。冬至日南極，晷長，南不極則溫為害；夏至日北極，晷短，北不極則寒為害。故《書》曰「日月之行，則有冬有夏」也。政治變於下，日月運於上矣。（日）〔月〕出房北，為雨為陰，為亂為兵；出房南，為旱為天喪。水旱至衝而應，及五星之變，必然之效也 (*Hanshu* 26.1296).

<sup>165</sup> This is not to say that there is no place for the celestial signs in the Classical text themselves. The judgment to the hexagram *Kun* 坤 is indeed concerned with the problem of directionality (*Zhouyi yizhu* 24), just as the “Great Plan” chapter deals with the reading of all sorts of signs—celestial, human, and otherwise—and the *Odes* deals with flooding and war. Nonetheless, the “Celestial Patterns” telescopes particular images so that celestial signs seem to be the primary concern of the passages in the Classic texts.

<sup>166</sup> For the taxonomic correspondences drawn between the Five Planets and other features of the cosmos in the “Celestial Offices” and “Celestial Patterns,” see the appendix of the present paper.

<sup>167</sup> Jeffrey Riegel suggests the *Liji* does not appear to have taken its present form before the White Tiger Hall debates of 79 CE. See Jeffrey Riegel, “Li chi” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993): 294.

with failure to adhere to the ritual, economic, and military prescriptions of the “Monthly Ordinances.” Moreover, by associating those signs with failures in the Five Duties, the treatise indicates that the ruler and his court are responsible for their appearance. The case of the Dazzling Deluder, Mars, presents a typical example:

熒惑曰南方夏火，禮也，視也。禮虧視失，逆夏令，傷火氣，罰見熒惑。

The Dazzling Deluder is said to correspond to ‘the south, summer, and fire.’<sup>168</sup> It corresponds to the rites. It corresponds to (Duty of) Sight. When the rites diminish and there are failures in the (Duty of) Sight, or when the ‘Summer Ordinances’ are violated, this damages the fire *qi*, and the penalty appears in the Dazzling Deluder.<sup>169</sup>

As is the case with Saturn and the other planets, the “Celestial Patterns” evokes the cosmology of the “Treatise on the Five Resources” and the *Great Tradition* for the “Great Plan” from which it derives its framework:

傳曰：「視之不明，是謂不愆，厥咎舒，厥罰恆奧，厥極疾。時則有草妖，時則有羸蟲之孽，時則有羊禍，時則有目痾，時則有赤眚赤祥。惟水沚火。」

The tradition says: When in looking one does not see, this is called ‘not distinguishing.’ Its sign of blame is laxity; its penalty constant warmth; and its extreme manifestation is disease. At times there are grassy monstrosities, at times the bane of sprout-eating insects, at times misfortunes involving sheep, at times ailments of the eye, at times red pestilences or red omens. Water dislocates fire.<sup>170</sup>

The “Celestial Patterns” places the aberrations in the motion or color of the Dazzling Deluder into a constellation of signs already established in the “Five Resources.” Retrograde Mars becomes readable against and amplified by the broader network of signs it is woven into through its association with the ruler’s failure to properly engage in the ritual Duty of Sight. Moreover, while Mars had long been associated with summer, the “Celestial Patterns” specifies that the Dazzling Deluder produces meaningful signs when the “Summer Ordinances” are violated.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>168</sup> This appears to be a quotative, but does not correspond exactly to any received text (*Hanshu* 26.1281). The association between Mars and the ritual mode of ‘seeing’ is not found in any earlier astronomic treatise, nor in the “Seasonal Ordinances” chapters pertaining to summer in the *Record of Rites* or the closely corresponding chapters pertaining to the three summer months in the *Lü shi chunqiu*. See Lü Buwei 呂不為 (d. 235 BCE) comp. *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Annals of Lü Buwei) in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Collected Works of the Many Masters), vol. 6. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1952): chapters 4–6.

<sup>169</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1281.

<sup>170</sup> *Hanshu* 27C.1405.

<sup>171</sup> The section on the last month of summer in the “Summer Ordinances” chapter of the *Record of Rites* contains many sets of correspondences that had been linked to Mars since at least the early Western Han. The last month of summer is tied to Zhurong, to fire, and to the days *bing* and *ding*. However, the “Monthly Ordinances” chapters also contains a series of policy and ritual recommendations. The Son of Heaven is to reside in the right chamber of the Mingtang 明堂 (Hall of Illumination); he is to ride in a red carriage; he is to order fishermen to

In contrast to the “Celestial Offices,” the “Celestial Patterns” situates celestial signs involving the planets in the broader networks of meaning of the Classics. When Ban Zhao, Ma Rong, and Ma Xu declare that the Dazzling Deluder strays from its path due to a fault in the Duty of Sight or a failure to implement the “Summer Ordinances,” they effectively relocate the meaning of the sign in the Classics. If one wishes for a more detailed or expansive explanation of what is happening when Mars doubles back on its path, one must look to the *Record of Rites* or to the *Great Tradition*, texts concerned chiefly with the question of how best to govern.

### The “Celestial Patterns” as a Dynastic History

It is not explicit classicism alone that sets the “Celestial Patterns” apart from the “Celestial Offices.” The “Celestial Offices,” like the *Shiji* as a whole, covers a period from antiquity up until the lifetime of its primary author, Sima Qian. The “Celestial Patterns,” like the *Hanshu* as a whole, is a dynastic history; it covers the Western Han dynasty. As does the “Five Resources,” the “Celestial Patterns” tells the story of the rise and fall of that dynasty. Its chronicle of celestial signs contains some four dozen entries that tell of the triumph of the dynastic founder Liu Bang 劉邦 (d. 195 BCE), troubling attempts to usurp power early in the dynasty, the glories and eventual excesses of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140–87 BCE), and the rising power of the Wang clan following the death of Emperor Yuan 元 (r. 48–33 BCE).

The chronicle effectively begins with the Chunqiu period, reproducing in somewhat different language, the same series of events that appear in the “Celestial Offices” through the rise of the Han. The “Celestial Patterns” chronicle then goes on to provide a detailed account of celestial signs through the end of the Western Han. A typical entry reads: “In the sixth year of Emperor Wu (135 BCE), the Dazzling Deluder guarded Cart Ghost.<sup>172</sup> The Prognostication said: ‘It is an aberration of fire. There will be a funeral.’ This year, in the Exalted Garden there was a fire. Dowager Empress Dou died” 六年，熒惑守輿鬼。占曰：「為火變，有喪。」是歲高園有火災，竇太后崩。<sup>173</sup> Four distinct units may be identified in this brief passage; 1) the time of occurrence; 2) the features of the celestial sign; 3) a citation of a prognostication text; and 4) events that transpired in the terrestrial or human realm.

Toward the end of the Western Han dynasty, increasingly inauspicious signs occur that, read conveniently in retrospect, are harbingers of its fall. Saturn, the Quelling Star, had led the Five Planets into Eastern Well announcing the rise of Liu Bang at the beginning of the dynasty. The final mention of Saturn in the chronicle occurs in 27 BCE, and tells of the Dazzling Deluder following the Quelling Star westward across the sky during the last week of the tenth month. In the first week of the eleventh month, Mars and Jupiter pass Saturn, all of them moving

---

seek out submarine dragons and turtles; he is to order his people to spare no labor in their toils so that they might provide for sacrifices to August Heaven, to the Lord on High, to the rivers and mountains, and to the Altars of Soil and Millet. And should he employ the wrong ordinances at the wrong time, there will be dire consequences. Should he employ the fall ordinances during the summer, for instance, he may expect unseasonable rains, failed crops, and disasters falling upon women in his court, or perhaps in the empire as a whole. See Wang Wenjin 王文錦 ed., *Liji yijie* 禮記譯解 (Translation and Interpretation of the Record of Rites), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001): 6.214–16.

<sup>172</sup> Cart Ghost corresponds to stars located in Cancer.

<sup>173</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1305.

retrograde, toward the northwest. The Prognostication predicts “warfare and funerals in the inner sphere and abroad” 外內有兵與喪 and that “there will be newly established kings and dukes” 改立王公. Major political upheavals, the chronicle explains, do indeed take place over the course of the next two years: the execution of King Xin 歆 of Yelang 夜郎 for treason, the burning of public temples, the theft of imperial seals, and finally, the death of King He 賀 of Liang.<sup>174</sup>

Complementary as it to the “Five Resources,” the “Celestial Patterns” does not repeat the earlier treatise’s account of the appearance of Halley’s Comet in the seventh month of 12 BCE, but does record the dramatic appearance in the fourth month of a “flowing star” that glowed red and white and stretched across the sky, more than 100 degrees in length. A series of smaller bright objects that seemed to fall from the sky followed the flowing star, perhaps meteors issuing from the comet’s tail. The dramatic celestial sign is interpreted in the chronicle both with respect to a similar sign recorded in the *Annals* Classic, and with respect to the coming fall of the Western Han:

郡國皆言星隕。《春秋》星隕如雨為王者失勢諸侯起伯之異也。其後王莽遂顛國柄。王氏之興萌於成帝（時），是以有星隕之變。後莽遂篡國。

In the commanderies and kingdoms in all cases it was said that they were falling stars. In the *Annals* “stars falling like rain” is a portent of a king losing power and the local lords rising to prominence. After this occurred, Wang Mang took the reins of the kingdom.<sup>175</sup> The Wang clan began to flourish during the reign of Emperor Cheng, and on account of this, the sign of the falling stars occurred. Later still, Wang Mang would usurp the empire.<sup>176</sup>

The penultimate entry in the chronicle cites the appearance of a bright, long-lasting comet near Oxherd that seemed to confirm the arguments of Xia Heliang 夏賀良 (d. ca. 5 BCE), and Gan Zhongke 甘忠可 (d. late 1st cent. BCE) before him, that the mandate of the Western Han needed to be renewed.

二年二月，彗星出牽牛七十餘日。傳曰：「彗所以除舊布新也。牽牛，日、月、五星所從起，曆數之元，三正之始。彗而出之，改更之象也。其出久者，為其事大也。」

In the second month of the second year [of the Jianping reign period] (4 BCE), a broom-star emerged at Oxherd, lasting more than seventy days. The tradition says: “A broom is the means by which the old is ushered out and the new is put forth. Oxherd, the sun, the moon, and the Five Planets, arise from the beginnings of calendrical permutations and the

<sup>174</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1310.

<sup>175</sup> In 8 BCE, four years after this occurrence, Wang Mang became Marshall of State (Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 537).

<sup>176</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1311



inception of the Three Rectifications.<sup>177</sup> Sweeping it away and ushering it out is the image of a change in order. The fact that it emerged for a long period signals that it corresponds to a great affair.”<sup>178</sup>

The court institutes a number of reforms aimed at renewing the mandate; it establishes a new reign period and a new imperial title, and changes the number of divisions in the clepsydra from 100 to 120, effecting a fundamental transformation in the calculation of time on the order of establishing a new calendar. It is the abolition of Xia Heliang’s reforms, however, that most directly presages the rise of Wang Mang:

八月丁巳，悉復蠲除之，賀良及黨與皆伏誅流放。其後卒有王莽篡國之禍。

On the *dingsi* day of the eighth month, all of these reforms were completely abolished. Xia Heliang and his clique in all cases submitted to punishment and were exiled. Following this, the calamity in which Wang Mang seized the empire finally occurred.<sup>179</sup>

Xia Heliang and his clique must have appeared remarkably prescient in the Eastern Han. The Western Han did fall, and its mandate would indeed need to be renewed. This did not occur, however, until the rise of the Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–57 CE), a member of a distant collateral branch of the Liu clan, but a Liu nonetheless. But, while the chronicle makes no such direct claim, it seems to imply that had the ritual reforms of Xia Heliang been maintained, the renewal of the mandate might have taken place under Emperor Ai 哀 (r. 6–1 BCE), and Wang Mang might never have risen to power.

Both the treatise and the history of the Western Han effectively end with the final entry in the chronicle:

元壽元年十一月，歲星入太微，逆行干右執法。占曰：「大臣有憂，執法者誅，若有罪。」二年十月戊寅，高安侯董賢免大司馬位，歸第自殺。

In the eleventh month of the first year of the Yuanshou reign period (2–1 BCE), the Year Star entered Grand Tenuity, and moved retrograde toward the vicinity of the Enforcers of the Law.<sup>180</sup> The prognostication said: “When the great ministers are in a superior position,

<sup>177</sup> In this instance, the Three Rectifications appears to refer to the first months of the new year in the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties. A citation of the *Great Tradition* in Ban Gu’s *Bohu tong* 白虎通 (Proceedings at White Tiger Pavilion) claims that the Xia 夏 dynasty (trad. ca. 2070–ca. 1600 BCE) took the thirteenth (i.e the first or intercalary) month as the beginning of the new year, while the Shang 商 Dynasty (trad. ca. 1600–1046 BCE) adopted the twelfth month, and the Zhou 周 Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) adopted the eleventh month. See *Bohu tong* 27 in *CHANT (CHinese ANcient Texts) database* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1998.) <<http://www.chant.org>>.

<sup>178</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1312.

<sup>179</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1312.

<sup>180</sup> Translation of *zhifa* 執法 after Pankenier 464. Pankenier suggests that there is some uncertainty concerning the identification of the two stars, but he regards η and β Virginis as most plausible.

the Enforcers of the Law are punished, as if they themselves were culpable.” On the *wuyin* day of the tenth month of the second year, the Marquis of Gao’an, Dong Xian 董賢 (d. 1 BCE), resigned his post as Marshall of State, returned to his domicile, and committed suicide.<sup>181</sup>

Wang Mang is not mentioned explicitly in the chronicle’s final entry, but Dong Xian’s death nonetheless marks the effective end of Liu power in the Western Han. Dong Xian’s fall came with Emperor Ai’s death, when he was accused of refusing to provide the young emperor with medical aid.<sup>182</sup> The next Marshall of State, *de facto* ruler for the remainder of the Western Han, and founder of the next dynasty, the short-lived Xin 新 (9–23 CE), would be Wang Mang himself.

### Conclusion

The chronicle at the conclusion of the “Celestial Patterns” is emblematic of the shift in the position of celestial signs between the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*. The “Celestial Patterns” at a glance appears to be a near facsimile of Sima Qian’s “Celestial Offices”; a great deal of technical material is shared between the two treatises. However, for Sima Qian, that material is the patrimony of men like himself and his father, readers of celestial signs who have served sages or have been ignored or derided by tyrants since high antiquity. While Sima Qian drew upon the material that would be included in the Classics as he composed his “Basic Annals,” he made little distinction between narratives in the *Documents* and narratives issuing from other, now unknown, sources. Narratives recounting appearances of celestial signs gained their authority through their association with authoritative figures more than their inclusion in authoritative texts. The “Five Resources,” and the works of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin on which it was based, drew not only authority, but their very structure from the *Annals* and the *Great Tradition* reading of the “Great Plan.” All manner of signs were organized into categories drawn from the “Great Plan,” especially the Five Resources, the Five Duties, and the Sovereign’s Standard. Each type of sign presented examples drawn from the *Annals*, in chronological sequence, followed by examples in the Qin and Western Han. While Liu Xiang’s “Discourse on the Five Resources Tradition of the ‘Great Plan’” could not have included the rise of Wang Mang, Ban Gu’s revision of it in the form of the “Five Resources” did, making it so that each individual chronicle of each type of sign appeared to gravitate toward the ultimate fall of the Western Han. Ban Zhao, Ma Rong, and Ma Xu effectively synthesized the technical materials of the “Celestial Offices” with the teleology and classicism of the “Five Resources.” In the “Celestial Patterns,” celestial signs became a direct reflection of the failure of the ruler to fulfill the Five Duties; technical knowledge became dependent on Classical authority, and records of the appearance of celestial signs became a chronicle of the downfall of a dynasty.

---

<sup>181</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1312.

<sup>182</sup> Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 68.

## Appendix A: Technical Materials in the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns”

Due to the close correspondence between the technical materials in the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns,” reading these materials against each other is of limited usefulness. Nonetheless, to give a full account of the sort of signs that were included in the categories of celestial offices and celestial patterns, it is worthwhile to review technical passages in the two treatises in detail. In addition to materials related to the stars and planets, several other types of signs appear in the treatises. Like the Dai corpus discussed in Chapter 2, the two treatises make no distinction between astronomic and meteorological phenomena. Below, we review two clusters of signs: clouds, *qi*, and comets followed by eclipses, halos, and inclement weather. Finally, we examine a twenty-four line poem that includes a wide variety of signs, exposing the fuzzy boundaries of the category of celestial signs. The technical materials in the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” engage with types of signs similar to those in the Dai celestial signs manuscripts. Moreover, they share many of the same fundamental concerns, especially warfare and agriculture.

### Clouds, *Qi*, and Comets

The *Shiji* “Celestial Offices” and the *Hanshu* “Celestial Patterns” present largely identical accounts of *qi*, clouds, and comets; most of their passages that engage with these sorts of signs correspond very closely, differing by only a character here and there.

Much as they are in the Dai corpus, *qi* and clouds are closely interrelated in the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns.” A series of passages describing clouds, *qi*, and the portents with which they are associated, opens by positioning *qi* as an observable phenomenon, and presenting a technique for identifying the location to which such signs correspond:

凡望雲氣，仰而望之，三四百里；平望，在桑榆上，千餘（里）二千里；登高而望之，下屬地者三千里。雲氣有獸居上者，勝。

Whenever one observes cloud *qi*, if one looks up to observe it, it corresponds to a location<sup>183</sup> three to four hundred *li* away. If one observes it from level ground, so that it can be seen above the mulberries and elms, then it corresponds to a location greater than one-thousand, or two-thousand *li* away. If one ascends the heights to observe it, and it gathers below upon the earth, it corresponds to a location three-thousand *li* away. When clouds have an animal dwelling atop them, there will be victory.<sup>184</sup>

Clouds here work in a manner somewhat analogous to the clouds associated with various domains in the opening of the “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 天文氣象雜占 (Miscellaneous

<sup>183</sup> This passage describes observers looking down at cloud *qi* from above and gives a distance of 3000 *li*. Such observers might walk through the very same cloud *qi*—mist or fog—even as they ascended or descended the hill or mountain from which they made their observations. Thus, it seems more probable that the distance given is not to the *qi* itself, but to the location to which the *qi* corresponds.

<sup>184</sup> *Shiji* 27.1336, *Hanshu* 26.1297. The character *li* in parenthesis is present in the *Hanshu* text. I suspect that the animals dwelling atop the clouds refer to shape in the cloud *qi*, similar to those found in “Miscellaneous Prognostications” manuscript from Mawangdui. See Chapter 2, p. 56 and figure 3a on p. 80. Alternatively, Pankenier renders the line “those atop which wild animals dwell are victorious” (497).

Prognostications), though the location to which the clouds correspond is identified by the relationship between the observer and the position of the clouds, rather than their form. As *qi*, they are comparable to the observable set of phenomena associated with particular events in the “Xingde” 刑德 (Punishment and Favor) meteoromantic text. The “Celestial Offices” and “Celestial Patterns” go on to present more specific geographic referents for different kinds of *qi*, identified by colors and positions, associated with different regions bounded not by political entities, but by mountains and water:

自華以南，氣下黑上赤。嵩高、三河之郊，氣正赤。恆山之北，氣下黑上青。勃、碣、海、岱之間，氣皆黑。江、淮之間，氣皆白。

From Mt. Hua south, the *qi* is black below and red above. In the regions around Mt. Songgao and the Three Rivers, the *qi* is perfectly red. North of Mt. Heng,<sup>185</sup> the *qi* is black below and blue-green above. Between Bohai, Mt. Jieshi, the sea,<sup>186</sup> and Mt. Dai,<sup>187</sup> the *qi* is entirely black. Between the Yangtze and Huai rivers, the *qi* is entirely white.”<sup>188</sup>

*Qi* is identified not only with locations, but like planetary aberrations, comets, eclipses, rainbows, and certain clouds, it is also associated with military prognostication. The “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” associate *qi* of various colors and positions with fortification and the movement of armies: “The *qi* of those on foot is white. The *qi* of earthworks is yellow. The *qi* of carriages suddenly rises high, and suddenly descends. It gathers together all over. The *qi* of cavalry is low and spread out. The *qi* of foot-soldiers whirls” 徒氣白。土功氣黃。車氣乍高乍下，往往而聚。騎氣卑而布。卒氣搏。<sup>189</sup> The appearance of the *qi* can be used to predict the advance or retreat of an enemy. If, for instance, “it is high in front but low in the rear, they will return without halting” 前高而後卑者，不止而反。<sup>190</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the likely outcome of a potential battle might be determined by examining a collision between the *qi* corresponding to each army. “When [multiple] *qi* encounter one another, the low defeats the high, and the sharp<sup>191</sup> defeats the blunt” 氣相遇者，卑勝高，兌勝方。<sup>192</sup> The “Celestial Offices” and “Celestial Patterns” passages, moreover, provide a high degree of specificity regarding both the distance and location of the enemy:

氣來卑而循車通者，不過三四日，去之五六里見。氣來高七八尺者，不過五六日，去之十餘里見。氣來高丈餘二丈者，不過三四十日，去之五六十里見。

If the *qi* comes in low and circulates about the carriage tracks, it will be no more than three or four days, and it can be seen five or six *li* distant. If the *qi* is seven or eight *chi* in

<sup>185</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1297 has *Chang Shan yi bei* 常山以北 for *Heng Shan zhi bei* 恆山之北.

<sup>186</sup> Following Pankenier 497.

<sup>187</sup> Mt. Dai is an alternate name for Mt. Tai (Taishan 泰山).

<sup>188</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337; *Hanshu* 26.1297.

<sup>189</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337; *Hanshu* 26.1297.

<sup>190</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337; *Hanshu* 26.1297.

<sup>191</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1297 has the somewhat more regulate *rui* 銳 for *rui* 兌. Both graphs mean sharp here.

<sup>192</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337; *Hanshu* 26.1297.

height, it will be no more than five or six days, and it can be seen more than ten *li* away. If the *qi* comes in one *zhang* to two *zhang*<sup>193</sup> in height, it will be no more than thirty or forty days, and it can be seen fifty of sixty *li* away.<sup>194</sup>

Given the context within which these statements are made, the unstated occurrence, a few days or an odd month off, is likely a military encounter. The “Celestial Offices” and “Celestial Patterns” next return to the subject of clouds, which are associated with battle or drought based on their shapes and colors: “When the high<sup>195</sup> clouds are pure white, then there will be a drought, and the officers are afraid” 稍雲精白者，其將悍，其士怯. Axle clouds (*you yun* 軸雲), ladle clouds (*shao yun* 杓雲), and hook clouds (*gou yun* 鉤雲) are to be read in accordance with their colors, and are largely associated with warfare.<sup>196</sup> Clouds surrounding the sun, we are told, are “the image of the lord of men” 人主象.<sup>197</sup> The materials included in this section of the “Celestial Offices” and “Celestial Patterns” likely circulated in manuscript versions that, like the “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” included images. The received treatises subtly remind us of the visual nature of these signs: “In every case, the prognostication is performed in accordance with form” 皆如其形以占.<sup>198</sup>

Both the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns,” moreover, describe *qi* as a phenomenon that appears in a wide variety of spaces, the examination of which is imperative. “As for the places where great floods occur, the battlefields where armies are defeated, and the remains of destroyed cities, there are coins<sup>199</sup> piled up beneath them. Above gold and jewels,<sup>200</sup> in all cases, there is *qi*. One must not fail to examine it” 大水處，敗軍場，破國之虛，下有積錢。金寶之上，皆有氣，不可不察。<sup>201</sup> *Qi* may be a source of illusion, or it may reveal the otherwise unseen. “Clam *qi*” 蜃氣, the phenomenon we know as a mirage, could either refer to a tendency to see something in a mirage that is not there, or to emanations from submarine palaces beneath the waves. “By the sea, the clam *qi* is the image of towers and platforms. The *qi* in vast fields<sup>202</sup> produces palaces and turrets” 海旁蜃氣象樓臺；廣野氣成宮闕然。<sup>203</sup> Cloud *qi* is the product of something in geography, not a mere random occurrence. And while the two treatises do not present images, unlike the “Miscellaneous Prognostications,” clouds are nonetheless understood through their visual features. “Cloud *qi* in each case is in the images of the mountains, rivers, and people that have gathered it together and piled it up” 雲氣各象其山川人

<sup>193</sup> That is, ten to twenty Chinese feet (*chi* 尺).

<sup>194</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337; *Hanshu* 26.1297.

<sup>195</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1297 has the variant *shao* 捎 for *shao* 稍. In later orthography, the sense intended here would generally be written with the character *xiao* 霄.

<sup>196</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337; *Hanshu* 26.1297.

<sup>197</sup> *Shiji* 27.1338; *Hanshu* 26.1298.

<sup>198</sup> *Shiji* 27.1338; *Hanshu* 26.1298.

<sup>199</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1298 has “springs” (*quan* 泉) for “coins” (*qian* 錢).

<sup>200</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1298 does not have the optional possessive *zhi* 之 in *jin bao zhi shang* 金寶之上 (above gold and jewels).

<sup>201</sup> *Shiji* 27.1338; *Hanshu* 26.1298.

<sup>202</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1298 has the orthographic variant *ye* 壘 for *ye* 野 (fields).

<sup>203</sup> *Shiji* 27.1338; *Hanshu* 26.1298.

民所聚積。<sup>204</sup>

The section of *qi* and clouds in the two treatises is nearly identical. One minor difference between the two treatises hints at the process through which the information included in these sections might have been integrated into them. We have already encountered the following line in the *Shiji*:

恆山之北，氣下黑上青。

North of Mt. Heng, *qi* is black below and blue-green above.<sup>205</sup>

The *Hanshu* has the same line, save a single character:

常山以北，氣下黑上青。

North of Mt. Chang, *qi* is black below and blue-green above.<sup>206</sup>

Both texts refer to the same mountain. The character Heng was almost certainly changed to Chang due to the taboo against using the personal name of an emperor, in this case Liu Heng 劉恆, posthumously known as Emperor Wen (r. 179–157 BCE). Ban Zhao, Ma Rong, and Ma Xu judiciously changed the tabooed character, even as they reproduced, with very few alterations, this particular section of the *Shiji* treatise. It is much more difficult to imagine, as Cui Shi 崔適 (1852–1954)<sup>207</sup> would have us believe, that the *Shiji* treatise is in fact a later work copied largely from the *Hanshu* treatise. Were this the case, the “Celestial Offices” would almost certainly speak of Mt. Chang, as the “Celestial Patterns” does.<sup>208</sup>

Neither treatise integrates clouds and *qi* into a broader historical or philosophical program. Whereas we saw in both treatises a strong connection between the central court and celestial signs in the case of the Five Planets, their representations of clouds and *qi* are more akin to those in the Dai corpus. While the “Celestial Patterns” sections on the Five Planets would be tied closely to the Classics through citations of the *Great Tradition* for the “Great Plan,” the Classics are absent entirely from its section on clouds and *qi*. *Qi* is only integrated into a classicist vision of governance and the cosmos where it is associated with the Five Duties in the “Celestial Patterns” section on the planets.

The materials on clouds and *qi* were included in the “Celestial Offices” and “Celestial Patterns,” most probably because the compilers of the two treatises deemed these to be part of the repertoire of technical knowledge that belonged in such a treatise. Their treatments of

<sup>204</sup> *Shiji* 27.1338; *Hanshu* 26.1298.

<sup>205</sup> *Shiji* 27.1337

<sup>206</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1297.

<sup>207</sup> Cui Shi argues that six of the eight treatises in the *Shiji* are in fact based on *Hanshu* treatises, the remaining two being based on other received sources. For his specific arguments regarding the “Celestial Offices” see his *Shiji tanyuan* 史記探源 (Investigation of the Origins of the Records of the Senior Archivist; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989): 101–2.

<sup>208</sup> Given the complexities of transmission with a manuscript culture, we must recognize that Cui Shi’s scenario is implausible, but not altogether impossible. Ban Zhao and Ma Rong could conceivably have written of Mt. Heng and had their work copied into a *Shiji* treatise. A later Eastern Han copyist might then have changed the character in the *Hanshu*, though the earlier version survived in the *Shiji*. In this scenario, portions of the “Celestial Offices” might represent an earlier version of the “Celestial Patterns.”

comets, which have no particular connection with *qi* in either treatise, work in much the same way. Both treatises contain passages that 1) provide a list of comets, intermixed with other baleful celestial signs; 2) comment on the production of comets; and 3) record historical instances of the appearance of comets.

The list in question occurs immediately following the section on halos and eclipses in the “Celestial Offices” and immediately after the section on the Five Planets in the “Celestial Patterns.” In the *Shiji*, it is immediately followed with the section on clouds and *qi*. In the “Celestial Patterns,” a lengthy section on the paths of celestial bodies separates the list from that section. The list itself begins with what are ostensibly the names of stars: The Star of the August Domain (Guohuang xing 國皇星); The Star of Illuminating Brightness (Zhaoming xing 昭明星); The Five Remnant Stars (Wucan xing 五殘星); The Star of the Great Bandit (Dazei xing 大賊星);<sup>209</sup> The Star of the Master of Danger (Siwei xing 司危星);<sup>210</sup> The Star of the Prison in the Han (Yu Han xing 獄漢星);<sup>211</sup> and the Candle Star (Zhu xing 燭星).<sup>212</sup> Of these, however, Sun and Kistemaker identify only one with a fixed star, the Star of the Master of Fate, located in Equuleus.<sup>213</sup> The others may refer to comets, meteor showers, or other types of celestial phenomenon that might have been treated as *xing* in early China. The list is something of a hodgepodge, giving certain ontological clues as to theories on the nature of *xing* in general, as well as the River in the Sky, the Han:

星者，金之散氣，〔其〕本曰火。星眾，國吉；少則凶。漢者，亦金之散氣，其本曰水。漢，星多，多水，少則旱，其大經也。

Stars are the dispersed *qi* of metal, whose basis is called ‘fire’/ ‘the human realm.’<sup>214</sup> Where the stars are many, the domain will experience good fortune. Where they are few, the domain will experience ill-fortune. The Han is also the dispersed *qi* of metal, whose basis is called ‘water.’ In the Han, where the stars are many, there are many floods. Where they are few, there is drought. This is the great constant rule.<sup>215</sup>

The question of whether *xing* here refers to stars in general or more ephemeral, less predictable, celestial phenomena such as meteors is important, but difficult to resolve. If it refers to stars in general, then certain places would seem always to be fated to receive good or ill-fortune. The stars associated with a particular domain or region change only when the treatises themselves are re-written, and even then, such changes are few and far between.<sup>216</sup> But if *xing* refers to “stars”

<sup>209</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1292 has instead “The Six Bandit Stars” (*Liu zei xing* 六賊星).

<sup>210</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1292 has the “Star of the Master of Deceit” (*Sigui xing* 司詭星).

<sup>211</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1292 has the “Star of All the Han” (*Xian Han xing* 咸漢星).

<sup>212</sup> *Shiji* 27.1333–34, *Hanshu* 36.1291–92.

<sup>213</sup> Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky during the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* (Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1997): 220.

<sup>214</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335 has *huo* 火 (fire); *Hanshu* 26.1292 has *ren* 人 (the human realm).

<sup>215</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335, *Hanshu* 26.1292–93.

<sup>216</sup> For a comparison of the *fenye* systems in *Lü shi chungiu*, *Huainanzi*, *Xingjing*, “Celestial Offices” chapter of the *Shiji*, and the *Hanshu* “Dili zhi” 地理志 (Geographical Treatise) see Feng Shi 馮時, *Chutu gudai tianwen xue* 出土古代天文學 (Excavated Ancient Astronomy; Taipei: Taiwan guji, 2001): 158–65.

that are ephemeral and unpredictable, as many of those in the list seem to be, then the passage falls in line with much of the other material in the two treatises, where celestial signs represent a class of phenomena that is subject to near constant variability.

The list to a certain extent likewise includes phenomena that moderns would label as meteorological rather than astronomic: “The Drums of Heaven have a sound that is like thunder but not thunder. The sound is in the earth, yet it reaches down to the earth. Wherever it goes, warfare emits from below” 天鼓，有音如雷非雷，音在地而下及地。其所往者，兵發其下。<sup>217</sup> No one today would describe thunder as an astronomic phenomenon. Nonetheless, it was a celestial sign.

Only one item in the list is explicitly identified as a comet, the “Banner of Chiyou,”<sup>218</sup> a comet that is also represented in the “Miscellaneous Prognostications.” Other items in the list can be identified as comets, even though they are called *xing*, on the basis of their shape. The *xing* Heduo 格澤 has the shape of a flame, while “Changgeng is like a bolt of cloth stretched across the Heavens” 長庚，如一匹布著天。<sup>219</sup> The appearance of these comets is associated with agricultural or military prognostications. An appearance of Heduo is associated with “harvesting without having planted” 不種而穫 and carries the warning that “if one does not engage in earthworks, there certainly will be great harm” 不有土功，必有大害。<sup>220</sup> When the Banner of Chiyou appears, “A King will march in conquest on all four directions” 王者征伐四方。<sup>221</sup> As for Changgeng, “When this *xing* appears, warfare arises” 此星見，兵起。<sup>222</sup>

The few passages that comment on the production of comets in the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” suggest that comets come about due to planetary anomalies. Their sections on Mercury, the Watch Star, state that “If it is early, it causes an eclipse of the moon. If it is late, it causes broom-stars and celestial monstrosities” 其蚤，為月蝕；晚，為彗星及天夭。<sup>223</sup> This is also true of Venus.<sup>224</sup> Under certain conditions, Jupiter may also be associated with the production of comets.<sup>225</sup> The fact that comets are presented as a sort of corollary to eclipses, produced by the action of planets, again indicates the messiness of the categories involved here. We just as well may have discussed these passages in a section on planets, or perhaps created a category in which we considered comets and eclipses together. Based on another passage, appearing in both the “Celestial Offices” and the “Treatise on Celestial Patterns” the same might be said of halos, rainbows, and eclipses.

<sup>217</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335; *Hanshu* 26.1293.

<sup>218</sup> For a detailed account of appearances of this particular comet excavated and received texts see Michael Loewe, “The Han View of Comets.”

<sup>219</sup> *Shiji* 27.1336; *Hanshu* 26.1293.

<sup>220</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335; *Hanshu* 26.1293.

<sup>221</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335; *Hanshu* 26.1293.

<sup>222</sup> *Shiji* 27.1336; *Hanshu* 26.1293.

<sup>223</sup> *Shiji* 27.1328. *Hanshu* 26.1284 has *chu* 出 (if it emerges) for *qi* 其 (if it is) and the orthographic variant *yao* 祲 for *yao* 夭 (monstrosities).

<sup>224</sup> *Shiji* 27.1327; *Hanshu* 26.1282.

<sup>225</sup> See *Shiji* 27.1316.



### Eclipses, Halos, and Inclement Weather

Explanations of the meanings of eclipses, halos, and inclement weather occur in close proximity. One passage opens by comparing the relative strength of two armies on the basis of halos associated with each:

兩軍相當，日暈等，力均；厚長大，有勝；薄短小，亡勝。重抱大破亡。

When two armies meet, and there is a solar halo, and the halos<sup>226</sup> are equal, the power of the two armies is even. If one is thicker, longer, or larger, the corresponding army will be victorious, and if one is thinner, shorter, or smaller, the corresponding army will not<sup>227</sup> be victorious. One that is encircled by layered [halos] will greatly destroy one that has no [halos].<sup>228</sup>

At the same time, halos may be used to predict whether the armies will engage in battle at all, or if perhaps, an army will engage in mutinous action against its own commander: “Embrace [by the halos] manifests harmony; but turned backs manifest disharmony; they manifest division, separation, and mutual departure. If it is straight, it means self-establishment. Upraised weapons destroy the armies, as in when a general is murdered” 抱為和，背為不和，為分離相去。直為自立，立兵破軍，若曰殺將。<sup>229</sup> The time when a halo appears and vanishes relative to the battle itself is also an important factor:

氣暈先至而後去，居軍勝。先至先去，前有利，後有病……見而去，其後發疾，雖勝亡功。

When *qi* halos arrive [before the battle takes place] and depart after it has concluded, the army that stays in position is victorious. If it arrives and departs [before the battle], then the first [to arrive]<sup>230</sup> has the advantage, and the latecomers are at a disadvantage... If even as it appears it departs, then the latecomers will set off at a rapid pace, and although they are victorious, they achieve nothing.”<sup>231</sup>

<sup>226</sup> For this passage, the *Hanshu* (26.1296) version is cited as the base text. *Shiji* 27.1331 has an additional *yun* 暈 (halo) here.

<sup>227</sup> *Shiji* 27.1331 has the orthographic variant *wu* 無 (negative existential verb) for *wang* 亡 (negative existential verb).

<sup>228</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1296; *Shiji* 27.1331.

<sup>229</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1296; *Shiji* 27.1331. Translation of this passage is particularly tentative. The *Zhonghua shuju* version of this passage indicates that premodern recensions of the *Shiji* contained some variation on these lines. Moreover, the precise way in which the passage should be punctuated is not entirely clear. I have followed the editors of the *Zhonghua* editions for both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*. Pankenier understands the *wu* 無/亡 from the previous line as belonging to the beginning of this section, which has the advantage of maintaining a tetrasyllabic rhythm. Thus, he renders the last line of the preceding quotation above and the first line of this quotation: “Concentric and enveloping [halos mean] complete destruction; without their enveloping it signifies harmony” (491).

<sup>230</sup> I tentatively translate the terms *qian* 前 and *hou* 後 as “first to arrive” and “the latecomer.”

<sup>231</sup> Or more literally, “will suffer illness” (*bing* 病). *Hanshu* 26.1296; *Shiji* 27.1331. The *Shiji* version does not contain the two existential verbs *you* 有. It also does not contain the second character *hou* 後 (latecomer).

In the lines that immediately follow, the text moves with ease from halos, to rainbows, back to halos, and on to eclipses:

見半日以上，功（太）（大）。白虹<sup>232</sup>屈短，上下銳，有者下大流血。日暈制勝，近期三十日，遠期六十日。其食，食所不利；復生，生所利；不然，食盡為主位。

If it appears above the top half of the sun,<sup>233</sup> the achievement is great. If a white rainbow is bent and short, and sharp<sup>234</sup> at the top and bottom, below it a great deal of blood will flow. Solar halos command victory within a minimum of thirty days and a maximum of sixty days. As for eclipses, they eclipse that which is not at an advantage. If it is born again, then what is born is at an advantage. If this does not occur, the full eclipse corresponds to the position of the lord.<sup>235</sup>

Eclipses, halos, and rainbows bleed into one another in this passage, found in both the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns.” No obvious formal break divides them. While we must impose categories upon the texts to make sense of them, the texts resist categorization. This is true as well of any division we might make between *qi* and inclement weather, at least in the case of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* treatises. The final lines of the section on *qi* and clouds reads:

（天）（夫）雷電、蝦虹、辟歷、夜明者，陽氣之動者也，春夏則發，秋冬則藏，故候者無不司之。

Thunder and lightning, rose-colored rainbows, thunder-claps, and night-brights, these are the movements of *yang qi*. In spring and summer, they are flung forth, and in autumn and winter, they are hidden away. And so, there are no observers who do not watch them.<sup>236</sup>

*Qi*, inclement weather, and rainbows freely intermingle.

Both the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” describe the appearance of eclipses as the products of planetary anomalies. While comets are produced due to the late appearance of Mercury or Venus, eclipses occur when the planets appear early. We have seen that both treatises also move easily from a discussion of halos to a discussion of eclipses—as does, in fact, the meteoromantic passage of the “Punishment and Favor” (Xingde 刑德) manuscript of the Dai corpus. The “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” overlap to a

<sup>232</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1296 has an orthographic variant for *hong* 虹 (rainbow).

<sup>233</sup> Pankenier reads: “If it appears longer than half a day...” (491).

<sup>234</sup> *Shiji* 27.1331 has the orthographic variant *rui* 兌 (sharp) for *rui* 銳 (sharp).

<sup>235</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1296; *Shiji* 27.1331. The last line in *Shiji* is “And if the eclipse grows still more complete, it is the position of the lord” 而食益盡，為主位。

<sup>236</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1298 has an orthographic variant for *xiahong* 蝦虹 (rose-colored rainbows) and speaks of those who “observe and record” (*hou shu zhe* 侯書者) rather than those who observe (*hou zhe* 侯者). This is rather a minor difference as those who observed celestial signs in a professional capacity would have been responsible for reporting their appearance, often in writing.

considerable extent in their descriptions of eclipses and other celestial encounters, but also contain a number of passages that are not shared.

One passage in the “Celestial Offices” but not in the “Celestial Patterns” echoes a passage in the “Five Planets Prognostications” that describes portents associated with the eclipse of each of the Five Planets and the star Great Horn.<sup>237</sup>

月蝕歲星，其宿地，饑若亡。熒惑也亂，填星也下犯上，太白也疆國以戰敗，辰星也女亂。（食）（蝕）大角，主命者惡之；心，則為內賊亂也；列星，其宿地憂。

If the moon eclipses the Year Star, there will be famine or destruction in the land corresponding to the lodge. In the case of the Dazzling Deluder, there will be disorder. In the case of the Quelling Star, those below will transgress against those above. In the case of Great White, powerful domains will be defeated in battle. In the case of the Watch Star, there will be disorder concerning women. If it eclipses Great Horn, he who commands the charge will loathe this, and if it eclipses Heart, then it is domestic disorder on account of bandits, and for the other arrayed stars, those lands corresponding to the lodges will have cause for worry.<sup>238</sup>

While the “Celestial Offices” exhibits certain similarities to the “Five Planets Prognostications” passage, such as the moon’s eclipse of the planets and the star Great Horn, differences between the two passages can be readily identified despite the fragmentary state of the excavated text. Unlike the “Five Planets Prognostications,” the “Celestial Offices” does not specify any time frame within which the events portended by the various eclipses should occur. This might have made the “Celestial Offices” passage less vulnerable to falsification than the “Five Planets Prognostications” passage. The order of presentation of the planets appears to vary somewhat, though both passages begin with eclipses of Jupiter. Where the “Five Planets Prognostications” speaks of the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) in association with Great Horn, the “Celestial Offices” refers to “he who commands the charge” (*zhu ming zhe* 主命者). These differences notwithstanding, the “Celestial Offices” did maintain a set of portents associated with the moon’s eclipse of the planets and certain stars.

In at least some instances, the “Celestial Patterns” treats the moon’s eclipse of various planets, and the star Great Horn, in a manner already familiar from the “Five Planets Prognostications” and *Shiji* treatise:

凡月食五星，其國（必）（皆）亡。歲以飢，熒惑以亂，填以殺，太白疆國以戰，辰以女亂。月食大角，王者惡之。

Whenever the moon eclipses the Five Planets, the corresponding domain will certainly

<sup>237</sup> “Wuxing zhan” 五星占 (Five Planets Prognostications) in Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, *Mawangdui tianwen shu kaoshi* 馬王堆天文書考釋 (An Examination and Interpretation of the Mawangdui Texts on Celestial Patterns; Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2004): 40, lines 39–40. See Chapter 2 of the present work, pp. 60–61, for a discussion of the passage in the context of the Dai corpus.

<sup>238</sup> *Shiji* 27.1332.

perish.<sup>239</sup> If it is the Year Star, then it will be by famine. If it is the Dazzling Deluder, then it will be by rebellion. If it is the Quelling Star, then it will be by murder. If it is Great White, then it will be by battle with a powerful domain. And if it is the Watch Star, then it will be by disorder among women. When the Moon eclipses Great Horn, the King loathes it.<sup>240</sup>

Several of the associations included here are also found in the *Shiji* treatise, including those between eclipses of Jupiter and famine, Mars and rebellion, Great White and destruction by a powerful kingdom. The “Celestial Patterns” reproduces familiar interactions between the planets as well. It explains that when the Year Star meets the Queller it portends domestic disorder, when it meets the Watch Star, scheming, and when it meets the Dazzling Deluder, hunger and drought. A conjunction between Great White and the Year Star portends flooding. Regarding conjunctions between the Dazzling Deluder and Great White, the treatise cites the old, familiar formula: “One must not take action using military means” 不可舉事用兵.<sup>241</sup>

Other interactions between the Five Planets, especially moments in which the Five Planets gather together, are shared between the “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns.” A domain corresponding to a celestial field wherein the Five Planets gather will come to rule the world, either by “gravity” (*zhong* 重) if the Queller leads the Five Planets, or by ritual, if the planets are led by the Dazzling Deluder. The “Celestial Offices” makes such statements regarding each of the Five Planets in their respective sections.<sup>242</sup> The “Celestial Patterns” gathers these statements into a single passage:

凡五星所聚宿，其國王天下：從歲以義，從熒惑以禮，從填以重，從太白以兵，從辰以法。以法者，以法致天下也。

Whenever the Five Planets gather together in a lodge, the corresponding domain shall reign as king over the realm. If [the planets] follow the Year Star, then [the domain] will do so by means of duty. If they follow the Dazzling Deluder, then it will do so by means of ritual. If they follow the Queller, then it will do so by means of majesty.<sup>243</sup> If they follow Great White, then it will do so by means of war. And if they follow the Watch

<sup>239</sup> Or: “The corresponding domains will all perish.”

<sup>240</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1286.

<sup>241</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1286. The passage also cites, but does not precisely identify, another source that refers to the planets in terms of the materials associated with them, thus merging the Five Planets into *wuxing* cosmology. The names of the Five Resources seem to act as names for the Five Planets. “One source says: When Fire meets Water there is smoldering, and when it meets Metal, there is melting. One must not take action using military means. When Soil meets Metal the domain loses territory; when it meets Wood, there is famine in the domain, and when it meets Water the moats are dammed up. One must not take action using military means. When Wood and Metal do battle, there is internal strife in the domain. If they meet in the same lodge, encroaching upon one another this is to do battle. When two planets come close to one another the calamity is especially great. If two planets are distant from one another, the calamity proves harmless. If they are within seven *cun* [the calamity] must occur” 一曰，火與水合為涿，與金合為鑠，不可舉事用兵。土與金合國亡地，與木合則國饑，與水合為雍沮，不可舉事用兵。木與金合鬪，國有內亂。同舍為合，相陵為鬪。二星相近者其殃大，二星相遠者殃無傷也，從七寸以內必之 (*Hanshu* 26.1286).

<sup>242</sup> See *Shiji* 27.1313; 27.1325; 27.1328 for Jupiter, Venus, and Mercury, respectively.

<sup>243</sup> I follow Wei Zhao’s 韋昭 (204–73) gloss of *zhong* 重 as *weizhong* 威重 (*Hanshu* 26.1287 n. 1).

Star, it will be by means of laws. Those who do this by means of laws bring the realm unto themselves by means of laws.<sup>244</sup>

The “Celestial Patterns” makes use of material from preceding traditions, but puts it into a more synthetic form.

Elsewhere in the “Celestial Offices” inclement weather is tied to the colors of the Five Planets, and in the “Celestial Patterns,” one passage suggests that inclement weather might be caused by the moon. The “Celestial Offices” identifies the colors of rings and horns about the Five Planets as portents of flood, warfare, drought, and disease:

五星色白圜，為喪旱；赤圜，則中不平，為兵；青圜，為憂水；黑圜，為疾，多死；黃圜，則吉。赤角犯我城，黃角地之爭，白角哭泣之聲，青角有兵憂，黑角則水。意，行窮兵之所終。五星同色，天下偃兵，百姓寧昌。春風秋雨，冬寒夏暑，動搖常以此。

White rings around the Five Planets make for funerals and drought. If there are red rings, then the center is not tranquil. These make for warfare. Blue rings make for worrisome floods. Black rings make for disease and many die. If there are yellow rings, then there will be good fortune. Red horns—my walls beat down; yellow horns—a fight over ground; white horns—a wailing sound. If there are blue horns, there are military worries, and if there are black horns, then there will be floods. It means doing that which brings about the demise of exhausted troops.<sup>245</sup> When the Five Planets are all the same color, the world will lay down its arms, and the ordinary folk will enjoy peace and prosperity. Spring winds, autumn rains, winter cold, and summer heat, [the planets] regularly scintillate on account of these [phenomena].<sup>246</sup>

Strictly speaking, inclement weather here is less a signifier than a signified, or if we read the passage in terms of causality, less a cause than an effect. It might be read as a sort of second order sign, an effect that follows the initial primary sign of disruptions in the appearance of the planets. There is nothing in the passage itself that suggests that those disruptions are effects of any failure on the part of the ruler, but read in the context of the basic taxonomies surrounding the planets in the “Celestial Offices” that suggest planetary aberrations are “penalties” (*fa* 罰) issuing from failures on the part of the ruler or his administration, we might establish the following sequence:

1. Fault regarding duty, ritual, favor, reduction, or punishment (*xing* 刑).
2. A consequence-free sign in the form of a planetary anomaly warning the ruler of the need to correct the fault.
3. A sign with consequences in the form of flood, drought, warfare, or plague if the ruler

<sup>244</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1286–87.

<sup>245</sup> I am not sure what exactly is meant by this ominous line. Translation is tentative. Xu Guang notes that one text had *zhi* 志 (aim to) for *yi* 意 (mean). *Shiji* 27.1322, n. b1.

<sup>246</sup> *Shiji* 27.1322. I follow Pankenier’s parenthetical explanation, “if the planets scintillate, it is usually due to this,” for the last line here (481).

does not respond adequately to the initial consequence-free sign.

The final line of the passage, however, suggests that the signs with consequences result from the consequence-free signs. Deviations from seasonable weather patterns occur “on account of these [phenomena],” that is, owing to chromatic aberrations in rings and horns around the planets. While the aberrations may cause inclement weather, however, even in the context of the “Celestial Offices,” they are not the first cause. The ultimate responsibility lies with the ruler and his officials.

The “Celestial Offices” and the “Celestial Patterns” suggest that inclement weather is at least to some extent dependent upon aberrations in the movement of *qi*. We have already seen in our discussion of *qi* in those texts that “thunder and lightning, rose-colored rainbows, thunder-claps, and night-brights” were products of “the movements of *yang qi*.”<sup>247</sup> We have also seen that “sudden lightning and wind demons” 迅雷風祲 are characterized, along with a host of other celestial phenomena ranging from rainbows to eclipses, as “essences of *yin* and *yang*” 陰陽之精.<sup>248</sup> While neither the “Celestial Offices” nor the “Celestial Patterns” describes or theorizes inclement weather in great detail, both texts embed inclement weather within the broader class of phenomena I designate as “celestial signs.”

Notwithstanding the modern impulse to separate astronomy from meteorology, *tianwen* from *qixiang*, that which happens beneath the sky from that which happens beyond it, in the Dai corpus and the two treatises inclement weather is integrated into the broader network of celestial signs. Inclement weather may be a sign of things to come, of poor harvests, or of war. It may be a manifestation of unbalanced *qi*. It may, as the “Celestial Offices” suggests, result from planetary aberrations, or, as one “Celestial Patterns” passage has it, from the movements of the sun and the moon. In no case does inclement weather constitute a separate category of phenomena from those we might think of as astronomical, but it is interconnected with and dependent on the broader discourse around comets, clouds, the planets, the sun, and the moon. Inclement weather is a celestial sign.

### The Fuzzy Boundaries of the Category of Celestial Signs

A poem included in both treatises discusses the effects of flooding and drought within a much broader class of terrestrial and celestial phenomena:

Heaven is rent and suspends these things,	天開縣物，	1
Earth shakes and splits.	地動坼絕。	2
Mountains collapse and crumble, <sup>249</sup>	山崩及隤，	3
Rivers are blocked up and streams dammed.	川塞谿壅；	4
Water rises and earth swells,	水澹地長，	5
Marshes dry up and the images appear.	澤竭見象。	6

<sup>247</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1296 has an orthographic variant for *xiahong* 蝦虹 (rose-colored rainbows) and speaks of those who “observe and record” (*hou shu zhe* 侯書者) rather than those who observe (*hou zhe* 侯者). This is rather a minor difference as those who observed celestial signs in a professional capacity would have been responsible for reporting their appearance, often in writing.

<sup>248</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1274.

<sup>249</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has *xi* 徙 (move) for *tuo* 隤 (crumble).

Inner and outer walls, gates of cities and towns,	城郭門閭,	7
No longer moistened <sup>250</sup> wither away. <sup>251</sup>	潤息稟枯;	8
Palaces and temples, corridors <sup>252</sup> and chambers,	宮廟廊第,	9
Are the places people inhabit.	人民所次。	10
Songs and customs, carriages and robes,	謠俗車服,	11
Look long upon what the people drink and eat.	觀民飲食。	12
The Five Grains, grasses and trees,	五穀草木,	13
Look long upon that to which they are linked.	觀其所屬。	14
Granaries, storehouses, stables, and armories,	倉府廩庫,	15
The roads that penetrate the four directions.	四通之路。	16
The Six Domesticated Animals, birds and beasts,	六畜禽獸,	17
Leave behind those who raise them.	所產去就;	18
Fish, turtles, <sup>253</sup> birds, and mice,	魚鱉鳥鼠,	19
Look long upon the place where they dwell.	觀其所處。	20
Ghosts weep and cry out, <sup>254</sup>	鬼哭若諄,	21
Men <sup>255</sup> run afoul of them. <sup>256</sup>	與人逢遭。	22
Doubtful rumors,	訛言,	23
Ring true. <sup>257</sup>	誠然。	24

Much of the poem may seem difficult to reconcile with its presence in the two treatises. There is no mention of comets, clouds, rainbows, planetary anomalies, thunder-claps, or summer frosts. Yet the opening couplet does draw our attention to Heaven as a source of “things” (*wu* 物) which the early commentator Meng Kang identifies as *xiang* 象, meaning “images” or “signs.”<sup>258</sup> The second line of the couplet establishes the symmetry between Heaven and Earth. Just as the sky opens up, so does the ground. The majority of the signs within the poem are in fact located in the terrestrial sphere. Mountains crumble. Marshes dry up. City walls wither away like grass. The decision of the historians to include this text in their respective treatises suggests that celestial offices and celestial patterns were somewhat porous categories, and that terrestrial phenomena went hand in hand with celestial signs. Indeed, the poem is most deeply concerned neither with the celestial realm nor the terrestrial realm, but with the human realm. It implores the reader, or perhaps the listener, to be, most of all, attentive and perceptive. The use of the verb “look long upon” (*guan* 觀) in three separate couplets works as a sort of leitmotif in the

<sup>250</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has the rare orthographic variant *gui nie* 閩臬 for *runxi* 潤息.

<sup>251</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1298; cf. *Shiji* 27.1339.

<sup>252</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has *di* 邸 (mansions) for *lang* 廊 (corridors).

<sup>253</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has the orthographic variant *bie* 鱉 for *bie* 鱉 (turtles).

<sup>254</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has the orthographic variant *hu* 呼 for *hu* 諄 (cry out).

<sup>255</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has the demonstrative pronoun *qi* 其 for the untranslated preposition *yu* 與.

<sup>256</sup> *Shiji* 27.1339 has the orthographic variant *feng wu* 逢悟 for *feng e* 逢遭.

<sup>257</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1298; cf. *Shiji* 27.1339. Pankenier’s translation of this poem gives the pronunciation of the final character in each line (500).

<sup>258</sup> *Hanshu* 26.1299 n. 1; *Shiji* 27.1339 n. c1.

poem, creating a triangle of association between the consumption of food and drink, agricultural production, and the activities of harvestable animals in the natural world. The listener, the ruler or his officials, is told to look upon what people eat and drink, the places where fish, turtles, birds, and mice dwell, and that to which the Five Grains and other plants “are linked” (*suo zhu* 所屬). The precise referent of this phrase is difficult to pin down, but it might bring to mind the land itself, the seasonable rains that nourish the crops, or the labor of the peasants in the fields. It might also be read in reference to the lines that immediately follow (lines 15–16), which describe the places where the Five Grains might be stored, and the roads that would allow those grains to be distributed in all Four Directions. With the ability to control the food supply comes a great deal of power. Maintaining that power is contingent upon maintaining means of producing, storing, and distributing food. It means managing land, labor, storage facilities, and a transport network. The capacity to produce food depends, however, not only on arable land and a population to till it, but also on seasonable weather. As we have seen, celestial signs, especially aberrations in planetary movements, but inclement weather as well, can be functions of failures of the ruler to adhere to the Five Duties in the “Celestial Patterns,” and can also be punishments for failures in particular areas, such as ritual or duty, reduction or punishment, in the “Celestial Offices.” Constant examination of what the people eat and drink, what they grow, and the birds and beasts they harvest, might allow for the detection of signs that allow the ruler and his officials to mitigate full-blown disasters before they occur. The poem ends on a haunting note. Boundaries that should not be crossed are transgressed as ghosts cry out and come upon the human realm. Abruptly shifting in meter from steady tetrasyllabic lines to a pair of disyllabic lines that hint at the difficulty of identifying what a given sign means, the poem concludes by pointing toward the murky boundary between falsehood and truth: “Doubtful rumors/ Ring true.”



### Appendix B: Tables of Planetary Correspondences

Planet	Method of Location	Direction	Material	Season	Days	Punishment for loss of...
Jupiter	Examine the paths of the sun and moon to measure forward or retrograde motion of the Year Star. 察日、月之行以揆歲星順逆。	East 東方	Wood 木	Spring 春	<i>jia</i> and <i>yi</i> 甲乙	Duty 義
Mars	Examine rigid <i>qi</i> to locate the Dazzling Deluder. 察剛氣以處熒惑。	South 南方	Fire 火	Summer 夏	<i>bing</i> and <i>ding</i> 丙丁	Ritual Propriety 禮
Saturn	Calculate its conjunction with Dipper to determine the position of the Quelling Star. <sup>259</sup> 曆斗之會以定填星之位。	Center 中央	Earth 土	Late Summer 季夏	<i>wu</i> and <i>ji</i> 戊己	When ritual, favor, duty, reduction, and punishment all are lost, only then does the Quelling Star waver. <sup>260</sup> 禮、德、義、殺、刑盡失，而填星乃為之動搖。
Venus	Examine the path of the sun to locate the position of Great White. 察日行以處位太白。	West 西方	Metal 金	Autumn 秋	<i>geng</i> and <i>xin</i> 庚辛	Reduction 殺
Mercury	Examine the conjunction between the sun and the Watch to set to order the position of the Watch Star. 察日辰之會，以治辰星之位。	North 北方	Water 水	Winter 冬	<i>ren</i> and <i>gui</i> 壬癸	Punishment 刑

Table 3.1: Planetary Correspondences in the “Celestial Offices”<sup>261</sup>

<sup>259</sup> The Western Jin 西晉 (265–316 CE) commentator Jin Zhuo 晉灼 (n.d.) suggests that it is not the Big Dipper that is referred to here, but the lodge Dipper, in Sagittarius, adjacent to the asterism Establishment (Jian 建): “Regularly beginning its cycle between Establish and Dipper in *jia chen* year (41<sup>st</sup> in the sexagenary cycle), every year the Queller moves through a single lodge, and in twenty–eight years completes its circuit of the heavens” 常以甲辰之元始建斗，歲鎮一宿，二十八歲而周天 (*Shiji* 27.1319, n. c1). During the only *jiachen* year in Western Jin, 284 CE, Saturn was located in an area of the sky corresponding to Capricornus. This suggests that Jin Zhuo was citing an earlier tradition, perhaps dating to a time when Saturn had indeed appeared in Dipper during a *jiachen* year. Saturn had been located within one to two degrees of Dipper and Establishment during its several months of visibility in the *jiachen* year 104 CE. Calculations were made using the software *Starry Night Orion Special Edition*, 6.4.3 (2009).

<sup>260</sup> The introductions to Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury include accounts of the punishments associated with each planet. In the case of Saturn, however, the punishment is not included in the introduction, but several lines after it. In the position where we would expect to see a punishment, based on the model of the other planets, we have the line: “The Yellow Lord is the Master of Favor, and the Image of the Lady Ruler” 黃帝，主德，女主象也。 Or, punctuated slightly differently, “The Yellow God is the Master of Women of Suasive Power, and the Master of the Images” 黃帝，主德女，主象也。 In either case, the Yellow Lord, and by taxonomic linkage, the Quelling Star were closely associated with favor and with women.

<sup>261</sup> Information on the Five Planets presented in this table is respectively derived from *Shiji* 27: 1312, 1317, 1319–20, 1322, and 1327.

Planet	Direction	Season	Material	Five Constants 五常	Five Exigencies 五事	Seasonal Ordinance 令	<i>Qi</i>
Jupiter	East 東方	Spring 春	Wood 木	Humaneness 仁	Bearing 貌	Ordinances of Spring 春令	Wood <i>qi</i> 木氣
Mars	South 南方	Summer 夏	Fire 火	Ritual 禮	Seeing 視	Ordinances of Summer 夏令	Fire <i>qi</i> 火氣
Venus	West 西方	Autumn 秋	Metal 金	Duty 義	Speech 言	Ordinances of Autumn 秋令	Metal <i>qi</i> 金氣
Mercury	North 北方	Winter 冬	Water 水	Wisdom 知	Listening 聽	Ordinances of Winter 冬令	Water <i>qi</i> 水氣
Saturn	Center 中央	Late Summer 季夏	Earth 土	Faithfulness 信	The Deliberative Mind 思心		

Table 3.2: Planetary Correspondences in the “Treatise on Celestial Patterns”<sup>262</sup>

<sup>262</sup> The information appearing in this table appears in *Hanshu* 26.1280–85.

## Chapter 4

### Etiology, Contingency, and Textual Authority: The Suasive Power of Celestial Signs

In “The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” Wolfram Eberhard (1909–1989) argues that the political function of portents hindered the development of science in early China. Because abnormal phenomena were treated as if they resulted from the actions of the imperial government, Eberhard argues, the early Chinese did not attempt to place them within a rational system of natural laws, and therefore, failed to advance toward a scientific understanding of nature.<sup>1</sup> Eberhard offers a somewhat confused range of explanations regarding the question of why, precisely, early actors inferred connections between politics and abnormal natural phenomena, ranging from superstition to cynicism. Eberhard writes that there was “no proof to the contrary” against the view that “the Chinese, their historians included, were ridden by superstitions of a kind which is found among primitive peoples” and that “Chinese official historians had no real historical understanding because they were unable to separate politically important events from completely unimportant events, some of which could never in actuality have happened, such as the appearance of a dragon in a well in the provinces....”<sup>2</sup> Eberhard reasons that in the Western Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE–8 CE) abnormal natural phenomena were

<sup>1</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, “The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” in John K. Fairbank ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957): 33–70. Implicitly engaging with the familiar if flawed question of why the Scientific Revolution occurred in Europe rather than China, Eberhard argues that the political function of astronomy and a preoccupation with symbolic order likewise impaired progress in developing an accurate calendar (65). Eberhard considers the abiding political function of the astral sciences to have been a detriment to the development of both abstract thinking and technology: “Those astronomers who prepared calendars certainly had a body of solid scientific knowledge. The formulas which they used for their calculations compare not unfavorably with the knowledge of Greek astronomers. They certainly had a genuine interest in the field and acquired special training through private tutors. The reason why they did not develop their knowledge into a unified scientific system seems to be that they were not interested in pure science for science’s sake. They did not spend time in developing abstract Laws or in studying the process of thinking (logic). But they also were not interested in applied technical sciences, e.g., in developing theoretical tools which could be used to control the flight of a cannon shell or to direct ships safely across the sea” (66). Eberhard here evinces two almost certainly false underlying assumptions: 1) the development of Greek logic lay at the foundation of technological development in late medieval and early modern Europe; 2) the level of technological development in Europe has since ancient times outstripped that of China. Daniel Morgan has recently pointed to empiricism and progressive advance in the development of Chinese calendrical systems. See his “Knowing Heaven: Astronomy, the Calendar, and the Sagecraft of Science in Early Imperial China,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013), ProQuest (3606338). For a critique of essentialist cultural explanations for technological development in both Asia and Europe, see Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): esp. 322–27. For China’s high level of naval development in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and an economic (rather than cultural) argument for why Portugal became the dominant naval power of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, see Janet L. Abu-Lughod, “All the Silks of China” in *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 316–51. For a highly readable account of the Scientific Revolution in Europe that takes into account the engagement of 17<sup>th</sup> century scientists with religion and Renaissance naturalism in addition to their classical heritage, see Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Eberhard 48.

treated as warnings issued from a personal deity. Yet at the same time, Eberhard claims that many of the political actors involved cynically manipulated and fabricated portents, and may not have believed in them at all.<sup>3</sup>

While Eberhard's essay, now over half a century old, did demonstrate that a fundamental function of astronomy in the Western Han was political, it failed to show why and how the claims surrounding portents succeeded as political rhetoric. Neither superstitious belief nor cynical non-belief amounts to an explanation of that rhetoric. To call a practice superstitious is to employ an epithet rather than an analytic category; superstitions are less the ideas we find impossible to understand than those we consider unworthy of investigation. It is of course difficult to prove that early imperial Chinese courtiers believed or did not believe in portents, but it is clear that they ascribed authority to them. The aim of this chapter is to examine the rhetorical practices by which that authority was established. What was it that made arguments regarding celestial signs authoritative?

Memorials on celestial signs happened *in medias res*, in the middle of things. While in the abstract space of technical texts such as the “Wuxing zhan” 五星占 (Five Planets Prognostications),<sup>4</sup> we sometimes see simple correspondences between particular kinds of signs and the events they presage, signs in memorials did not correspond to the events they presaged in a neat, one-to-one manner. Signs with the same formal characteristics could mean different things in different contexts. Memorialists treated each sign as the product of unique conditions. Arguments concerning the proper response to signs often cited the conditions surrounding those signs that were responsible for their production. While memorialists employed historical precedents to indicate events likely to occur following certain types of signs, the reading of signs was never so systematic as to allow for prognostic certainty. Read in retrospect, through the lens of the chronicles in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han) technical treatises on celestial patterns and general omenology, or even the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Tradition),<sup>5</sup> signs were meaningful primarily in terms of subsequent events. Yet on the occasions when memorials were delivered, when no one knew what the future held, the signs were read against present conditions and past events rather than future events. Memorialists consistently underscored their arguments with two fundamental rhetorical tropes: 1) signs appear due to identifiable conditions; and 2) both the prevention of the baleful events the sign presages and the resolution of the sign itself are contingent upon the removal or rectification of the underlying conditions that initially produced the sign. We will refer to the first as the trope of etiology and to the second as the trope of contingency.

This chapter employs two fundamentally distinct but complementary approaches to the rhetoric of celestial signs, one synoptic and one telescopic. The first portion of the chapter is a survey of rhetorical tropes found in a large number of memorials on celestial signs.<sup>6</sup> Its purpose

<sup>3</sup> Eberhard 69. Eberhard points specifically towards Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) as an individual who may not have believed in portents but used baleful signs to make political arguments (53).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of this manuscript, see Chapter 2, pp. 33–34; 42–49 in the present work.

<sup>5</sup> See the discussion of the works of David Schaberg and Li Wai-yeet at the conclusion to part I of the present chapter.

<sup>6</sup> The methodology of the first portion of the chapter bears some similarity to the practice of “distant reading,” seeking as it does a sort of bird’s-eye view of the rhetoric of memorials. For an outline of distant reading

is to show that the tropes of etiology and contingency were general features in the rhetoric of memorials and to identify the textual authorities that supported these tropes. Examining a broad range of memorials shows that memorialists employed authoritative texts to show how baleful signs came into being and how they could be resolved. Memorials gave accounts of the origins of particular signs, identifying the pathways through which they were produced and pointing toward people, political policies, or ritual failures that had produced them. Etiology, moreover, would imply contingency. If the processes by which baleful signs and events came into being could be identified, then those processes could be stopped, or even reversed. Baleful signs and the events they presaged could be resolved, made to melt away, if the underlying conditions that allowed for their initial appearance were altered. Authoritative technical texts and historical exemplars could be used to explain why certain signs came into being and what should be done about them.

While the first portion of the chapter establishes a fundamental argument concerning the methods by which celestial signs were fashioned into suasive devices in a large number of memorials from the late Western Han through the late Eastern Han dynasty (25 CE–220 CE), it does so at the expense of historical nuance. Generalization comes necessarily at the cost of specificity. The second portion of this chapter works to diminish that cost by giving fine-grained readings of groups of memorials presented under specific historical circumstances, allowing us to address an additional set of questions. Why do we find comparatively few memorials on baleful celestial signs prior to the late Western Han? How did recent events enter into the body of authoritative texts memorialists employed? In what ways did memorialists address multiple signs appearing around the same time? Finally, to what extent were baleful celestial signs distinct (or indistinguishable) from other types of baleful signs in the rhetoric memorialists employed? We will examine the memorials of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 198–ca. 107 BCE)<sup>7</sup> and Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (ca. 200–121 BCE), early in the reign of Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140–87 BCE), which suggest that the early-mid Western Han courts may have been more concerned with an absence of auspicious signs than the presence of baleful portents. Second, we turn to the

---

approaches in a stricter sense, see Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (London: Verso, 2007). To gather materials for this chapter, I combed through the fifty-three page list of Western Han, Xin 新 (9–23 CE), and Eastern Han (25–220 CE) memorial titles included as an appendix in Wang Qicai 王启才, *Handai zouyi de wenxue yiyun yu wenhua jingshen* 漢代奏議的文學意蘊與文化精神 (The Literary Meaning and Cultural Spirit of Han Dynasty Memorials; Beijing: Renming daxue, 2009): 290–343. I then used the Scripta Sinica database of the Academia Sinica to locate and read through memorials with titles that referred directly to celestial signs or unspecified portents. The titles given for the memorials in Wang Qicai appear in large part to be derived from Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) ed., *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Complete Texts of High Antiquity, the Three Dynasties, Qin, Han, the Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties; Beijing: Shangwu, 1999). Despite the length of the list given in Wang Qicai, it nonetheless omits numerous memorials that are germane to the basic questions of this chapter. Certain memorials Wang Qicai omits are therefore included here. I am also particularly indebted to two works that made it possible to efficiently gain a sense of the context in which all of these memorials were composed: Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han, and Xin Periods: 221 BC–24 AD* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); and Rafe de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220) AD* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> For Dong Zhongshu's dates see Chapter 1, p. 15, n. 43.

memorials of Gu Yong 谷永 (fl. 36–9 BCE) and Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE), late in the reign of Emperor Cheng 成 (r. 33–7 BCE), which cite twenty years of bad portents, in addition to the 12 BCE dazzling display of Halley’s Comet. Both writers launched attacks on persons close to the Emperor, their particular factional loyalties determining precisely which persons were deemed to be at fault. Finally, we will examine the responses of Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139 CE), Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE), and Li Gu 李固 (ca. 94–147 CE) to a 133 CE earthquake in which the ostensibly terrestrial event is treated as a celestial sign. While each of these three case studies belongs to a different historical period, these three sets of memorials nonetheless show that explanations of etiology, assurances of contingency, and appeals to authoritative texts consistently underscored the authority of celestial signs.

### Part I: A Synoptic View of Suasion and Celestial Signs

Our synoptic view must begin with an account of etiology. In its classical Greek sense, the notion of *aitios* (αἴτιος) indicates both who is responsible for an event and why that event occurs. Reason indicates responsibility. To speak of the etiology of celestial signs in this sense is to speak not only of the processes through which such signs are produced, but to evoke the agents responsible for their production. Questions of etiology not only include how and why things happen, but whom to blame. The trope of etiology involves the articulation of a pathway by which signs spring into being. For both auspicious and inauspicious signs, the first identifiable element along that path is most often a human agent. While the heavens provided a model for governance, the failure of the rulers of men to follow it disturbed the source of the model itself. Late Western Han and Eastern Han memorials on celestial signs routinely employed the trope of etiology to explain how signs came into being and who was responsible.

Yang Bing 楊秉 (94–167 CE), an expert in the *Changes* (Yijing 易經) and the *Documents* (Shu 書) Classics, opened a memorial advising Emperor Huan 桓 (r. 147–167 CE) to cease his incognito excursions after a great wind had uprooted trees, by pointing to the emperor himself as the source of both auspicious and inauspicious signs. “Auspicious emblems issue from suasive power; disasters are responses born of affairs” 瑞由德至，災應事生。<sup>8</sup> Disasters happened for a reason. Heaven and the human realm were related to one another via mutual resonance,<sup>9</sup> yet Han memorialists in many cases treated actors at court as the primary agents

<sup>8</sup> Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) comp., Li Xian 李賢 (651–684) comm., *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965). Technical treatises (*zhi* 志) are compiled by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306) with commentary by Liu Shao 劉昭 (fl. ca. 502–ca. 519): 54.1769.

<sup>9</sup> Paul U. Unschuld, writing of both the relationship between the human and celestial realms and between symptoms and illness, points to a “paradigm of correspondences” between signs and the events or illnesses to which they are tied. Signs may neither be said to cause nor be caused by events or illnesses, but appear and disappear in conjunction with them. See his “Unification of the Empire, Confucianism, and the Medicine of Systematic Correspondence” in *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1985): 51–66. In his recent work on astro-omenology, David Pankenier eschews a linear understanding of temporality in early China in the sense that antecedent events may be said to cause the events that follow them, writing that the early Chinese synthesized “the complementary aspects of time and space into an all-embracing fabric of acausal, patterned orderedness.” See his *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*:

responsible for the appearance of baleful celestial signs. Citing the *Zuozhuan*, Yang Bing continued: “There is no gateway for calamity and good fortune. These are things that people bring on themselves” 禍福無門，唯人所召。<sup>10</sup> Yang Bing never indicates what sort of baleful events the sign might presage, but does suggest that the activities of the ruler are responsible for its appearance.

While we may stop short of ascribing a billiard-ball model of causality to the production of baleful celestial signs, memorialists employed a rhetorical device we might call a “chain of amplification”<sup>11</sup> to place the agency of the ruler at the beginning of the processes that produced baleful signs. Chains of amplification have a powerful rhetorical impact articulated through a simple and easily comprehensible underlying structure: “If A then B, if B then C, if C then D.” In a 31 CE memorial on a solar eclipse, Zheng Xing 鄭興 (1<sup>st</sup> cent CE), a former student of Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE), cites a passage in the *Zuozhuan* that in one breath treats Heaven, Earth, and the human realm in parallel, but in the next suggests that the human realm is at the center of the cosmos and that human agents are ultimately responsible for all manner of baleful signs. “The *Annals* (Chunqiu 春秋) Classic claims that when Heaven runs counter to the seasons it constitutes a disaster, when Earth runs counter to its creatures it constitutes a monstrosity, and when human beings run counter to suasive power it constitutes disorder” 春秋以天反時為灾，地反物為妖，人反德為亂。<sup>12</sup> The symmetry is broken, however, with the concluding words of the citation: “If there is disorder, then monstrosities and disasters are born” 亂則妖灾生。<sup>13</sup> Human failure produces disorder, and disorder is the source of baleful signs both in the heavens and upon the Earth. In Zheng Xing’s account, human agency proves the first link in the production of inauspicious signs. The “human beings” of whom he speaks seem to be high officials at court, or the emperor himself.

Memorialists constructed elaborate chains describing the production of celestial signs, and at the beginnings of these chains they often placed human actors. Chen Zhong’s 陳忠 (d. 125) memorial in defense of Chen Bao 陳褒 (fl. 102–122 CE), who had been dismissed from his post as Imperial Counsellor (Sikong 司空) after being blamed for the occurrence of a recent earthquake, opens with such a chain:

臣聞位非其人，則庶事不敝；庶事不敝，則政有得失；政有得失，則感動陰陽，妖變為應。

I have heard that when the wrong people occupy [high-ranking] positions, then

---

*Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 364.

<sup>10</sup> Yang Bing in *Hou Hanshu* 54.1768 is citing an episode occurring in the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of Duke Xiang 襄 of Lu (550 BCE). For the context of the quotation, see Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jizhu* 春秋左傳集注 (Collected Commentaries to the Zuo Tradition of the Annals) 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981): 9.23.1079. Hereafter cited as *Zuozhuan*.

<sup>11</sup> I acquired the phrase “chain of amplification” as a denotation for a rhetorical figure from conversations with Robert Ashmore.

<sup>12</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 36.1221 after *Zuozhuan* 7.15.763.

<sup>13</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 36.1221 after *Zuozhuan* 7.15.763.

administrative affairs are out of order. And when the various affairs are out of order, then in governance there are errors. When in governance there are gains and losses, then all of these will disturb *yin* and *yang*. Monstrosities and aberrations are produced in response.<sup>14</sup>

While Chen Zhong evokes the notion of resonance, *ganying* 感應 (stirring and response), by describing monstrosities and aberrations as *ying* 應 (responses), he nonetheless creates the sense that problems in the human realm exist prior to those responses through the rhetorical device of the chain of amplification. One sign follows the next, each worse than the last. The first sign is in fact a set of conditions in the human realm in which the wrong people occupy official positions, and conversely, the right people find themselves unemployed. Thus, Chen Bao's wrongful dismissal, Chen Zhong argued, was the first identifiable sign in a series that had led to the production of the "monstrosities and aberrations." Ironically, the very same sort of etiology, employed by a writer with a less favorable view of Chen Bao, might have supported Chen's dismissal in the first place.

Yi Feng 翼風 (fl. 47–46 BCE), in a 47 BCE memorial prompted by a series of floods and episodes of famine, likewise ascribes the human realm a central position in the production of baleful signs:

臣聞人氣內逆，則感動天地；天變見於星氣日蝕，地變見於奇物震動。

I have heard that when human *qi* internally runs against the course,<sup>15</sup> then it stirs and disturbs Heaven and Earth. In the heavens, aberrations appears in the *qi* of the planets and in eclipses of the sun, and upon the earth, aberrations appear in the form of strange creatures and earthquakes."<sup>16</sup>

Yi Feng's argument, like Chen Zhong's, is compatible with a model of mutual resonance between Heaven and Earth, evoking the notion that human actions stir (*gan* 感) the heavens. While the model of resonance does not immediately indicate causal direction, however, the chained structure of his rhetoric places the locus of responsibility on actors in the human realm, implicating the emperor and close advisors.<sup>17</sup> Yi Feng claims that disturbances in human *qi* are responsible for the appearance of both terrestrial and celestial signs.

Memorialists often characterized baleful signs as resulting from disturbances in the balance of cosmological forces that issued from problems in the political realm. General Zhu Fu

<sup>14</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 46.1562.

<sup>15</sup> It is not entirely clear whether "human" (*ren* 人) refers here to the specific person of the ruler, nobles, or the masses of people in the human realm. If the former reading is correct, "internally" (*nei* 內) refers to the body of the ruler and suggests a disturbance in his particular body leading to a disturbance in the cosmos. *Nei* is more difficult to parse in the second reading, but might also refer to the bodies of many people, or perhaps to inner regions of the realm.

<sup>16</sup> Ban Gu 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) comp., Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) comm., *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962): 75.3173.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of resonance theory, see Chapter 1, pp. 11–16, of the present work.



朱浮 (d. 57 CE), serving under the Eastern Han founder Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–57 CE), opened a memorial on a 30 CE eclipse by describing it as a disturbance in the balance of *yin* and *yang*:

臣聞日者眾陽之所宗，君上之位也……若陽上不明，尊長不足，則干動三光，垂示王者。

I have heard that the sun is the most honored of the many *yang* and corresponds to the superior position of the lord....But if *yang* above is not bright, but lacking in honor and esteem, then the Three Luminaries [i.e. the sun, moon, and stars] will be pestered and disturbed, and send down their admonitions to the King.<sup>18</sup>

The ruler corresponds to the sun, but it is his lack of honor and esteem that acts on the Three Luminaries, leading them to stir and manifest signs. Zhu Fu describes the etiology of the eclipse in terms of a disruption of the normative celestial dynamics of *yin* and *yang*, yet the agency of that disruption lies in the human realm. The eclipse is reflexive. Celestial disorder is a manifestation of human disorder.

The normative celestial dynamics of *yin* and *yang* could serve as a model for governance, a set of patterns the ruler should follow. If the administration failed to follow those patterns, however, the patterns themselves would be disturbed, thus producing baleful signs. Wei Biao 韋彪 (d. 89), Acting Superintendent of Ceremonial (Taichang 太常), placed human agency at the center of the strange weather that took place one summer, circa 82 CE:<sup>19</sup>

臣聞政化之本，必順陰陽。伏見立夏以來，當暑而寒，殆以刑罰刻急，郡國不奉時令之所致也。農人急於務而苛吏奪其時，賦發充常調而貪吏割其財，此其巨患也。

I have heard that the foundation of transformative governance lies certainly in following along with *yin* and *yang*. I humbly submit that since Start of Summer<sup>20</sup> I have seen that it has been cold when it ought to be hot, and this has likely been brought about due to the imposition of harsh and excessive punishments and fines and the failure of the commanderies and kingdoms to carry out the seasonal ordinances. Farmers have been hurried in their tasks, yet vicious officials have stolen their time. They have paid their taxes regularly, yet greedy officials have seized their property. These are great dangers indeed.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 33.1141.

<sup>19</sup> Wei Biao's biography does not specify the year when this memorial was submitted. However, the narrative surrounding its submission is positioned in between events occurring in 82 CE and 84 CE (*Hou Hanshu* 26.915–19).

<sup>20</sup> Start of Summer is the 10<sup>th</sup> of the 24 Segments of *Qi* in the solar calendar and takes place on May 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>. See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000): 186.

<sup>21</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 26.918.

The unseasonably cool summer weather likely contributed to a poor harvest. Wei Biao suggests that the blame for that weather belongs to the avaricious and callous officials who failed to allow farmers the time they needed to tend their fields and, adding insult to injury, sought to take for themselves too great a share of the fruits of the workers' labor. While the sign of inclement weather plays a role here, Wei Biao's argument is as much concerned with the practical effects of the failure to plant at the right time as it is with the disruption in *yin* and *yang*. The agency of the ruler and his court plays a role in determining the bountifulness of the harvest, not only on the level of cosmic dynamics, but at the level of agricultural practice on the ground.

A correct understanding of how baleful celestial signs come into being was a necessary precondition for finding remedies and solutions. For the memorialist who wished to spur concrete action, baleful signs were subject to change or resolution, but only to the extent that their etiology could be explained and their source identified. Zhou Ju 周舉 (d. 149) blamed a severe drought on tolerance for corrupt officials coupled with excessive expenditures at Emperor Shun's 順 (r. 126–144 CE) court in a 134 CE memorial. Zhou appealed to an admonition Master Yan (Yanzi 晏子; 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE) had made to Duke Jing of Qi 齊景公 (r. 547–490) during the Chunqiu period.

昔齊有大旱，景公欲祀河伯，晏子諫曰：『不可。夫河伯以水為城國，魚鼈為民庶。水盡魚枯，豈不欲雨？自是不能致也。』

Long ago, there was a great drought in Qi. Duke Jing wished to perform a sacrifice to the Earl of the River. Master Yan admonished him: “You must not do it. For the Earl of the River takes the waters as his kingdom and the fish and turtles as his subjects. If the waters dry up, the fish will wither away. How could it be that he does not wish for rain? From this [we know that] he cannot have brought it on.”<sup>22</sup>

Master Yan's argument pertains most directly to the logic of sacrifice; it is no good to propitiate a deity who is not responsible for the problem at hand, a deity who indeed, suffers from the disaster as much as the Duke himself.<sup>23</sup> By invoking this story, Zhou Ju suggests that ritual means alone cannot resolve the drought occurring in his own time. The wrong actions, undertaken without regard to the disaster, cannot serve to resolve it: “The actions Your Majesty has undertaken address but the superficial aspects of the problem, without searching out its substance. It is as if you were climbing a tree in hopes of obtaining a fish, walking backwards in hopes of going forward” 陛下所行，但務其華，不尋其實，猶緣木希魚，却行求前。<sup>24</sup> Ritual means are not necessarily beneficial at all, and certainly not enough so to resolve the drought. The social conditions that produced the disaster must be addressed:

<sup>22</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 61.2026

<sup>23</sup> A more extensive version of this story is included in *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (The Annals of Master Yan) 1.15.21–22, in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Collected Works of the Many Masters), vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1952).

<sup>24</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 61.2026.

誠宜推信革政，崇道變惑，出後宮不御之女，理天下冤枉之獄，除太官重膳之費。

Truly you ought to act in a trustworthy fashion and reform your administration, venerate the Way and overcome your state of delusion. Send those women you do not favor away from the palace, pardon those in the world who have been wrongly imprisoned, and abolish the excessive banqueting expenditures of the Court Provisioners.<sup>25</sup>

Early in his memorial, Zhou Ju employs a chain of amplification to describe the way blockages in *yin* and *yang* ultimately produce baleful celestial signs such as floods and droughts in cosmic dynamic terms:

夫陰陽閉隔，則二氣否塞；二氣否塞，則人物不昌；人物不昌，則風雨不時；風雨不時，則水旱成災。

When *yin* and *yang* are closed off and isolated, then the two types of *qi* are blocked up. When the two types of *qi* are blocked up, human beings and creatures do not flourish. When human beings and creatures do not flourish, wind and rain are unseasonal. When wind and rain are unseasonal, floods and droughts become disasters.<sup>26</sup>

While this statement may at first glance seem to place the “closed off and isolated” *yin* and *yang* prior to human agency in the etiology of disaster, the ruler and his court<sup>27</sup> are positioned as the agents responsible for creating policies aligned with the normative balance of *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are “closed off and isolated,” Zhou Ju subtly suggests, on account of the many people who cannot enjoy marital relations when the number of women in the harem becomes too great:<sup>28</sup>

萬物之中，以人為貴。故聖人養之以君，成之以化，順四節之宜，適陰陽之和，使男女婚娶不過其時。

Among the myriad things, human beings are the most noble. Thus, the sage employs the lord to nourish them and transformation to complete them, causing them to follow along the normative patterns of the Four Seasons and to attune themselves to the harmony of *yin* and *yang*, making it so that men and woman do not miss the opportune time for

<sup>25</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 61.2026.

<sup>26</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 61.2025.

<sup>27</sup> Zhou Ju specifies that it is not the ruler alone who is responsible for the drought and the underlying problems that produced it, and also blames high status eunuchs who took wives and set up households: “It is not Your Majesty alone who has done this, but your eunuchs have also falsified their forms, married young women, and cloistered them, so that they reach old age without ever having a partner. This is a violation of the heart of Heaven” 非但陛下行此而已，豎宦之人，亦復虛以形執，威侮良家，取女閉之，至有白首歿無配偶，逆於天心 (*Hou Hanshu* 61.2025).

<sup>28</sup> Zhou Ju refers to a dearth of available brides among the highest ranks of the aristocracy. Even the largest harem could not have had an appreciable effect on the broader population of commoners.

marriage.<sup>29</sup>

Celestial signs arise from the court and are resolvable by the court. Zhou Ju's proposal to thin the ranks of the harem and reduce court expenditures works by claiming that the ruler and his officers are both responsible for the production of the disaster and possessed of the power to eliminate it.

Yang Bing, Zheng Xing, Chen Zhong, Yi Feng, Zhu Fu, Wei Biao, and Zhou Ju all employ the trope of etiology to identify the conditions that produced the baleful signs that immediately prompted their memorials. The celestial signs themselves are not the only signs being read; the memorialists engage with other signs at court that may be treated as conditions responsible for the production of the omens. These conditions are placed into chains of amplification. Claims about the causation of baleful signs allow memorialists to further arguments regarding who is responsible and what should be done. Such claims, however, were not simply a matter of exploiting acceptable notions of causation. Memorialists further supported their rhetoric by appealing to theories and precedents in authoritative texts.

### **Authoritative Theories: From Etiology to Contingency**

Four of the Five Classics are routinely cited in memorials on celestial signs: the *Documents*, the *Changes*, the *Odes* (Shi 詩) Classic, and the *Annals*. With the exception of citations to the *Changes*, these citations most often allude to precedents, historical examples in which a sign—celestial or otherwise—has appeared before. When inauspicious signs occur, the exemplary ruler understands their etiology correctly and then makes appropriate changes to his ritual behavior and administrative policies, and good fortune is duly recovered. The inept ruler ignores inauspicious signs and ultimately faces the consequences. In addition to precedents, many memorials also specifically cite two Classical texts that provide an underlying theoretical basis for the reading of celestial signs: the “Xici zhuan” 繫辭傳 (Tradition of the Appended Statements) to the *Changes* and the “Hong fan” 洪/鴻範 (Great Plan) chapter of the *Documents*.

“The Appended Statements” contains the single most commonly cited statement on the appearance of celestial signs: “Heaven displays the signs, revealing good and ill-fortune” 天垂象，見吉凶。 In the opening of a 142 CE memorial citing an encounter between the Dazzling Deluder<sup>30</sup> and the moon, Zhou Ju equates the statement of the “Appended Statements” with the notion of celestial pattern, writing that “by examining celestial patterns, we clearly perceive the transformations of the times” 觀乎天文，以察時變。<sup>31</sup> The notion that Heaven displays signs underscored correspondences between particular celestial bodies with particular political roles at court and bolstered claims that Heaven, despite its lack of language, did in fact communicate its

<sup>29</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 61.2025.

<sup>30</sup> I.e. Mars.

<sup>31</sup> Zhou Ju is citing the “Appended Statements.” Citations of the “Appended Statements” refer to Huang Shouqi 黃壽祺 and Zhang Shanwen 張善文 eds., *Zhouyi yizhu* 周易譯注 (A Modern Translation and Annotation of the Zhou Changes; Shanghai: Guji, 2001): 556. His memorial appears in Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140–before 204 CE) comp., Wang Liqi 王利器 comm., *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 風俗通義校注 (Text Critical Commentary on A Comprehensive Account of Customs) 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981): 5.254–55.

will through the production of signs. Li He 李郃 (fl. 89–126 CE), serving as Chancellor (Situ 司徒) at the opening of Emperor Shun's reign in 126 CE, argued for leniency toward the Empress Dowager Yan 閻 (d. 126 CE),<sup>32</sup> suggesting that celestial signs stood in for the speech of Heaven: “I have heard that Heaven does not speak, but displays signs so as to manifest good and ill-fortune, and that it displays disasters, aberrations, and anomalies to reprimand and admonish 臣聞天不言，縣象以示吉凶，挺災變異以為譴誡.”<sup>33</sup> Drawing on the “Appended Statements,” Li He draws a close analogy between the appearance of celestial signs and warnings.

Correspondences between sun and ruler, moon and ministers (or in some cases, women at court) built upon *yin* and *yang* dynamics central to the “Appended Statements” and played a major role in memorials prompted by eclipses. Ding Hong 丁鴻 (d. 94 CE), an expert in the Ouyang 歐陽 interpretation of the *Documents*,<sup>34</sup> opens a 92 CE memorial on an eclipse by citing the fundamental symmetry between the sun and moon, on the one hand, and the ruler and his ministers, on the other: “I have heard: the sun is the essence of *yang*, and so the sun remains full and does not wane, for it is the sign of the lord. The moon is the essence of *yin*, and so it waxes and wanes with regularity, for it is the standard of the minister” 臣聞日者陽精，守實不虧，君之象也；月者陰精，盈毀有常，臣之表也。<sup>35</sup> When the sun appears to wane, as in a solar eclipse, the fundamental relationship between the ruler and his ministers is out of balance. Ding Hong continues, “Thus eclipses of the sun occur when ministers take power over their lords, and *yin* becomes dominant over *yang*. When the moon becomes full and does not diminish, it is because the lower ranks are full of arrogance” 故日食者，臣乘君，陰陵陽；月滿不虧，下驕盈也。<sup>36</sup> Like Li He, Ding Hong echoes the language of the “Appended Statements” and suggests that celestial signs are delivered as warnings: “When the ways of men below grow treacherous, the verifying tallies appear in the heavens above. Though there may be secret schemes, the gods illuminate the truth of the matter. The signs are displayed and the warnings made apparent, so as to advise the lord of men” 人道悖於下，效驗見於天，雖有隱謀，神照其情，垂象見戒，以告人君。<sup>37</sup> The correspondence between sun and ruler, moon and ministers, was also used on occasion to argue for lenience toward imperial officials.

Following a 31 CE solar eclipse, Zheng Xing points to the trepidation of officials at Emperor Guangwu's court and he characterizes the eclipse as a warning from a benevolent, even paternal, Heaven that seeks to guide the ruler, lest he stray from his proper path:

<sup>32</sup> Empress Yan 嚴 had ordered the murder of Emperor Shun's mother, Lady Li 李氏, shortly after his birth in 115 CE. In 124 CE, she had him deposed as crown prince and made him King of Jiyin 濟陰. Following the death of Emperor An in 125 CE, Dowager Yan placed the five-year old Liu Yi 劉懿, the Little Emperor (Shao di 少帝; r. 125) on the throne, but he fell ill and died within the year. In the absence of another heir, Emperor Shun took power. While Li He's call for leniency toward the Dowager Yan was nominally accepted, she too died the next year (*Hou Hanshu* 10B.435–37).

<sup>33</sup> *Hou Hanshu* (treatises) 11.3242, n. 5.

<sup>34</sup> A succinct and useful account of the transmission of the Ouyang interpretation of the *Documents* is presented in Liang Cai, *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014): 109–10.

<sup>35</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 37.1265.

<sup>36</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 37.1265.

<sup>37</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 37.1266.

夫日月交會，數應在朔，而頃年日食，每多在晦。先時而合，皆月行疾也。日君象而月臣象，君亢急則臣下促迫，故行疾也……今陛下高明而羣臣惶促，宜留思柔剋之政，垂意洪範之法，博採廣謀，納羣下之策。

As for encounters between the sun and the moon, they generally occur on the first day of the lunar month, but the eclipses of the sun in recent years have in large part occurred on the last day of the month. When they come together before the proper time, it is in every case due to hurried movement of the moon. The sun is the sign of the lord, and the moon the sign of his ministers. When the lord is high-handed and insistent then his ministers below are in straitened circumstances and so their movements are pressed....Now, Your Majesty is exalted and perspicacious, but your many ministers are wracked with fear. It is fitting that you consider administering them by means of mild suasion, concentrating upon the methods of the “Great Plan.” Graciously adopt their far-reaching plans, and accept the memorials of your many subordinates.<sup>38</sup>

Zheng Xing does not directly cite the “Appended Statements” but employs its understanding of celestial signs to offer a reading of the solar eclipse in which the usual understanding of ministers usurping the power of the sovereign is inverted, so that sovereign is in fact encouraged to listen to and yield to his ministers. “Mild suasion” (*rouke* 柔剋), one of three types of “suasive power” (*san de* 三德) in the “Great Plan,” does not so much represent a means of keeping the ruler’s officials in line, as the power the ruler exercises through his ministers when he is wise enough to treat them well and give due consideration to their views on policy.<sup>39</sup>

The “Great Plan” is a treatise on good government of divine origin, according to its opening preface, that is revealed and transmitted only to the worthy. According to its opening narrative section, King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (r. 1046–1043 BCE), having recently conquered the Shang and still himself uncertain of the proper methods of governance, sought the advice of worthy men. Jizi 箕子 (trad. 11<sup>th</sup> cent BCE), an erstwhile Shang official who had feigned madness to escape the wrath of the wicked King Zhou of Shang (Di Zhou 帝紂; r. 1075–1047 BCE), offered King Wu a set of instructions for administration that constituted the “Great Plan.” We have already encountered three of the Nine Divisions in Chapter 3, the Five Resources (*wu xing* 五行), Five Duties (*wushi* 五事), and the Sovereign Standard (*huang ji* 皇極),<sup>40</sup> which

<sup>38</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 36.1222.

<sup>39</sup> The “Great Plan” describes the *three modes of suasive power* as follows “As for the three modes of suasive power, the first is called ‘rectification and alignment’; the second is called ‘hard suasion’; and the third is called ‘mild suasion.’ In times of peace and prosperity, employ rectification and alignment. Toward those who insist against allying with you, employ hard suasion. Toward those who are in harmony and ally themselves with you, employ mild suasion. Toward those of humble status, employ hard suasion. Toward those who are exalted and illustrious, employ mild suasion” 三德：一曰正直，二曰剛克，三曰柔克。平康正直。彊弗友剛克，變友柔克。沈潛剛克，高明柔克。Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞 comm., *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 尚書校釋譯論 (Notes, Explanation, Translation, and Discussion of the Venerable Documents), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005): 1172.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase *huangji* could be understood in multiple ways. Nylan notes that *huang* meant “great,” “sovereign”

together constitute the first, second, and fifth of the Nine Divisions. The *Hanshu* “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (Treatise on the Five Resources) employs the Five Resources, Five Duties, and the Sovereign Standard as the basic organizing principle for its eleven sections. The “Five Resources” itself was almost certainly based on Liu Xiang’s “On the Five Resources Tradition in the ‘Great Plan’” (Hongfan wuxing zhuan ji 洪範五行傳論), which was in turn based on earlier Western Han traditions of reading the *Documents*.<sup>41</sup> To refer to the “Great Plan” in memorials on celestial signs was to cite the fundamental Classical basis for omenological claims.

In the Eastern Han, the “Great Plan” continued to play a central role in the discourse on omens. In 26 CE, Yin Min 尹敏 (fl. ca. 26– ca. 72 CE), an expert in the Ouyang interpretation of the *Documents* and both the *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁 (Guliang Tradition) and *Zuozhuan* for the *Annals*, submitted a memorial arguing that the “Great Plan” should be used to understand and resolve baleful signs:

六沴作見，若是供御，帝用不差，神則大喜，五福乃降，用章于下。若不供御，六罰既侵，六極其下。明供御則天報之福，不供御則禍災至。欲尊六事之體，則貌、言、視、聽、思、心之用，合六事之揆以致乎太平，而消除轆軻孽害也。

When the Six Dislocations occur, if in all cases they can be brought under control, the ancestors will not sigh,<sup>42</sup> and the gods will be overjoyed. The Five Blessings will thereupon be sent down, illuminating all below. But if the Six Dislocations cannot be

---

and “augment,” glossed as either *da* 大 or, by Fu Sheng 伏生 (d. after 156 BCE), as *wang* 王, while *ji* meant “to maximize,” “absolute,” “culminant,” or “standard,” as in the sense of “highest principle.” The phrase as a whole meant “Greatness Maximized” or “Sovereign Standard.” See Michael Nylan, *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings* (Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1992): 17, 23–24. As the “Treatise on the Five Resources” is based on Liu Xiang’s extension of Fu Sheng’s tradition for the “Great Plan,” I have adopted the rendering “Sovereign Standard.”

<sup>41</sup> The medieval historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) claimed that the “‘Treatise on the Five Resources’ was derived from Liu Xiang’s work on the ‘Great Plan’ chapter of the *Documents*” 五行出劉向洪範. See his *Shi tong* 史通 (A Complete Understanding of History): 3.10 in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Books of the Four Chambers), Wenyuange edition, Intranet version, (2007). A description of Liu Xiang’s work in his biography in the *Hanshu* does indeed suggest that it had much in common with the “Five Resources”: “Liu Xiang saw that in the ‘Great Plan’ chapter of the *Documents*, Jizi set forth praises and condemnatory responses of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Resources for the benefit of King Wu of Zhou (r. 1046–1043 BCE). Liu thereupon collected and collated a record of auspicious signs, disasters, and anomalies from high antiquity, through the Chunqiu period, along with the Qin (221–207 BCE) and Western Han. He traced back actions and events and connected the *Tradition* to calamities and good fortune. He arranged them according to category so that they followed one another, and each had its own discrete heading within the text. In total, it included eleven chapters (*pian*). He called it the ‘On the Five Resources Tradition of the ‘Great Plan’ and submitted it to the throne” 向見《尚書》《洪範》，箕子為武王陳五行陰陽休咎之應。向乃集合上古以來歷春秋六國至秦漢符瑞災異之記，推迹行事，連傳禍福，著其占驗，比類相從，各有條目，凡十一篇，號曰《洪範五行傳論》，奏之 (*Hanshu* 36.1950). The title is not listed in the bibliographic treatise to the *Hanshu*. However, a work entitled “Wuxing zhuan ji” 五行傳記 (Records Concerning the Traditions on the Five Resources) in eleven *juan* 卷 (fascicles) rather than eleven *pian* 篇 (chapters) is credited to Liu Xiang therein. See *Hanshu* 30.1705.

<sup>42</sup> I read *jie* 嗟 for *cha* 差.

brought under control, the Six Penalties will advance, and the Six Extremes will descend. Whosoever understands how to bring the Six Dislocations under control, Heaven will reward with blessings. But calamity and disaster will come unto those who cannot bring the Six Dislocations under control. If one desires to fulfill the Six Duties, then in enacting bearing, speech, sight, listening, deliberation, and mind, he must bring those Six Duties into a single standard of measurement so as to summon Great Peace, thereby resolving and eliminating the difficulties of bane and injury.<sup>43</sup>

Yin Min's memorial couched the "Great Plan" as the ideal method to eliminate disasters. Correct response to baleful signs can bring on auspicious results, the "Five Blessings" identified in the "Great Plan": "long life" (*shou* 壽); wealth (*fu* 富); good health (*kangning* 康寧); cultivation of fine suasive power (*xiu hao de* 修好德); and "the ultimate fulfillment of the charge" (*kao zhong ming* 考終命).<sup>44</sup> Failure to take remedial action, however, leads to the Six Penalties,<sup>45</sup> and finally the Six Extremes. The Six Extremes immediately follow, and are the negative corollary to the Five Blessing in the Great Plan. These include: "inauspicious early death" (*xiong duan zhe* 凶短折); disease (*ji* 疾); worry (*you* 憂); poverty (*pin* 貧); repugnance (*e* 惡); and weakness (*ruo* 弱).<sup>46</sup> Avoiding the Six Extremes and receiving the Five Blessings required the ruler to identify their source in the Six Duties,<sup>47</sup> and thereby rectify ritual faults of his own, or of those at his court. Yin Min's memorial earned him a place as a Gentleman of the Palace (*langzhong* 郎中) in Guangwu's court.<sup>48</sup>

Zhu Fu, in his memorial on the 30 CE solar eclipse, pointed to Classical texts in general and the "Great Plan" in particular as the foundation for reading signs to argue that men from throughout the empire should be eligible for selection as Academicians: "The Five Classics record the policies of domains and great clans. The 'Great Plan' distinguishes the patterns in disasters and anomalies. All proclaim and illuminate the Way of Heaven, so as to verify the affairs that are to come" 五典紀國家之政，鴻範別災異之文，皆宣明天道，以徵來事者也。<sup>49</sup> Zhu Fu, in the vaguest of terms, gestures toward events to come that the signs might presage. But these ill-defined events are not yet set in stone, the capacity of the court to respond to the signs leaves the future very much open. Memorials on omens appealed to the "Great Plan" both to explain the etiology of inauspicious signs and to explain how they could be eliminated.

<sup>43</sup> *Hou Hanshu* (treatises) 13.3268, n. 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1196. This final phrase might also refer to living out the full span of one's life. I prefer to take *ming* 命 as referring to Heaven's Charge, however, both because properly fulfilling Heaven's command is perhaps an even greater blessing than attaining long life and because reading *ming* as "lifespan" renders the last of the Five Blessings somewhat too similar to the first.

<sup>45</sup> While the precise forms of the Six Penalties are unknown, they serve as a rhetorical bridge between the initial condition of the Six Dislocations and the ultimate emergence of the Six Extremes.

<sup>46</sup> *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1196.

<sup>47</sup> While in the "Great Plan" the last of these duties was *si* 思 (deliberation), the "Five Resources" treated the fifth duty as *sixin* 思心 (the deliberative mind). Yin Min, however, treats *si* and *xin* as two separate duties, "deliberation and mind," and hence refers to Six Duties rather than five.

<sup>48</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 79.2558. Yin Min soon lost favor due to his opposition to the apocrypha. *Hou Hanshu* 79.2558.

<sup>49</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 33.1141–42.



The “Great Plan” entered into the reading of all manner of baleful signs, celestial and otherwise. In a 178 CE memorial citing a litany of signs including fog, earthquakes, comets, and an eclipse, Lu Zhi 盧植 (d. 192) cited the “Great Plan” as an effective means of “exorcising and pacifying disasters and inauspicious signs” 禳服災咎.<sup>50</sup> Lu Zhi paired an understanding of the etiology of ill-portents of all types with the means to eliminating them. “In examining the aberrations of recent years, we find that all are instances of *yang* losing its position and *yin* encroaching. There must also be a means by which disasters can be eliminated and ill-fortune prevented” 案今年之變，皆陽失陰侵，消禦災凶，宜有其道。<sup>51</sup> While Lu Zhi’s account of the etiology of baleful celestial signs rests upon the foundation of *yin* and *yang* cosmic dynamics, the “Great Plan” provides the key to eliminating those signs.

The “Appended Statements” and the “Great Plan” were authoritative sources that memorialists could draw upon to make cosmological claims regarding the etiology of all manner of signs, auspicious and inauspicious, celestial and otherwise. These two texts presented a set of theories that allowed memorialists to create connections between baleful signs, the underlying conditions of their production, and the events they presaged. This set of theories was highly flexible and could be used to connect variegated signs to one another, to conditions at court, and to conditions in the empire as a whole, thereby producing powerful arguments that linked developments in the political and religious center of the human world to cosmological processes. Theory was a vital rhetorical tool, but not the only tool memorialists had at their disposal. Memorialists appealed also to precedents in which baleful signs had appeared in the past and to the models of exemplary rulers who had addressed those signs by rectifying themselves or their courts.

### **Authoritative Exemplars: Turning Calamities into Good Fortune**

Explaining how baleful signs came into being was a powerful suasive technique, but only insofar as something could be done about them. Indeed, for a baleful sign to function as a call to action, the action must at least be potentially efficacious. Etiology and contingency in practice went hand in hand. Explanations of etiology allowed the memorialist to point toward the conditions that brought baleful signs into being, while assurances of contingency allowed the writer to claim that if the conditions that brought the sign into being were eliminated, so too would be the sign itself and whatever catastrophic events it might have presaged.

Claims that baleful signs were subject to change rested on authoritative precedents. Memorialists looked to occurrences of baleful signs under sage rulers in the distant past to show how the correct response to such events could ultimately turn calamities into good fortune. Certain stories were told and retold to the point where simply mentioning the names of the persons involved evoked them in their totality. Judging from extant sources, three precedents proved particularly valuable in making arguments concerning celestial signs: King Wuding of Shang’s 商武丁 (trad. r. 1250–1192 BCE) self-rectification after a pheasant appeared on the ear

<sup>50</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 64.2117. I present the variant *rang* 禳 for *rang* 攘 following the Jigu Pavilion (Jigu ge 及古閣) and Wuying Hall (Wuying dian 武英殿) recensions of the text. Lu Zhi points specifically to the work of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) and his disciples on the “Great Plan.”

<sup>51</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 64.2117.

of his tripod recorded in the “Gaozong rong ri” 高宗彤日 (High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice) chapter of the *Documents*; King Cheng of Zhou’s 周成王 (r. 1042–1021 BCE) acknowledgment of the hidden virtue of the Duke of Zhou 周公 (11<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE) following an omen in which wind blew over trees in the “Jinteng” 金籒 (Metal-bound Coffin) chapter of the *Documents*; and Duke Jing of Song’s 宋景公 (r. 517–452 BCE) selfless refusal to sacrifice his chief minister, his subjects, or the bounty of the harvest to exorcise the ill portent of the Dazzling Deluder’s appearance in the celestial field corresponding to his own domain. The stories of King Wuding of Shang, King Cheng of Zhou, and Duke Jing of Song, each present cases of exemplary rulers who responded properly to the appearance of baleful signs and reaped the rewards.

### King Wuding and the Pheasant in “The High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice”

“The High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice” chapter of the *Documents* presents King Wuding of Shang’s exemplary response to an inauspicious omen. We examined in Chapter 3 the role this narrative plays in the “Benji” 本紀 (Basic Annals) of Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist).<sup>52</sup> The *Documents* text reads:

高宗彤日，越有雉雉。祖己曰：「惟先格王，正厥事。」乃訓于王，曰：「惟天監下民，典厥義。降年有永有不永。非天天民，民中絕命。民有不若德、不聽罪，天既孚命正厥德，乃曰其如台。嗚呼！王司敬民。罔非天胤，典祀無豐于昵。」

On the High Ancestor’s<sup>53</sup> Day of Sacrifice, on the ear of the tripod a pheasant cried. Zuji said: “It has come before the King<sup>54</sup> to rectify his affairs.” And he admonished the king, saying: ‘Heaven watches over the King’s men below, supporting them in their duties. And while our allotments of years are sometimes many and sometimes few, it is not Heaven that causes men to die young, cutting their lives (*ming*) short while they are still in their prime. But there are many among the people who do not yield to your suasive power, who refuse to acknowledge their crimes. Heaven bestows its charge (*ming*) on those who rectify their own suasive power! Yet now they say, “What are we to do?” Alas, as you sit upon the throne you must be reverent toward your subjects. None among the ancestors was not a scion of Heaven.<sup>55</sup> Do not give too abundantly to your father<sup>56</sup> in your sacrifices.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE), *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959): 3.103. See Chapter 3, pp. 84–102, for details.

<sup>53</sup> Gaozong, or the High Ancestor, is the temple name of King Wuding of Shang (*Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 2.992, n.1).

<sup>54</sup> As Gu and Liu note that Kong Guang’s 孔光 (d. 5 CE) memorial on the 2 BCE eclipse read *xian jia* 先假 for *xian ge* 先格 (*Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 2.1001, n. 3). Kong Guang seems to understand the full sentence Zuji utters as “It forewarns the King to rectify him in his duties.”

<sup>55</sup> Alternatively, the phrase *tianyin* 天胤 may refer specifically to the ruler, or previous rulers, rather than ancestors in general. See *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 2, 1014.

<sup>56</sup> *Ni* 昵 might also refer to the ruler’s close relatives rather than strictly his father.

<sup>57</sup> *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 2, 992–1011.

We recall from the “Basic Annals” that the reign of King Wuding of Shang, whom Han writers identified as the High Ancestor though he was not the first Shang King, was a period of renaissance for the Shang dynasty, just as the reign of King Xuan 周宣王 (r. 827–782 BCE) would be for the Zhou. Zuji advises the king not to make excessive sacrifices to his father, or perhaps his nearest relatives, lest he fail to properly honor the more ancient Shang kings. The *Documents* chapter itself does not explain that King Wuding heeded Zuji’s sage advice, but memorials that cite the Shang High Ancestor as an exemplar describe his reign as inaugurating, as Liu Xiang put it, “a hundred years of good fortune” 百年之福.<sup>58</sup>

In a 19 BCE memorial interpreting a flock of pheasants that descended during the Grand Archery Ceremony (*Da she li* 大射禮), Marshall of State Wang Yin 王因 (d. 15 BCE), along with certain others,<sup>59</sup> pointed to the “Day of Sacrifice” as a precedent showing that an inauspicious sign could be used as an opportunity for reform and renewal:

天地之氣，以類相應，謹告人君，甚微而著。雉者聽察，先聞雷聲，故月令以紀氣。經載高宗雉雉之異，以明轉禍為福之驗。

The *qi* of Heaven and Earth mutually respond in kind, so as to reproach and warn the lord of men, in a subtle yet clear fashion. If we examine the pheasant by listening, first we hear the sound of thunder, for the monthly ordinances serve to give order to *qi*. The Classic records the anomaly of the pheasant that cried at the court of the High Ancestor of Shang, so as to clearly illuminate the verification of how ill-fortune can be turned into good.<sup>60</sup>

Wang Yin combines the sign of the gathered pheasants with the sound of thunder to integrate both signs into the dynamic interaction of *qi* between Heaven and Earth. Moreover, he explains the specific etiology of the signs and offers Emperor Cheng a method by which they might be eliminated:

外有微行之害，內有疾病之憂，皇天數見災異，欲人變更，終已不改……宜謀於賢知，克己復禮，以求天意，繼嗣可立，災變尚可銷也。

<sup>58</sup> *Hanshu* 36.1964.

<sup>59</sup> *Hanshu* 27C.1417.

<sup>60</sup> *Hanshu* 27C.1417 suggests that a group led by Wang Yin delivered the memorial. No others are named, save a certain man who, according to Yan Shigu (*Hanshu* 27C.1418, n. 1), bore the personal name Chong 寵, but whose surname is not given. Shao-yun Yang points to this memorial as the first of Emperor Cheng’s reign that would be directed not at a political enemy “but to warn Chengdi against his own increasingly erratic and seemingly reckless behavior” (See his “The Politics of Omenology in Chengdi’s Reign,” in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen eds., *Chang’an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* [Seattle: University of Washington, 2014]: 332). Soon after the appearance of the omen, damage to some of the birds’ wings was discovered, suggesting that they had been in captivity, and hence that the omen was staged (ibid 333) indicating a deliberate reproduction of the omen in the “High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice.”

Outside the court, you have subjected yourself to dangers in your incognito travels. At court, you are beset by the worries of sickness and disease. August Heaven many times has manifested disasters and anomalies, in hopes that you would turn over a new leaf, but up to this point you've yet to change your ways... You ought to heed the counsels of the worthy and the knowledgeable, get in control of yourself, and return to ritual propriety, so as to seek Heaven's Will! Your heir can be established; disasters and aberrations still can be resolved.<sup>61</sup>

Wang Yin's conclusion underscores the notion that a proper response to the signs will remove both the signs and the circumstances that produced them. Emperor Cheng, like King Wuding of Shang, might yet renew his dynasty, should he reform himself.

Kong Guang 孔光 (d. 5 CE), writing some seventeen years later, likewise cited the "Day of Sacrifice" to argue that the proper response to an inauspicious sign produced blessings and renewal. Responding to a 2 BCE eclipse and the subsequent death of the Dowager Empress Fu 傅 some two weeks later,<sup>62</sup> Kong Guang describes the etiology of the eclipse using the conventional analogy between the ruler and the sun in which a solar eclipse signals the encroachment of *yin* forces on the ruler, so that "the suasive power of the lord is diminished" 君德衰微.<sup>63</sup> Kong Guang treats the eclipse as a sign that the ruler is in precarious position, drawing on the language of the "Great Plan:"

如貌、言、視、聽、思失，大中之道不立，則咎徵薦臻，六極屢降。皇之不極，是為大中不立，其傳曰『時則有日月亂行』。

When bearing, speech, sight, hearing, and deliberation are all lost, and the Supreme and Central Way is not established, then the proofs of blame all arrive and the Six Extremes descend one after another. When the Sovereign fails to find the Standard (*huang zhi bu ji*), this is a failure to establish the Supreme and Central Way. The *Tradition* [attached to the "Great Plan"] says 'When this occurs, the sun or moon strays from the proper path.'<sup>64</sup>

It is the "Day of Sacrifice," however, that Kong Guang deploys to underscore the notion that the sign is a warning calling on the ruler to reform:

書曰『惟先假王正厥事』，言異變之來，起事有不正也。臣聞師曰，天（右）（左）與王者，故災異數見，以譴告之，欲其改更。

The *Documents* says "It came before [the events it presaged] to tell the kings to set right

<sup>61</sup> *Hanshu* 27C.1418. The phrase "get in control of yourself, and return to ritual propriety" is a quotation from *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects) 12.1. See Cheng Shude 程樹德 comm., *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 (Collected Commentaries to the Analects), vol. 3., preface dated 1939 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990): 817.

<sup>62</sup> The Dowager Fu is said to have died "ten or more days after" 後十餘日 the eclipse (*Hanshu* 81.3359).

<sup>63</sup> *Hanshu* 81.3359.

<sup>64</sup> *Hanshu* 81.3359.

their affairs,”<sup>65</sup> meaning that when anomalies and disasters come about, there is something that is not right that brings them into being (*qi shi*). I have heard that Heaven assists the king, and therefore many times manifests disasters and anomalies to reproach him, desiring that he mend his ways.<sup>66</sup>

Kong Guang treats Heaven as a benevolent agent which produces signs for the benefit of the ruler. The wise ruler seeks to understand their etiology, “that which brings them into being.” Once their etiology is understood, the signs can then be resolved. Citing factionalism, slander, and avarice at court, Kong Guang argues that “worthy and good”<sup>67</sup> (*xianliang* 賢良) officials must be employed, punishments and fines moderated, and taxes reduced. Near the conclusion of his memorial, Kong Guang again appeals to the “Day of Sacrifice”: “The *Documents* says: ‘Heaven has bestowed its charge on those who align their powers!’ This speaks of aligning your powers so that you might follow the course of Heaven”<sup>68</sup> 書曰『天既付命正厥德』，言正德以順天也。Kong Guang concludes by emphasizing that, while the performance of exorcistic rites would be of no avail in responding to the eclipse,<sup>69</sup> by addressing the circumstances which had brought it about, it would be possible to “resolve the calamity and make good fortune flourish” 銷禍興福,<sup>70</sup> just as the High Ancestor had once done.

### King Cheng and the Violent Winds

The violent winds that descended upon King Cheng’s realm in the early Zhou, ripping trees from the ground, are several times cited alongside the pheasant that descended to King Wuding’s court on the day of sacrifice. Liu Xiang<sup>71</sup> and Du Ye both cite the two events as a pair, in each case pointing to how the two kings managed to rectify themselves or their courts in the aftermath of the inauspicious signs. In his 2 BCE memorial on the solar eclipse, Du Ye describes the former kings’ responses to these events as a model which Emperor Ai 哀 (r. 7–1 BCE) should follow: “I have heard that the High Ancestor of Shang was deeply stirred by the appearance of the omen of the wild bird, and that King Cheng of Zhou grew terrified after the violent passage of the great winds. Would that Your Majesty become so perfect in integrity” 臣聞野雞著怪，高宗深動；大風暴過，成王怛然。願陛下加致精誠。<sup>72</sup> As Du Ye employs them, a single lesson is to be learned from the two precedents. Howsoever baleful the signs a ruler confronts, it is his own response to them that matters most.

The “Metal-bound Coffer,” in contrast to the “Day of Sacrifice,” places the problem of

<sup>65</sup> For the *Documents* quotation, see *Shangshu jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 2, 998. The *Documents* text has *ge* 格 for *jia* 假 (came). Gu and Liu explain that *jia* is used in several *Hanshu* citations of this line as the two characters had the same sound and could be used interchangeably (*Shangshu jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 3, 1001).

<sup>66</sup> *Hanshu* 81.3359.

<sup>67</sup> *Hanshu* 81.3360.

<sup>68</sup> *Hanshu* 81.3360.

<sup>69</sup> Kong Guang writes: “The petty arts and exorcistic rites of the vulgar in the end are of no benefit in responding to Heaven and blocking off the source of anomalies” 俗之祈禳小數，終無益於應天塞異 (*Hanshu* 81.3560).

<sup>70</sup> *Hanshu* 81.3360.

<sup>71</sup> See Liu Xiang’s memorial on the 12 BCE appearance of Halley’s Comet below.

<sup>72</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3478.

the slandered official front and center. The year after the Zhou conquest King Wu grew ill, and his younger brother, the Duke of Zhou, pleaded with his ancestors, King Tai 大王, Wang Ji 王季, and King Wen 文王, to kill himself in his older brother's place. Having received an auspicious response, the Duke of Zhou seals away the strips (*ce* 冊) recording his communications with the ancestors in a metal-bound coffer, and his brother the king is healed. The narrative advances from the moment of the King's recovery to the chaotic times following his death. Around that time, the Duke of Zhou's brothers, led by the eldest Guan Shuxian 管叔鮮 (d. ca. 1041 BCE)<sup>73</sup> rebelled, spreading rumors that the Duke of Zhou would soon depose the King and place himself on the throne. The Duke of Zhou then spent two years in the east, quelling their rebellion. Upon the Duke of Zhou's return from his campaign against his rebellious brothers, the King did not punish him, but seemed to regard him with fear.<sup>74</sup>

王亦未敢誚公。秋，大熟，未穫，天大雷電。以風禾盡偃，大木斯拔，邦人大恐，王與大夫盡弁，以啟金縢之書，乃得周公所自以為功、代武王之說。

The King did not dare censure the Duke. In autumn, at the [normative] time of the great ripening, the grain was not yet ready for harvest, and the heavens thundered, and let forth lighting and wind. Wind blew down the stalks of grain and pulled the great trees from the earth. The people of the land were very afraid, and the King and the noblemen donned their caps, opened the metal-bound coffer, and viewed the strips. Only then did they learn of the Duke of Zhou's merit, and of his attempt to offer himself as a substitute for King Wu.<sup>75</sup>

Only at this point did King Cheng come to recognize the Duke of Zhou's true character. The King realized also that the violent, unseasonable weather manifested Heaven's recognition of the Duke, in contrast to his own failure to recognize his uncle:

王執書以泣，曰：「其勿穆卜。昔公勤勞王家，惟予沖人弗及知。今天動威以彰周公之德，惟朕小子其新逆，我國家禮亦宜之。」

The King held the writings and wept, saying: 'Do not divine about it. In the past the Duke labored for the royal house, but because I was but a little child, I did not understand it. Now, Heaven quakes and inspires awe in order to illuminate the character of the Duke of Zhou. I, the young son, must go and greet him anew. The rites of my domain and my house require it.'<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Guan Shuxian is the immediate younger brother of King Wu (*Shiji* 35.1563). According to a fratrilineal principal, he could claim to be King Wu's heir.

<sup>74</sup> I have consulted and in some instances borrowed from the translations of James Legge (359–60) and David Nivison trans., "The Metal-Bound Coffer," in WM. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From Earliest Times to 1600*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 32–35.

<sup>75</sup> *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1235 and 1240. Punctuation has been altered to introduce a full stop after *leidian* 雷電 (thunder and lightning).

<sup>76</sup> *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1240.

The tearful young king's change of heart provokes a heavenly response in turn. "The King went out into the suburbs, and the Heavens set forth rain, and a contrary wind, so that the stalks all rose up. The Two Dukes ordered the people of the land to replant all the trees that were lying down. In that year, there was a bountiful harvest" 王出郊，天乃雨，反風，禾則盡起。二公命邦人，凡大木所偃，盡起而築之。歲則大熟。<sup>77</sup> The winds that blew in reverse mirrored the reversal in King Cheng's treatment of the Duke of Zhou. The bounty of the harvest was an auspicious sign that signaled Heaven's approval just as much as the violent winds signaled Heaven's admonition.

Though the "Metal-bound Coffin" itself never mentions the death of the Duke of Zhou, Han readings sometimes understood King Cheng's recognition of the Duke of Zhou to be posthumous.<sup>78</sup> Zhang Huan's 張奐 (104–181 CE) reading of a series of omens in the summer of 169 CE, including the appearance of a blue snake before the throne, hail, lightning, great wind, and trees being ripped from the ground, argued for leniency toward members of the reform movement defeated in a violent conflict with the eunuch faction led by Cao Jie 曹節 (d. 181 CE) the previous fall. Zhang also sought proper burial for those who had died:

昔周公既薨，成王葬不具禮，天乃大風，偃木折樹。成王發書感悟，備禮改葬，天乃立反風，其木樹盡起。今宜改葬蕃、武，選其家屬，諸被禁錮，一宜蠲除，則災變可消，昇平可致也。

Long ago when the Duke of Zhou died, King Cheng did not follow the full rituals in burying him. Heaven thus sent forth a great wind that knocked down trees and bent their trunks. King Cheng then found what the Duke of Zhou had written and had a sudden realization, and then reburied him in accord with the full rituals. Heaven then sent down another wind that blew in the opposite direction, so that the trees stood up once more. Now, we ought to rebury Chen Fan (d. 168 CE) and Dou Wu (d. 168 CE) with full honors and nominate their heirs. And as for all those who have been proscribed from politics, they should be pardoned at one stroke. Then the disasters and aberrations can be resolved, and peace can be had.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1240.

<sup>78</sup> Both Sima Qian and Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca. 97 CE) place the appearance of the violent winds and rains after the death of the Duke of Zhou (*Shiji* 33.1522; *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 [Commentary on Balanced Discourses] in *Xin zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 [New Collected Works of the Many Masters; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982]: 55.787). The *Shangsu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (Great Tradition of the Documents), as cited in *Hou Hanshu* 65.2141 n. 4, likewise supports this view: "When the Duke of Zhou died, King Cheng wished to bury him at Chengzhou, and Heaven then sent forth thunder, rain, and wind, so that the grain stalks all lay flat upon the ground, and the great trees were uprooted. The people of the domain were very afraid" 周公薨，成王欲葬之於成周，天乃雷雨以風，禾即盡偃，大木斯拔，國人大恐。

<sup>79</sup> Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328–376), Zhou Tianyou 周天游 ed., *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 後漢紀校注 (Text-Critical Commentary for the Chronicles of the Later Han; Tianjin: Tianjin guji, 1987): 23.642. The version of this memorial in *Hou Hanshu* 65.2141 presents a truncated version of the narrative surrounding King Cheng's posthumous treatment of the Duke of Zhou, perhaps because the story was so well known: "Long ago the Duke

Zhang Huan himself had commanded the Northern Army against Dou Wu on behalf of Cao Jie in the previous year, a decision he seems to have regretted,<sup>80</sup> perhaps having discovered the hidden virtue of Dou Wu and Chen Fan after their deaths, just as King Cheng had discovered the Duke of Zhou's act of self-sacrifice when he opened the metal-bound coffer. Zhang Huan presented a powerful case for giving Dou Wu and Chen Fan a proper burial based on the authoritative Classical precedent of King Cheng's posthumous honors for the Duke of Zhou, which we are told deeply moved Emperor Ling 靈 (r. 168–189 CE). However, due to the entrenched power of the eunuch faction at court, Emperor Ling, unlike King Cheng, was unable to ritually honor those worthy ministers who had sacrificed themselves.

### The Integrity of Duke Jing of Song

While King Cheng responded to a series of baleful celestial signs by honoring the Duke of Zhou's offer to sacrifice himself in exchange for King Wu, Duke Jing of Song refused to sacrifice his Prime Minister, his people, or the bounty of the harvest to save himself from the baleful influence of the Dazzling Deluder. The *Shiji* recalls:

三十七年，楚惠王滅陳。熒惑守心。心，宋之分野也。景公憂之。司星子韋曰：「可移於相。」景公曰：「相，吾之股肱。」曰：「可移於民。」景公曰：「君者待民。」曰：「可移於歲。」景公曰：「歲饑民困，吾誰為君！」子韋曰：「天高聽卑。君有君人之言三，熒惑宜有動。」於是候之，果徙三度。

In the 37<sup>th</sup> year of Duke Jing of Song (480 BCE), King Hui of Chu destroyed the domain of Cao. The Dazzling Deluder [i.e. Mars] guarded the Heart constellation. Heart is the celestial field corresponding to Song. Duke Jing grew afraid because of it. Ziwei, the Observer of Planets, said: 'Its [baleful influence] can be transferred to the Prime Minister.' Duke Jing said: 'The Prime Minister is my top aide.' Ziwei said, 'It can be transferred to the people.' Duke Jing said, 'A lord relies on his people.' Ziwei said, 'It can be transferred to the harvest.' Duke Jing said, 'If the harvest is poor, the people will be in dire straits. Over whom should I then be a lord?' Ziwei said, "Heaven is exalted but listens to those who are humble. You, My Lord, have three times spoken the words of a lord. The Dazzling Deluder ought to move.' Thereupon, they observed it. As expected, it had moved three degrees.<sup>81</sup>

Another well-known version of the narrative concludes in still more dramatic fashion. In the

---

of Zhou was buried without the full rituals, and Heaven thereupon quaked and inspired awe. Now Dou Wu and Chen Fan were loyal and steadfast but have not received clemency, and the advent of the monstrosities and pestilences is due to this. We ought to quickly rebury them with full honors and nominate their heirs. And as for those who have been proscribed from politics, they should be at one stroke pardoned" 昔周公葬不如禮，天乃動威。今武、蕃忠貞，未被明宥，妖眚之來，皆為此也。宜急為改葬，徙還家屬。其從坐禁錮，一切蠲除。

<sup>80</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 65.2140.

<sup>81</sup> *Shiji* 38.1631.



*Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master of Huainan), Duke Jing explains that he would rather sacrifice his own life than his kingdom: “If I wanted to kill my people in order to survive, who would consider me a true lord? My life (*ming*) has certainly reached its end. Ziwei, speak no more” 而欲殺其民以自活也，其誰以我為君者乎？是寡人之命固已盡矣，子（韋）无復言矣。<sup>82</sup> Immediately after hearing this moving speech, Ziwei turns to the north, and tells the Duke that he has effectively earned a pardon:

敢賀君！天之處高而聽卑。君有君人之言三，天必（有）三賞君。今夕星必徙三舍，君延年二十一歲。

I dare to congratulate you. Even though Heaven is high above it hears what lies down below. You have spoken as a true lord on three occasions, so Heaven will certainly reward you three times. This evening the Dazzling Deluder will surely travel through three lunar lodges, and you will extend your life by twenty-one years.<sup>83</sup>

In this version of the narrative, the Dazzling Deluder moves three full lodges, rather than a mere three degrees, and the life of the ruler himself is saved by his refusal to sacrifice his subjects. While the passage does not spell out the relationship between the ruler and the celestial sign, Heaven clearly responds to his words and intentions.

Duke Jing’s response to the baleful sign was frequently cited in Eastern Han memorials, especially those related to planetary omens to argue for the contingency of inauspicious signs. In a memorial in response to a series of planetary omens, Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132–192 CE) pointed to the ruler’s potential to overcome them as Duke Jing of Song once had:

臣聞熒惑示變，人主當精明其德。則有休慶之色……以杜漸防萌，則其救也。昔宋景公小國諸侯，三有德言，而熒惑為之退舍。

I have heard that when the Dazzling Deluder manifests aberrations, if the ruler of men purifies and illuminates his suasive power, then fine and auspicious colors will prevail...If you stop up the gradual and guard against the sprouts, then we will be saved. Long ago Duke Jing of Song, local lord of a small domain, three times spoke words of suasive power, and so, the Dazzling Deluder moved retrograde three lodges.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Slightly modified from Major et al. 12.28.461; D.C. Lau, *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引 (A Concordance to the Master of Huainan), Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies of Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992): 12.28. This text is cited by chapter and entry number.

<sup>83</sup> Slightly modified from Major et al. 12.28.461; *Huainanzi* 12.28.

<sup>84</sup> *Cai Zhonglang ji* 蔡中郎集 (Collected Works of Cai Yong): 2.9b–10a in *Siku quanshu*. This memorial should be treated with some caution as Zhang Xincheng 張心澂 expresses doubt regarding the authenticity of parts of Cai Yong’s collected works. See *Weishu tongkao* 偽書通考 (Complete Investigation into Forged Books; Shanghai: Shangwu, 1939): 956.

Cai Yong's memorial also claims that planetary omens originate in the excessive power of ministers, and through his use of the exemplar of Duke Jing focuses attention on the potential for corrective action rather than on the origins of the sign. Zhou Ju, in his memorial on the encounter between Mars and the Moon, likewise points to the possibility of overcoming the problems that produced the sign. The sign itself is a message from Heaven meant to aid the ruler:

楚莊曰：『災異不見，寡人其亡。』今變異屢臻，此天以佑助漢室，覺悟國家也。……宋景公有善言，熒惑徙舍，延年益壽。……務知戒慎，以退未萌。

King Zhuang of Chu (r. 613–591 BCE) once said, “Disasters and anomalies no longer appear—I am finished!” Now, aberrations and anomalies arrive with great frequency. These are Heaven's aid to the House of Han, sent to awaken the ruling house... Duke Jing of Song said his fine words, and the Dazzling Deluder moved to another lodge, so that his years were extended and his life was lengthened... Take wisdom as your task, be cautious and circumspect, and so reverse [ill-fortune] before the sprouts have grown.<sup>85</sup>

As does Cai Yong, Zhou Ju employs the exemplar of Duke Jing in arguing for the corrective potential of the sign. By raising the case of Duke Jing in conjunction with King Zhuang of Chu's famous declaration that when signs ceased to appear all hope for the sitting ruler was lost, moreover, Zhou Ju highlights the salutary effect of baleful signs. Baleful signs have a doubled valence. They announce both that the ruler is in a dangerous position and that he has the capacity to extricate himself from it.

While memorials prompted by the appearance of baleful signs are often used to launch an attack on a faction or a particular person, the story surrounding Duke Jing could also be used to defend officials who were blamed for the appearance of such signs. Following a 122 CE earthquake, Emperor An demoted the Imperial Counsellor Chen Bao, one of the Three Excellencies (*san gong* 三公), blaming him for the occurrence of the disaster. Chen Zhong, concerned with the increasing power of the Imperial Secretariat (*shang shu* 尚書) as opposed to the Three Excellencies, cited Duke Jing's refusal to sacrifice his own Prime Minister in defending Chen Bao:

近以地震策免司空陳褒，今者災異，復欲切讓三公。昔孝成皇帝以妖星守心，移咎丞相，使賁麗納說方進，方進自引，卒不蒙上天之福，徒乖宋景之誠。故知是非之分，較然有歸矣。又尚書決事，多違故典，罪法無例...

Recently on account of an earthquake the Imperial Counsellor Chen Bao was dismissed from his post. Now, on account of disasters and anomalies, you are also about to dismiss in one fell swoop the Three Excellencies. Long ago, the Filial Emperor Cheng, facing the appearance of a monstrous star guarding Heart, transferred the blame to his Chancellor, having Fei Li (fl. 7 BCE) place the blame on Zhai Fangjin (d. 7 BCE), who then

<sup>85</sup> *Fengsu tongyi* 5.255.

committed suicide. In the end, Emperor Cheng did not receive the blessings of High Heaven, for he had simply turned his back on the integrity of Duke Jing. Thus, knowledge of the right and wrong decision lies along a clear path. Moreover, the Secretariat has in many cases violated hallowed precedents in handling affairs, failing to distinguish between culpability and lawfulness...<sup>86</sup>

While Chen Zhong used the occasion not only to defend Chen Bao but also to attack the Secretariat, his memorial presents a political twist on the presumably magical rites of exorcism Ziwei once proposed. When Ziwei asked Duke Jing to transfer the misfortune of the sign to his prime minister, his people, or the harvest, he did not suggest that the Duke blame them for having caused the sign to come into being, but rather that its baleful influence be re-directed toward them rather than toward the Duke himself.<sup>87</sup> Here, however, the danger associated with the sign comes directly from being blamed for having brought it into being through one's actions. Chen Zhong refers back to the historical example of Emperor Cheng in the late Western Han. In attempting to expiate the baleful sign by transferring the blame for the Dazzling Deluder<sup>88</sup> guarding Heart to Zhai Fangjin, Emperor Cheng himself incurred the blame, and died without an heir soon afterwards.

Where the theoretical models drawn from the “Great Plan” and the “Appended Statements” provided memorialists with Classical sources of authority that lent rhetorical power to their arguments regarding the origins of baleful signs, precedents authorized memorialists to make claims regarding the best methods by which to address those signs. There was, after all, something paradoxically auspicious in each baleful omen, for disasters and anomalies represented Heaven's aid to the ruler, so that he might rectify his own ritual comportment, his court, or the administration of his empire. The narrative surrounding Duke Jing of Song's response to the appearance of the Dazzling Deluder in the Heart constellation speaks, in particular, to the notion that the baleful influence of a given sign was not fixed, but transferable and subject to change. The narrative suggests that there were ritual methods of removing the planet's baleful influence and shifting it onto persons or things in the realm other than the ruler himself. Yet, the narrative we have is written against such rituals, for in the end, the auspicious response comes not from employing such methods, but in the ruler taking personal responsibility for the sign in his refusal to redirect its influence. The precedent of King Wuding's response to the appearance of the pheasant on the cauldron lent powerful support to arguments in favor of ritual reform. King Cheng's ultimate recognition of the Duke of Zhou bolstered arguments that high officials who had fallen from favor be honored once again, whether this meant a proper burial or a return to high office. Duke Jing of Song's response to the Dazzling Deluder served as a solemn reminder that the best of rulers did not shift blame onto their subordinates, but placed

<sup>86</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 46.1565.

<sup>87</sup> While we might imagine that the people or the prime minister could be blamed as agents that had produced the sign, this is not true of the harvest. The narrative suggests that the sign itself is harmful, and Ziwei suggests that only the direction or object of that harm can be controlled. The conclusion to the story, in which the Dazzling Deluder is moved to another celestial field, likewise suggests that its baleful influence will ultimately affect another state.

<sup>88</sup> Li Xian's commentary specifies that the monstrous star referred to here was indeed the Dazzling Deluder (*Hou Hanshu* 46.1566, n. 7).

the welfare of the realm ahead even of their own lives.

### From Distant Reading to Close Reading

Our synoptic look at how celestial signs work in a large number of memorials over some 250 years has allowed us to discover a number of rhetoric methods and tropes. As we have found, explanations of the etiology of baleful signs, coupled with assurances that both the signs themselves and the dangers they presaged could be changed, created a powerful sense of authority. Moreover, we have seen that both etiology and contingency were supported by references to texts, especially the Classics. Those cited most frequently included the “Appended Statements,” the “Great Plan,” and the narratives surrounding the exemplary figures King Wuding of Shang, King Cheng of Zhou, and Duke Jing of Song, each of whom was able to transform calamity into good fortune by responding properly to the appearance of baleful signs.

We now shift from a synoptic to telescopic perspective, examining the details of particular memorials in particular contexts in search of subtle features of rhetoric that escape notice from a bird’s eye view. David Schaberg’s *A Patterned Past* and Li Wai-yee’s *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* have previously engaged with the precise questions of the rhetorical use of celestial signs in speeches in the *Zuozhuan*. Their conclusions to a great extent may be extended to Han memorials. While the heavens are “not moral but regular,”<sup>89</sup> their regularity is the source for human morality, a model the ruler must emulate. Discussions of baleful signs center on the human world. Schaberg writes:

The world’s intelligibility, its whole availability as a source of infallible signs for the rhetorical treatment of human action, is informed by the assumption that it works for virtue and that it is readable on the basis of training in traditional knowledge... Although these realms of knowledge are made in some cases to provide a quasi-scientific, extra-human basis for what is right in the human world, they regularly return to the practical considerations of human behavior in society.<sup>90</sup>

The assumed regularity of the heavens allows for the rhetorical claim that signs are infallible, even if speech makers do not always agree on what they mean. Schaberg notes that not only signs themselves but the world as a whole is intelligible, for conditions within the human realm are always read in conjunction with the signs. Thus the reading of signs never becomes a fully-systematized, mechanical activity. “[T]he various representations of a single theory (astronomy, for instance) in separate speeches do not necessarily add up to a coherent body of knowledge. System is held in abeyance for the sake of local rhetorical force.”<sup>91</sup>

Li Wai-yee likewise points to the critical importance of reading the human realm in conjunction with baleful signs that issue from non-human sources. “Anomalies become the occasion for remonstrances,” she writes, “when they are regarded as the manifestations of

---

<sup>89</sup> David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001): 96

<sup>90</sup> Schaberg 123–24.

<sup>91</sup> Schaberg 97.

disorders in the human realm.”<sup>92</sup> An anomaly is not a meaningful sign, in other words, unless it can be tied to human failure. There is no straight forward systematic way of tying a particular type of sign to a particular event, but one must always read it against the historical context of its production:

Anomalous signs in nature do not necessarily yield stable rules of reading. The system of nature...depends on variables....In a sense, this increases the authority of the system, because the possible relationship between natural phenomena and human destiny may be combined with causality based on human agency.<sup>93</sup>

It is in the reading of those variables, as much as the signs themselves, through which speech-makers in the *Zuozhuan* and memorialists in the Western and Eastern Han made their most powerful arguments.

Western and Eastern Han memorials do not, however, generally display the degree of prescience sometimes found in *Zuozhuan* speeches. Both Schaberg and Li assiduously read the speeches in the *Zuozhuan* as compositions that took their final forms centuries after the speakers had died. The historiographers knew what events from previous times had come to pass, and so, the speakers in the text often attain an uncanny prescience. The juxtaposition of signs and the events they presaged lent narrative coherence to the bare chronological structure of the text. As Li puts it, “The sign and its fulfillment or betrayal, interpretation, and manipulation structure events, define narrative units, and assert or question the readability of the past, thereby defining causality, human agency, and possible ‘reason in history.’”<sup>94</sup> The most prescient words the speakers uttered did not belong to themselves, but to those later anonymous writers who composed the speeches they should have made. Han memorials, in contrast, read signs less with respect to events that are certain to come to pass, than with respect to the historical milieu that prevailed at the time of their composition: the personal and ritual comportment of the emperor and his closest companions, the effectiveness of the administration, and the economic and military conditions of the empire.

We turn to three groups of memorials in three particular historical milieux: 1) early in the reign of Emperor Wu; 2) after the appearance of Halley’s Comet late in the reign of Emperor Cheng; 3) following an earthquake that occurred around the time Emperor Shun reached adulthood. This closer focus will allow us to broaden the questions of our discussion. Why do we find fewer memorials on disasters and anomalies prior to the late Western Han? How did the rhetoric of etiology continue to function as theories of dynastic cycles developed? In what manner were celestial signs positioned within the broader discourse of omenology, and to what extent could signs that were not *in the heavens* still be signs of *Heaven’s will*?

---

<sup>92</sup> Li Wai-yee, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University East Asian Center, 2007): 195.

<sup>93</sup> Li Wai-yee 200.

<sup>94</sup> Li Wai-yee 86.

## Part II: Three Moments in the Rhetoric of Celestial Signs

Tracing the circulation of celestial signs through a given culture demands multiple methodologies, both a distant reading of large sets of materials and close readings of individual texts. We have established that memorialists from the late Western Han through the late Eastern Han employed the tropes of etiology and contingency to identify how inauspicious signs came into being and what should be done about them, marshaled the “Appended Statements” and the “Great Plan” to lend Classical authority to their cosmological arguments, and called on hallowed precedents in which sage rulers exhibited exemplary responses to baleful signs. Shifting from distant reading to close reading allows us to bring greater nuance to these general conclusions by considering how the rhetoric of memorials operated in particular historical circumstances. We begin with two memorials that fell outside the bounds of our more general investigation owing to their concern with a lack of auspicious signs rather than the presence of inauspicious signs. A close analysis of Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong’s memorials *circa* 134 BCE suggests that the relative dearth of memorials on disasters and anomalies in the mid-Western Han may be explained not only by the relative frequency of (putatively) auspicious omens during Emperor Wu’s reign, as Martin Kern has suggested,<sup>95</sup> but also because memorials critical of imperial policies or ritual protocols addressed a lack of good omens rather than the presence of bad ones. Turning to memorials penned by Liu Xiang and Gu Yong late in the reign of Emperor Cheng, we consider how the tropes of etiology and contingency operated in a discursive climate that had come to favor relatively deterministic models of dynastic succession. While the emperor could not necessarily be identified as the sole agent responsible for the appearance of baleful signs in such models, both Liu Xiang and Gu Yong continued to address the emperor as a participant in the dynamic activities of the cosmos who was capable, at least to an extent, of forestalling or preventing a change of dynasties. Finally, we consider the workings of the tropes of etiology and contingency, cosmological theory, and precedents in the rhetoric surrounding the earthquake of 133 CE. The memorials of Zhang Heng, Ma Rong, and Li Gu following the event demonstrate the porous and capacious nature of the category of celestial signs. Having outlined the general exegetical strategies that were available to the memorialists who interpreted celestial signs, we may now address how particular historical conditions drove the arguments of memorialists, and the hermeneutic processes by which memorialists read those historical conditions in conjunction with the celestial signs themselves.

### Arguments from Absence

Memorials on celestial signs in the late Western and Eastern Han dynasties predominantly concern inauspicious signs, disasters and anomalies (*zai yi* 災異), rather than auspicious emblems (*rui* 瑞) pointing to the legitimacy of the emperor.<sup>96</sup> From the reign of Emperor Yuan

<sup>95</sup> While numerous omens occurred during Emperor Wu’s reign that would be interpreted as inauspicious signs in the late Western Han, during his reign omens were generally interpreted as auspicious. This was especially so from the period between 113–103 BCE. See Martin Kern, “Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141–87 B.C.),” *Chugoku shigaku* 中国史学 (Chinese History) (Dec., 2000): 1–31.

<sup>96</sup> As Bielenstein argued, reports of a given type of phenomena are not necessarily directly correlated to the number

through the late Eastern Han such memorials are common, but before that period they are relatively rare. While the absolute number of such memorials is no doubt to some extent an artifact of the total number of texts that have been preserved, it also reflects a shift in the rhetoric around celestial signs. The memorials of Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong pertaining to celestial signs early in the reign of Emperor Wu evince a rhetorical approach to celestial signs distinct from that seen in late Western Han and Eastern Han memorials. Both writers used celestial signs to make arguments regarding administrative and ritual policy at court. However, unlike their late Western Han and Eastern Han counterparts, their arguments hinged on a lack of emblems of legitimacy rather than the appearance of baleful celestial signs. Nonetheless, Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong, like later writers, employed tropes of etiology and contingency to assert that undertaking the actions they suggested would produce the desired results.

Both Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong address the absence of auspicious signs in part because the edicts that invited their composition asked questions about the absence of such signs.<sup>97</sup> Early in his reign, most likely in 134 BCE following the death of the Dowager Dou 竇 (d. 135 BCE), Emperor Wu formally posed a series of questions concerning proper governance to perhaps one hundred officers who had been nominated as “worthy and good” (*xianliang* 賢良).<sup>98</sup> This edict evinced concern with the origins of omens bad and good, yet it focused on the question of how to summon auspicious signs and auspicious realities. Emperor Wu asks:

三代受命，其符安在？災異之變，何緣而起？……何脩何飭而膏露降，百穀登，德潤四海，澤臻中木，三光全，寒暑平，受天之祐，享鬼神之靈，德澤洋溢，施虐方外，延及羣生？

As for charges received in the Three Dynasties, where are their tallies?  
As for the aberrations of disasters and anomalies, by what path do they arise?  
What must I cultivate and what must I adorn for nurturing dew to descend,  
for the hundred grains to come to fruition,  
for favor to blanket the Four Seas,  
for grace to descend upon the grasses and trees,  
for the Three Luminaries to remain whole,  
for cold and hot weather to be in balance,  
to receive the blessings of Heaven,  
to have our offerings received by the holiness of the ghosts and spirits,

---

of actual appearances. Bielenstein notes, for example, that while reports of solar eclipses were few in number during the reign of Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 73–49 BCE), actual occurrences of solar eclipses were relatively frequent compared to other reigns. See Hans Bielenstein, “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien Han Shu,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 142. We should not take the frequency of reports as evidence of the frequency of appearances of a given type of phenomenon.

<sup>97</sup> It is doubtful that Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong were unusual in their concern with the absence of auspicious signs; had we access to the non-extant responses to the edicts, we would likely find that many of them reflected similar concerns. While we cannot, of course, ever be sure about the precise content of texts that we do not have, Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong’s memorials perhaps to some extent represent broader tendencies in the rhetorical practices of their time.

<sup>98</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2495.

so that favor brims forth, extending beyond the realm, reaching all living things?<sup>99</sup>

The edict specifically seeks out the etiology of disasters and anomalies, but when it turns to the question of the agency of the ruler and his court, it asks what must be done to summon auspicious signs of the Emperor's legitimacy. The auspicious signs Emperor Wu lists seem a motley group. Good signs are defined by the absence of bad signs; if the Three Luminaries remain whole, then no eclipses occur, and if cold and heat are balanced, then there are no summer frosts. The positive signs of the ruler's legitimacy follow the receipt of sacrifices by the proper ghosts and spirits, seasonable weather, and agricultural productivity.

The edict that prompted Gongsun Hong's memorial, dating perhaps to the fifth year of Emperor Wu's adult rule (130 BCE),<sup>100</sup> addresses experts knowledgeable in "the ties that bind together celestial patterns, earthly contours, and human affairs" 天文地理人事之紀,<sup>101</sup> and likewise asks questions concerning the etiology of both auspicious and inauspicious signs. The edict recalls a period in high antiquity (*shanggu* 上古) when, despite the reign of a rustic and unceremonious mode of governance, ubiquitous auspicious signs signaled the perfected state of the world and its ruler:

陰陽和，五穀登，六畜蕃，甘露降，風雨時，嘉禾興，朱中生，山不童，澤不涸；  
麟鳳在郊藪，龜龍游於沼，河洛出圖書...

*Yin and yang* were in harmony,  
the Five Grains grew tall,  
the Six Domesticated Animals multiplied,  
sweet dew fell,  
winds and rains were seasonable,  
fine stalks flourished,  
vermillion grasses grew,  
the mountains did not grow barren,  
the marshes did not dry up,  
the unicorn and the phoenix were in the suburban moors,  
the turtle and the dragon swam in the pools,  
and the Yellow River and the Luo River produced the Chart and the Writings...<sup>102</sup>

Emperor Wu, naturally enough, asks how he might bring such things about in his own time: "I consider these to be fine things indeed. Now, by what path might I bring them here" 朕甚嘉之，今何道而臻乎此?<sup>103</sup> Emperor Wu takes his own potential agency in bringing such signs into being as a given. He asks about the etiology of baleful signs such as floods and droughts that

<sup>99</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2496–97.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Loewe notes that this memorial has also been dated to 140 BCE and 134 BCE (*Biographical Dictionary*, 126).

<sup>101</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2614.

<sup>102</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2613–14.

<sup>103</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2614.



occurred under good rulers: “Where are the beginnings of the Ways of Heaven and the Human Realm? How is it that the verifications of good and ill-fortune have their appointed times? From what did the inauspicious signs of the floods in the time Yu and the drought in the time of Tang issue” 天人之道，何所本始？吉凶之效，安所期焉？禹湯水旱，厥咎何由？<sup>104</sup> The edict does not ignore baleful celestial signs, but asks how such signs could have come into being under ideal rulers whose reigns ought to have been visited by auspicious signs alone. The final question it asks encompasses all of the questions that precede it: “How is it that the Tally of Heaven’s Charge is wasted or made to flourish” 天命之符，廢興何如？<sup>105</sup>

Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong’s responses to these edicts address the etiological concerns they present. The edicts do not argue for contingency, but seem to assume it. They present no doubt that the agency of the emperor plays a role in the production of signs, but seek to further understand the nature of that process.

### Dong Zhongshu

Dong Zhongshu’s *Hanshu* biography is largely comprised of his responses to three imperial edicts dating to circa 134 BCE. In his three responses, Dong points to the *Annals*, the *Odes*, and the *Documents* as ethical guides for the ruler. He argues that the imperial use of punishment and favor must follow the course of the seasonal cycle of *yin* and *yang* and encourages a reduction in the use of punishment. Finally, he argues for increased use of favor and moral suasion, citing the need for the establishment of educational institutions and the institution of regulations to prevent officials from engaging in production and trade.<sup>106</sup> Dong Zhongshu points specifically to signs that accompanied the appearance of great rulers in the past; he judges the lack of the appearance of such signs in the Han as evidence that changes to administrative and ritual policy must be made.

Recalling the white fish that leaped into King Wu’s boat prior to his conquest of Shang, according to traditions surrounding a lost version of the “Taishi” 泰誓 (Great Oath) chapter of the *Documents*,<sup>107</sup> Dong Zhongshu argues that certain types of signs must appear to show the

<sup>104</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2614.

<sup>105</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2614.

<sup>106</sup> Detailed summaries and analysis of the three edicts and Dong Zhongshu’s responses to them are presented in Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 86–100.

<sup>107</sup> No fewer than three versions of the “Great Oath” chapter of the *Documents* existed at different points, including a lost pre-Qin version, a lost Han version, submitted to the Han court by an unnamed woman from Henan, and the archaic script version forged in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. See notes to Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996): 130, <http://yalepress.yale.edu/yupbooks/pdf/nylan3notes.pdf>, accessed August 3, 2012 and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞, *Shangshu xue shi* 尚書學史 (A History of the Study of the Book of Documents; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989): 33. Yan Shigu notes that the quotation is from the modern script “Taishi” chapter, but it is not included in the received text, the archaic script forgery. For pre-imperial citations of the “Great Oath” not appearing in the received text see Matsumoto Masaaki 松本雅明 (1912–1993), *Shunjū sengoku ni okeru Shōsho no tenkai: rekishi ishiki no hatten o chūshin ni* 春秋戰國における尚書の展開：歴史意識の發展を中心に (The Development of the Book of Documents in the Chunqiu and Warring Domains Periods: With Central Emphasis on the Development of a Consciousness of History; Tōkyō: Kazama Shobō, Shōwa 41 [1966]): 59–62. For the Chinese text and English translation of Jiang Sheng’s 江聲 (1721–1799) reconstructed version of a modern script

legitimacy of the ruler:

臣聞天之所大奉使之王者，必有非人力所能致而自至者，此受命之符也。天下之人同心歸之，若歸父母，故天瑞應誠而至。《書》曰「白魚入於王舟，有火復於王屋，流為烏」，此蓋受命之符也。周公曰「復哉復哉」，孔子曰「德不孤，必有鄰」，皆積善累德之效也。

I have heard that when Heaven's great emissaries come to kings, they must possess those things that cannot come about by human power alone, yet come about all on their own, and these are the Tallies of Receiving the Charge. The people of the realm of a single mind will take refuge in him, as if they were taking refuge in their own fathers and mothers, and thus, Heaven's Auspicious Emblem responds to his integrity and arrives. In the *Documents* it says: "The white fish entered the king's vessel, and there was a fire upon the king's roof that transformed into a bird." These must have been the Tallies of Receiving the Charge.<sup>108</sup> The Duke of Zhou said, "It has come! It has come!" and Kongzi (trad. 551–479 BCE) said that "Suasive power never dwells alone, but always has neighbors."<sup>109</sup> These are events that verify the piling up of goodness and the accumulation of suasive power.<sup>110</sup>

In treating these past signs as "events that verify the piling up of goodness," Dong Zhongshu points to the role of the ruler in their production. Heaven produces signs that no human power could produce, yet issues those signs in response to the actions of the sovereign. King Wu receives the Charge, the command to overthrow the Shang, because his own ancestral line has accumulated merit. But that Charge is only revealed as such because it is accompanied by Heaven's Auspicious Emblem (*tianrui* 天瑞). An expert in the *Annals*, Dong Zhongshu employs historical events to argue for a benevolent Heaven that sends forth inauspicious signs as warnings to prompt corrective action. Should the ruler fail to undertake the necessary reforms, additional signs occur, and only if the ruler ignores all warnings, does he ultimately come to a bad end:

國家將有失道之敗，而天乃先出災害以譴告之，不知自省，又出怪異以警懼之，尚不知變，而傷敗乃至。

When a domain and its ruling clan are on the verge of collapse because they have lost the

---

version of the chapter from *Shangshu jizhu yinshu* 尚書集註音疏 (Collected Commentaries, Phonetic Glosses, and Sub-commentaries to the Venerable Documents), see James Legge trans., *The Shoo King*, In *The Chinese Classics with a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes*, vol. 3 in 2 parts (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1972): 298–99.

<sup>108</sup> In *Shiji* 4.120, by contrast, King Wu interprets the events as signs that it is not yet time to Shang. See Chapter 3, pp. 93–94.

<sup>109</sup> *Lunyu jishi* 4.25.279. Arthur Waley translates the cited passage: "Moral force (*te*) never dwells in solitude. It always brings neighbors." See his *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Random House, 1989 [1938]): 106.

<sup>110</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2500.

Way, then Heaven first sends forth disasters and calamities to warn them. If they do not know to reflect on themselves, then it again sends forth strange omens and anomalies to startle and terrify them. If they still do not know to transform themselves,<sup>111</sup> only then does great harm and collapse befall them.<sup>112</sup>

The Way, which for Dong Zhongshu refers to the proper method of governance, is ever present and always available to those rulers who would follow it. The decline of a given ruling house is not the result of a capricious Heaven, rather it signals the failure of men to enact the proper method of governance: “When the Way of Zhou fell into decline under King You (r. 781–771 BCE) and King Li (877–841 BCE), it was not that the Way was lost, but that King You and King Li failed to follow it” 夫周道衰於幽厲，非道亡也，幽厲不繇也。<sup>113</sup> The Way is not something that comes into being and fades away for no reason. Like a footpath through the undergrowth, it persists so long as it is traveled.

Dong Zhongshu employs familiar etiologies of the production of inauspicious signs couched in chains of amplification, yet human agency remains at their source:

及至後世，淫佚衰微，不能統理群生，諸侯背畔，殘賤良民以爭壤土，廢德教而任刑罰。刑罰不中，則生邪氣；邪氣積於下，怨惡畜於上。上下不和，則陰陽繆戾而妖孽生矣。此災異所緣起也。

In later ages, given to licentiousness and frivolity and in a state of decline, it became impossible to unify and set to order the various living things, and the local lords betrayed one another. They were cruel and base toward the good people in their struggle for territory, abandoned favor and moral suasion, and relied upon punishments and penalties. When punishments and penalties failed to hit the mark, malevolent *qi* was produced, and with the accumulation of malevolent *qi* below, resentment and enmity festered above. And when above and below were not in harmony, then *yin* and *yang* were disturbed and disordered, and inauspicious creatures were born. This is how disasters and anomalies come into being.<sup>114</sup>

In the most direct sense, inauspicious signs are products of disruptions in the harmonious balance of *qi* dynamics that connect the human realm with the cosmos, disruptions that issue from human failures. In Zhou times, the failure of King Li and King You to follow the way led to strife between the local lords and enmity throughout the human realm. The fall of the dynasties upon the earth and the appearance of baleful signs in the heavens are ultimately contingent upon the agency of the ruler.

Dong Zhongshu’s memorial was, however, not written in response to the appearance of any specific sign in his own time, but rather in response to both a lack of signs and a lack of institutions Dong wished to see put into place. Emperor Wu’s edict seeks a generalized

<sup>111</sup> This phrase might also be understood “If they still do not recognize the aberrations...”

<sup>112</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2498.

<sup>113</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2499.

<sup>114</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2500.

explanation of the signs, both auspicious and inauspicious, in the past. In a manner that mirrors his presentation of the production of inauspicious signs, Dong Zhongshu employs chains of amplification to describe how general prosperity, good governance, and auspicious signs might be brought into being. The ruler's proper alignment of his own heart is at the core of the etiology of both the production of auspicious emblems and the institution of the Kingly Way:

故為人君者，正心以正朝廷，正朝廷以正百官，正百官以正萬民，正萬民以正四方。四方正，遠近莫敢不壹於正，而亡有邪氣奸其間者。是以陰陽調而風雨時，羣生和而萬民殖，五穀孰而中木茂，天地之間被潤澤而大豐美，四海之內聞盛德而皆徠臣，諸福之物，可致之祥，莫不畢至，而王道終矣。

Thus, he who acts as lord of men aligns his own heart to align his court, aligns his court to align his multitudes of officers, aligns his multitude of officers to align his myriad subjects, and aligns his myriad subjects to rectify the Four Directions. When the Four Directions are aligned, none far or near will dare not to be united in that alignment, so that there will be no malevolent *qi* that creeps in among them.

This is the means by which *yin* and *yang* will be properly tuned,  
the winds and rains made seasonable,  
the many living things brought into harmony,  
the Myriad Subjects allowed to lay down roots,  
the Five Grains ripened and the grasses and trees made to flourish.

All between Heaven and Earth shall be nourished and made most bountiful. All within the Four Seas, having heard of your great suasive power, will gravitate towards you and give fealty. None among the many things that mark prosperity, or auspicious omens that might be brought about, shall fail to come into being, and the Kingly Way will be enacted at last!<sup>115</sup>

Dong Zhongshu presupposes the contingency of all manner of signs and offers a detailed proposal to summon auspicious signs. The institution of the Kingly Way is in this sense not a point one arrives at, but a pathway that one follows.

Dong Zhongshu's response to Emperor Wu's edict mirrors the concerns and assumptions of the edict itself, and more generally speaking, broader attitudes toward signs early in Emperor Wu's reign. Dong Zhongshu's noted political opponent and rival *Annals* expert Gongsun Hong<sup>116</sup> likewise responds to the absence of auspicious signs with arguments that locate human agency at the beginning of the etiological chains through which such signs are produced.

<sup>115</sup> *Hanshu* 56.2502–03.

<sup>116</sup> According to Dong Zhongshu's biography, Gongsun Hong was jealous of his superior understanding of the *Annals*, and it was due to Gongsun Hong's suggestion that Dong was exiled to serve under the notoriously violent King of Jiaoxi 膠西 (*Hanshu* 56.2525). For analysis of a letter Dong Zhongshu may have sent to Gongsun Hong, if it is indeed authentic, see Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 110–11.

### Gongsun Hong

Gongsun Hong's memorial shows that he shared Dong's views of the cosmological role of governance and advocated limiting the role of punishment and increasing the role of moral suasion. It is otherwise largely devoid of concrete suggestions for changes in imperial policy; the vague nature of the memorial might have contributed both to the decision of the Superintendent of Ceremonial to dismiss it as belonging to the lower rank of the hundred-odd responses Emperor Wu received, and to Emperor Wu's decision to select it as the best among them.<sup>117</sup> The memorial earned a private audience with the Emperor, during which he may have made the direct policy proposals that are lacking in the memorial itself.<sup>118</sup> Like Dong Zhongshu, Gongsun Hong responds to an edict that assumes a gradual decline from the perfected state of high antiquity in which the signs of prosperity and plenty had been a ubiquitous presence. And like Dong Zhongshu, Gongsun Hong constructs an etiological chain, centered on the state of the heart of the ruler, through which auspicious signs might once again be summoned. Gongsun Hong argues that if good government is put into practice, the effect will be evident not only in the conditions of the Emperor's subjects, but in auspicious manifestations in the cosmos:

臣聞之，氣同則從，聲比則應。今人主和德於上，百姓和合於下，故心和則氣和，氣和則形和，形和則聲和，聲和則天地之和應矣。故陰陽和，風雨時，甘露降，五穀登，六畜蕃，嘉禾興，朱草生，山不童，澤不涸，此和之至也。

I have heard that when *qi* is unified then it follows [the course], and when tones are set in proper intervals then they resonate. Now, if the ruler of men harmonizes his suasive power to that above, and the Hundred Families harmonize in accord below, then their hearts will be harmonized and *qi* will be harmonized. If the *qi* is harmonized, then its form will be harmonized, and if its form is harmonized, then tones will be harmonized, and if tones are harmonized, then Heaven and Earth will resonate in harmony.

Thus,

‘*Yin* and *yang* will be in harmony,  
winds and rains will be seasonable,  
sweet dew will descend,

<sup>117</sup> We are given no specific information regarding why the memorial received a low rank, or what precise features of the memorial impressed Emperor Wu, so any attempt to explain motivations is necessarily speculative. The matter is further complicated by the lack of certainty regarding the dating of the memorial. That latest date that has been suggested, 130 BCE, is the same year Gongsun Hong became Metropolitan Superintendent of the Left (Zuo Neishi 左內史). See Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 126. The position of the memorial at the opening of his biography, coupled with its dismissal by the Superintendent of Ceremonial, suggests that Gongsun Hong had yet to obtain high status at court at the time of its submission.

<sup>118</sup> Gongsun Hong's later career, first as Metropolitan Superintendent of the Left (130 BCE), subsequently as Imperial Counsellor (126 BCE), and finally as Chancellor (124 BCE until his death in 121 BCE), provide a sense of his ideals regarding how good governance is achieved in practice. Gongsun Hong argued unsuccessfully against maintaining military campaigns in the southwestern regions of Ba 巴 and Shu 蜀, requested that a fixed number of students attend instruction by the Academicians, proposed a ban on the possession of bows to curb banditry, and, shortly before his death, warned of the coming rebellion of Liu An. See Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 126–27.

the Five Grains will grow tall,  
 the Six Domesticated Animals will multiply,  
 the fine stalks will flourish,  
 the vermilion grass will grow,  
 mountains will not grow barren,  
 and marshes will not dry up.<sup>119</sup>  
 This is the advent of harmony.<sup>120</sup>

Gongsun Hong posits a direct relationship between the suasive power of the ruler, his ability to inspire a harmonious response from his subjects below, and the flourishing of the realm, that employs cosmological resonances articulated through the dynamics of *qi*. The production of auspicious signs, at least on a rhetorical level, issues from the agency of the ruler. The appearance of rare creatures such as the unicorn and phoenix, and the production of the River Chart and the Luo Writings are all traceable, along the paradigmatic axis of the formal structure of the memorial, to the ruler's suasive power. Whereas the hallmarks of cosmic regularity, such as a good harvest and the absence of natural disasters, may be explained as "the advent of harmony," the presence of positive auspicious emblems suggests that harmony has been fully realized:

故形和則無疾，無疾則不夭，故父不喪子，兄不哭弟。德配天地，明並日月，則麟鳳至，龜龍在郊，河出圖，洛出書，遠方之君莫不說義，奉幣而來朝，此和之極也。

Thus, when form is harmonized, then there are no illnesses, and when there are no illnesses, there are no early deaths. Fathers do not mourn for their sons, and elder brothers do not weep for their younger brothers. When [the ruler's] suasive power is matched to Heaven and Earth so that it is as bright as the sun and moon:

The unicorn and the phoenix arrive,  
 the tortoise and the dragon dwell in the suburbs,  
 the River Chart and Luo Writings emerge,<sup>121</sup>  
 and none among the lords of distant lands do not delight in duty and bear tribute  
 of cloth to the court.

This is the ultimate in harmony.<sup>122</sup>

For Gongsun Hong, there is a perfect symmetry between the appearance of auspicious and inauspicious signs and the presence of good or poor governance in the human realm. At the core of good governance are four basic virtues: humanity, duty, propriety, and knowledge. Together these constitute "the foundation of order and the application of the Way" 治之本，道之用也。<sup>123</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Here, Gongsun Hong echoes the language of the edict. See *Hanshu* 58.2614.

<sup>120</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2616.

<sup>121</sup> Gongsun Hong again repeats the language of the edict here.

<sup>122</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2616.

<sup>123</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2616.

As he concludes his memorial, Gongsun Hong explains away the baleful signs that appeared under the virtuous rulers Yu and Tang as residual effects of the actions of their predecessors:

臣聞堯遭鴻水，使禹治之，未聞禹之有水也。若湯之旱，則桀之餘烈也。桀紂行惡，受天之罰；禹湯積德，以王天下。因此觀之，天德無私親，順之和起，逆之害生。此天文地理人事之紀。

I have heard that Yao encountered a great flood and that he had Yu control it. I have never heard that there was a flood in the time of Yu. As for the drought in the time of Tang, it was but remaining embers left from the time of Jie. Jie and Zhou acted repugnantly, and so they received the Punishment of Heaven. Yu and Tang piled up suasive power, and so they became kings over the realm. Looking at it from this perspective, the power of Heaven knows no favorites. If you follow it, then harmony arises, but if you go against it, calamity will be born. These are the cords that bind together celestial patterns, earthly contours, and human affairs.<sup>124</sup>

Heaven is both a model to be followed and an agent, possessed of power of its own, that demands obedience. Rulers in the human realm who fail to follow it do so at their peril. Gongsun Hong acknowledges, in blaming the drought in the time of Tang on the tyrant Jie of Xia, that cruel and benighted governance produces baleful signs.<sup>125</sup> Yet, his memorial focuses primarily on the potential rewards that come when sage government is instituted. Great bounties await the king who can bring harmony to his own heart and to the hearts of his subjects. Should human affairs be put into perfect order, both the patterns of the heavens and the contours of the earth will respond in kind, producing agricultural plenty and bountiful auspicious signs. The dearth of such signs was the wellspring from which the memorials of both Gongsun Hong and Dong Zhongshu drew their power.

Both Gongsun Hong and Dong Zhongshu echoed the language and assumptions of Emperor Wu's edict. Their arguments from absence come in response to a series of questions about absences. The symmetry between Gongsun Hong's memorial and the edict itself is almost perfect; both the auspicious emblems and precedents he cites are the same auspicious emblems and precedents mentioned in the edict itself. Signs, too, appear in perfect symmetry with the character of the ruler. For Gongsun Hong, no baleful sign could appear under a good ruler; his paradigm does not account for omens such as the pheasant that appeared during the High Ancestor's Day of Sacrifice or the violent winds that blew in the time of King Cheng. The drought in the time of Tang remained from the reign of the wicked Jie, and the floods under Yu remained from Yao, though Gongsun Hong never addresses why the sage-king Yao should have encountered such a disaster. Gongsun Hong's rhetoric is almost completely determined by the rhetoric of the edict, encouraging in tone, assuring the emperor that the precise signs he desires will appear should he cultivate good governance. Dong Zhongshu goes further afield, using

<sup>124</sup> *Hanshu* 58.2617.

<sup>125</sup> More puzzling, however, is Gongsun Hong's tacit attribution of the floods in the time of Yu to the actions of Yao. Gongsun Hong does not really resolve the problem of baleful signs appearing under sage rulers, but simply pushes the appearance of the floods from one sage ruler to another.

Classical texts and precedents not mentioned in the edict itself, most notably, the narrative of the “Great Oath” in which King Wu receives auspicious emblems that are a testament to his own legitimacy. Dong Zhongshu’s rhetoric focuses to a great extent on narratives of decline that are absent in Gongsun Hong’s memorial. Both writers respond to an absence of signs and claim that if their own policy suggestions are implemented then auspicious signs of legitimacy will appear. Yet while Gongsun Hong’s language seems designed to please the emperor, Dong Zhongshu’s rhetoric works by provoking anxiety, reminding the emperor of the fallen, hallowed houses of the distant past.

### **Etiology and Contingency in the End Times**

Writing more than a century later, Liu Xiang and Gu Yong presented memorials concerned with the appearance of a baleful celestial sign in 12 BCE, Halley’s Comet. It was a time when the future of the empire was uncertain. Great expenditures had been made to build the Changling 昌陵 mausoleum, disturbing existing grave sites and angering local residents.<sup>126</sup> Relatives of the Dowager Wang had held the post of Marshall of State, one after another, since 32 BCE.<sup>127</sup> Worst of all, after some twenty years on the throne, Emperor Cheng had finally produced two children, only to have both infants die and their mothers be murdered or forced to commit suicide soon thereafter.<sup>128</sup> A string of baleful signs had occurred including an eclipse on the first day of the year and the appearance of a spectacular comet. Recently developed calendrical theories suggested that the time was ripe for dynastic change. It was against the backdrop of these events that Liu Xiang and Gu Yong would present the memorials to follow.<sup>129</sup>

Gu Yong’s memorial on the comet presents a complex perspective. He cites the contemporary context of its appearance, political problems at the court and economic problems in the empire, other recent signs, and theories of when and how auspicious signs might be made to appear which recall the arguments of Gongsun Hong and Dong Zhongshu. Most of all, Gu Yong points to the contingency of the sign. The dangers it portends need not come into being, just as newly sprouted weeds need not grow into maturity, should the gardener diligently dig

<sup>126</sup> Both Gu Yong and Liu Xiang objected to the construction of the Changling mausoleum. For a detailed account of the archaeology of Changling and the historical implications of the project and its abandonment, see Michael Loewe, “The Tombs Built for Han Chengdi and Migrations of the Population” in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen eds., *Chang’an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014): 201–17.

<sup>127</sup> These men included three brothers and one cousin of the Dowager: Wang Feng 王鳳 33–22; Wang Yin 王音 22–15; Wang Shang 王商 15–12; and Wang Gen 王根 12–8 BCE (Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 247).

<sup>128</sup> Palace Lady Xu (Xu Meiren 許美人) and Cao Weineng 曹偉能, the mothers of the two infants, were murdered or forced to commit suicide, apparently by Emperor Cheng’s own order at the behest of his Empress Zhao Feiyan’s 趙飛燕 (d. 1 BCE) younger sister Zhao Zhaoyi 趙昭儀 (d. after 1 BCE) in 12 BCE (*Hanshu* 27B.1416; 97B.3990; 99B.3993).

<sup>129</sup> Shao-yun Yang describes four distinct phases in the practice of reading omens over the course of Emperor Cheng’s reign: “Phase 1, 32–Late 24 BCE: Omens as Weapons in Factional Conflicts”; “Phase 2, Late 24–Early 15 BCE: Omen Reports Generally Not Read in Political Terms”; “Phase 3, Early 15–Early 12 BCE: Wangs Use Omens to Criticize Chengdi and Zhang Fang: Those Outside the Court Use Omens to Criticize Wangs”; “Phase 4, Early 12–7 BCE: Growing Interest in Omen-Based Eschatology” (“Politics of Omenology” 323–46). The memorials under discussion here belong to the final phase, in which concern with end times and dynastic destruction had become increasingly prevalent.



them up. Liu Xiang's reading of the appearance of the comet draws on his interpretation of signs in the past paired with the historical events they accompanied. Liu Xiang cites signs that occurred over a millennium earlier, such as the pheasant and the violent winds that visited King Wuding and King Cheng, to argue that the baleful signs at hand were also subject to resolution. While Gu Yong points directly towards the Emperor's closest companions as the etiological source of the appearance of the baleful signs of 12 BCE, Liu Xiang more obliquely criticizes the family of the Empress Dowager Wang.

### Gu Yong

Gu Yong's memorial presents an etiology of both auspicious and inauspicious signs comparable to the etiologies of Gongsun Hong and Dong Zhongshu. It directly compares the appearance of signs under Emperor Cheng with signs that occurred in the past, and argues for a limited contingency of baleful signs. Recent work by Liu Tseng-kuei 劉增貴 has shown that Gu Yong's technical work on calendrical calculations reveals his conception of history to be largely cyclical. Specifically, Gu Yong's Three Troubles (San nan 三難) theory suggests that a major crisis would occur in 2 CE, 106 years following the adoption of the Grand Inception Calendar (Taichu li 太初曆) in 104 BCE. Because Gu Yong's views on calendrical matters suggested that historical cycles were not necessarily subject to human control, his rhetorical emphasis on the agency of the ruler is all the more remarkable.<sup>130</sup> Gu Yong is quite clear that Heaven might select another house to rule in the Liu clan's stead, and urges Emperor Cheng to end his liaisons with low-ranking (or low born) people, to avoid raising taxes, and to reduce his excessive expenditures while there is yet still time. When troubling signs occur, it is crucial, Gu Yong argues, that they be addressed while they are yet in an incipient state, for there will come a point when nothing can be done.<sup>131</sup>

Following the opening section of his memorial, in which Gu Yong politely apologizes for the impropriety of remotely submitting his views while serving as Governor (Shou 守) of Beidi 北地 rather than delivering his memorial in person as an officer of the court, Gu outlines the conditions that define good governance and necessarily lead to the appearance of a corresponding set of auspicious signs:

<sup>130</sup> Liu Tseng-kuei, "Calendrical Computation Numbers and Han Dynasty Politics: A Study of Gu Yong's Three Trouble's Theory," Luke Habberstad trans., in Nylan and Vankeerberghen, 293–322. Michael Nylan's translation of the entire memorial under discussion here, produced with the assistance of Michael Loewe, is included on pp. 296–302.

<sup>131</sup> Shao-yun Yang points out, however, that to an extent Gu Yong treated Emperor Cheng as a victim of the times in which he lived. Nonetheless, if Emperor Cheng were to follow his advice, Gu Yong held that crisis could ultimately be averted. Yang explains: "[A]lthough Gu Yong's interpretations still reiterated the standard omenological formula, in which good rulers receive good omens and bad rulers receive bad omens, he further claimed that the current omens carried an eschatological significance transcending any individual's virtues or misdeeds. The number of omens that had occurred since Chengdi's accession was exceptionally large, Gu Yong asserted, not because Chengdi was an exceptionally bad ruler, but because he had the misfortune to rule in exceptionally perilous times. Gu Yong did argue, however, that the worst of the impending crises could be averted if Chengdi rid himself of the influence of unworthy companions and consorts, stopped his incognito excursions, rejected a recent proposal to raise taxes, reduced government expenditures, and stepped up relief efforts for refugees displaced by the floods" (338).

王者躬行道德，承順天地，博愛仁恕，恩及行葦，籍稅取民不過常法，宮室車服不踰制度，事節財足，黎庶和睦，則卦氣理效，五徵時序，百姓壽考，庶中蕃滋，符瑞並降，以昭保右。

If the king reverently puts into practice the suasive power of the way, receives and follows Heaven and Earth, is expansive in his affection, humaneness, and caring, so that his grace reaches even the reeds by the roadside,<sup>132</sup> and if he does not tax his subjects beyond the normal allowance or recruit more than the customary number of people for labor service, does not violate the sumptuary regulations in his palaces, chambers, carriages, and clothing, so that his affairs are regulated and his finances sufficient, and so that the average folk remain harmonious and yielding, then<sup>133</sup> the *qi* of the hexagrams will appear with regularity, the Five Proofs succeed each other in season, the Hundred Families will enjoy long life, the many grasses will prosper and multiply, tallies and auspicious emblems will descend together, so as to illuminate the protection and aid [he has received].<sup>134</sup>

Gu Yong's set of conditions includes both vague and concrete items. Most officers of the empire would probably agree that the ruler should "reverently put into practice the suasive power of the way" but it is not quite clear what doing so really means. Thus, Gu Yong points to more concrete actions to improve the state of the economy: lowering taxes, reducing court expenditures, providing relief to areas affected by flooding, suspending travel restrictions to allow for migration, and sending imperial envoys to inspect conditions in various regions of the empire. The signs he identifies as contingent upon these conditions are likewise defined largely in terms of economic prosperity. The Five Proofs, perhaps identifiable with the Many Proofs of the "Great Plan" which include rain, sunshine, warmth, cold, and wind, come in the proper seasons.<sup>135</sup> Grasses grow, the *qi* assigned to the hexagrams follows regular patterns. The people

<sup>132</sup> Gu Yong references Mao 246, "The Reeds by the Roadside" (Xing wei 行葦): "Fortunate are those reeds by the roadside, for the oxen and sheep tread not upon them" 敦彼行葦，牛羊勿踐履。The Mao preface treats the ode as evocative of a state in which the "loyalty and magnanimity" (*zhong hou* 忠厚) of the ruling clan is so great that "their humaneness extends even to the grasses and trees" (*ren ji cao mu* 仁及草木). See Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al., *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Correct Meanings of the Mao Odes), vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999): 17.2.1079–80.

<sup>133</sup> The particle *ze* 則 (then) introduces a result clause following a conditional. However, the original text does not distinguish between real and hypothetical conditionals. Nylan renders the series of clauses preceding *ze* as indicative statements describing the governance of a True King, rather than a series of hypothetical conditionals addressed directly at the current ruler (Liu Tseng-kuei 297–98). Regardless of whether we understand the statements as real or hypothetical conditionals, a comparison is made between Emperor Cheng's current actions and those of an ideal ruler.

<sup>134</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3467.

<sup>135</sup> The "Great Plan" points to the agricultural bounty these Five Proofs produce when they appear in balance and at the proper time, as well as the potential for harm when any one of them is either absent or appears in excess. "As for the Many Proofs, these are called rain, sunshine, warmth, cold, and wind. When all five appear, each according to the proper order, the many grasses grow luxuriant. If one among them is too often present, then it is

live long, because there is enough to eat. The austerity of the court is mirrored by the prosperity of the empire.

At the same time, of course, the reverse is true. Gu Yong's rhetoric situates debauchery at court as prior to chaos in the realm and the appearance of all manner of baleful signs. Gu Yong continues:

失道妄行，逆天暴物，窮奢極欲，湛湎荒淫，婦言是從，誅逐仁賢，離遯骨肉，羣小用事，峻刑重賦，百姓愁怨，則卦氣悖亂，咎徵著郵，上天震怒，災異婁降，日月薄食，五星失行，山崩川潰，水泉踊出，妖孽並見，彗星耀光，饑饉荐臻...

But if [the King] loses the way and goes about recklessly, going against Heaven and doing violence to creatures, becoming excessive in his expenditures and going to extremes in his desires, getting drunk and becoming debauched, doing whatever his women tell him to, punishing or banishing those who are humane and worthy, distancing himself from his own flesh and blood,<sup>136</sup> and allowing the throng of petty men to run his business, instituting severe punishments and heavy taxes, so that the Hundred Families are grieved and resentful, then the *qi* of the hexagrams will be in disorder, and proofs of blame will make clear his error. Above, Heaven will quake with anger, and disasters and anomalies will descend in droves; the sun and moon will eclipse one another; the Five Planets will lose their courses; mountains will crumble and rivers will break their banks; waters and springs will burst forth; monstrosities and banes will appear at once; comets will sparkle; starvation and famine will arrive...<sup>137</sup>

The behaviors Gu lists under the aegis of “going against Heaven and doing violence to creatures” again includes both indulgent conduct and wasteful consumption of scarce resources. Towards the end of the list, Gu also indicates the failure to employ good officials, orders to banish good men from court, and finally, resentment among the Hundred Families as conditions that precede the appearance of baleful signs. Gu treats Heaven as a personified force, describing its movements in emotional terms. Heaven does not impassively respond, but is stirred to rage. The signs that occur under a poor ruler are both general and specific, celestial and terrestrial. Even as eclipses occur, strange creatures appear. As the courses of the Five Planets are thrown into disarray, mountains crumble. Comets sparkle above while the subjects of the empire starve below. The list of baleful signs concludes: “The Hundred Families will be short-lived, and the myriad creatures will die young” 百姓短折，萬物夭傷。<sup>138</sup> These final signs are the most inauspicious of all, for they directly harm the human beings and other living things for whose

---

inauspicious. If one among them is too often absent, it is [also] inauspicious” 庶徵：曰雨、曰暘、曰燠、曰寒、曰風、曰時。五者來備，各以其敘，庶草蕃廡。一極備，凶；一極無，凶 (*Shangshu jiaoshi yilun*, vol. 3, 1186–87).

<sup>136</sup> I follow Nylan's interpretation of this line, which suggests that the falling fortunes of the Liu clan issued in part from Emperor Cheng's failure to employ greater number of his own relatives. Nylan reads “those who separate themselves from their own flesh and blood” (Liu Tseng-kuei 298).

<sup>137</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3467.

<sup>138</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3467.

welfare the ruler is responsible.

Gu Yong concludes his generalized discussion of the etiology of auspicious and inauspicious signs by pointing out the ultimate consequence of failing to properly respond to a series of baleful portents:

終不改寤，惡洽變備，不復譴告，更命有德。詩云：「乃眷西顧，此惟予宅。」

If in the end he does not awaken and change his ways, the ill effects will accumulate and the [preconditions for dynastic] change will be complete.<sup>139</sup> He will not again be warned, but the Charge will be transferred to one who is possessed of suasive power. The *Odes* says: “And He looked unto the west/ This would be our home!”<sup>140</sup>

Whereas Dong Zhongshu had once responded to a lack of auspicious signs that indicated that Emperor Wu truly possessed Heaven’s Charge, Gu Yong suggests that the recent signs suggest that Emperor Cheng was on the verge of losing dynastic legitimacy. Still, the events portended by baleful signs remained subject to change, at least so long as such signs continued to appear. When baleful signs ceased to appear, it would mean that the ruling clan had truly been forsaken.

Gu Yong looks not only to the signs immediately at hand, but evokes all those that have occurred since the beginning of Emperor Cheng’s reign, in order to point to the particularly perilous state in which the dynasty found itself. Emperor Cheng’s reign compares unfavorably with those of all previous Han rulers and the rulers of the Chunqiu period:

建始元年以來二十載間，羣災大異，交錯鋒起，多於春秋所書。八世著記，久不塞除，重以今年正月己亥朔日有食之，三朝之會，四月丁酉四方衆星白晝流隕，七月辛未彗星橫天。

In the twenty years that have passed since the beginning of the Jianshi reign period (33 BCE), a throng of disasters and great calamities have occurred, coming one after another, in greater numbers than those recorded in the *Annals*. The records of the eight previous emperors were not kept locked away. Worse, on the first day of the first month of this year, *jihai*, an eclipse of the sun occurred, and was all the more ominous for happening on

<sup>139</sup> Following Nylan (Liu Tseng-kuei, 298).

<sup>140</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3467. Gu Yong’s citation of the ode “August Indeed” (Mao 241; Huang yi 皇矣) smacks of irony. Employing a variant in the latter line, the first person pronoun yu 予 (translated “Our”) for the prepositional yu 與, Gu Yong effectively renders the ode in the collective voice of the early Zhou rulers. The Mao preface gives the gist of the ode as a whole: “‘August Indeed’ praises the Zhou. Heaven saw that there was none so good as Zhou to replace Yin. And among the many generations of Zhou, there was none so good as King Wen in cultivating his own suasive power” 《皇矣》、美周也。天監代殷莫若周，周世世脩德，莫若文王 (*Mao shi zhengyi* 16.4.1017). Emperor Cheng is implicitly cast as falling on the wrong side of history. Another dynasty might soon come along and replace the Han. A latter day King Wen, possessed of the suasive power Emperor Cheng lacked, might soon lead an army against him, should he fail to reform his licentious behavior and inhumane policies, ignoring all the signs of danger, as King Zhou had done long ago.

the very day when the year, month, and day all began their counts.<sup>141</sup> Then, on the *dingyou* day in the fourth month in all Four Directions multitudes of stars fell in full daylight, and a comet traversed the sky on the *xingwei* day in the seventh month.<sup>142</sup>

The current year had been the occasion of three particularly baleful celestial signs: an unexpected eclipse, an unusually bright meteor shower, and an appearance of a dazzlingly prominent comet. These spectacular displays suggested that the dynasty had reached a point of crisis and that remedial actions should be taken immediately.

Gu Yong described the problems that beset the emperor and his empire as the result of gradual developments that had been allowed to go on for too long. “Calamity arises from the minuscule and incipient, treachery is born from that which is lightly regarded” 禍起細微，姦生所易。<sup>143</sup> The key was to address the signs and change course before the sprouts had come to full maturity. Gu points toward the urgency of eliminating calamity while it remained “minuscule and incipient,” and so liable to remedies, even as he noted that the series of recent disasters showed that the Emperor’s problems were already far beyond that point. Contingency, in Gu’s rhetoric, was limited; the Liu house stood, already, on the brink of destruction. Soon, Gu Yong warned Emperor Cheng, it would be too late to save the dynasty no matter what he did:

彗星，極異也，土精所生，流隕之應出於飢變之後，兵亂作矣，厥期不久，隆德積善，懼不克濟。

The comet is the most extreme of anomalies, born from the spirit of the soil. The response, which had stars falling to earth, will first emerge after the famines, which will spawn, in turn, civil wars.<sup>144</sup> The time is not far off, when no matter how great your suasive power or your accumulated goodness, I fear you will not be able to survive.<sup>145</sup>

Thus, Gu Yong turned to his recommendations, the actions Emperor Cheng must take immediately if the dynasty were to be saved. First, he must distance himself from the debauched officials who have taken advantage of his largess, particularly those serving in the women’s quarters. Perhaps more importantly still, he must duly honor and promote those loyal, talented, and earnest men who had been passed over.

加惠失志之人，懷柔怨恨之心。保至尊之重，秉帝王之威，朝覲法出而後駕，陳兵清道而後行，無復輕身獨出，飲食臣妾之家。三者既除，內亂之路塞矣。

Bestow rewards on those who have not been allowed to fulfill their aims, and show tenderness toward those with resentment and anger in their hearts. Maintain the gravity of the most honored one, hold fast the majesty befitting emperors and kings. At court,

<sup>141</sup> Following Nylan (Liu Tseng-kuei, 299).

<sup>142</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3468.

<sup>143</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3470.

<sup>144</sup> Following Nylan (Liu Tseng-kui, 299).

<sup>145</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3468.

ensure that the proper procedures have been enacted and only then drive your carriage. In sending forth troops, clear the path before allowing them to march. Never again humiliate yourself by venturing out alone, eating and drinking in the houses of your officials and concubines. If these three practices are all abolished, the road to disorder in the palace will be blocked off.<sup>146</sup>

The means to resolving baleful celestial signs lay in exposing and negating the conditions at court that had brought them into being. Gu's rhetoric is powerful, however, not only because it roots its recommended actions in the etiology of baleful celestial signs, but also because it claims that those actions must be taken immediately, lest the dynasty's last chance for preservation slip by. Gu concludes his memorial by emphasizing that both baleful signs and the calamities they portend *can* be resolved. In contrast with the polite niceties of the opening of his memorial, Gu Yong's language borders on goading:

少省愚臣之言，感寤三難，深畏大異，定心為善，捐忘邪志，毋貳舊愆，厲精致（改）（政），至誠應天，則積異塞於上，禍亂伏於下，何憂患之有？竊恐陛下公志未專，私好頗存，尚愛羣小，不肯為耳！

Briefly reflect on your foolish minister's words, be stirred and awakened by the Three Troubles, deeply fear the great anomalies, fix your heart on doing good, rid yourself of and forget those with wayward ambitions, do not repeat your previous mistakes, diligently concentrate on bringing about reform, and be of the utmost integrity in responding to Heaven, and then the accumulated anomalies will be blocked off above, and calamities and disorder will be buried below. What fear of danger would there be? I only fear that Your Majesty has yet to focus his aim on the broader good, and that your personal proclivities yet remain, and so you will continue to keep and cherish your throng of petty favorites, and be unwilling to take action!<sup>147</sup>

Gu's memorial is a call to action, a pointed attack on Emperor Cheng's closest companions, male and female, the people with whom he chose to eat and drink and escape the dreariness of life as the political and religious head of the empire, but his attacks were never directed against the Wang clan. Indeed, if Gu's language, stripped of its initial veneer of polite and apologetic formality, becomes caustic, or even rude, it is perhaps because he enjoyed the protection of the Wang clan. Gu Yong could attack Emperor Cheng's favorites in the rear palace with naked, transparent language, precisely because their power to retaliate against him was limited by his own relationship with the Wang clan.

### Liu Xiang

Writing two years later, Liu Xiang would cite many of the same baleful signs in his memorial, implicitly directed against the Wang clan, that Gu Yong had in his attack against

<sup>146</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3570.

<sup>147</sup> *Hanshu* 85.3472.

Emperor Cheng's favorite consorts and officials. Liu Xiang does not, in this particular memorial, issue a direct attack against anyone; it is through Ban Gu's suggestion that we infer the memorial as being directed against the power of the Empress Dowager Wang and her natal family. The weight of Liu Xiang's rhetoric rests upon a slew of historical examples, drawn both from the distant past and from the imperial period. It is through these examples that Liu Xiang both demonstrates that the Han dynasty is in dire straits and that by undertaking the right actions the dynasty might yet be saved.

Liu Xiang begins by showing that appeals to historical precedent have a long history as a means of admonishing rulers:

臣聞帝舜戒伯禹，毋若丹朱敖；周公戒成王，毋若殷王紂。《詩》曰「殷監不遠，在夏后之世」，亦言湯以桀為戒也。聖帝明王常以敗亂自戒，不諱廢興，故臣敢極陳其愚，唯陛下留神察焉。

Your minister has heard that when the Emperor Shun warned Yu, nothing was so effective as the example of [Yao's nefarious son] Dan Zhu, and when the Duke of Zhou warned King Cheng, nothing was so effective as the example of King Zhou.<sup>148</sup> Where the *Odes* says, "The mirror of Yin is not far away, but lies in the age of the rulers of Xia,"<sup>149</sup> it also speaks of how Tang took Jie as a warning. Sage emperors and perspicacious kings ever take warning themselves from the examples of those who have fallen, who have given way to disorder. They do not prohibit [talk of] the rise and fall [of dynastic houses], and so, their ministers dare to fully express their views.<sup>150</sup> Would that Your Majesty focus attention upon this and know it well.<sup>151</sup>

Thus, Liu Xiang prepares Emperor Cheng for a serious discourse on the dangers that befall dynasties. Just as Yin served as a mirror to the Zhou, encouraging King Cheng to govern better than his predecessors, Liu Xiang cites a litany of historical precedents that might serve as a mirror for Emperor Cheng.

Liu Xiang appeals to the Classics and to Kongzi's example to further support the notion that observing the heavens is a basic means of taking a sort of barometric reading of the political climate. Urging Emperor Cheng to heed him well, Liu Xiang cites the statement in the *Changes*

<sup>148</sup> Yan Shigu suggests that Liu Xiang here refers to the Duke of Zhou's appeal to the negative example of King Zhou in the "No Ease" (Wuyi 無/亡逸) chapter of the *Documents* (*Hanshu* 35.1963, n. 2).

<sup>149</sup> Liu quotes Mao. 255, "Dang" 蕩 (Mighty). NB: The meaning of the title of this ode is contested. According to the Mao and Zheng readings, which frame the ode as criticism of King Li of Zhou 周厲王 (r. 877–841 BCE), it means dissolute. Zheng Xuan glosses the phrase *dangdang* 蕩蕩 as "descriptive of the abandonment and destruction of law and order" 法度廢壞之貌 (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1154). I, however, follow Waley's rendering of the title, which better accords with the use of the phrase *dangdang* in the opening lines of the ode: "The Lord on High is *dangdang*" 上帝蕩蕩. Waley offers an apt explanation of the couplet cited here, "The Yin destroyed the Xia because of their wickedness, just as the Zhou are now destroying the Yin" (*Book of Songs*, 262, n. 3).

<sup>150</sup> *Yu* 愚, which in its most basic sense means "foolish" and is often used as a sort of humilific prefix, here seems to be used as a metonym for *yuyi* 愚意, "foolish views" or "humble views."

<sup>151</sup> *Hanshu* 36.1963.

that the ideal ruler “observes celestial patterns, in order to examine the alternations of the seasons” 觀乎天文，以察時變，<sup>152</sup> and he recalls a conversation between Kongzi and Duke Ai of Lu 魯哀公 (r. 494–467 BCE) in which the sage pointed to both cruel governance in the human realm and major celestial anomalies that, in Liu Xiang’s view, were “all aberrations [indicating] a change in the ruling house” 此皆易姓之變也。<sup>153</sup> Liu Xiang then proceeds to recount at great length a score of major signs that have occurred from the time of Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 BCE) through the time of Emperor Cheng’s illustrious grandfather, Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 73–49 BCE). Liu Xiang tells of the eclipses, comets, and planetary omens that occurred in the last years of the Qin 秦 Dynasty (221–207 BCE). He cites numerous celestial signs, but does not distinguish them in any strict manner from baleful terrestrial omens such as the fire that burned the palace or the “giant that appeared at Lintao.”<sup>154</sup> This long series of signs, inauspicious from the perspective of the Qin, culminates in the gathering of the Five Planets in the Eastern Well constellation, which signaled the rise of Liu Bang and the Han dynasty.<sup>155</sup> Liu Xiang goes on to

<sup>152</sup> The quotation is from the commentary on the judgment (*tuan* 象) to *Bi* 賁 (Elegance) the 22<sup>nd</sup> hexagram in the *Changes*. See *Zhouyi yizhu* 188.

<sup>153</sup> Liu Xiang’s full explanation reads: “The *Changes* states: ‘He observes celestial patterns, in order to examine the alternations of the seasons.’ Long ago, Kongzi told Duke Ai of Lu how Jie of Xia and Zhou of Yin unleashed violence and cruelty over the world, and thus, when there are errors in the calendar then the constellation Assistant Conductors (six stars in Boötes) loses its position, and the first month of the year loses its regularity. These are all aberrations that signal changes in the ruling house 《易》曰：「觀乎天文，以察時變。」昔孔子對魯哀公，並言夏桀、殷紂暴虐天下，故曆失則攝提失方，孟陬無紀，此皆易姓之變也 (*Hanshu* 36.1964).

<sup>154</sup> The commentators are silent on the source of this statement. Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (ca. 466–527 CE) comp., *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Commentary on the Rivers Classic): 2.25a, in *Siku quanshu*, does record what appears to be a related anecdote occurring during the time of the sage-king Yu: “When Yu was settling the flood water, he went westward to a place overlooking the River Tao, and saw there the giant, who gave him *The Black Jade Writings* which he placed by the river” 禹治洪水，西至洮水之上，見長人，受「黑玉書」于斯水上。The Qing scholar Xu Wenjing 徐文靖 (1667–ca. 1756) cites the *Shuijing zhu*, but presents the text somewhat differently: “The *Commentary on the Rivers Classic* says: ‘When Yu set to order the floodwaters, he looked out over the river and saw a white faced tall man with the body of a fish who said to him, ‘I am a river spirit.’ And he gave Yu the River Chart and returned to his deep abyss” 水經注曰：禹理水觀于河見白面，長人魚身出，曰：吾河精也。授禹河圖而還于淵。See the preface to his *Yu gong hui jian* 禹貢會箋 (Assembled Notes on the Tribute of Yu), 1a, in *Siku quanshu*.

<sup>155</sup> Liu Xiang’s account of the signs that accompanied the fall of the Qin and the rise of the Han reads: “From the last years of Qin Shihuang through the reign of Qin Ershi 秦二世 (r. 209–207 BCE), the sun and moon encroached upon and eclipsed one another, mountains and hills collapsed, the stars emerged in the first month of each of the Four Seasons, Great White crossed the heavens and marched forward, there was thunder in the absence of clouds, Bent Arrow lit up the night, the Dazzling Deluder encroached on the moon, a disastrous fire burned the palace, wild birds frolicked in the court, the gates of the capital collapsed inward, the giant appeared at Lintao, stones fell in Dong Commandery, a comet covered Great Horn (i.e. Arcturus), and Great Horn on its account vanished. Looking at the words of Kongzi, and accounting for the anomalies of the violent Qin, Heaven’s Charge is truly worthy of trepidation. And when the time of Xiang Yu’s 項羽 (d. 202 BCE) defeat arrived, there was again a comet over Great Horn. When the Han invaded the Qin, the Five Planets gathered at Eastern Well, and this was a sign that they would take the world 秦始皇之末至二世時，日月薄食，山陵淪亡，辰星出於四孟，太白經天而行，無雲而雷，枉矢夜光，熒惑襲月，孽火燒宮，野禽戲廷，都門內崩，長人見臨洮，石隕于東郡，星孛大角，大角以亡。觀孔子之言，考暴秦之異，天命信可畏也。及項籍之敗，



recall signs of major political importance occurring later in the dynasty. He cites a total solar eclipse and blood rains that fell in the time of Emperor Hui 惠 (r. 194–188 BCE), the second Han emperor, who was dominated for the whole of his reign by his mother, Empress Lü 呂 (r. 187–180 BCE).<sup>156</sup> Liu cites the comet and twenty days of overcast weather that signaled that the King of Changyi 昌易 (fl. 74 BCE), Huo Guang's 霍光 (d. 68 BCE) initial choice to succeed Emperor Zhao 昭 (r. 86–74 BCE), would not last a full month.<sup>157</sup> Liu also appeals to auspicious signs of mid-dynastic renaissance that occurred during the reign of Emperor Zhao, presaging the rise of Emperor Xuan. Two of these signs directly express revival: a dead willow in the gardens of the Shanglin Palace that came back to life and a fallen stone slab on Mt. Tai that stood up once more. A third sign, this time occurring in the heavens, suggested that Emperor Xuan would be a charismatic, magnetic leader: “A great star like the moon advanced westward, with the multitude of stars following it” 大星如月西行，眾星隨之。<sup>158</sup> Recalling all of the signs recorded in the imperial annals, Liu Xiang turns to fundamental lessons to be learned:

觀秦、漢之易世，覽惠、昭之無後，察昌邑之不終，視孝宣之紹起，天之去就，豈不昭昭然哉！高宗、成王亦有雉雉拔木之變，能思其故，故高宗有百年之福，成王有復風之報。

When we observe the transition from the Qin to the Han, see that Emperor Hui and Emperor Zhao were without progeny, examine why the King of Changyi did not last long, and look upon the Filial Emperor Xuan who followed him and rose up, then how could the question of who Heaven approaches and who it distances itself from be anything but crystal clear! The High Ancestor of Shang (King Wuding) and King Cheng of Zhou for their parts had the omens of the pheasant and the trees ripped from the ground, and one can understand why they occurred. Thus the High Ancestor enjoyed a hundred years of prosperity and King Cheng was rewarded with the winds that blew in reverse.<sup>159</sup>

---

亦孛大角。漢之入秦，五星聚于東井，得天下之象也 (*Hanshu* 36.1964).

<sup>156</sup> Following the death of Emperor Hui in 188 BCE, a series of infant emperors assumed the throne, while the Empress Lü maintained power. She appointed members of her own clan at the highest ranks of the political and military structure, and the Lü clan attempted to claim imperial power at the time of her death in 180 BCE. When the attempt failed, the Lü clan was destroyed. See Michael Loewe, “The Former Han Dynasty,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 135–36.

<sup>157</sup> For an analysis of the reasons for which the King of Changyi was nominated and almost immediately thereafter dismissed, see Liu Pakyuen (Liao Boyuan) 廖伯源, *Les institutions politiques et la lutte pour le pouvoir au milieu de la dynastie des Han antérieurs* (Political Institutions and the Struggle for Power in Western Han Dynasty; Paris: Collège de France, 1983): 106–70.

<sup>158</sup> *Hanshu* 36.1964.

<sup>159</sup> Liu Xiang continues: “And when the time of Xiang Yu’s defeat arrived, there was again a comet at Great Horn. When the Han invaded the Qin, the Five Planets gathered at Eastern Well, and this was a sign that they would take the world. In the time of the Filial Emperor Hui, it rained blood, and the sun was eclipsed along the ecliptic, and an anomaly occurred in which its light was extinguished and the stars appeared. In the time of the Filial Emperor Zhao, there was a stone that had lain flat at Mt. Tai but stood up, a fallen tree in Shanglin that rose up

Liu Xiang presents a series of signs in the Qin and Han that might be open to multiple readings, but encourages Emperor Cheng to look at those signs in light of the precedents under King Wuding and King Cheng. Liu Xiang gives no clear account of the etiology of the signs, but instead implies that examining the historical appearances of signs makes the processes by which they are brought into being easily understood; it is clear enough what sort of rulers receive Heaven's favor and what sort of rulers lose it. All manner of baleful signs remain subject to resolution, for such signs were once visited upon the courts of King Wuding of Shang and King Cheng of Zhou, both great rulers in antiquity. It is their exemplary responses to those signs which Emperor Cheng must emulate, for if he does, auspicious signs are sure to follow: "The response of the brightness of spirits is like a shadow or an echo, the whole world hears it in the same way" 神明之應，應若景嚮，世所同聞也。<sup>160</sup> Liu Xiang thus tempers his stern warning to King Cheng with a reminder that he too might ultimately become a sage-king.

Liu Xiang points to the contingency of baleful signs, warning Emperor Cheng of the unprecedented number of such signs that had occurred during his own reign. Liu Xiang pointed to the frequent eclipses during the reign of Duke Xiang 襄 of Lu (r. 572–542 BCE). At that time, Liu notes, one such event had occurred approximately every three years and five months. Early in the Western Han, during the reign of Emperor Jing 景 (r. 156–141 BCE), eclipses had occurred approximately every three years and one month. But since the beginning of Emperor Cheng's reign, eclipses occurred with still greater frequency, Liu Xiang argued, on average every two and one-half years: "From ancient times to the present day, seldom has there been such a thing" 古今罕有。<sup>161</sup> Liu Xiang would emphasize both the frequency and severity of the recent signs, most notably the appearance of Halley's Comet two years earlier, and the potential to

---

once again, and a great star like the moon that advanced west, so the multitude of stars followed it. There were special anomalies, the outward forms of the rise of the Filial Emperor Xuan. When the Celestial Dog bore down upon the Han (i.e. the Milky Way), and when it was constantly cloudy for twenty days without rain, these were anomalies that the King of Changyi would not last long. All are recorded in the 'Annals of Han' 及項籍之敗，亦孛大角。漢之入秦，五星聚于東井，得天下之象也。孝惠時，有雨血，日食於衝，滅光星見之異。孝昭時，有泰山臥石自立，上林僵柳復起，大星如月西行，眾星隨之，此為特異。孝宣興起之表，天狗夾漢而西，久陰不雨者二十餘日，昌邑不終之異也。皆著於《漢紀》 (*Hanshu* 36.1964).

<sup>160</sup> *Hanshu* 36.1964. Liu Xiang's treatment of celestial signs as shadows and echoes of events at court prefigures the statement in the introduction to the *Hanshu*, "Tianwen zhi" 天文志 (Treatise on Celestial Patterns) that "[w]hen the administration fails (down) here, then aberrations appear (up) there, just as shadows are images of their forms, and echoes are responses to sounds" 政失於此，則變見於彼，猶景之象形，鄉之應聲 (*Hanshu* 26.1273).

<sup>161</sup> Liu Xiang writes: "A careful examination of the 242 years of the *Annals* reveals thirty-six eclipses. These were especially numerous during the reign of Duke Xiang of Lu (r. 572 BCE–542 BCE), one eclipse occurring about every three years and five months, with a small remainder. Once the Han had flourished and finally become tranquil, during the reign of the Filial Emperor Jing they were especially numerous, one eclipse occurring every three years and one month. Your Minister, Xiang, counted instances speaking of eclipses of the sun, and now, for three years running, there have been eclipses one after another. Since the Jianshi reign period (32 BCE–29 BCE), there have been eight eclipses in twenty years, occurring once every two years and six months on average. From ancient times to the present day, rarely has there been such a thing" 謹案春秋二百四十二年，日蝕三十六，襄公尤數，率三歲五月有奇而壹食。漢興訖竟寧，孝景帝尤數，率三歲一月而一食。臣向前數言日當食，今連三年比食。自建始以來，二十歲間而八食，率二歲六月而一發，古今罕有 (*Hanshu* 36.1963).

eliminate them:

臣幸得託末屬，誠見陛下有寬明之德。冀銷大異，而興高宗、成王之聲，以崇劉氏。故猥猥數奸死亡之誅。今日食尤屢，星孛東井，攝提炎及紫宮，有識長老莫不震動，此變之大者也。

Your minister has been so fortunate as to belong to your clan, and I truly see that Your Majesty is possessed of magnanimous and bright suasive power. You hope to eliminate these great anomalies, and gain a reputation like that<sup>162</sup> of the High Ancestor and King Cheng, so as to honor the Liu clan. Thus, I have been willing to speak forthrightly, though I risk punishment by death. Now, eclipses of the sun are especially numerous, there has been a comet in Eastern Well, the flames of the Assistant Conductors<sup>163</sup> have reached the Purple Palace,<sup>164</sup> and none of the aged men of knowledge does not quake with fear. And these are only the greatest of the aberrations...<sup>165</sup>

Liu Xiang does not, in this memorial, openly name a particular faction or group whose influence at court might be rooted out, in order to ameliorate the baleful signs that plagued the reign of Emperor Cheng. Instead, his memorial concludes with a request for a private audience, in which he begs to explain the implications of the signs through the technical charts in his charge. In support of his appeal for a private audience with the Emperor, Liu cites the *Changes* and the *Documents*:

事難一二記，故《易》曰「書不盡言，言不盡意」，是以設卦指爻，而復說義。《書》曰「佯來以圖」，天文難以相曉，臣雖圖上，猶須口說，然後可知...

It is difficult to record these events one by one. Thus the *Changes* says, “Writing does not give full expression to words. Words do not give full expression to intent.”<sup>166</sup> This is why, after one has set forth the hexagrams and pointed out the relevant lines, one goes on to explain their meaning. Where the *Documents* says, “I sent them to bring the charts,”<sup>167</sup>

<sup>162</sup> More literally, “gain a reputation like” (*xing...zhi sheng* 興……之聲) might be rendered as “give rise to the tones of” the High Ancestor and King Cheng. The tones of these ideal rulers would have resonated throughout the realm exhibiting a powerful and morally suasive influence over the broader population.

<sup>163</sup> I follow Pankenier’s rendering of *Sheti* 攝提 (463).

<sup>164</sup> Purple Palace is a major constellation in the circumpolar region.

<sup>165</sup> *Hanshu* 36.1965.

<sup>166</sup> This is an oft-cited quotation from the first fascicle of the “Appended Statements” (*Zhouyi yizhu* 563). While it is generally used to describe the impossibility of fully conveying one’s meaning through language, here Liu Xiang seems to employ it to reinforce the sense that there are numerous signs that have occurred which he has not mentioned in his memorial. As Liu Xiang uses these lines, they might also be rendered: “One does not write down all that one would say, and one does not say all that one means.”

<sup>167</sup> Liu Xiang is quoting the “Luo gao” 洛誥 (Proclamation at Luo) chapter of the *Documents*. The phrase appears in a speech made by the Duke of Zhou to King Cheng, in which he describes having sent for maps, and then performing prognostications to determine if the capital should indeed be built at Luo. See *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1457.

the celestial patterns were indeed difficult to understand, for even should a minister submit the charts, he nonetheless must explain them in person, and only then can they be understood...<sup>168</sup>

Liu Xiang got his private audience, but Emperor Cheng was not able to adopt his recommendations. The *Hanshu* tells us that each time Liu was summoned, he pointed to the weakened position of the Liu clan and the rise in power of the Wang clan. As elaborate as was the memorial's account of signs past and present, Liu delivers no precise recommendations for changes to administrative policy, reserving these, it seems, for his private meeting with the Emperor. The modern reader, like the Eastern Han historian Ban Gu, can only speculate. Where Gu Yong was able to employ vituperative rhetoric on account of his relationship with the Wangs, Liu Xiang did not dare even to submit his criticisms of the Wang clan in written form.

Both Gu Yong and Liu Xiang wrote at a time when the end of the Han dynasty appeared to be a real possibility. The two men agreed on a number of points: the empire was strapped for cash; imperial power had largely been usurped by favorites of one sort or another, and the absence of an heir put the dynasty in grave danger. They agreed as well that the signs of danger were numerous and persistent. A twenty-year record of inauspicious signs gave omenological corroboration to the baleful political realities on the ground. It was not any single, isolated omen occurring at one particular moment, but a great many omens occurring over two decades, that showed that Emperor Cheng and the Han Dynasty were in danger. Though their precise political alliances differed, Gu Yong an ally of the Wang family, Liu Xiang their longtime critic, the rhetorical strategies the two writers employed overlapped considerably. Both Gu Yong and Liu Xiang marshaled their expert knowledge of the Classics and of recent history to support claims that the appearance of baleful signs could be traced to the personal comportment of the ruler and that the proper response to such signs could avert real political disaster on the ground.

### The Earthquake of 133 CE as a Celestial Sign

Following the earthquake of 133 CE,<sup>169</sup> Emperor Shun issued an edict seeking explanations as to why the event had occurred and what should be done about it. Both Emperor Shun's edict and these three extant responses to it read the sign of the earthquake against the background of the manifold signs surrounding it:

五月庚子，詔曰：「朕以不德，統奉洪業，無以承順乾坤，協和陰陽，災眚屢見，咎徵仍彰。群公卿士將何以匡輔朕之不逮，奉答災異？災異不空設，必有所應，其各舉敦樸之士一人，直言厥咎，靡有所諱。」

On the *gengzi* day of the fifth month, an edict said: "I, despite my lack of suasive power, have inherited a grand enterprise, but have no means by which to receive and follow along with Qian and Kun and bring into harmonious order *yin* and *yang*. Disasters and pestilences have many times appeared, and proofs of blame continue to manifest.

<sup>168</sup> *Hanshu* 36.1965–66.

<sup>169</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.507; *Hou Hanshu* 6.262.

Nobles, ministers, and officers, by what means can you rectify and assist me in my carelessness, so that I might reverently respond to disasters and anomalies? Disasters and anomalies are not set forth in vain, but there must be something to which they respond. Would that each of you promote a single man who is an honest and simple officer, to directly speak of the signs of blame, considering nothing to be unspeakable.<sup>170</sup>

The earthquake, occurring some eight years into Emperor Shun's reign, came in the wake of several troubling developments. In 132 CE, military woes, ranging from Xianbei raids in Liaodong 遼東 to the rebellion of the "Monstrous Bandit" 妖賊 Zhang He 章河 (fl. 131–132 CE) in Yang province (Yangzhou 楊州), had beset the seventeen-year-old ruler.<sup>171</sup> Drought in the capital had led to famine and rituals to summon rain had been performed to little avail.<sup>172</sup> Liang Na 梁納 (d. 150 CE), whose brother Liang Ji 梁冀 (d. 159 CE) would come to dominate the court from 142 CE until shortly before his death, had been made Empress.<sup>173</sup> Counter to precedent, proposals had been made to enfeoff both the Emperor's former nurse-maid, Song E 宋娥 (fl. 125–137 CE) and his new brother-in-law.<sup>174</sup> Concerns about the poor quality of men nominated as Filial and Incorrupt had prompted the issue of a controversial edict emphasizing literary capability and the ability to cite the Classics effectively.<sup>175</sup>

Common sense notions of what an earthquake is may tell us that it is a terrestrial rather than a celestial sign, but Emperor Shun's edict makes no such division. The earthquake is never referred to in specific terms, but treated as a disaster or an anomaly that must somehow issue from the ruler's lack of suasive power, his failure to follow along with, and in turn maintain, the harmonious patterns of *yin* and *yang* inherent in Qian and Kun, Heaven *and* Earth. The memorials of Zhang Heng, Ma Rong, and Li Gu address the earthquake just as if it were a celestial sign, and present it in conjunction with now familiar tropes of etiology and contingency. There is no clearly demarcated divide between celestial, terrestrial, and human signs. All are part of the same discursive and cosmological world, bound together by resonances and subject to the appropriation of the learned and dynamic memorialist. Zhang Heng points to the occurrence of the earthquake in conjunction with thunder and lightning, and appeals to familiar tropes of etiology and contingency, to argue that reforms to the method of selecting Filial and Incorrupt men should be revoked. Ma Rong, arguing for increased official attention to the seasonal needs of farmers, never mentions the earthquake, but treats it as a generic instance of a disaster. Li Gu, whose striking memorial carried the day, treats the earthquake as a warning issued from Heaven calling for the disenfeoffment of Song E and greater circumspection in filling official positions. The three memorialists respond not to a single sign with a fixed, absolute meaning, but to the manifold political, economic, and cosmological circumstances that confront them.

<sup>170</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.507.

<sup>171</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 6.260.

<sup>172</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 6.259.

<sup>173</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 10B.439.

<sup>174</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 61.2021.

<sup>175</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 6.261.

## Zhang Heng

Zhang Heng's technical acumen and official position made him extraordinarily qualified as a reader of celestial signs. Like Sima Qian, two centuries earlier, Zhang Heng held the post of Senior Archivist (Taishi ling 太史令) and, in addition to his works on history, he had produced star charts, composed a treatise on celestial patterns, and made improvements to the armillary sphere.<sup>176</sup> He was an expert in various prognostication techniques, including the reading of the wind.<sup>177</sup> Zhang Heng was an expert historian who identified multiple points of disagreement between the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*. Liu Zhen 劉珍 (fl. 110–125 CE) and Liu Taotu 劉陶駘 (fl. 120–125 CE) wished to consult him when they composed their *Hanji* 漢紀 (Han Annals), but did not receive permission to include his views, perhaps owing to his position that the Gengshi 劉更始 (r. 23–25 CE) Emperor, rather than his former general, Guangwu, should be recognized as the founder of the Eastern Han.<sup>178</sup> Though his treatise on celestial patterns was never adopted, Zhang Heng's readings of signs nonetheless must have carried great weight at Emperor Shun's court. Those who doubted his technical acumen had been proved wrong less than a year earlier when Zhang Heng successfully developed a seismograph. The bronze instrument consisted in eight dragon heads facing eight directions, each of which held in its mouth an iron ball. Should a quake occur in a given direction, the iron ball would issue from the corresponding dragon's mouth and roll into the mouth of a toad. The historian Fan Ye's 範曄 (398–445) praise for Zhang Heng's instrument evokes the language of verification reminiscent of historical studies of omens, such as the chronicles in the "Tianwen zhi" 天文志 (Treatise on Celestial Patterns) and the "Five Resources" in the *Hanshu*: "Verifying it on the basis of actual events, they fit together perfectly as if it were divine" 驗之以事，合契若神.<sup>179</sup> Initial doubts concerning the efficacy of the instrument were soon dispelled:

嘗一龍機發而地不覺動，京師學者咸怪其無徵，後數日驛至，果地震隴西，於是皆服其妙。自此以後，乃令史官記地動所從方起。

Once, the mechanism in one of the dragon heads disengaged, and yet no one felt the earth move. All of the scholars in the capital city complained that there had been no proof. Several days later a messenger arrived, and it turned out that there had been an earthquake in Longxi. Thereupon, all were convinced of its marvelous efficacy. From this time forward, the archival officers were ordered to record the direction from which earthquakes issued.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>176</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1897–98. See also Joseph Needham (in collaboration with Wang Ling), "Astronomy" and "Seismology" in *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 3 "Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1959): 342–43; 360–61; 386; 626. For Zhang Heng's technical writings, see Yeong-Chung E. Lien, "Zhang Heng, Eastern Han Polymath, His Life and Works" (Phd Diss, University of Washington, 2011): 402–90 and 509–533, UMI (3452743).

<sup>177</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1912.

<sup>178</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1940.

<sup>179</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1909.

<sup>180</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1909.

The innovation was considered to be so important that it was recorded not only in Zhang Heng's biography, but in the "Basic Annals" for the reign of Emperor Shun as well.<sup>181</sup> The name given to the seismograph, the "Instrument for Observing Wind and Movements of the Earth" (*Hou feng di dong yi* 候風地動儀),<sup>182</sup> suggests that Zhang Heng explicitly associated earthquakes with the observation of winds. Counter-intuitive though it may be, Zhang Heng's seismograph was a technology for reading celestial signs.

In the opening of his memorial, Zhang Heng treats the 133 CE earthquake as if it were in the same category as other violent weather manifestations. Zhang Heng begins with a rather standard but nonetheless revealing trope of etiology: "I have heard that where there is good governance auspicious signs *descend*; and when there is repugnant governance inauspicious proofs appear" 臣聞政善則休祥降，政惡則咎徵見。<sup>183</sup> Though Zhang Heng's memorial is presented in response to an earthquake, he refers to auspicious signs as bounties that *descend*, implying that even signs that do not appear in the heavens issue from above. Moreover, Zhang Heng refers not only to the earthquake in his memorial, but to recent weather manifestations that appeared in conjunction with it:

聞者，京師地震，雷電赫怒。夫動靜無常，變改正道，則有奔雷土裂之異。

Recently, in the capital there has been an earthquake, and thunder and lightning have blazed in anger. When movement and stillness are without constancy, and aberrations and alterations are imposed upon the correct way, then there are anomalies consisting in rolling thunder and rent soil.<sup>184</sup>

On the level of technical observation, reading earthquakes was part and parcel of the practice of reading the winds. On a rhetorical level, the sign of the earthquake functioned little differently from violent, unseasonable weather. The boundary between celestial and terrestrial signs proved porous and ill-defined.

Signs above and below, Zhang Heng claimed, constituted warnings from Heaven: "Monstrous stars appear above; quaking and rending manifest below. Heaven's warning is clear. It is enough to chill the heart" 妖星見於上，震裂著於下，天誠詳矣，可為寒心。<sup>185</sup> Zhang Heng rhetorically located the source of those signs in specific recent changes to policies concerning how individuals were nominated as Filial and Incorrupt. The new nomination procedures, adopted in the eleventh month of the previous year, required all but the most talented candidates be at least forty years of age and possessed of literary skill. As the "Annals" of Emperor Shun's reign describe the rules, "All candidates must fully comprehend the section and sentence commentaries to the Classics, and lettered officers must be able to compose official briefs and memorials to be eligible for selection" 諸生通章句，文吏能牋奏，乃得應選。<sup>186</sup>

<sup>181</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 6.260; 59.1909.

<sup>182</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1909.

<sup>183</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.512.

<sup>184</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.512.

<sup>185</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.514.

<sup>186</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 6.261.

Appealing to the example of Kongzi's most filial disciple, Zengzi 曾子, who was unrefined and dull (*lu dun* 魯鈍) compared to his more eloquent but less virtuous contemporaries, Ziyou 子游 and Zixia 子夏, Zhang Heng held that the most filial candidates might be ineligible for selection under the new rules.<sup>187</sup> The new system created, Zhang Heng warned, a situation in which it was difficult to distinguish those who truly possessed such virtues from those who were merely eloquent. Under such conditions, it was no wonder earthquakes and inclement weather occurred:

今真偽渾淆，昏亂清朝，此為上陵下替，分威共德，災異之興，不亦宜乎？

Now, the true and the false are mixed together, and darkness and disorder are visited upon the Clear Court. Because of this, those above fall into decline and those below are abandoned, dividing up authority and sharing favor. As for the rise of disasters and anomalies, is it not to be expected?"<sup>188</sup>

Good and poor officials could no longer be differentiated. The distinctions between minister and ruler had been eroded, Zhang Heng claimed, as ministers arrogated the authority and capacity to distribute favors that properly belonged to the ruler alone. Insofar as the earthquake and concurrent violent weather manifestations could be traced to the political conditions at Emperor Shun's court, they also remained subject to change. Zhang Heng bookends his memorial with reminders that baleful signs do not always or inevitably lead to calamity. He recalls, in his opening, the Classical example of King Cheng's response to the violent winds: "Long ago King Cheng doubted the Duke of Zhou and great winds uprooted trees, but when he opened the metal-bound coffer, a wind that would blow them upright arrived in turn. The responses between Heaven and the human realm are quick as shadows and echoes" 昔成王疑周公而大風拔樹木，開金縢而反風至，天人之應，速於影響。<sup>189</sup> In his final line, Zhang Heng proclaims that while the time for action is long overdue, reform may still avert disaster: "Those who are clear-sighted resolve calamity before it sprouts. Now, the sprouts have already appeared, but if you refine your governance and tremble with fear, then calamity can yet be transformed into blessing" 明者消禍於未萌，今既見矣，修政恐懼，則轉禍為福矣。<sup>190</sup> Evoking the familiar trope of the sprouts of calamity, Zhang Heng claims that crisis can yet be averted, but must be averted soon.

### Ma Rong

Ma Rong's response to the earthquake is less a reading of the sign itself than a reading of the state of the economy. Prompted by the occurrence of an earthquake though it is, Ma Rong never once refers directly to the quake. The earthquake is a sign, but a comet or an eclipse or just about any other event that could be treated as a warning from on high might have done just as well. The sign that concerns Ma Rong most is the advent of famine, and it is toward that sign

<sup>187</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.513.

<sup>188</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.513.

<sup>189</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.512.

<sup>190</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.514.



that his economically-oriented admonitions are directed.

Ma Rong claims in his opening that so long as the empire is properly ordered, auspicious signs of celestial constancy should manifest themselves in the heavens:

臣聞「立天之道曰陰與陽，立地之道曰柔與剛」。夫陰陽剛柔，天地所以立也。取仁於陽，資義於陰，柔以施德，剛以行刑，各順時月，以厚群生。帝王之法，天地設位，四時代序。王者奉順，則風雨時至，嘉禾繇植；天失其度，則咎徵并至，饑饉薦臻。

I have heard that “the ways that establish the heavens are called *yin* and *yang* and the ways that establish the earth are called supple and firm.” Thus *yin*, *yang*, firm, and supple are the means by which Heaven and Earth are established. Humaneness is selected from *yang*, and duty is received from *yin*. Suppleness is the means by which favor is extended, and firmness is the means by which punishments are enforced. All follow the proper seasons and months, so as to make the many living things prosper. As for the methods of emperors and kings, the positions of Heaven and Earth, and the continual revolution of the Four Seasons, if the King venerates and follows them, then wind and rain arrive at the proper season, and the fine grains grow in great numbers. But should Heaven lose its measure, then the proofs of blame arrive, and episodes of famine and starvation come one after another.<sup>191</sup>

Ma Rong focuses on signs that are clearly and directly tied to agriculture. Following the order inherent in the heavens serves to maintain that order, bringing wind and rain at the right time, and leading to bountiful harvests. But when the celestial order is lost, unspecified inauspicious signs occur, and famine follows with them.<sup>192</sup>

Following his brief theoretical introduction to the etiology of auspicious and inauspicious signs, as well as good and poor harvests, Ma Rong tactfully and tactically points out that the ruler seems to be doing just about everything right:

今科條品制，四時禁令，所以承天順民者，備矣，悉矣，不可加矣。

Now, the administrative grades, regulatory systems, and ordinances of the Four Seasons, are the means by which one receives [the model of] the heavens and causes the people to follow it. These have been set in place and are quite complete. There is nothing that could be added to them.<sup>193</sup>

<sup>191</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.510

<sup>192</sup> Ma Rong was an expert in the study of celestial patterns and, it will be recalled from Chapter 3, helped to compile the *Hanshu* “Treatise on Celestial Patterns” along with his brother Ma Xu 馬續 (ca. 79–after 141 CE) and Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 48–ca. 116 CE). Had he wished to do so, he might have presented a much more technical argument involving a host of planetary portents, comets, or rainbows, in addition to the recent earthquake. The absence of such signs in his rhetoric can but be deliberate. Ma Rong draws the attention of his court audience only to those signs that directly affect agricultural production.

<sup>193</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.510.

Ma Rong defines the means by which one follows Heaven in terms of a set of regulations, including the ordinances directing which activities should be carried out at which time of year. However, though those regulations may be complete and perfectly articulated, he points to imperfection in their enforcement as the source of baleful signs both in Heaven and in the human realm. Ma Rong continues:

然而天猶有不平之效，民猶有咨嗟之怨者，百姓屢聞恩澤之聲，而未見惠和之實也。

Yet in the heavens there continue to be events that verify that all is not tranquil and among the people there continue to be sighs of animosity. The Hundred Families have many times heard talk of grace and favor, but have yet to see the substance of benefits and harmony.<sup>194</sup>

The crux of the problem, for Ma Rong, lies in the disjunction between *shi* 實 and *sheng* 聲, respectively rendered above as *substance* and *talk*. Where Zhang Heng was satisfied to speak of baleful signs as shadows and echoes, Ma Rong insists that imperial grace must manifest in a practical, pragmatic manner. The signs of the greatest ultimate importance are those that imply a bountiful harvest. To some extent, the basic sense of the term *shi* 實 meaning “to bear fruit” is operable here. Famine and starvation, perhaps the most inauspicious of signs, not only portend calamities to come but mark visible and present suffering among the people.

It is not enough to announce the suasive power of the emperor through the production of regulations in accord with the regularity of the heavens. Enforcement of those regulations must be articulated in perfect balance. Under the present conditions, however, “excessive severity” had come to be normative:

今從政者變忽法度，以殺戮威刑為能賢。問其國守相及令長何如？其稱之也曰「太急」，其毀之也曰「太緩」。

Now, those who carry out the administration alter and disorder the laws and measures, so that those who engage in slaughter, intimidation, and punishment are regarded as capable and worthy. If we ask about the governors, chancellors, and magistrates of the kingdoms, those who praise them say they are excessively severe and those who damn them say they are excessively lenient.<sup>195</sup>

Excessive severity described the most effective administrators, while excessive leniency was an epithet, a smear. Ma Rong employs a rhetoric of balance to argue in favor of shifting away from excessive severity in the enforcement of the regulations, in favor of a more moderate mode of administration. He pushes for a shift toward more lenient policies, while at the same time

<sup>194</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.510.

<sup>195</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.510–11.

maintaining the posture that neither excessive severity nor excessive leniency should be tolerated. Excessive severity and excessive leniency are equally dangerous in cosmological terms. Ma Rong points to the tendency to favor severity over leniency as the root of recent disasters: “Severity brings on cold, and leniency brings on heat. Both are the same in their culpability, yet those who discuss them forgive severity, and this is why *yin* and *yang* are out of balance” 夫急致寒，緩致燠，二者罪同，而論者許急，此陰陽所以不和也。<sup>196</sup> As is often the case, etiology implies contingency. Recognizing the etiology of the imbalance of *yin* and *yang* illuminates the means by which that balance might be recovered:

復之之道，審察緩急之謗譽，鈞同寒燠之罪罰，以崇王政，則陰陽和也。

The method by which it might be restored lies in carefully examining the calumny and praise directed at leniency and severity and in balancing and unifying the culpability and fines for cold and hot. If by these means one exalts kingly governance, then *yin* and *yang* will be in harmony.<sup>197</sup>

The restoration of balance at the cosmological level likewise implies the restoration of balance in the administration of official policy:

好惡既明，則宰官之吏，知所避就。又正身以先之，嚴以涖之，不變則刑罰之。夫知為善之必利，為惡之必害，孰能不化？則官良矣。

Once that which is good and that which is repugnant have been made clear, then the various officials will know what to avoid and what to follow. Moreover, rectify yourself and lead them, sternly watch over them, and if they do not change, then punish and penalize them. For if they know that to do good will certainly profit them, and to do ill will certainly harm them, who could fail to be transformed? Thus, your officials will be fine indeed!<sup>198</sup>

Both the method for resolving and etiology of the cosmological problems the empire faces lie in the political realm. The vague sense that *yin* and *yang* are out of balance, which might produce earthquakes, floods, droughts, and a host of other signs, is the product of excessive severity on the part of officials. If, under threat of punishment, officials come to realize that excessive severity is just as damaging as excessive leniency both the cosmological and political problem will be resolved.

Ma Rong invokes cosmology, but the stakes involved in his discussion of cosmic imbalances are continually tied to agricultural production. Appealing to Classical texts, Ma Rong suggests that agriculture is the first responsibility in governance and implies that military unrest in various parts of the empire is the result of a failure to implement policies that encourage

<sup>196</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.511.

<sup>197</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.511.

<sup>198</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.511.

agricultural production:

臣聞洪範八政，以食為首；周禮九職，以農為本。民失耕桑，饑寒并至，盜賊之原所由起也。

I have heard that in the Eight Administrative Responsibilities in the “Great Plan” foodstuffs comes first, and in the Nine Official Responsibilities in the *Rites of Zhou*<sup>199</sup> farming is considered the most fundamental. When the people fail to plow or attend to silk production, then starvation and cold both come upon them. This is the path by which thieves and bandits arise!<sup>200</sup>

Ma Rong goes on to describe how, in ancient times, the economic needs of the people had been better fulfilled. The people themselves were frugal and assiduous, holding austere weddings and funerals, and continually engaging in their work. Most importantly, however, officials did not interrupt agricultural production.

今則不然，此盜賊所以不息。誠使制度必行，禁令必止，則士者不濫法式之外，百工不作無用之器，商賈不通難得之貨，農夫不失三時之務，各安所業，則盜賊消除，災害不起矣。

Now, it is no longer so. This is why thievery and banditry do not cease! If it were truly so that administrative measures were carried out effectively, and the [overly numerous] prohibitions were to stop, then officers would not act outside the bounds of the laws and ceremonies, the Hundred Artisans would not produce useless implements, the merchants would not trade in luxury goods, and farmers would not fail to perform the tasks of the Three Agricultural Seasons. If all found repose in their respective enterprises, the

<sup>199</sup> The “Great Plan” lists the *bazheng* 八正 or “Eight Administrative Responsibilities” as follows: “As for the Eight Administrative Responsibilities, the first is foodstuffs; the second, goods; the third, sacrifices; the fourth, the offices of the Counsellor; the fifth, the management of public works; the sixth, the management of the masses; the sixth, management of raiders; the seventh, attending to guests; the eighth, military matters” 八政：一曰食，二曰貨，三曰祀，四曰司空，五曰司徒，六曰司寇，七曰賓，八曰師 (*Shangshu jiaozhu yilun*, vol. 3, 1159). The “Tianguan zhong zai” 天官冢宰 (High Ministers of the Celestial Offices) chapter of the *Rites of Zhou* (Zhouli 周禮) describes the Nine Occupations as follows: “By means of the Nine Occupations employ the myriad people. The first includes the three kinds of farmers who give rise to the Nine Grains; the second are the gardeners, who raise the grasses and trees; the third are the foresters, who produce resources from the mountains and marshes; the fourth are the shepherds, who nurture the birds and beasts; the fifth are the Hundred Artisans, who embellish and transform the Eight Materials; the sixth are the merchants, who circulate goods and make them plentiful; the seventh are the noble women, who work the silk and hemp; the eighth are servant men and women, who gather and harvest the various materials; and the ninth are the idle people, who are without regular employment, but go from doing one thing to doing another” 以九職任萬民：一曰三農，生九穀；二曰園圃，毓草木；三曰虞衡，作山澤之材；四曰藪牧，養蕃鳥獸；五曰百工，飭化八材；六曰商賈，阜通貨賄；七曰嬪婦，化治絲枲；八曰臣妾，聚斂疏材；九曰閑民，無常職，轉移執事 (*Zhouli zhushu* 周禮注疏 [Commentary and Sub-commentary to the Rites of Zhou] vol. 1 [Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999]: 2.32).

<sup>200</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.511.

problem of bandits and thieves would be resolved and disasters and calamities would no longer arise.<sup>201</sup>

Ma Rong's approach to the 133 CE earthquake centered on signs of an economic nature rather than the earthquake itself. The earthquake was, for Ma Rong, a mere symptom of a host of problems plaguing the empire. The symptom itself he never directly addresses. His solution to the problem of the earthquake, and disturbances in *yin* and *yang* in general, lies in addressing economic problems created by an unbalanced implementation of official policy. Excessive severity had been valued despite its damaging effects, taking farmers away from their work, thereby producing famines, and disturbances in the balance of *yin* and *yang*. Ma Rong does not directly implicate any particular person or faction at court, and claims in the beginning that workable regulations and seasonable ordinances are already on the books. Resolution of both economic and cosmological problems lay in ensuring that those regulations and ordinances were properly implemented.

### Li Gu

Li Gu's memorial on the 133 CE earthquake has the distinction of having been selected as the finest among the responses Emperor Shun received. This is not necessarily owing to any feature of Li Gu's rhetoric, but is perhaps due to the relative simplicity and concrete nature of his proposal. Li Gu specifically argues that Song E, the erstwhile nurse-maid of the young emperor, should not be granted a nobility, owing to the lack of precedent for such an action. Li Gu employs familiar tropes of etiology and contingency, but his rhetoric is striking nonetheless owing to the manner in which he envisions the body of the emperor and employs the image of dikes along a river as a metaphor for governance.

Li Gu begins with an almost stock description of the etiology of baleful signs:

愚以為天不言，以災異為譴告。政之治亂，主之得失，皆上帝所伺，而應以災祥者也。

In my humble view, Heaven does not speak, but delivers warnings by means of disasters and anomalies. Order and disorder in governance, and the achievements and failures of the ruler, all are observed by the ancestors above, and responses come in the form of disasters and auspicious signs.<sup>202</sup>

Though Li Gu employs a commonplace, it is not perfunctory. Li Gu positions the earthquake as a warning from Heaven. This in turn bolsters his claim that the ennoblement of Song E violates Heaven's will. Coming to the point, Li Gu treads lightly, avoiding at all costs insulting Emperor Shun's childhood favorite. Instead, he turns to the absence of support in the Classics, or any historical precedent, for raising the status of a nurse-maid to that of a noble:

<sup>201</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.511.

<sup>202</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.508.

阿保雖有大功，勤勞之恩，可賜以貨賄，傳之子孫，列土分爵，實非天意。漢興以來，賢君相繼，豈無保乳之養？非不寵貴之。然上畏天威，俯察經典，不可，故不封也。

Your nurse-maid, Song E, certainly has a great deal of merit, and the grace of her diligent labor might be rewarded with goods, but to vest her with heritable property, dividing up land and bestowing upon her a nobility, truly is not Heaven's will. Since the beginning of the Han, worthy rulers have succeeded one after another, and who among them has not been nurtured by a nurse-maid? It is not that they did not favor them and consider them to be noble. Yet, when they looked up they feared Heaven's majesty, and when they looked down and examined Classical texts, they found that it was not permissible, and so, these lords did not enfeoff their nurse-maids.<sup>203</sup>

Li Gu employs technical texts to claim a specific etiological link between the excessive investiture of both rewards and authority in the Emperor's favorites and the appearance of baleful signs:

今封阿母，恩賞太過，常侍近臣，威權太重。臣案圖書，災異之發，亦以為然。

Now, in enfeoffing Nurse-maid E, your favor and reward was excessive, and the majesty and authority of those close ministers who regularly serve you has become too great. I have examined the charts and texts, and found that the occurrence of disasters and anomalies also corroborates that it is so.<sup>204</sup>

Li Gu thus presents an account of the appearance of recent disasters traceable to Emperor Shun's ways of doling out favors that implicitly treats the earthquake of 133 CE as a warning from Heaven, and in that sense, as a celestial sign.

The body plays a crucial and multivalent role in Li Gu's rhetoric. Li uses the body in three distinct ways. First, while he focuses on a very narrow, precise source for the appearance of baleful signs, the body of the Emperor is identified with the whole of the realm, so that earthquakes and eclipses appear in the body of the Emperor himself:

王者父天母地，體具其山川。今日蝕地動，山崩晝晦，主將安立？物將安寄？

The King takes Heaven as his father and Earth as his mother. His body contains their mountains and rivers. Now there are eclipses and earthquakes, mountains crumble, and it grows dark in the light of day. Where can the ruler stand in repose? When can his creatures lodge themselves in repose?<sup>205</sup>

<sup>203</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.509.

<sup>204</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.508.

<sup>205</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.508.

Emperor and empire were of a single body. Second, Li Gu brings home the critical importance of employing forthright (*fang zhi* 方直) ministers and rejecting those who are wayward and glib (*xie ning* 邪佞) using the rhetoric of the body. The word *ti* 體 in its nominal sense refers to the body. Its derivative verbal sense describes a relationship of intimacy. Li Gu states that if His Majesty raises up loyal and good (*zhong shan* 忠善) men then “lord and minister will be on intimate terms with one another, and the relations between he who is above and those below him will flourish” 君臣相體，上下交泰。<sup>206</sup> Close relationships involve bodily proximity.

Li Gu’s third reference to the body comes in the context of an extended analogy between the governance and the dikes along a river:

夫人君之有政，猶水之有隄防，隄防完全，雖遭雨水霖潦，不能為變。政教一立，暫遭凶年，不足為憂。誠令隄防穿漏，萬夫同力，不復能救。政教一壞，賢智馳騫，不能復還。今隄防雖堅，漸有孔穴。

Now, the lord of men has his administration just as a river has its dikes. So long as those dikes maintain complete integrity, then even if the rains come flooding down, nothing can change it. Once governance based on moral suasion has been established, even if a year of famine should suddenly be encountered, it will not be sufficient cause for worry. But if the dikes of the river were truly made to leak, then even ten-thousand men exerting all their strength at once would not be able to repair it. Once governance based on moral suasion breaks down, the worthy and the wise ones flee, and they cannot be made to return again. Now, though the dikes are solid, holes are gradually beginning to appear.<sup>207</sup>

As did Gu Yong above, Li Gu suggests that while baleful signs can still be addressed, a point might come in the future when nothing can be done. Baleful signs are subject to resolution, but their contingency is limited. Action should be taken before the sprouts grow. In Li’s terms, changes must be made before the dike begins to leak, for once the dike has sprung a leak, it will no longer be possible to stem the flood. Once moral suasion is no longer effective and the last capable and loyal men have distanced themselves from the court, good governance is no longer possible. At this point in his memorial, Li shifts from the analogy of the dike, and once again employs the rhetoric of the body:

譬之一人之身，本朝者，心腹也；州郡者，四支也。心腹痛則四支不舉，故臣所憂，在腹心之疾，非四支之患。

Compare this to the body of a man. The central court is the heart and belly, while the provinces and commanderies are the four limbs. When the heart and belly ache in pain the four limbs cannot be lifted. Thus, what ministers worry over lies in the illness of the heart and belly, not in the dangers to the four limbs.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>206</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.508.

<sup>207</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.509.

<sup>208</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.509.

Li Gu's concrete advice in his memorial consists in a single rather minor action, canceling the proposed enfeoffment of Song E. In more general terms, he suggests limiting the power of those immediately around the emperor. By evoking an image in which the central court is the heart and torso of the empire, while the provinces and commanderies are the four limbs, Li Gu reinforces the sense that problems in the central court have powerful rippling effects. Rectifying the central court is the means to bring prosperity and security to the entire empire. Li Gu continues:

臣以為堅隄防，務政教，先安心腹，釐理本朝，雖有寇賊、水旱之變，不足介意也。<sup>209</sup>令隄防壞漏陋，心腹有疾，雖無水旱之災，天下固不可不憂矣。

I believe that to make solid the dikes and work hard at devising civilizing policies, one must first bring repose to the heart and belly, bringing order to the imperial court. Even if there are raiders and bandits, and the aberrations of floods and droughts, they will be no cause for concern. But if the dikes break down and water leaks through the holes, if the heart and torso grow ill, then even if there are no disasters of floods and droughts, it is certain that one cannot help but worry for the world.<sup>210</sup>

Li Gu deftly undermines, in the closing of his memorial, the semiotic value of the signs themselves, be they drought and floods, raiders and bandits, or earthquakes and eclipses. The ultimate security lies in setting the central court to order, making the dikes steadfast, ensuring the health of the heart and torso. Even if baleful signs do not appear, a central court in disorder will lead to calamity. Conversely, a well-ordered central court that practices rule by moral suasion will be equipped to address whatever disasters may arise.

The responses of Zhang Heng, Ma Rong, and Li Gu to the earthquake of 133 CE show that, well into the Eastern Han, no simple, straight-forward system of drawing correspondences between a single type of sign and a single sort of event that it presaged, or that produced it, had emerged. Had such a system emerged, it would have stripped celestial signs of their flexibility and memorialists of a great source of rhetorical power. For all of the effort that had been expended in the compilation of chronicles of signs, such as those at the conclusion of the *Hanshu* "Celestial Patterns" and throughout the "Five Resources" each occurrence of each type of sign remained the unique product of the particular circumstances which had produced it. Memorialists could draw on precedents and principles, authoritative texts and cosmological correspondences, but there were no hard and fast rules for interpreting celestial signs.

Even the boundaries of what constituted a celestial sign were unclear. The category of celestial patterns, well-attested from the mid-Western Han on, concerned primarily astronomical and meteorological phenomena, yet signs that communicated Heaven's will often did not fall into that category. The name given to Zhang Heng's seismograph does indicate that earthquakes were in part understood as meteorological phenomena, yet Ma Rong's memorial equally indicates that

<sup>209</sup> The text presented here follows Yuan Hong 袁宏 (328–376 CE), *Hou Hanji* 後漢紀 (Chronicles of the Later Han): 18.17a in *Siku quanshu*.

<sup>210</sup> *Hou Hanji jiaozhu* 18.509–10.



the precise features of the sign at hand were sometimes less important than the conditions that surrounded it. Ma Rong never explains why excessive severity on the part of local administrators should produce an earthquake, as opposed to a flood, an eclipse, a comet, or a drought. The most powerful sign for Ma Rong is not the earthquake that occurred so far from court, but the palpable suffering of the overtaxed and underfed peasants. Li Gu mentions the earthquake in the same breath as he mentions recent eclipses, seemingly making little distinction between the two kinds of phenomena. While earthquakes are particularly amenable to analogies between the physical terrain of the empire and the body of the emperor, Li Gu in his conclusion suggests that regard for baleful signs is less important than regard for the underlying conditions at court that produce disorder, those conditions that gradually cause holes to develop in the dikes that hold back the flood waters.

### Conclusion

Half a century ago, Wolfram Eberhard argued that Western Han technical experts failed to develop a rational, systematic way of accounting for natural phenomena because of the political role astronomy played in early imperial courts. Born into a family of astrophysicists and astronomers, Eberhard, as a scholar of astronomy in the Han and Three Kingdoms periods,<sup>211</sup> grappled with the question of why the promising technologies of early astronomical measurement in China had not developed into the same sort of astronomical science that would emerge in Europe in the Scientific Revolution. Eberhard implicitly proposed an answer to the question Nathan Sivin explicitly critiqued in his classic 1982 essay, “Why the Scientific Revolution Did Not Take Place in China—or Didn’t It?” In his 2005 revision of the same work, Sivin writes that the question of “why the scientific revolution did not take place in China...becomes a useful question primarily when one locates the fallacies that lead people to ask it.”<sup>212</sup> Eberhard’s understanding of astronomy as a system of natural laws governing the movements of celestial bodies, concerned only with nature and never with culture, lay at the heart of his frustrations with its unfortunate political function in early imperial China. In modern astronomy, celestial bodies move according to regular patterns that are unaffected by ritual, politics, calumny, or war. Celestial signs, however, do not behave in the same way.

Regularity played a role, but as that against which celestial signs were defined. In calendrical treatises, as opposed to the omenological treatises that concern us here, we find a search for regularity, but that regularity is relative rather than absolute. There is always the possibility that planets and stars will not behave as they should, just as there is a possibility that summer frosts might fall, or spring rains might not come. Regularity is not an absolute set of laws into which all phenomena are to be integrated, but a background against which anomalies emerge. Readers of celestial signs did not interpret those signs in isolation, but read them against the conditions of their production. In reading each sign, and making claims regarding its significance, they would read the world. And the world was too complex, too replete with variables, to be reduced to any system of simple taxonomic correspondences, or even the most

<sup>211</sup> Alvin P. Cohen, “In Memoriam: Wolfram Eberhard, 1909–1989,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 49, no. 1 (1990): 125.

<sup>212</sup> Nathan Sivin, “Why the Scientific Revolution Did Not Take Place in China—or Didn’t It?” Revised version, *Selected Writings of Nathan Sivin: Chinese Science and Medicine*, p. 1, accessed June 3, 2015, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~nsivin/writ.html>. The essay first appeared in *Chinese Science* 5 (1982): 45–66.

complex set equations.

Readings of celestial signs changed to some extent over time. Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong, early in the reign of Emperor Wu, expressed greater concern with the absence of auspicious emblems than with the presence of baleful signs. Late in the Western Han, Liu Xiang and Gu Yong cited sign after inauspicious sign in their dire warnings to Emperor Cheng to get his house in order or risk dynastic collapse. Memorials invoking disasters and anomalies became commonplace. The citation of baleful signs, paired with claims regarding how they had come into being and what might be done about them, had become an established practice. Even in the early days of the Eastern Han, Yin Min could use his knowledge of the “Great Plan” to present himself as authority on omens thereby gaining a position at court and General Zhu Fu could cite an eclipse to argue that Emperor Guangwu should cast a broader net in recruiting officials. In the mid-to-late Eastern Han, even as technical experts such as Zhang Heng developed new technologies for precisely identifying celestial signs, including both improvements to the armillary sphere and his seismograph, claims regarding the precise meaning of any sign could only be made with reference to signs in the human world. For Zhang Heng, the earthquake of 133 CE was a sign that officials were being recruited in the wrong way. For Ma Rong, it was a sign that officials were excessively severe in their administration. For Li Gu, it was a sign that Emperor Shun had shown too much largess to his favorites. The trope of etiology allowed memorialists to create chains of amplification detailing the processes through which signs had come into being. The trope of contingency allowed them to claim that if the conditions that produced the signs were removed, so too would be the signs themselves, along with the baleful events they presaged. The signs that most concerned memorialists, however, were not the celestial signs themselves, but the baleful signs in the human world that led to their production.

## Chapter 5

## Celestial Signs, Ritual, and the Performance of Voice

I emerge from the clarity of the Purple Palace, And gather unto me the dazzling brightness of Grand Tenuity.	出紫宮之肅肅兮， 集太微之閭閭。
I command Wang Liang to hold the Whip before the Four Horses, And leap over the heights of the Towering Pavilion.	命王良掌策駟兮， 踰高閣之將將。
I set forth knotty Net Carriage, And hunt among the vast expanse of the Blue Grove.	建罔車之幕幕兮， 獵青林之芒芒。
I bend the tension of the Majestic Bow, And shoot the Great Wolf of Bozhong Mountain.	彎威弧之拔刺兮， 射嶧豕之封狼。
I gaze out over the Ramparts in North Village, Beat out the rat-ta-tat of the River Drum.	觀壁壘於北落兮， 伐河鼓之磅磅。
I ride upon the flowing waters of the Fords of Heaven, And float over the rippling waters of the Cloudy River.	乘天潢之汎汎兮， 浮雲漢之湯湯。

—Zhang Heng, “*Fu* on Contemplating the Mystery”<sup>1</sup>

It is not without reason that Joseph Needham (1900–1995) characterized Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139 CE) as, above all else, a paragon of scientific virtue. In the volume on “Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth” of *Science and Civilization in China*, Needham showed that Zhang Heng produced maps of the stars and astronomical treatises, contributed to the development of quantitative cartography and geometry, built a water-powered motor for the armillary sphere and added horizon and meridian rings to it, and constructed the earliest seismograph that we can identify.<sup>2</sup>

In the epigram to this chapter, a quotation from Zhang Heng’s “Sixuan fu” 思玄賦 (*Fu* on Contemplating the Mystery), we are presented with a journey through the stars that is as

<sup>1</sup> Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531) comp., Li Shan 李善 (630–689) comm., *Wenxuan* 文選 (Refined Selections) vol. 2, (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986): 15.674; cf. Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) comp., Li Xian 李賢 (651–684) comm., *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965): 59.1934. Technical treatises (*zhi* 志) in the *Hou Hanshu* are compiled by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306) with commentary by Liu Shao 劉昭 (fl. ca. 502–ca. 519). , lines 351–62. I have in some instances borrowed from, and benefited a great deal from consulting, the David Knechtges’ translation of this poem, which also serves as a comprehensive commentary on its copious allusions. See David Knechtges trans., “Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery,” in *Wen Xuan*, or *Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1 (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press: 1982–1996): 105–38.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Needham (in collaboration with Wang Ling), “Astronomy” in *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 3 “Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1959): 343; 360–61; 533–38; 626.

technically learned as it is dizzying and fantastical. Zhang Heng's persona moves from one adjacent constellation to the next. Zhang Heng travels from Purple Palace (in Draco, primarily), to Grand Tenuity (in Leo and Virgo), to Wang Liang and Whip (both in Cassiopeia), to Four Horses (in Scorpio), and onward, to star after star, along an efficient and "mappable" path.<sup>3</sup> Needham saw in this "imaginary journey beyond the sun" evidence that "Zhang Heng, the great astronomer, mathematician and engineer"<sup>4</sup> understood the earth to float in infinite space, rather than in a series of nested crystalline spheres. For Needham, this showed that Zhang Heng's understanding of the infinity of space was on the same level as writers in the time of the Copernican Revolution such as Francis Godwin (1562–1633) and Giordano Bruno (1548–1600).<sup>5</sup> The value of Zhang Heng's *fu* issues from the voice in which Needham hears it performed, the voice of the astronomer.

More recently, in his dissertation chapter "The 'Si xuan fu': Mixing Astronomy and Poetry,"<sup>6</sup> Yeong-chung E. Lien has argued that Zhang Heng isolated astral imagery in the poem, separating the mythic imaginary world of far off places in the terrestrial realm from the real world of the stars, by evoking them in two distinct legs of his journey. "The former," Lien writes, "is an imaginary trip through imaginary places while the latter is an imaginary excursion through real places."<sup>7</sup> Lien shows that Zhang Heng writes in a poetic tradition that includes Qu Yuan's 屈原 (ca. 347–ca. 277 BCE) "Li sao" 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow) and "Yuan you" 遠遊 (Far Roaming),<sup>8</sup> and Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE) "Da ren fu" 大人賦 (*Fu* on the Great Man), but argues that, prior to Zhang Heng, this tradition privileged the imaginary over the real and the act of leaving the world behind rather than staying in it. Lien shows a much greater sensitivity to the literary context of Zhang Heng's *fu*,<sup>9</sup> but, like Needham before him,

<sup>3</sup> Yeong-Chung E. Lien, "Zhang Heng, Eastern Han Polymath, His Life and Works" (Phd Diss, University of Washington, 2011): 234–35, UMI (3452743). In addition to pointing out that Zhang Heng moves along a mappable and relatively direct path, Lien also provides coordinates for the constellations along Zhang Heng's journey and maps. For my own maps, see the appendix to this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Needham 440, note d.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Godwin wrote a fictional account of a voyage to the moon in *The Man in the Moone; or, A Discourse on a Voyage Thither, by Domingo Gonsales, the Speedy Messenger* (1638). Giordano Bruno wrote the philosophical tract *De Infinito Universo* (1584). See Needham 440.

<sup>6</sup> Lien 194–246.

<sup>7</sup> Lien 230.

<sup>8</sup> While the authorship of each of these pieces is disputed, "Encountering Sorrow" was attributed to Qu Yuan no later than the time of Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE), and "Far Roaming" was attributed to him no later than the time of Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. 89–158). See Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959): 84.2482, and Hong Xingzu 洪興祖 (1090–1155) and Wang Yi's 王逸 (fl. 89–158), *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (A Supplementary Commentary to the Lyrics of Chu; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983): 5.163. In addition to Hong Xingzu and Wang Yi's commentaries to the *Chuci buzhu*, I have consulted and in some instances borrowed from Aoki Masaru 青木正兒 (1887–1964), *Shin'yaku Soji* 新譯楚辭 (A New Translation of the Lyrics of Chu), in *Aoki Masaru zenshū* 青木正兒全集 (Collected Works of Aoki Masaru), vol. 4 (Tokyo: Shunjū, 1969–75) [hereafter as Aoki, *Soji*]; Arthur Waley, *The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955); and David Hawkes ed. and trans, *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South* (Boston: Beacon, 1962).

<sup>9</sup> The *fu* is a poetic genre sometimes likened to the rhapsody or prose-poetry, because it mixed prose sections with metered verse. *Fu* tended to favor ebullient language, and frequently featured descriptive chains composed of

hears Zhang Heng speaking in the voice of the astronomer. Yet Lien also draws our attention to the decidedly ethical overtones that voice possessed,<sup>10</sup> as it advocated active participation in the affairs of the world (*ru shi* 入世), rather than leaving it all behind and going into reclusion (*chu shi* 出世). Lien treats Zhang Heng's journey through the stars as the triumph of realism over myth, accurate perception over fantasy, and the dutifulness of the Confucian official over the escapist yearnings of the Daoist wanderer.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter begins and ends with the example of Zhang Heng because modern readings of the “Contemplating” are particularly illustrative of the impact that the performance of voice has on how we interpret texts. Both Needham and Lien display an abiding concern with science, and the way in which they describe Zhang Heng's voice reflects that concern. Zhang Heng speaks in the voice of the astronomer. Needham recognizes Zhang Heng as a visionary for imagining a celestial journey beyond the sun, rather than for repudiating an escapist literary genre. Lien hears Zhang Heng's call to “enter the world,” yet hears that ethical stance issuing primarily from his ability to distinguish reality from myth rather than from his classicism.

Once we have decided, consciously or unconsciously, to hear a particular work in a particular kind of authorial voice, every aspect of that work is colored by it. We emphasize and remember the passages that best exemplify that voice, even as we ignore or forget those that do not. In reading a text, we both identify a voice and perform it, bringing something of ourselves and our own concerns to that voice. Readers in Han times heard their own frustrations with treacherous court politics expressed in the voice of the loyal but misunderstood minister Qu Yuan of the fallen kingdom of Chu 楚 because they shared his concerns, as modern readers might hear Zhang Heng as a scientific objectivist because we ourselves are concerned with science.

Just as the performance of voice enters into the act of silent reading, it is a central problem in enacting ritual and in the composition of imitative poetry. Ritual performers play roles. Some act as ideal supplicants, enacting the voices of those who would perfectly serve and perfectly sacrifice to the deities whom they venerate. Others play the roles of the deities themselves, mimicking their voices. The voices of both the supplicant and the deity can be, and often are, imitated, thereby producing hybrid forms. We encounter frustrated ministers who adopt aspects of the voice of the deity and the voice of the supplicant, rulers who speak as gods, and rulers who speak as supplicants.

Our central concern here is two-fold: First, how does the performance of these various

---

alliterative and rhyming binomes. In Han times, *fu* were generally quite lengthy, regularly running four-hundred lines or more.

<sup>10</sup> In their study of modes of scientific observation and the representation of phenomena in a scientific context from the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the present in the Euro-American context, Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison argue that notions of objectivity have consistently maintained strong ethical valences. For this reason, they refer to various modes of scientific seeing and representation as *epistemic virtues*. See Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2007): *passim*, esp. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Lien heuristically employs the term Daoist in comparisons between the “Contemplating the Mystery” and the “Far Roaming” 遠遊 (Far-Roaming) attributed to Qu Yuan (not to be confused with Liu Xiang's *sao* style poem of the same title). In a stricter sense, religious Daoism would not develop until the late Eastern Han (25–220 CE). “Far Roaming” does indeed feature encounters with immortals such as Wang Qiao 王喬 and Red Pine (Chi Song 赤松) who would later become prominent Daoist figures, as well as an abiding concern with becoming an immortal (*deng xian* 登仙). See *Chuci buzhu* 5.164–67.

voices shape the meanings of the celestial signs they employ? Second, how do celestial signs allow for these voices to emerge? From these two fundamental questions, more specific areas of inquiry arise: How do the movements of celestial bodies in the heavens, such as the movement of the stars around the pole or the sun across the sky, create possibilities for poetic composition? How does the celestial journey, rooted in the Sun God's journey from dawn until dusk, acquire new valences as it is appropriated by political leaders and frustrated officials? To what extent are the auspicious or inauspicious meanings of various celestial signs stable, even as they are articulated in different types of voices?

Signs derive their meaning relative to other signs, according to the contexts in which they appear. And there are many different kinds of contexts. In Chapter 2, we saw that signs derived part of their meanings from when they appeared in time and space; violent winds in third month meant houses would be destroyed, but the same sign in the sixth month meant there would be war in spring.<sup>12</sup> Mars in retrograde motion boded ill-fortune, but only for the specific region corresponding to the celestial field in which the Dazzling Deluder was currently located. In Chapters 3 and 4, we saw that celestial signs suggested very different courses of action depending on the sort of etiologies within which they were positioned. To say what a given sign meant was less a process of identifying the events the sign predicted, than a process of identifying the events that had produced it. As we turn toward celestial signs in liturgy and poetry in this chapter, we will see that the meaning of celestial signs is likewise contingent upon the voices that invoke them. The same celestial signs mean different things if we hear them invoked by a deity as opposed to a supplicant, a ruler as opposed to a frustrated official, or a secular modern astronomer as opposed to an ancient classicist statesman.

In the first part of this chapter, we will examine the legacy of the pre-imperial *Chuci* 楚辭 (Lyrics of Chu) that served as a primary model for Han liturgists and poets. We find within that legacy a multitude of voices. The voices of the supplicant and the deity intermingle in the “Jiu ge” 九歌 (Nine Songs), sometimes engaging in extended dialogue, as gods describe their journeys through the heavens, and mediums call on them to descend to and linger in the human realm. The celestial journey in “Encountering Sorrow,” read in the voice of Qu Yuan, became a model for latter day frustrated ministers. The second part of the chapter turns to the poetry of the court of the mid-Western Han ruler, Emperor Wu 武 (r. 140–87 BCE). In the poetry of his reign, the Emperor was made to speak in multiple voices. In Sima Xiangru's “*Fu* on the Great Man,” he spoke as a god who dominated the heavens themselves. In his court liturgy, the “Jiaosi ge” 郊祀歌 (Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices), however, Emperor Wu spoke as an ideal supplicant, whose prayers never went unheard. The third and final part of the chapter turns to three articulations of the voice of the frustrated minister in Han times. In Liu Xiang's 劉向 (79–8 BCE) “Yuan shi” 遠逝 (Vanishing into the Distance), the frustrated minister journeys to the stars, pleading for them to recognize his true disposition and grant him justice, a goal which proves as elusive in the heavens as it is on Earth. Similarly, Wang Yi's 王逸 (fl. 89–158) “Shou zhi” 守志

<sup>12</sup> “Riyue fengyu yunqi zhan” 日月風雨雲氣占 (Prognostications on the Sun and Moon, Wind and Rain, and Clouds of Qi), in Liu Lexian 劉樂賢, *Mawangdui tianwen shu kaoshi* 馬王堆天文書考釋 (An Examination and Interpretation of the Mawangdui Texts on Celestial Pattern; Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2004): 188, lines 48–49.

(Holding Fast to My Will), blurs the boundary between celestial journey and textual journey, ultimately calling on rulers to heed the written memorials of learned officials as well as their readings of the movements of the planets and stars. Finally, we return to Zhang Heng, who in his “Contemplating the Mystery” dismisses the value of the celestial journey, in favor of the journey through Classical texts.

## Part I: The Pre-Imperial Legacy

### The Suppliant and the Deity in the “Nine Songs”

The voice of the suppliant is the primary voice we hear when reading texts presented as liturgical repertoires, such as the “Nine Songs,” and, as we will see in the next part of this chapter, the voice of the ruler is articulated as the voice of the suppliant in Emperor Wu’s liturgical repertoire. We hear supplicants as they describe the rituals of purification they undertake, how they gather up the materials to be used as offerings, how they set forth sacrificial vessels, the music they play and the dances they perform when they are visited by deities. Liturgical texts at the same time indicate the desired ends of the rituals that are performed. The ends of a given ritual range from ensuring the regular progress of the seasons of the year to summoning deities and making them merry. The first of the “Nine Songs,” “Donghuang Taiyi” 東皇太一 (The Supreme Unity, Light of the East) describes a sumptuous and ostensibly successful ritual to a bright northerly star:<sup>13</sup>

On an auspicious day and under a fine star, <sup>14</sup>	吉日兮辰良，	1
Let our reverence gladden the Lord on High.	穆將愉兮上皇。	2
We brandish our long swords by their jade hilts,	撫長劍兮玉珥，	3
How they chime and ring!	璆鏘鳴兮琳琅。	4
From turquoise mats held fast by jade weights,	瑤席兮玉璫，	5
In our wares <sup>15</sup> we present our offering’s jasper scent:	盍將把兮瓊芳。	6
We offer meats steamed <sup>16</sup> in melilotus	蕙肴蒸兮蘭藉，	7

<sup>13</sup> Supreme Unity corresponds to 8 Draconis.

<sup>14</sup> In what is most likely an anachronistic imposition of Han ritual cycles onto the Chu verse, Wang Yi ties *ri* and *chen* to specific dates in the sexagenary cycle, claiming that *ri* refers to *jia* 甲 and *yi* 乙 days, and that *chen* refers to *yin* 寅 and *mao* 卯 days (*Chuci buzhu* 2.55). *Jia* and *yi* are the first two of the Ten Heavenly Stems, and *yin* and *mao* are the third and fourth of the Twelve Earthly Branches. They coincide on the *jiayin* 甲寅 and *yimao* 乙卯 days, the 51<sup>st</sup> and 52<sup>nd</sup> days of the sexagenary cycle. Wang Yi perhaps is suggesting that it was on these two days when the ritual might be performed.

<sup>15</sup> I have not adopted Wang Yi’s reading of *he* 盍 as the contraction form of *he bu* 盍不 or “why not” (*Chuci buzhu* 2.56). Following Wang Yi, the line might be rendered “Why not present the turquoise scent of our offerings?” Waley follows Wang Yi’s reading, rendering the line “Why not now take the perfumed spray?” (*Nine Songs*, 23). Hawkes reads the line more loosely, “Now take up the rich and fragrant flower-offerings” (36).

<sup>16</sup> I understand *zheng* 蒸 as a verb meaning “to steam” and add the phrase “We offer” for clarity. Jiang Ji 蔣驥 (fl. 1713–1727), in contrast, understands *zheng* as the verb *jin* 進, meaning offer in this context. See his *Shandai gezhu Chuci* 山帶閣註楚辭 (Cloudy Peak Studio Commentary to the Lyrics of Chu; Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1971): 2.2a.

upon woven orchids, And pour libations of cinnamon wine and peppered liqueur.	奠桂酒兮椒漿。	8
We raise our batons and beat our drums, In the distance, they slacken their pace, as we sing in repose,	揚枹兮拊鼓， 疏緩節兮安歌，	9 10
The woodwind and zither players in their ranks, the music surges and swells.	陳竽瑟兮浩倡。	11
Let the Holy Ones dance in their enchanted raiment, <sup>17</sup> As fragrances so sweet fill the hall.	靈偃蹇兮姣服， 芳菲菲兮滿堂。	12 13
The Five Tones flourish in abundant accord, Let the Lord be gladdened with joy and peace. <sup>18</sup>	五音紛兮繁會， 君欣欣兮樂康。	14 15

It is difficult, of course, to make any firm statements regarding how this song might have been used in the actual performance of a ritual, for rituals like texts themselves may subtly shift in important ways over time and space. The received text nonetheless provides us with abundant clues. Imagining the song in the voices of the supplicants who performed it, we hear those voices describing features of the ritual itself. The first two lines announce their selection of an appropriate time to perform the ritual, and a statement of the purpose of the ritual. The song reads as if it were blocking for a feast of the senses. The supplicants enjoin the Supreme Unity to descend, enjoining the deities with the sounds of swords, beating drums, songs of repose, and surging woodwind and string music. Their ritual produces fine fragrances (lines 6 and 13), inviting deities to dine on rare and pleasant delicacies and to taste richly spiced wines (lines 6–8). The performance intensifies as music and dance crescendo in lines 9–12. Lines 13–14 describe the ritual as it is performed to perfection, so that all of the scents permeate the hall and the music is redolent and harmonious. The final line of the song returns to its basic stated purpose, bringing joy to the god. And while in English we must choose to render the line in a given mode, the performance of the ritual transforms the sense of the line from optative to indicative, from an expression of desire to gladden the god, to a statement celebrating the fact that the god *is* or *has been* gladdened.

Like the Western Han “Suburban Sacrifices,” “Supreme Unity” betrays no sense that ritual might fail. Many of the “Nine Songs,” by contrast, evince a strong anxiety that however carefully we conduct our rituals, the gods might not come. When they do come, their stay might be all too brief. Songs of frustrated ritual, in which a deity pays no heed to the dedication of a supplicant or medium, form the basis for the voice of the frustrated official in the “Encountering Sorrow,” and the Han *Chuci* tradition. In “Yun zhong jun” 雲中君 (Lord among the Clouds), as soon as the deity descends, he vanishes in a whirlwind, leaving the supplicant with “a wearied

<sup>17</sup> While classical Chinese syntax does not formally distinguish between indicative and optative modes—the former mode consisting in language that describes things as they are, and the latter consisting in language that evokes wishes or desires—lines that express a desired response on the part of the deity are marked with the optative *let* in translation of lines 2, 12, and 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.55–57.



heart” (*lao xin* 勞心) and longing for the god’s presence.<sup>19</sup> The supplicant of “Xiangjun” 湘君 (Lord of the Xiang River) weeps and sighs while searching in vain for a deity that never descends at all, tossing his or her<sup>20</sup> ring and pendant into the river waters, in an act that seems to anticipate the trope of Qu Yuan’s suicide by drowning.<sup>21</sup> A similar trope also occurs in “Xiang furen” 湘夫人 (Lady of the Xiang River) when the supplicant drapes his or her sleeve into the Yangzi 江, and leaves behind a shirt on the bank of the River Li 醴.<sup>22</sup>

Supplicants in the “Nine Songs” bemoan separation from the gods whom they seek. Amidst thunder, dark falling rain, and wind, the supplicant in “Shangui” 山鬼 (Goddess of the Mountain) complains in the final line: “I long for you,<sup>23</sup> but all I encounter<sup>24</sup> is pain” 思公子兮徒離憂.<sup>25</sup> The opening lines of “Lady of the Xiang River” present a god who descends before the supplicant, but is hazy and indistinct:

The High God’s daughter descends to the northern sandbar,	帝子降兮北渚，	1
But the far off look in her eyes brings me to sorrow. <sup>26</sup>	目眇眇兮愁予。	2

There is a quasi-romantic quality to encounters and separations between gods and supplicants. In what would become one of the most often repeated lines in later poetic tradition, the supplicant in “Shao Siming” 少司命 (The Lesser Master of Fate) declaims:

You came without a word and left without saying farewell,	入不言兮出不辭，	11
--	----------	----

<sup>19</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.59.

<sup>20</sup> As there were both male and female mediums and ritual performers in early China it is difficult to assume the gender of the supplicant. Gopal Sukhu, in a study of the gender of the protagonist in “Encountering Sorrow,” which might equally be applied to the genders of the mediums who perform the “Nine Songs,” argues that the gender shifts between male and female. See his “The Intergendered Shama of the *Li Sao*,” in *The Shaman and the Heresiarch: A New Interpretation of the Li Sao* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013): 71–85, esp. 79.

<sup>21</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.61–3.

<sup>22</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.68.

<sup>23</sup> My interpretation of *gongzi* 公子 here as the supplicated deity runs counter to the traditional interpretations of both Wang Yi and the Five Ministers (*Wu chen* 五臣) commentaries, which posit that *gongzi* refers to Zijiao 子椒, who slandered Qu Yuan at the Chu court (*Chuci buzhu* 2.81–82). David Hawkes’ understanding of the basic sense of the *gongzi*, which he renders “my lady,” seems to agree with my own (43). Waley renders the line, “My love of my Lord has brought me only sorrow” (*Nine Songs*, 54).

<sup>24</sup> I follow Wang Yi’s gloss of *li* 離 as *li* 罹, meaning “to meet with” or “suffer from” (*Chuci buzhu* 2.81). Waley seems to understand *li* in a similar sense and translates the line: “My love of my Lord has brought me only sorrow” (*Nine Songs*, 54). Hawkes, however, appears to read both *li* and *you* 憂 in the sense of sorrow: “I think of my lady and stand alone in sadness” (43).

<sup>25</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.81.

<sup>26</sup> I follow the interpretation of the Song commentator Hong Xingzu rather than Wang Yi. Hong Xingzu explains: “‘Indistinct’ is descriptive of subtlety. It means that when the spirit descends, [the persona] looks on but does not see her, and that this causes him to feel sorrow” 眇眇，微貌也。言神之降，望而不見，使我愁也 (*Chuci buzhu* 2.64).

Riding on a whirlwind and raising your cloudy banner.	乘回風兮載雲旗。	12
There is no sorrow greater than parting in life,	悲莫悲兮生別離，	13
And no joy greater than newly coming to know and be known [by a lover or intimate friend]. <sup>27</sup>	樂莫樂兮新相知。	14

The voice of the supplicant in the “Nine Songs” is by and large a frustrated voice, a seeker of elusive deities who appear not at all, or who vanish in a flurry of wind almost immediately. It is this frustrated aspect of the voice that would undergird the Han tradition of celestial journey poetry—a poetry of protest by men claiming to have been passed over, slandered, or rejected by fickle or unreliable rulers.

In “Da Siming” 大司命 (Greater Master of Fate) two voices emerge, that of the deity and that of a supplicant. According to Wang Yi’s largely allegorical work of textual exegesis, the voice of the supplicant belonged to Qu Yuan, and the voice of the deity, to King Huai 懷 of Chu (r. 328–299 BCE). Aoki Masaru 青木正兒 (1887–1964) saw the piece as a dialogue between two mediums, one representing the deity, and the other, the supplicant.<sup>28</sup> Republican-era scholar and poet Wen Yiduo’s 聞一多 (1899–1946) imaginative, anthropological reconstruction of a ritual performance of the song employs a larger cast: a Greater Master of Fate, several beautiful people (i.e. supplicants) who entice the god, and a pair of gate keepers.<sup>29</sup> While there is no direct evidence for the particulars of Wen Yiduo’s reconstruction and there were likely many variants in how the ritual was actually performed, it is nonetheless very useful for imagining “Greater Master of Fate” as liturgical song rather than as text on a page.

The scene opens, in Wen’s reconstruction of “Greater Master of Fate,” with the procession of the Greater Master of Fate behind the gates of the palace, preferably on a foggy day. A horn blows. The gatekeepers swing open the gate, and the Greater Master of Fate sings:

Swing wide the Gate of Heaven,	廣開今天門，	1
In a flurry I mount the black clouds.	紛吾乘兮玄雲。	2
And command Whirlwind to go before me,	令飄風兮先驅，	3
And make Torrential Rain <sup>30</sup> sprinkle the dust. <sup>31</sup>	使涑雨兮灑塵。	4

<sup>27</sup> Waley renders the phrase *xin xiang zhi* 新相知 as “making new friends” (*Nine Songs*, 41) and Hawkes follows suit in rendering it as “making new friendships” (41). I follow Wang Yi in understanding *xiang zhi* as referring explicitly to lovers. He writes: “It means that of all the joys in the world, there is none so great than when women and men first come to know one another. Qu Yuan speaks of himself not having the joy of newly coming to know [King Huai/a lover], but only having the sorrow of parting in life” 言天下之樂，莫大於男女始相知之時也。屈原言己無新相知之樂，而有生別離之憂也 (*Chuci buzhu* 2.72). While Wang Yi reads these lines within the allegorical context of Qu Yuan’s relationship to King Huai, in the ritual context they confirm the quasi-erotic nature of the union between the medium and the god.

<sup>28</sup> Aoki Masaru, “Soji Kyūka no bukyokuteki kekkō” 楚辭九歌の舞曲的結構 (The Structure of the Dance Performances in the Nine Songs of the Lyrics of Chu), *Shinagaku* 支那學 (Sinology), no. 7 (1934): 1–23.

<sup>29</sup> Wen Yiduo, “Jiu ge’ gu ge wuju xuanjie” 「九歌」古歌舞據懸解 (A Conjectural Interpretation of the “Nine Songs” as an Ancient Song and Dance Libretto) in *Wen Yiduo quan ji* 聞一多全集 (Collected Works of Wen Yiduo): 305–34, in Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898–1948) *Minguo congshu* 民國叢書 (Collectanea of Works of the Republican-era), vol. 90 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991).

Wen Yiduo imagines a ritual iteration of the god's descent from the heavens. Through the act of performance, the terrestrial procession is ritually transformed into a celestial descent. His interpretation proves compatible with that of Wang Yi, who glosses the first-person pronoun in the second line as referring to the Greater Master of Fate. In the lines that follow, the voice shifts, however, either to Qu Yuan in Wang Yi's view, or to the beautiful supplicant (*meiren* 美人), as Wen Yiduo presents the ritual:

My Lord spirals and soars as he descends,	君迴翔兮以下，	5
I leap over Hollow Mulberry <sup>32</sup> and follow you. <sup>33</sup>	踰空桑兮從女。	6

Wang Yi posits that in the next couplet the voice shifts to the Master of Fate:<sup>34</sup>

Variegated and many are the Nine Lands,	紛總總兮九州，	7
How could long life and early death lie in my hands? <sup>35</sup>	何壽夭兮在予！	8

The next six lines crescendo, in Wen Yiduo's reading, as the music grows more intense and the dancing more frenzied. Wang Yi does not clearly indicate the voicing of lines 9–10, but identifies the first-person pronoun in line 11 as Qu Yuan. We might tentatively understand lines 9–10 as a continuation of the supplicant's ascent that begins in line 6 and culminates in a union between the supplicant and the deity in line 15.

High I fly and soar in repose,	高飛兮安翔，	9
Mounting clear vapors, driving <i>yin</i> and <i>yang</i> .	乘清氣兮御陰陽。	10
You and I purify ourselves and rush,	吾與君兮齋速，	11
To lead the god through the Nine Mountains' Ridges.	導帝之兮九坑。	12
Our holy robes are long and flowing,	靈衣兮被被，	13
As jade pendants ring and chime. <sup>36</sup>	玉佩兮陸離。	14

Wen Yiduo's libretto suggests that the following couplet is a moment of union. The lines are repeated three times, first by the supplicant, then by the Greater Master of Fate and the supplicant, and finally by all those present at the ritual:

A single <i>yin</i> and a single <i>yang</i> ,	壹陰兮壹陽，	15
--	--------	----

<sup>30</sup> Wang Yi reads Whirlwind and Torrential Rain as referring to the deities Earl of the Wind (Fengbo 風伯) and the Legions of Rain (Yushi 雨師; *Chuci buzhu* 2.68).

<sup>31</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.68.

<sup>32</sup> According to Wang Yi, Hollow Mulberry is the name of a mountain (*Chuci buzhu* 2.69).

<sup>33</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.69.

<sup>34</sup> In Wen Yiduo's libretto, the lines are sung by the supplicant.

<sup>35</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.69.

<sup>36</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.69–70.

None among the masses understand what I do.<sup>37</sup>

眾莫知兮余所為。 16

While Wang Yi glosses the first-person pronoun in line 16 as referring to Qu Yuan, Wen Yiduo's libretto exploits the ambiguity of the reference. In its performative context, the subject in whose voice the line is uttered might equally be the god and the medium who achieves union with the god. The supplicant and the deity, in the fully realized ritual, become inseparable and indistinguishable. If the deity descends to the human realm, the human medium ritually becomes a god. But as soon as the ritual is fulfilled, deeply felt separation and longing displace the ecstasy of union. The supplicant seeks the evanescent deity once again.<sup>38</sup>

I break off the turquoise bud from the spirit blossom, <sup>39</sup>	折疏麻兮瑤華，	17
To leave at his abandoned abode.	將以遺兮離居。	18
Old age comes on gradually, and I am at the end of the road;	老冉冉兮既極，	19
Not to grow closer is to grow farther away.	不淺近兮愈疏。	20
Mounted upon his team of dragons, the wheels of his carriage resound,	乘龍兮鱗鱗，	21
As he gallops high—straight to the sky.	高駝兮冲天。	22
I braid the cinnamon twigs and linger;	結桂枝兮延佇，	23
My longing only grows, how it brings me to sorrow!	羌愈思兮愁人。	24
But what can a person in sorrow do?	愁人兮奈何，	25
I only wish I could remain as I am and not fade away.	願若今兮無虧。	26
It is true that people meet with their fates,	固人命兮有當，	27
Who can do a thing about coming together and going separate ways? <sup>40</sup>	孰離合兮可為？	28

By the mid-Western Han, the Greater Master of Fate was, like Supreme Unity, identified with a star.<sup>41</sup> He descends to the terrestrial realm, however, mounted upon a carriage of clouds,

<sup>37</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.70.

<sup>38</sup> I am in agreement with Hong Xingzu's claim that from this point forward the poem should be read in the voice of the supplicant (though I do not, unlike the Song commentator, identify the supplicant exclusively as Qu Yuan) (*Chuci buzhu* 2.70). I do not follow Wen Yiduo's view that lines 19–20 should be read in the voice of the deity.

<sup>39</sup> I follow Wang Yi's gloss of *shu* 疏 as *shen* 神 (spirit).

<sup>40</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.701. Both Waley and Hawkes offer more elegant but less strict renderings of the line. Waley has "From meetings and partings none can ever escape" (*Nine Songs*, 38), while Hawkes has "Its meetings and partings not his to arrange" (40).

<sup>41</sup> "Siming" 司命 or "Master of Fate" appears to have referred to different stars in different texts, however. According to Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, whose work is based on the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 (Prognostication Classic of the Kaiyuan Reign [713–41]), the constellation "Siming" consists in two stars north of the lodge Barrens (*xu* 虛) in Aquarius (*The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society* [Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1997]: 169–70). I suspect that the two stars might respectively be paired with "Greater Master of Fate" and "Lesser Master of Fate." Both the "Treatise on the Celestial Offices"

with the rain and wind gods going before him to announce his imminent arrival. The journey of the medium mirrors that of the deity to some extent, moving from the earth toward the heavens, rather than from the heavens toward the earth. Yet the vehicle of the medium is more rarefied, consisting in clear *qi* and the dual forces of *yin* and *yang*; it does not quite possess the overwhelming visible, tactile presence<sup>42</sup> of the celestial signs that make up the procession of the deity. The driver of the procession in lines 21–22 is left ambiguous; in contrast to the rendering above, we might well imagine the supplicant mounted upon dragons in pursuit of the deity after an all-too-brief tryst. Yet the overall force of lines 17–28 is that reunion does not and cannot occur. The supplicant is left far behind, aging quickly, and steeped in irresolvable sorrow. Terrestrial processes of ritual preparation, feeding on spirit blossoms and the braiding together of cinnamon twigs, cannot overcome the distance between the heavens and the earth.

While “Greater Master of Fate” presents a sort of cascade in which the medium and the god engage in dialogue, call out to one another, and at times speak in unison, so it is difficult or impossible to distinguish their voices, we can divide “Dong jun” 東君 (Lord of the East) into three sections in which the respective voices of the supplicant and the deity are relatively clear. Yet for Wang Yi, the voice of the deity bleeds into the voice of the ruler in the song, not because the song is ambiguous, but because the two voices are essentially one.

The deity, whom Wang Yi later calls the Sun God or *Ri shen* 日神,<sup>43</sup> describes his rise in the morning, ritually enacting the dawn, in the opening of “Lord of the East”:

At dawn I am on the verge of rising in the east,	暉將出兮東方，	1
Shining forth from my balustrade—the Fusang tree.	照吾檻兮扶桑。	2
I pat my steed as he trots steadily forward,	撫余馬兮安驅，	3
The night glows white and the sky brightens.	夜皎皎兮既明。	4
I drive the dragon boat and mount thunder,	駕龍輶兮乘雷，	5
Raising the cloud banners that winnow and wind.	載雲旗兮委蛇。	6
Long I sigh, and as I am about to further ascend,	長太息兮將上，	7
My heart circles low and I gaze back on my old abode. <sup>44</sup>	心低徊兮顧懷。	8

(Tianguan shu 天官書) and the “Treatise on Celestial Patterns” (Tianwen zhi 天文志) however, identify “Siming” as “the fourth star...in the constellation Wenchang Palace” 文昌宮……四曰司命. See *Shiji* 27.1293 and Ban Gu 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) comp., Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) comm., *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962): 26.1275. *Wenchang* is a group of six stars in Ursa Major. While the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* dates to the Tang, Sun and Kistemaker, using a Fourier Analysis, have shown that the observations it contains date to the Western Han (53–65), which suggests that “Siming” may have also referred to the constellation of two stars in Han times.

<sup>42</sup> Vision to some extent encompasses both seeing and touch. For a discussion of the visible and the tactile in early China with extensive comparisons to the case of classical Greece, see Michael Nylan, “Beliefs about Seeing: Optics and Moral Technologies in Early China,” *Asia Major* 21, no. 1 (2008): 89–132, esp. 99, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Wang Yi elliptically identifies the first-person pronoun in line 2 as the sun (*ri* 日), but in his comment on line 18 he refers to the deity as *Ri shen* (*Chuci buzhu* 2.75). The sun and the Sun God appear to be identical within the context of the ritual.

<sup>44</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.74.

As is that of the Greater Master of Fate, the Sun God's procession is largely composed of celestial signs. His cloud banners fly in the wind as he drives forth the thunder itself. Yet there are multiple levels, the more mundane of which might be traces of the ritual performance on the plane of ordinary reality. The deity's descent on the clouds might have been actualized by a performer mounting a horse. On the plain of ritual reality, the horse is thunder, and the banners of the procession do not simply represent clouds, but are clouds. The image of the horse and rider would, however, become a fundamental trope in songs that presented voices of frustrated officials who found themselves exiled from court, as we shall see in our discussion of "Encountering Sorrow" and Zhang Heng's "Contemplating." Here, where the Sun God himself looks back with longing upon his old abode, he seems to recall the dawn, and will finally return to his place of origin with the completion of the song and of the ritual.

In the second section of the song, we hear the voices of the supplicants who perform the ritual rather than that of the deity. They praise the Sun God, describe the music they perform for him, and express their desire for the consummation of the successful ritual with the ascent of the medium and the descent of the holy retinue of the deity:

How the sight and sound of him gladdens us!	羌聲色兮娛人，	9
Those who behold him are succored and forget to return! <sup>45</sup>	觀者愴兮忘歸。	10
Play the zithers, beat the drums,	緬瑟兮交鼓，	11
Sound the flutes and the bells <sup>46</sup> hanging from their turquoise stands,	簫鍾兮瑤虞，	12
Let the fifes ring out; blow the woodwinds,	鳴簾兮吹竽，	13
Let us seek the Holy Vessel <sup>47</sup> so worthy and lovely.	思靈保兮賢媯。	14
Let her take flight and rise upon kingfisher wings,	翾飛兮翠曾，	15
As our songs unfold, along with the dance.	展詩兮會舞。	16
Responding in key, keeping the rhythm,	應律兮合節，	17
Let the descent of the Holy Ones block out the sun. <sup>48</sup>	靈之來兮蔽日。	18

As in "Greater Master of Fate," musical performance crescendos, culminating in the arrival of the god. The descent of the Holy Ones may be understood in optative mode, as the purpose of the ritual, but once it occurs, its sense becomes indicative: the Lord of the East and the members of his entourage *have descended* and *have blocked out* the sun.<sup>49</sup> However, in contrast to the case

<sup>45</sup> I follow Wang Yi's gloss of *dan* 愴 as *an* 安 (put at ease; *Chuci buzhu* 2.74).

<sup>46</sup> Hong Xingzu suggests that this may refer to a type of music in which flutes and bells play a prominent role (*Chuci buzhu* 2.75).

<sup>47</sup> Wang Yi specifies the medium as the referent of *Lingbao*, rendered above as Holy Vessel. In the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, *Lingbao* would become the name of a major branch of religious Daoism. I follow Wang Yi's interpretation of the verb *si* 思 and *si de* 思得, literally "desire to obtain" (*Chuci buzhu* 2.75). Hawkes renders *si* as "see" (42) while Waley elides it entirely, apparently interpreting it as a tone word (*Nine Songs*, 45).

<sup>48</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.74–75.

<sup>49</sup> In contrast to later tradition, the clouds here do not have a negative valence; they are not allegorical symbols for

of “Greater Master of Fate,” the final portion of the song is in the voice of the deity rather than that of the supplicant. The Lord of the East displays spectacular power over the very stars in his journey home:

In robes of black <sup>50</sup> cloud and trousers of brilliant rainbow,	青雲衣兮白霓裳，	19
I notch the Long Arrow and shoot the Wolf of Heaven.	舉長矢兮射天狼。	20
My bow in hand I sink down once again, <sup>51</sup>	操余弧兮反淪降，	21
And lift the Northern Dipper to ladle out cinnamon liqueur.	援北斗兮酌桂漿。	22
I take my reins, galloping and soaring to the heights,	撰余轡兮高駝翔，	23
And in the depths of darkness make my journey east. <sup>52</sup>	杳冥冥兮以東行。	24

The final section of the song is, for Wang Yi, a model of how the ideal ruler acts. First-person pronouns in lines 21 and 23 underscore the sense that the deity himself is speaking. Clothed in clouds and rainbows, the deity proclaims that he grasps the Long Arrow<sup>53</sup> and slays the Wolf of Heaven, the brightest star in the sky, Sirius. It is in this act of violence that Wang Yi shifts to reading the deity as the ruler. Wang’s exegesis suggests that the ruler should take action against malevolent forces in his realm:

日為王者，王者受命，必誅貪殘，故曰舉長矢，射天狼，言君當誅惡也。

The Sun is the king. The king has received a charge, and therefore must punish those who are greedy and cruel. Thus, he “notches the Long Arrow and shoots the Wolf of Heaven.” This means that the lord ought to punish those who are repugnant.<sup>54</sup>

Yet upon completion of his martial errand, the Sun sinks below the horizon. In his comment on

---

officials who obscure the light or virtue of the ruler. Rather, the appearance of the mass of clouds comes with the presence of the god and his retinue. Wang Yi says of line 18: “This means that the Sun God is overjoyed, and so descends, following his subordinate officers, who block out the sun as they arrive” 言日神悅喜，於是來下，從其官屬，蔽日而至也 (*Chuci buzhu* 2.75).

<sup>50</sup> *Qing* 青 is a vague color term and variously corresponds to shades of blue, black, or green. In this context, it is perhaps best to imagine a steely dark gray, the color of the underside of a thunderhead.

<sup>51</sup> Both Waley and Hawkes invert the position of lines 20 and 21 (Waley, *Nine Songs*, 45; Hawkes 42). Hawkes further argues in his textual notes that the phrases *fan lun jiang* 反淪降 and *gao tuo xiang* 高駝翔 in lines 21 and 23 should exchange positions (186). Hawkes renders these phrases, respectively, as “I plunge down to my setting” and “I soar high up in the sky” (42). I follow the received text, however, as it seems more straight forward to imagine the sun first sinking on the horizon, and then subsequently rising high again as it returns to the east in the pre-dawn hours. The case of the Year Star (Taisui 太歲), often called Counter-Jupiter because the unseen planet’s position was calculated in diametric opposition to that of Jupiter, in technical texts shows that the early observers could and did imagine unseen celestial bodies “rising up” under the plane of the visible horizon.

<sup>52</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.75–76.

<sup>53</sup> I suspect this to be an alternate name for the constellation *Hu shi* 弧矢 (Bow and Arrow) corresponding to parts of Canis Major and Puppis.

<sup>54</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.75.

the following line, Wang Yi returns to speaking of the Sun, but treats the Sun as a ruler: “It means that after the Sun punishes those who are repugnant, it returns to follow the Way and retires, descending into the midst of the Great Yin, never boasting of its deeds” 言日誅惡以後，復循道而退，下入太陰之中，不伐其功也。<sup>55</sup> Wang Yi suggests that just as the Sun vanishes to the other side of the world in the night, the ruler might retreat from action following a successful campaign against the enemies of the empire or the royal house. The literal sense of “the Way” with respect to the sun likely refers to its path through the sky, but it also carries an ethical-political sense. The ruler hides himself away once his duties are completed, entering into a space where he is no longer visible to the wide world. Wang Yi suggests that the ideal ruler does not keep power all to himself, but distributes both power and position to the right people. The ladling out of cinnamon liqueur represents the ruler promoting and bestowing honors upon his most worthy subjects: “The Dipper is a Jade Pitcher. The line means that since those who are repugnant have been punished, he takes the jade dipper and pours libations, bestowing nobilities upon those who are worthy and capable, and promoting those who are abundant in virtue” 斗，謂玉爵。言誅惡既畢，故引玉斗酌酒漿，以爵命賢能，進有德也。<sup>56</sup>

Wang Yi posited in the conclusion to “Lord of the East” a resolution to the fundamental tensions between lords and ministers that dominated his allegorical commentary on texts of the pre-imperial and Western Han *Chuci* tradition. By Wang Yi’s time, poetry in the *sao*-style had become, above all, a vehicle for the expression of disappointment on the part of men at court, and their frustration with rulers who could not identify their talents or their virtues. At the same time, Wang Yi had come to court late in the reign of Emperor An 安 (r. 107–125 CE), at a time when the empire was weakened by both powerful neighbors and nearly autonomous localities, and when imperial in-laws and eunuchs competed for dominance at court.<sup>57</sup> The weakness of the emperor undermined the stability of the entire political order. In “Lord of the East,” Wang Yi saw a model for an emperor who would punish those who threatened the stability of the dynasty and its empire, and who would reward and promote ministers who were capable and worthy. While the *Chuci* tradition is replete with fickle gods and frustrated supplicants, whom Wang Yi reads allegorically as imperceptive lords and their unrecognized loyal ministers, “Lord of the East” represents the perfectly reliable god and the all-powerful but restrained ruler, the supplicant whose ritual consistently succeeds and the good minister who is ever honored by his lord.

### The Exemplary Voice of the Frustrated Minister in “Encountering Sorrow”

Where the Lord of the East represented the ideal ruler, the attributed author of “Encountering Sorrow,” Qu Yuan, exemplified the ideal minister. Yet his was a voice marked by frustration. He spoke not always as a supplicant, but in his wandering journey through Heaven and Earth, at times spoke as if he were a lost or forsaken god. He desired recognition, but not only for his own sake; he claimed the entire realm was imperiled by the blindness of his lord.

<sup>55</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.75.

<sup>56</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.76.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Loewe, “The Conduct of Government and the Issues at Stake A.D. 57–167,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 303–5.



“Encountering Sorrow” laid a foundation for Han poetry in the voice of the frustrated minister. Implicitly or explicitly, every poet or lyricist who wrote in the *sao* or Han *fu* style of being an unrecognized yet loyal and talented individual evoked the voice of Qu Yuan. While we perhaps cannot ever know who actually composed “Encountering Sorrow,” or even if it was composed by a single individual at all, we can assume with some confidence that, for the most part, readers from the mid-Western Han onward<sup>58</sup> heard the song in Qu Yuan’s voice.

It is his story that structured readers’ understanding of what “Encountering Sorrow” meant. The song did not record the details of Qu Yuan’s life, but those with the literary skill to emulate his voice would have known those details well enough. If Sima Qian’s account is representative, Han readers would have seen Qu Yuan as a once favored member of the royal family of Chu, who was slandered by the chief minister, Jin Shang 靳尚 (fl. late 4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), after having been honored with the serious and weighty task of drawing up a new legal code. He was sent away from court as an envoy to Qi. During his absence, King Huai 懷 (r. 328–299 BCE) made the disastrous decision to ally himself with the Qin, which then reneged on a promise to transfer lands to Chu, and twice defeated Chu in the military conflicts that followed. When Qu Yuan returned, he warned King Huai against journeying to Qin himself, but Qu Yuan’s pleas fell on deaf ears. King Huai died as a captive in Qin, and during the reign of his son, King Qingxiang 頃襄 (r. 298–262 BCE), Qu Yuan once again incurred the wrath of a Prime Minister, King Huai’s youngest son, Zilan 子蘭 (d. after 299 BCE), and left the Chu court for good.<sup>59</sup> Chu was ultimately destroyed by Qin within the century, in the tenth year of the Benighted 幽 King of Chu (228 BCE), a fate that might have been averted, we are to understand, had but King Huai continued to place his trust in his most loyal and virtuous minister.

As much as the story of Qu Yuan defined the song, the song fit the story, imbuing it with palpable emotion. Variably employing both the voice of the deity and the voice of the supplicant, the song tells the story of an unwilling vagrant who drifts from one threshold to another. He wanders along the riverbanks of the land, and across the sky, but each time he arrives at a doorway or a gate, he finds himself unable to cross through it. Each attempt to enter a space where his voice might be heard fails. His procession, like that of Emperor Wu’s persona in the “Great Man” discussed below, is made up largely of celestial signs, but the gods of wind and rain and thunder fail him. Until the final lines of the song, he remains trapped in liminal spaces. Never reintegrated into the social and political world that has rejected him, he can but cross over into death, by breaking the plane of the waters of the Mi River.

“Encountering Sorrow” contains traces of a deified voice very much akin to that of the Sun God in “Lord of the East.” Following the persona’s lengthy plaint at the grave of Shun, he takes off, leaving the terrestrial realm and journeying across the sky in a single day:

<sup>58</sup> Citing Sima Qian’s biography of Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 347–ca. 277 BCE), Jia Yi’s 賈誼 (201–169 BCE) “Lament for Qu Yuan” (“Diao Qu Yuan” 弔屈原) and Yang Xiong’s 楊雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) “Contra ‘Encountering Sorrow’” (“Fan Li sao” 反離騷), Pauline Yu has shown that, from the early to mid-Western Han on, “Encountering Sorrow” was nearly always read within a historical context. See her *The Reading of Imagery in Chinese Poetic Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987): 100–4.

<sup>59</sup> *Shiji* 84.2481–86.

In the morning I set out from Cangwu, <sup>60</sup>	朝發軔於蒼梧兮，	94
And in the evening I arrived at the Hanging Garden;	夕余至乎縣圃；	
I wanted to linger awhile at the inlaid doorways <sup>61</sup>	欲少留此靈瑣兮，	95
of the Holy One,		
But the sun was about to set.	日忽忽其將暮。	
I commanded Xi and He to slow their pace,	吾令羲和弭節兮，	96
And looked out upon Mt. Yanzi but did not approach it.	望崦嵫而勿迫。	
For the road was long and went far into the distance,	路曼曼其脩遠兮，	97
And I was ready to go above and below in my search.	吾將上下而求索。	
So I bade my steed drink from the Pool of Heaven, <sup>62</sup>	飲余馬於咸池兮，	98
And I tied him off at the Fusang Tree. <sup>63</sup>	總余轡乎扶桑。	

The allusions here to the sun's journey across the sky are deliberate and clear. We recall Fusang as the tree from which the Lord of the East's journey begins. We remember Xi and He as the sage-king Yao's ministers in the "Yaodian" 堯典 (Canon of Yao) and might also recall the subsequent story of their drunkenness and dereliction in late Xia, during a time of drunken and derelict rulers, as related in Sima Qian's account.<sup>64</sup> Wang Yi fills in additional details, citing Mt. Yanzi as the mountain into which the sun sets and the Pool of Heaven as "the place where the sun bathes" (*ri yu chu ye* 日浴處也).<sup>65</sup> The persona, whether read as Qu Yuan or someone else, does not speak exclusively in the voice of a supplicant. In his description of his journey through the heavens, he speaks at times in the voice of a deity. Near the conclusion of the song, the phrase "In the morning I set out" reoccurs. In its second iteration, the phrase initiates a journey through the stars.

In the morning I set out from the Fords of Heaven, <sup>66</sup>	朝發軔於天津兮，	174
And in the evening I arrived at the Western Extreme. <sup>67</sup>	夕余至乎西極。	

Fords of Heaven corresponds to a group of stars in Cygnus, which surround a hollow in the Milky Way, a place in which two branches of the radiant Cloudy River seem to be separated by a sandbar of darkness. Read in the voice of Qu Yuan, the image of the celestial sojourner crossing

<sup>60</sup> According to tradition, Cangwu is the location of Shun's grave (*Chuci buzhu* 1.26).

<sup>61</sup> Wang Yi glosses *suo* 瑣 as *men lou* 門鑊 (door inlays) and the Five Ministers gloss *suo* as *men ge* 門闕 (doorways). See *Chuci buzhu* 1.26. Hawkes has the phrase "fairly precincts" for *ling suo* 靈瑣 (28). Aoki Masaru understands the phrase to mean "the gateway to the city of the holy ones" (*reijo no mon* 靈城の門) (*Soji*, 155).

<sup>62</sup> Pool of Heaven or *Xian chi* 咸池 corresponds to three bright stars in Auriga (Sun and Kistemaker 179).

<sup>63</sup> The Fusang is the tree the sun brushes by as it rises (*Chuci buzhu* 1.27).

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 3, p. 95, for details.

<sup>65</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.27.

<sup>66</sup> *Tianjin* 天津 corresponds to a group of stars in Cygnus.

<sup>67</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.44.

the fords presages his ultimate descent into the water of the Mi River. Fords of Heaven is the final point of departure for the loyal but mistreated minister. Yet even without the particular narrative of Qu Yuan, the voice of the frustrated minister emerges in the poem. In his plaint before the tomb of Shun, the persona explains that the fall of the mythic Xia 夏 dynasty (trad. ca. 2070–1600 BCE) resulted from a failure to follow the admonitions of worthy officials, and the fall of the Shang 商 (trad. ca. 1600 trad.–1046 BCE) resulted from their active mistreatment:

Jie of Xia went against those who were constant, <sup>68</sup>	夏桀之常違兮，	80
And so then met with calamity.	乃遂焉而逢殃。	
King Zhou diced and pickled his minister,	后辛之菹醢兮，	81
And the House of Yin <sup>69</sup> for this reason did not	殷宗用而不長。	
endure. <sup>70</sup>		

After a series of unsuccessful attempts to woo celestial goddesses, the persona seeks the aid of a diviner to tell him if he will ever find a fitting match. The diviner assures him that like the great but once obscure men who would eventually stand at the side of sage kings, he could not but be recognized:

If your true disposition is fine indeed,	苟中情其好脩兮，	146
Why must you use a matchmaker?	又何必用夫行媒。	
Yue was working as a wall-builder at the Cliffs of Fu, <sup>71</sup>	說操築於傅巖兮，	147
When King Wuding employed him, doubting him not.	武丁用而不疑。	
Lü Wang was wielding a butcher's knife,	呂望之鼓刀兮，	148
When he encountered King Wen and was lifted from	遭周文而得舉。	
obscurity. <sup>72</sup>		

“Encountering Sorrow” employs less celestial imagery than later poems in the tradition such as the “Great Man” and “Contemplating,” but arguably uses those signs in a more nuanced way. We will find that in the “Great Man,” celestial signs consistently fall under the dominion of the ruler-deity, and in “Contemplating,” celestial signs are largely in harmony with one another, as well as with Zhang Heng’s persona. In “Encountering Sorrow,” however, the celestial signs in the persona’s procession are in open conflict with other competing signs that appear to block his

<sup>68</sup> My interpretation of *chang* 常 (constant) as a preposed object for the verb *wei* 違 (went against) is at variance with tradition. Wang Yi passes the phrase *chang wei* 常違 without comment, while the Five Ministers explain that “it means that he constantly turned his back on Heaven and went against the Way” 言常背天違道 (*Chuci buzhu* 1.23). Aoki Masaru follows the Five Ministers reading (*Soji*, 152). Hawkes renders the line: “Chieh of Hsia all his days was a king most unnatural” (27).

<sup>69</sup> Yin 殷 is an alternate name for the Shang dynasty.

<sup>70</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.23.

<sup>71</sup> In the absence of the frame story of King Wuding’s discovery of Fu Yue at a place identified by the name Fu, Fu may also be understood as a title, i.e. Tutor Fu.

<sup>72</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.38.

way, even as he approaches the Gate of Heaven:

I send Wang Shu racing before me, And set Feilian to galloping behind. The August Simurgh serves as my vanguard, But the Master of Thunder informs me all is not yet prepared.	前望舒使先驅兮， 後飛廉使奔屬。 鸞皇為余先戒兮， 雷師告余以未具。	100 101
I command Phoenix to take flight and upward soar, And to continue onward day and night. But Whirlwinds gather and we are torn from one another, As they bring Clouds and Rainbows to block our way. <sup>73</sup>	吾令鳳鳥飛騰兮， 繼之以日夜。 飄風屯其相離兮， 帥雲霓而來御。	102 103

Emperor Wu's persona maintained total mastery over the celestial signs that made up his procession; he expressed his power through them and over them. Zhang Heng's persona, we will see, proceeds in a kind of perfect harmony with celestial signs, including both those in his procession and those he meets along the way. In "Encountering Sorrow," however, members of Qu Yuan's procession continually disappoint him. While Emperor Wu's persona demonstrated his power by having the Earl of Wind punished, the wind god in "Encountering Sorrow" is emblematic of the persona's own impotency. Wind god though he may be, Feilian seems to exercise no power over the Whirlwinds which break the ranks of the procession. Master of Thunder, whom we might imagine would lead the procession boldly and decisively forward, warns the persona that he is unprepared to advance.<sup>74</sup>

Once the procession finally arrives at Changhe, the Gates of Heaven, the persona is neither greeted with the warm reception Zhang Heng's persona receives, nor does he blaze over the threshold like the Great Man. Instead, the frustrated minister finds himself once again on the outside looking in.

I bade the High God's <sup>75</sup> porter to open the gate, But he just leaned against Changhe Gates	吾令帝閭開關兮， 倚閭闔而望予。	105
--	---------------------	-----

<sup>73</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.28–29. Hawkes understands Whirlwinds, Clouds and Rainbows to be essentially similar to the other signs in the persona's procession. He renders couplet 103: "The whirlwinds gathered and came out to meet me, Leading clouds and rainbows, to give me welcome" (29). Hawkes' rendering effaces the negative connotations surrounding these signs. Wang Yi's allegorical reading of these signs as "the wicked and repugnant crowds" (*xie e zhi zhong* 邪惡之眾) and "slanderers" (*ning ren* 佞人) (*Chuci buzhu* 1.29) is based in the omenological tradition. As we saw in Chapter 2, whirlwinds, rainbows, and in some instances, clouds, were identified largely as inauspicious signs no later than the early Western Han, and likely earlier.

<sup>74</sup> At another point, Fenglong, familiar to us from "Punishment and Favor" (Xingde 刑德) manuscripts discovered at Mawangdui (*terminus ad quem* 168 BCE), ascends the clouds to seek Fu Fei, which only results in a brief and frustrating tryst. Fenglong is described by Wang Yi as the Master of Clouds (Yun shi 雲師; See *Chuci buzhu* 1.31, line 112). For the "Punishment and Favor" manuscripts, see Chapter 2, pp. 34 and 49–55.

<sup>75</sup> In the interests of clarity, I take a slight liberty here in treating *Di* 帝 (god; emperor) as synonymous with *Shang Di* 上帝, the High God, as *Di* seems to be a single figure who maintains power over the celestial realm, just as the terrestrial *Di* maintains power over the human realm.

and stared at me.  
 The moment grew dark and I could only give up,      時曖曖其將罷兮，      106  
 So I plaited dark orchids and stood there unmoving.<sup>76</sup>      結幽蘭而延佇。

At the end of the main text of “Encountering Sorrow,” Qu Yuan once again finds himself on the verge, unable to advance, yet somehow unable to retreat:

Ascending to the dazzling lights of August Heaven,<sup>77</sup>      陟陞皇之赫戲兮，      184  
 I suddenly catch a glimpse of my old home.      忽臨睨夫舊鄉。  
 My groom is saddened and my steed full of woe,      僕夫悲余馬懷兮，      185  
 Looking back, it will not go forward.<sup>78</sup>      蜷局顧而不行。

At the very moment where Qu Yuan seems to be on the verge of leaving the world behind, he finds that he is still caught in its grasp. He remains in a kind of limbo, unable to abandon his old home and unable to return to it. Absent the narrative surrounding Qu Yuan, the finale proves ambiguous. We might well read the last line as a final, hopeful note:

The finale says:      亂曰：  
 Enough!      已矣哉，  
 Throughout the land there is no one,      國無人莫我知兮，      186  
     not one who knows me,  
 So why should I cling to my city of old?      又何懷乎故都？  
 Since there are none with whom      既莫足與為美政兮，      187  
     I could practice good governance,  
 I will journey to the abode of Peng Xian.<sup>79</sup>      吾將從彭咸之所居。

There is no reason in principle why following Peng Xian need necessarily be read as indicating that the persona of the song drowned himself, until we hear it in Qu Yuan’s voice. We know, however, that Han readers as early as Jia Yi 賈誼 (201–169 BCE) understood the conclusion of the song in precisely these terms.<sup>80</sup> Caught forever in an otherwise inescapable limbo, Qu Yuan makes his final exit not by fording the river, but by breaking through the plane of its waters and crossing the threshold into death.

<sup>76</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.29–30.

<sup>77</sup> I following Wang Yi’s gloss of *huang* 皇 as *huang tian* 皇天 (*Chuci buzhu* 1.47).

<sup>78</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.47.

<sup>79</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.47.

<sup>80</sup> See Jia Yi’s “Diao Qu Yuan” 弔屈原 (Lament for Qu Yuan) in *Shiji* 84.2494.

## Part II: Celestial Signs in the Multiple Voices of Emperor Wu

### The Ruler as a Deity: Sima Xiangru's "Fu on the Great Man"

As does "Encountering Sorrow," the "Great Man" narrates the celestial journey of a persona who is dissatisfied with the human realm. The two celestial journeys share much in common, including the names of certain deities, the image of the procession, and the topos of the persona's arrival at the celestial gates. The voice of the "Great Man" is, however, completely at odds with the voice of "Encountering Sorrow." Whereas Qu Yuan speaks from a place of indecision, longing, and frustration, the Great Man continuously and enthusiastically pronounces his own power over the very heavens. Where the gods either fail or ignore Qu Yuan, they find themselves under the dominion of the Great Man. Where Qu Yuan's celestial procession wanders and hesitates, the Great Man's decisively surges upwards. Where Qu Yuan fails to gain entry to the celestial palace, the Great Man bursts through the Gates of Heaven. In the "Great Man," celestial signs—whether part of the Emperor's procession, markers in the landscape through which he moves, or deities he encounters along the way—underscore the power of the emperor himself.

As it is presented in the biography of its author, Sima Xiangru's *fu* was written as an over-the-top panegyric for Emperor Wu and was meant to supersede the poet's already dazzling earlier works:

相如拜為孝文園令。天子既美子虛之事，相如見上好僊道，因曰：「上林之事未足美也，尚有靡者。臣嘗為《大人賦》，未就，請具而奏之。」相如以為列僊之傳居山澤間，形容甚臞，此非帝王之僊意也，乃遂奏《大人賦》。其辭曰：

Sima Xiangru was commissioned as Filial Prefect of the Garden of Letters. Since the Emperor had admired him for the achievement of "Master Vacant," and Xiangru saw that [the Emperor] was fond of immortals, Xiangru said: "The composition of the 'Fu on Shanglin Park' is not worthy of admiration, but there is something still more extravagant. I have composed the 'Fu on the Great Man' and while it is not yet complete, please allow me to prepare it and perform it." Xiangru considered the ranks of immortals who dwelt in the mountains and marshes, their bodies and countenances quite gaunt, not to be the caliber of immortals suited to emperors and kings. Thereupon, he composed the "Fu on the Great Man." Its lyrics read...<sup>81</sup>

While the narration in the first half of the song is presented largely from a close third-person perspective, the apotheosizing quality of the voice is unmistakable from the song's first lines. It is what a god living in an all-too-small, even claustrophobic, human world might say about himself.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2592. A nearly identical passage is presented in *Shiji* 117.3056.

<sup>82</sup> I have consulted and in some instances borrowed from Stephen Owen's translation of this poem in his *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911* (New York: Norton, 1996): 182–84.

There is a Great Man in this world,	世有大人兮，	1
Who resides in the central province.	在乎中州。	2
Though his home extends 10,000 leagues, <sup>83</sup>	宅彌萬里兮，	3
It is not enough to [make the spirits] tarry a moment there.	曾不足以少留。	4
Sorrowed by the narrowness of the ways of the world,	悲世俗之迫隘兮，	5
He lifts himself up and roams far. <sup>84</sup>	竭輕舉而遠游。	6

While various commentators point out that the phrase “Great Man” is an appellation for the ruler,<sup>85</sup> Sima Xiangru uses the term in a vividly literal sense. The emperor becomes a sort of giant, the vastness of his empire reduced to the most cramped of quarters. Unlike the persona of “Encountering Sorrow,” who wanders the terrestrial plain for the first third of the poem, slowly and continually cultivating himself, the Great Man’s celestial journey is immediate, no self-cultivation necessary. Emperor Wu’s persona prepares his procession by incorporating comets, rainbows, and other celestial signs into it:

Bearing <sup>86</sup> crimson pennants of unadorned rainbows,	乘絳幡之素蜺兮，	7
He rides the cloudy <i>qi</i> and floats upward.	載雲氣而上浮。	8
He sets forth the comet <sup>87</sup> <i>Geze</i> <sup>88</sup> as his fine banner-pole,	建格澤之修竿兮，	9
And to it binds variegated pennants of dazzling brilliance.	總光耀之采旄。	10

<sup>83</sup> I employ the translation league for *li* because it evokes the right tone, and like *li*, a league is a measure of distance that a person can walk over a given amount of time. I treat the two terms as equivalents in translation and do not convert units. While both league and *li* were defined according to different standards at different times, a league was always much longer than a *li*. In his discussion of *li* as a measure of distance, Endymion Wilkinson explains that “up until the early Qing...it was supposed to have been 1/10 of one double-hour’s walking on level ground” (*Chinese History: A Manual*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000]: 237). A *li*, in other words, is the distance one can walk in about twelve minutes. A league, in contrast, is equivalent to approximately three miles, or the distance one can walk in one hour. For succinct discussion of the development of the league, see Ronald Edward Zupko, “Measures of Distance” in John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg eds., *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia* (New York and London: Garland, 2000): 386–87.

<sup>84</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2592.

<sup>85</sup> Zhang Yi 張揖 (fl. 227–233) explains the terms as a simple way of referring to the emperor, writing that the Great Man is “an analogy for the Son of Heaven” 喻天子. Xiang Xiu 向秀 (ca. 221–ca. 300), however, suggested that the term was used specifically to refer to the ideal ruler that “when the Sage is on the throne, he is referred to as the Great Man” 聖人在位，謂之大人 (*Shiji* 117.2056, n. 1).

<sup>86</sup> *Shiji* 117.3056 has the variant *chui* 垂 (suspend) for *cheng* 乘.

<sup>87</sup> The phrase “the comet” has been added for clarity.

<sup>88</sup> I am unsure of the meaning of *Geze* and suspect that the characters are used to give the sound of the name, rather than being used according to their conventional meanings. Owen translates *Geze* as “Sky’s Pike-Star” (182). David Pankenier more literally renders *Geze* as “Arriving Beneficence Star.” See his *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 496.

He hangs the Week Star as his banner,  
Trailing broom-stars as his streamers.<sup>89</sup>

垂旬始以為幟兮， 11  
曳彗星而為髻。 12

From the outset of the song, the Great Man displays his mastery over celestial signs, all of which he is able to bend easily to his will. His power extends to even the potentially dangerous *Geze*. The “Tianguan shu” 天官書 (Treatise on the Celestial Offices) explains:

格澤星者，如炎火之狀。黃白，起地而上。下大，上兌。其見也，不種而穫；不有土功，必有大害。

The comet<sup>90</sup> *Geze* is shaped like a flame. It is yellow-white and rises up from the ground. The lower portion of it is large, and the upper portion is sharp. When it appears, there will be those who reap a harvest without having sown seeds. If there are no earthworks undertaken, then there will certainly be a great calamity.<sup>91</sup>

The Great Man ascends the celestial heights upon a procession of winds, dragons, horses, and clouds in a dizzying flurry. As he arrives, “in a flash the fog is lifted and suddenly the clouds disappear”<sup>92</sup> 煥然霧除，霍然雲消 (line 30), and he proceeds to establish his dominion over the gods themselves, some of whom are familiar as directional deities in the Mawangdui (*terminus ad quem* 168 BCE) manuscripts.<sup>93</sup> The Great Man commands the Five Gods to go before him (line 37), and makes the respective Assistants (*cheng* 丞) or Heads of the Left (*zuo* 左)<sup>94</sup> of the south and east, Zhu Rong 祝融 and Gou Mang 句芒, clear his path and lead the way (lines 43 and 47).<sup>95</sup> In line 45, the poet employs the first-person pronoun *wu* 吾, and the voice of the poem abruptly pivots to the first-person,<sup>96</sup> creating the effect that the Great Man is directly and immediately speaking in his own voice.

The Great Man most boldly articulates his power over the cosmos as he describes the acts of violence he visits upon personified celestial signs. Just as the Lord of the East shoots the Wolf

<sup>89</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2592. “Broom-star” (*hui xing* 彗星) is a common appellation for comets derived from the fuzzy, broom-like appearance of their tails.

<sup>90</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335 describes *Geze* as a *xing* 星, which may mean star, comet, or even planet. Based on the description of the physical characteristics of *Geze*, it likely is a comet rather than an ordinary star. *Hanshu* 26.1293 omits the word *xing*.

<sup>91</sup> *Shiji* 27.1335. *Hanshu* 26.1293 has *ke* 客, “guest” or possibly “invading army,” for *hai* 害 (calamity).

<sup>92</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2593.

<sup>93</sup> Mawangdui is the archaeological site, discovered in 1973, where manuscripts on celestial omenology such as the “Wuxing zhan” 五星占 (Five Planets Prognostications) and the “Tianwen qixiang zazhan” 天文氣象雜占 (Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and *Qi* Images). These titles were added by modern editors. See Chapter 2, *passim*, for details.

<sup>94</sup> These are the respective titles given to the subordinate directional deities in the “Prognostications on the Five Planets” and the “Teachings on Celestial Pattern.” See the taxonomic tables in Chapter 2, p. 75 and Chapter 3, p. 145

<sup>95</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2595.

<sup>96</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2595.



of Heaven, the Great Man punishes the gods of wind and rain:

When the moment grows dark, becoming dusky and murky,	時若曖曖將混濁兮，	65
I summon Ping Yi to punish the Earl of Wind, and to castigate the Legions of Rain <sup>97</sup>	召屏翳誅風伯刑雨師。	66

Whereas as Wang Yi's understanding of the allegorical implications of "those who are repugnant" (*e* 惡) in "Lord of the East" locates them firmly in the terrestrial realm under the direct political control of the ideal ruler, Sima Xiangru's portrait of the magnified Emperor Wu casts him as a lord over the gods themselves. The Great Man, moreover, does not just have the power to punish weather deities who step out of line, but to summon other deities, such as Ping Yi, to do his bidding. A few lines later in the *fu*, the Great Man arrives at the Gates of Heaven. Various referred to as Changhe 閭闔 or Tianmen 天門, the Gates of Heaven are a touchstone in both spirit journey poetry and liturgy. In "Encountering Sorrow," they are a barrier through which Qu Yuan cannot pass. In the "Contemplating," they are a threshold over which Zhang Heng's persona harmoniously crosses. In the "Great Man," they are a paltry fortification, the flimsiness of which casts into relief the Great Man's boundless will and unrestrained power:

I swing open the Gates of Heaven and enter the Palace of the High God, <sup>98</sup>	排閭闔而入帝宮兮，	69
Carry off the Jade Maidens and take them away with me. <sup>99</sup>	載玉女而與之歸。	70

Following the Great Man's raid of the Palace of the High God, and prior to the final crescendo of the *fu*, a moment of reflection occurs. It is marked by a shift in both direction and perspective. The Great Man descends to the top of a mountain, and again the poem employs first-person pronouns that explicitly mark the direct speech of the persona of Emperor Wu:

Circling round Yin Mountain, soaring and spiraling down,	低徊陰山翔以紆曲兮，	73
Today at last I see the Queen Mother of the West. Hair gleaming white, she wears her headdress, dwelling in a cave,	吾乃今日覩西王母。 鬢然白首戴勝而穴處兮，	74 75
Fortunate to have the Three-Footed Crow as her servant.	亦幸有三足烏為之使。	76
If one must live forever without dying as she does,	必長生若此而不死兮，	77
Then even if one could endure for ten-thousand generations, it would not be worthy of joy. <sup>100</sup>	雖濟萬世不足以喜。	78

<sup>97</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2596.

<sup>98</sup> I am perhaps taking a slight liberty here, as the text has *Di* rather than *Shangdi* 上帝. However, the sense of the text seems to point toward a single, particularly powerful deity, rather than one among the Five Gods.

<sup>99</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2596.

<sup>100</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2596.

In the late Western Han, Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) would suggest that the “Great Man” had been intended, like Yang Xiong’s own *fu*, as a vehicle for admonishing the emperor, but that the political content of the genre lay buried beneath heaps of dazzling rhetoric. The *fu* succeeded in entertaining and delighting its audience, but as a suasive device, Yang Xiong claimed, it was a failure.<sup>101</sup> If there is a critique in the “Great Man,” it is at least partially located in the encounter between the Great Man and the Queen Mother of the West. The modern scholar and *fu* specialist Gong Kechang argues, on the one hand, that while Sima Xiangru “did not place emphasis on indirect admonition” 不重諷諫, his use of “disrespectful language” 不敬之辭 toward the Queen Mother ran counter to his stated intention of glorifying the emperor.<sup>102</sup> The *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han) commentator Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) argues, however, that the glory of the Great Man is effected through the contrast between his own image and that of the Queen Mother: “In the discourse of former times, all had considered the Queen Mother of the West to be the greatest of immortals and gods. Thus, when Xiangru spoke of the glory and of the pleasure in the journey of the Great Man, he looked back at the Queen Mother and thought her low and narrow, nothing worthy of his envy” 昔之談者咸以西王母為仙靈之最，故相如言大人之仙，娛遊之盛，顧視王母，鄙而陋之，不足羨慕也。<sup>103</sup> For Yan Shigu, the lowly state of the Queen Mother only served to further magnify the power and vigor of the emperor.

The final crescendo and ultimate resolution of the *fu* likewise might be read as high praise or grave admonition:

I pass through the crack-in-the-sky to the Upturned Shadows,	貫列缺之倒景兮，	85
And ford Fenglong’s torrential currents.	涉豐隆之滂濞。	86
Galloping in my carriage on the long descent,	騁游道而脩降兮，	87
At full pace, I leave fog in my wake and vanish into the distance.	驚遺霧而遠逝。	88
Distressed by the narrowness of the terrestrial realm,	迫區中之隘陝兮，	89
I slacken my pace and emerge from the Northern Edge.	舒節出乎北垠。	90
I leave my riders camped at the Dark Tower,	遺屯騎於玄闕兮，	91
And pass my vanguard at the Chilly Gate.	軼先驅於寒門。	92

<sup>101</sup> Both Yang Xiong’s general views on the *fu* and the “Great Man” in particular are recorded in his *Hanshu* biography: “Yang Xiong considered the *fu* to be intended for the purpose of indirect admonition, yet it is certain that by adducing analogies and speaking, and using extremely gorgeous and lavish phrases, and extravagantly expanding the topic, it strives to reach a point where there is nothing that anyone could add to [the fullness of its descriptions]. Once this has been done, it returns to the upright, but by this point, the observer has already missed [its intent] 雄以為賦者，將以風也，必推類而言，極麗靡之辭，閎侈鉅衍，競於使人不能加也，既乃歸之正，然覽者已過矣 (*Hanshu* 87.3575). Translation of this passage borrows in some instances from Martin Kern, “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 2 (Dec., 2003): 390–91.

<sup>102</sup> Gong Kechang 龔克昌 ed., *Quan Han fu pingzhu* 全漢賦評注 (A Critical Commentary to the Complete Han Rhapsodies), 3 vols. (Shijiazhuang: Huawen wenyi chubanshe, 2004), vol. 1: 173.

<sup>103</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2598 n.16.

Below there are only rugged heights and no earth,	下崢嶸而無地兮，	93
Above only emptiness and no sky.	上嶮廓而無天。	94
Vision bedazzled I do not see,	視眩泯而亡見兮，	95
Hearing benumbed I do not hear.	聽敞怳而亡聞。	96
Mounting the void into the distant heights,	乘虛亡而上遐兮，	97
I surpass No Companions <sup>104</sup> and dwell alone. <sup>105</sup>	超無友而獨存。	98

Moving beyond even Upturned Shadows (Dao ying 倒景), the empyrean heights where shadows are cast upwards by the sun and moon that shine from below,<sup>106</sup> the persona makes his final ascent. Gong Kechang, echoing Yang Xiong's claim that an admonitory sense lay buried in Sima Xiangru's *fu*, characterizes the Great Man's final destination as a "deep abyss of isolation in emptiness" 孤獨虛無的深淵.<sup>107</sup> If we understand the purpose of *fu* as critique, the persona's final exit is eerie and horrible—a permanent immortality spent in total isolation, a fate far worse than the languishing poverty of the Queen Mother. If, on the other hand, we understand the purpose of the poem as unabashed glorification of the power of the emperor, we are likely to read his solitary endurance as a testament to his singular magnificence.<sup>108</sup>

Yang Xiong held that while the *fu* was meant to turn Emperor Wu away from his ambition to become an immortal, it only egged him on:

往時武帝好神仙，相如上《大人賦》，欲以風，帝反縹縹有陵雲之志。繇是言之，賦勸而不止，明矣。

In bygone days, Emperor Wu was fond of spirits and immortals, and Sima Xiangru submitted the "*Fu* on the Great Man," desiring to indirectly admonish him. The Emperor, instead, fluttered and flitted, harboring the ambition to ascend the clouds. Speaking of it from this perspective, it is clear that the *fu* only encourages and does not restrain.<sup>109</sup>

Whether a critique was intended or not, the effect of the *fu* was anything but admonitory. The voice of the ruler was made to speak not just as a god, but as a lord over the gods. Celestial

<sup>104</sup> Owen renders this phrase as "beyond lack of others" (184).

<sup>105</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2598.

<sup>106</sup> In a note to the "Great Man," Fu Qian 服虔 (fl. 184–189 CE) explains: "His person is at the highest place in the heavens, and he looks down and sees the sun and the moon, so that the shadows are upturned below him" 人在天上，下向視日月，故景倒在下也 (*Hanshu* 57B.2599).

<sup>107</sup> Gong Kechang, vol. 1, 173.

<sup>108</sup> While the antepenultimate and penultimate couplets of the "Far Roaming" (attributed to Qu Yuan) are nearly identical to those of the "Great Man," in the final couplet of "Far Roaming" the persona discovers a celestial neighbor: "I surpass non-action and arrive at Ultimate Purity, and become the neighbor of the Great Beginning" 超無為且至清兮，與泰初而為鄰 *Chuci buzhu* 5.175. While we perhaps cannot determine which poem was responding to which, the conclusion to "Far Roaming" contrasts and appears to be in dialogue with that of the "Great Man." The isolation of the persona of the "Great Man" is thrown into sharp relief against the companionship the persona of "Far Roaming" finds beyond the sky.

<sup>109</sup> *Hanshu* 87B.3575. Cf. Kern, "Western Han Aesthetics," 392.

signs, whether they are meteorological or astral phenomena, names of gods, or designations for specific places, all played a role in the process of apotheosis. Building his procession of comets and stars, the Great Man ascends upon the winds, dragons as his steeds. Arriving in the heavens, he places the gods of wind and rain under his dominion. Changhe Gate, which stands over the threshold to the celestial palace, is a boundary whose primary rhetorical purpose is to allow for the Great Man's transgression against it. The Dark Tower and the Chilly Gate, respectively identified by commentators as a mountain and a gateway to the Northern Culmen (*beiji* 北極) in the heavens,<sup>110</sup> spatially mark the Great Man's exit from even the world of the gods, to a yet higher and more exclusive level of the cosmos. His procession left behind, the Great Man ascends to such heights that the earth can no longer be seen below, and nor can the sky above. There is nothing to see, nothing to hear. He dwells in the void, a complete singularity unto himself. In Gong Kechang's reading, the notion of the Great Man being without companions serves only to underscore his isolation. Even the Queen Mother had her Three-Footed Crow. Yet, read as panegyric, the final line of the *fu* emphasizes the transcendent and uniquely magnificent personality of the Great Man. He has no companions, for none, even among the gods, can be his match. The emperor's response to the *fu*, as we are told in both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, was unequivocal:

相如既奏《大人賦》，天子大說，飄飄有陵雲氣游天地之間意。

Once Sima Xiangru had completed his presentation of the “*Fu* on the Great Man,” the Son of Heaven was overjoyed. He fluttered and flitted about, filled with the desire to ascend the cloudy *qi* and roam about the heavens and the earth.<sup>111</sup>

Overcome with the impact of the “Great Man,” Emperor Wu remained encouraged and unrestrained.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>110</sup> The Northern Culmen is the celestial north pole, the central point around which the heavens appear to revolve. Zhang Yi glosses the Dark Tower as “the mountain of the Northern Culmen” (*beiji zhi shan* 北極之山) and Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140-before 204) glosses Chilly Gate as “the gateway to the Northern Culmen” (*beiji zhi men* 北極之門; *Hanshu* 57B.2599, n. 9–10).

<sup>111</sup> *Hanshu* 57B.2600.

<sup>112</sup> Sima Xiangru's “Great Man” was, of course, not the only poem to represent the emperor as an all-powerful god. Many *fu*, including Yang Xiong's own, employ the trope of apotheosis. Ma Rong, the classical exegete and co-compiler of the *Hanshu* “Treatise on Celestial Patterns,” penned the “Hymn of Guangcheng Garden” (Guangcheng song 廣成頌) while working as a Collator of Texts in the Eastern Pavilion archives in 115 CE. Attacking what he regarded as a dangerous proposal at court to diminish honors for military achievements, Ma Rong created an image of the emperor as a god who establishes his dominion over all others, bringing potentially malevolent entities under control. One passage reads: “And off in the distance I set my gaze upon the climbers of the heights/ Wheel my carriage about/ Ascend the great place/ Pacify Pingyi/ And whip Goumang./ I pass over Desolate Turbidity/ Emerge from the Layered Yang/ Reach the Cloudy Han/ And traverse the Celestial Pond./ I navigate the Ghostly Hallows/ Drive through Spirit Fields/ I summon the Numinous Protector/ And call upon the Fang Xiang clan/ To drive away Pestilence/ Lay chase to spirits of disaster/ Eradicate Wang Liang/ Cut down the Roaming Lights/ Put a cangue upon the Dog of Heaven/ And bind the Subterranean Goat” 爾乃藐觀高蹈，改乘回轅，泝恢方，撫馮夷，策句芒，超荒忽，出重陽，厲雲漢，橫天潢。嚙層導鬼區，徑神場，詔靈保，

### The Ruler as the Ideal Supplicant: “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices”

While the “Great Man” articulated the voice of the ruler as the voice of a supreme god, the voice of the ruler more often is aligned with the voice of a supplicant. The voice of the supplicant is the dominant mode in which the voice of the ruler is articulated in Emperor Wu’s liturgical repertoire, the “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices.”<sup>113</sup> The narrative surrounding the development of the “Suburban Sacrifices” suggests that Emperor Wu’s sacrifices were well-received:

至武帝定郊祀之禮，祠太一於甘泉，就乾位也；祭后土於汾陰，澤中方丘也。乃立樂府，采詩夜誦，有趙、代、秦、楚之謳。以李延年为協律都尉，多舉司馬相如等數十人造為詩賦，略論律呂，以合八音之調，作十九章之歌。以正月上辛用事甘泉園丘，使童男女七十人俱歌，昏祠至明。夜常有神光如流星止集于祠壇，天子自竹宮而望拜，百官侍祠者數百人皆肅然動心焉。

When Emperor Wu fixed the rites of the suburban sacrifices, he built a shrine to Supreme Unity at Sweet Springs Palace, which corresponded to the position of *qian* [the first hexagram, corresponding to Heaven and the northwest].<sup>114</sup> He worshiped Lord Soil by Fenyin at a square hill among the marshlands.<sup>115</sup> Only then did he establish the Music Bureau, and collected odes to be sung at night,<sup>116</sup> including songs of Zhao, Dai, Qin, and

---

召方相，驅厲疫，走蜮祥。捎罔兩，拂游光，枷天狗，縹墳羊 (*Hou Hanshu* 60A.1963–64).

<sup>113</sup> Martin Kern’s study of Western Han hymns, “In Praise of Political Legitimacy: The *Miao* and *Jiao* Hymns of the Western Han” *Orient Extremis* 38 (1996) 1: 29–67, written while Kern was still a graduate student, remains the best point of entry in English for examining these materials and I am heavily indebted to it. Readers of German should also consult Martin Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (The Sacrificial Hymns of the Chinese State: Literature and Ritual in Political Representation of the Han Through the Six Dynasties; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997). The key difference between Kern’s readings of these materials and my own is that I emphasize that the songs should be read in the voice of the emperor himself, even if he is not the actual performer of the songs. The emperor serves as an intermediary between Heaven and Earth, and it is through his acts of supplication that auspicious signs are ritually brought into being.

<sup>114</sup> This suggests that Sweet Springs Palace was selected in part for its location northwest of the city (*Hanshu* 22.1045 n. 3).

<sup>115</sup> Yan Shigu explains: “On the banks of River Fen, the soil markedly protrudes, and this is called *the square hill among the marshlands*. In sacrificing to the Earth, the square is selected because it is in the image of the shape of the Earth” 汾水之旁，土特堆起，是澤中方丘也。祭地，以方象地形 (*Hanshu* 22.1045, n. 4). Wu Renjie 吳仁傑 (fl. 1178), on the basis of records elsewhere recording sacrifices to Lord Soil at *yuanyiu* 園丘 (round tumulus), believes that *fangqiu* (square hill) is an error for *yuanyiu*. For Wu Renjie’s analysis see Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1918), *Hanshu buzhu* 漢書補注 (Supplementary Annotations to the History of the Han; Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2008) 22.14b. For an example of the Lord Earth being worshiped at *yuanyiu*, see *Shiji* 12.461.

<sup>116</sup> For the phrase *cai shi ye song* 采詩夜誦, I follow here the interpretation of Otake Takeo (1905–1982) trans., *Kanjo* 漢書 (History of the Han), vol. 1 (Tôkyô: Chikuma, 1977–1979): 199. Yan Shigu suggests that the content of these songs was kept secret. “*To be sung at night* means that the lyrics were in some cases secret and could not be openly performed or revealed, and so, they were sung at night” 夜誦者，其言辭或祕不可宣露，

Chu. He commissioned Li Yannian (d. 91 BCE) as Commandant of Harmonizing the Modes, and appointed many persons including Sima Xiangru and tens of others to compose odes and *fu*. They provisionally categorized them according to key, so as to harmonize them with melodies in eight tones, and composed nineteen songs.<sup>117</sup> On the first *xin* day of the first month of the year, they conducted the ceremonies at the Round Tumulus at Sweet Springs, where seventy boys and girls would all sing them, and sacrifices were conducted from dusk until dawn. At night there often was a spirit light like a meteor that perched in the sky above the altar. And from his Bamboo Palace the Son of Heaven would make obeisance from afar,<sup>118</sup> and the hearts of the several hundred officials and attendants responsible for conducting the sacrifices were all awed and moved by it.<sup>119</sup>

Emperor Wu, and those working on his behalf, made every effort to ensure that the rituals would be pleasing to the gods. They selected cosmologically appropriate locations. For Supreme Unity, whom we remember from the opening song of the “Nine Songs,” they chose a position corresponding to the first hexagram of the *Changes*, *qian* 乾, and therefore, to the sky. They conducted sacrifices to Lord Soil on a mass of fertile land arising out of a marsh. They collected music, and perhaps lyrics, from the traditions of various regions of the empire, as the traces of the *Chuci* in the repertoire suggest, but reinvented and reorganized these materials in the form of the nineteen songs of the “Suburban Sacrifices.” They selected the first *xin* 辛 day of the year for its homophonic association with the word “renewal” (*xin* 新).<sup>120</sup> They performed the sacrifices to Supreme Unity, thereby summoning a strange light above the altar that signaled both the efficacy of the ritual and the legitimacy of the emperor. He watched from afar, the perfect supplicant in his humbly named ritual hut, the Bamboo Palace, even as his courtiers stood awestruck by the power of the ceremony.

---

故於夜中歌誦也 (*Hanshu* 22.1045, n. 6).

<sup>117</sup> NB: These “nineteen songs” are not to be confused with the Nineteen Old Songs (Shi jiu jiu ge 十九舊歌).

<sup>118</sup> The *Han jiu yi* 漢舊儀 (Old Ceremonies of the Han Dynasty), cited in the *Sanfu huang tu* 三輔黃圖 (Plan of the Three Capital Regions; ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE) 3.10b, in *Siku quanshu*, claimed that the Bamboo Palace was located some three *li* from the altar (*Hanshu* 22.1046, n. 8). The *Sui shu* 隋書 (History of the Sui Dynasty), compiled by Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) between 629 and 636, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973): 33.969 attributes the *Han jiu yi* to Wei Jingzhong 衛敬仲, active during the Liang dynasty (502–557 CE).

<sup>119</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1045

<sup>120</sup> Yan Shigu explains the use of *xin* days as follows: “In using the first *xin* day of the month, they employed the day on which suburban sacrifices to Heaven are carried out according to the *Rites of Zhou*. *Xin* is selected because it means to purify and renew oneself” 用上辛，用周禮郊天日也。辛，取齊戒自新之義也 (*Hanshu* 22.1045, n. 7). Winter Solstice was a hallowed time in ancient China; the sacrifices to Supreme Unity nearly coincide with the La 臘 Festival, held on the third *xu* 戌 day after the winter solstice (between 16–27 January), the Great Exorcism, held on the eve of the La Festival, the Lunar New Year (21 January–20 February), and the celebration of the Winter Solstice itself (22 December). For an excellent overview of each of these festivals, see Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances during the Han Dynasty 206 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Princeton: Princeton University Press and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975). At the Winter Solstice, prognostications for the new year were made, the shadow of the gnomon were measured, and the lowest of the twelve pitch pipes, *huang zhong* 黃鐘, were played (Bodde 165–88).

“Tianmen” 天門 (Gates of Heaven) commemorates the appearance of the meteor-like light:

The Gates of Heaven open,	天門開，	1
Vast and boundless.	詖蕩蕩，	2
In harmony all come,	穆並騁，	3
And descend to the feast..	以臨饗。	4
Their light shines through the night,	光夜燭，	5
And so his suasive power and faithfulness are manifest. <sup>121</sup>	德信著，	6
Grand is the grace of the Holy Ones, <sup>122</sup>	靈浸鴻，	7
In long life we delight.	長生豫。	8
Great and crimson, the road <sup>123</sup> is wide,	大朱涂廣，	9
Level are the stones from which the hall is built.	夷石為堂，	10
Holding batons inlaid with jade, singers and dancers perform,	飾玉梢以舞歌，	11
<i>Ti zhaoyao</i> , <sup>124</sup> as if ever looking out.	體招搖若永望。	12
The stars linger in response, <sup>125</sup>	星留俞，	13
Replete with light,	塞隕光，	14
Shining upon the Purple Canopy,	照紫幄，	15
Crimson and deep yellow. <sup>126</sup>	珠熲黃。	16

Just as in “Greater Master of Fate,” but in contrast to the “Great Man,” “Encountering Sorrow,” and “Contemplating,” the Gates of Heaven are the locus from which the deities initiate their descent to savor the sacrifices, rather than boundaries through which sojourners from the human

<sup>121</sup> There is some ambiguity in the phrase *de xin zhuo* 德信著, as the line does not specify whose *de* is being discussed and *xin* might be read adverbially (i.e. “truly”) or as a noun. I follow the interpretation of Yan Shigu who considers the light of the spirits in line 5 to be a response to the *de xin* of the supplicant. He writes: “As for the spirit–light that shone in the night, it came in response to his integrity, and this in turn made his suasive power and faithfulness manifest and bright” 神光夜照，應誠而來，是德信著明 (*Hanshu* 22.1061, n. 3). That response in turn shows that the supplicant, Emperor Wu, is possessed of suasive power and faithfulness.

<sup>122</sup> The *Zhonghua* edition parenthetically notes that some versions of the received text have the variant *ping er* 平而 for *ling qin* 靈浸 (*Hanshu* 22.1061). Reading the variant, the line might be rendered as “Tranquil and grand.”

<sup>123</sup> I follow Yan Shigu’s understanding of *tu* 涂 as *daolu* 道路 (road) (*Hanshu* 22.1061, n. 5).

<sup>124</sup> This phrase will be discussed in detail below. Its two meanings are simultaneously active, and it could be rendered either “Their bodies sway to and fro” or “They embody [the movements of the star] *Zhaoyao*.”

<sup>125</sup> Yan Shigu explains that the *yu* 俞 should be understood in the sense of *da* 答, meaning to respond to the invitation constituted by the ritual (*Hanshu* 22.1062, n. 7).

<sup>126</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1061.

realm may or may not pass. The descent of the deities in the first stanza is orderly and harmonious, building toward a successful ritual. The second stanza both commemorates the lights that shone above the altar and gives them meaning. These become a response to the “suasive power and faithfulness” of the supplicant, who in the ritual sense—even if he looked on the ceremonies from his distant Bamboo Palace—is Emperor Wu. But while the song brings glory to the supplicant, it does so in a very different manner than did Sima Xiangru’s *fu*. Where the persona of the “Great Man” asserted his power over the gods, the supplicant in “Gates of Heaven” is reverent and grateful as he proclaims his delight in the promise of long life.

The third stanza turns to the performance of the ritual itself. Lines 9-10 emphasize the rigorous preparation of the place wherein the ceremony is performed. The deities are to proceed along the crimson grand avenues of Chang’an toward a great hall built of carefully selected materials, the ranks of dancers leading their way. Moreover, the phrase *ti zhao yao* 體招搖 in line 12 reveals those dancers to be graceful and enticing supplicants whose movements are mimetic of the most constant of celestial signs: the fixed stars. *Zhaoyao*, as an adjective, means “to sway to and fro” or “to twinkle.” But it is also the name given to Gamma Boötis, the Twinkler, a star sitting off the tip of the Northern Dipper ever circling the circumpolar region.<sup>127</sup> The nominative and verbal senses of the word *ti* are active simultaneously, for the *bodies* of the dancers sway to and fro, even as they *embody* the movements of the star Zhaoyao. The next stanza explicitly refers to the starry lights that linger above the Purple Canopy in which the banquet for the gods is given. The crimson light seems to glow yellow through the walls of the canopy,<sup>128</sup> and in the fifth stanza, the play between the celestial signs and the dancers is redoubled. The dancers’ banners on the wing, the sun and moon glow ever brighter:

Banners like wings gathered together,	幡比翮回集，	17
In pairs take flight in spirals.	貳雙飛常羊。	18
The moon harmoniously sends forth its golden waves;	月穆穆以金波，	19
The sun flashes and sheds its light. <sup>129</sup>	日華耀以宣明。	20

The fifth stanza is the climax of the song, the moment in which the celestial signs shine most brightly and in which the dancers seem to embody the deities most fully. From these dizzy heights, the song descends to the sober libations that accompany the descent of the deities:

Alighting <sup>130</sup> on the clear winds, far off and indistinct,	假清風軋忽，	21
Onward they rush to us, we pour many libations.	激長至重觴。	22

<sup>127</sup> Otake suspects that an image of *Zhaoyao* was painted on the banners (vol. 1, 204). If this is indeed the case, we must understand *Zhaoyao* as a metonym for nine-star Northern Dipper of which *Zhaoyao* itself constitutes the tip of the handle.

<sup>128</sup> Yan Shigu suggests this reading for lines 15-6 (*Hanshu* 22.1062, n. 8).

<sup>129</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1061.

<sup>130</sup> I read *jia* 假 in the sense of *jie* 借, following *Hanshu buzhu* 22.28a.



Spirits circle about as if they would linger and remain, <sup>131</sup>	神裴回若留放，	23
In audience <sup>132</sup> we hope to approach them,	殯冀親以肆章。	24
and to bathe in their light. <sup>133</sup>		

The audience between supplicant and deity is followed by a reflective turn in the voice, a series of comments on the broader implications of the successful ritual. The spirits would descend, and the empire would receive their bounty, for the ritual was performed at the right time and in the right manner (lines 25–26). Lines 27–28 mark the departure of the spirits:

We are covered by and filled with blessings, ever in	函蒙祉福常若期，	25
keeping with the appointed time,		
And though the high heavens are lonesome and vast, we	寂寥上天知厥時。	26
know the appointed moment. <sup>134</sup>		
Burgeoning, surging upward, following their high	泛泛溟溟從高旂，	27
banners,		
Upon this road, we strive to present <sup>135</sup> that which they	殷勤此路臚所求。	28
seek. <sup>136</sup>		

The eighth stanza is an apt conclusion. It expresses a final sense of gratitude for the bounty of the spirits, and it praises the magnitude of their glory, even as they vanish to the distant reaches of the cosmos:

Delighting in the upright and enjoining the good-	佻正嘉吉弘以昌，	29
fortuned, broad and resplendent,		
Their beauty and glory booming forth and flooding the	休嘉砰隱溢四方。	30
Four Directions.		
Concentrating their essences and quickening their wills,	專精厲意逝九閼，	31
they go off to the Nine-fold Heavens,		
Surging off in the Six Directions they/we float over the	紛云六幕浮大海。	32
vast expanses. <sup>137</sup>		

The multiple possible readings for the final line of “Gates of Heaven” show that, even in his capacity as an ideal supplicant, Emperor Wu might be counted among the gods. We are not told explicitly whether it is “they” or “we” who fly off into the cosmos. The song is readable in both

<sup>131</sup> I follow Wang Xianqian’s suggestion that *fang* 放 be read in the sense of *ji* 寄 (to lodge in), based on Gao You’s 高誘 (fl. 205-212) gloss of *fang* in his commentary on the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (*Hanshu buzhu* 22.28a).

<sup>132</sup> I read *jin* 覲 for *jin* 殯 (*Hanshu* 22.1062, n. 12).

<sup>133</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1062.

<sup>134</sup> It is also possible to read the subject of this line as the spirits themselves. Following this reading the second half of the line might be rendered “they know the appointed moment.” However, the stanza as a whole seems primarily to express the sense that the supplicants have correctly and diligently performed the ritual.

<sup>135</sup> Following Ying Shao’s reading of *lu* 臚 in the sense of *chen* 陳 (*Hanshu* 22.1063, n. 16).

<sup>136</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1062.

<sup>137</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1062.

ways, we may imagine the Emperor describing the gods' return, as they vanish from the halls of sacrifice, or ascending along with them. "Gates of Heaven," as do several of the songs in the "Suburban Sacrifices," also appears to commemorate a specific event. The song speaks of the light of the gods and of the stars (lines 5; 14), the performers seeking to bathe within it (line 24). Through song, dance, and sacrifice, the omen of the light over the altar is reconstituted, brought into being anew. The song recalls the appearance of a celestial sign, and ritually reproduces that sign. While we saw in Chapters Two and Three how technical texts and suasive memorials explained and interpreted celestial signs that were, or might be, already-out-there in the world, here we see how liturgy and ritual worked to bring celestial signs into being.<sup>138</sup>

In a similar fashion, the opening half of "Wei Taiyuan" 惟泰元 (O Supreme Progenitor) works to bring a host of celestial signs into being, all of which indicate cosmic regularity and produce prosperity in the human realm:

O Supreme Progenitor be exalted,	惟泰元尊，	1
And let the blessings of the Earth Mother <sup>139</sup> be many.	媪神蕃釐，	2
Let them be a warp and weft for Heaven and Earth,	經緯天地，	3
And bring completion to the Four Seasons.	作成四時。	4
Let their rarefied essences raise the sun and moon,	精建日月，	5
And the stars and planets be measured and regular.	星辰度理，	6
Let <i>yin</i> , <i>yang</i> , and the Five Courses,	陰陽五行，	7
Complete their cycles and begin anew.	周而復始。	8
Let clouds and wind, thunder and lightning,	雲風雷電，	9
Send down sweet dew and rain,	降甘露雨，	10
So that the Hundred Families prosper and multiply,	百姓蕃滋，	11
And all perform their inherited tasks. <sup>140</sup>	咸循厥緒。	12

While the song opens on a note of reverence, the first three stanzas are largely devoted to an

<sup>138</sup> While I employed the indicative mode in my rendering of "Tianmen," a song that commemorated a specific event that had already occurred, here I use the optative to indicate that each performance works to bring into being the bounties which it describes.

<sup>139</sup> Yan Shigu respectively associates Taiyuan 泰元, or Supreme Progenitor, and Aoshen 媪神 (Earth Mother), with Heaven and Earth (*Hanshu* 22.1057, n. 1). Anne Birrell respectively renders the names of the two gods as "Holy Creator" and "Old Goddess" (*Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988]: 38). Wu Renjie argues, however, that Taiyuan should be understood as Supreme Unity 泰一, one of three major recipients of sacrifices, the other two being Heaven and Earth. Moreover, Wu reads *yun* 焜 for *ao* 媪 and suggests that *yunshen* is not the name of a second god, but instead that it refers to burnt sacrifices to the god Supreme Unity (*Hanshu buzhu* 22.23b.).

<sup>140</sup> I follow Yan Shigu's gloss of *xu* 緒 as *ye* 業 (*Hanshu* 22.2057, n. 2). *Ye* refers to legacy or heritage. By extension, I interpret it to mean the occupations people inherit from their parents. Birrell renders this line: "All tracing the right line" (39).

expression of desire for the various bounties the supplicants seek. These come primarily in the establishment of cosmic regularities, that is, the timely progression of the Four Seasons (line 4). The second stanza articulates these regularities in astral and cosmological terms. The supplicants ask that celestial bodies follow their established courses; in other words, they hope to avoid baleful eclipses, planets moving in retrograde motion, inauspicious comets, and imbalances in *yinyang* 陰陽 or the Five Courses (*wuxing* 五行). The third stanza draws closer to the terrestrial and human realms, citing specifically meteorological phenomena, the timing of which can make or break the agricultural yield in any given year. Yet despite the thunder and lightning in line 9, the tone of the song is one of desire and hope rather than avoidance and fear; the sweet dew in line 10 is sweet because it nourishes crops. The first half of the song culminates by expressing a desire for both prosperity and continued diligent labor on the part of the empire's ordinary subjects, the masses of men and women who devote their lives to agricultural production. Just as in the "Canon of Yao," their timely and faithful labors are part and parcel of the greater network of cosmic regularities.

The second half of "O Supreme Progenitor" describes the ritual itself. The supplicant declares his ritual qualifications, narrates the presentation of the offerings, and in the final stanza, describes the musical performance that accompanies the descent of the deities:

I continue the traditions, reverent and diligent,	繼統共勤，	13
Yielding to the August Power,	順皇之德，	14
With simurgh chariots and dragon scales,	鸞路龍鱗，	15
Nothing goes unadorned.	罔不矜飾。	16
The offerings in our finest wares are set forth,	嘉籩列陳，	17
In the hope that they will be savored with delight.	庶幾宴享，	18
Let ill-fortune and disaster be swept away,	滅除凶災，	19
Sent blazing forth over the Eight Wastes.	烈騰八荒。	20
Bells, drums, and woodwinds play,	鐘鼓竽笙，	21
Cloud dancers soar.	雲舞翔翔，	22
Let the <i>Zhaoyao</i> banners of the Holy Ones fly, <sup>141</sup>	招搖靈旗，	23
And the Nine Tribes come as guests. <sup>142</sup>	九夷賓將。	24

In line 13, the supplicant explicitly announces that the ceremony is performed in the proper manner, according to tradition and with due reverence. The final three stanzas refer to features of the banquet itself: the fine dishes on which the offerings are presented (line 17), the music and dancers (lines 21–23), and the ostentatiously decorated chariots (line 15).<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Reading *zhaoyao* as verb, rather than the star off the tip of Northern Dipper, this line might be rendered: "To and fro sway the banners of the gods."

<sup>142</sup> *Hanshu* 22.1057.

<sup>143</sup> Such was the sense of decadence and opulence in the song that early in the reign of Emperor Cheng 成 (r. 33–7

Whereas the first half of the song expresses desire for cosmic regularity, desire in the second half is more closely centered upon the particular space where the ritual is performed. It is a desire both for presence and absence, for if the gods descend to the ritual space, if they come to the feast, then ill-fortune and disaster shall be driven far away. At the same time, desire operates on multiple levels. If the dance is perfectly performed, then cloud dancers will ascend like the mediums of old Chu, holding aloft their banners embroidered with images of the Dipper,<sup>144</sup> so that they become the starry banners of the gods themselves. And if the gods attend the banquet, and there is order in the world, then representatives of peripheral groups, over which Emperor Wu wished to establish his dominion, might be seated at his table (line 24).

The most distinctive feature of celestial signs in the ritual repertoire of Emperor Wu's court, as opposed to those in the "Nine Songs," "Encountering Sorrow," or Han *sao*-style poetry, is that they are always auspicious, always signs that the ruler-suppliant would seek to bring into being. In stark contrast to the celestial signs we saw in technical texts and memorials, which were by and large baleful omens that demanded circumspection, if not ritual or political reforms, celestial signs in the voice of the ruler-suppliant underscore the ruler's legitimacy and suasive power. The appearance of the light over the altar is a sign that Emperor Wu was an ideal and hence efficacious suppliant before Heaven, and therefore, through its ritual re-enactment, he could claim the continued support of Heaven. The regularities of the cosmos—the movements of the planets, the sun, and moon, timely winds and rains, the orderly procession of the Four Seasons, and the timely and continual work of the agricultural labor force itself—would then ensure continued agricultural bounty, and a well-fed and docile populace. And if the gods themselves eagerly sit at the ruler's table, how much more so should the representatives of the Xiongnu, the Qiang, and other potential adversaries or allies in the human realm?

### Part III: The Celestial Journey of the Frustrated Minister in Han Times

#### A Journey in Search of Justice: "Vanishing in the Distance"

Few figures in early imperial China spoke with greater authority on the meaning of celestial signs than Liu Xiang. In his *Hanshu* biography, Ban Gu writes that such was Liu Xiang's enthusiasm for both Classical and technical learning (*jing shu* 經術) that "by day he would recite the texts and their traditions (*shu zhuan* 書傳)<sup>145</sup> and by night he would observe the starry lodges, sometimes not sleeping until dawn" 晝誦書傳，夜觀星宿，或不寐達旦。<sup>146</sup>

---

BCE), Chancellor Kuang Heng 匡衡 (d. 30 or 29 BCE), a proponent of simplified and economic ritual, would submit a memorial to change line 15 from "Simurgh chariots and dragon scales" to "abandoning [that which is repugnant] and selecting that which is beautiful and perfect" 涓選休成 (see *Hanshu* 22.1057, n. 8). For Kuang Heng's ritual reforms, see Michael Loewe, "K'uang Heng and the Reform of Religious Practices – 31 BC" in *Crisis and Conflict in Han China 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974): 154–92.

<sup>144</sup> Yan Shigu, as mentioned above, suggests that an image of the star Zhaoyao was inscribed upon the banners of the gods (*Hanshu* 22.1057, n. 7). As it is difficult to imagine how an image of a single star could be embroidered on a banner, Zhaoyao here seems more likely to be a metonym for an image of the Northern Dipper with Zhaoyao at the tip of its handle.

<sup>145</sup> *Shu zhuan* 書傳 may also be read as a proper noun meaning, "The *Documents* and its traditions" or possibly, "the traditions of the *Documents*."

<sup>146</sup> *Hanshu* 70.1963.

Indeed, Liu Xiang was a careful reader of the Classics and an astute observer of the stars. He understood celestial events as historical events and went to great pains to consider the relationship between signs in the heavens, the terrestrial developments that produced them, and the events they portended. Yet for Liu Xiang, neither reading the Classics nor reading the celestial signs recorded therein was a mere philological or philosophical enterprise. As we saw in previous chapters, Liu Xiang read the signs in his own day on the basis of what he had learned from the signs that had appeared in the past, especially those recorded in the *Annals* (Chunqiu 春秋) Classic. It was on the basis of the authority of the past that Liu Xiang would produce his arguments concerning how best to respond to celestial signs in the present.

While Liu Xiang is well-remembered as an omenologist and statesmen, the great majority of his many poetic compositions have been lost.<sup>147</sup> Precious little remains, save for his highly stylized set of poems in the *sao*-style, the “Jiu tan” 九嘆 (Nine Laments or, more literally, Nine Sighs). We do not know precisely when Liu Xiang penned the “Nine Laments.” David Hawkes, without making any strong claim regarding the matter, writes: “...I prefer to believe that Liu Hsiang wrote during the bitter years out of office when his friends and patrons were being undermined and destroyed by the hostile clique surrounding the Emperor Yüan.”<sup>148</sup> While we cannot be certain whether the poems within it are the direct product of their composer’s own experience, Liu Xiang’s set of poems nonetheless bears the indelible imprint of one who had not only fully internalized the voice of the frustrated minister, but was able to articulate that voice in a creative and nuanced manner.

Celestial signs play a prominent role in Liu Xiang’s poems.<sup>149</sup> Liu Xiang is at his most original in his use of celestial signs to invoke the context of the judicial hearing. In “Li shi” 離世 (Parting with the World), Liu writes:

The Holy One, King Huai, <sup>150</sup> still grants me no audience,	靈懷曾不吾與兮，	5
But instead listens to the slanderous words	即聽夫人之諛辭。	6
of those people.		
Let my testimony be brought before Heaven and Earth.	余辭上參於天墜兮，	7

<sup>147</sup> Liu Xiang’s *Hanshu* biography states that “he submitted several tens of *pian* of *fu* and *song*” 獻賦頌凡數十篇 (*Hanshu* 70.1928). One complete additional *fu* entitled “Qing yu Huashan *fu*” 請雨華山賦 (*Fu* on Praying for Rain at Mt. Hua), along with two short fragments, and several other *fu* titles are attributed to him in various medieval encyclopedia. See Fu Zhengang 費振剛, Hu Shuangbao 胡雙寶, and Zong Minghua 宗明華 eds., *Quan Han fu* 全漢賦 (Complete *Fu* of the Han Dynasty; Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1993): 151–59.

<sup>148</sup> Hawkes 151–2. It might well be that Liu Xiang composed the set early in his life, before his series of political misfortunes began, or late in life, when he was a prominent figure at the court of Emperor Cheng. After all, Liu Xiang’s contemporary Wang Bao 王褒 (fl. 61–54 BCE), composed a similar set of poems, and we do not know him to have ever been a victim of slander; indeed, his political career seems to have gone quite smoothly prior to his untimely death due to illness while on an errand for Emperor Xuan 宣 (r. 73–49 BCE) (*Hanshu* 64B.2830).

<sup>149</sup> References to the sun and moon, wind and rain, and the stars themselves abound in Liu Xiang’s set of poems. His “Far Roaming” features a celestial journey through the stars that could be compared to the likes of the “Great Man,” and the other well-known song by the same name attributed to Qu Yuan.

<sup>150</sup> I follow Wang Yi in reading the phrase *Ling Huai* 靈懷 (Holy Huai) as a reference to King Huai of Chu (*Chuci buzhu* 16.285).

Let the Four Seasons verify what I have said.	旁引之於四時。	8
I point to the sun and the moon that they might shed their light upon me,	指日月使延照兮，	9
And I touch upon Zhaoyao that it might bear witness on my behalf. <sup>151</sup>	撫招搖呂質正。	10

Liu Xiang the omenologist in several cases cited the appearance of signs in the heavens to bear witness to the truth of his own words, though his role as an interpreter of celestial signs at court may well have come after the composition of the “Nine Laments.”<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, that Liu Xiang suggests in his poems that signs in the heavens have a capacity to bear witness in a quasi-judicial manner is revealing, if only because it breaks with the familiar patterns of language and conventions of staid omenological records and formulaic memorials. Disasters and celestial anomalies, worrisome though they might be to the emperor or his favorites, carried a different set of connotations to those who were politically on the outs. For those who felt that their own voices went unheard, or wished to present themselves as such, celestial signs might speak on their behalf.

Nevertheless, justice is perennially hard to come by. Even the most heartfelt complaints could fall on deaf ears, and this seems to have been the case whether addressing gods or mere rulers of men. Liu Xiang’s “Vanishing into the Distance” stages a courtroom drama in which his persona seeks a formal hearing among the signs of the heavens. These signs are not portents but anthropomorphic deities. Following the obligatory opening lines in which he states his own sorrow at not having been duly recognized, Liu writes:

Choked up feelings long held within,	情慨慨而長懷兮，	5
I trust in the August One on High to bear witness on my behalf.	信上皇而質正。	6
And so I join with <sup>153</sup> the Five Mountains and the Eight Holy Ones,	合五嶽與八靈兮，	7
And I go off in search of the Nine Starbirds <sup>154</sup> and the Six Spirits.	訊九魁與六神。	8
I summon the Lunar Lodges that I might present my testimony,	指列宿以白情兮，	9
And charge the Five Gods to take my deposition. <sup>155</sup>	訴五帝呂置詞。	10

<sup>151</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.285.

<sup>152</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 243–49.

<sup>153</sup> The Five Mountains here are personified as gods and hence can be gathered together. I am in essential agreement with Hawkes’ understanding of the line, which he renders “Convoke the Five Peaks and the gods of every quarter” (158).

<sup>154</sup> Wang Yi identifies *jiu qi* 九魁 as “the nine stars of the Northern Dipper” 北斗九星 (*Chuci buzhu* 16.292). My rendering of the *qi* as starbirds attempts to capture its sense as it is used in the words *qidui* 魁堆 and *qique* 魁雀, both kinds of birds. My rendering must be considered tentative, however, as it assumes that the sense of *qi* in *jiuqi* is the same as in the birds’ names. One recension of the text has the character *kui* 魁 for *qi* 魁 (*Chuci buzhu* 16.293). “Nine chiefs” would be a more appropriate rendering for the phrase *jiu kui*. Hawkes has “the Nine Bright Shiners” (158).

Let Northern Dipper act as my advocate,	北斗為我折中兮，	11
And Supreme Unity hear the evidence on my behalf. <sup>156</sup>	太一為余聽之。	12

Liu Xiang's persona seeks recognition from signs in the heavens when it is unavailable in the human realm. He pursues not a single deity, but a whole host of gods identified with stars, mountains, and each and every direction.<sup>157</sup> From the Five Gods<sup>158</sup> and the Dipper, he seeks testimony on his own behalf, which can only come in the form of some anomaly, some disruption of the regular celestial patterns that imply all is well in the world. He urges them to speak on his behalf before no earthly ruler, but before Supreme Unity himself, who paradoxically, is the ultimate celestial model for the emperor in the human realm.

The voice of the deity is not, however, absent from Liu Xiang's ministerial plea. Following the initial foray into the celestial court, the song presents a vision of a celestial procession composed of great beast-like constellations, comets, and various sorts of rainbows:

Clothed in the True Way of the <i>yin</i> and <i>yang</i> ,	云服陰陽之正道兮，	13
I drive forth the perfect harmony of Lord Soil.	御后土之中和。	14
I take the sinuous twists of the Azure Dragon for my pendant,	佩蒼龍之蚺虬兮，	15
And the snaking spiral of Grand <sup>159</sup> Rainbow for my belt.	帶隱虹之透虵。	16
Trailing behind me the dazzling luminescence of the Broom-star,	曳彗星之皓旰兮，	17
I touch upon the Crimson Bird and Junyi.	撫朱爵與鷦鷯。	18
I roam the chilly clarity of Pure Holiness,	遊清靈之颯戾兮，	19
Wearing wispy trails of cloudy robes.	服雲衣之披披。	20
I set up a jade blossom <sup>160</sup> and a crimson banner,	杖玉華與朱旗兮，	21
Hang forth the Bright Moon's mysterious pearl.	垂明月之玄珠。	22
I fly the Rainbows Flags that block the light,	舉霓旌之帶翳兮，	23
And raise the ruddy yellow <sup>161</sup> knotted pennants. <sup>162</sup>	建黃纁之總旄。	24

<sup>155</sup> I am particularly indebted to Hawkes for lines 7–8 (see Hawkes 158).

<sup>156</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.292–93.

<sup>157</sup> The supplications of Liu Xiang's persona might be compared to those of King Xuan of Zhou 周宣王 (r. 827–782 BCE) as they are recounted in the Mao 258, “Yun Han” 雲漢 (Cloudy River) and its commentaries. See Chapter 6, pp. 275–80.

<sup>158</sup> The Five Gods were associated with the Five Planets. See Chapter 2, p. 75.

<sup>159</sup> I follow Wang Yi's gloss of *yin* 隱 as *da* 大 (grand) (*Chuci buzhu* 16.293). In the absence of his gloss, we would take the phrase *yin hong* 隱虹 as “Hidden Rainbow.”

<sup>160</sup> Following a textual variant that reads *ce* 策 (whip) for *jua* 華 (flower) (*Chuci buzhu* 16.292), Hawkes renders this line “Jade is my whip; my banner is scarlet” (158).

<sup>161</sup> I follow Wang Yi's gloss of *huang xun* 黃纁 as *chi huang* 赤黃 (red-yellow; *Chuci buzhu* 16.293).

<sup>162</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.293.

Whereas the procession in “Great Man” created a maximal sense of the power of the Great Man himself, and Qu Yuan’s procession in the “Encountering Sorrow” met with one insurmountable obstacle after another, Liu Xiang here emphasizes his own perfect harmony with the celestial procession, which moves perfectly and effortlessly through space, entirely without coercion. Liu Xiang’s own blamelessness is the source of the harmony that permeates the procession, and by metonymic logic, the entire cosmos:

I am pure and without error,	躬純粹而罔愆兮，	25
For I have received the marvelous ways <sup>163</sup>	承皇考之妙儀。	26
of my August Fathers. <sup>164</sup>		

Cosmic harmony proves, however, to be both ephemeral and elusive, the daydream of a frustrated minister. The vision of the celestial journey does not so much end, as simply peter out, after which it is immediately followed by a temporal and spatial shift. In the latter portion of the poem, Liu Xiang’s persona no longer seeks recognition in a just hearing among the stars. Rather, the idealized celestial journey is replaced with a terrestrial journey characterized by frequent and recurrent obstacles, and repeated tropes of blocked vision:

Regretting the injustice of bygone affairs,	惜往事之不合兮，	27
I cross the Miluo River and travel downstream.	橫汨羅而下瀉。	28
Riding the burgeoning waves southward I ford,	乘隆波而南渡兮，	29
Following the currents of the Jiang and the Xiang.	逐江湘之順流。	30
I venture to the deep waters of	赴陽侯之潢洋兮，	31
the Marquis of Yang; <sup>165</sup>		
I descend the stony rapids and climb upon the isles.	下石瀨而登洲。	32
Hills piled high block my vision; <sup>166</sup>	陵魁堆以蔽視兮，	33
Clouds dusky and dim darken the way before me.	雲冥冥而闇前。	34
The mountains spiny heights without bound,	山峻高以無垠兮，	35
Their piled grandeur bears down upon me.	遂曾閼而迫身。	36
Flurries of snow pile up on the trees,	雪霏霏而薄木兮，	37
Clusters of clouds gather and descend.	雲霏霏而隕集。	38

<sup>163</sup> I follow Wang Yi’s gloss of *yi* 儀 as *fa* 法 (ways) (*Chuci buzhu* 16.293). The word *yi*, as it is used here, most directly evokes ceremonies or ritual forms. It may also refer to demeanor or manners, rulers, regulations, standards, or even instruments and apparatus, such as the *hun yi* 渾儀 or armillary sphere.

<sup>164</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.293.

<sup>165</sup> The Marquis of Yang is likewise a prominent figure in Yang Xiong’s “Contra ‘Encountering Sorrow.’” In a comment attached to that piece, Ying Shao explains: “The Marquis of Yang was an ancient local lord. Found guilty of a crime, he threw himself into the river, where his spirit became a great wave” 陽侯，古之諸侯也，有罪自投江，其神為大波 (*Hanshu* 87A.3519, n. 3).

<sup>166</sup> Hawkes’ rendering of this line is something of an over-translation, but I agree with his interpretation: “The steep-towering banks shut off my view of *Heaven* (158, emphasis added).



Hemmed in by hills dark and treacherous,	阜隘狹而幽險兮，	39
The craggy stones block out the sun.	石參嵯以翳日。	40
With sorrow for my old home, I burst into anger,	悲故鄉而發忿兮，	41
At having been away from my land for so long.	去余邦之彌久。	42
I turn my back on the Dragon Gates	背龍門而入河兮，	43
and enter the river,		
Climb the Great Mound and gaze out	登大墳而望夏首。	44
at the Headwaters of the River Xia. <sup>167</sup>		

Liu Xiang echoes the narrative surrounding Qu Yuan's death, but instead of drowning in the River Mi, he travels downstream, crisscrossing various waterways, ascending isles, and following secluded paths through treacherous mountain terrain. He finds neither death nor justice. His sojourn into the heavens was inspired by the desire to be recognized, to be heard and to be seen, yet he returns to the terrestrial sphere only to wander a landscape replete with features that obscure vision. Stony hills and inclement weather make it impossible for Liu Xiang's persona to see a way forward, but more importantly, they make it impossible for him to be viewed from above. Celestial signs in the later part of poem, including "flurries of snow" and "clusters of clouds," serve not as potential witnesses to his character, but quite the opposite. They prevent the very possibility of witness. And so, like Qu Yuan before him, Liu Xiang's persona longs for his own land, unable to return. He recalls the Dragon Gates, the portal into the palace and political life through which he could not gain entry, even as he crosses the threshold of the river. But although in line 44 the persona claims to *enter* the river, there is no final moment, no death by drowning, no resolution to be had. The final section of "Vanishing into the Distance," the "lament" or "sigh" (*tan* 歎), describes a man doomed to endless wandering:

The Lament says:	歎曰：	
Whirlwinds spin like tumbleweeds,	飄風蓬龍，	61
Dust rises and twists.	埃拂拂兮。	62
The grasses waver and the trees shed their leaves,	中木搖落，	63
As the season withers and sickens.	時槁悴兮。	64
Living in treacherous times I have encountered calamity,	遭傾遇禍，	65
And cannot be saved.	不可救兮。	66
Long I moan, ever I sob,	長吟永歔，	67
My tears fall without end.	涕究究兮。	68
To vent my feelings I present this poem,	抒情陳詩，	69
In hopes of clearing my name.	冀以自免兮。	70
Down with the waters I flow,	頽流下隕，	71
With each day I am further away. <sup>168</sup>	身日遠兮。	77

<sup>167</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.294.

<sup>168</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.295.

At the end of the poem, Liu Xiang perhaps does not entirely remove the mask of his persona, but like a performer in some Noh drama, we can see the jaw of the man underneath.<sup>169</sup> Liu Xiang ends on a note that is strikingly self-conscious; his poem is explicitly inscribed with its own textuality and with its purpose as text. Liu tells us, in line 69, that the poem is a poem, and in line 70, what he hopes to achieve by writing it. He drops the conceit of a journey first through the heavens, and then through terrestrial waterways and craggy mountains; in the end, the images that populate the poem are but manifestations of the feelings of its composer. There is no resolution within the poem itself, but hope remains that its composer might clear his name,<sup>170</sup> and once again cross the threshold of the Dragon Gates, regaining entry into the palace.

Liu Xiang's *sao* poetry, in contrast to early works in the genre such as the "Nine Songs" and "Encountering Sorrow," carried a self-consciousness of the poems as texts, and as texts that were written in a particular tradition. Three times in his set of poems, Liu Xiang mentions "Encountering Sorrow" by name, and twice he refers to the act of reading (*lan* 覽) or reciting (*tan* 嘆) it. In the second case, Liu Xiang specifies Qu Yuan as its author.<sup>171</sup> Even in the very first couplet of the opening poem of his set, Liu Xiang refers to Qu Yuan in the third person.<sup>172</sup> "Chiu T'an is written mostly in the *persona* of Ch'ü Yüan," David Hawkes writes, "but often Liu Hsiang speaks for himself through Ch'ü Yüan's mouth, and sometimes he drops the mask altogether and speaks of Ch'ü Yüan in the third person."<sup>173</sup> The final two poems we examine in this chapter likewise evince a strong sense of the consciousness of text as text, written in a genre, and in response to earlier, and by now canonical, works.

<sup>169</sup> Liu Xiang only partially adopts Qu Yuan's voice in his compositions, and so, there is always a play between the persona of the poems and the author underneath. Liu Xiang engages in the act of composing, just as one must do in the act of reading, in a kind of performance, but he does not fully transform himself into the role he is playing, maintaining a conscious distance from it. Richard Schechner uses the term "performative consciousness" to designate the continuing consciousness of performers *as themselves* even as they play a role. He writes: "This same performative principle applies to Noh drama and is visible there in the mask that is too small for the actor's face—too small, that is, if the mask is intended to cover the whole face (as it does in Ramlila). In Noh, below the delicate white mask of the young female the spectator sees the thick, dark jowls of the mature male performer. The extreme formality of Noh leaves no doubt that this double exposure is no accident. Why is part of the main actor's face left showing—thereby undercutting the very illusion the mask and costume create? Is not the delight of Noh increased by the knowledge of the incomplete transformation achieved?" Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985): 6–8. Liu Xiang's suite is particularly moving not because he is able to transform himself fully into Qu Yuan, but rather, because he continually reminds the reader that it is he, Liu Xiang, beneath the mask.

<sup>170</sup> Here, I am reading the poem as if it were produced during one of the periods in which Liu Xiang was politically out of favor.

<sup>171</sup> References to reading and reciting "Encountering Sorrow" are respectively found in "Xi xian" 惜賢 (Longing for Worthies) and "You ku" 憂苦 (Lamenting Bitterness; *Chuci buzhu* 16.295 and 300; Hawkes 159.1 and 162.17). "Si gu" 思古 (Contemplating the Ancients) also mentions both the "Encountering Sorrow" and the "Great Plan" (Hong fan 洪範) chapter of the *Documents* (*Chuci buzhu* 16.307; Hawkes 166.15 and 18).

<sup>172</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 16.282; Hawkes 152.1.

<sup>173</sup> Hawkes 151.

### The Celestial Journey as a Textual Journey: “Holding Fast to My Will”

In his commentary on the *Chuci*, Wang Yi effectively wrote himself into that canon, implicitly claiming the final word on it. Like Liu Xiang and other Han writers before him, Wang Yi composed a set of nine poems in imitation of the presumably pre-imperial “Nine Songs” and “Jiu zhang” 九章 (Nine Illuminations). He appended his “Jiu si” 九思 (Nine Longings) to the end of the commentary, seemingly closing off the collection as a whole.

It is difficult to read Wang Yi’s poems in terms of his personal biography, for we know little of his life. His *Hou Hanshu* biography is so brief that we may examine it in its entirety:

王逸字叔師，南郡宜城人也。元初中，舉上計吏，為校書郎。順帝時，為侍中。著楚辭章句行於世。其賦、誄、書、論及雜文凡二十一篇。又作漢詩百二十三篇。

Wang Yi was styled Zishu, and a man of Yicheng in Nanjun. In the Yuanchu reign period (114–120), he was commissioned as a Reporter of Accounts for his commandery, and was selected as a Gentleman Collator. In the time of Emperor Shun, he was selected as Palace Attendant. He composed the *Sentence and Section Commentary to the Lyrics of Chu* which has been transmitted to the present age. His *fu*, eulogies, letters, essays, and assorted writings totaled twenty-one chapters. He also composed Han poems<sup>174</sup> in 123 chapters.<sup>175</sup>

We can gather from these few sentences that Wang Yi was a prolific writer in several genres. He seems most of all to have been a composer and interpreter of poetry, to whom we are much indebted for his commentary on the *Chuci*. Certain genres are not mentioned in his biography, in particular any sort of memorial. Unlike Liu Xiang, Wang Yi’s political career appears to have been relatively unremarkable. Never did Wang Yi become embroiled in political controversy, nor did he ever get himself into any serious trouble, so far as we can tell from his biography. He served as a Gentleman Collator in the Imperial Archives under Emperor An, a post suited to his particular talents, and was enough favored that he was given the honorary post of Palace Attendant, a promotion that greatly increased his income and prestige.<sup>176</sup>

We do not really know if Wang Yi was ever a frustrated official in the same way the Liu Xiang had been. This did not, however, prevent him from adopting such a voice. At the same time, Wang Yi’s tone is in some ways less somber than that of Liu Xiang. While he begins and

<sup>174</sup> Precisely what “Han poems” means is not entirely clear. One suspects that Wang Yi may have written poems similar to the Music Bureau poetry (Yuefu 樂府) or “Old-style poems” (Gushi 古詩). For a general account of poetry from the last century of the Eastern Han, see Cai Zong-qi., *The Matrix of Lyric Transformation: Poetic Modes and Self-Presentation in Early Chinese Pentasyllabic Poetry* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996). For a critical re-assessment of the position of Eastern Han poetry within the broader tradition, see Stephen Owen, “‘Han’ Poetry and the Southern Dynasties,” in *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center Press, 2006): 23–72.

<sup>175</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 80A.2618.

<sup>176</sup> Though as a Palace Attendant he had a high salary of 2000 *shi* or its equivalent, and perhaps the ear of Emperor Shun, whatever advice he might have offered has been lost to us. For a brief description of the duties of Palace Attendants, see Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 59–60.

ends with the familiar conventions that characterize the voice of the frustrated official, such as the world upside-down topos, images of darkness and murkiness, and explicit statements of sadness and disappointment, these feel almost tacked on, particularly at the end of the poem. Indeed, read apart from its somber bookends, the body of the poem describes a seemingly successful celestial journey that ultimately lands the persona, like Wang Yi himself, among the treasures of a precious archive. It is within the texts of that palace archive where the most significant portion of the journey takes place.

“Holding Fast to My Will” opens in an idyllic space that is paradoxically occupied by inauspicious and petty creatures:

I ascend jade peaks free and easy,	陟玉巒兮逍遙，	1
And survey the towering heights of lofty hills.	覽高岡兮嶢嶢。	2
The ranks of cinnamon trees spread forth,	桂樹列兮紛敷，	3
Sprouting purple blossoms and extending their branches.	吐紫華兮布條。	4
This is where the Simurgh ought to dwell,	實孔鸞兮所居，	5
But now none but owls gather here.	今其集兮惟鴞。	6
The crows and magpies are startled and call out,	烏鵲驚兮啞啞，	7
As I gaze off into the distance.	余顧瞻兮怱怱。	8
The sun and moon grow dark,	彼日月兮闇昧，	9
And ill airs block off the heavens.	障覆天兮褻氛。	10
That lord of mine—he is deaf,	伊我后兮不聰，	11
How can I display my integrity and prove that I am loyal? <sup>177</sup>	焉陳誠兮効忠。	12

Though the first four lines of the poem describe a grand and lovely vista, the persona’s easy saunter through it is interrupted when he discovers its occupants: vicious, rapacious fowl—owls, crows, and magpies—perch in the rightful dwelling of the auspicious Simurgh. Their presence is manifested as much aurally as visually in their ugly cawing. Wang Yi’s persona fixes his gaze on the distance and the heavens darken. Like many before him, he takes to the skies to express his heartfelt loyalty in the face of a lord who can neither hear his voice nor recognize his value:

I take flight, soaring beyond this vulgar world,	攄羽翮兮超俗，	13
Traveling unfettered I nourish my spirit.	遊陶遨兮養神。	14
Yoking six slithering dragons,	乘六蛟兮蜿蟬，	15
I gallop and ascend the clouds.	遂馳騁兮陞雲。	16
I raise the comet’s light as my banner,	揚彗光兮為旗，	17
And grasp the lightning riding crop for my whip.	秉電策兮為鞭。	18
In the morning I set out from Ying,	朝晨發兮鄴郢，	19
And at supper arrive at Layered Springs.	食時至兮增泉。	20

<sup>177</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 17.326.

I turn about the bends, camp in the north,	繞曲阿兮北次，	21
And wheel my carriage to the southern extreme.	造我車兮南端。	22
I visit Black and Yellow <sup>178</sup> and present my gift,	謁玄黃兮納贄，	23
I exalt loyal valor and remain steadfast.	崇忠貞兮彌堅。	24
I traverse the Nine Palaces and survey all,	歷九宮兮徧觀，	25
Glimpsing the precious treasures of the Secret Archives. <sup>179</sup>	睹祕藏兮寶珍。	26

Wang Yi's journey to the heavens employs familiar conventions; he uses celestial signs in tried if not tired ways, taking lightning as his whip, comets for his banner, and dragons for his steeds. His journey from Ying in the east, turning about at Piled Springs, and off to the north, then abruptly to the south, rendered in a mere four lines, feels almost perfunctory. His arrival at the celestial court is more interesting. He offers his gifts to Black and Yellow, the God<sup>180</sup> of the Center (*zhong yang zhi Di* 中央之帝),<sup>181</sup> and they are well-received. He assumes a position at court where he is allowed to view the treasures of its archives. It is at this point in the poem where the distinction between a textual journey and a celestial journey blurs. The persona speaks of traversing the Nine Palaces once he has arrived at the court of the God of the Center, yet it is difficult to say whether this means a celestial journey through the eight cardinal directions plus the center, or if it is a journey through a *Jiu gong tu* 九宮圖, a Chart of the Nine Palaces, such as that found at Mawangdui.<sup>182</sup> When Wang Yi's persona continues on his journey, we may find ourselves asking an unanswerable and in some ways wrong-headed question: Is he really describing a journey through the heavens or a journey through texts and charts that represent the heavens?

I approach Fu Yue, <sup>183</sup> riding upon a dragon,	就傳說兮騎龍，	27
---	---------	----

<sup>178</sup> The anonymous commentator glosses “Black and Yellow” (*xuan huang* 玄黃) as “the God of the Center” (*zhong yang zhi di* 中央之帝也) (*Chuci buzhu* 17.326). Hawkes reads this line: “I called on the Lord of Heaven and offered him tribute” (181). Elsewhere, black and yellow are used metonymically for Heaven and Earth. See e.g. Michael Nylan, *The Canon of Supreme Mystery: A Translation with Commentary of the T'ai Hsüan Ching* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), tetragram 42, p. 275.

<sup>179</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 17.326. The phrase *micang* 祕藏 is rare in early China, but an instance in Liu Xin's 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) biography indicates that it specifically refers to texts stored in the imperial archives. “The *Annals* had been edited by Zuo Qiuming (trad. 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), and all were old texts in archaic script. More than twenty were stored in the Imperial Archives, where they were kept but not made available. The Filial Emperor Cheng, saddened that learning was incomplete and the texts fragmentary, somewhat apart from their original form, during his reign set forth and made available *the secret stores*, collating and putting in order the archaic script...” 及春秋左氏丘明所修，皆古文舊書，多者二十餘，通藏於祕府，伏而未發。孝成皇帝閱學殘文缺，稍離其真，乃陳發祕藏，校理舊文 (*Hanshu* 36.1969–70). In his use of the phrase *micang*, Wang Yi seems to refer to the location where such texts were stored, hence the rendering “Secret Archives” above.

<sup>180</sup> Or possibly: “Gods.”

<sup>181</sup> This gloss is drawn from the anonymous commentary to the poem in *Chuci buzhu* 17.326.

<sup>182</sup> For the “Chart of the Nine Palaces” and the Xingde 刑德 (Punishment and Favor) manuscript on which it appears, see Chapter 2, pp. 78–79.

<sup>183</sup> G (Sco), HR 6630, formerly γ Tel. Fu Yue 傳說 is mentioned in neither the “Treatise on Celestial Offices” nor the *Hanshu* “Treatise on Celestial Pattern,” though a line from the “Far Roaming” attributed to Qu Yuan makes it quite clear that there was a star called Fu Yue in Han times: “I marvel at how Fu Yue was able to lodge among

Meet the Weaver Maiden <sup>184</sup> and take her as my bride.	與織女兮合婚。	28
I raise the Net of Heaven <sup>185</sup> and capture the wayward,	舉天罟兮掩邪，	29
Draw the Bow of Heaven <sup>186</sup> and shoot the treacherous.	彀天弧兮射姦。	30
I follow the true men and soar up high,	隨真人兮翱翔，	31
Consuming the primordial ethers, long I endure.	食元氣兮長存。	32
I look upon Grand Tenuity <sup>187</sup> so very solemn,	望太微兮穆穆，	33
And peer at the brilliance of the Three Stairways. <sup>188</sup>	睨三階兮炳分。	34
[Those at court] aid one another in governance and bring completion to the transformations,	相輔政兮成化，	35
They build a blazing legacy and trail the fragrant scent. <sup>189</sup>	建烈業兮垂勳。	36

In a few brief lines, Wang Yi describes an itinerary that traverses the far reaches of the heavens. From Fu Yue, near the southern horizon, Wang's persona abruptly travels some eighty degrees northward to Weaver Maiden, the bright star Vega. He then proceeds westward—or far eastward—to Heaven's Net, in Taurus, and southwest to the Bow of Heaven. From here, he gazes northwest, at the great palace constellation Grand Tenuity, and then spies Three Stairways further northward still.

Like Zhang Heng's, Wang Yi's journey can be mapped, and constitutes a near complete circumnavigation of the heavens (see figures 1a–b in the appendix to this chapter). Such are the distances between the objects he describes that they are never all visible at a single time.<sup>190</sup> They cannot be viewed directly and simultaneously with the eye, but one might behold them all at once in the imaginative space of the celestial journey, or within the textual space of the star chart. The space through which Wang's persona journeys is at once celestial and textual. There is no means of distinguishing between a journey through the heavens and a journey through texts that represent the heavens in his work. If we imagine mediums using songs like those recorded in the “Nine Songs” in the context of an ecstatic ritual—singing, dancing, and experiencing visions—it might be possible to argue that the journey is literally a journey in and through the sky. While those mediums worked in a tradition, it had been a tradition transmitted whole cloth, taught through the act of performing the rituals themselves, rather than produced, interpreted, imitated, and reproduced as a disembodied set of lyrics among writers and readers. Wang Yi was no medium, but a professional collator and poet who worked in the medium of writing.

To write a commentary on the *Chuci*, Wang Yi had to be aware of his own compositions as compositions within a genre and a tradition. Wang Yi produced an allegorical reading of the

the stars” 奇傳說之託辰星兮 (*Chuci buzhu* 5.164).

<sup>184</sup> A group of three bright stars forming a triangle in Lyra.

<sup>185</sup> A lunar lodge in Taurus.

<sup>186</sup> A group of stars in Canis Major.

<sup>187</sup> Ten stars spread through Virgo, Coma Berenices, and Leo Major.

<sup>188</sup> The Three Stairways (*sanjie* 三階) is an alternate name for the Three Platforms (*santai* 三台) (*Hou Hanshu* 52.1710, n. 10).

<sup>189</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 17.326–27.

<sup>190</sup> From horizon to horizon, we can see at most 12hrs of right ascension at once whereas the constellations Wang Yi includes span some 19hrs.

*Chuci*; his own writing in the *sao* genre sometimes brings meanings that are elsewhere hidden beneath symbols to the surface. Where he reads the Lord of the East in the “Nine Songs” slaying the Wolf of Heaven as an allegory for the ruler “punishing those who are repugnant”<sup>191</sup> 誅惡, he makes the point more directly in his own poem, even as he adopts the deity’s voice. Eschewing the figure of the Wolf of Heaven, Wang plainly states that he uses the Bow of Heaven to shoot the treacherous, just as he uses the Net of Heaven to capture the wayward, rather than some celestial beast. But for all the power that echoes through his deified voice, in lines 33-34, the voice of the frustrated minister begins to re-emerge, as he gazes at those constellations most closely identified with the court, Grand Tenuity and Three Stairways, from afar without actually entering into them. The poem ends with an expression of sadness typical of the genre:

The sun on the horizon sinks in the west;	目瞿瞿兮西沒，	37
The way is far off and I stifle a sigh.	道遐迴兮阻歎。	38
My will grows ever stronger but there is no way to vent it,	志穡穡兮未通，	39
And in frustration I pity myself. <sup>192</sup>	悵敞罔兮自憐。	40

Wang Yi’s final word comes, however, not at the end of his last poem, but in the finale to the complete set of poems. In six lines, it succinctly expresses Wang Yi’s reading of the genre as a whole:

The finale says:	亂曰：	
If Heaven’s Courtyard is illuminated,	天庭明兮雲霓藏，	1
then the clouds and rainbows will be hidden away,		
And the Three Luminaries will shine,	三光朗兮鏡萬方。	2
mirrors reflecting all the world.		
Reject the lizards, advance the turtles and dragons,	斥口 <sup>193</sup> 蜴兮進龜龍，	3
Follow their memorials and counsels,	策謀從兮翼機衡。	4
rely upon Pivot and Balance.		
Find a match for Ji and Xie so they might restore	配稷契兮恢唐功，	5
the works of Yao,		
And sigh for those fine and talented ones,	嗟英俊兮未為雙。	6
who have not yet found their mates. <sup>194</sup>		

Celestial signs play a vital and multifaceted role in Wang Yi’s conclusion. Darkness and obscurity throughout the world may be eliminated if Heaven’s Hall is brightened. The anonymous commentator explains: “If Heaven is clear, the clouds and rainbows will be eliminated, and the sun, moon, and stars will shine. If the ruler’s illumination spreads to those

<sup>191</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 2.75.

<sup>192</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 17.327.

<sup>193</sup> The text has the rare character *song* consisting in three elements left to right: *chong* 虫, *mu* 木, and *pian* 片.

<sup>194</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 17.327.

below, thereby inducing order, both worthies and fools will find their proper places” 天清則雲霓除，日月星辰昭，君明下理，賢愚得所也。<sup>195</sup> The modality of the final four lines seems to shift from the conditional to the imperative. Wang Yi addresses the ruler directly, telling him to reject weak but potentially parasitic insects in favor of auspicious creatures.<sup>196</sup> In the fifth line, Wang beseeches the ruler to search for such noble figures as the respective ancestors of the Zhou and Shang dynastic houses, Ji and Xie, without whom, he implies, Yao could not have achieved his great works.<sup>197</sup> And in the final line, he reminds the ruler to remember that there is always an Yi Yin hidden away in the kitchen, or a Fu Yue building a wall, always a wise and worthy minister dwelling in obscurity, waiting to be discovered.

It is in the fourth line of the finale, however, where Wang Yi suggests that the ruler must subject himself to the textual and technical regimes from which his ministers drew so much of their power. Wang asks not just that the ruler listen to counsels, which might be offered by anyone with access to the ruler, but that he follow written memorials (*ce* 策) that could be composed only by learned officials. More specifically still, Wang asks that the ruler rely on two stars in the Dipper, Pivot and Balance. This might be read as a metonym for the stars, and celestial signs, in general. It might be read as an injunction that the ruler maintain his position at the center, and that he dole out favors fairly to those who revolve around him. Or it might be read in more specific terms, as a reference to a technology used to measure the movements of the stars, the armillary sphere.<sup>198</sup> In either case, to rely upon the stars meant trusting in those who

<sup>195</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 17.327.

<sup>196</sup> I am following the reading of the anonymous commentator who analogizes the lizards to petty men (*xiao ren* 小人) and turtles and dragons and exemplary individuals (*junzi* 君子; *Chuci buzhu* 17.327).

<sup>197</sup> For a discussion of Yao in *Shiji*, see Chapter 3, pp. 88–91.

<sup>198</sup> The anonymous commentator expands the phrase *jiheng* to mean *xuanji yuheng* or “Agate Pivot and Jade Balance” *xuanji yuheng* 璇璣玉衡 (*Chuci buzhu* 17.327). The same phrase appears, albeit with an orthographic variant, in the “Shun dian” 舜典 (Canon of Shun) chapter of the *Documents*: “He examined the Agate Pivot and Jade Balance to equalize the Seven Administrators” 在璿璣玉衡以齊七政. The Pseudo-Kong commentary to the *Documents* (ca. 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. CE) explains: “To ‘examine’ is to clearly perceive. Agate is a type of fine jade. The Pivot and Crossbar are an implement that the King uses to set to order the celestial patterns. It can rotate. The Seven Administrators are the sun, moon, and Five Planets. Each administers a different domain. Shun clearly perceived the celestial patterns and equalized the Seven Administrators so as to determine whether or not he met the approval of the Heart of Heaven” 在察也。璿美玉璣衡王者，正天文之器可運轉者七政，日月五星各異政舜察天文，齊七政，以審已當天心與否. See Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al. comp., *Shangshu zhushu* 尚書注疏 (Commentary and Subcommentary to the Documents): 2.6 in *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Books of the Four Chambers), Wenyuange edition, Intranet version, (2007). Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE) likewise read *xuan* as “fine jade” 美玉也 and *ji* as “an armillary sphere” 渾天儀 (*Shiji* 27.1291, n. 2). Zheng Xuan, in his commentary on the *Shun Ben ji* 舜本記 (Basic Annals of Shun) writes: “The Agate Pivot and the Jade Balance refer to the armillary sphere. The Seven Administrators refer to the sun, the moon, and the Five Planets” 璿璣，玉衡，渾天儀也。七政，日月五星也 (*Shiji* 1.24, n. 1). The technical treatises on celestial patterns in both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, however, understand the *xuanji yuheng* to refer to the seven stars in the Northern Dipper, which in turn govern the Seven Administrators (*Shiji* 27.1291; *Hanshu* 26.1274). Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞 have effectively argued that the phrase *xuanji yuheng* could not have meant armillary sphere in the “Canon of Shun” (Shun dian 舜典) chapter of the *Documents* as the device does not seem to have existed before the Western Han dynasty. See their *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 尚書校釋譯論 (Notes, Explanation, Translation, and Discussion of the Venerable Documents), vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005):



had the capacity to read them. And no one was more qualified to read the stars than Wang Yi's close contemporary Zhang Heng.

### **The Journey through the Classics: “Contemplating the Mystery”**

Zhang Heng's “*Fu* on Contemplating the Mystery” includes the lexical, metrical, and narratological features that readers by the Eastern Han had come to expect from poems about celestial journeys. In terms of its language and its cast of characters there is much that is familiar from “Encountering Sorrow” and from the “Great Man.” Yet it is less an imitation of earlier poems in the tradition than a literary response to them. It does not just borrow the voice of the tradition, but engages in a kind of dialogue with it. While Zhang speaks at times of consuming vapors or adorning himself with aromatic plants, cultivation in the poem is fundamentally achieved through the reading of texts. Zhang's *fu* performs and displays its author's erudition; it is replete with allusions to the *Odes* (Shi 詩) Classic, *sao*-style poetry, and historical narratives. Though the narrative surrounding the production of “Contemplating the Mystery” itself casts the poem clearly in the voice of a frustrated official, it does at times adopt the voice of a deity, but a deity that is neither frustrated like that found in the “Encountering Sorrow,” nor domineering, like that found in the “Great Man,” but rather in harmony with the cosmos. And though Zhang's persona, like Qu Yuan and the Great Man, ascends to great heights, in the end he neither exits the world nor resigns himself to exile from it, but calls into question the fundamentals of the genre by choosing to return to the world where earlier voices left it behind.

“Contemplating the Mystery” is presented in Zhang Heng's *Hou Hanshu* biography as, like “Encountering Sorrow,” the plaint of a slandered man:

帝引在帷幄，諷議左右。嘗問衡天下所疾惡者。宦官懼其毀己，皆共目之，衡乃詭對而出。閹豎恐終為其患，遂共讒之。衡常思圖身之事，以為吉凶倚伏，幽微難明，乃作《思玄賦》，以宣寄情志。

The Emperor took him behind the palace curtains, where Zhang gave criticism and advice concerning the court entourage. The Emperor once asked Heng who were the most hateful men in the empire. Fearing that he would speak ill of them, the eunuchs all glared at him. Heng gave an evasive response and left. Still fearing that Heng would make trouble for them, the eunuchs all slandered him instead. Heng constantly pondered the question of how he should act. He believed that good and bad fortune were intertwined, and their dark subtleties were hard to understand. He then wrote the ‘*Fu* on Contemplating the Mystery’ to express his thoughts and feelings.<sup>199</sup>

Like Qu Yuan before him, Zhang Heng is portrayed as a wise minister who had the ear of the ruler, and thus incurred the wrath of his jealous and backbiting contemporaries who sought to

114–18. This has no bearing, however, on how the anonymous commentator used the phrase in his commentary to Wang Yi's set of poems. Given that both Ma Rong and Zheng Xuan seem to have understood the phrase as referring to an armillary sphere, it is likely that the commentator used the term in the same sense.

<sup>199</sup> *Hou Hanshu* 59.1914. Translation of this passage, slightly modified, follows Knechtges, “Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery”: 105.

damage his reputation. Echoes of the language of “Encountering Sorrow” and the “Nine Songs” resonate throughout Zhang’s lengthy poem. Like Qu Yuan, Zhang’s persona adorns himself with various types of flowers and aromatic plants, knitting them together as he cultivates himself early in the poem, and complains none are able to see the full flower of his blossoms, nor detect the fragrance of his scent.<sup>200</sup> As in “Encountering Sorrow,” we find the intermittent presence of the voice of the deity, too, in “Contemplating the Mystery.” Like the sun itself, Zhang’s persona sets out in the morning from the Valley of Dawn (Yanggu 湯谷) and in the evening rests at the tree Fusang.<sup>201</sup> Like Qu Yuan, he visits the grave of Shun and consults diviners. Early in the poem he hovers on the brink of a threshold, seemingly without any means of crossing it:

I do not suppress my character nor go along with the crowd,	不抑操而苟容兮，	
It is as if I were overlooking the Yellow River, but had no boat. <sup>202</sup>	譬臨河而無航。	60

Yet even here, Zhang Heng’s language creates a sense of distance between the poet and the images appearing in the poem that contrasts with the immediacy of the “Encountering Sorrow.” Employing a stock metaphor, he does not say he is about to cross a river, but introduces the images of doing so with a word meaning “as if” (*bi* 譬), subtly if unintentionally reminding us that we are encountering a text in the celestial journey genre, rather than a putative account of an actual celestial journey.

Zhang Heng’s language, especially with regard to the flight through the heavens, at times recalls the “Great Man.” As he turns northward, Zhang’s persona is described as being “pressed up upon the lowly narrowness of the world” 逼區中之隘陋,<sup>203</sup> which calls to mind the image of the Great Man too large for the human realm in which he resides. Gods join Zhang’s procession. The Vermillion Bird carries his flag, and Pingyi goes before him clearing the way.<sup>204</sup> He flies rainbow flags and cloud banners.<sup>205</sup> But celestial signs are not an object of domination in “Contemplating,” as they had been in the “Great Man,”

The contrasts among “Encountering Sorrow,” the “Great Man,” and “Contemplating,” are perhaps most readily apparent in the way in which the three poems configure the encounter with the Gates of Heaven. Qu Yuan is simply unable to enter. The Great Man blazes through, without asking permission. Zhang Heng’s persona, however, enters the gates in an orderly, ritually correct manner, and once inside, he is greeted with a warm reception:

I bade the Celestial Porter open the gate,	叫帝闈使闢扉兮，	
And saw the turquoise palaces of the Celestial August One.	覲天皇于瓊宮。	340

<sup>200</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.652; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1914, lines 14–22.

<sup>201</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.658–59; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1920, lines 125 and 120.

<sup>202</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.654; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1916.

<sup>203</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.667; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1929, line 229.

<sup>204</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.660–61; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1922, line 150 and *Hou Hanshu* 59.1923, line 165.

<sup>205</sup> *Wenxuan* 672–23; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1933, lines 322 and 333.

<p>I listened to the nine movements of the Vast Music, As they unfurled slowly and harmoniously. I examined the modes and measures for bringing order to chaos, And I thought of how to establish a beginning and contemplated the end. For when joy is let loose without any restraint, I fear that happiness will vanish and sorrow will come. The Plain Maiden<sup>206</sup> played the strings and the notes lingered, But Great Rong<sup>207</sup> sighed and said, “Take heed!” Already having guarded against excess and quieted my will, I found myself with leisure to soar.<sup>208</sup></p>	<p>聆廣樂之九奏兮， 展洩洩以彤彤； 考治亂於律均兮， 意建始而思終。 惟般逸之無斁兮， 345 懼樂往而哀來。 素女撫絃而餘音兮， 太容吟曰念哉。 既防溢而靖志兮， 迨我暇以翱翔。 350</p>
---	--

Zhang Heng is ushered through the celestial gates and is greeted immediately with a multivalent musical performance. The music serves as a means of restoring order where chaos reigns, yet at the same time, it inspires in the listener thoughts of an unfettered joy that transforms in an instant to sorrow. The Plain Maiden who plays the song takes its celestial melody to too great an intensity, too dizzying a crescendo. Yet the heavens have their own means of restoring balance. When the Music Master, Great Rong, commands the Plain Maiden, “Take heed,” he ensures that the music does not become excessive. His persona is a guest in the celestial court, and a welcome one at that, but he is not needed there. He is free to continue his journey, and ultimately, to return to the human realm.

In the section of the *fu* that immediately follows, Zhang Heng’s persona makes a circuit of the heavens, journeying through a series of constellations. As Edward Lien shows, Zhang Heng, the cartographer of stars, follows a sensible course, moving from one asterism to the next, proceeding in order, never crisscrossing the sky nor doubling back.<sup>209</sup> He leaves Purple Palace (Zigong 紫宮), gathers his procession at Grand Tenuity (Taiwei 太微), bends Majestic Bow (Weihe 威弧), shoots the Great Wolf (Fenglang 封狼), beats the River Drum (Hegu 河鼓), and floats upon the Cloudy River (Yun Han 雲漢),<sup>210</sup> to cite just a few of the locations along his itinerary. Zhang’s persona proceeds to ever greater heights. As did Emperor Wu’s persona in the “Great Man,” and Qu Yuan’s in the “Far Roaming,” Zhang Heng’s persona passes through the

<sup>206</sup> The *Hou Hanshu* version of the text does not have the word *nü* 女 (maiden).

<sup>207</sup> Li Shan identifies Great Rong as the Music Master of the court of the Yellow God (*Wenxuan* 15.673).

<sup>208</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.673–74; cf. *Hou Hanshu* 59.1933–34.

<sup>209</sup> Lien 231–44. Lien provides Mercator projection maps created using Google Sky, breaking the journey into five segments, and showing the stars as they appear today. For my own maps of Zhang Heng’s celestial journey, in orthographic projection, with the stars shown as they appeared at the time of the composition of his *fu*, see figures 2a and 2b in the appendix to this chapter.

<sup>210</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.674; cf. *Hou Hanshu* 59.1934, lines 351–62 The constellations respectively correspond to parts of Draco, parts of Leo and Virgo, Canis Major and Argonavis, Sirius, and  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$  Aquilae. For a complete list of the identifiable asterisms and constellations in this part of the poem, see Lien 234–35.

## Upturned Shadows.

I braved the clash of startling thunder,	凌驚雷之硃礪兮，	
And dallied among the slippery tendrils of wild lightning,	弄狂電之淫裔。	370
I traversed the superlative darkness of undifferentiated vapors,	踰瘡鴻於宕冥兮，	
Passed through Upturned Shadows and soared to the heights.	貫倒景而高厲。	
Vast and empty there were no bounds,	廓盪盪其無涯兮，	
And then I saw beyond the sky. <sup>211</sup>	乃今窺乎天外。	

Confronted with the vast nothingness beyond the shell of the firmament, Zhang Heng does not seek to go out in the empty reaches of space. Unlike Emperor Wu's persona, who ultimately dwells alone beyond the world, Zhang's persona passes through Upturned Shadows only to reject what lies beyond them and return to the world that he has left behind. In the following lines, he once again returns to the Dipper, and gazes back at the world he left, a world to which he was bound to return:

I perched upon Kaiyang <sup>212</sup> and gazed downward,	據開陽而頰眠兮，	375
Looking over the darkness of my old home.	臨舊鄉之暗藹。	
I was sorrowed at how being away from my dwelling had labored my heart;	悲離居之勞心兮，	
Feeling wearied, I desired to return.	情悁悁而思歸。	
My soul twisted round, many times I looked behind me;	魂眷眷而屢顧兮，	
My steed leaned on the chariot shaft and lingered.	馬倚軛而徘徊。	380
Though pleasure journeys bring me joy,	雖遊娛以媮樂兮，	
How could I bear this sorrow and yearning?	豈愁慕之可懷。	
I went forth from Changhe Gates	出閭闔兮降天途，	
and descended the Celestial Path,		
Riding upon whirlwinds, galloping astride the void.	乘焱忽兮馳虛無。	
The clouds thickened and wrapped round my wheels;	雲菲菲兮繞余輪，	385
The souging wind beat my flag.	風眇眇兮震余旗。	
Flying wildly, dark and dim,	繽連翩兮紛暗曖，	
My vision suddenly blurred,	儵眩眩兮反常閭。	
I returned to my constant abode. <sup>213</sup>		

<sup>211</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.675; cf. *Hou Hanshu* 59.1934. Knechtges' rendering of the verb *kui* 窺, meaning "peer" or "look," is uncharacteristically loose: "Now I can *explore* the realm beyond the heavens" ("Contemplating the Mystery," 135).

<sup>212</sup> Kaiyang is a star in the Big Dipper.

<sup>213</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.675–76; cf. *Hou Hanshu* 59.1937.

The image of the figure looking back with pained longing at his old home, his horse tarrying and refusing to advance, is a central trope of the tradition of celestial journey poetry. Zhang Heng, however, inverts a key element of this trope, allowing the desired return home to actually take place. His longing and sorrow are no less than that of any other voice in the tradition, yet he refuses to remain in exile or exit the world entirely. Zhang's persona, unlike that of those who went before him, returns not only from Upturned Shadows, but emerges from the Gates of Heaven. Zhang revises an old trope to announce his triumphant return. In a cloudy mass, like a Holy One descending toward a medium in the "Nine Songs," he reappears at his old home.

Both Zhang Heng's "old home" and his journey, however, prove to be profoundly textual. His return to the place from which he set out recalls the opening of the poem:

I praise the profound teachings of former wise men;	仰先哲之玄訓兮，	1
However lofty they may be I will not violate them.	雖彌高而弗違。	
For if not the Hamlet of Humanity where can one reside,	匪仁里其焉宅兮，	
And if not the Footprints of the Dutiful what can one follow? <sup>214</sup>	匪義迹其焉追？	

Zhang Heng here sets himself up as a Yan Yuan, a devoted and ideal disciple of sagely teaching, as he echoes the language of Kongzi's 孔子 (551–479 BCE) favorite student, who once said of his master's teachings: "The more I look upon him the loftier he seems" 仰之彌高.<sup>215</sup> From the very opening of his lengthy *fu*, Zhang frames both the notions of a place where one resides and a path one follows in terms of classicist values. The story surrounding the production of the *fu* is conventional, in that it presents the apology of a good official who has lost favor due to the jealous machinations of his fellows. Zhang presents himself not just as a loyal official who seeks to regain his proper place at court, however, but as an individual who can take refuge in his classical values, even if he never regains the trust of a ruler. Though Zhang does employ many of the conventions of the genre, such as the procession comprised of celestial signs, he does so only to subvert them. The ideal procession, as we see in the conclusion of the *fu*, journeys through and is composed of texts:

I drive the fine carriage of the Six Classics, And roam among the tranquil groves of the way and its power.	御六藝之珍駕兮， 遊道德之平林。	395
I knot together the canons as my net, And chase classicist and Mohist teachings as my prey.	結典籍而為罟兮， 毆儒墨以為禽。	
I ponder the transformations of <i>yin</i> and <i>yang</i> , Reciting the lovely tones of the Elegantiae and the Hymns. <sup>216</sup>	玩陰陽之變化兮， 詠雅頌之徽音。	400

<sup>214</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.651; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1914.

<sup>215</sup> *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects) 9.11. See Cheng Shude 程樹德 comm., *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 (Collected Commentaries to the Analects), vol. 2, preface dated 1939 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990): 593.

<sup>216</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.676; cf. *Hou Hanshu* 59.1947.

In the end, Zhang Heng effectively repudiates two central tenets of the genre: first, the implicit notion that recognition is the ultimate prize; and second, that undertaking celestial journeys, figurative or literal, is a necessary or even a valuable practice. In “Encountering Sorrow,” a diviner once said to Qu Yuan:

If your true disposition is fine indeed, Why must you use a matchmaker? <sup>217</sup>	苟中情其好脩兮， 146 又何必用夫行媒。
---	--------------------------

The diviner implied that Qu Yuan’s fervent desire for recognition would ultimately be fulfilled, meaning a latter day King Wuding or a King Wen would find him, just as they had found Fu Yue and Lü Wang, no matter how humble or obscure his station might be. Zhang Heng questions, however, the very notion that one should desire recognition:

If my true disposition is steadfast and upright, Though none recognize me I will not be ashamed. <sup>218</sup>	苟中情之端直兮， 407 莫吾知而不慙。 408
--	-----------------------------

Instead, Zhang Heng proclaims that he will continue to cultivate himself, no far-off roaming required:

Silent and without interfering action I firm up my will, And roam carefree and easy with humanity and duty. Without leaving my doorway, I will know the world, <sup>219</sup> Why must I tire myself with traveling into the distance? <sup>220</sup>	默無為以凝志兮， 與仁義乎逍遙。 410 不出戶而知天下兮， 何必歷遠以劬勞？
--	--

Travel takes on a different meaning in Zhang Heng’s conclusion. The ideal journey is conducted not with a team of cloud-like dragons and a carriage streaming rainbows and comets, but with the classical virtues of humanity and duty as companions. And the most meaningful kind of travel does not involve leaving behind one’s old home, but staying within it, and making the journey through texts.

In his final summary, Zhang Heng seems to question the very basis of the genre.<sup>221</sup> The fundamental problem of the genre, loyal and talented officials being overshadowed by slanderers and sycophants, is perennial. Having written a long poem in which the persona journeys through all Six Directions, Zhang repudiates the very possibility of finding relief or recognition through

<sup>217</sup> *Chuci buzhu* 1.38.

<sup>218</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.676; *Hou Hanshu* 59.1938.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. *Laozi* 老子 47. “He does not leave his door, but knows the world” 不出戶，知天下。 See Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 CE) comm., *Laozi Daodejing* 老子道德經 (Laozi’s Classic of the Way and Its Power) in *Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Collected Works of the Many Masters), vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1952).

<sup>220</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.677; cf. *Hou Hanshu* 59.1938.

<sup>221</sup> In this sense, Zhang Heng’s *fu* is in the tradition of Yang Xiong’s “Contra ‘Encountering Sorrow.’” See *Hanshu* 87A.3516–21.

such a journey:

<p>The finale<sup>222</sup> says:          Heaven is eternal and Earth long lasts,              but our years do not linger,          Waiting for the Yellow River to clear              only left me full of woe.          And so I desired to traverse the distances              to bring pleasure to myself;          Above and below I went without constancy              throughout the Six Directions.          I went over bounds, and upward I leaped,              leaving behind the ways of the world;          A twirling whirlwind, my spirit rose,              satisfied in all my desires.          But Heaven cannot be ascended<sup>223</sup>              and the immortals are few;          The Lady of the Cypress Boat in her sorrow              regrets that she cannot fly away.          And so high are perched Red Pine and Wang Qiao              —who can meet them?          Knotting up the spirit and far roaming              makes the heart depart.<sup>224</sup>          I turned about my will              and followed the profound counsels,          I obtained what I sought,              what more should I long for?<sup>225</sup></p>	<p>系曰：          天長地久歲不留，          俟河之清祗懷憂。          願得遠渡以自娛，      415          上下無常窮六區。          超踰騰躍絕世俗，          飄遙神舉逞所欲。          天不可階仙夫稀，          柏舟悄悄吝不飛。      420          松喬高峙孰能離，          結精遠遊使心攜。          迴志竭來從玄謀，          獲我所求夫何思！</p>
--	--

Zhang Heng holds a mirror up to the genre of celestial journey poetry, and refracted through that mirror, the celestial journey is transformed into a mirage. Zhang's celestial journey ends with a paradoxical act of recognition that such journeys are impossible. The heights are too great. The Heavens can only be visited in flights of fancy. No one can actually encounter Red Pine or Wang Qiao, at least not outside the medium of language. And this is true even for the most virtuous of individuals. Language allows us to envision celestial journeys, but never to actually experience

<sup>222</sup> Knechtges renders the term for the concluding section "Epilogue" (139).

<sup>223</sup> Again Zhang Heng alludes to a disciple's praise for Kongzi, in this case Zigong 子貢, who once said of the sage, "The Master can never be reached, just as Heaven can never be scaled" 夫子之不可及也，猶天之不可階而升也 (*Lunyu* 19.25; see Cheng Shude, vol. 3, 1342).

<sup>224</sup> I follow Fan Ye's gloss of *xie* 攜 here as meaning *li* 離 (*Hou Hanshu* 59.1939, n. 4).

<sup>225</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.677; *Hou Hanshu* cf. 59.1938. In the final line of the *fu*, Zhang Heng echoes *Fayan* 1.17: "By definition, learning prompts and facilitates the search to become a noble person. There have certainly been cases where seeking a goal did not bring attainment of it, but in no case has a goal ever been attained without seeking it" 學者所以求為君子也。求而不得者有矣。夫未有不求而得之者也 (Michael Nylan trans., *Exemplary Figures/Fayan* [Seattle: University of Washington, 2013] 1.17.14–15).

them. Indeed, it is a far cry from the celestial journeys of the “Nine Songs,” which seem to have been performance texts used in rituals where the celestial journey ritually took place in each successful performance.

Though Zhang Heng writes in a genre that allows him to take flight, he reveals his preference for a classicist mode in which escape to the celestial realm is impossible in his citation of Mao 26, “Bo zhou” 柏舟 (Cypress Boat). The Lady of the Cypress Boat is held by the Mao preface to be the consummate figure of the “humane person who is unfortunate” 仁而不遇.<sup>226</sup> As Liu Xiang retold her story in the *Lie nü zhuan* 烈女傳 (Biographies of Blazing Women), the Lady of the Cypress boat had been the daughter of the Marquis of Qi, who was married off to the Lord of Wei, only to find that her husband had died just as she arrived at his city. Refusing to return home, she observed the three-year mourning period, after which the new Lord of Wei wished to marry her, rather than share his power with a Dowager Duchess. Encouraged by her own brothers to accept his proposal, she refused to do so, ever remaining the loyal widow despite the fact that she was beset on all sides, trapped in an inescapable situation.<sup>227</sup> Taking flight, or going off on a celestial journey, was never an option for the Lady of the Cypress Boat. Indeed, she could escape neither the insults of the petty people around her nor the sorrow in her own heart. In the final verse of the song ascribed to her she laments:

Oh sun, Ah moon!	日居月諸!	25
Why must you wane in turn?	胡迭而微?	26
The sorrow in my heart	心之憂矣,	27
Is like an unwashed robe.	如匪澣衣!	28
In the quiet, I consider it,	靜言思之,	29
But I cannot beat my wings and fly away. <sup>228</sup>	不能奮飛!	30

Edward Lien deftly elucidates the incredible technical acumen Zhang Heng displays in his “Contemplating the Mystery,” arguing that the poem advocated “entering the world” rather than “leaving the world.” For Lien, Zhang is not only a poet, but also a scientist and visionary who turns away from the fanciful world of mythology to the real world of the stars. Lien characterizes Zhang’s journey as breaking with tradition in a number of ways: 1) it is mappable and moves through the stars along an efficient path; 2) his passage through Upturned Shadows suggests that he views the universe as infinite; and 3) mythical places occur prior to his passage through the Gates of Heaven and real places, i.e. the stars, come only afterward. Lien’s conclusions may be rendered more capacious by further considering other works in the tradition.

<sup>226</sup> Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al., *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Correct Meanings of the Mao Odes), vol. 1 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999): 2.1.113.

<sup>227</sup> Positioning the Lady of the Cypress Boat as an exemplar, Liu Xiang never acknowledges motivations other than loyalty or chastity that might explain her actions. As a Duchess Dowager, she likely would have enjoyed both power and independence that would have been lost upon her marriage to the new Duke of Wei. See Liu Xiang comp., *Gu Lienü zhuan* 古列女傳 (Arrayed Biographies of Women, Ancient): 4.3a–b, in *Siku quanshu*. Note that later editors added the word *gu* (ancient) to the title to distinguish Liu Xiang’s work from later texts following its model.

<sup>228</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 2.7.116.



Lien's reading of Zhang Heng, in particular, may advance our understanding of Wang Yi. Wang Yi's journey, too, is mappable, and follows a more or less efficient path around the Heavens. Though his journey passes through fewer constellations and is generally less impressive than Zhang's, technical knowledge of the stars plays a similar role in it, though on less grand a scale. Both the "Great Man" and the "Far Roaming" attributed to Qu Yuan portray personas that move through Upturned Shadows and gaze out at the boundlessness beyond. While it is true that Zhang Heng clusters images of the stars toward the end of his *fu*, there is perhaps no clear demarcation between the "real locations" of the stars and the mythological locations in the far reaches of the terrestrial realm. The stars above, in a scheme involving only the Four Directions, east, west, south, and north, indeed seem to be set apart from the terrestrial realm. However, Zhang's journey moves through Six Directions: east, west, south, north, down, and up;<sup>229</sup> following his journey north he briefly descends into the cavernous earth, and finally rises high up above. The stars are all located in this final direction, and thus, appear at the end of the *fu*. Belonging to the final direction, the section describing Zhang's journey through the stars is not separate from the rest of his journey, but rather, brings completion to it.

As moderns, we may see the stars in the sky as being real, while we consider the Fusang Tree and Valley of Dawn to be mythological. However, it is difficult to apply such distinctions to ancient thinkers and writers, however great their technical acumen might have been. We may be tempted to read Zhang Heng as a champion of objective realism, an ancient proponent of empiricism and objectivity over myth and superstition. While Zhang Heng could gaze up and see the stars, his knowledge of the geography of the terrestrial world was highly mediated by texts. The line between myth and reality was inevitably blurred. In the end, however, Lien emphasizes Zhang's moral claims over his scientific claims, writing that Zhang rejects the notion of the celestial journey when he finally chooses between "leaving the mundane world to seek transcendence or staying in the corrupt world to cultivate his own virtue."<sup>230</sup> Indeed, Zhang's moral claims are based less in the reality of the stars, than in the validity of Classical texts such as the *Analects* (Lunyu 論語) and the *Odes* (Shi 詩). Zhang Heng denies the very possibility of escaping to the heavens, becoming an immortal, or taking a celestial sojourn. The stars are visible, and perhaps real, but journeys through them are not. The real journey, the meaningful journey, is thus the journey through texts.

### Conclusion: Reading, Writing, and Performing Voice

In the introduction to his *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365–427)*, Robert Ashmore foregrounds the problem of reading and its relationship to performance:

The simplest and most immediate sort of 'reading' is an oral recitation, a live performance in real time. One reading can differ from another through differences in

<sup>229</sup> *Wenxuan* 15.677; *Hou Hanshu* cf. 59.1938; line 416.

<sup>230</sup> Lien 239. For a full essay on the moral component of Zhang Heng's journey in "Contemplating," see David Knechtges, "A Journey to Morality," in Chan Ping-leung et al. eds., *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library, 1932–1982* (Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Library of the University of Hong Kong, 1982): 162–82.

emphasis, or in the ligatures and pauses that articulate the underlying structure, or by variants in timbre, pitch, volume, and cadence, along with a range of less tangible qualities in delivery by which each reading allows the audience to hear the presence of the text through the presence of the reader. We also refer to readings by different readers, or distinct readings by the same reader, as ‘interpretations’ of the poem, as we might speak of different interpretations of the same musical notation. We likewise often speak of accounts of a poem’s meaning, divorced from actual recitation, as readings. But even in these cases, the idea of a real-time oral reading underlies the idea of interpretation, and even serves as its guarantee.<sup>231</sup>

Even alone, in silence, each reading is a performance, and disagreements over the validity of a given reading stem to some extent from differences between these solitary, private performances. As Ashmore puts it, “To judge another reader’s interpretation to be a valid reading means that we can imagine hearing it that way, even if we ourselves prefer to hear it in a different way; when we say a reading is invalid, we mean that we simply cannot hear it that way.”<sup>232</sup>

Every reading must be articulated in a voice. That voice can never be neutral or mechanical, but is always dependent on how the reader understands the persona, the speaker embedded in the text. At the same time, readers must mentally perform the role of that persona, bringing the text to life in their own inner ears, and before their own minds’ eyes. And so, each individual’s reading is at least a little bit different, performed for a different audience, and by a different performer. Readers ineluctably insert themselves into texts, for this is the only way that sense can be made of them. Reader-performers take on the role of the persona, always bringing something of themselves to that role. As Richard Schechner, the dramatist and seminal writer in the field of performance studies, put it: “It isn’t that a performer stops being himself or herself when he or she becomes another—multiple selves coexist in an unresolved dialectical tension. Just as a puppet does not stop being ‘dead’ when it is animated, so the performer does not stop being, at some level, his ordinary self when he is possessed by a god or playing the role of Ophelia.”<sup>233</sup>

We tend to perform the roles of the personas of the texts we read, and oftentimes equate the persona with the author. We know, or at least think we know, what the author said, and we try to read the author’s words as he would have said them. Thus, to read Zhang Heng’s *fu* is to imagine ourselves as Zhang Heng, playing his roles. Yet even as we try to read in his voice, it is inevitably inflected with concerns that belong to us. For those of us who are scientifically-minded, living at a time when the rejection or ignorance of science presents a potential for disaster on a global scale, it is easy to read Zhang Heng as a sort of ancient hero, a champion of science vs. myth, of reality vs. escapism. Yet, in treating Zhang Heng as a paragon of scientific virtue, we risk drowning out the more dominant source of his ethos, his classicism.

Although even as we read ancient songs and poetry today we may be said to mentally perform them, the sense in which the works in this chapter were performed changed a great deal

<sup>231</sup> Robert Ashmore, *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365–427)*, (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010): 1.

<sup>232</sup> Ashmore 2.

<sup>233</sup> Schechner 6.

between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. The “Nine Songs,” or songs much like them, were ensemble pieces, including dancers, music, food, drink, preparatory rituals of purification and perhaps erotic rites. We cannot hope to reconstruct quite what an actual performance might have looked like, though based on the texts that remain, we might attempt to re-imagine them, as both Wang Yi and Wen Yiduo in fact did. While some scholars might object to such bald acts of conjecture, to understand liturgical songs only as written texts is to ignore their earliest context entirely. The Han ritual repertoire, like the “Nine Songs,” was a set of performance texts.<sup>234</sup> They differed substantially from the “Nine Songs,” however, as they tended to adopt the voice of the supplicant rather than the deity, and uniformly presented successful rituals, eschewing the ambivalence of the earlier set of songs. Emperor Wu’s court did, however, produce poetry that articulated the voice of the ruler as the voice of the deity, in the form of the over-the-top panegyric, the “Great Man.”

Celestial journey poetry in the voice of the frustrated minister would be predicated on the notion that even the most loyal, sincere, and wise officers could be, and often were, objects of slander and ridicule at court. “Encountering Sorrow,” generally attributed to Qu Yuan in Han times, formed the prototype of the genre, and subsequent writers, including Liu Xiang, Wang Yi, and Zhang Heng, would write both in and against his voice. Liu Xiang’s persona sought, in “Vanishing into the Distance,” a hearing among the stars and recognition from them. In the end, however, he was forced to wander among the same waterways Qu Yuan had, while fog, snow, clouds, and treacherous mountains rendered him unseen by Heaven. Wang Yi’s celestial journey is conspicuously textual; he arrives in the celestial court, only to enter its archives, just as he had entered the archives of the terrestrial court of Emperor An. In the conclusion to his set of poems, Wang Yi beseeches his own ruler, and the rulers of posterity who might read his work, to rely upon two sources to ensure good governance: the stars (or perhaps, the instruments used to measure the movements of the stars) and texts submitted by worthy men. In “Contemplating the Mystery,” Zhang Heng effectively repudiates the genre of the celestial journey, arguing that in the end, the only journey worth making is the journey through the Classics.

The uses of celestial signs in these songs and poems were as diverse and multivalent as the voices of their personas. Celestial signs in the “Nine Songs” consisted in the gods themselves: The Lord of the Clouds, the stars Supreme Unity and Greater Master of Fate, and the Sun, the Lord of the East. Clouds and whirlwinds appeared as well, evincing the moment when the god and the medium achieved union, and expressing, in their ephemerality, the brevity of such encounters. The ritual corpus presents celestial signs both as gods, and as locations along the path of the gods’ descent to Emperor Wu’s court. In the “Suburban Sacrifices,” celestial signs are consistently auspicious, yet in celestial journey poetry, we see that the same signs can be used in multiple ways. The Gate of Heaven was a barrier to Qu Yuan, a boundary to be transgressed for Emperor Wu, and a portal through which Zhang Heng’s persona would be ritually welcomed into the celestial court. The gods and celestial signs in their respective processions would likewise have very different valences. Qu Yuan would be repeatedly disappointed by the gods in his procession, whereas Emperor Wu’s persona would dominate them, and Zhang Heng’s persona would respectfully drive them forth. Liu Xiang’s “Vanishing

<sup>234</sup> Though one might argue that all texts are “performance texts” in the sense that every reading is a performance, I reserve the term *performance texts* for those that are used to conduct live performances before an audience.

into the Distance” would present the stars as having the potential to exact a kind of divine judgment, but paradoxically, they too would be limited in their capacity to see clearly. For Wang Yi, the sovereign who followed the wise counsels of men and carefully observed celestial signs would rule well. Zhang Heng, in the end, turns away from the stars, despite his incredible knowledge of them, and identifies the textual journey, rather than the celestial journey, as the ideal voyage for humane, talented, and loyal persons who have not been duly recognized.

Celestial signs do not produce meaning in isolation, but derive their meaning always in relation to some type of context. We saw in Chapter 2 that the meaning of signs in the heavens was spatially configured through the celestial field system, and in Chapter 3, how that meaning was historically configured against political and environmental events that occurred before, concurrent to, and after a given sign. In Chapter 4, we learned that it was rarely a single sign that gave force to a political argument, but a host of celestial and terrestrial signs, as well as political, economic, and military events. It was from a certain totality of current events and circumstances that historical actors made claims about what signs must have meant. Whereas in earlier chapters we focused on celestial signs tied to actual observation, in this chapter, we have articulated how celestial signs could be employed in text and performance independent of specific, real-time observations, how they could be evoked in ritual, song, and poetic contexts by human actors using language, rather than by Heaven itself. Here too, however, we find that celestial signs claim their meaning along an axis. We understand what celestial signs mean by performing, and listening to ourselves perform, the voice that brings them into being.

### **Appendix: Mapping Celestial Journeys**

Images for the celestial journeys of Zhang Heng and Wang Yi were created using the free and open-source program Stellarium. The stars are depicted according to their positions as of 133 CE, the year of the earthquake discussed at the conclusion of Chapter 4. In order to mirror as closely as possible the three-dimensional model of the armillary sphere, I have employed orthographic projections for all four maps.

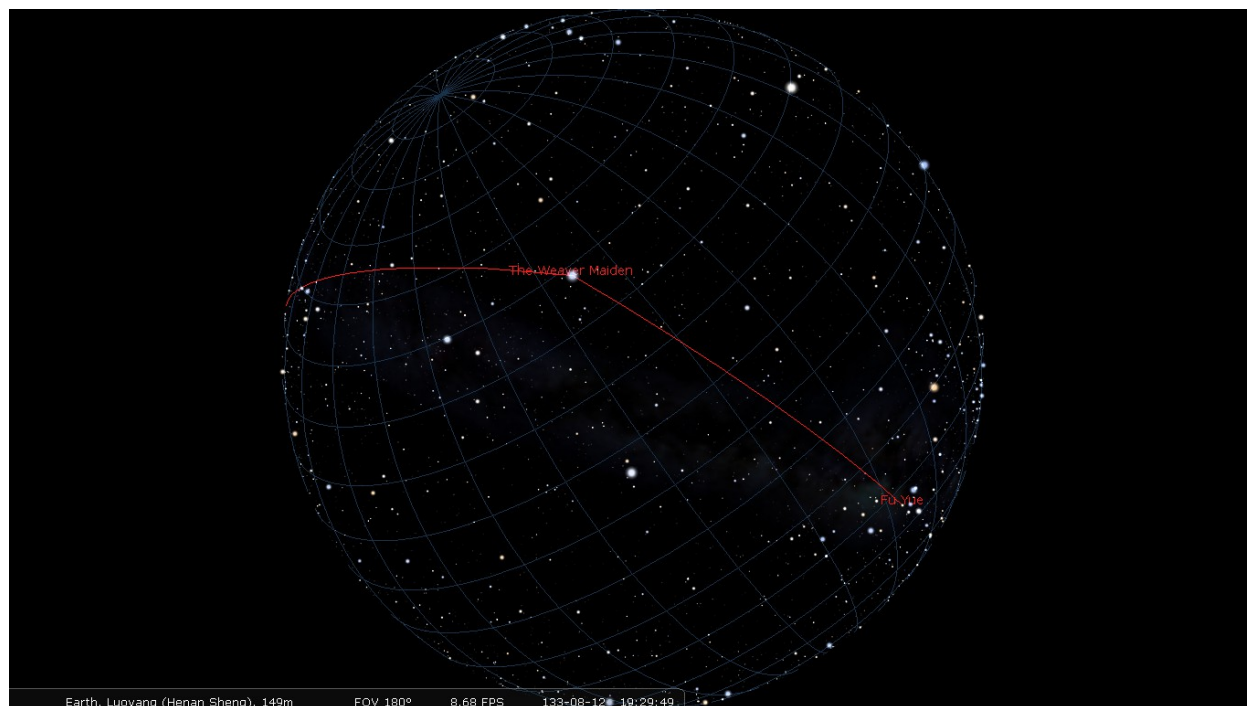


Figure 1a, Orthographic Projection of Wang Yi's journey, beginning.

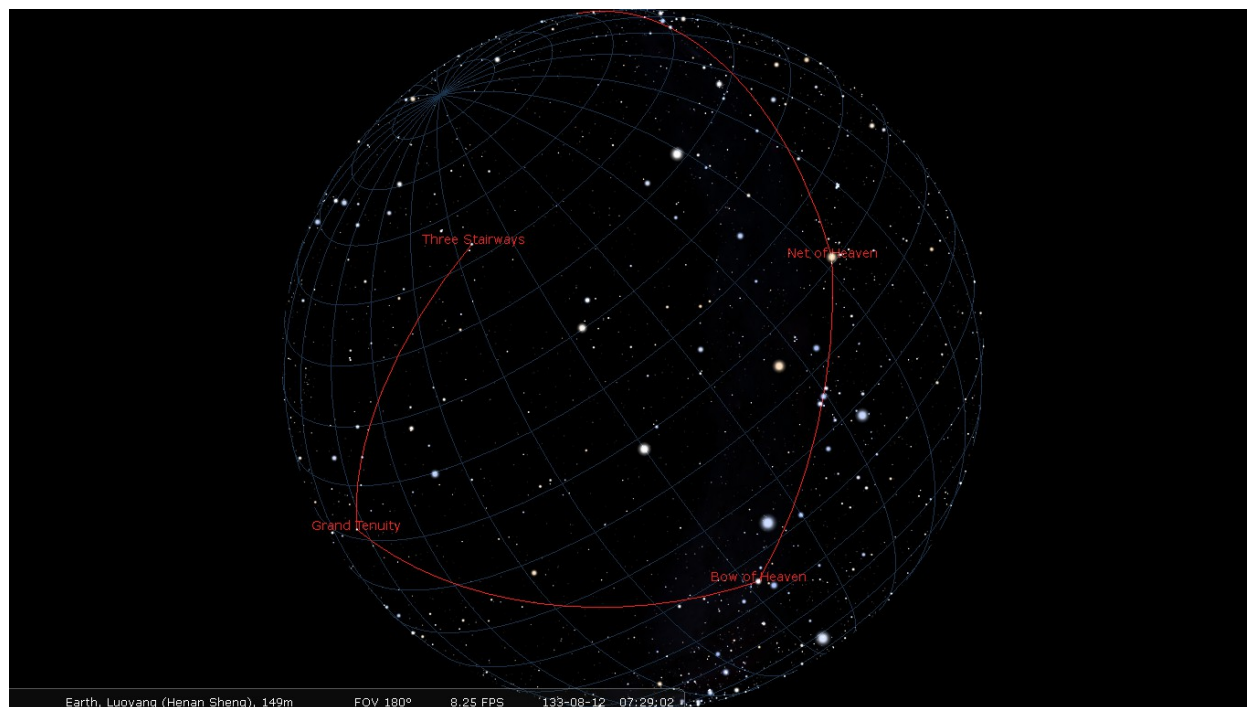


Figure 1b, Orthographic projection of Wang Yi's journey, middle and end.

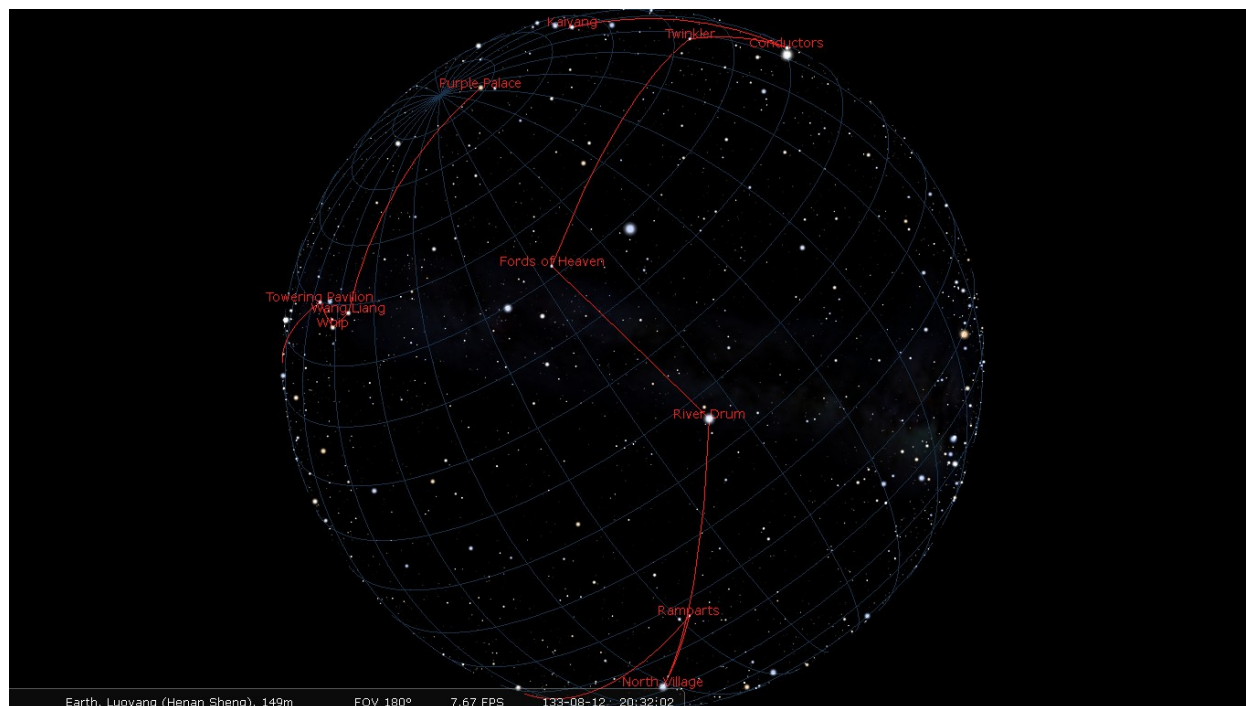


Figure 2a, Orthographic projection of Zhang Heng's journey, beginning and end.

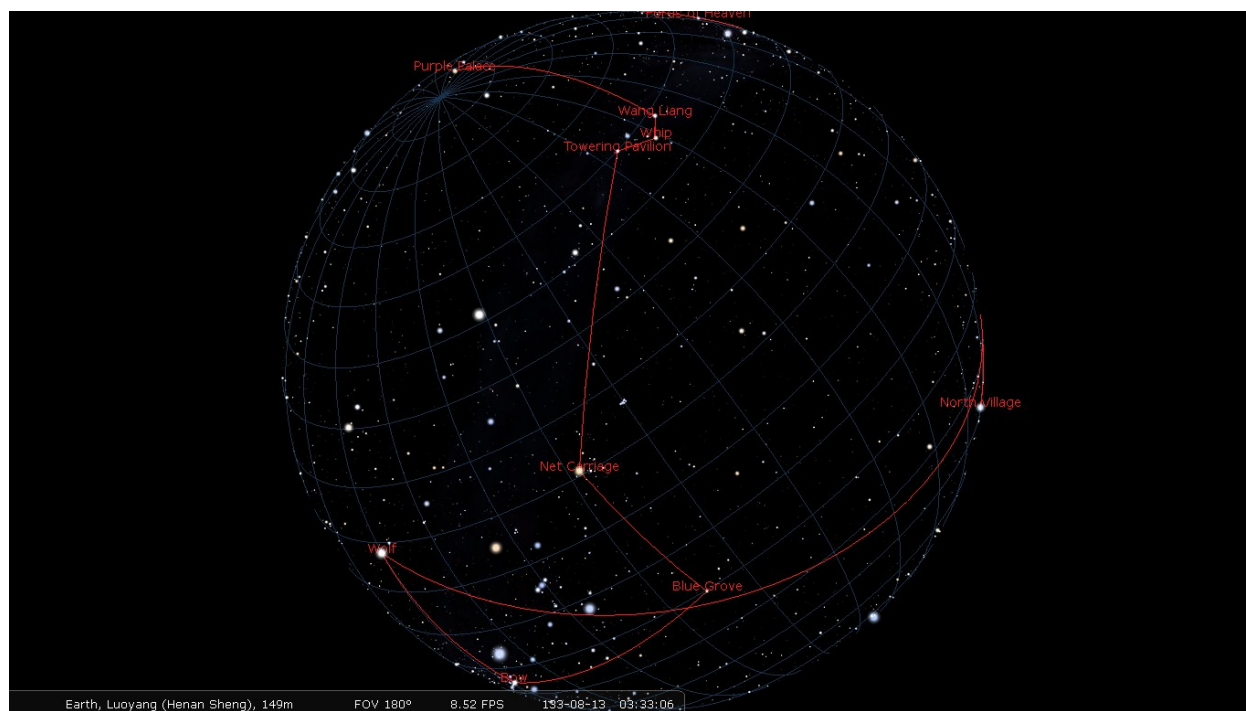


Figure 2b, Orthographic projection of Zhang Heng's journey, middle and end.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion and Supplement: “Cloudy River” and the Problem of Ritual Failed

A is that without which B would be lost.

A is that through which B is lost.<sup>1</sup>

—Barbara Johnson, on the logic of the *supplément*

For their mystical notions are eminently coherent, being interrelated by a network of logical ties, and are so ordered that they never too crudely contradict sensory experience but, instead, experience seems to justify them.<sup>2</sup>

—E.E. Evans-Pritchard

Clouds and comets, rainbows and planets in retrograde motion, halos about the sun and the moon, floods, fires, and droughts all permeated the culture of early imperial courts. These were not natural phenomena that actors at those courts impassively and objectively observed, but part and parcel of a cosmological realm that was inseparable from the world of the court. As signs their meanings were defined against and in terms of developments at court or in the broader empire; the act of interpreting celestial signs implicated events in the human world. Writers of history interpreted the signs of the past in terms of the historical record, often using them to compare the character of rulers past and present. Writers of memorials interpreted signs that appeared in their own day in terms of political events, powerfully underscoring arguments regarding court ritual and administrative policy by claiming that they knew why the signs had appeared and what could be done to resolve them. Liturgy, in a complementary fashion, actively sought to bring auspicious celestial signs into being, so as to preserve the cosmic order, ensure the prosperity of the empire, and reinforce the legitimacy of the ruling house. Finally, literary celestial journeys told of the plight of talented and worthy officials who failed to advance in their political careers in language that appropriated elements of liturgical style.

The discourse that constructed the authority of celestial signs was diverse and flexible. It included narratives in which rituals succeeded and rituals failed; accounts of baleful signs that were addressed properly and that were addressed inadequately; stories of rulers of great suasive power whose legitimacy was confirmed by dazzling celestial displays and stories of rulers whose actions caused baleful signs to appear and who brought the Punishment of Heaven on themselves. This discourse was not confined to any single genre or any single historical period. Writers cited events occurring in the mythic epochs of high antiquity, throughout the Chunqiu (722–481 BCE) period, and throughout imperial history, from the founding of the Qin 秦 (221–207 BCE) dynasty up until their own historical moments. The very same writers, in some instances, composed or compiled texts on celestial signs in several different genres. Zhang Heng

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Johnson, “Writing” in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995): 45.

<sup>2</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902–1973), *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1937): 319.



張衡 (78–139 CE) wrote *fu*, histories, technical treatises, and memorials to the throne that all engaged with celestial signs. Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) collected anecdotes, wrote memorials, compiled an omenological treatise, and composed poetry that invoked celestial signs. Ma Rong 馬融 (79–166 CE), who assisted Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 49–ca. 120 CE) in the compilation of the “Tianwen zhi” 天文志 (Treatise on Celestial Patterns), wrote poetry and composed memorials that engaged celestial signs. The broader discourse on celestial signs was not limited to and cannot be adequately understood within the frame of a narrowly-construed history of astronomy. Nor were celestial signs confined to a single genre of technical texts on omenology, no more so than writers were obliged to produce works in only one genre.

The rhetoric of celestial signs rested on the dual fundamental assumptions that the ruler and his court were imperfect and that their imperfection produced disturbances in the cosmic order. The rituals the emperor performed, in contrast, aimed to preserve that order. Acting as an ideal supplicant, the emperor ritually summoned auspicious emblems that displayed his legitimacy before the whole realm: sweet dew, seasonable rains, constancy in the cycles of the seasons, *yin* and *yang*, the sun and moon, and the Five Planets. The rhetoric of edicts and memorials, historical annals and treatises, and liturgical repertoires assumed that ritual could and should be efficacious. Experience, too, verified that this was so. Every bumper crop and every accurate calendrical prediction evinced a simple truth: often but not always, ritual worked. A general trust in the efficacy of ritual lay at the center of the discourse. Ritual failure, like a cornerstone in a grand edifice, occupied a peripheral yet structurally important position within the discourse.

### Disjunction and Failure

Ritual, from prayer to prognostication, can and does fail, a fact that modern people know as well as the ancients. As sure as the weather forecast will sometimes be wrong, a compliment will sometimes be taken as a slight, an apology will be met with anger, a vow of ‘til death do us part will be broken. On the whole, none of this leads us to lose faith in the practices of offering compliments, making apologies, or pronouncing wedding vows. When ritual fails, we can always come up with explanations as to why it fails. The compliment was self-serving. The apology was insincere. She never really loved him anyway. Or we may target the recipient of the ritual act. He doesn’t know how to take a compliment. She is unforgiving. He only married her for her money. Ritual fails. Yet even as we explain why ritual fails, we explain why and how ritual succeeds. If you want a compliment to be well-received, make sure you truly mean it. If you want to be forgiven, make sure that your apology shows that you are truly contrite. If you want your marriage to last, make sure you really love the person, and that you are committing to him for the right reasons. If we do everything right and the ritual still fails, we can always blame the other person or some special external circumstance. Scholarship in the fields of both general religious studies and sinology in recent years has shown that a marked contrast exists between the way actors ritually construct the world to be and the way they know full well that it actually is; ritual constructs an ideal version of the world, whereas the world in which people actually live is messy, violent, and fragmented.

Jonathan Z. Smith’s “The Bare Facts of Ritual” argues that the bear festival performed by

the Yakut people of Finland acts as an ideal version of the bear hunt, necessitated by the incongruity between the way the hunt is actually carried out and the ritual prescriptions that dictate how it should be performed. Ritual prescriptions demand that the animal be killed in hand-to-hand combat, be fully awake when it is killed, and that it be facing the hunter.<sup>3</sup> In fact, however, the hunters make extensive use of traps, and even modern weapons such as shotguns, mitigating to some extent the grave dangers they would face if they carried out the hunt in precise accord with ritual prescriptions.<sup>4</sup> The bear festival involves raising a bear cub in the village, keeping it almost as if it were a pet for two to three years, and finally slaughtering it in accord with the ritual prescriptions for the hunt. Smith explains: “Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled course of things.”<sup>5</sup> Smith does not argue that the bear festival is a sympathetic rite aimed to influence the hunt itself. Nor does he argue that the festival works to create social cohesion, *contra* ritual theorists in the tradition of Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955).<sup>6</sup> Though Smith never uses the term, his explanation is psychological; the bear festival aims at resolving the tension in the mind of the hunter between the way things are and the way they should be. He concludes: “The ritual displays a dimension of the hunt that can be thought about and remembered in the course of things. It provides a focusing lens on the ordinary hunt which allows its full significance to be perceived, a significance which the rules express but are powerless to effectuate.”<sup>7</sup>

In their recent comparative work, *Ritual and Its Consequences*, the religious studies scholar Adam Seligman, the anthropologist Robert P. Weller, the early China scholar Michael J. Puett, and the psychiatrist Bennett Simon effectively synthesize aspects of Jonathan Smith’s view of the incongruence between ritual and reality with theories of ritual aimed at producing social cohesion. Seligman et al. are relatively sympathetic toward Smith’s views and relatively critical of those of Radcliffe-Brown, yet ultimately arrive at a position that lies between the two:

Smith’s emphasis on incongruity and tension is an excellent starting point for a theory of ritual. But a friendly amendment to Smith’s argument may also be called for.

Smith’s attempt to save ritual practitioners from being read as prerational actors may have led him to go too far in emphasizing the cognitive aspects of incongruity—that ritual works because it allows the practitioners to think about the disjunction between ritual performance and the real world. But it is important to note that ritual is not necessarily—or even primarily something one thinks about. Indeed, if we take Smith’s emphasis on incongruity seriously, it may actually help point us away from such a

cognitive reading of ritual and toward one focusing more on the active, and endless, work

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Bare Facts of Ritual,” *History of Religions* 20, no. 1/2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (Aug.–Nov., 1980): 120.

<sup>4</sup> Smith 122.

<sup>5</sup> Smith 125.

<sup>6</sup> For a succinct description of Radcliffe-Brown’s ritual theories and their position within the development of academic theories of ritual in general, see Catherine Bell, “Ritual and Society: Questions of Social Function and Structure” in *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford, 2009): 27–29.

<sup>7</sup> Smith 127.

of ritual.<sup>8</sup>

Radcliffe-Brown saw ritual, Seligman et al. argue, as a simple means of creating social cohesion. Seligman et al. do not ultimately deny the claim that social cohesion is a goal of ritual, but argue that the work of ritual is never finished. The goal of remaking the fragmented and disordered world of lived experience into the whole and ordered world of ritual is never achieved:

Ritual is part of a never-ending attempt to take particulars of these patterns and build an order out of them. Ritual, therefore, means never-ending work. It is a recurrent, always imperfect, project of dealing with patterns of human behavior—patterns that are always at risk of shifting into dangerous directions—or of unleashing demons.

Such a tragic view assumes there will never be a finality or a point of perfection. It is a fractured and fragmented world, and it will always be so.<sup>9</sup>

Seligman et al., unlike Radcliffe-Brown, do not characterize ritual as something that achieves social cohesion. Nonetheless, their view suggests that ritual aims toward producing social cohesion, even if that goal can never actually be reached. The goal remains in the subjunctive space of *as if* reality.

Michael Ing, in his *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism* (2012), engages both Jonathan Smith and Seligman et al. in his analysis of the problem of ritual failure in the *Record of Rites* (Liji 禮記). Ing identifies “the disjuncture between the subjunctive world and ‘the real world’”<sup>10</sup> as a point of similarity between the perspectives of Smith and Seligman et al. However, where Smith seems to emphasize cognitive aspects of ritual, Seligman et al. emphasize the transformative function of ritual: “Ritual, according to Seligman, is not so much about thought as it is about action. In short, ritual is not the representation of inner beliefs; rather, ritual is work; it is the construction of an ordered world set in the context of a real, and threatening, unritualized world.”<sup>11</sup> Ing then compares the view of ritual proposed in the *Record of Rites* with that of Seligman et al:

In line with Seligman and his colleagues, this Confucian theory of ritual is about the creation of a subjunctive world—a world ‘wished for’ or ‘imagined.’ But unlike Seligman, this world is not understood in terms of an “as if” world in opposition to the “real” world...the ritual world is understood *as* the real world in the sense that ritual performers hope that the competing worlds, all of which are dysfunctional, will be ordered by ritual, while at the same time recognizing that their hope will often be in vain.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Adam B. Seligman et al., “Ritual and the Subjunctive,” In Seligman, et al, *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008): 27.

<sup>9</sup> Seligman et al 42.

<sup>10</sup> Michael David Kaulana Ing, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 207–8.

<sup>11</sup> Ing 208.

<sup>12</sup> Ing 209.

The world of ritual is not, then, a separate space from the world of lived experience. *The Records of Rites*, in Ing's reading, advocates a theory of ritual as an ordering force in the world. Yet, the world of lived experience never attains the ordered wholeness of ritual reality; ritual falls short. "Ritual success," Ing explains, "is vulnerable to incompetent ritual performers, people from other social worlds wielding military or other kinds of power, natural disasters, and death."<sup>13</sup>

Both Seligman et al. and Michael Ing are primarily concerned with the action of ritual upon human beings. Ritual remains always within an *as if* space, or is bound to fail in bringing perfect order to human society, in large part because, we intuitively know, human society never reaches a perfect state of order. That is, there never was, and probably never will be, an Age of Great Peace (Datong 大同) such as that mythically recalled in the *Record of Rites*. Disorder is the norm in this human world. The heavens, however, are different. Rituals aimed at maintaining cosmic regularity must have proved quite efficacious, much of the time. Anomalies and aberrations were just that, deviations from the normative state of things. Even so, rituals aimed at maintaining the regularity of the cosmos too, at times, proved inefficacious. Worse still, the technologies of omen interpretation did not always produce clear or reliable readings of what those anomalies and aberrations meant. Because the heavens and the human realm were bound together by resonances, those who wished to reform ritual practices or administrative policies sought explanations of ritual failure in the human realm.

Paradoxically, the process of explaining why ritual fails only strengthens the discourse surrounding ritual. Explanations of the efficacy of ritual are built on explanations of the inefficacy of ritual. How do we know how it works? Because we have explanations as to why it fails. Ritual failure stands in a supplementary relationship to ritual efficacy. A *supplément* is both an addition and a substitute, a danger and a remedy.<sup>14</sup> Ritual failure threatens the notion of ritual efficacy, while at the same time rescuing it, by opening up a space for explanations of why and how ritual succeeds. Let us fill in our epigram's algebraic variables. Ritual failure is that through which the efficacy of ritual is lost. Ritual failure is that without which ritual efficacy would be lost.

### Celestial Signs in "Cloudy River"

We know that there must have been times when ritual supplications did not bring about the meteorological phenomena or astral regularities they were intended to produce. From our modern vantage point, we take this as a matter of course. However, we are mistaken if we think that this knowledge belongs to us alone. Mao 258, "Yun Han" 雲漢 (Cloudy River), was certainly a well-known ode by Han times, enshrined as it was in the *Odes* (Shi 詩) Classic, which predated the Western Han (206 BCE–8 CE) by centuries. In celebrating King Xuan of Zhou's 周宣王 (r. 827–782 BCE) concern for his subjects and cataloging the apparent failure of the rituals

<sup>13</sup> Ing 214.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson explains the term *supplément* as it was used by the Deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida to critique the logocentric bias of Western culture inherent in the speech-writing binary. Derrida argued that writing was *supplément* to speech; speech was privileged, a mark of presence, whereas writing was a pale substitute, an absence (Johnson 44–46).

he performed, it acts as a supplement to always-auspicious liturgies such as the “Songs for the Suburban Sacrifices” (Jiaosi ge 郊祀歌) of Emperor Wu’s 武 (r.140–87 BCE) court. Even though the ruler-suppliant was virtuous and steadfast, his ancestors seemed to be deaf, and Heaven seemed to be blind. Yet even when rituals seemed to fail, hope remained.

The liturgy of Emperor Wu’s court served both to commemorate specific events and to bring specific events into being, such as the descent of the gods to the banquet or the regular progression of the seasons. Yet, “Cloudy River” served as a reminder that there were no guarantees. There would always be years of dearth, floods, famines, droughts, and baleful signs in the heavens. “Cloudy River” was composed in the voice of a ruler whose acts of supplication failed. Han readings of the ode included in the Mao 毛 tradition (ca. 150 BCE)<sup>15</sup> and Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127–200 CE) sub-commentary served both to position the composition of the poem within specific historical circumstances and to accommodate it to the cosmological ideals surrounding the observation and production of celestial signs. Tradition held that the song commemorated King Xuan of Zhou’s unflagging efforts to rid his empire of drought, though the rituals he performed, one after another, brought no rain. The Zhou ancestors, a diabolical drought demon, and the resonant action of *qi* all seem to play a role in bringing about the drought. As we saw in Chapter 3,<sup>16</sup> King Xuan would ultimately enjoy a long and prosperous reign, though the song tells us only of his early desperation. The Mao tradition preface reads:

《云漢》，仍叔美宣王也。宣王承厲王之烈，內有撥亂之志，遇災而懼，側身修行，欲銷去之。天下喜于王化復行，百姓見憂，故作是詩也。

In “Cloudy River,” Reng Shu<sup>17</sup> praises King Xuan. King Xuan inherited the smoldering remains of the reign of King Li (r. 877-841 BCE), yet within him he had the will to overcome chaos. He met disaster with dread, lowered himself, and paid scrupulous attention to cultivating his own actions in his desire to dissipate and extirpate it. The world took delight in his return to the path of Kingly Transformation, and in the concern he bestowed upon the Hundred Families, and thus [Reng Shu] composed this ode.<sup>18</sup>

The reign of King Xuan’s father, King Li, had been an unmitigated disaster. Following King Li’s ignominious death in exile, King Xuan was left in the care of the Co-Chancellors, the Duke of Shao and the Duke of Zhou, who served as regents for some thirteen years before King Xuan took the throne in 827 BCE. Early in King Xuan’s reign, the sins of the father were visited upon

<sup>15</sup> For the compilation of the Mao tradition, see Steven Van Zoeren, “The Preface to Mao’s Odes” in *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991): 80–115.

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 99–100.

<sup>17</sup> Little is known of Reng Shu himself. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) cites a reference to his son in the *Annals*: “Reng Shu was a nobleman of Zhou. In the *Annals* entry for the fifth year of Duke Huan of Lu (707 BCE) it says: ‘In summer, Heaven’s Appointed King invited the Son of Reng Shu to court’” 仍叔，周大夫也。《春秋》魯桓公五年，夏，天王使仍叔之子來聘。Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al., *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Correct Meanings of the Mao Odes), vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing Daxue, 1999): 18.2.1192–93.

<sup>18</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1192.

the son, as a drought raged in the empire. Redemption was not easily won.

“Cloudy River” opens with an evocative but, in this context, inauspicious image of the Milky Way:

Radiant is that Cloudy River	倬彼云漢，	1
Shining and revolving in the heavens <sup>19</sup>	昭回于天。	2

The ode itself casts the king as an indefatigable supplicant. In Zheng Xuan’s reading of the opening lines, however, King Xuan emerges as an observer of celestial signs:

云漢，謂天河也。昭，光也。倬然天河水氣也，精光轉運于天。時旱渴雨，故宣王夜仰視天河，望其候焉。

Cloudy River refers to the River of Heaven [i.e. the Milky Way]. “To shine” is to be bright. “It is radiant” because the River of Heaven is watery *qi*, pure and bright as it turns and revolves in the heavens. Because at that time there was a drought and a thirst for rain, King Xuan looked up to the River of Heaven at night and observed the signs therein.<sup>20</sup>

In a context in which the voice of the ruler is likewise the voice of a frustrated supplicant, the celestial sign—the shining Cloudy River—is possessed of a baleful sense. It seems almost to jeer at the unfortunate young king. Zheng Xuan claims that the Cloudy River is constituted of watery *qi*; the very fact that it is so bright and so clearly visible indicates the lack of moisture in the air. King Xuan watches the sky, hoping to see signs that it might rain—perhaps a halo about the moon—but instead only sees the starkly defined River of Heaven, even as the rivers of the Earth run dry.<sup>21</sup> The sense of the line is, however, derived in relation to its context within this particular poem. When the same image is used in an ode purported to describe “King Wen’s capable management of his men” 文王能官人 it is unambiguously positive.<sup>22</sup> Lines 13–15 of Mao. 238, “Yu pu” 棫樸 (Oak Clumps),<sup>23</sup> read:

Radiant is that Cloudy River,	倬彼雲漢，	13
A banner in the heavens.	為章于天。	14
Long live the Kings of Zhou... <sup>24</sup>	周王壽考……	15

Reading the same line in the context of the reign of King Wen, the bright Cloudy River becomes

<sup>19</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1193.

<sup>20</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1193.

<sup>21</sup> See line 42 of this ode below.

<sup>22</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 16.3.996.

<sup>23</sup> “Oak Clumps” is Arthur Waley’s translation of this title. See Arthur Waley trans. and Joseph R. Allen ed., *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (New York: Grove Press, 1996): 234.

<sup>24</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 16.3.1000.

a symbol of King Wen's remarkable ability to create order in the wake of the chaos and corruption wrought by King Zhou 紂 (r. 1075–1046), the last king of the Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BCE). Zheng Xuan wrote: “The Cloudy River in the heavens is a patterning banner. It is analogous to the Son of Heaven who creates law and order in the world” 雲漢之在天，其為文章，譬猶天子為法度於天下。<sup>25</sup>

The king himself speaks in the third line of “Cloudy River.” In the remainder of the stanza, the ruler-suppliant expresses profound frustration with the sorry circumstances of his empire and the apparent inefficacy of the myriad rituals he performs:

The king says, “Alas!	王曰於乎。	3
In what way are the people of this age guilty?	何辜今之人?	4
Heaven sends down death and disorder,	天降喪亂，	5
And starvation and famine arrive in droves.	饑饉薦臻。	6
There is no spirit whom I did not venerate;	靡神不舉，	7
There is nothing so precious that I did not offer it.	靡愛斯牲。	8
All scepters and rings have already been given,	圭璧既卒，	9
Yet no one heeds my call.” <sup>26</sup>	寧莫我聽。	10

It is as if the complaints of the earnest king were spoken into a void. His rituals are directed at ending the years of drought that have plagued the empire, at bringing into being the mundane but essential celestial sign of timely rain. Zheng Xuan explains:

言王為旱之故，求于群神，無不祭也。無所愛于三牲，禮神之圭璧又已盡矣，曾無聽聆我之精誠而興雲雨。

It means that the king sought the aid of all the spirits, and there were none to whom he did not sacrifice. None of the three sacrificial animals did he withhold. Moreover, he had already offered all the scepters and rings for performing rites to the spirits. Yet still they did not hearken to his pure integrity and bring forth rain clouds.<sup>27</sup>

Of the eight total stanzas in the eighty-line song, all but the first and last begin with the same line: “The drought is already exceedingly severe” 旱既太甚。<sup>28</sup> In multiple instances, “Cloudy River” pairs images of drought with the ominous sort of thunder and lightning that occurs in absence of rain. The second stanza opens:

The drought is already exceedingly severe,	旱既大甚，	11
Blazing! Booming! Sweltering! <sup>29</sup>	蘊隆蟲蟲。	12

<sup>25</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 16.3.1000.

<sup>26</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 16.3.1193–94.

<sup>27</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 16.3.1194.

<sup>28</sup> Lines 11, 21, 31, 41, 51, and 61 (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1195–1202).

The Mao tradition identifies the word *long* 隆, which I have rendered “booming,” as descriptive of thunder. “Booming,” Zheng Xuan further explains, refers specifically to thunder in the absence of rain.<sup>30</sup> Thunder occupies an inverted position, as a sign that under normal circumstances accompanies rainfall, but here underscores the severe heat. The Mao tradition glosses the binomes, *he he, yan yan* 赫赫炎炎 (scorching and searing; line 33)<sup>31</sup> as descriptive of the *qi* of the drought and the *qi* of heat. Both Mao and Zheng Xuan read the emotive binomial expressions in terms of the technical discourse of Han cosmology.

The central tension of “Cloudy River” is articulated between two competing mutually exclusive celestial signs: drought and seasonal rain. The first the ruler-suppliant hopes to drive away. The second he hopes to bring into being. Yet as the drought continues to rage, he wonders if his ancestors hear him at all:

The drought is already exceedingly severe—	旱既太甚，	41
Bald are the mountains and dry are the rivers!	滌滌山川。	42
The Drought Demon does cruel deeds,	旱魃為虐，	43
Burning and charring.	如燄如焚。	44
My heart is weary of the heat,	我心憚暑，	45
It is as if my worried heart were scorched.	憂心如薰。	46
The dukes and ancient lords,	群公先正，	47
Do not hear me.	則不我聞；	48
O August Heaven, O High God,	昊天上帝，	49
Why do you make me flee? <sup>32</sup>	寧俾我遯？	50

The image of the drought itself is cruel enough. It is a great demon that blights the land, laying waste to all that stands before it. The song takes an inward turn in lines 45–46, however, when the Drought Demon seems to lay waste to the very heart of the ruler. These lines not only evince the dire state of the situation, but also evoke the concern the ruler has for his realm. This is precisely why, according to the Mao tradition, the ode should be read as an encomium for King Xuan. The final lines of the stanza return to the motif of spirits who cannot or do not hear the ruler-suppliant’s prayers. August Heaven and the High God prove no better at perceiving and rewarding King Xuan’s supplications than are his own ancestors. Specifying no particular subject, but seeming to refer to all those deities and ancestors to whom he has offered sacrifices,

<sup>29</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1195.

<sup>30</sup> The Mao tradition treats three terms in the line as adverbs. An exact rendering in English necessitates inventing words: “*Blazingly*, it scorches; *boomingly* it thunders; *swelteringly*, it is hot” 蘊蘊而暑，隆隆而雷，蟲蟲而熱. Zheng Xuan further explains: “‘Boomingly it thunders,’ is not the sort of thunder that comes with rain. Yet the sound of thunder rings out still” 隆隆而雷，非雨雷也，雷聲尚殷殷然 (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1195–96). For a second image of thunder and lightning in the poem see lines 23–24 (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1197).

<sup>31</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1199.

<sup>32</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1200.



King Xuan complains in vain: “None look and none see” 靡瞻靡顧.<sup>33</sup>

“Cloudy River” in its final stanza returns to the image of the king looking up at the heavens, beseeching both his noble ancestors and August Heaven itself for aid:

I gaze up at August Heaven,	瞻印昊天，	71
There is a sparkle among the stars.	有嘒其星。	72
O noblemen and lords,	大夫君子，	73
The shining light ascends without slackening—	昭假無贏，	74
The Great Charge is almost at an end. <sup>34</sup>	大命近止。	75
Do not abandon your achievements.	無棄爾成。	76
How could I ask this for my own sake?	何求為我？	77
I do so for the security of the many governors. <sup>35</sup>	以戾庶正。	78
I gaze up at August Heaven,	瞻印昊天，	79
When will it bring favor and repose? <sup>36</sup>	曷惠其寧？	80

The image of the ruler is that of an ideal supplicant and an ideal observer of celestial signs. He never abandons his quest to perform the correct ritual to bring rain, and is ever watchful of the stars for signs that his prayers have or have not been answered. He claims that he desires not to save himself, but the dynasty. He performs his acts of supplication for the benefit of the many governors below him, and his royal lineage before him. The ode need not address what many educated later listeners and readers would have known, that King Xuan would rule over some four decades of prosperity. Understood from the perspective of the speaker, the tone of the final line feels bleak and nearly hopeless, yet later listeners and readers were assured that King Xuan would ultimately enjoy the favor and repose he so desperately sought.

### Prognostication and Ritual

The ode “Cloudy River” represented the king as a supplicant, but in Zheng Xuan’s reading, the king is also an observer of *qi*. King Xuan’s supplications are ritual acts aimed at restoring the heavens to order, at summoning the auspicious sign of seasonal rains. Observing *qi*, no less than a prayer for rain, is a ritual act. By diligently observing celestial signs, King Xuan might come to understand the will of Heaven, or the etiology of the drought, and rectify his own court, so as to resolve the baleful sign and thereby avoid its ultimate consequences. In our

<sup>33</sup> Line 36 (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1199).

<sup>34</sup> The phrase “*Da ming jin zhi*” 大命近止 occurs in line 35 and line 75. My own interpretation differs from that of Zheng Xuan. Zheng holds that *da ming* refers to the lives of King Xuan’s multitudinous subjects who have been brought to the point of starvation and imminent death. (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1199 and 1204). However, the phrase here appears to be used as a sort of threat to the ancestors who ignore King Xuan’s pleas; if they do not bring rain soon, there will be rebellion and the Great Charge that was once theirs shall be lost forever. This jives with the imperative that immediately follow, “Do not abandon your achievements!”

<sup>35</sup> I follow Zheng Xuan’s understanding of *shu zheng* 庶正 as *zhong guan zhi zhang* 衆官之長 (leaders of the many officers) (*Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1204).

<sup>36</sup> *Mao shi zhengyi* 18.2.1204.

reading of the Dai corpus *Changes* (Yi 易) related texts in Chapter 2, we saw that the rulers of Dai had texts within their possession that told them, unequivocally, that even those most skilled in *Changes* prognostication got it wrong a lot of the time. Kongzi's 孔子 (trad. 551–479 BCE) declaration to Zigong 子貢 (trad. 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE) bears repeating: “Out of one hundred prognostications, I get it right seventy times. Even when Liangshan of Zhou performed his prognostications, he had to go with the majority! That’s all there is to it” 子曰：吾百占而七十當，唯周梁山之占也，亦必從其多者而已矣!<sup>37</sup> Just as Kongzi warned Zigong of the frequent unreliability of *Changes* prognostication, he also warned his disciple that the integrity of the person performing the prognostication was vitally important: “Without character, one cannot understand the *Changes*” 無德，則不能知易。<sup>38</sup> Whatever the precise shape the ritual of prognostication took, failure to perform the ritual in the right way, at the right time, or with the right mindset, likely entered into explanations of why prognostication did not always work perfectly, thereby strengthening the discourse as a whole.

Though the product of another time and place, the procedure used by the Zande tribe in central Africa to detect and identify witchcraft, described in E.E. Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937) indicates the extent to which ritual concerns can affect the validity of prognostication. The Zande procedure involved administering poison, called *benge*, to a fowl and asking a yes-or-no question. If the fowl died, that might, for instance, indicate an affirmative answer, whereas if it lived, that might indicate a negative answer. The procedure required extensive ritual preparation. Should any aspect of that preparation go awry, the procedure would not work, and any answers it had yielded would be deemed invalid. Evans-Pritchard details the ritual care with which the Azande gathered poison, selected the fowl, and chose a site to perform the ritual itself. The Azande selected a place distant from the homestead, and from the potential influence of baleful witchcraft that might cause the oracle to give a false response. The procedure was performed early in the morning before the poison became too potent. Finally, while the fowl were a precious commodity of which a typical household possessed not more than half a dozen, the poison was tested prior to use to ensure that some birds died and that others lived. Only a married male whose wealth sufficed to acquire both the poison and fowl could conduct the procedure. The preparer of the poison and the consulter who asked the questions were required to avoid all tabooed foods, certain glutinous plants, fish, and elephant flesh, and to abstain from sexual relations for four to five days before the procedure. Any contact with profane persons might destroy the power of the oracle.<sup>39</sup> In summary, Evans-Pritchard explains: “All good oracle poison is the same, whoever owns, operates, and consults it. But its goodness depends on the care and virtue of owner, operator, and consulter.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Chen Songchang 陳松長 and Liao Mingchun 廖名春, “Yao shi wen” 《要》釋文 (Transcription of the “Essentials”) in their “Boshu ‘Er san zi wen,’ ‘Yi zhi yi,’ ‘Yao’ shi wen” 帛書《二三子問》、《易之義》、《要》釋文 (Transcription of the Silk “The Inquiries of Two or Three Disciples”, “The Meaning of the *Changes*,” and “The Essentials”) *Daojia wenhua* 道家文化 (Daoist Culture) 3 (1993): 434–35, lines 16–17.

<sup>38</sup> Chen and Liao, “Yao shi wen,” line 8.

<sup>39</sup> Evans-Pritchard 281–87.

<sup>40</sup> Evans-Pritchard 292.

Failures in ritual and failures on the part of the owner, operator, and consulter likewise explain inefficacy in prognostication: witchcraft, broken taboos, carelessness in gathering or storing the oracle poison itself. The Azande know full well that the prognostications of the oracles are not always borne out:

The oracle says one thing will happen and another and quite different thing happens. Here again Azande are not surprised at such an outcome, but it does not prove to them that the oracle is futile. It rather proves how well founded are their beliefs in witchcraft and sorcery and taboos. On this particular occasion the oracle was bad because it was corrupted by some evil influence. Subsequent events prove the presence of witchcraft on the earlier occasion... Azande see as well as we that the failure of their oracle to prophesy truly calls for explanation, but so entangled are they in mystical notions that they must make use of them to account for the failure. The contradiction between experience and one mystical notion is explained by reference to other mystical notions.<sup>41</sup>

Scholarly debates on Zande ritual practice have been largely centered on the question of efficacy and what inefficacy indicates concerning the purpose of the entire system. Scholars have likened Zande ritual practitioners to Western analogues ranging from devout Christians to engineers. Peter Winch criticizes Alasdair MacIntyre's philosophical inquiry into how Zande practices might be subjected to a rational critique,<sup>42</sup> arguing instead that Zande ritual practices, like Christian acts of supplication, help practitioners to accept the vagaries and uncertainties of life, but not to control them. Winch explains the Christian example:

In Judaeo-Christian cultures the conception of "If it be Thy Will," as developed in the story of Job, is clearly central to the matter I am discussing. Because this conception is central to Christian prayers of supplication, they may be regarded from one point of view as freeing the believer from dependence on what he is supplicating for. Prayers cannot play this role if they are regarded as a means of influencing the outcome for in that case the one who prays is still dependent on the outcome. He frees himself from this by acknowledging his complete dependence on God.<sup>43</sup>

According to Winch, Zande ritual practice has a similar function:

Clearly the nature of Zande life is such that it is of very great importance to them that their crops should thrive. Clearly too they take all kinds of practical "technological" steps, within their capabilities, to ensure that they do thrive. But that is no reason to see their magical rites as a further, misguided such step. A man's sense of the importance of

<sup>41</sup> Evans-Pritchard 338–39.

<sup>42</sup> For MacIntyre's views, see his "Is Understanding Religion Compatible With Believing?" in John Hick ed., *Faith and the Philosophers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964): 62–77.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society" in Nancy K. Frankenberry and Hans H. Penner eds., *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theory and Method in Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999): 370.

something to him shows itself in all sorts of ways: not merely in precautions to safeguard that thing. He may want to come to terms with its importance to him in quite a different way: to contemplate it, to gain some sense of his life in relation to it.<sup>44</sup>

Winch criticized Alasdair MacIntyre for imposing a universalizing notion of rationality onto Zande practices, but Winch himself understands those practices in terms of Western cultural categories. Robin Horton, in a scathing critique of Winch, brings the argument full circle, comparing Zande ritual practices to those of the Western “scientific technologist” and arguing that their purpose lies in “explanation, prediction, and control.”<sup>45</sup>

[A]ll of Winch’s remarks about the Zande mystical thinker’s attitude to experience are equally applicable to the scientific technologist. He too treats his theory as an article of faith, not as a hypotheses. He too avoids trying out any course of action which his theory says would be practically disastrous. He too greets any disappointment of theory-based prediction with *ad hoc* excuses which account for the disappointment whilst leaving the core of the theory intact—excuses about probable carelessness of operators, faults in instruments and impurities in materials.<sup>46</sup>

Winch likens the Azande to Christians and Horton likens them to engineers. Despite the acrimonious tone of the debate, their respective insights regarding the Zande practices are not mutually exclusive in any absolute sense. Each scholar usefully employs comparisons to his own culture to bring out different aspects of purpose in Zande ritual practice. Winch seems to address a broader set of Zande ritual practices, whereas Horton focuses more narrowly on prognostication and the identification of witchcraft. Prayers for a good harvest are acts of supplication, and Winch may well be right in his view that, in some sense, these serve to free “the believer from dependence on what he is supplicating for.” Nonetheless, the poison oracle presented a means of explaining why bad things happened in general, and by extension, why even the most reverent acts of supplication did not always produce efficacious results. The ode “Cloudy River” itself presents a series of acts of supplication that did not produce rain, and thus might be read along the lines of Winch’s reading of Zande ritual. The Zheng Xuan commentary to the ode, however, treats the king not only as a supplicant, but also as an observer of signs. In Horton’s terms, King Xuan observes *qi* for the purposes of “explanation, prediction, and control.”

The Azande knew that prognostication sometimes failed, and possessed the means to explain why it failed. The ideas that serve to explain the failure of the oracle are in themselves lent credence by the very fact of failure. The Azande experienced the reality of witchcraft in the failure of the oracle. While the existence of witchcraft was a given for the Azande, each instance in which it manifested its presence by interfering with the otherwise reliable oracles reinforced the experience of its power and ubiquity. The failure of the oracle underscored the efficacy of the constellation of ritual concepts and practices of which it was a part.

<sup>44</sup> Winch 369.

<sup>45</sup> Robin Horton, “Professor Winch on Safari,” in Frankenberry and Penner 400.

<sup>46</sup> Horton 395.

### Failure as Supplement

Failure creates a space where explanation becomes possible. In his account of the poison oracle among the Azande, Evans-Pritchard emphatically and repeatedly claims that the Azande had no theories regarding how their technique worked, but that they simply knew that it did. He isn't quite right. The Azande may not have had a developed positive theory of what made their oracles work, but they did have an elaborate theory of why oracles failed. Their understanding of how oracles worked took the form of explanations of failure. Just as oracles failed because the poison was inefficacious, the men conducting the ritual had violated taboos, or witchcraft had corrupted them, oracles succeeded because the poison had been gathered, stored, and tested with care, because the owner, operator, and consulter kept the taboos, and because the baleful influence of witchcraft had been avoided. According to the regular order of things, the oracles succeeded, but called for no explanation.

Baleful celestial signs in early imperial China signaled the breakdown of the regular order of things, the failure of the heavens to proceed according to normative, otherwise constant, patterns. Because the heavens were tied by the dynamics of *qi* and systems of correspondence to the imperial court, baleful celestial signs likewise reflected a breakdown in the ritual or political order of the court. In the introductory chapter, we saw that the discourse on celestial patterns served to interpret anomalies, those celestial phenomena for which the descriptive discourse of calendrics cannot account. In Chapter 2, we turned to the manuscripts on the *Changes* to investigate possible ways in which experts at the court of Dai could have explained the workings of prognostication based on celestial signs. The manuscripts on celestial signs themselves offer little explanation, and unlike texts on celestial signs a few generations later, they do not center on the concerns of the imperial court. In Chapter 3, we turned to treatises concerned with celestial signs issuing from the imperial court itself: the “Tianguan shu” 天官書 (Treatise on the Celestial Offices) in the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist), and the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (Treatise on the Five Resources) and “Treatise on Celestial Patterns” in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han). Supplementing our account of the first treatise by reading the celestial signs in Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) “Benji” 本記 (Basic Annals) from high antiquity through the fall of the Western Zhou 周 dynasty (1046–772 BCE), we found rulers who took heed when baleful signs appeared, rulers who responded to such signs inadequately, and even rulers who created baleful signs of their own will. Xi 羲 and He 和 served the sage-king Yao 堯 as calendarists, and according to some traditions, as the drivers of the sun’s chariot. But under Di Zhongkang 帝中康 of Shang, they grew licentious and lost their way. King Wuding 武丁 (trad. r. 1250–1192 BCE) rectified his sacrificial rituals when a pheasant appeared on the High Ancestor’s Day of Sacrifice and King Cheng 成 (r. 1042–1021 BCE) honored the Duke of Zhou 周公 (11<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE) when the violent winds blew. But King Wuyi 武乙 (trad. r. 1147–1113 BCE) humiliated an effigy he called the “Spirit of Heaven,” and the wicked King Zhou lost his realm after failing to respond to a human sign of Heaven’s will: the rise of Earl of the West. In the “Five Resources” and “Celestial Patterns” treatises, appearances of baleful signs mark a path that gravitates toward the rise of Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9 CE–23 CE) like cairns along a well-worn

trail. In Chapter 4, we saw that memorialists employed the occasions of baleful signs to explain the processes by which those signs had come into being. The breakdown of the regular, constant order of things called for an explanation of the etiology of the sign. In tracing back the sign to its source, be it excessive favor bestowed on those close to the emperor, excessive taxation in times of famine, or the violation of ritual prescriptions against incognito excursions from the palace, these explanations pointed both to the contingency of the signs themselves and the events they presaged. In Chapter 5, we saw that the “Jiuge” 九歌 (Nine Songs) of the *Chuci* 楚辭 (Lyrics of Chu) express an anxiety that the gods will not descend, or will vanish all too quickly. Their descriptions of the offerings made, preparatory purifications, and longing of the medium for the god are rendered all the more poignant because of the possibility that the ritual will prove inefficacious. Sima Xiangru’s “Daren fu” 大人賦 (*Fu* on the Great Man) poetically transforms Emperor Wu into an all-powerful deity who attains immortality. Yet Emperor Wu could never ascend to the heavens outside the particular space of ritual and poetry. The songs of frustrated officials with which the chapter closes, too, are made possible by a kind of breakdown. In a perfect world, lords would always be wise enough to recognize worthy and talented men. In their expressions of longing for discerning lords, poems on celestial journeys appropriate the language of liturgy to describe a world that remains fragmentary and unjust.

### **The Cloudy River and the Comet in the West**

By way of conclusion, let us return to the anecdote with which we began, Master Yan’s 晏子 (6<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE) admonition of Duke Jing of Qi 齊景公 (r. 547–490 BCE). When a comet appeared over his domain, the bumbling Duke planned to have a ritual of exorcism performed, but Master Yan warned against that course of action. The comet had appeared for a reason. Instead of fulfilling his responsibilities as lord of the domain, Duke Jing had spent his time enjoying music, drinking too much, and cavorting with his toadies. Overtaxed and underfed, his subjects were on the verge of open rebellion. The ritual of exorcism might well succeed, but only temporarily. Even if the comet were exorcised, so long as these conditions persisted, Master Yan declaimed, the comet would surely appear again.

The “Cloudy River” ode presents a scenario that in many ways mirrors Master Yan’s admonition of Duke Jing. King Xuan of Zhou was a diligent and worthy ruler, whereas Duke Jing was mediocre at best. King Xuan was deeply pained by the suffering of his people, whereas Duke Jing hardly noticed the famines that plagued his domain. King Xuan faced a drought that persisted for years on end, whereas Duke Jing faced a comet, the sort of phenomenon that *always* vanishes within a few months. The rituals King Xuan performed failed repeatedly. Duke Jing’s attempt to exorcise the comet would almost certainly have been successful, at least in the short run. Master Yan did not even suggest that the ritual might fail to remove the sign, but instead argued that the sign would appear again.

Learned officers at court in the late Western Han and Eastern Han, and perhaps earlier, would have known both stories. The narrative surrounding “Cloudy River” insisted that even when all rituals were assiduously performed by the most virtuous of ruler-suppliants, those rituals might not prove efficacious. The anecdote of the comet in the west assumes, as a matter of course, that a ritual to exorcise the comet would likely be successful, if only in achieving its immediate purpose, though the ruler-suppliant may be bumbling, inept, and unrepentant. The

two stories were by no means mutually contradictory, nor did they contradict experience. Ritual sometimes failed when it should have proved efficacious, and it sometimes produced the intended result when it should have failed. In the long term, however, learned readers knew that King Xuan's prayers for rain would eventually succeed, even if "Cloudy River" did not say so explicitly. And Master Yan confirmed that the potential success of a ritual to exorcise the comet would be hollow, for so long as Duke Jing failed to reform himself and his administration, the comet would surely return.

Looking back at the Cloudy River and the comet in the west, and all the celestial signs that we have discussed between them, our task is not to understand what they were, or even what they meant, but the myriad ways in which they were rendered meaningful. The Cloudy River was not exactly the Milky Way, but was both less and more than the Milky Way. It was not a galaxy. No one knew that they lived within it, or that its misty appearance issued from the light of billions of distant stars. Zheng Xuan tells us that the Cloudy River is a mass of watery *qi*. To evaluate the extent to which Zheng Xuan's understanding of the Cloudy River conforms to a modern scientific understanding of the Milky Way would surely be a fruitless exercise, entirely missing what is at stake in his claim. The comet in the west was no more a comet, insofar as we understand a comet to be an icy core surrounded by a shell of gas that issues from the outer solar system, than the Cloudy River was a galaxy. We cannot retroactively calculate whether such a comet appeared at all. Turning away from objectivist concerns, we then might ask what particular signs meant in the culture of early imperial courts. This question sets us off on a good start, but soon becomes complicated by the very diversity of those courts and the actors who operated within them. Duke Jing and Master Yan interpreted the meaning of the comet in fundamentally different ways. The Cloudy River is a baleful sign in the eponymously-titled ode, but a mark of the legitimacy of King Wen in "Oak Clumps." The processes by which celestial signs are interpreted and made meaningful are complex, variegated, and manifold. Celestial signs are never read in isolation, but with reference to a dense web of recent and historical events, Classical texts, cosmological correspondences, current administrative policies, and the ritual comportment of the ruler and his court—the host of other signs that collectively make up the world.

## Works Cited

- Abu-Lughod, Janet L. "All the Silks of China," 316–51. In *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Aoki Masaru 青木正兒 (1887–1964). "Soji Kyûka no bukyokuteki kekkô" 楚辭九歌の舞曲的結構 (The Structure of the Dance Performances in the Nine Songs of the Lyrics of Chu). *Shinagaku* 支那學 (Sinology), no. 7 (1934): 1–23.
- . *Shin'yaku Soji* 新譯楚辭 (A New Translation of the Lyrics of Chu). In *Aoki Masaru zenshû* 青木正兒全集 (Collected Works of Aoki Masaru). Vol. 4. Tokyo: Shunjû, 1969–75.
- Ashmore, Robert. *The Transport of Reading: Text and Understanding in the World of Tao Qian (365–427)*. Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Bai Guangqi. "Boshu 'Wuxing zhan' de jiazhi ji bianzhi shidai" 帛書五星占的價值及編制時代 (The Value and Compilation Date of the Silk 'Five Planets Prognostications'). *Yindu xuekan* 殷都學刊 (The Yindu Journal), no. 3 (1997): 42–43.
- Ban Gu 班固 (32 CE–92 CE) comp., Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) comm. *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han). Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962.
- Bell, Catherine. "Ritual and Society: Questions of Social Function and Structure," 23–60. In *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Revised edition. New York: Oxford, 2009.
- Bielenstein, Hans. "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien Han Shu." *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 127–43.
- . *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980.
- Birrell, Anne. *Popular Songs and Ballads of Han China*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.
- Bodde, Derk. *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances during the Han Dynasty 206 B.C.–A.D. 220*. Princeton: Princeton University Press and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975.
- Cai Zong-qi. *The Matrix of Lyric Transformation: Poetic Modes and Self-Presentation in Early Chinese Pentasyllabic Poetry*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1996.



- CHANT (*CHinese ANcient Texts*) database. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1998. <<http://www.chant.org>>.
- Chartrand, Mark R. Astronomical charts by Wil Tirion. *National Audubon Society Field Guide to the Night Sky*. New York: Knopf, 1991.
- Chavannes, Édouard (1865–1918) trans. *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts'ien* (The Historical Records of Sima Qian). 5 vols. Leroux: 1895–1905. In electronic form through “Les Classiques des Sciences Sociales.” Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. [http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/sema\\_tsien/sema\\_tsien.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/sema_tsien/sema_tsien.html).
- Chemla, Karine and Guo Shuchu. *Les neuf chapitres: Le classique mathématique de la Chine ancienne et ses commentaires*. Paris: Dunod, 2004.
- Chen Meidong 陳美東. *Zhongguo gudai tianwenxue sixiang* 中國古代天文學思想 (Ancient Chinese Astronomical Thought). Beijing: Zhongguo kexue jishu, 2008.
- Chen Mengjia. “Han jian nianli biaoxu” 漢簡年曆表敘 (Prolegomena to Chronological Tables Based on the Han Wooden Tablets). *Kaogu xuebao* 考古學報 (Bulletin of Archaeology), no. 36 (1965): 103–149.
- Chen Songchang 陳松長. *Mawangdui boshu “Xing-De” yanjiu lungao* 馬王堆帛書《刑德》研究論稿 (Summary of Research on the Mawangdui Silk “Punishment and Favor” Texts). Taipei: Taiwan guji, 2001.
- Chen Songchang 陳松長 and Liao Mingchun 廖名春, “Yao shi wen” 《要》釋文 (Transcription of the “Essentials”). *Daojia wenhua* 道家文化 (Daoist Culture) 3 (1993): 434–35.
- Cheng Shude 程樹德 comm. *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 (Collected Commentaries to the Analects). 4 vols. Preface dated 1939. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990.
- Cook, Constance. “Scribes, Cooks, and Artisans: Breaking the Zhou Tradition.” *Early China* 20 (1995): 241–77.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mark. *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004.
- . “The Social Roles of the Annals Classic in Late Western Han.” In Nylan and Vankeerberghen, 461–76.

- Cullen, Christopher. *Astronomy and Mathematics in Ancient China: The Zhou bi suan jing*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge, 1996.
- “Understanding the Planets in Ancient China: Prediction and Divination in the *Wu xing zhan*.” *Early Science and Medicine* 16 (2001): 218–251.
- *The Suàn shù shū = ‘Writings on Reckoning’: A Translation of a Chinese Mathematical Collection of the Second Century BC, with Explanatory Commentary*. Cambridge U.K.: Needham Research Institute, 2004.
- “Numbers, Numeracy and the Cosmos.” In Nylan and Loewe, *China’s Early Empires*, 323–38.
- “*Wu Xing Zhan* 五星占 ‘Prognostics of the Five Planets.’” *SCIAMVS: Sources and Commentaries in the Exact Sciences* 12 (2011): 193–249.
- Daston, Lorraine and Peter Galison. *Objectivity*. Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2007.
- de Crespigny, Rafe. *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220) AD*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007.
- Dong Shan 董珊. “Tan Mawangdui boshu ‘Tianwen qixiang zazhan’ de xingcheng’ 談馬王堆帛書《天文氣象雜占》的形成 (A Discussion of the Formation of the Mawangdui Silk Text: “Miscellaneous Prognostications on Celestial Patterns and *Qi* Phenomena.” <http://www.jianbo.org/admin3/2005/dongshan002.htm>.
- Eberhard, Wolfram. “Index zu den Arbeiten über Astronomie, Astrologie, und Elementenlehre.” *Monumenta Serica* 7 (1942): 242–66.
- “The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China.” In *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, edited by John K. Fairbank, 33–70. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) comp., Li Xian 李賢 (651–684) comm. *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han Dynasty). Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965. Technical treatises (*zhi* 志) in the *Hou Hanshu* are compiled by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306) with commentary by Liu Shao 劉昭 (fl. ca. 502–ca. 519).
- Feng Shi 馮時. *Zhongguo tianwen kaoguxue* 中國天文考古學 (Archaeoastronomy in China). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2001.

- Frank, Andre Gunder. *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Nancy K. Frankenberry and Hans H. Penner eds. *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief: Studies in Twentieth-Century Theory and Method in Religion*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999.
- Fu Juyou 傅舉有. “Han dai liehou de jiali—jian tan Mawangdui san hao mu muzhu” 漢代列侯的家吏——兼談馬王堆三號墓墓主 (The Family Servant of a Han Dynasty Marquis—A Thorough Discussion of the Tomb Occupant of Mawangdui Tomb 3.” *Wenwu* 文物 (Cultural Relics) 1 (1999): 86–89, 96.
- Fu Zhengang 費振剛, Hu Shuangbao 胡雙寶, and Zong Minghua 宗明華 eds. *Quan Han fu* 全漢賦 (Complete *Fu* of the Han Dynasty). Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1993.
- Galvany, Albert. “Signs, Clues and Traces: Anticipation in Ancient Chinese Political and Military Texts.” *Early China* 38 (2015): 1–43. (DOI: 10.1017, Published online May 2015).
- Gentz, Joachim. “The Ritual Meaning of Textual Form: Evidence from Early Commentaries of the Historiographic and Ritual Traditions.” In *Text and Ritual in Early China*, edited by Martin Kern, 124–148. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005.
- Gong Kechang 龔克昌 ed. *Quan Han fu pingzhu* 全漢賦評注 (A Critical Commentary to the Complete Han Rhapsodies). 3 vols. Shijiazhuang: Huawen wenyi, 2004.
- Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893–1980) and Liu Qiyu 劉起鈞 comm. *Shangshu jiaozhu yilun* 尚書校釋譯論 (Notes, Explanation, Translation, and Discussion of the Venerable Documents). 4 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005.
- Hanfeizi 韓非子 (ca. 280–233 BCE). *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Collected Commentaries to the Hanfeizi). In *Zhuzi jicheng*. Vol. 5.
- Harper, Donald. *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*. London: Kegan Paul, 1998.
- Hawkes, David ed. and trans. *Ch'u Tz'u: The Songs of the South*. Boston: Beacon, 1962.
- He Jieju 何介鈞. *Changsha Mawangdui er san hao Han mu* 長沙馬王堆二三號漢墓 (Han Dynasty Tombs 2 and 3 at Mawangdui, Changsha). Beijing: Wenwu, 2004.

- He Xiu 何休 (129–182 CE) comm., Xu Yan 徐彥 (Tang) subcomm., *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏 (Commentary and Sub-commentary to the Gongyang Tradition of the Annals). Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999.
- Heidarzadeh, Tofigh. *A History of Physical Theories of Comets, From Aristotle to Whipple*. [United States]: Springer, 2008.
- Henricks, Robert G. trans. *Lao-tzu: Te-tao ching*. New York: Ballantine, 1989.
- Hong Ye 洪業 (William Hong, 1893–1980). “Chunqiu jingzhuan yinde xu” 春秋經傳引得序 (Preface to the Harvard-Yenching Index to the Annals Classic and Commentaries). In *Chunqiu jingzhuan yinde* 春秋經傳引得 (Harvard-Yenching Index to the Spring and Autumn Annals Classic and Commentaries). Vol. 1. Beijing: Hafo Yanjing xueshe, 1937.
- Horton, Robin. “Professor Winch on Safari.” In Frankenberry and Penner, *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief*, 378–408.
- Huang Shouqi 黃壽祺 and Zhang Shanwen 張善文 eds. *Zhouyi yizhu* 周易譯注 (A Modern Translation and Annotation of the Zhou Changes). Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2001.
- Ing, Michael David Kaulana. *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Jiang Ji 蔣驥 (fl. 1713–1727). *Shandai gezhu Chuci* 山帶閣註楚辭 (Cloudy Peak Studio Commentary to the Lyrics of Chu). Taipei: Guangwen shuju, 1971.
- Johnson, Barbara. “Writing.” In *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 39–49. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995.
- Kalinowski, Marc. “The *Xingde* 刑德 Texts from Mawangdui.” Phyllis Brooks trans. *Early China* 23–24 (1998–99): 125–202.
- Karlgren, Bernhard. “Legends and Cults of Ancient China.” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 18 (1946): 199–365.
- Kern, Martin. “In Praise of Political Legitimacy: The *Miao* and *Jiao* Hymns of the Western Han.” *Orient Extremis* 38 (1996) 1: 29–67
- *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (The Sacrificial Hymns of the Chinese State: Literature and Ritual in Political Representation of the Han Through the Six Dynasties). Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997.

- “Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141–87 B.C.)” *Chugoku shigaku* 中国史学 (Chinese History) (Dec., 2000): 1–31.
- “Western Han Aesthetics and the Genesis of the *Fu*.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 2 (Dec., 2003): 383–437.
- Knechtges, David. “A Journey to Morality.” In *Essays in Commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the Fung Ping Shan Library, 1932–1982*, edited by Chan Ping-leung et al., 162–182. Hong Kong: Fung Ping Shan Library of the University of Hong Kong, 1982.
- trans. “Rhapsody on Contemplating the Mystery,” 105–38. In *Wen Xuan, or Selections of Refined Literature*. Vol. 1. Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press: 1982–1996.
- Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) et al. *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義 (Correct Meanings of the Mao Odes). 3 vols. Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1999.
- *Shangshu zhushu* 尚書注疏 (Commentary and Sub-commentary to the Documents). In *Siku quanshu*.
- D.C. Lau. *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引 (A Concordance to the Huainanzi). Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies of Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992.
- Legge, James trans. *The Shoo King*. In *The Chinese Classics with a translation, critical and exegetical notes, prolegomena, and copious indexes*. Vol. 3 in 2 parts. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1972.
- Lehoux, Daryn. *What Did the Romans Know? An Inquiry into Science and World Making*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2012.
- Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (ca. 466–527 CE) comp. *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Commentary on the Rivers Classic). In *Siku quanshu*.
- Li Shisheng 黎石生. “Changsha Mawangdui sanhao muzhu zaiyi” 長沙馬王堆三號墓主再議 (A Re-evaluation of the Identity of the Occupant of Tomb No. 3 at Mawangdui, Changsha). *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 (Palace Museum Journal), no. 3 (2005): 150–55.
- Li Wai-ye. *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography*. Cambridge: Harvard University East Asian Center, 2007.

- Liang Cai. *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2014.
- Lien, Yeong-Chung E. “Zhang Heng, Eastern Han Polymath, His Life and Works.” Phd Diss. University of Washington, 2011. UMI (3452743).
- Liu Lexian 劉樂賢. *Mawangdui tianwen shu kaoshi* 馬王堆天文書考釋 (An Examination and Interpretation of the Mawangdui Texts on Celestial Patterns). Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue, 2004.
- Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) comp. *Gu Lienü zhuan* 古列女傳 (Arrayed Biographies of Women, Ancient). In *Siku quanshu*.
- Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721). *Shi tong* 史通 (A Complete Understanding of History). In *Siku quanshu*.
- Liu, Lydia. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Liu Pakyuen (Liao Boyuan) 廖伯源. *Les institutions politiques et la lutte pour le pouvoir au milieu de la dynastie des Han antérieures* (Political Institutions and the Struggle for Power in Western Han Dynasty). Paris: Collège de France, 1983.
- Liu Tseng-kuei, “Calendrical Computation Numbers and Han Dynasty Politics: A Study of Gu Yong’s Three Trouble’s Theory.” Luke Habberstad trans. In Nylan and Vankeerberghen, *Chang’an 26 BCE*, 293–322.
- Lloyd, Geoffrey and Nathan Sivin. *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Loewe, Michael. *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC–AD 9*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974.
- Loewe, Michael. “The Former Han Dynasty.” In Twitchett and Loewe, *Cambridge History of China*, 103–222.
- “The Conduct of Government and the Issues at Stake A.D. 57–167.” In Twitchett and Loewe, *Cambridge History of China*, 291–316.
- “The Han View of Comets,” 61–84. In *Divination, Mythology, and Monarchy in Han China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

- *A Biographic Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han, and Xin Periods: 221 BC–24 AD*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- *Dong Zhongshu, a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- “The Tombs Built for Han Chengdi and Migrations of the Population.” In Nylan and Vankeerberghen, *Chang’an 26 BCE*, 201–17.
- Lü Buwei 呂不為 (d. 235 BCE) comp., Gao You 高誘 (fl. 205–212 CE) comm. *Lü shi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Annals of Mr. Lü). In *Zhuzi jicheng*. Vol. 6.
- Lynn, Richard John trans. *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Major, John S. *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four, and Five of the Huainanzi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.
- Major, John S., Sarah Queen, Andrew Meyer, and Harold D. Roth trans. *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- Martzloff, Jean-Claude. *A History of Chinese Mathematics*. Stephen S. Wilson trans. Berlin and New York: Springer, 1997.
- Matsumoto Masaaki 松本雅明 (1912–1993). *Shunjû sengoku ni okeru Shôsho no tenkai: rekishi ishiki no hatten o chûshin ni* 春秋戰國における尚書の展開：歴史意識の發展を中心に (The Development of the Book of Documents in the Chunqiu and Warring Domains Periods: With Central Emphasis on the Development of a Consciousness of History). Tôkyô: Kazama Shobô, Shôwa 41 [1966].
- Mazzotti, Massimo. *The World of Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Mathematician of God*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.
- “Mawangdui Hanmu boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ shiwen” 馬王堆漢墓帛書<五星占>釋文. In *Zhongguo tianwenxue shi wenji* 中國天文學史文集 (Collected Documents on the History of Astronomy in China), 1–13. Beijing: Kexue, 1979.
- Moretti, Franco. *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*. London: Verso, 2007.
- Morgan, Daniel. “Knowing Heaven: Astronomy, the Calendar, and the Sagecraft of Science in Early Imperial China.” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2013. ProQuest (3606338).

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration. “SDO Sundog Mystery.”  
[http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/11feb\\_sundogmystery/](http://science.nasa.gov/science-news/science-at-nasa/2011/11feb_sundogmystery/).
- Needham, Joseph (in collaboration with Wang Ling). “Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth.” In *Science and Civilization in China*. Vol. 3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1959.
- Nienhauser, William H., Jr. et al. trans. “The Basic Annals of Pre-Han China.” In *The Grand Scribe’s Records*. Vol. 1. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Nôda Chûryû and Yabuuti Kiyoshi. *Kansho riturekishi no kenkyû* 漢書率曆志の研究 (Researches in the Treatise on Harmonics and Calendrical Astronomy of the Han history). Kyoto: Zenkoku, 1947.
- Nylan, Michael. *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings*. Nettetal, Germany: Steyler Verlag, 1992.
- *The Canon of Supreme Mystery: A Translation with Commentary of the T’ai Hsüan Ching*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.
- *The Five “Confucian” Classics*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996.
- “Beliefs about Seeing: Optics and Moral Technologies in Early China.” *Asia Major* 21, no. 1 (2008): 89–132.
- “Yin-yang, Five Phases, and qi.” In Nylan and Loewe, *China’s Early Empires*, 398–413.
- Nylan, Michael and Michael Loewe eds. *China’s Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Nylan, Michael and Griet Vankeerberghen eds., *Chang’an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2014.
- Otake Takeo (1905–1982) trans. *Kanjo* 漢書 (History of the Han). 3 vols. Tôkyô: Chikuma, 1977–1979.
- Owen, Stephen trans., ed. *Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911*. New York: Norton, 1996.
- “‘Han’ Poetry and the Southern Dynasties.” In *The Making of Early Chinese Classical Poetry*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Asia Center Press, 2006: 23–72.



- Pankenier, David W. *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Peterson, Willard. "Making Connections: 'Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations' of the *Book of Change*." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 1 (Jun., 1982): 67–116.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1902–1973). *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1937.
- Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 ed. *Changsha Mawangdui Hanmu jianbo jicheng* 长沙马王堆汉墓简帛集成 (Collected Bamboo and Silk Texts from Han Tombs at Mawangdui, Changsha). 7 vols. Shanghai: Fudan, 2014.
- Queen, Sarah A. *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達 (fl. 718 CE). *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 (Prognosticatory Classic of the Opening Epoch Reign [713–41]) in *Siku quanshu*.
- Riegel, Jeffrey. "Li chi." In *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, edited by Michael Loewe, 293–97. Berkeley: University of California, 1993.
- Rochberg, Francesca. "Divine Causality and Babylonian Divination," 411–23. In *In the Path of the Moon: Babylonian Celestial Divination and Its Legacy*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Sanfu huang tu* 三輔黃圖 (Plan of the Three Capital Regions; ca. 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE). In *Siku quanshu*.
- Schaberg, David. *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001.
- Schafer, Edward H. *Pacing the Void: T'ang Approaches to the Stars*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985.
- Seligman, Adam B., Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, "Ritual and the Subjunctive," 17–42. In *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Shapin, Steven. *The Scientific Revolution*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996.

*Siku Quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Books of the Four Chambers). Wenyuange edition. Intranet version (2007).

Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE). *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Senior Archivist). Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959.

Sivin, Nathan. “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy.” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series, 55, Livr. 1/3 (1969): 1–73.

——— “Why the Scientific Revolution Did Not Take Place in China—or Didn’t It?” Revised version. *Selected Writings of Nathan Sivin: Chinese Science and Medicine*. <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~nsivin/writ.html>. First appeared in *Chinese Science* 5 (1982): 45–66.

——— “Change and Continuity in Early Cosmology: *The Great Commentary to The Book of Changes*.” In *Chugoku godai kagakushi ron zoku hen* 中国古代科学史論続編 (Essays on Ancient Chinese Science), edited by Yamada Keiji 山田慶兒, 3–43. Kyoto: Jinbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo, 1989.

——— *Granting the Seasons: The Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280, With a Study of its Many Dimensions and a Translation of its Records*. New York: Springer, 2009.

Smith, Jonathan Z. “The Bare Facts of Ritual.” *History of Religions* 20, no. 1/2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (Aug.–Nov., 1980): 112–27.

*Starry Night Orion Special Edition*, version 6.4.3. 2009.

*Stellarium*. 2009. Available for download at <http://www.stellarium.org/>.

Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker. *The Chinese Sky During the Han: Constellating Stars and Society*. Leiden, New York, and Köln: Brill, 1997.

Tambiah, Stanley. *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Tseng, Lillian Lan–ying. *Picturing Heaven in Early China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Tomiya Itaru 冨谷至 and Yoshikawa Tadao 吉川忠夫 trans. *Kanjo gogyōshi* 漢書五行志 (The History of the Han “Treatise on the Five Resources”). Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1986.

- Tunc Tezel. “Retrograde Mars,” NASA, Astronomy Picture of the Day, December 16, 2003. [http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/image/0312/retrogrademars03\\_tezel.jpg](http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/image/0312/retrogrademars03_tezel.jpg).
- Twitchett, Denis and Michael Loewe eds., “The Ch'in and Han Empires.” In *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
- Unschuld, Paul U. “The Medicine of Systematic Correspondence,” 51–100. In *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1985.
- Unschuld, Paul U. and Hermann Tessenow in collaboration with Zheng Jinsheng. *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: An Annotated Translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic*. 2 vols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 2011.
- Van Zoeren, Steven. “The Preface to Mao's Odes,” 80–115. In *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- Waley, Arthur trans. *The Analects of Confucius*. New York: Random House, 1989 [1938].
- trans. *The Nine Songs: A Study of Shamanism in Ancient China*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955.
- Waley, Arthur trans. and Joseph R. Allen ed., *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry*. New York: Grove Press, 1996.
- Wang Shujin 王樹金. “Mawangdui Hanmu boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ yanjiu pingshu” 馬王堆漢墓帛書五星占研究評述 (A Commentary on the Researches on the ‘Five Planets Prognostications’—A Book on Silk Unearthed from the Han Tombs at Mawangdui.” *Hunan sheng bowuguan guankan* 湖南省博物館館刊 (Journal of the Hunan Provincial Museum), no. 7 (2010): 16–34.
- Wang Qicai 王启才. “Handai zouyi de wenxue yiyun yu wenhua jingshen” 漢代奏議的文學意蘊與文化精神 (The Literary Meaning and Cultural Spirit of Han Dynasty Memorials). Beijing: Renming daxue, 2009.
- Wang Wenjin 王文錦 ed. *Liji yijie* 禮記譯解 (Translation and Interpretation of the Record of Rites). 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 2001.
- Watson, Burton trans. “Precautions within the Palace,” 84–89. In *Basic Writings of Han Fei Tzu* in the omnibus volume *Basic Writings Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963–1964). NB: *Mo Tzu* and *Hsün Tzu* are separately paginated.

- Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249 CE) comm. *Laozi Daodejing* 老子道德經 (Laozi's Classic of the Way and Its Power). In *Zhuzi jicheng*. Vol. 3.
- Wang Yi 王逸 (fl. 89–158). *Chuci buzhu* 楚辭補注 (A Supplementary Commentary to the Lyrics of Chu). Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983.
- Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643) comp. *Sui shu* 隋書 (History of the Sui Dynasty). Beijing: Zhonghua, 1973.
- Wen Shiou Tsu. “The Observations of Halley's Comet in Chinese History.” *Popular Astronomy* 42 (1934): 191–201.
- Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946). “‘Jiu ge’ gu ge wuju xuanjie” 「九歌」古歌舞據懸解 (A Conjectural Interpretation of the “Nine Songs” as an Ancient Song and Dance Libretto), 305–34. In *Wen Yiduo quan ji* 聞一多全集 (Collected Works of Wen Yiduo). In Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898–1948) *Minguo congshu* 民國叢書 (Collectanea of Works of the Republican-era). Vol. 90. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1991.
- Peter Winch. “Understanding a Primitive Society.” In Frankenberry and Penner, *Language, Truth, and Religious Belief*, 342–79.
- Wu Zeyu 吳則虞. *Yanzi chunqiu jishi* 晏子春秋集釋 (Collected Commentaries to the Annals of Master Yan). 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962.
- Xi Zezong 席澤宗. “Mawangdui Han mu boshu zhong de huixingtu” 馬王堆漢墓帛書中的彗星圖 (The Chart on Comets among the Silk Texts at the Han Tombs at Mawangdui). *Wenwu* 2 (1978): 5–9.
- Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531) comp., Li Shan 李善 (630–689) comm., *Wenxuan* 文選 (Refined Selections), 6 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1986.
- Xu Zhentao 徐振韜. “Cong boshu ‘Wuxing zhan’ kan ‘Xian-Qin hunyi’ de chuang zhi’ 從帛書《五星占》看“先秦渾儀”的創制 (An Examination of the Invention of the Armillary Sphere in the Pre-Qin Era through the Silk “Five Planets Prognostications”). *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) (Feb. 1976): 84, 89–94.
- Xu Zhentao, David W. Pankenier, and Jiang Yaotiao. *East Asian Archaeoastronomy: Historical Records of Astronomical Observations of China, Japan, and Korea*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers on behalf of the Earth Space Institute, 2000.

- Yabuuti Kiyoshi, Kaoru Baba, and Catherine Jami. *Une Histoire des mathématiques chinoises*. Paris: Belin, pour la science, 2001.
- Yan Kejun 嚴可均 (1762–1843) ed. *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文 (Complete Texts of High Antiquity, the Three Dynasties, Qin, Han, the Three Kingdoms, and the Six Dynasties). Beijing: Shangwu, 1999.
- Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan jizhu* 春秋左傳集注 (Collected Commentaries to the Zuo Tradition of the Annals). 4 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981.
- Yang Shao-yun. “The Politics of Omenology in Chengdi’s Reign.” In Nylan and ankeerberghen, *Chang’an 26 BCE*, 323–46.
- Yates, Robin D.S. *Five Lost Classics: Tao, Huang-Lao, and Yin-yang in Han China*. New York: Ballantine, 1997.
- Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (Annals of Master Yan). In *Zhuzi jicheng*. Vol. 4.
- Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗 (1843–1906). *Hanshu yiwenzhi tiaoli* 漢書藝文志條理 (Explanation of Items in the History of the Han Bibliographic Treatise). In *Ershiwu shi yinwen jingji zhi kaobu cui bian* 二十五史藝文經籍志考補萃編 (Assorted Collection of Supplements and Investigations into the Bibliographic Treatises of the Twenty-Five Standard Histories), edited by Wang Chenglüe 王承略 and Liu Xinming 劉心明. Beijing: Qinghua daxue, 2011–12.
- Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140–before 204) comp., Wang Liqi 王利器 comm., *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 風俗通義校注 (Text Critical Commentary on A Comprehensive Account of Customs). 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981.
- Pauline Yu. *The Reading of Imagery in Chinese Poetic Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- Zhang Xincheng 張心澂. *Weishu tongkao* 偽書通考 (Complete Investigation into Forged Books). Shanghai: Shangwu, 1939.
- Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺. *Mawangdui boshu Zhouyi jingzhu* 馬王堆帛書周易經傳校讀 (A Text-Critical Reading of the Mawangdui Silk Zhou Changes Classic and Its Commentaries). Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008.
- Zhang Zhenglang 張政烺 et al., *Mawangdui Hanmu wenwu* 馬王堆 (Cultural Relics from the Mawangdui Han Tombs). Changsha: Hunan, 1992.

*Zhuzi jicheng* 諸子集成 (Collected Works of the Many Masters). 8 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1952.

Ronald Edward Zupko, "Measures of Distance." In *Trade, Travel, and Exploration in the Middle Ages: An Encyclopedia*, edited by John Block Friedman and Kristen Mossler Figg, 386–87. New York and London: Garland, 2000).