

REVIEW ARTICLE

Authorial Strategies in Pursuit of the Great Book: Ruminations about a Published Dissertation on Han China

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From Dissertation to Publication

The respected SUNY series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture has released Zhao Lu's 趙璐 2013 doctoral thesis by the same title and subtitle (thereafter "PhD").¹ This first section will address some form-related problems; the next section will unfold sequential reading notes; and the last five sections will focus on thematic facets of the book's contents.

Cover design is sober and almost elegant, despite the dominant colour being an ill-omened khaki-green. Between the covers, page layout looks a bit dense, perhaps in part due to the chosen East Asian typeface, which looks smaller than the English text and somewhat squat. Both complete and simplified logograms are used.² The systematic prefixing of all C.E. dates with "AD" proves cumbersome, especially in the case of four-figure years unambiguously modern or contemporary (see pp. 186–87

In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture. By Zhao Lu. SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019. Pp. xxi + 328. \$90.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

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¹ Zhao Lu, "In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013).

² A note inadvertently cites an excerpt from an ancient Chinese source in simplified logograms: "夫《离骚》之文，依托五经以立义焉" (p. 256, n. 153; the same excerpt is given again, now in complete logograms, on p. 150). The name of a historical figure first mentioned in transliteration only, "Chen Fan" (p. 139) is typed "陈蕃" a few pages onwards (p. 151). Qian Mu's 錢穆 surname is also typed "钱" once in the main text (p. 192) and once in the index (p. 324).

and 190 for examples of such overloaded text: “AD 1763–1820,” “AD 1821–1850,” “AD 1719–1788,” and so forth). A few instances of “AD” now suffixed (“fl. 88–125 AD,” p. 106) and utterances such as “around 107 to AD 113” (p. 258, n. 175) hamper reading speed.

Copy-editing and proofreading have left out a number of typographical errors, word omissions, mistyped logograms, and cases of mismatching East Asian text and transliteration.³ Pinyin and Hepburn syllable spacing or joining and capitalization tend to be erratic, especially in endnotes.⁴ Duplicate occurrences betray clumsy uses of copying and pasting.⁵ Upon verification, many of these defects appear to have been carried over from the dissertation, which raises some suspicion as to which extent the latter has been actually revised for “turning it into a book” (p. xiii).

The style could be more formal. Occurrences of “job” to mean “duty,” “position,” or “responsibility” could have been avoided, as well as familiar-sounding expressions.⁶ Even the best scholarly work is no longer “groundbreaking” once it has been in circulation for several decades (see p. 245, n. 15, for a “1983” publication, and p. 250, n. 86, for a “1984” one). Careful copy-editing should have spotted such awkward uses of the possessive as “Confucius’s the *Annals*” (p. 89, translation block,

³ I have noted “the appearance the *Scripture of the Great Peace*” (p. 38); “he was also interested astrology” (p. 45); “could use them sabotage his rule” (p. 94); “Although seldom explicitly expressed in Han literati’s writings, they tended to think that they possessed special knowledge to assist the emperor, although this was seldom explicitly expressed in their writings” (p. 173); “*rushing*” for the logograms “儒生” (p. 193); “As the same valences suggests” (p. 214); “*Moushi*” for the Japanese reading of 孟子, *Mōshi* (p. 225, n. 106); “Tado” for the implicit name Tadao 忠夫 (p. 235, n. 100); “*Frühlingsund Herbstannalen*” (p. 239, n. 25); twice the capitalized “Beijing” for the Chinese “背景” (p. 245, n. 15; p. 277, n. 36); “their relationship between a teacher and a student” (p. 250, n. 83); “*Kangceng*” for the Chinese “康成” (p. 260, n. 15); “Li Qian” for the implicit Chinese name 李賢 (p. 261, n. 16); “*Yashi*” for the Chinese text “顏氏” (p. 267, n. 97); “Lingao 靈寶” (p. 267, n. 98); “Liu Xiuqing” for the Chinese name “陸修靜” (p. 269, n. 1); “新” for the pinyin “*jin*” (p. 276, n. 29); the Japanese “中國の的道教” for a book title transliterated “*Chūgoku no Dōkyō*” (p. 296). On p. 267, n. 98, the last referenced work has no author’s name.

⁴ For instance, “*kan*” for the Japanese reading of the name of the Han 漢 dynasty (p. 252, n. 115).

⁵ For instance, “For an excellent study of the Hongdu Gate school, see” (p. 243, n. 5; p. 259, n. 5); the mistyped “*Shansan jing*” for the implicit Chinese title “十三經” (pp. 262–64, nn. 40, 43–45, 47, 49, 58, and 76).

⁶ I have noted “keeping *yin* and *yang* in balance was the job of the highest Han officials” (p. 5; also indexed, p. 314); “*yin* and *yang* are the foundation of the empire and it is the emperor’s job to maintain their relationship” (p. 6); “their editorial jobs” (p. 126); “Their job description” (p. 168); “Yin Min’s job was to delete prophecies” (p. 235, n. 110); and “Ma Rong did take [Deng Zhi’s] job offer” (p. 256, n. 153). See also “the icing on the cake” (p. 17).

for the Chinese text 孔子之《春秋》) and the pleonastic “an elaborate biography of He Xiu’s life” (p. 263, n. 54).

The core of *In Pursuit of the Great Peace* consists of five chapters, subdivided into short sections bearing headings and subheadings that occasionally slip into sensationalism (“The Rise and Fall of the National Academy, or Taixue 太學,” p. 104, is quite misleading). Conventionally, they are preceded by a List of Illustrations (p. xi), Acknowledgments (pp. xiii–xiv), and a short Introduction (pp. xv–xxi), and followed by a Conclusion (pp. 171–79) and six short appendices (pp. 181–215). These appendices bring together various work materials and research notes bearing a varying relevance to the focus of the book. The use of the future tense (“I will also include,” p. 215; “Therefore, I will draw a much smaller pool,” p. 283, n. 16) to announce preceding book contents—awkward since, in sequential order, these pages are supposed to be read last—betrays textual relocation performed in the course of revising the doctoral dissertation. Comparing both versions shows that Appendix 1 is made of material originally appearing at the beginning of “1. The Emergence of the New and Old Script Controversy in the Qing Dynasty” (PhD, pp. 6–9). Appendix 2 contains mainly the sections “Intellectual Transitions of the Qing Dynasty” and “The Changzhou School & New Script vs. Old Script Controversy” (PhD, pp. 5–6 and 9–13). Appendix 3 corresponds to most of “2. Depicting the Old and New Script Schools: the model of the Han Old/New Script controversy since the Twentieth Century” (PhD, pp. 13–25). Appendix 4 is a rendition of most of “3. Defining and Redefining the Confucian State: the Model of the Nationalization of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty and its Relation to Han Classicism” (PhD, pp. 25–38), from which a development on Lionel Jensen’s *Manufacturing Confucianism* has been deleted (cf. PhD, pp. 34–35) and where Liang Cai’s *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* is discussed instead.⁷ Appendix 5 reproduces “The Study of Apocryphal Texts and their Awkward Position in Han Classicism” (PhD, pp. 38–42) and Appendix 6, the section identically titled “*Chen, wei*, and Apocrypha: a Matter of Definition” (PhD, pp. 119–23). In sum, the first five appendices are made of the relocated first chapter of the original dissertation, while the sixth and last one derives from the prolegomenon to the third chapter.

⁷ Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Liang Cai, *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014). Though Jensen’s book is no longer quoted in the published version of Zhao’s work, its references were not removed from the bibliography (p. 294).

All the PhD-version footnotes to the introduction, chapters, conclusion, and appendices appear as endnotes under a single Notes section (pp. 217–83). Since the running header of the main text only displays the title of the current chapter, and the running header of the endnotes section does not display the corresponding page numbers, a bookmark must be kept inserted permanently among endnotes, otherwise the reader must flip back to the chapter’s first page to identify its number, during which process the numbering of the note being looked for is usually forgotten, check again that note numbering, and finally locate the note itself in the right endnotes section. All this can take up to a minute and risks leading to a wrong note. “Ibid.” could have served more often to reduce the bulk of consecutive endnotes referring to the same source.⁸

The Bibliography lists sources of undistinguished kinds, in alphabetical order, by author or by title (pp. 285–312). The list of secondary sources seems up-to-date as regards publications in Chinese and in Japanese, but, as we shall see, it lacks some standard Western-language works. Publications in French are conspicuously absent, while those in German amount to a single reference (p. 295). The Bibliography omits some references given in the text, for instance Joachim Gentz’s *Das Gongyang zhuan* (referred to on p. 239, nn. 25 and 30),⁹ while, conversely, as we have seen, the book does not cite at least one work listed in the Bibliography. Finally, the meagre Index (pp. 313–28) proves to be very selective and unreliable.¹⁰

Reading Notes

The back cover claims that, “instead of treating the [Han era (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.)] literati as puppets of competing and imagined lineages, [the author] uses sociological methods to reconstruct their daily lives and to show how they created their own thought by adopting, modifying, and opposing the work of their contemporaries and predecessors.” This threefold mode seems to be an ordinary feature of intellectual history, regardless of time and culture. It also states that, “far from being static, classicism in Han China was full of innovation”—a central word in Zhao’s discourse, as we shall see—“and ultimately gave birth to both literary writing and religious

⁸ For instance, pp. 222 (nn. 53–56 and 62–63), 224 (nn. 87–89), 225 (nn. 111–15), 247 (nn. 35–38 and 41–46), and 262 (nn. 31–32).

⁹ Joachim Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlings- und Herbstanalen* (Chunqiu) (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2001).

¹⁰ For instance, contrary to what two index entries read (p. 314), the title *Chunqiu yuanming bao* 春秋元命包 does not appear in pp. 58–59 or in p. 230, n. 41, nor is the title *Shangshu xuanji qian* 尚書璇機鈐 included in Table 1 (p. 51) or mentioned on p. 228, n. 8.

Daoism” (*sic*). The following pages will serve to put this abstract in perspective, naturally within the limits of my own expertise.

The reader expects from an introduction, especially in a book derived from a doctoral dissertation, to provide an up-to-date “state of the art,” some methodological or theoretical discussion, and a synthetic preview of the ensuing chapters. If the book’s contents are indeed sketched (pp. xx–xxi), the early part of the introduction is too thin to allow for the field and methodological or theoretical matters to be dealt with in some depth. Zhao offers a swift and astonishingly distorted picture of the study of intellectual debates in early imperial China, to the point that one wonders if the term “caricature,” applied by Zhao to “previous scholarship” (pp. xv–xvi), would not fit his own picture better. Zhao apparently mistakes the so-called *guwen* 古文 (translated as “old script”) / *jinwen* 今文 (translated as “new script”) controversy for the entire intellectual life of the period. According to Zhao, the dominant view of “the intellectual landscape from 100 BC to AD 200 is a grim one: two groups of bigoted pedants upheld twisted, fossilized Confucian doctrines for their political benefits” and, therefore, “[w]e poorly understand the transformations that took place in this nebulous three hundred years,” a period that “remains a dark tunnel” (pp. xv–xvi; “nebulous” returns, p. xvii).

As examples of works by “historians,” probably meaning “Sinologists” here, who “have cast old models away” (p. xvi), Zhao can cite only two *T’oung Pao* papers by Michael Nylan, dated 1994 (“The *Chin wen/Ku wen* Controversy in Han Times”), and Michael Loewe, dated 2012 (“Confucian’ Values and Practices in Han China,” missing from the bibliography).¹¹ For centuries in China and since even before the foundation of institutional academic Sinology in the early nineteenth century in the West, have scholars not been discussing, commenting upon, and translating the Chinese classics, comparing pre- and early imperial “philosophical” works and their ideas, nor studied Han politics, erudition, religions, society, rites, and more? Even the less known, belatedly investigated era of “political division” (third–sixth century C.E.) is no longer the “dark tunnel” it used to be. One only has to browse through Loewe’s *Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*,¹² Rafe de Crespigny’s *Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, and the four-volume *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature* by

¹¹ Michael Nylan, “The *Chin wen/Ku wen* Controversy in Han Times,” *T’oung Pao* 80, no. 1–3 (1994), pp. 83–145; Michael Loewe, “Confucian’ Values and Practices in Han China,” *T’oung Pao* 98, no. 1–3 (2012), pp. 1–30.

¹² A source surprisingly missing in Zhao’s bibliography, while Loewe’s companion volume to this dictionary, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), is recorded, albeit with the wrong publication date of “2011.”

David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang (also absent from Zhao's bibliography),¹³ and peek at the thousands of notes and references collected therein, to be convinced that the “dark tunnel” is mostly a figment of Zhao's imagination. Furthermore, his bibliography shows that, in the process of writing his text, Zhao constructed his representation of these intellectual debates and their social background precisely by drawing information from, in addition to Nylan's and Loewe's papers, several dozens of secondary sources with which he seems to be in general agreement.

Misrepresenting the field was all the more unnecessary since a few valuable points in Zhao's introduction suffice to convince the reader that his research fills a niche in the “intellectual market.” First, there is the concise, promising roadmap set out in these terms:

This work thus will examine the dynamic between scholars, the classics, intellectual innovations, and political reality. Through the constant appropriation of the classics, intellectual innovations took place among these communities, thus gradually forming the political and literati culture that became fundamental to imperial China. This culture and many elements of classical hermeneutics inspired [Taoist] sects after the collapse of the Han dynasty. (p. xvii)

(Again, one will have noted two occurrences of “innovations.”) Second, there is the interesting emphasis on “a peripatetic and epistolary scholarly culture marked by the use of calligraphy and poetry in the social life of newly mobile teachers and disciples throughout imperial China,” and on how “[c]lassicism dissolved in this traveling culture” (p. xix). And third, there is Zhao's promise to “[read in] a radically different angle” (p. xx) the “so-called apocrypha (*chenwei* 讖緯)” (p. xvi), a textual corpus still widely underestimated and underused by the Western academia.

As for theoretical discussion, all Zhao brings forth in his introduction is the “interaction ritual chains theory (IR theory)” and its component idea of “emotional energy (EE)” ascribed to an American sociologist, Randall Collins (p. xvii).¹⁴ This theory (into which I did not delve) may have its own merits, but, at least as Zhao summarizes it, it does not seem to contribute revolutionary insights to the topic at

¹³ Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC–AD 24)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Rafe de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms (23–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); David R. Knechtges and Taiping Chang, eds., *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2010–2014).

¹⁴ Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). Collins returns elsewhere in the book, but in each further case again, the relevance of the reference and its import to Zhao's work is not strikingly obvious (see pp. 134 and 143).

hand (pp. xvii–xviii), unless you never realized that “ideas or innovations result from new combinations of old ideas, or opposition to them” (p. xviii), that people “interact” and “compete with each other” (p. 2), and that “at least two people” are needed for “interaction” to take place (p. xviii). Does any contemporary academic really believe in “the static transmission of knowledge” (p. xvii)? “Static transmission” is an oxymoronic phrase.

Many Sinologists are aware of the existence of a discipline called “sociology” and have interpreted ancient Chinese sources along sociological lines. A work I am familiar with is *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China*, by Robert F. Campany, which I reviewed for *Études chinoises*.¹⁵ Of course, Campany and Zhao do not address the exact same issues, but Zhao’s focus on the Han era in his book happens to be contained within Campany’s own chronological boundaries (third century B.C.E.–third century C.E.), and Campany similarly stressed “tensions” surrounding communities of adepts, “competition” between practitioners, and the necessity to fully take into account the historical, economical, and social backdrop of the literary motifs under scrutiny. Sadly, Zhao did not benefit from reading Campany’s work, since his bibliography does not record a single publication from that prolific author.

Although Zhao does not acknowledge it, his “dynamics”-driven approach to the source materials also owes a lot to contemporary trends in what is now commonly called “digital humanities,” in particular, the historical implementation of social network analysis (“social networking,” p. xix). A recent paper by Thomas Mazanec on “Networks of Exchange Poetry in Late Medieval China” is a good example of such treatment. Notwithstanding differences in source corpora, human groups, and historical periods, Zhao’s critique—which is not new—of the “schools” of traditional historiography and his emphasis on scholars’ mobility echo some of the conclusions reached by Mazanec after analysing a closed corpus of exactly “10,869 poems exchanged between 2,413 individuals”: “the concept of ‘poetic schools’ is not a useful lens through which to view the Late Tang” era (830–874) and “poets at the center of the network are increasingly characterized by their mobility.”¹⁶

Chapter 1, “Toward a Zeal for Classicism: Intellectual Transitions from 74 BC to AD 9 China” (pp. 1–47), starts off in the middle of the story as “Liu Xin” 劉歆

¹⁵ Robert Ford Campany, *Making Transcendents: Ascetics and Social Memory in Early Medieval China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009). My review appeared in *Études chinoises* 28 (2009), pp. 279–84.

¹⁶ Thomas J. Mazanec, “Networks of Exchange Poetry in Late Medieval China: Notes toward a Dynamic History of Tang Literature,” *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 5, no. 2 (November 2018), p. 322.

(c. 50 B.C.E.–23 C.E.) jumps on stage without corresponding logographic name, dates, or any background information being provided—a collateral effect of the contents of the dissertation having been reordered without necessary adjustments (compare PhD, p. 8). The reader patient enough to search the entire book will find these details in Appendix 1 (p. 182), together with those of Xin’s father, Xiang 向, and read that both compiled a “bibliography” titled “Seven Summaries” (“Qi lue” 七略). In that Appendix, Liu Xiang’s dates are given as “ca. 77–6 BC,” then, back to Chapter 1, simply as “77–6 BC” (p. 3). The topics of the chapter are the “Great Peace (*taiping* 太平)” ideal and “the rise of classicism” to which this ideal led (p. 2). The chapter also deals succinctly with the “Well-Field (*jing tian* 井田) system,” a supposedly ancient agrarian institution which Wang Mang 王莽 (45 B.C.E.–23 C.E.) revived as a “key way to achieve a peaceful state of society” (pp. 29–30).

To put it summarily, this chapter is about how, under the first Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.), “anxiety about Heaven’s will” led to a desire to revert to the “Kingly Way” of “the ancient sage kings” who “putatively” wrote the classics (p. 3), “the only window to the Golden Age” (p. 20), in order to restore “harmony with Heaven” (p. 3).¹⁷ Zhao defines two opposing trends: a growing reliance on the classics on the one hand, which led to the so-called *jinwen/guwen* controversy, and, on the other hand, Li Xun’s 李尋 (*fl.* 15–5 B.C.E.) and Xia Heliang’s 夏賀良 (d. 5 B.C.E.) effort to “override” the classics with “the revealed text, the *Scripture of the Great Peace* [*Taiping jing* 太平經]” (p. 3). In the section under the heading “An Abortive Path: Li Xun’s Departure from the Classics” (pp. 35–38), it has escaped Zhao’s attention that, forty years ago, Barbara Kandel (today surnamed Hendrischke) described in some detail the political “Taiping Faction” behind the appearance of that first Great Peace document.¹⁸

Zhao concludes the chapter by stating that “[t]he love of antiquity sprouts from distress in the present” (p. 46). It may be so, but to the same cause one could also ascribe many other things, such as the reading of observed phenomena as “signs” that reveal unknown doings and mechanisms. Zhao, who seems to underestimate

¹⁷ The English phrase “Kingly Way,” not indexed, occurs over sixty times in the book, but one has to wait until a further translation block to be sure that it is translated from the Chinese *wangdao* 王道 (pp. 22–23). Léon Vandermeersch’s classic monograph by the same title, *Wangdao ou La voie royale: Recherche sur l’esprit des institutions de la Chine archaïque*, vol. 1: *Structures culturelles et structures familiales*; vol. 2: *Structures politiques. Les rites* (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1977 and 1980), is not assessed or mentioned by Zhao.

¹⁸ See Barbara Kandel, *Taiping jing: The Origin and Transmission of the “Scripture on General Welfare”: The History of an Unofficial Text* (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1979), pp. 5–23.

this “ancient science” (as per Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin¹⁹), relegates to a late endnote the admission that, “[a]fter Emperors Xuan [宣 (r. 74–49 B.C.E.)] and Yuan [元 (r. 49–33 B.C.E.)], interpretations of omens continued to be a fashion among many literati in the court” (p. 227, n. 139). It may have been more than mere “fashion,” as suggest in particular the compiling of entire treatises included in the official historiography of the imperial era and innumerable remnants of “apocrypha” that mainly concern the interpretation of “signs.”²⁰

Chapter 2, “The Conflation between Heaven and the Classics: The Rise of Apocrypha (*chenwei* 讖緯)” (pp. 49–78), covers the first half of the first century C.E. It focuses on the process that led from scattered predictive materials to the formation of a corpus of “apocrypha” (*wei* 緯, literally the “weft” in woven fabric, while the “classics” are called *jing* 經, literally the “warp”) and on the political purpose these books served before and after the Han restoration. Its main hypothesis is that, by claiming Weft books to be “divinely revealed commentaries on the classics” (p. 78), their authors proposed a median way between classical hermeneutics and the direct celestial divulgation claimed by the proponents of the *Tai ping jing*. The themes covered are the Weft conceptions of the “sage” (*sheng* 聖), the theory of political succession according to different Five Agents (*wuxing* 五行, or “Five Phases” for Zhao) theories, the conflict between Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 36) and Liu Xiu 劉秀 (5 B.C.E.–57 C.E.), restorer of the Han dynasty as Emperor Guangwu 光武 (r. 25–57), and how both rivals made use of mantic arts to support their political claims.

Ingenuously, after recounting how Wang Mang used cosmology to legitimate his takeover, Zhao concludes: “For Wang Mang, the progression of the Five Phases was so powerful that he was obliged to abolish the current imperial house and take the crown” (p. 65). Or rather, is this not exactly what he wanted his contemporaries and posterity to believe? This shows the lasting efficiency of Wang Mang’s “high-profile propaganda,” as Zhao calls it more lucidly elsewhere (p. 71).

More importantly to me, an interesting section reviewing “The Function of Sages in Human Society” (pp. 57–59) stresses heaven’s guidance provided to human beings through the “sages,” whereas my own analysis of similar materials—and many others

¹⁹ See Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 4–6.

²⁰ For the treatises, see B. J. Mansvelt Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han: Their Author, Sources, Contents and Place in Chinese Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 111–74 (a work also unknown to Zhao). For an example from the “apocryphal” corpus, see my “Portents in Early Imperial China: Observational Patterns from the ‘Spring and Autumn’ Weft *Profoundly Immersed Herptile* (*Qiantan ba*),” *International Journal of Divination and Prognostication* 1, no. 2 (2019), pp. 251–87. More than 85% of the 232 citations of the *Chunqiu qiantan ba* 春秋潛潭巴 contain epistemic data derived from the observation of irregular phenomena.

overlooked by Zhao—emphasized the function of political legitimization of narrative motifs found there.²¹

In view of the thematic centrality of sovereign legitimacy throughout the book, it is surprising that Ban Biao's 班彪 (3–54) *Disquisition on the Royal Mandate* (*Wangming lun* 王命論), composed before 30 in support of the Han restoration, is nowhere mentioned by Zhao. Incidentally, the same Ban Biao was also the author of the earliest draft of the history of the Han dynasty, which his son, Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), and his daughter, Ban Zhao 班昭 (49–116), would develop and eventually bring to completion. While, in an absolute sense, it is not incorrect to write that Ban Gu was “one of the authors of the *History of the Han*” (p. 129), it would be fairer to write “the main author,” since he composed “the major part” of the work between 76 and 83.²² In particular, he is credited with the invention of the “Monograph on the Five Agents” (“Wuxing zhi” 五行志)—though not of its typology—, which would become a standard feature of subsequent official historiography. Mainly missing when Ban Gu died in 92 were the other treatises, which Ma Xu 馬續 (before 79–after 141) and a group of scholars under the editorship of Ban Zhao later compiled.²³

Chapter 3, “Apocrypha, Confucius, and Monarchy in Emperor Ming’s Reign (AD 58–75)” (pp. 79–98), focuses on the reign of Liu Yang 劉陽 (28–75), better known as Emperor Ming 明, during the third quarter of the first century. Zhao’s main point is that the monarch, confronted by his brothers who contested his legitimacy, chose to “conform to the image of Confucius” (p. 97) and govern as a “sage king” by relying on the image of Confucius in the West. The main weakness of the argument, however, is that Zhao cannot link Emperor Ming with West representations of Confucius as “dark sage” (*xuansheng* 玄聖) (pp. 80–85) and “uncrowned king” (*suwang* 素王) (pp. 85–89). Zhao’s hypothesis rests on a single passage, reported in the *Later Han Documents* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), from a conversation between Ming and a high dignitary of the regime, Huan Yu 桓郁 (d. 93), during which the emperor quoted *The*

²¹ See my “Epiphanies of Sovereignty and the Rite of Jade Disc Immersion in West Narratives,” *Early China* 37 (2014), pp. 393–443, unacknowledged by Zhao. Zhao could not possibly have known that paper when he completed his dissertation in 2013, but by the time the book version was published, that paper had been available for several years. This suggests that Zhao’s revision of his manuscript and updating of his bibliography was either limited or extraordinarily selective, considering how rare Western publications are that deal with the West.

²² Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*, p. 6.

²³ Also in Chapter 2, the phrase: “Thus the previous passage from *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian* claims that the text is as old as the mythical sovereigns who created the human realm” (p. 56) should read: “Thus the previous passage from *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian and Kun* claims that *Cracking Open the Regularity of Qian* is as old as the mythical sovereigns who created the human realm.”

Analects (*Lunyu* 論語)—not the *Weft*—and compared himself with Confucius (p. 92). It is, therefore, without any evidence that Zhao posits, in the book’s introduction, that Emperor Ming “adopted apocrypha to depict himself as a latter-day Confucius” (p. xx) and, in the chapter’s conclusion, that Ming “[drew] from apocryphal texts [to show] that he was the emperor who was as sagely as Confucius” (p. 98). In de Crespigny’s *Biographical Dictionary*, however, we read, without elaboration, that “Emperor Ming appears to have fully accepted the New Text” (p. 608), referring to the interpretation of the classics based on their version in the then-current script, *jinwen*. Zhao could perhaps have approached the topic more fruitfully from this perspective.

Still in that chapter, I find the following remark by Zhao to be plain common sense: “despite how we tend to think of [dynastic succession based on the Five Agents] in modern times, the theory’s proponents were not so much forming a philosophically or metaphysically rigorous theory, as identifying the Han dynasty as the legitimate successor of the Zhou dynasty” (p. 83). Yet on other occasions, this perspicuity lapses into naïveté, especially at the onset of sections.²⁴

An endnote returns to the struggle between Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu and how both contenders relied on mantic arts to support their political claims. Strangely, instead of Chapter 2, which deals at some length with the topic, the reader is now referred to a single page in a book in Chinese by Lü Simian 呂思勉 [1884–1957],²⁵ *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (1947), re-edited in 2005 (p. 242, n. 60).²⁶

If, in the first chapter, Zhao’s “sociological” approach produced dispersed comments on scholars’ acquaintance with one another and allusions to their careers (e.g., pp. 9, 18, 24, and 39), his attempt to draw a “sociological” picture of the actual life conditions and career prospects of Later Han dynasty (25–220) officials and literates is more effective in Chapter 4 (“Finding Teachers versus Making Friends: The Gradual Departure from Classicism in the First Two Centuries AD,” pp. 99–135). There, Zhao excels in locating source materials from the relevant historiography and retelling historical anecdotes that illustrate the intellectual trends and activities of an increasingly “peripatetic” (pp. 103, 115, 124, 126, and 134), “writing” (p. 126) and “epistolary” culture (pp. 142 and 152) that characterize the restored dynasty and would define the Early Medieval era. Zhao notes rightly that “it [is] difficult for us to identify the transmission of apocryphal texts” (p. 112) and convincingly suggests that

²⁴ Opening statements that read as platitudes include: “Intellectual communities are not isolated units; they are open to contacts between individuals and the exchange of ideas” (p. 38); “To possess knowledge is to possess power” (p. 57); and “Reform movements and revolutions have happened throughout human history, and their initiators and leaders seem always to have had good reasons for them” (pp. 63–64).

²⁵ I supplement between square brackets the Chinese names and dates omitted in Zhao’s book.

²⁶ Lü Simian, *Qin Han shi*, rev. ed. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005).

“old text traditions” (based on classics written in the antique script, *guwen*) “rarely stood alone in family transmission” (p. 110) and “were obviously a part of the Eastern Han intellectual culture” (p. 122).

A table conveniently reminds us that, of twelve Later Han rulers, only the founder, Liu Xiu, lived beyond the age of sixty, that his reign was the longest of the restored dynasty, and that the other eleven emperors died on average around the age of twenty-eight (p. 100, Table 4).

Chapter 5, “The Radical and the Conservative: Zheng Xuan, He Xiu, the *Scripture of the Great Peace*, and Their Stances on the Classics” (pp. 137–70), pictures the renowned classicists Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) and He Xiu 何休 (129–182) as intellectuals “more similar than different” (p. 159, subheading). Zhao reminds the reader of Zheng Xuan’s remarkable commentarial achievements, which, in his view, point to “a higher level” of “synthesis” and “abstraction” (p. 169).²⁷ By contrast, He Xiu focused on the Gongyang 公羊 exegetical tradition of the *Spring and Autumn* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) chronicle as embodying “the pure transmission line of Confucius” (p. 169). Zhao perhaps devotes too much space to the story of the unicorn (*qilin* 麒麟) in the last entry (at least in the Gongyang tradition) of the chronicle, since he adds nothing to our knowledge of this much-discussed motif (pp. 155–57).²⁸ This survey leads to the conclusion that “[t]heir career paths, social lives, and scholarship all suggest that Zheng Xuan and He Xiu were products of Eastern Han literati culture” (p. 159). Considering that both were literates living in second-century China, one wonders what else they could be.

The last part of the chapter returns to the *Taiping jing*. Zhao is right to be “cautious” about attempts to compare the Great Peace documents with the West corpus or the various writings of the Taoist religion (p. 268, n. 101). The section under the heading “To Be Better than the Classics: Comprehensive and Essential” (pp. 162–69) starts on the premise that “previous scholarship is silent on the relationship between the classics and the [Great Peace documents]” (p. 162). “Silent” should not be taken literally. Since Great Peace is a theme pervading the classics, scholars who study the *Taiping jing* sooner or later at least touch upon the topic. Then, we are

²⁷ The translated title “*Rites and Etiquette*” (p. 140) comes without logograms or *pinyin* transliteration, but it might be none other than the *Yili* 儀禮 listed as “The *Ceremonies and Rites*” in Appendix 1, p. 181.

²⁸ In 1985 already, Anne Cheng discussed it in her *Étude sur le confucianisme Han. L’élaboration d’une tradition exégétique sur les classiques*, Mémoires de l’Institut des hautes études chinoises (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises), pp. 241–66 (yet another scholarly work unknown to Zhao). For a recent English translation of that entry, see Harry Miller, *The Gongyang Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals: A Full Translation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 275–76.

presented with a project of the author(s) of the *Taiping jing* to compile a universal chrestomathy under the heavenly inspired editorship of the Celestial Instructor (*tianshi* 天師), which would surpass the classics and, thereby, render them dispensable. To my astonishment, nowhere does Zhao mention my 2002 paper subtitled “The Epistemology of the *Taiping jing*,” which deals exactly with that topic. Even though that *œuvre de jeunesse* should be revised, in particular the translations, it incorporates more *Taiping jing* excerpts and offers a more comprehensive analysis than Zhao’s section (which includes an excursus on the *Huainan zi* 淮南子, pp. 166–67). What Zhao brings to the topic is his confident interpretation of such signifiers as *jing* 經 (“classics”) and *zhangju* 章句 (“chapter and verse”) in two *Taiping jing* citations as referring to Han-era literati culture (pp. 163–64), whereas, in my view, the ten-phase process of textual corruption that impacts “*jing*” through successive transmissions could imply Early Medieval Taoist “scriptures”—and possibly Buddhist “sutras”—as much as Han classics.²⁹

Zhao also translates an important excerpt that marks the main speaker as claiming heavenly inspiration: 是故天使吾深告勅真人，付文道德之君 “For this reason Heaven has sent me to strictly command you to give texts to a virtuous lord” (p. 167). Here I would rather translate *shi* 使 with the injunctive meaning “to make, cause, employ,” as in another comparable passage (not noted by Zhao) that expresses a claim to prophecy (a term to which I shall return):

久久道成德就，迺得上與天合意，迺後知天所欲言。天使太陽之精神來告吾、使吾語。

After a very long time, the Way [I] accomplished and Virtue [I] achieved, only then could [I] above join intentions with Heaven, and thereafter know what Heaven wanted to say. Heaven made quintessential deities of Great Yang come to inform me and make me speak.³⁰

Chapter 5 concludes by stating that the authors of the *Taiping jing* “replaced classicism with its own revelation and scriptures” (p. 169).

The untitled conclusion unfolds four short sections supposed to “zoom out” and “look at the panorama” (p. 171). The first section, under the heading “Han Intellectual

²⁹ See my “Revelation between Orality and Writing in Early Imperial China: The Epistemology of the *Taiping jing*,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74 (2002), pp. 79 (n. 49) and 85. Compare Zhao, pp. 163–64.

³⁰ *Taiping jing*, Zhengtong daoze 正統道藏 ed., vol. 39, unit 50, “Jie shice shu” 解師策書 (Explaining the instructor’s programmatic document), fol. 6a. My translation of this title is tentative. Compare Barbara Hendrischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace: The Taiping jing and the Beginnings of Daoism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), p. 160.

Communities and Their Features” (pp. 171–74), mainly summarizes the respective social positions of intellectuals and the Emperor and briefly returns to the “mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命).³¹ The next section, “The Matter of the Great Peace” (pp. 174–75), stresses that there existed no “clear” or “unitary” definition of Great Peace among Han literati, contrasts the term with *datong* 大同 (“great equality”),³² and notes that “*taiping* has reoccurred in Chinese history again and again since the Han dynasty” (p. 175). The penultimate section, “The Production of Innovation and Its Driving Force” (pp. 175–77), opposes He Xiu, who “advocated a return to the ‘pure’ form of the fundamental classic,” to the author(s) of the *Taiping jing*, for whom “one should completely depart from the classics”, and situates Zheng Xuan “in the middle” (p. 176).³³ The last section, “The Impact and Legacy of Classicism” (pp. 177–79), considers that classicism “brought the Han empire crucial social changes, many of which were linked to the frequent travel of literati” (p. 177). Zhao rightly stresses that the Han Empire had an efficient postal network, with which individual knowledge transportation (“letters,” “texts with [one’s] master’s teachings,” “news and hearsay”) could not compare. But why add that such private “travel of information” “constituted a *rival* method” for the official network and conveyed “a *rival* narrative of the empire where the voice of the literati instead of the bureaucracy dominated” (p. 177; italics mine)? What proves that both networks of epistemic circulation did not simply coexist and fulfil quite different purposes?

That last section also touches upon the “study of mystery” (*xuanxue* 玄學) and “pure discussions” (*qingtan* 清談) at the turn of the Early Medieval era (p. 178). Buried in a long endnote, a confusing remark suddenly casts doubts on what Zhao’s book has supposedly been about: “My dissertation is focused on how knowledge in Buddhism and Daoism could be stimulating” (p. 271, n. 14). The unedited occurrence of “dissertation” notwithstanding, does this strange statement really applies to Zhao’s work? Both religions are hardly touched upon in his book: apart from introductory considerations, Taoism is mentioned only in Chapter 5, in connection with the *Taiping jing* (pp. 160–63), and Buddhism makes two swift appearances, in the last

³¹ Chapter 1, p. 218 (nn. 5 and 8), and Conclusion, p. 269 (n. 3), share bibliographical references and partly overlap.

³² Another classic Sinological theme of enquiry. Early examples unknown to Zhao include Werner Eichhorn, “T’ai-p’ing und T’ai-p’ing-Religion,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 5, no. 1 (1957), pp. 113–40; Timotheus Pokora, “On the Origin of the Notions T’ai-p’ing and Ta-t’ung in Chinese Philosophy,” *Archiv Orientalní* 29, no. 3 (1961), pp. 448–54.

³³ In Chapter 5, Zhao had stated that Zhang Heng “saw the essence of the classics in [Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.–18 C.E.) *Supreme Mystery* (*Taixuan* 太玄)] and believed it as a future classic” (p. 150), but we now read: “It is not clear whether Zhang Heng believed that the *Supreme Mystery* would become one of the new classics” (p. 176).

paragraph of the Conclusion (p. 179) and in a discussion of the meaning of “Buddhist apocrypha” (Appendix 6, pp. 214–15).

The first appendix, “The Chinese Classics” (pp. 181–83), lists the “Thirteen Classics” (*shisan jing* 十三經) according to the 1816 reprint edition³⁴ of Southern Song (1127–1279) versions and summarily relates their titles to Han bibliographical categories. Endnotes mainly refer to *The Five “Confucian” Classics* by Nylan³⁵ (misquoted with near-consistency as *The Five “Confucian Classics”*, including in the bibliography³⁶) and to Benjamin Elman’s *Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*.³⁷

The title of the second appendix, “The Origin of the Old Script / New Script Controversy” (pp. 185–88), immediately brings to mind the papers by Hans van Ess (“The Old Text/New Text Controversy: Has the 20th Century Got It Wrong?”; “The Apocryphal Texts of the Han Dynasty and the Old Text/New Text Controversy”)³⁸ and Nylan (“The *Chin wen/Ku wen* Controversy in Han Times”) bearing analogous titles, which are indeed mentioned in endnotes (to Appendix 3) and in the bibliography. However, the appendix relies mostly on half a dozen Chinese works, probably less known to Western readers, with publication dates (including re-editions) ranging from 1966 to 2011. A late explanation of the difference between the capitalized “New Script / Old Script”—referring to two antagonist social groups imagined by Qing dynasty (1644–1911) scholars—and the lowercase “new script / old script”—referring to “the relevant concepts in the previous scholarship” (p. 272, n. 1)—should have appeared as early as Chapter 1, where the “controversy” is first alluded to (p. 28).

Appendix 3, “The Contrast-Debate Model and Its Critique” (pp. 189–97), continues the discussion of the “controversy” in modern times, which Zhao proposes to call “the ‘contrast-debate’ model,” a coinage whose heuristic value has escaped me. The controversy naturally centres on the different versions of the classics, but also on Liu Xin’s role as exegete and possible forger, on Zheng Xuan’s integration of both “traditions,” and on the nature of “schools” and exegetical transmission lines. Zhao summarizes theories by the Chinese scholars Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908),

³⁴ *Shisan jing zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1816; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).

³⁵ Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

³⁶ See pp. 239 (n. 29), 271 (nn. 2–6), 273 (n. 21), 280 (n. 36), and 301. To be fair, the right formula occurs once (p. 235, n. 105).

³⁷ Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

³⁸ Hans van Ess, “The Old Text/New Text Controversy: Has the 20th Century Got It Wrong?,” *T’oung Pao* 80, no. 1–3 (1994), pp. 146–70; idem, “The Apocryphal Texts of the Han Dynasty and the Old Text/New Text Controversy,” *T’oung Pao* 85, no. 1–3 (1999), pp. 29–64.

Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927), Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 [1893–1980],³⁹ Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990), and Ma Zonghuo 馬宗霍 (1897–1976). Zhao’s minute annotations on the editing and re-editing of these authors’ works demonstrate his good acquaintance with the sources. Zhao then contrasts these theories to more recent works by Nylan again and Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮, his preference going to the latter’s *Chunqiu yu “Han dao”* 《春秋》與「漢道」(The *Spring and Autumn* and the “Han Way”).⁴⁰ Zhao could have remarked that, beyond the case at hand, deconstructing received representations has been an academic trend since the “postmodernist” turn and the ensuing “crisis of representation” of the 1960s and 1970s.

Appendix 4, “The Assumptions of the Confucian Empire and Its Problems” (pp. 199–208), usefully summarizes some modern and contemporary Chinese, Japanese, and Western theories on the nature of Han Confucianism, its relationship with Chinese monarchism, and the role of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 B.C.E.). Starting with Fung Yu-lan’s [馮友蘭] (1895–1990) “triumph of Confucianism,” Zhao then presents scholarly developments by the Japanese Itano Chōhachi 板野長八 [1905–1993], Nishijima Sadao 西嶋定生 [1919–1998], Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, and Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡辺義浩, and reviews critiques of “Confucianism” as an unstable Western signifier by Sivín, Nicolas Zufferey, Nylan, Loewe, and Liang Cai, carefully leaving the issue open. In these pages, Zhao could have reminded the reader that the Japanese revision of Chinese theories owed much to the adoption of Western analytical categories in the Meiji era (1868–1912) and the integration of European-language terms into the Japanese language via the designing or redefinition of *kanji* 漢字 compounds.

If merged and rewritten, Appendices 2–4 could have constituted a welcome epilogue to beef up the book’s conclusion by showing how scholars during the late imperial era in turn interpreted the exegetical theories of their remote forerunners and organized them into currents or “traditions” with a varying degree of historicity.

The last two appendices return, albeit swiftly, to the West corpus. Appendix 5, “Apocryphal Texts: A History of Superstition and Adulation” (pp. 209–11), surveys opinions on the corpus expressed in works published or republished between 1926 and 2008 by Lü Simian, Gu Jiegang, Zhou Yutong 周予同 (1898–1981), Tjan Tjoe Som 曾珠森 [1903–1969], Chen Pan 陳槃 [1905–1999], Robert P. Kramers [1920–2002], Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 [1921–1989], Zhong Zhaopeng 鍾肇鵬, Jack L. Dull [1930–1995], Chen Suzhen, and van Ess, as well as two collective books in Chinese. This appendix reads well as a concise, sound plea for a reconsideration of

³⁹ Gu Jiegang’s dates are mistyped as “1983–1980” (p. 232, n. 59).

⁴⁰ Chen Suzhen, *Chunqiu yu “Han dao”*: *Liang Han zhengzhi yu zhengzhi wenhua yanjiu* 《春秋》與「漢道」: 兩漢政治與政治文化研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011).

the corpus without interference from such inadequate Western analytical categories as “superstition,” “heterodoxy,” and “pseudoscience”—all of which are common derogatory exonyms used to discredit and undermine any beliefs, views, and organized knowledge that are not one’s own. However, as I shall argue below, Zhao’s own discursive habits contribute to the perpetuation of the scholarly misapprehension of this corpus.

Appendix 6, “*Chen, Wei, and Apocrypha: A Matter of Definition*” (pp. 213–15), briefly unearths the old issue of the adequacy of the English term “Apocrypha” as a Western designation for the *Weft*, a use that van Ess already “defended” twenty years ago (as duly noted on p. 282, n. 5). Zhao rightly stresses the relevant “secret” and “hidden” implications of the Western term as well as its problematic “pejorative” and “commentarial” connotations, but eventually acknowledges the usage, as nearly all other Western writers did before him—Robert P. Kramers in his chapter for the first volume of the *Cambridge History of China* being an exception.⁴¹ Zhao mentions the phrase *weishu* 緯書 (literally “weft writings, documents, or books”) only in Qing dynasty context (p. 214), which is potentially misleading since He Chengtian 何承天 (370–447) already used it in his treatise on “Celestial Patterns” (“Tianwen” 天文), eventually appended to the *Song Documents* (*Song shu* 宋書).⁴² More importantly, because it shows that the phrase soon conveyed a negative subtext, Xu Mao 許懋 (464–532) formally opposed it to *zhengjing* 正經 (“correct classics”) in his advice to the throne composed in 502 or soon after, as cited in the *Liang Documents* (*Liang shu* 梁書).⁴³

⁴¹ See Robert P. Kramers, “The Development of the Confucian Schools,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1: *The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 759: “In Western literature the *wei* are usually referred to as apocryphal books, though the analogy is somewhat remote.”

⁴² See Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513) et al., *Song shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), vol. 23, “Tianwen,” p. 678.

⁴³ See Yao Cha 姚察 (533–606) and Yao Silian 姚思廉 (d. 637), *Liang shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), vol. 40, “Liezhuan” 列傳 (Biographies), p. 575. In Chinese historiography since the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the historiographer), by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–86 B.C.E.), *liezhuan* (literally “serial relations”) refers to biographies proper as well as thematic memoirs centred on renowned figures; see the discussion in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, vol. 7: *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China by Ssu-ma Ch’ien*, ed. William H. Nienhauser, Jr. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), “Introduction,” pp. v–viii.

Charting Epistemic Lineages and Social Networks

Twelve “charts” supplement the first and fourth chapters. They are made of names linked by a nexus of lines materializing “master to disciple transmission” (single-headed arrow), “father-son relationship with a transmission line” (arrow and stroke), “alliance” (single stroke), “father-son relationship” (double stroke), and “hostile relationship” (double-headed arrow). They focus on one or more “transmission” or “family transmission” lines (Charts 1, 7–9, and 11), a network around a particular figure and his disciples (Chart 2), the “learning” of a father and a son (Chart 3), “alliances” (Chart 4), “enemies” (Chart 5), “affiliates” (Charts 6 and 12), and “a family and their disciples” (Chart 10). Boldfaced names or lines occasionally serve to highlight “starters of official traditions” (Charts 2–3), “alliances” (Chart 4), and “hostile relationships” (Charts 5–6). The epistemic objects transmitted fall into three categories: (1) the classics and their exegetical traditions (Charts 1, 7–9, and 11–12) and, twice each, (2) “astrology” (Charts 2–3), and (3) “apocryphal texts” (Charts 11–12). Some epistemic objects are marked as being received “without a transmission line” (Charts 9 and 11–12), which refers to other means of knowledge acquisition, such as consulting manuscripts stored in the imperial library (see p. 123).

Some of these visual documents tend to incorporate too much information to be profitably readable, especially when compared to very similar “tables” drawn by Tjan Tjoe Som in his study and translation of the *White Tiger Comprehensive Discussions* (*Baihu tongyi* 白虎通義 or *Baihu tong*).⁴⁴ Surprisingly, Zhao does not mention these tables, even though he cites Tjan’s book elsewhere. In Zhao’s book, Chart 10, “The Huan Family and Their Disciples” (p. 114), perhaps the clearer and most original, and thereby most useful chart, shows with plain clarity how three generations of the Huan 桓 clan from Longkang 龍亢 in Pei Commandery 沛郡 (see p. 107) influenced, either directly or indirectly, the five Later Han emperors Ming, Zhang 章 (r. 75–88), An 安 (r. 106–125), Shun 順 (r. 125–144), and Huan 桓 (r. 146–168), and favoured the careers of the seven officials—none of whom appears in the index—Ding Hong 丁鴻 (d. 92), Zhang Pu 張酺 (d. 104), Yang Zhen 楊震 (“59–124” on p. 107, “54–124” on p. 113), Zhu Chong 朱寵 (*fl.* 126), Huang Qiong 黃瓊 (86–164), Zhang Huan 張奐 (104–181)—spelled “Zhan Huan” in the chart—and Yang Ci 楊賜 (d. 185).

These interesting charts are open to critique. First, they seem mostly to serve schematization purposes; the discussion does not fully exploit them. Second, some of them contain duplicate elements. Charts 4 (“Liu Xiang and His Alliances,” p. 41), 5

⁴⁴ See Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T’ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*, vol. 1: *Introduction; Translation of Chapters I, II, XVIII, XL; Notes. A Contribution to the History of Classical Studies in the Han Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949), Tables I–VIII (between pp. 86 and 87).

(“Liu Xin and His Enemies,” p. 43), and 6 (“Liu Xin and Li Xun’s Affiliates,” p. 44) reproduce the same structure and text, the single difference being that the “emphasis in bold” moves from a set of strokes or arrows to another. Perhaps all three charts could have been combined into a single one. Chart 9 (“Transmission Lines of Old Text Traditions,” p. 111) reappears almost entirely (except for the isolated “?—Du Lin 杜林” element) in the upper register of Chart 11 (“Transmission of Knowledge in Ma Rong and Zheng Xuan’s Time,” p. 121). In turn, Chart 11 is reproduced integrally in Chart 12 (“Partisans and Their Affiliates,” p. 127), which adds to the picture Guo Tai 郭 [泰] (127/128–169) and his “network,” in the lower right angle of the chart.⁴⁵ Linking this network to the rest of the chart is possible only through Chen Shi 陳寔 (104–187), an “Academician” (*boshi* 博士) “who specialized in apocrypha from Emperor An’s reign (r. AD 106–125) onward” (p. 106) and “a leader of the early partisan movement” (p. 120). Would a single chart, spread on two opposing pages or possibly printed on a larger, folded sheet, not have been more convenient?

Third, these charts fail to match accurately the information given in the corresponding text. For example, we read that Jia Kui 賈逵 (30–101) received the Zuo exegetical tradition (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳) of the *Spring and Autumn* chronicle from his father “Jia Hui 賈徽 (fl. 6 BC), a disciple of Liu Xin” (p. 110), but then Chart 9 displays a Liu Xin—“Jia Zheng 賈徵”—Jia Kui transmission line. Elsewhere, we learn how Hu Xian 胡憲 (d. 104), a “student” of the influential Huan clan mentioned above, “was recommended by his teacher Huan Rong” 桓榮 (c. 20 B.C.E.–c. 59 C.E.) and thereby “became the tutor of the future emperor Ming” (p. 113). But Chart 10 omits Hu Xian and instead links Huan Rong to Emperor Ming by an arrow symbolizing direct master-disciple relationship. We also read that “Chen Yuan 陳元 (fl. AD 25) received the Zuo tradition . . . from his father Chen Qin 陳欽 (ca. 34 BC–AD 15), who had taught Wang Mang the Zuo tradition” (p. 120).⁴⁶ And yet Chart 11 depicts Wang Mang receiving the Zuo tradition not from Chen Qin, but directly from Chen Qin’s master Jia Hu 賈護 (dates unknown). One last example, a note explains: “Although they were friends, I did not link Dou Zhang, Zhang Heng, Cui Yuan, and Wang Fu together in chart 12 for the sake of readability” (p. 254, n. 127), but upon closer examination, none of these four names appears in Chart 12.

Finally, those charts raise new questions, especially when an epistemic object occurs in a transmission link without earlier or subsequent mention in the whole line. Thus, in Chart 9, predominantly concerned with the Zuo exegesis, the transmission of

⁴⁵ For the correct orthography of Guo’s personal name, see de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, p. 289.

⁴⁶ Which is consistent with Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*, p. 37.

the *Zhou Rites* (*Zhou li* 周禮) is noted only between Liu Xin and Jia Zheng. Hence the intriguing questions: Whence did Liu Xin get the *Zhou Rites* from? And what in turn did Jia Zheng do with that book? Why did he not transmit it to his son Jia Kui? Still in Chart 9, the mention of the “Fei” (no logogram given; not indexed) tradition of the *Changes* (*Yi* 易) only between Jia Hu and his disciple Chen Qin, in a line otherwise concerned with the transmission of the Zuo exegesis, raises the same questions.

On Translating (and Transliterating)

Readers familiar with books on Taoism, where occurrences of the logogram 道 are rendered by a mixture of transliterations (“Tao,” “Dao,” or “*dao*”) and translations (“Way” or “way,” also plural) sometimes confusingly, including in the same sentence, will feel relieved to peruse a work where the logogram is given the straightforward capitalized translation (“Way”) almost consistently. Very few exceptions to this commendable practice are to be noted. For instance, the Chinese 道之難全, first translated as “[p]reserving the Way was just as hard as this” (Chapter 1, p. 31), reappears on the next page as “it is difficult to preserve the complete Dao” (p. 32).⁴⁷ It is when touching upon Taoism or historical eras posterior to his book’s coverage that Zhao’s confident handling of the logogram generates awkward utterances,⁴⁸ as if the “Way” exalted throughout Chinese history by so many masters or thinkers, each presumably with his or her own peculiar understanding of what the signifier meant, were not invariably spelled in the same way in Chinese sources.

For unexplained reasons, some logograms happen to be deprived of translation. The text mainly gives the conventional rendering “phoenixes” for 鳳凰 (pp. 5 and 58, second translation block), but the synonymous variant reading 鳳皇 is merely transliterated as “*fenghuang*” (p. 14, translation block). As to the logogram 氣, it seems never to be translated. It is rendered by the transliterated syllable “*qi*” instead, including in a translation block where both spellings “氣” and “炁” occur (p. 58), a peculiarity unaccounted for by Zhao. The name of the animal known in Chinese as 麒麟 is not translated. To the usual, if perhaps inaccurate, rendition “unicorn” found in Western scholarship because of some early depictions of the animal, Zhao prefers to keep to the transliteration *qilin*, including in several “translation” blocks (pp. 14, 54,

⁴⁷ Yet another occurrence carried over from PhD, pp. 99–100 and 102.

⁴⁸ See “the Way, or ‘Dao’” (Chapter 5, p. 167) in relation to the *Huainan zi*, and the reverse proposition in Appendix 2, “the Dao 道, or the Way” (p. 185), now in relation to the later “Dao Learning” or “learning of the Dao” (not elucidated, but, considering that Zhao refers there to Peter Bol’s *Neo-Confucianism in History* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008], probably for the Chinese *daoxue* 道學, the “Learning of the Way,” one of the trends of what Sinology sometimes calls “neo-Confucianism”).

84, 156, and 157). The term is given several different definitions in the book, first as “an auspicious and ominous animal that normally only appears in a prosperous society” (p. 54), then as “an ancient mythic animal whose appearance was often considered auspicious” (p. 85), then again as “mystical animal” (p. 156), finally as “the symbolic creature of the Great Peace” (p. 264, n. 71, rendering the Chinese 太平之獸, literally “beast of Great Peace”). Note that the phrase 得麟 means “finding” the beast rather than “obtaining” it (p. 54), since none of the figures involved in that story was actively searching for one. A last example, Appendix 3 gives “Xin Learning” for 新學 (not indexed) in Kang Youwei’s book title (p. 190).

Zhao relies on a number of translated excerpts from primary sources, conventionally set as indented blocks. Commendably, the Chinese text is always displayed before the English translation, though punctuation in both texts often disagrees. Some of these translations may seem too interpretative and convoluted, others literal to the point of being incomprehensible. The short paraphrases that follow translation blocks generally add little to the translation.

It should go without saying that there is no such thing as a perfect translation, and that the translation process intrinsically entails a varying degree of distortion. If bracketed insertions (a tool that I too have made mine) are a convenient way to add clarity to the target-language text, they should be used carefully so as not to increase distortion. For example, a translation of a long excerpt from the *Taiping jing* contains the following phrase: “reception and transmission [of evil]” (p. 165). The bracketed insertion naturally derives from Hendrischke’s translation of the same passage.⁴⁹ But, while “evil” made sense in Hendrischke’s understanding of the notion of *chengfu* 承負 (which I prefer to translate simply as “inherited [or received] burden”) in her 1991 paper, it fits rather unwell in Zhao’s text, especially since all five *Taiping jing* citations in this section deal with epistemological, not moral, matters.⁵⁰

Another example, “act based on smooth [progress]” for the Chinese 以順動 (p. 6) lacks readability and misses the point. Used twice in the same excerpt, the Chinese phrase conveys the idea of conform action, especially with the universal (or “natural”) cycles, a concern which was of paramount importance to the ancient Chinese. Here is how I would tentatively translate the whole excerpt:

⁴⁹ See Hendrischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace*, p. 199.

⁵⁰ Barbara Hendrischke, “The Concept of Inherited Evil in the *Taiping Jing*,” *East Asian History* 2 (1991), pp. 1–30. The “inherited burden” has less to do with morality or sin than with actions that deviate from cosmic cycles—thereby disrupting universal equilibrium—and accumulate over time, and, on the epistemological level, with the spread of falsehood.

陰陽未和；災害未息。咎在臣等。臣聞易曰：「天地以順動，故日月不過，四時不忒；聖王以順動，故刑罰清而民服。」天地變化，必繇陰陽。

Yin and Yang have not harmonized; disasters have not ceased. Responsibility resides in [us, your] subjects. [I, your] subject has learned from the *Changes*: “Heaven and Earth move conformingly, thus Sun and Moon do not trespass, the four seasons do not deviate. The sage king moves conformingly, thus punishments are clear and the people submits.” The variations of Heaven and Earth definitely proceed from Yin and Yang.⁵¹

Now here is how I would translate another excerpt, which concerns the superhuman documents of political legitimacy known as the *River Chart* (*Hetu* 河圖) and the *Luo Writing* (*Luo shu* 洛書) and the conditions of their appearance:

太平嘉瑞，圖、書之出，必龜龍銜負焉。黃帝、堯、舜、周公，是其正也。

When the [*River*] *Chart* and [*Luo*] *Writing*, auspicious auguries of Great Peace, appear, definitely [they are brought by] a turtle [or] a dragon, in its mouth [or] on its back. This was the norm for the Yellow Emperor, Yao, Shun, and the Duke of Zhou.

In Zhao’s book, the latter half of the excerpt is misunderstood as meaning: “They appeared in their regular forms to the Yellow Emperor, Yao, Shun, and the Duke of Zhou” (p. 145).

Zhao is aware of “wordplay” in Han exegetical literature (see pp. 157–58), by which he means the use of logograms deconstructed into their visual components, a practice abundantly documented by Zongli Lu 呂宗力 for the Early Medieval era.⁵² However, in another passage, he has missed an obvious case of paronomasia, as “致” and its gloss “至” belonged to the same rhyme group in Zheng Xuan’s time.⁵³ Furthermore, the same passage could easily have been given a clearer and better translation. Here is what I would propose:

⁵¹ For which Zhao gives: “Now *yin* and *yang* do not harmonize with each other, and disasters have not stopped. The guilt [for these] lies in us. I have heard from the *Changes* that ‘Heaven and Earth act based on smooth [progress]. Therefore the sun and moon do not behave excessively, and the four seasons are free from error. When the sage kings act based on smooth [progress], the penalty is fair and the populace is thus convinced.’ The changes of Heaven and Earth always follow *yin* and *yang*” (p. 6).

⁵² See Zongli Lu, *Power of the Words: Chen Prophecy in Chinese Politics, AD 265–618* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 111–58.

⁵³ Axel Schuessler, *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese: A Companion to Grammata Serica Recensa* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), p. 299, lists both in the same subgroup (29-15) of the rhyme group *-it, *-its, *-is (Zhi bù 質部).

致之言至也。一謂誠也。經禮謂周禮也。周禮六篇，其官有三百六十。曲猶事也。事禮謂今禮也。

“To achieve” is to say “to attain.” “One” means “sincere.” “Classical rites” mean “*Zhou Rites*.” In the six chapters of the *Zhou Rites*, the offices are three hundred and sixty. “Trifle” is like “service.” “Service rites” mean “current rites.”

By contrast, here is how Zhao’s translation goes, retaining no less than five different transliterated syllables—not counting the proper name “Zhou” (p. 148):

Zhi is a way to say “arrival.” Another explanation [for *zhi*] is “completion.” *Jing li* means the Zhou rites. The *Rites of Zhou* contains six chapters, and there are 360 official positions. *Qu* is similar to “affairs (*shi*).” *Shi li* means today’s rites.

Zhao’s understanding of 一謂 as meaning “another explanation,” though correct in other contexts, is not supported here, since the first two sentences of the excerpt comment on the logograms “致” and “一” in the phrase 其致一也 (“[What] they achieve is one”; Zhao: “Their aim is the same”). As to “completion,” it would have been more appropriate if the source had read 成, not “誠.”

An excerpt from a letter ascribed to the official, erudite, and prolific writer, Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), proves difficult to make sense of (p. 133). In a note attached to his tentative translation, Zhao concedes: “[t]he logic behind this is not obvious to me.” Then he hypothesizes what computational speculation Zhang Heng might have had in mind, only to conclude: “If this is true, Zhang Heng read the numbers rather roughly” (p. 258, n. 181). This strikes me as heuristically awkward. Would it not be more rewarding to put forth a viable hypothesis, instead of one that is discarded immediately after being formulated?

Further translation issues have caught my attention. A straightforward signifier, *wang* 王 (king) has generated repeated cases of interpretative translation. “Kingly way (or ways)” for *wangdao* 王道 and “Sage king (or kings)” (“sagely kings” once) for *shengwang* 聖王 must rank amongst the most frequent English utterances in the book, with over sixty occurrences each.⁵⁴ Through some sort of contamination, *wangdao* is rendered as “the way of the sage king” (p. 96, first translation block), while 王事 (literally “royal matters or affairs”) becomes “the affairs of the true king” (pp. 86 and 87). “[P]lain kings [uncrowned kings]” works well for *suwang* 素王

⁵⁴ These “sage kings” are first enumerated as “Huangdi 黃帝, Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, King Wen 文王, and King Wu 武王” (p. 15), then again in a later endnote as “Huangdi 黃帝, Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, Tang 湯, King Wen 文王, King Wu 武王, the Duke of Zhou 周公, and Confucius” (p. 230, n. 37).

(p. 81), but when “uncrowned” proves inappropriate for *su* 素 in the analogous phrase 素臣, Zhao resorts to “untitled minister” (p. 88, translation block), which becomes “plain minister” in the corresponding note (p. 240, n. 40). On the next page, “untitled minister” now serves to render *suxiang* 素相 (p. 89). In such binomials, *su* could conveniently be translated as “shadow” (in the sense of “not having official status”), thus “shadow king” and “shadow minister.”

Another straightforward signifier, *ming* 明 is repeatedly misconstrued throughout the book. The phrase 導民不明 conveys the idea of leading the people without lucidity or in a manner not understandable; “did not brightly lead the people” (p. 4), though literal, does not really make sense. The phrase 明經 simply means to understand the classics; “enlightened in the classics” (p. 8) seems too strong. The phrase 明吉凶之分 means to make obvious or evident, rather than “illuminate” (p. 25), the division between the auspicious and the inauspicious. “[B]right kings” for 明王 (twice on p. 31) seems too literal; here “enlightened” would perhaps read better.

At the other end of the luminous spectrum, the logogram *xuan* 玄 gives rise to the commentary: “‘Dark’ in ‘dark sage’ [*xuansheng* 玄聖] can mean ‘obscure,’ implying that [Confucius’s] position is a low one: he is a sage whom no one knows” (p. 81). I am not aware of the latter meaning of *xuan*, which could derive from a semantic transfer on Zhao’s part from the English signifier “obscure.” An endnote adds that “‘dark’ can also be epithet of the Way” (p. 238, n. 11). But the logogram, whose early meanings include “cerulean,” is also metonymic of the heavens.

Judging from his translations of certain excerpts, Zhao’s knowledge of the ancient Chinese science of omens seems limited. Appearing in Chapter 1, *xiang* 祥 and *yi* 異 are near-technical terms denoting opposite categories of phenomena interpreted as signs: respectively, for instance, “lucky omen” and “anomaly” (as substantives) or “lucky” and “abnormal” (in adjectival function).⁵⁵ Zhao goes for “auspiciousness” and “bizarreness” (the latter also on p. 10) instead, two substantives expressing conditions or qualities (p. 16, translation block). In the same chapter, the phrase 陵谷易處 does not mean “hills and abysses moving around” (p. 17), but, literally again, “hills and valleys exchanging place,” a typical instance of cosmic order being subverted, which the ancient Chinese dreaded.⁵⁶ In Chapter 2, the phrase 符瑞之應 does not mean “[t]he correspondence of tallies and omens” (p. 68, translation block), but “the response of auguries as tokens,” which alludes to the various auspicious signs sent by superhuman instances to sanction sovereign legitimacy and the resulting social order in the human

⁵⁵ According to the grammatical categories of European languages.

⁵⁶ See my “Portents in Early Imperial China,” pp. 280–81. In Western religious representations, the same motif, mentioned in Isaiah 40: 4 and Luke 3: 5, is positive, since it announces the preparation of “a way for the Lord.”

world.⁵⁷ Still in Chapter 2, the same sentence 四夷雲集，龍鬥野 (my punctuation) is translated twice differently. The first rendition reads, inadequately: “The barbarians of the four directions will gather like clouds, and the dragon will fight [them] in the wild” (p. 68, first translation block)—a good example of misused bracketed addition. A few pages further, a longer version of the same excerpt gives a slightly better rendition: “The barbarians of the four directions will gather like clouds, and the dragon will fight in the wild” (p. 76, translation block). In those times, dragons (plural) fighting each other belonged to the nomenclature of observational patterns treated as signs—in this case negative.⁵⁸

Hasty translation, or inattentive copying and pasting, has resulted in awkward occurrences, such as “[t]he ninth generation of the red Liu” for 帝劉之九 (p. 77, first translation block), which nearly duplicates “[t]he ninth generation of the red emperor” 赤帝九世 (ibid.). At times, a logogram has escaped the translator’s vigilance. In Chapter 3, the sentence 德澤不洽 is rendered as “virtue was not harmonized” (pp. 86–87, translation block), leaving out the logogram 澤.⁵⁹ Conversely, English terms not bracketed work their way into translations, such as “ethos” in the sentence “transforming the people’s ethos by virtue” for 以德化民 (Appendix 3, p. 197).

In addition to those already noted, inconsistency in translation includes the following cases. In Chapter 1, for 元命 (“primordial mandate”), Zhao favours “grand mandate,” without any philological argument (see p. 226, n. 120: “the grand mandate of Heaven” for 天之元命). Then, in Chapter 2, he translates the Weft book title *Chunqiu yuanming bao* 春秋元命包 as “*Annals’ Inclusion of the Primary Mandate*” (Table 1, p. 51).

The logogram *ru* 儒 (a “literate,” sometimes specifically a Confucian one) is mostly rendered by the syllable “Ru” or “ru,” including in “translations” (“a [typical] ru,” p. 142, translation block). Occasionally, one will find 儒者 translated as “[some] Confucians” (p. 97, translation block), 俗儒 as “vulgar classicist,” and 儒 alone, logically then, as “classicist” (p. 262, n. 36).

In the main text, 通人 is rendered as “polymath” (p. 142), then as “man with comprehensive knowledge” (p. 168), and finally as “erudite” (p. 262, n. 36).

⁵⁷ This is how Tiziana Lippiello rightly translates the phrase in her *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China: Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties* (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2001), p. 31, n. 16 (“responses of auspicious omens as tokens”).

⁵⁸ For example, see *Chunqiu qianta ba*, in *Jūshū isho shūsei* 重修緯書集成, ed. Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八 (Tokyo: Meitoku shuppansha, 1971–1992), vol. 4B: *Shunju* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn), ed. Nakamura Shōhachi, p. 90, 3rd item.

⁵⁹ In the next translation block, an allusion to the paragons “Chang Hong” 萇弘 and “Meng Ben” 孟賁 is left unexplained (p. 87).

In Chapter 4, the phrase 草書 is rendered four times (without any elaboration) as “draft script” (pp. 130–31), then twice as the more literal “Grass writing” in a related endnote (p. 257, n. 163).

Said to denote “miscellaneous writings” (p. 129), the phrase 百家群言 prompts Zhao to devote a short note to the Sinological ill treatment of *jia* 家 as referring to something both collective and epistemic.⁶⁰ There, he deems the logogram to be “an extremely perplexing word in the field of early China” and explains that, “[i]n this case specifically, the word *jia* simply indicates works by various ancient masters such as Han Feizi [韓非子], Mozi [墨子], among others” (p. 255, n. 145). Soon after, the phrase 百家 in the sentence 古今訓詁百家之言 is translated as “the hundred experts” (p. 256, n. 156). Finally, in Chapter 5, *baijia* becomes “the Hundred Families” and, a few lines further, is said to “literally” mean “hundred households” (p. 142, translation block and following text).

Last but not least, in the Conclusion, rather than “All-under-Heaven would be greatly peaceful” (p. 270, n. 6), “Great Peace here below” for the sentence 天下太平 would be more consistent with Zhao’s general understanding of *taiping* as a concept best encapsulated in English by a substantive.

European-Language Categories and the Chinese Data

Questions of translation lead us to analytical categories and the problem of their tacitly assumed universality. In the book’s introduction, Zhao inadvertently opens Pandora’s box by declaring confidently: “Scriptures are an intriguing phenomenon in both the ancient and modern world. From the Talmud, Bible, and Qur’an to the Chinese classics, they seem to provide unfailing guidance for the people who are devoted to them” (p. xv). Perhaps a semantic delineation or elementary discussion of what “scripture” means to Zhao would have convinced the reader that two groups of texts as diverse as, on the one hand, the sacred books of the Ancient Near East and European monotheisms, and, on the other hand, the thirteen “Chinese classics,” as Zhao calls the *shisan jing* edited by Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) in 1816, are comparable. A far-off echo of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (1889–1951) “family resemblances” (“*Familienähnlichkeiten*”) could be suspected here,⁶¹ but as in most Sinological publications that implicitly compare European- and Chinese-language

⁶⁰ Zhao’s dealing with the issue would have benefited from perusing Jean Levi’s recent and polemical “Le Confucianisme existe-t-il?,” *Asiatische Studien / Études asiatiques* 72, no. 4 (2018), pp. 1099–1132.

⁶¹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen / Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, rev. 4th ed. (German 1953; Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), § 65–70.

categories, the Viennese thinker's influence is not acknowledged in the book. Furthermore, when Zhao returns to "scriptures" at the end of his book, they now form a religious category distinct from the ("Confucian") "classics": "The outcome of this undertaking is also a *jing*, the word for 'classic,' which in religious traditions soon came to mean 'scripture'" (Chapter 5, p. 168). In one of the last notes of the book, the late definition of "canonical" as "a standard but not necessarily fixed category of scriptures accepted by certain communities" (Appendix 6, p. 282, n. 6) presupposes in turn that "scripture" should be defined.

Inherited from Western religious categories and their terminology in European languages, the signifiers "revelation" and "prophecy" abound in Zhao's book, yet receive no more definition than "scripture." As is the case in all the Sinological publications that I have consulted, the former is understood and used to denote any claim of superhuman origin, the latter in the general sense of "prediction." In a narrow sense, however, "revelation" proper covers epistemic divulcation on the occasion of a claimed direct contact between humans and a supreme superhuman entity (for contacts with a superhuman emissary, the relevant term is "apocalypse"), while "prophecy" simply refers to "a speech on behalf of a superhuman agency." Misusing these terms—and others belonging to the same *répertoire*—has allowed modern and contemporary Sinologists to weave a discourse on Chinese religiosity that reads as inspired literature, with countless cases of religious experiences building an *image d'Épinal* as fantasized as was, at the other end of the ideological spectrum, the "philosophical kingdom" that Enlightenment thinkers dreamed China to be.

In Chapter 2, Zhao writes: "Heaven first sent down a prophecy, asking Confucius to set up a standard" (p. 55). But the fragments thus summarized report that "Heaven sent down a writing in blood (or a blood-coloured writing)" 天下血書 (p. 54; my translation), a phenomenon that has little to do with what a "prophecy" is supposed to be. Nor is it a "revelation" either, because, unlike in the Celestial Instructor's first-person utterance in the *Taiping jing*, there is no claim of a superhuman contact (the sole criterion of an epistemic divulcation does not suffice). "Prophecy" again is later applied to the Weft book titled *Chifu fu* 赤伏符 (p. 67). But what the passage cited contains is "a statement about what one thinks will happen in the future, or the process of making such a statement", that is, a "prediction" (according to standard English dictionaries with online presence). The same goes for the mantic material used by Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu in their ideological war, which Zhao calls, without any supporting evidence, "prophetic texts" (p. 234, n. 94). As to the signifier "prophets" inserted in a section heading ("The Classicists and Prophets from Liu Xiu's Group," p. 72), it is equally out of place, since the persons described in that section are literates basing predictions on the classics, not what a "prophet" is supposed to be—a religious expert who "spoke for" a superhuman entity.

In Chapter 5, at least a reference to primary sources should corroborate such heavily loaded statements as “Zheng [Xuan] made commentaries on four of the Five Classics, which he saw as a unitary corpus derived from heavenly revelations” (p. 138). Zhao boldly calls He Xiu’s interpretation of the unicorn incident “an unambiguous prophecy about the rise of the Liu family” (p. 158), even though the Gongyang passage quoted and translated opens with these words (my translation):

夫子素案圖錄，知庶姓劉季當代周。

The Master (i.e., Confucius) was used to referring to charts and registers, and knew that the commoner Liu Ji should succeed the Zhou.⁶²

Here, *tulu* 圖錄 does not denote any divine or superhuman speech, but (as the Five Agents theories alluded to later on in the excerpt) points to the mantic lore of pre- and early imperial China. Other West remnants suggest that the imagined sources of the superior knowledge of Confucius were mainly archival documents of the era’s political entities and “inductive” methods like manipulative techniques (hexagram divination) and phenomenal (uranic) observation. That Confucius was prompted to act or “inspired” (in the religious sense) by a supernatural emissary does not imply that his knowledge was of “revealed” origin, or that his announcement of Liu rule had anything “prophetic.”⁶³

To each of the Western categories above corresponds no single, fixed signifier in Chinese. Symmetrically, the Chinese signifier 天文 (“celestial patterns”) does not correspond to any single Western category. Zhao’s book uses the English terms “astronomy” and “astrology” without clearly stating to what they refer. Chapter 4 gives “mathematical astronomy [and] astrology” (p. 130) where the source (referred, but not quoted) reads “天官、歷數.”⁶⁴ As a category, *tianguan* 天官 (“celestial offices”) more or less corresponds to our descriptive astronomy, political astrology, and some meteorological observations, while the phrase *lishu* 歷數 (“calendar reckoning”) evokes

⁶² Compare Zhao, “Confucius had often referred to the charts and knew that the Liu family would replace Zhou” (p. 157). *Shuxing* 庶姓 (“commoner” in my translation) refers to people who had no family relationship with the ruling Ji 姬 clan of the royal house of Zhou 周. Ji 季 was the courtesy name of the founder of the Han dynasty, Liu Bang 劉邦 (256/247–195 B.C.E.); see Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods*, p. 254.

⁶³ On this topic, see Grégoire Espeset, “Erudition and Reasoning versus Prophecy in Pseudo-Confucian Discourse,” forthcoming in *Divination in Chinese Religions* (working title), ed. Philip Clart, Fabrizio Pregadio and Matthias Schumann (Leiden: Brill).

⁶⁴ See Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445) et al., *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), vol. 52, “Cui Yin liezhuan” 崔駰列傳 (Biography of Cui Yin), p. 1722.

the astronomical system.⁶⁵ In the same chapter, “mathematical astronomy, astrology, and cosmology” (p. 132) supposedly covers “天文、陰陽、歷筭” (again referred, but not quoted).⁶⁶ As a category, *tianwen* replaced *tianguan* in the nomenclature of Han official monographs,⁶⁷ while *lisuan* 歷筭 (“calendar computation”) points again to the astronomical system. The title *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 is rendered as “*Classic of Astrology from Kaiyuan Reign*” (p. 303), but *zhan* 占 means “prognostication” or “to prognosticate” and is used in a wide array of mantic contexts beyond astrology.

On Great Peace Documents, Again

How Zhao deals with the Great Peace documents of Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval era is also confusing and reactivates simplistic ideas fuelled by age-old unhistorical approaches and intuitive research methods.

To begin with, Zhao’s overall attitude is quite ambiguous. In Chapter 1, in a note referring to a classic 1979 paper by Max Kaltenmark [1910–2002],⁶⁸ he declares: “I do not take the received version of *Taiping jing* as the original text passed down from Gan Zhongke to Li Xun. Instead, I consider it a compilation from the Six Dynasties, though it does reflect many ideas popular in the Han dynasty” (p. 226, n. 121). Chapter 5 reveals that this position is actually not his own, but the Sinological view prevailing today (see pp. 160 and 264–65, n. 83). And yet, in the same chapter, he, nevertheless, announces that he will “put [the *Taiping jing*] in the context of Han classicism” (p. 138) and considers “the passages [in the *Taiping jing*] that mention the classics . . . to be from the Eastern Han” (p. 161).

When citing the received *Taiping jing*, Zhao conventionally refers to Wang Ming’s 王明 [1911–1992] *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經合校⁶⁹ (see p. 268, nn. 103–4,

⁶⁵ “Calendar” for *li* 歷 is to be understood along the lines of Nathan Sivin, *Granting the Seasons: The Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280, With a Study of Its Many Dimensions and an Annotated Translation of Its Records* (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. 38–40, whence Zhao’s “mathematical astronomy” also derives. Note that “astrology” for *tianwen* (Sivin, *Granting the Seasons*, p. 35) is as reducing as “calendar” is for *li*.

⁶⁶ See *Hou Han shu*, vol. 59, “Zhang Heng liezhuan” 張衡列傳 (Biography of Zhang Heng), p. 1897.

⁶⁷ See my “Sketching out Portents Classification and Logic in the Monographs of Han Official Historiography,” *Bochumer Jahrbuch zur Ostasienforschung / Bochum Yearbook of East Asian Studies* 39 (2016), pp. 6–7.

⁶⁸ Max Kaltenmark, “The Ideology of the *T’ai-p’ing ching*,” in *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion*, ed. Holmes Welch and Anna K. Seidel (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 19–52.

⁶⁹ Wang Ming, *Taiping jing hejiao* (1960; reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979).

106–7, 109, and 111). When it was first published in 1960, then revised in 1979, this first-ever critical edition was certainly an important step in the textual analysis of a notoriously difficult source. Since then, however, it has shown limitations in several respects, in particular unreliable punctuations and erroneous or uncorrected readings. In a review article—referenced, hence supposedly read, by Zhao—I discussed a few later critical editions, none of which is devoid of shortcomings, but some of which should be preferred to, or at least used together with, Wang’s text.⁷⁰ One of the main problems with Wang’s edition is that it conflates the 642-folio *Taiping jing* proper and the much later, 211-folio *Great Peace Scripture Digest* (*Taiping jing chao* 太平經鈔), which precedes it in the Taoist Canon of the Ming. This textual conflation has led nearly any scholar subsequently citing the *Taiping jing* to treat both sources as if they were a single one—and more often than not, indiscriminately as a “Han text.”

Chapter 4 starts with a mistaken affirmation: “In AD 166, Xiang Kai 襄楷 [died after 188] brought a scripture with the same name [i.e., ‘*Scripture of the Great Peace*’] to Emperor Huan 桓 (r. AD 147–167)” (p. 99). A note refers to “*Hou Han shu*, 20b: 1076, 1083” (p. 243, n. 2).⁷¹ Actually, these pages, which contain parts of the text of Xiang Kai’s well-known memorial, mention only a *shenshu* 神書 (“divine document”).⁷² Chapter 5 begins with a near-identical affirmation: “in AD 166, Xiang Kai 襄楷 brought the [*Taiping jing*] to the attention of Emperor Huan 桓 (r. AD 147–167)” (p. 137) and, exactly as in the previous chapter, a note refers to “*Hou Han shu*, 20b: 1076, 1083” (p. 259, n. 2). A later section with the heading “The (Re) emergence of the *Scripture of the Great Peace*” returns to the theme and finally spells out the name of that “divine document”: “*Writing of the Great Peace with Blue-Green Headings* (*Taiping qingling shu* 太平清領書)” (pp. 159–60).⁷³

First, that title should rather be translated as “*Document of the Clear Guidance of Great Peace*.” Zhao’s “blue-green” betrays a confusion with a later variant of the title, *Taiping qingling dao* 太平青領道, mentioned in the fourth century by Yu Xi 虞

⁷⁰ See my “Editing and Translating the *Taiping Jing* and the Great Peace Textual Corpus,” *Journal of Chinese Studies* 48 (2008), especially pp. 473–75.

⁷¹ These pages are, in fact, in vol. 30B, which is vol. 20B of the biographical section of the *Hou Han shu*, not of the whole source.

⁷² See *Hou Han shu*, vol. 30B, “Lang Yi Xiang Kai liezhuan” 郎顛襄楷列傳 (Biographies of Lang Yi and Xiang Kai), p. 1080. The same “divine document” is mentioned again on p. 1081, outside of Zhao’s page range.

⁷³ This title, in fact, appears on p. 1084, again outside of Zhao’s page range.

喜 (281–356) in his *Forest of Monographs* (*Zhilin* 志林).⁷⁴ Second, contrary to Zhao’s statement, this title is evidently different from the one given in the *Han Documents* (*Han shu* 漢書), which does contain the trisyllable “太平經,” yet preceded by five logograms.⁷⁵ Thirdly, Zhao adds that this document (the *Taiping qingling dao*) is “often known as the *Scripture of the Great Peace*” (p. 160). “Often”? It may have become so at some point in history and might still be to some ill-informed minds, but in the extant sources, the identification is not documented before the seventh century. In their *Hou Han shu* commentary, completed in 676, *five hundred years* after Xiang Kai’s memorial submission, the Tang prince Li Xian 李賢 (653–684)—not the *Literary Selections* (*Wenxuan* 文選) commentator “Li Shan 李善 (630–689)” as wrongly stated (p. 160)—and his scholarly associates claimed, yet without adducing any evidential material, that the “divine document” was no other than “the current Taoist *Great Peace Scripture*” 神書，即今道家《太平經》也。⁷⁶ Fourth, in the same page, the intrusion of the unexplained English title “*Book of Great Peace*” (p. 160) only confuses matters further.⁷⁷

Actually, to the best of my knowledge, the earliest attested occurrence of the trisyllable “太平經” alone dates to 200, in Xun Yue’s 荀悅 (148–209) selective reorganization of the *Han Documents* as the *Han Annals* (*Han ji* 漢紀), next to the original passage from the *Han Documents*, either as a shortened rendition of it or because Xun read it as two consecutive document titles.⁷⁸

To have published and lectured about these issues several times, only to find

⁷⁴ Cited by Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (370–449) in his commentary on Chen Shou 陳壽 (233–297/300), *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (Monograph on the Three States) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), “Wu shu” 吳書 (Wu documents), vol. 46, “Sun polu taoni zhuan” 孫破虜討逆傳 (Biography of Sun, [General] destroying enemies, suppressing rebels), p. 1110.

⁷⁵ See Ban Gu et al., *Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), vol. 75, “Sui, liang Xiahou, Jing, Yi, Li zhuan” 眭兩夏侯京翼李傳 (Biographies of Sui, the two Xiahou, Jing, Yi and Li), p. 3192. Added punctuation seems to split the phrase into two consecutive titles, followed by a single length indication: “《天官曆》、《包元太平經》十二卷。” The comma also interrupts the underlining that marks titles, suggesting that the modern Chinese editors understood the phrase as referring to two documents. “Twelve volumes” (*shier juan* 十二卷) may apply either to both documents altogether, or the second document only.

⁷⁶ See *Hou Han shu*, vol. 30B, p. 1080, commentary.

⁷⁷ Checking the dissertation reveals that this title corresponds to “*Writing of the Great Peace with Blue-Green Headings*” appearing on the same book page, for which Zhao gave “*Book of the Great Peace with Blue-Green Headings*” in his dissertation. See PhD, pp. 273, 274, and 275 (n. 85).

⁷⁸ See Xun Yue, *Han ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), vol. 28, “Xiao Ai huangdi ji” 孝哀皇帝紀 (Annals of Filial August Emperor Ai), p. 492.

again and again the comfortable repetition of received simplifications and errors, generates a feeling of hopelessness.

A Study of Fragments: The Weft Remnants

Following Zhao's promise at the onset of his work, the reader expects decisive heuristic advances from hitherto neglected material: the fragmentary Weft corpus (or "Apocrypha"). But Zhao's perception of these materials seems unclear and, in view of the thematic and functional variety of their contents, simplistic, or even biased. Early on, he defines them as "explanations of the classics, purportedly revealed by Heaven" (Introduction, p. xx), before stating towards the end of the book that they "primarily contain prophecies and legends to reveal the classics' heavenly nature and the state of the mandate of Heaven" (Chapter 5, p. 164). One will note the two occurrences of "revealed," first in the religious sense, which I briefly addressed above, then in the common sense of "to make known, to cause to be seen."

Inserted between Zhao's two chapters of sociological analysis, Chapters 2 and 3, as we have seen, mainly concern the Weft. In both chapters, Zhao's efforts to deal with the remnants in a historical context rather than as isolated epistemic entities without clear chronological rooting are commendable. This allows the reader to better understand what was, politically and intellectually, at stake.

Chapter 2 proposes sixteen English translations of Weft book titles (pp. 50–51), some of which vary in further occurrences. "Key to the Heavenly Pivot in the Book of Documents," which first translates the title *Shangshu xuanji qian* 尚書璇機鈐 (p. 50),⁷⁹ becomes "The Big Dipper Key to the *Book of Documents*" in a later chapter (p. 93). "Recorded Rule for the Movement of Mandate" for *Luyun fa* 錄運法 (Table 1, p. 51) becomes "Recorded Rule for the Conveyance of the Mandate" in a translation block (p. 69). "Covenant for Assistance from Spirits" for *Yuanshen qi* 援神契 (Table 1) becomes "Tally for Assistance from Spirits" (p. 70). "Annals' Diagrams Elaborating Confucius" for *Chunqiu yan Kong tu* 春秋演孔圖 (Table 1) becomes "The Diagrams of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* Deduced by Confucius" in two later occurrences (pp. 82 and 238, n. 12). "Documents' Match of Observations" for *Shangshu zhonghou* 尚書中候 (Table 1) becomes "Inner Observation of the Documents" in an endnote (p. 233, n. 84).⁸⁰

Still in Chapter 2, Zhao treats and translates as a book title ("the *Secret Classic of Confucius*," p. 73) the phrase 孔丘秘經 found in a letter by the Academician and

⁷⁹ "Heavenly Pivot" also serves to render "天樞" only a few lines further.

⁸⁰ For the meaning of that title, see Zhang Jiazi 張甲子, "Shangshu zhonghou tiyi kao" 《尚書中候》題意考, *Henan keji daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 河南科技大學學報(社會科學版), 2010, no. 3, pp. 14–17.

official Su Jing 蘇竟 (died after 29 C.E.) dating to about 27.⁸¹ In its context, however, it seems more likely that the phrase works as an early, collective reference to Weft materials that prefigured the textual corpus edited in 56, as the attached seventh-century commentary assumes (“祕經，幽祕之經，即緯書也”).⁸² The same letter mentions 圖讖之占 (literally “prognostics of charts and predictions” or “prognostics of predictions [including, or based on] charts”),⁸³ which in all likelihood points to the same materials, with *tu* 圖 perhaps emphasizing their tangible or visual quality. It should be noted that *tuchen* 圖讖 is sometimes understood as referring specifically to the *River Chart*.⁸⁴ In Chapter 3, Zhao considers the phrase *Chunqiu tuchen* 春秋圖讖, found in an imperial edict (*zhao* 詔) dating to 65, to denote “one of the apocryphal texts of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*,” and translates it as “The Diagrams and Prophecies of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*” (pp. 93–94). Here again the context of the phrase suggests less a fixed book title—no textual citation is given—than a generic reference to Weft materials related to the *Spring and Autumn* chronicle.⁸⁵ On the opposite page, Zhao renders *tuchen* as “diagrams and prophecies” in plain text, not in title format (p. 95).

More disappointing, however, is how Zhao refers to individual Weft citations in his endnotes. Typically, each note gives the page in the Chinese 1994 edition of Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi’s 中村璋八 [1926–2015] critical edition,⁸⁶ which makes sense insofar as that edition incorporates a number of corrections—even though, presumably, it also generated a number of new typographical errors. Then the source from which the Japanese editors retrieved the material is sometimes provided, and sometimes not.⁸⁷ Here the reader would expect at least minimal information about that source’s date, especially considering that, in many cases, the said date is remotely

⁸¹ For the date of Su Jing’s letter, see de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, p. 758.

⁸² *Hou Han shu*, vol. 30A, “Su Jing Yang Hou liezhuan” 蘇竟楊厚列傳 (Biographies of Su Jing and Yang Hou), p. 1043, commentary (n. 1).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 1046.

⁸⁴ On which, see Michael Saso, “What is the *Ho-t’u*?” *History of Religions* 17, no. 3–4 (February 1978), pp. 399–416.

⁸⁵ See *Hou Han shu*, vol. 2, “Xianzong Xiaoming di ji” 顯宗孝明帝紀 (Annals of illustrious ancestor Filial Emperor Ming), p. 111.

⁸⁶ *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成, ed. Yasui and Nakamura (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1994).

⁸⁷ The source is not provided on pp. 231 (n. 50), 239 (n. 22), and 240 (nn. 39 and 40). At least once, a Weft citation bypasses the critical edition and refers directly to a primary source (see p. 263, n. 59). It would have been interesting to know whether that citation appears in the critical edition, and if it does, why did Zhao not refer to that edition in this case.

posterior to the era under consideration. None is given. Instead, such references are always to modern editions, so that, for instance, the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, compiled between 977 and 983 under the editorship of Li Fang 李昉 (925–996), bears once and for all—including in the bibliography—the date “1960”; the [*Da Tang*] *kaiyuan zhanjing* 〔大唐〕開元占經, compiled by Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達 (Gautama Siddhārtha) during the Kaiyuan 開元 regnal era (713–741), the date “1994”; and the *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義, written during the Sui dynasty (581/589–618) by Xiao Ji 蕭吉 (530/540–614), the date “1984.”⁸⁸

In the Japanese edition, the number of surviving fragments of each Weft book can range from a single citation to several hundreds, except in very few cases of texts more or less complete. Between the mid-sixth and mid-seventh centuries, about 60% of Weft books disappeared from the catalogue of the imperial library,⁸⁹ and by Song times, most were lost. Some Weft book titles are attested and textual citations given in documents firmly dated and cited, particularly in Han historiography, while others seem to appear only towards the end of the Medieval era. Consequently, the later the source of a fragment, the higher the probability that the said fragment is a late rewriting or a forgery. Logically, then, the diverse materials collected by Yasui and Nakamura cannot all be given the same historical value. In order for the reader to approach the question of the genuineness of the Weft remnants with a critical eye, I find it useful, in my work, for each fragment cited, to trace the earliest available textual citation and bibliographical mention of the corresponding Weft title. This is what Zhao does twice (p. 234, nn. 90–91), leaving the reader to wonder why the same treatment is not applied systematically to the dozen of Weft texts cited in his book.

Working with a mostly fragmentary corpus requires care in inferring conclusions. Zhao, therefore, makes a mistake when insisting on the fact that, “[i]n the apocryphal texts, . . . unlike Yan Yuan, who is said to represent the force of water, Zixia is not

⁸⁸ See pp. 228 (n. 11), 230 (n. 36), and 231 (n. 49); bibliography, pp. 297, 303, and 308. The classic study and translation of the *Wuxing dayi* by Marc Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination dans la Chine ancienne: Le Compendium des cinq agents* (*Wuxing dayi, VI^e siècle*) (Paris: École française d’Extrême-Orient, 1991), is apparently unknown to Zhao.

⁸⁹ The Liang dynasty (502–557) had 32 Weft books amounting to 232 volumes. The Sui inventory lists only 13 titles amounting to 92 volumes. See Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580–643), *Sui shu* 隋書 (Sui documents) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), vol. 32, “Jingji zhi” 經籍志 (Monograph on bibliography), p. 940.

paired with any of the Five Phases” (p. 92; see also p. 241, n. 52).⁹⁰ This cannot prove anything, simply because Zixia may well have been paired with one of the Five Agents in Weft material no longer extant.

In Chapter 3, Zhao cites the fragment “邱為制法之主，黑綠不代蒼黃” (p. 83). An endnote adds that it is a citation from the “Xiao jing gou ming jue 孝經鉤命決” and locates it on p. 1011 of the Chinese edition.⁹¹ So far so good, except that this Weft title is nowhere translated (see also p. 263, n. 59) and not indexed. Still in the note, Zhao (rightly) disagrees with the punctuation of the critical edition, which he gives as “邱為制法，主黑綠不代蒼黃，” without the logogram 之 (p. 238, n. 17). Consulting the critical edition shows that, in fact, Zhao has treated as a single fragment three duplicate citations attached to three different Weft titles, as follows:

Fragment:	Weft title (<i>Jūshū isho shūsei</i> location)
邱為制法之，主黑綠，不代蒼黃	孝經鉤命決 (vol. 5, p. 71)
丘為制法，主黑綠，不代蒼黃	孝經援神契 (vol. 5, p. 54)
丘為制法之，主黑綠，不代蒼黃	春秋演孔圖 (vol. 4A, p. 15)

This case involves only minor discrepancies: the genitive marker 之 is omitted once and “邱” is a common variant for the name of Confucius.⁹² But in other duplication cases, variant readings and syntactical order may differ strongly, and textual volume as well. This case simply casts doubts on the reliability of all primary sources citations in Zhao’s book.

Another cause for concern is Zhao’s discourse on the Weft, which only perpetuates the distorted scholarly perception of the corpus and hampers the development of a mature, scientific approach that would at last be appeased and normalized. Here is a sample of such emotional terminology (my italics). Introduction: “most *obscure* corpus” (p. xx). Chapter 2: “This corpus looks so *alien* to us nowadays” (p. 49); “They might be *outlandish* to modern scholars, but they spoke right to the heart of their readers in the first century AD” (p. 57); “the apocryphal world would seem *alien*

⁹⁰ Yan Yuan 顏淵 refers to Yan Hui 顏回 (521–490/481 B.C.E.), courtesy name Ziyuan 子淵, the favourite disciple of Confucius; Zixia 子夏 is the courtesy name of Bu Shang 卜商 (507–425 B.C.E.), another first-generation disciple. See *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), vol. 67, “Zhongni dizi liezhuan” 仲尼弟子列傳 (Biographies of Zhongni’s disciples), pp. 2187–88 and 2202–3; translated in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, ed. Nienhauser, vol. 7, pp. 64–65 and 74–75.

⁹¹ Corresponding to *Jūshū isho shūsei*, vol. 5: *Kōkyō, Rongo* 孝經·論語 (Classic of filial piety, The Analects), edited by Yasui and Nakamura, p. 71.

⁹² On the rule of avoidance of Confucius’s personal name, see Zhang Weixiang 張惟驥 (1883–1948), *Lidai huizi pu* 歷代諱字譜 (Table of avoided characters through the Ages), Xiao shuangji an congshu 小雙寂庵叢書 ed. (1932), vol. A, f. 21a.

or even *repulsive* to Xunzi [荀子]” (p. 60); about an excerpt just cited: “As *puzzling* as the passage is . . .” (p. 75). Owing perhaps to the title of Licia Di Giacinto’s own monograph, Zhao calls a “riddle” an allusive trisyllabic passage, which, in my view, is very easy to understand (p. 54). “Riddles” return a few pages further on (p. 71). This overemphatic discourse on the Weft might be part of Zhao’s general attitude towards things—to the modern reader—not strictly “rational” or mechanistic, which one would not normally expect to happen. For instance, the “anecdote” involving Gongsun Shu’s dream, his wife’s reaction to it and the subsequent appearance of a dragon, is deemed, again, “outlandish” by Zhao (p. 67). The competition for imperial power between the same Gongsun Shu and Liu Xiu inspires him to this comment: “The campaigns of both sides were no more irrational, keeping in mind their audiences, than those of the most recent US presidential election” (p. 70). Once one forfeits sensationalistic utterances, gratuitous comparisons of this kind become useless and out of place.⁹³

The few fragments and excerpts translated by Zhao show plainly that there is nothing unfathomable or esoteric about Weft books, once one understands their underlying logic and acknowledges their literary history and the resulting fragmentary state of the corpus. Some passages may be philologically difficult for the unaccustomed modern scholar, in part because—not unlike other literary genres in China and elsewhere—Weft literature is allusive. But, as Zhao himself seems to be aware of (see p. 57), this allusiveness was certainly not a major problem for their intended audience.

Final Ruminations

Zhao’s book shares some of the strengths and limitations of Licia Di Giacinto’s earlier monograph, another doctoral dissertation on Han-era culture published with minimal revision.⁹⁴ Both pledge to reinstate Weft remnants, but their overemphatic discursive mode simultaneously perpetuates misconceptions about them. Both strive to translate Weft excerpts, but in such limited number that they convey distorted perceptions of the corpus as a whole and underestimate the importance of the ancient science

⁹³ Further allusions to contemporary North-American society, more evocative of journalistic than scholarly writing, serve to remind the reader of the book’s implied audience: “Similar to working at the White House or a top-twenty university” (p. 102); “not too bad compared to the average tuition at Ivy League schools in the United States” (p. 117); “Teachers had greater authority in the ancient world than in twenty-first-century universities” (p. 118).

⁹⁴ Licia Di Giacinto, “By Chance of History: The Apocrypha under the Han” (Ph.D. diss., Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2007), published as *The Chenwei Riddle: Time, Stars, and Heroes in the Apocrypha* (Gossenberg: Ostasien Verlag, 2013), which I reviewed for *T’oung Pao* 100, no. 4–5 (2014), pp. 505–11.

of omens in it. Both rely heavily on analytical categories determined by Western religions to defend theses that distort the primary materials they choose to translate and discuss. To put it simply, Di Giacinto contends that the Weft authors were mainly concerned with “messianic politics” and expected the arrival of a “political saviour”—the latter notion owing a lot to the work of Anna Seidel (1938–1991).⁹⁵ In Zhao’s book, without textual evidence supporting the claim, one also reads: “He Xiu identified the Liu family as the savior of humanity” (p. 158). Soteriological agency exists in the Taoist and Buddhist religions, but Confucius and Liu Bang do not qualify for such a profile—except perhaps in some later popular representations,⁹⁶ but neither published dissertation deals with that topic.

I wonder if the current title on the cover, marketable as it might be, should not have been discarded to the benefit of a reformulated version of the subtitle that would have encapsulated better what the book is about. Surely Great Peace is one of the themes dealt with therein, but so is the Weft phenomenon, and yet the front cover does not allude to it. It seems to me significant that in Chapter 4, perhaps the best part of the book, none of the primary materials cited by Zhao discuss Great Peace or the Kingly Way. In this respect, the first page of that chapter is misleading.

My critical reading of Zhao’s book also sheds light on the authorial strategies used by authors to make their contribution to a field seem disproportionately important. When I read that, “[i]n order to receive attention from colleagues, scholars need to prove that their approaches to significant topics are important,” and that “[m]embers of intellectual communities compete to become the center of conversations. These struggles take the shape of ‘my ideas are new,’ ‘my ideas are important,’ and ‘my ideas are true’” (Introduction, pp. xvii–xviii), I cannot help but wonder whether Zhao is talking about Han scholars, or about himself and how he perceives his peers. That “[his] ideas are new” is indeed part and parcel of the authorial strategy of Zhao, whose discourse is pervaded by an obsession with “innovation.” “Innovation” and its adjectival form “innovative” appear on the back cover of the book, in two section headings (pp. 28 and 175), in the Introduction (16 occurrences), in Chapter 1 (17 occurrences), in Chapter 2 (7 occurrences, including “innovativeness,” p. 74), in Chapter 5 (10 occurrences), in the Conclusion (4 occurrences), and in the endnotes (p. 263, n. 53; p. 264, n. 79), as well as in the abstract of the dissertation version

⁹⁵ In particular Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha,” in *Tantric and Taoist Studies: In Honour of R. A. Stein*, ed. Michel Strickmann (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1981–1985), vol. 2, pp. 291–371.

⁹⁶ For a recent survey of some popular representations of Confucius, see Oliver Weingarten, “The Unorthodox Master: The Serious and the Playful in Depictions of Confucius,” in *A Concise Companion to Confucius*, ed. Paul R. Goldin (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), pp. 52–74.

(PhD, p. v) and among the dissertation's keywords. Zhao reminds those of us who forgot it that "[i]ntellectual innovations tend to take place through rearrangement of existing knowledge" (p. 152) and that, quite logically, Zheng Xuan's and He Xiu's "innovations were deeply rooted in Han classicism and commentarial traditions" (p. 159). The Conclusion posits that, "[a]t the end of the Western Han, a two-way innovation took place: via Liu Xin with a great synthesis and Li Xun with a grand departure" (p. 175). On the next page, "[the] compromise of the authority of the classics led to a three-way innovation" in the second century C.E. (p. 176). Firstly, it is hard not to see these constructions as simplistic. Secondly, the insistence on "innovation" at a given point in time seems to imply that historical times exist during which nothing new is introduced. A well-known example, the "Dark Ages" that the European Medieval era had long been assumed to be was a representation derived from Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374),⁹⁷ which Italian Renaissance and later Humanist thinkers reactivated to overplay the chasm between a present triumphantly turned towards building future's new humankind and a past rejected as obsolete. Another well-known example, the supposedly intrinsic timelessness and unchangeable nature of "the Orient" composed a caricature that contributed to the ideological legitimization of the economically driven European colonial expansion.⁹⁸ Is "innovation" not part of the ever-ongoing multifarious processes that make human cultural history?

Despite the perceived shortcomings on which this essay may have exaggeratedly focused, Zhao Lu's book (like Licia Di Giacinto's) is meritorious in many respects. This perfectible result of a talented young scholar's hard research work, tackling difficult issues and tapping unconventional materials, shows brilliantly that there is a wealth of data to make use of in both the *Weft* and *Great Peace* corpora as well as in the abundant biographical information found in official historiography. Such efforts must be encouraged—as much as today's pressure should be relaxed on young doctors to waste no time publishing their dissertations as a means to launch their academic careers in an increasingly insecure economic context.

⁹⁷ See Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," *Speculum* 17, no. 2 (April 1942), pp. 226–42. For Petrarca, however, darkness laid in the scarcity of historical records, as opposed to the light of abundant documentation of the Antiquity. To this image of darkness authors later added the meaning of a "decline" in civilization.

⁹⁸ See Edward W. Said's (1935–2003) classic work *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), which sparked heated scholarly debates within and without the field of the same name.