By Chance of History:
The Apocrypha under the Han

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CHAPTER ONE

A REVIEW OF THE APOCRYPHAL PHENOMENON THROUGH HISTORY

1. THE APOCRYPHAL PHENOMENON UNDER THE HAN

The term “apocrypha” as key word for rendering the technical Chinese chenwei 謎緯 into English was born in Western sinology during the 1950’s, when Tjan Tjoe Som translated the fragmentary proceedings of the congress held in AD 79 at the White Tiger Hall (Baihuguan 白虎觀). The rendition “prognostication books” was later adopted in the most famous study on the chenwei in English, namely the doctoral thesis of Jack Dull (1966). More recently, Lü Zongli has defined chenwei as “prophetic-apocryphal texts”, adhering to literary renderings such as “prophetic books” and “wefts”, the first being a translation of the term chenshu 譬書 and the second of weishu 纹書. Mostly for reasons of clarity, the present study shall consistently use “apocrypha” and, at a lesser extent, “prognostication books” to refer to the whole Han corpus. Even though “apocrypha”, a well-known key-word in biblical studies, has been questioned by Robert P. Kramers, this term still is one the best available options to frame the Han chen phenomenon, especially thanks to its contradictory nuances. It is certain, in fact, that the chen texts came to be presented as Confucius’s secret classics (Kongqiu mijing 孔丘祕經) as early as the first decades AD, regardless of the discomfort of those critics who deemed them to be prognostication books. Over the following decades and centuries, the cryptic Han chen scripts gradually turned into parallel classics, although not always formally endorsed. Thus, while it is not safe to assume that all the chen were written with the intent to comment on the canon, the Chinese apocrypha, because of their link to the classics, became object of heated debates, reminding one of the history of their western counterparts.

1 See Tjan Tjoe Som (1949), 100.
2 Lü Zongli (2003), 28.
3 Lü Zongli (2003), 28.
4 Kramers argues “the wei are usually referred to as apocryphal books, although the analogy is somewhat remote”. See Kramers (1986), 759.
6 For a review of the controversial relationship between apocryphal writings and the bibles of the European churches, see Goodspeed (1939), 1-12. Both van Ess and Lü Zongli consider the term
The different way of importing a Chinese term into our cultural world could obviously be labelled a problem of conventions. Yet, it may well work as litmus revealing the complex terminological issues hidden behind the binomial chenwei. In the 1940s, Chen Pan 陳槃, undoubtedly one of the most prolific scholars dealing with the topic, published a well-known article with a precise examination of all the phrases used in the sources of classical China to refer to this cultural phenomenon. Beside chen and wei, words relating to the idea of talisman or auspicious omen — “token” (fu 符), “record” (lu 錄), “forewarning” (hou 候) — and the familiar binomials “Diagram of the Yellow River” (Hetu 河圖) and “Script of the Luo River” (Luoshu 洛書) also play an important role.

The best way to see how these different elements are combined into the modern corpus is to briefly examine the Choshu Isho Shusei 重修緯書集成 [Revised Collection of Apocryphal Texts], the Japanese collection of 178 fragmentary chenwei texts and the primary source for modern research on the apocrypha. It is possible to dissect this large anthology into four main parts. The first two parts encompass all texts whose titles include the expressions Hetu or Luoshu. Consequently, the fragments of lost books such as the Hetu-Huichangfu 河圖會昌符 [The Diagram of the Yellow River. The Token: Meeting the Glory] or the Luoshu-Zhenyaodu 洛書甄曜度 [The Script of the Luo River. The Measure: Observing the Luminaries] belong to these two groups. The third section assembles all the wefts: the Yiwei 易緯 [Wefts of the Changes], the Shuwei 書緯 [Wefts of the Documents], the Shiwei 詩緯 [Wefts of the Odes], the Liwei 礼緯 [Weft of the Rites], the Chunqiuwei 春秋緯 [Wefts of the Annals], the Yuewei 楼緯 [Wefts of the Music], and the Xiaojingwei 孝經緯 [Wefts of the Classic of Filial Piety]. Examples of apocryphal titles in this group are the Xiaojing-Yuanshenqi 孝經援神契 [(Weft of) the Classic of Filial Piety. The Talisman: Quoting the Spirits], and the Shangshu-Kaolingyao 商書考靈曜 [(Weft of) the Documents. Examining the Luminaries]. The Shuwei-group contains a subsection called Zhonghou 中候 [The Forewarning of the Middle (Rising)]. Texts such as the Shangshu Zhonghou-Woheji 商書中候握河紀 [(Weft of) the Documents - The Forewarning of the Middle (Rising). Holding the Mark of the River] belong to this group. This indicates that the whole Han canonical corpus and basic works such as the Xiaojing were supposed to be provided with wefts. The great exception, and with it the last category, is represented by the Lunyu 論語

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7 In this regard, see Chen Pan (1944), 297-308; Seidel (1983), 308-313.
[Analects], which did not have wefts but rather prophetical interpretations (Lunyu chen 論語讖), as for instance the Lunyu-Zhaishuaisheng 論語摘衰聖 [(Weft of) the Analects. The Sage: Specifying the (Reasons for the) Decline]. Thus, the key-word chenwei should be considered a sort of collective noun used to refer to the structural complexity of the apocrypha. In the next section, we shall trace the development of the most important terms and briefly review the landmarks of the history of the chenwei under the Han.

1.1 Terminology and the Early Han history of the chenwei

1.1.1 The chen scripts

All the historical evidence tends to confirm that chen was the most important term associated with the apocrypha under the Han. The first explanation of the meaning of chen dates back to the beginning of the second century AD, when Xu Shen 許慎 (AD 30-124) completed his well-known Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 [Explanation of Simple Characters and Analysis of Compounds] and explained the character by connecting it to the idea of prophecies which had come true (yan 驗).8 Moreover, according to the famous Later Han astronomer Zhang Heng 張衡 (AD 78-139), the chen books essentially were texts embodying prognostications:

立言於前，有徵於後，故智者貴焉，謂之讖書。

They put words first and the verification arrives thereafter. Therefore, educated people have attached some value to them and called them prophetical scripts.9

The first text which has been unambiguously labelled chen in the available sources is a book in 12 juan 卷 called Tianguanli baoyuan taipingjing 天官曆包元太平經 [Classic of the Great Peace: the Calendar of the Heavenly Officials encompasses the Origin] presented to the throne by Gan Zhongke 甘忠可 in the last decades of the first century BC.10 According to the dynastic histories, Gan Zhongke came from the region of Qi 齊, the traditional homeland of those magicians and occultists (shenxian 神仙) who, together with specialists in technical disciplines such as calendar, astrology, or medicine, are usually referred to as fangshi 方士.11 The objective of the Tianguanli was to announce the message of the Master of the Red Essence (Chijingzi 赤精子), namely the

8 Shuowen jiezi 90B.
9 Hou Hanshu 59:1912. For an overview of the use of chen in the still extant sources, see Dong Ping (1993). The Chinese scholar analyses and discusses, in particular, the occurrence of chen in Shi ji 43:1787; Hanshu 48:2226; Huainanzi 16:531. For further analyses of this topic, see also Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 2; Lippiello (2001), 56.
crisis and resurrection of the power of the Han dynasty:

漢家逢天地之大終，當更受命於天，天帝使真人赤精子，下教我此道。

The Han will come across the “Great Termination” of Heaven and Earth. They will receive the mandate from Heaven once again. The emperor of Heaven sent the true man, the Master of the Red Essence, to instruct me about this path.12

The famous scholar and librarian Liu Xiang 劉向 (77?-6? BC) refused to give credence to the Tianguanli and ordered the magician’s arrest. Gan Zhongke eventually died in prison. His disciples, however, continued to teach Gan’s theories by finally meeting prominent scholars such as the student of the Documents Li Xun 李尋.13 Thanks to him, the Tianguanli was submitted to the court a second time. Liu Xiang’s son Liu Xin 劉歆 refused the text by succinctly stating that the text did not match the contents of the classical corpus (bu he wu jing 不合五經).14

The number of references to prognostication books — chenshu 變書 or chenji 變記 — increases considerably in the historical accounts dealing with Wang Mang’s interregnum and the civil war of the first century AD. Shortly before the foundation of the Later Han dynasty in AD 25, Liu Xiu 劉秀, the future Later Han emperor Guangwudi 光武帝, received the text known as Chifufu 赤伏符 [The Token of the Red Secret] from his former companion Qiang Hua 彌華. This book essentially announced the definitive restoration of the Han by hinting at the “Revolution of the five Potencies” (wude zhongshi 五德終始). This well-known theory, which is linked to the Warring States thinker Zou Yan’s 鄒衍 (ca. 300 BC), associated each historical period with one of the five agents (wu xing 五行) — Water, Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal — and the corresponding colour, namely Black, Green, Red, Yellow, and White. Thus, at the end of the first century BC, the Liu clan was seen as the human counterpart of the Agent Fire and the colour Red.15 Finally, the passage below suggests that the Chifufu was considered to be a proof of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate (tianming 天命) upon Liu Xiu:

光武先在長安時同舍生彌華自關中奉赤伏符，曰「劉秀發兵捕不道，四夷雲集龍野，四七之際火為主」。臣因復奏曰：「受命之符，人應為大，萬里合信，不議同情，周之白魚，曷足比焉？【…】」讖記曰：「劉秀發兵捕不道，卯金修德為天子」。

12 Hanshu 75:3192.
13 Hanshu 75:3192. For Li Xun’s scholarly background, see Hanshu 75:3179.
14 For an analysis of the anecdotes involving Gan Zhongke, see, for example, Dull (1966), 113-121; Itano Chôhachi (1976), 56-58. For Liu Xiang’s and Liu Xin’s condemnation, see Hanshu 75:3192.
15 For a brief introduction to Zou Yan’s theory of the revolution of the Five Powers — a theme on which we shall dwell at length in this study — see Graham (1989), 329-330, Sun Guangde (1993), 121-139.
When Guangwu was still in Chang’an, his one-time companion Qiang Hua submitted the *Token of the Red Secret*, which said: “Liu Xiu will send out troops and capture those who do not follow the Way. The barbarians from the four directions will gather like clouds and dragons will fight in the fields. Within 28 years, Fire will be ruler.” After that, [Liu Xiu’s] followers submitted a memorial which said: “You have received the talisman [showing the bestowal of the] Mandate and [therefore] the response of the men is great. [People] within ten thousand *li* have granted you [their] trust: do not discuss these collective feelings. How could the white fishes of the Zhou be better than that (i.e. this book)? The prognostication records maintain: “Liu Xiu will send out troops and capture those who do not follow the Way: Maojin will recover the Potency and become son of Heaven.”

The excerpt presents a few aspects which are well worth stressing once again. The famous cryptograms Maojin 卯金 and Maojindao 卯金刀 refer to the components of the character Liu 劉. Moreover, it is evident that Liu Xiu’s companions regarded the appearance of the Chifufu as an auspicious omen, similar to the white fish of the Zhou 周 ruling clan which, according to a very popular anecdote, announced to king Wu 武王 his imminent victory over the Shang 商.

According to the historical chronicles of the period, Guangwudi was not the only one to use books as evidence of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate. Liu Yang 劉揚, for example, tried to justify his political ambitions by means of unidentified prognostication books. From this perspective, the most interesting case is undoubtedly that of the Sichuanese warlord Gongsun Shu 公孫述, an official who challenged Guangwudi’s imperial authority until AD 35. According to the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 [Book of the Later Han], Gongsun Shu falsely drew (*wangyin 妄引*) from prognostication records (*chenji*) in order to proclaim himself the true emperor of China. Unlike Liu Yang, who did not mention any specific text, Gongsun Shu quoted three titles which today belong to the apocryphal corpus, namely the *Luyunfa* 錄運法 [The Model: Recording the Revolution (of the Five Potencies)], the *Kuodixiang* 括地象 [The Image: Surveying the Earth], and the *Yuanshenqi 援神契*.  

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17 On this and similar word games, see Lippiello (2000).
18 *Hou Hanshu* 1A:21.
19 For the anecdote involving Liu Yang, see *Hou Hanshu* 21:763; Dull (1966), 204. Concerning the period of civil war, Hans Bielenstein has carried out an outstanding study, reconstructing facets and details of the chaotic decades between the end of Wang Mang’s interregnum and the third decade of the first century AD. For Guangwudi’s rivals, see Bielenstein (1959), especially pp. 113-198.
20 Gongsun Shu is perhaps the most famous adversary of Liu Xiu in the civil war at the beginning of the first century AD. After 24 AD, he declared himself king of Shu 蜀 and Ba 巴 with the capital in what is now Chengdu 成都 by claiming to be the “general who stabilizes the Han” (ding Han jiangjun 定漢將軍). This strategy did not stop him from adopting an expansionistic policy. Encouraged by some initial successes, Gongsun Shu took the final step and declared himself first emperor of the Cheng 成 dynasty. For further details on Gongsun Shu, see *Hou Hanshu* 13:538; Dull
1.1.2 Diagrams and Scripts: Hetu and Luoshu

The chen of the civil war were presented as tangible evidence of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate. In all probability, this legendary and mystic aura derived from the association of some of the texts with the Diagram of the Yellow River and the Script of the Luo River. At the beginning of their long history, the binomials Hetu and Luoshu were not considered together. In the pages of the Shujing [The Classic of the Documents], the Hetu was as an object, probably made of jade, which belonged to the treasures of the Zhou. As such, it symbolized the royal and magical authority of the ruling clan. In the following centuries, the Hetu clearly became a symbolic herald announcing the arrival of a virtuous and sage sovereign: Confucius, for instance, lamented the absence of both Hetu and phoenix. Finally, in the Xici [Appended Statements], this heavenly talisman came to be associated with a further token coming from the waters of a river, namely the Luoshu.

As in the case of the Hetu, the Luoshu was supposed to announce the appearance of an enlightened ruler. In the Guanzi, in fact, both Diagram and Script are mentioned among propitious omens, such as phoenixes and dragons. Finally, during the last centuries BC, the stories concerning the Diagram and the Script merged with different traditions. The Hetu, in particular, came to be presented as Green Diagram (lutu 綠圖) in the Mozi 墨子:

A red bird with a jade tablet in the beak descended to the she altar of the Zhou. It said: “Heaven ordered king Wen of the Zhou to dispel the Yin and conquer the country”. The beginning of peace finally arrived. The River sent forth a green diagram and the earth displayed the chenghuang. In the Huainanzi 淮南子 [Masters of Huainan], the Luoshu evolved into a Cinnabar
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Script (danshu 丹書). Finally, one should recall the Transcribed Diagram and Script (lutushu 錄圖書) which was presented to Qin Shi Huangdi 秦始皇帝 (r. 221-210 BC) by the magician Lu Sheng 盧生: the document prophesized the downfall of the dynasty because of Hu 胡 (wang Qin zhe Hu ye 亡秦者胡也). Instead of paying attention to his son Hu Hai 胡亥 (r. 210-207 BC), the first emperor understood Hu as a noun referring to northern barbarians and organized a huge military campaign against them.27

At the end of the Early Han, Luoshu and the Hetu certainly were tokens symbolizing the bestowal of the Heaven’s mandate upon a wise and sage ruler. A few chen texts named after the Hetu/Luoshu were available at the court at the beginning of the first century AD. Wang Mang, for example, quoted from a not-identified Zigetu 紫閣圖 [Diagram of the Purple Pavilion] and, in AD 7, he summoned to the court experts in different disciplines, including students of the classics, trained astrologers, and people acquainted with the “prognostications of the Diagrams” (tuchen 圖讖). Moreover, the bibliography of the Hanshu, which also contains Liu Xiang’s catalogue Qi lüe 七略 [The Seven Epitomes], lists seventeen chapters (pian 篇) of “diagrams, scripts, and secret records (tushu miji 圖書祕記)” at the end of the section “astrology” (tianwen 天文). According to the Tang commentators, this cryptic expression referred to texts later included in the apocryphal corpus.29

1.1.3 Wei and Confucius’s secret classics

Besides being sometimes associated with Hetu and Luoshu, the Han chen scripts were

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26 Huainanzi 2:75.
27 For the anecdote in Sima Qian’s work, see Shiji 6:252. This is one of the most famous political prophecies in China and it has therefore been mentioned and discussed at least from the first century AD. For early interpretations of the prophecy see, for instance, Huainanzi 18:617; Lun heng 78:328. Brief mention and discussion of the anecdote are to be found, for example, in Lü Zongli (2003), 18-19.
28 Hanshu 99A:4069.
29 Hanshu 30:1765. Dong Ping (1993). In all probability, the original Qi lüe did not encompass the entry tushu miji. In fact, the text says that the tianwen section of the imperial library encompassed 21 “lineages” (jia 家) and 445 “scrolls” (juan 卷). As Wang Yingling 王應麟 wrote, the entry tushu miji was added later. See Yuhai 2:61. In all probability, however, we have here an early addition. Both the expressions tushu and miji, in fact, were used to refer to the chen books before the Later Han editing. For tushu see, for example, Hou Hanshu 35:1202. As for the term miji 祕記, it is significant to consider the case of Yang Chunqing 楊春卿, a man from Sichuan who supported Gongsun Shu during the civil war at the beginning of the first century AD. According to the biography of one of his descendants, Yang committed suicide and left to his son a few secret records (miji). The medieval historian clearly understood miji to mean the apocrypha since he also stated that Yang was fond of tuchen (shan tuchen 善圖讖). See Hou Hanshu 30A:1047. When one considers these elements, it is fairly safe to trust the Tang commentators and take the entry tushu miji as a reference to the chenwei. In this regard, it is important to recall that the Hou Hanshu mentions a further editing of the books of the imperial library made at the beginning of the first century AD. At this time, the scholar Su Jing edited the books together with Liu Xin. See Hou Hanshu 30A:1042.
also regarded as parallel classics written and hidden by Confucius. On the eve of Guangwudi’s victory, an official named Su Jing 蘇竟 defined the chen books of the period as Confucius’s secret classics (Kongqiu mijing 孔丘秘經). Slightly later, the scholar Huan Tan 桓譚 explicitly stated that the prognostication books were attributed to the Master of Lu. Finally, the distinguished exegete Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) wrote:

【…】孔子雖有聖德，不敢顯然改先王之法，以教授於世。若其所欲改，其陰書於緯，藏之以傳後王。

[…] “Even if he had the virtue of a sage, Confucius did not dare to openly subvert the conventions of ancient kings when educating his contemporaries. [Yet], he covertly wrote in the wefts what he strove to change. [Later], he hid them in order to pass them down to the rulers of the future.

Thus, the Han chen books were regarded as classics written and hidden by Confucius. This belief was behind the birth of the term wei as labelling for the Han chen scripts. Wei, in its literary meaning of weft — hence the association with jing 經, warp and, by association, classics — was not among the first labels of the apocrypha. During the first centuries AD, for instance, the appendices to the classics were clearly labelled chen: Zhang Heng once used the expression Chunqiu chen 春秋讖 to refer to the prognostication books affiliated to the Annals. In this way, if the technical term “prognostication of the classics” (jingchen 經讖) occurs in the chronicles, the reader of Han documents will find binomials like jingwei 經緯 only in documents of the second century AD.

1.1.4 Guangwudi and the birth of the apocryphal corpus

With the restoration of the Han dynasty in AD 25, the history of chen scripts enters a new phase: from unknown and mysterious texts, they become an important component of Chinese culture. Grateful for the prophecies of the Chifufu, Guangwudi entrusted two

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30 For Su Jing, see Hou Hanshu 30A:1041-1042; Dull (1966), 200-203.
31 Dongguan Hanji 16:108.
33 Shuowen jiezi 644B. For a detailed explanation of the meaning of wei, see Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 2.
34 Hou Hanshu 59:1912. For a detailed analysis of chen as label for the appendices of the classics, see Chen Pan (1948a), esp. 308-315.
35 See, for example, Hou Hanshu 29:1025, 35:1196, 35:1203, 57:1857.
36 See Huang Fushan (2000), 5-6. Liu Hong 劉洪, for example, unambiguously labelled the apocryphal texts as the “wefts of the classics” (jingwei 經緯) and as “Confucius’ wefts” (Kongzi wei 孔子緯). See Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3042. On Liu Hong’s calendrical expertise, see Cullen (2002).
scholars, namely Yin Min 尹敏 and Xue Han 薛漢, with the task of collating and systematizing (jiaoding 校定) the prognostication books. Shortly before AD 56, then, the sovereign officially released the apocryphal corpus (xuanbu tuchen yu tianxia 宣布圖讖於天下). 37

Which methods were used during the editorial work and to what extent the edited apocrypha were different from the prognostication books in circulation before the restoration are difficult questions that will probably never find a satisfactory answer. One point, however, seems to be quite certain: the editorial work must have greatly contributed to fixing the formal aspects of the chenwei corpus. In all probability, the editorial committee arranged the contents of the prognostication books in 81 chapters. In this regard, it is appropriate to recall the words of Zhang Heng who wrote:

河洛五九，六藝四九，謂八十一篇也。

The [texts named after the Diagram of the] Yellow River and [the Script of the] Luo River are forty-five. The [texts attached to the] six arts (i.e. the classics) are thirty-six. [All together] they are referred to as the 81 chapters. 38

At this point, two considerations are mandatory. First, the eighty-one chapters were artificially determined, since 81 was a meaningful number. Nor was it the first example of such a method: Liu Xin chose it as numerical constant for his Santong li 三統歷 [The Calendrical System of the Three Concordances], while Wang Mang designated eighty-one prime scholars during the reign of emperor Ping 平 (r. 1 AD-6 AD). 39 Moreover, it is interesting to note that a classic work of philosophy such as the Laozi 老子 or a medical work like the Huangdi neijing 黃帝內經 [The Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor] are also characterized by a subdivision in eighty-one sections.

The second mandatory consideration regards the classification of the texts. Essentially, the systematized corpus endorsed a few tendencies of the period between the end of the first century BC and the beginning of the first century AD. Consequently, some chapters of the corpus were presented as Hetu or Luoshu, whereas others were attached to the classics. Hence, the texts were often referred to as “prognostications of the Diagrams” (tuchen 圖讖), “diagrams and scripts” (tushu 圖書), prognostications of the classics (jingchen 經讖), and “prognostication records” (chenji 譏記). Despite the formal association, the whole corpus must have been associated to Confucius. A later account written by the famous medieval scholar Liu Xie 劉勰 (d. 522) emphatically stresses that the 81 chapters of the corpus were all attributed to the Master of Lu (ba shi yi pian jie

38 See the commentary in Hou Hanshu 59:1913. See also Hou Hanshu (zhì) 7:3166.
1.2 Later Han scholarship and the apocrypha: influence and opposition

The history of the apocrypha at the Later Han courts is a contradictory adventure marked by the success of these texts in political, technical, and exegetical circles and the bitter reaction of a few distinguished scholars. The following remarks shall then serve to recall the most important facts.

1.2.1 The success of the apocrypha

(a) The political and ritual field

The readers of Later Han chronicles cannot avoid noticing the influence exercised by the chen books at the courts of the Later Han emperors. In a few cases, for instance, certain people used the obscure language of the apocrypha to promote their political careers. This was the case of the prefect of Yewang, Wang Liang, who was designated Minister of Public Works (da sikong) because his name was allegedly found in the Chifufu. Even the rulers, and especially Guangwudi, Mingdi (r. 58-76), and Zhangdi (r. 76-105), often yielded to the evocative wording of the chenwei. In AD 56, Guangwudi performed the Feng and Shan sacrifices because several apocryphal texts seemed to attach a crucial importance to them. According to Sima Biao (240-306) — the medieval author of the treatises (zhi) of the Hou Hanshu — the emperor took his final decision during the night, when reading an excerpt from the Hetu: Huichangfu. It spoke of the ninth generation of the Red Liu (chi Liu zhi jiu) grasping the mandate at Daizong, which was the place in which the Feng and Shan sacrifices were usually performed. In all

40 Wenxin dialong 4:103.

41 According to the Hou Hanshu, the Chifufu said that Wang Liang had to deal with the Dark Warrior (xuanwu 玄武) after having ruled over Wei 楚. In the eyes of the historian, the interpretation of the prophecy was uncomplicated. The capital of the ancient state of Wei, annexed by Qi during the Warring States Period, was moved to the city of Yewang under Qin Shi Huangdi. Yewang, however, was also the city where Wang Liang was prefect. Hence, the wording “Wang Liang rules over Wei” had been interpreted as an unambiguous reference to the prefect of Yewang. Xuanwu referred to the spirit of the agent Water (shuishen 水神) and, since the ministry for public works had to deal with problems relating to the control of rivers, Wang Liang’s appointment was seen as obvious. In this regard, see Hou Hanshu 22:774; Choshu isho shusei 6:98; Dull (1966), 218-219. A second similar case involved Sun Xian 蘇咸 who became Ministry of War thanks to unspecified prophecies (chen). In this regard, see Dongguan Hanji 12:82; Dull (1966), 219-220.

42 Apparently, Guangwudi was extremely moved by the Huichangfu (gan ci wen 资此文). See Hou Hanshu (zhi) 7:3163. Dull (1966), 226. For an analysis of the treatise on sacrifices, see Mansvelt Beck (1990), 88-110.
probability, the chenwei were part of a complex strategy of the ritualists in an attempt to persuade Guangwudi, presented as the ninth generation of the Liu clan, of the need to celebrate the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate through the Feng and Shan sacrifices:

登封告成，為民報德，百王所同。陛下輒拒絕不許，臣下不敢頌功述德業。河雒讖書，赤漢九世，當巡封泰山【…】

To climb [the Taishan, perform] the Feng sacrifice and announce the completion [of the ceremonies] in order to display the Potency to the people is what hundred kings had in common. [Yet], Your Majesty has often declined [the invitation] and refused permission. [We], ministers and subordinates, do not dare to praise [your] achievements and to transmit [your] virtues and accomplishments. [According to] the prognostication books [named after the Diagram of the] Yellow River and [the Script of the] Luo River, the ninth [generation] of the red Liu must go on tour [of inspection] and perform the Feng ceremony on the Taishan: […]\(^43\)

On the first day of March, AD 56, the ceremonies were finally performed. Guangwudi also inscribed a stele with six citations of apocryphal texts in order to testify his profound belief in the chenwei. Unlike most of the texts quoted in the records before the editing, the apocrypha referred to on the stele were explicitly associated with the classics or with the tokens of the rivers:\(^44\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hetu-Chifufu 河圖赤伏符</td>
<td>The Diagram of the Yellow River. The Token: the Red Secret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetu-Huichangfu 河圖會昌符</td>
<td>The Diagram of the Yellow River. The Token: Meeting the Glory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetu-Hegupian 河圖合古篇</td>
<td>The Diagram of the Yellow River. The Chapter “In Tune with the Antiquity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetu-Tiliuyu 河圖提劉予</td>
<td>The Diagram of the Yellow River. The Dispense: Raising the Liu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luoshu-Zhenyaodu 雒書甄曜度</td>
<td>The Luo Script. The Measurement: Observing the Luminaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaojing-Goumingjue 孝經鉤命決</td>
<td>The Classic of Filial Piety. The Decision: Hooking the Mandate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost all the quotations from the texts listed above referred to the necessity of performing the Feng and Shan sacrifices and of inscribing a stele. Apart from the already mentioned prognostication of the Chifufu, in which the name of Liu Xiu is

\(^43\) Hou Hanshu (zhì) 7:3163.
\(^44\) The apocryphal texts listed in the table are mentioned in Hou Hanshu (zhì) 7:3165-3166.
explicitly mentioned, the remaining prophecies seem to hint at the members of the Liu clan in a much more ambiguous way by using expressions of the third generation (san shi 三世) or the ninth generation (jiu shi 九世) of the Liu.

(b) The technical field

The importance of the apocrypha in technical fields cannot be underestimated. Not only did the mysterious chen books influence the official debates on the calendar, they also held an enormous fascination for specialists in astrology or in different mantic practices. The promulgation of a new time system in AD 85 opened a long-lasting chain of official debates. The Lüli zhi 律曆志 [Monograph on Pitchpipes and Calendar] in the Hou Hanshu demonstrates that the chenwei played a rather significant role during the often-heated discussions. First, the Superior Origin (shangyuan 上元) of the new official almanac — that crucial point in the history of the cosmos when several astronomical phenomena happened simultaneously — was chosen in accordance with the apocrypha. The shangyuan was fixed at 2,760,000 years before the fourteenth year of the reign of duke Ai 哀 in the pre-imperial state of Lu 魯: This corresponds to 481 BC in our time-system.\footnote{Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3038.} According to the Annals, in this year Confucius captured a unicorn in the west;\footnote{Zuozhuan: Ai gong 14 (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 2172).} according to the chenwei, this year was a watershed in human history, marking the ideal beginning of Han imperial authority.\footnote{See, for example, Choshu isho shusei 4A:15.} Second, even though a few outstanding technicians such as Cai Yong 蔡邕 or Liu Hong 劉洪 condemned the use of the apocrypha in the calendrical field, a few scholars like Feng Guang 馮光 and Chen Huang 陳晃 drafted an additional almanac which was based on the chenwei.\footnote{Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2B: 3037-3042. On the influence of the chenwei on Later Han calendrical discussions, see Dull (1966), 275-283.}

The relevance of the apocrypha for questions dealing with technical disciplines also emerges in the biographies of the Hou Hanshu. A few individuals combined the study of the chenwei with a training in disciplines like astrology (tianwen 天文), calendrical matters (lisuan 歷算), or mantic practices. Zhai Pu 翟酺 and Liu Yu 劉瑜, for instance, had a deep interest in all these techniques. On the other hand, Liao Fu 廖扶 was an expert in astrology, in the chenwei, and in the astrological technique of the fengjiao 風角.\footnote{For Zhai Pu 翟酺, see Hou Hanshu 48:1602; for Liu Yu, Hou Hanshu 57:1854. The biography of Xie Yiwu is in Hou Hanshu 82A:2715. Finally, for Liao Fu, see Hou Hanshu 82A:2719.}
The influence of the apocrypha in exegetical fields

The importance of the apocrypha for matters concerning the exegetical work of the Later Han period is evidenced in several documents of this epoch. Apart from the influence exercised by the chenwei in ritual questions, it is mandatory to recall the conference on the classical canon held at the White Tiger Hall in AD 79. The fragmentary proceeding of the congress, gathered under the title Baihutong 白虎通 [Discussions of the White Tiger (Hall)], encompass several explicit quotations from the apocrypha. Evidently, some layers of these texts were supposed to be useful for solving problems of an exegetical character. Accordingly, it is no surprise that several thinkers and officials of the period were attracted by these texts. Among other less influential figures, high-ranking scholars showed a considerable interest in the corpus officially released by Guangwudi. The case of He Xiu 何休 (129-182) is particularly noteworthy since he was a distinguished expert in the Gongyang 公羊 commentary on the Annals and one of the leading figures of the New Text (jinwen 今文) interpretation of the classics.

The chenwei also attracted the attention of scholars trained in the Old Text (guwen 古文) versions of the canon. The astronomer and guwen scholar Jia Kui 賈逵, for instance, used the apocrypha to maintain the superiority of the Zuozhuan 左傳 over the other (jinwen) commentaries of the Annals. His disciple Xu Shen studied the Old-Script classics as well as the apocrypha. Finally, it is mandatory to recall the versatility of the distinguished scholar Zheng Xuan who, apart from being extremely erudite in the classical corpus and interested in technical disciplines like calendar and astrology, also wrote commentaries to several apocryphal books.

1.2.2 Thinking about the chenwei: Later Han opposition to the apocrypha

The assumptions about the legendary origins of the chenwei, along with the complex...
terminological issues, represent the first difficulty in circumscribing the main aspects of this cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, some Han documents are very helpful. There is no doubt, in fact, that the first scholars who tried to rationalize the chen lived and wrote under the Later Han, when these books apparently dictated law in political matters, in scientific discussion, and in exegetical works. The scholar Huan Tan, for example, dared to challenge the authority of the apocrypha and to refuse to see them as Confucius’s work.\footnote{Dongguan Hanji 16:108.} He also added:

【…】臣譚伏聞陛下窮折方士黃白之術，甚為明矣；而乃欲聽納讖記，又何誤也！其事雖有時合，譬猶卜數隻偶之類。陛下宜垂明聽，發聖意，屏羣小之曲說，述五經之正義，略靁同之俗語，詳通人之雅謀。

[...] I, Tan, bow down to hear that Your Majesty has banned the methods of Yellow and White of the magicians: this has been extremely clever! Yet, now You wishes to hear and accept the prognostication records: this is really a mistake! The matters [recorded in these texts] may well match the time (i.e. the contemporary situation) but they are actually just like the fortuitous [right responses based on] mantic practices. If Your Majesty regards it as appropriate to hand down enlightenment and virtue, to develop the ideas of the sages, [You should] remove all [these] small twisting wordings and transmit the correct significance of the classics, overlook the vulgar wordings of [these] carbon copy-like [texts] and promote the refined plans of the widely-learned people.\footnote{Hou Hanshu 28A:960. For a thoroughly introduction to Huan Tan’s thought and his unfortunately fragmentary work Xin lun 新論 [New Discourses], see the study by Pokora (1975). For analyses of Huan Tan’s judgement on the apocrypha, see Dull (1966), 235-237; Lippiello (1997) 187-188.}

Huan Tan lived at the wrong time: Guangwudi ignored his admonishment and condemned him to exile. Slightly later, Yin Min tried to follow his example. When the emperor ordered him to collect and edit the chenwei, Yin Min responded that these texts were not the work of the sages since they included several unpolished “broken characters” (jinbi biezi 近鄙別字) — maojindao would be an apt example — as well as heterodox words of the time.\footnote{Hou Hanshu 79A:2558. For an analysis of Yin Min, see Dull (1966), 232-235; Lippiello (1997), 188-189.}

Both Yin Min’s and Huan Tan’s resistance to the apocrypha is indicative of the discomfort certain scholarly circles felt in dealing with the chenwei. This aspect emerges also in Zhang Heng’s memorial to the throne in which the Later Han astronomer tried to convince emperor Zhang of the unreliability of these texts. For any research on the apocrypha, the value of this document is enormous since the Later Han astronomer also dwells on the origins of these books:

若夏侯勝、眭孟之徒，以道術立名，其所述著，無讖一言。劉向父子領校祕書，闕
定九流，亦無讖錄。成、哀之後，乃始聞之。

[And let us consider] the case of the disciples of Xiahou Sheng and Sui Meng, who gained some fame thanks to the methods of the dao: in their scripts there is no trace of the word chen. Even Liu Xiang and his son, who systematised the books, reviewing and arranging the [texts of] the nine [philosophical] trends, do not mention the prognostication records. Only after the reign of emperor Cheng and emperor Ai, did this word begin to be heard […].

In the history of the chenwei, Zhang Heng’s account is of essential importance: this is probably the most authoritative opinion for reconstructing the Han history of the apocrypha. A few details need to be emphasized. First, the Later Han astronomer clearly intends to destroy the magical aura surrounding the apocrypha, by rejecting the legendary origins of the texts. Yet, he even tries to identify their birth-time. In this way, we learn that the official cultural world ignored the existence of the chenwei until the reigns of emperor Cheng (r. 32-7 BC) and emperor Ai (r. 6 BC-AD 1).

A few decades after Zhang Heng’s memorial to the throne, the scholar Xun Shuang challenged again the legendary aura of the apocrypha. Below his arguments in the wording of his son Xun Yue (d. 209 AD):

世稱緯書。仲尼之作也。臣悅叔父故司空爽辨之。蓋發其偽也。有起於中興之前。【…】然則可謂八十一首非仲尼之作矣。

[My] contemporaries are accustomed to speaking about the wefts as the work of Confucius. My father, the Minister for Public Works [Xun] Shuang, has discussed this point and has ascertained that they are forgeries. They appeared before the [period of] “Middle Rising” (i.e. before Guangwudi’s reign). […] In this way, it is possible to say that the 81 [texts] are not the work of Confucius.

Xun Shuang was convinced that the chenwei developed during the period called the “Middle Rising”, a term which here refers to the beginning of the Later Han. Thus, just like Zhang Heng, Xun Shuang rejected legends and stereotypes and said that the apocrypha developed at the end of the Early Han dynasty.

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58 The scholars Xiahou Sheng and Sui Meng were active at the beginning of the first century BC. For the exegetical tradition of the Xiahou clan, see Hanshu 27:1353; van Ess (1993), 43. For Sui Meng, see Hanshu 75:3195.
60 Shenjian 3:12.
61 A few passages of the chronicles testify that this wording refers to Guangwudi’s reign. See, for instance, Hanshu 22:1035; Hou Hanshu 2:100; 4:195. He also adds that they were written by Zhongchang’s disciples (Zhongchang zhi tu zhi zuo hu 終張之徒之作乎). Yet, the exact identity of Zhongchang is unfortunately unknown.

After having briefly recapitulated the development of the apocryphal phenomenon under the Han, I shall now turn to the late history of these texts. The following remarks will focus on the centuries after the downfall of the Han and will address the ways in which scholars and rulers dealt with the *chenwei*. Two aspects play a central role. First, the post-Han centuries witnessed the gradual disappearance of these texts because of several political proscriptions. From the third century AD up to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the rulers of Chinese territory, or of part of it, often banned both the study and the collection of these books. Yet, an account of this topic would be incomplete without considering the role played by the cultural community in this process. The history of the transformation of the once flourishing corpus into fragments is, in fact, a fascinating and complex process of political persecution and strong intellectual disapproval. Taken alone, these factors would not have been strong enough to cause such a massive decline whereas their interaction definitively condemned the apocrypha to their modern fragmentary status. It follows that the exploration of the reasons for the disappearance of the *chenwei* constitutes the one side of the coin. The necessity of inquiring this point, however, should not overshadow the second aspect which characterizes the history of the apocrypha in the post-Han period, namely the partial success of the political bans. Given that the eight-volumes *Choshu isho shusei* presents an impressive number of apocryphal fragments, it is appropriate to dwell on the reasons for the survival of so many textual evidences. In fact, while on one hand the fragmentary status of the modern corpus suggests that the political and scholarly persecution was extremely effective, the quantity of material that is still extant induces us to avoid an overestimation of the role of the bans. In the next paragraph, we shall look at this issue and consider the contradictions within both Chinese political spheres and intellectual circles.

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62 A few studies have demonstrated the relevance of the *chenwei* during the medieval age. In her book published in 2001 and focused on omens and mirabilia in the Han and the following medieval age, Tiziana Lippiello has illustrated the significance of apocryphal wordings and themes in the *Furui zhi* [Treatise on Talismans and Portents] of the *Songshu* [Book of the (Liu) Song Dynasty], written by the medieval author Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513). In 2003, Lü Zongli published a pioneering study concerning the use of political prophecies from the downfall of the Later Han in 220 up to the first half of the sixth century: as to be expected, the apocrypha play a significant role in this study.
2.1 The rulers and the apocrypha after the Han: proscriptions

2.1.1 Proscriptions

In his recent study of political prophecies in the medieval era, Lü Zongli reconstructs several interesting facets of the banning of the apocrypha. The first documented proscription dates back to AD 267, when emperor Wu 武 (r. 265-290) of the newly established Jin 晉 dynasty (265-420) deemed it necessary to officially prohibit the study of the Han apocryphal corpus, here called tuchen, and that of prognostication texts based on the interpretation of the stars and vapours (xingqi 星氣).\(^6^3\) The Jin decree of 267 triggered a long process of destruction, which was destined to last up until the sixteenth century. During the medieval era, for example, the chenwei were proscribed several times. Fu Jian 符堅 of the Qin 秦 dynasty (351-383), emperor Wu 武 (r. 454-465) of the Liu Song 刘宋 (420-479), Taiwu 太武 (424-452) and emperor Wen 文 (r. 471-500) of the Northern Wei 魏, as well as emperor Wu 武 of the Liang 梁 (502-557) imposed bans on the study and collection of apocryphal texts.\(^6^4\) The Northern Wei veto of 485 is particularly noteworthy for its severity:

自今圖讖、祕緯及名為孔子閉房記者，一皆焚之。留者以大辟。

From now on, the prognostication books [named after the] Diagram [of the Yellow River and the Script of the Luo River], the secret wefts, and the records which are said to have been hidden by Confucius will all be destroyed. Those who conserve [such books] will be subject to the capital sentence.\(^6^5\)

Also under the Liang dynasty, the imperial veto upon the collection of the chenwei (jin xu chenwei 禁畜讖緯) must have been implemented with great diligence. In the first half of the sixth century, when the ban certainly was in force, Ruan Xiaoxu 阮孝绪 (479-536), a prominent bibliographer, refused advice to hide his own copies of the

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\(^{63}\) Jinshu 3:56. Li Meixun 李梅训 and Zhuang Dajun 庄大钧 mention a ban on the “secret studies” (neixue 內學), apparently released at the beginning of the third century. See Li Meixun and Zhuang Dajun (2002), 42. Even if there is no trace of it in the official histories — we only find a brief mention in the commentary on the Sanguozhi 三國志 [History of the Three Reigns] — the interpretation by the Chinese scholars appears to be reliable. First, during the medieval age, the term neixue was often used to refer to the apocrypha. See Hou Hanshu 82A:2705; Sanguozhi 23:660. This, in turn, could confirm the hypothesis advanced by Jack Dull, who dates the first official attempt to proscribe the apocrypha or, at least to limit their use, back to the end of the Later Han dynasty. See Dull (1966), 402-405.

\(^{64}\) For a detailed reconstruction of the bans, see Lu Zongli (2003), 39-70. In particular, for the proscription under the Jin, see Jinshu 106:2765; Lu Zongli (2003), 39-43; for Fu Jian’s ban, see Jinshu 114:2897; Lu Zongli (2003), 46-52. The ban promulgated under the Song is not reported in the official chronicle of the dynasty. Yet, according to Suishu 32:941 it took place between 457 and 465. In this regard, see also Lü Zongli (2003), 52-55. For the proscription under the Liang, see Nanshi 76:1895.


Chapter One. A review of the apocryphal phenomenon through history

...chenwei and burned them. Nor did the government’s crackdowns against these texts subside in the following centuries. At the beginning of the Sui 隋 (589-618), the chronicles document two bans. A veto was imposed again under the Tang when emperor Gaozong 高宗 (r. 650-684) prohibited private scholars from possessing prognostication books: nevertheless, he did not condemn the texts associated with the classics.

In the period between the beginning of the Tang and the thirteenth century, the histories document of 1004 under the Song rule. A quiet period followed and the persecution ceased for more than two centuries. Under the Yuan 元 dynasty (1260-1368), however, four bans were imposed on the apocrypha. Finally, in 1504, Xiaozong 孝宗 of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) gave the order to reinforce the veto upon these texts.

2.1.2 Political censorship

Chinese cultural circles became aware at a very early point in time that the banning process was transforming the apocrypha in sources difficult to access. In the Suishu 隋書 [Book of the Sui Dynasty], the Tang historian Wei Zheng 魏征 (580-643) wrote:

至宋大明中，始禁圖讖，梁天監已後，又重其制。及高祖受禪，禁之踰切。煬帝即位，乃發使四出，搜天下書籍與讖緯相涉者，皆焚之，為吏所糾者至死。自是無復其學。

And then, towards the middle of the [era] “Great Enlightenment” (457-464) under the [Liu] Song dynasty, the rulers began to ban the prognostication texts connected to the Diagram [of the Yellow River]. Later, during the [era] “Heavenly Supervision” (502-520), the Liang reinforced the ban. And Gaozu, when he was bestowed with the mandate, banned them. When emperor Yang came to the throne, he sent envoys in the four [directions] to collect the books of the whole world; those [books] which could be related to apocrypha, were all to be destroyed. The officers could even face the death sentence. It

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66 Nanshi 76:1895; Lü Zongli (2003), 56.
67 Suishu 32:941.
68 According to the decree, the wefts, the Shangshu-Zhonghou, and the prognostication texts associated with the Lunyu were explicitly excluded from the ban. The veto is not reported in the official histories but it appears in Tanglü Shuyi 唐律疏義 [Compendium of Tang Law]. See Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 33. Moreover, an official edict of 756 refers to a state veto on the possession of the apocrypha. See Jiu Tangshu 11:285. By the middle of the eighth century, the second Tang emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 763-780) imposed an additional ban on material dealing with astrology and, in particular, on books devoted to the interpretation of the sky (tianwen tushu 天文圖書). See Xin Tangshu 47:1215.
69 Songshi 7:123.
70 Emperor Shizu 世祖 (r. 1260-1295) issued three vetoes in quick succession: the first in 1266, the second in 1273, and the third in 1280. The fourth was promulgated under emperor Taiding 泰定 (r. 1324-1328). In this regard, see Yuanshi 6.112; 8:147; 13:266, 29:662.
71 Mingshi 15:195.
follows that there is no possibility to restore their (i.e. of the apocrypha) teachings […]. 72
Evidently, as early as the Tang, the study of the apocrypha was seriously endangered because of the many proscriptions. Considering this fact from our modern viewpoint, there can be no doubts about the effectiveness of the bans and the role they have played in the destruction of the texts. Yet, it is also questionable whether the official distaste of the chenwei affected each available copy:

Even within the Imperial library, many [copies of the apocrypha] are scattered or lost. 73

Wei Zheng’s words, and especially that yi 亦, are extremely interesting: the Tang historian is evidently suggesting that, as late as the beginning of the Tang, copies of the apocrypha were still conserved within the Imperial library. 74 This fact logically clashes with an interpretation which explains the fragmentariness of the corpus by pointing at the aversion of the ruler for these texts. If we in fact assume that Chinese sovereigns were moved by hate and reprisal, we might ask why they did not destroy the copies of the apocrypha which were more accessible, namely those conserved at the imperial palace. Thus, we must necessarily suppose that at least some of the bans were not directed against the copies available at the court but rather at the copies conserved in private collections. 75

After being widely used as propaganda material during the civil war at the beginning of the first century AD, the chenwei continued to play a significant political role at the medieval courts. As Lü Zongli has clearly shown, the rulers of medieval China often attempted to legitimate their imperial aspirations by means of obscure prophecies from

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72 Suishu 32:941.
73 Suishu 32:941.
74 Recently, Lü Zongli has argued that the wefts, namely the Han appendices to the classics, were not the target of the proscriptions. See Lü Zongli (2003), 77-78. On the basis of an unexplained differentiation of chen, understood simply as books treating political matters, and wei, presented as texts dealing with the classics and rituality, Lü suggests that the appendices to the classics were spared. The only historical hint in this direction may well be the edict released by Gaozong under the Tang: yet, this cannot be taken as a generic trend of the banning process. It is certainly true that it is difficult to understand the target of the bans, mainly because of the generic terminology adopted to refer to the prognostication books of the Han or of later ages. However, some historical edicts actually testify that the private study of the wefts was banned. The bans released under the Wei, Liang, and Sui all explicitly mentioned the character wei. See again Weishu 7A:155; Nanshi 76:1895. Moreover, the list of proscriptions in the bibliographic chapter of the Suishu clearly deals with the wefts also, since Wei Zheng presents in this section the surviving appendices to the classics. See Suishu 32:941.
75 In this regard, Lü Zongli rightly highlights the wish of medieval rulers to destroy the apocrypha conserved in private collections; see Lü Zongli (2003), 71-77. Accordingly, the veto on the apocrypha reminds one of Qin Shi Huangdi’s notorious ban of 213 BC, which prohibited the private ownership of historical books and Confucian classics. See Bodde (1986), 70.
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the apocrypha or from unidentified prognostication books. Two points are particularly noteworthy in this context. First, the rulers clearly had an interest in prophecies and stories concerning royal tokens; second, the vetoes on these texts certainly did not stop scholars and intellectuals working at court from studying or using the chenwei. The Wei ban of AD 485 was particularly draconian. Yet, Li Daoyuan酈道元 (ca. 466—527), the eminent geographer who was pursuing a distinguished bureaucratic career, enriched his Shuijing zhu水經注 [Notes on the Classic of the Sees] with several passages from the apocrypha. Moreover, when several scholars were invited to the imperial palace in Datong大同 to attend a congress on rites, some of the participants openly referred to the text Jimingzheng稽命徵 [Exploring the Proofs of the Mandate].76 Another very significant case is the Liang proscription in the first half of the sixth century. Roughly at the time when Ruan Xiaoxu burned his own collection of chenwei, Zu Xuan祖暅, an official serving at the court, was ordered to gather all the scripts dealing with ancient records on astrology: the apocrypha were presumably among them.77 It is therefore evident that several imperial vetoes were mainly directed at the private possession and private study of both the Han corpus and unidentified prophetic texts.78

2.1.3 The political use of the apocrypha after the Han

A very interesting example of political censorship is an edict released in 444 under the Northern Wei dynasty: the following excerpt clearly portrays the interest private individuals continued to show in the apocrypha and similar texts.

All those stupid people puzzled because of their trust in evil enchanters are now privately sponsoring magicians and collecting books like prophetic records, mantic [manuals], apocrypha, and technical [texts]. […] Now, from kings and dukes down to the commoners, all those who privately sponsor in their homes Buddhist priests, magicians, and alchemists must surrender [these people] to the official in charge: to hide them is forbidden. If by the fifteenth day of the second month they do not appear, magicians and

76 Weishu 108:2793.
77 The result was a voluminous work aptly called Tianwen Lu天文錄 [Astrological Records] In this regard, see Suishu 20:561.
78 Later proscriptions were explicitly formulated in this sense: the second ban of the Sui, Gaozong’s edict during the second half of the seventh century, the proscription imposed under the Later Zhou and some of the last bans all explicitly mentioned their primary target, namely those private scholars (sijia私家) who continued to study the chenwei. See Beishi 11:418; Suishu 2:38; Songshi 7:123; Yuanshi 29:272.
priests will be put to death and their hosts will be executed with their families.\textsuperscript{79}

The reasons lying for the determination of the rulers to condemn and ban private collections of the apocrypha are obviously outside the framework of this study. Yet, the evident severity in the excerpt presented above should induce us to briefly consider this issue since a few facets were to heavily influence later studies. Apart from the complex motivation of the individual rulers — the reader will find these in Lü Zongli’s analysis — one reason for the veto on the private possession of the apocrypha stands out particularly. Medieval rulers dearly feared the obscure wordings of the apocrypha because they could be used to challenge imperial authority. The Northern Wei period, for instance, abounds in such episodes. Round about the twenties of the sixth century, Liu Zhuqi 劉靈助 declared himself king of Yan 燕, justifying this act, among other things, by referring to the apocryphal texts which clearly spoke about the right of the Liu clan to govern (\textit{Liushi dang wang} 劉氏當王).\textsuperscript{80}

\textbf{2.1.4 Writing new chen texts}

Apart from this instrumental use of the Han \textit{chenwei}, a further point is relevant. In all probability, some scholars did not limit themselves to interpreting the Han corpus but wrote works inspired by the original apocrypha. A first hint in this direction is found in the excerpt presented above in which emperor Wu lists the interests of private circles: besides \textit{yin/yang}, we find the binomials “Wefts and Diagrams” and “Prognostication records”. Up to now, we have regarded \textit{chenji} as a generic term referring to the \textit{chenwei}, but its simultaneous occurrence with \textit{tuwei} clearly invalidates this hypothesis. Since \textit{tuwei} is one of the standard binomials used in medieval China to refer to the apocrypha, it is convenient to consider \textit{chenji} to be a term designating prognostication books which did not belong to the Han \textit{chenwei} corpus. This element necessarily leads us to reflect on the habit of writing texts similar to the Han \textit{chenwei}: we shall use the term “pseudo-apocrypha” to refer to these works. Is there textual proof which may corroborate this assumption?

From the very beginning, the \textit{chenwei} cultural phenomenon was very dynamic: in this regard, the official chronicles certainly provide a few valuable hints at cases of forgery or plagiarism. In the second half of the first century AD, for instance, the prince of Chu 楚 was indicted for having sponsored groups of magicians to fabricate prognostication

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Weishu} 4B:97. Lü Zongli (2003), 59.

\textsuperscript{80} See \textit{Weishu} 91:1959 A further anecdote from the \textit{Weishu} is also interesting: a certain Yun Ji 霍季 is in fact reported to have claimed that his name was found in the apocrypha. See \textit{Weishu} 3:56. For a further similar anecdote, see also \textit{Weishu} 28:689. This tendency continued in later ages, in this regard see \textit{Suishu} 85.1898; \textit{Yuanshi} 205:4564.
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texts. A few decades later, Zhang Heng said that a few people continued to enlarge the original corpus:

且河洛, 非古篇錄已定, 後人皮傅, 無所容篡, 永元中, 清河宋景遂以歷紀推言水災, 而偽稱洞視玉版。

Moreover, chapters and records attached to the Classics or to the [Diagram of] the Yellow River and to the Luo [script] were already fixed when later people [still] added superficial and naïve [texts]. In the middle of the [era] “Eternal Origin” (AD 89-105), Song Jing from Qinghe used the calendrical marks (i.e. cycles) to calculate and discuss floods (lit. water calamities) and he claimed that [he knew that] from a jade tablet seen in a cave.

Thus, as early as the second half of the first century AD, the official apocrypha were being imitated. Song Jing, evidently, had written a book concerning the prediction of floods: yet, instead of presenting it as his own work, he claimed that he had seen this material on a jade tablet in a cave. In all probability, this tendency grew considerably in the post-Han period. The medieval histories, for instance, document the existence of prophetic texts, which today are not included in the anthologies of apocryphal fragments: titles such as Liu Xiang chen 劉向讖 [Liu Xiang’s Prophecies], Jing Fang chen 京房讖 [Jing Fang’s Prophecies], and Laozi He Luo chen 老子河洛讖 [The Prophecies of the He and of the Luo by Laozi] are good examples. As Lü Zongli stresses, these texts have to be regarded as medieval chen or, as he says, “contemporaries chen prophecies”. All these titles were apparently regarded as parts of the chenwei corpus in the medieval era, as the fragments surviving from the Liang catalogue of the imperial library testify. Finally, by summing the number of scrolls listed in the Liang catalogue under the heading chenwei to the juan conserved in the Tang libraries, we may infer that the apocryphal corpus included 232 titles by the seventh century AD. Considering that Zhang Heng clearly stated that each title belonging to the Han corpus in 81 sections encompassed only one juan, we may easily understand the dynamic development of the apocryphal phenomenon in the centuries after the downfall of the Han.

The remarks above have briefly commented on the main facets of the banning process, ascertaining that the political fury of the medieval era was not always directed at the chenwei available at the court so that, as late as the beginning of the Tang, copies of the apocrypha were still conserved within the Imperial library. From this perspective, we may safely assume that several official copies were lost during the medieval centuries: after all, at the beginning of the Sui dynasty, the librarian Niu Hong牛弘 bitterly

81 Hou Hanshu 42:1429.
82 Hou Hanshu 59:1912.
83 Lü Zongli (2003), 102-106.
84 All these texts were in fact listed under the heading chenwei. See the Liang catalogue presented in the commentary to the Suishu, in Suishu 32:940.
complained about the gradual but constant impoverishment of the Imperial Library. Yet, at this point, one question becomes mandatory: why was no attempt undertaken to save and hand down at least those damaged copies, or part of them, which were conserved in the library? This issue may be cleared up only if we assume that at least a part of the intellectual community opposed to efforts to preserve and pass down the *chenwei*, at least under their proper name.

2.2 The intellectuals and the rejection of the apocrypha

The attitude of the scholarly world towards apocryphal texts in the centuries after the Han is a highly interesting theme which hopefully will attract the attention of future research. Here, we shall limit the discussion to a few representative cases which effectively exemplify how the cultural community was split when dealing with the *chenwei*. On the one hand, countless intellectuals regarded the texts as heretical works, giving rise to one of the most interesting cases of censure in China; on the other hand, many scholars continued to draw from the apocrypha in their scientific or exegetic activity. Even if the apocrypha did not enjoy political sponsorship as it had happened under Guangwudi, Mingdi, and Zhangdi, their development in cultural circles closely echoes their turbulent adventure at the court of the Han. The remarks below will try to highlight these points by focusing on the condemnation of the texts and discussing a few basic facets of their endurance within Chinese cultural landscape. This twofold analysis will clear up, it is hoped, the paradox mentioned at the beginning, namely the survival of such a large number of fragments.

Scholarly rejection was a salient feature of the history of the apocryphal phenomenon.

85 For Niu Hong and his memorial, see *Suishu* 49:1298-1299. The librarian urged the emperor to trace all books conserved in private collections. In this regard, Lü Zongli maintains that the aim of the librarian included the tracing of copies of the apocrypha. Yet, this interpretation is slightly suspect. Niu Hong, in fact, describes in detail the cultural haemorrhage of the time. More specifically, the librarian speaks of five disasters (*e*) from the Qin up to the Sui. Following the edict of 113 BC, with which Qin Shi Huangdi ordered the books to be burned, the Han scholars interpreted the classical canon on the basis of prophecies: according to Niu Hong, this was the first disaster which considerably contributed to the decadence of the culture (*ci ze shu zhi yi e* 此則書之一厄也). Therefore, it is probable that Niu Hong was speaking of official texts and not of the apocrypha. The second and third disasters mentioned by the Sui librarian happened at the beginning and at the end of the Later Han dynasty. In spite of this, the collection of the Jin was still considerably large (*wenji you guang* 文籍尤廣). The remaining two *e*, both during the chaotic medieval centuries, greatly contributed to decimating the cultural legacy. By looking at the question from a quantitative viewpoint, Niu Hong maintains that the *juan* conserved in the capital were more or less one half of the scrolls listed in the bibliographic catalogues of only a century earlier. For Niu Hong and his memorial, see *Suishu* 49:1298-1299. After Niu Hong’s appeal, the Sui emperor effectively launched a book search. See *Suishu* 1:19.

86 In their essay on political proscriptions and the collecting of the apocrypha, Li Meixun and Zhuang Dajun also hint at the responsibilities of the scholarly community. See Li Meixun and Zhang Dajun (2002), 42-43.
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From this perspective, intellectual stigmatization clearly preceded political censure, as the cases of Huan Tan or Yin Min testify. By the end of the first century AD, then, Zhang Heng tried to articulate the scholarly aversion in a political proposal: his suggestion to gather all the prognostication books as to burn them was undoubtedly a remarkable attempt to clean up both the exegetical and the technical work of the time from the influence of these texts. The audacity showed by the Later Han scholars became a source of inspiration for their intellectual descendants. 87 Specifically, it is possible to distinguish two strategies for rejecting the apocrypha. First, several scholars publicly expressed their distaste. Second, the ignoring of themes and guidelines expounded in them has been a very effective strategy of Chinese intellectual communities in denying the authority of these texts. The historian Fan Ye, 范曄 (398-445), to whom we owe the major part of the documents conserved in the *Hou Hanshu*, is certainly a good example for illustrating the first approach. In his introduction to the biographies of the *fangshi*, the historian points out that technicians living under Wang Mang and Guangwudi were very fond of the apocryphal texts. Unfortunately, continues Fan Ye, the first sovereigns of the Later Han were very fascinated by these books: unscrupulous people exploited this weakness to rise in the hierarchical scale. 88 In the following centuries, technicians, historians, and commentators expressed their critical views towards the apocrypha by explicitly condemning the texts or by simply refusing to use them in their scholarly activity. Initially, calendrical experts were particularly harsh in judging the prognostication records as false and heretical. Towards the end of the fourth century AD, Jiang Ji, 姜岌 defended his new calendrical system by openly ridiculing the contents of the apocrypha texts. 89 About a century later, He Chengtian, 何承天 and Zu Chongzhi, 祖沖之 (429-500), two great astronomers of pre-modern China, condemned those specialists who used the *chenwei* in their calendrical activity. Below is an excerpt from Zu’s intervention at an official discussion in 462.

![Image]

Charts and weft are extremely confusing. Some of them use emperor and kings to increase their value whereas others resort to worthies and sages in order to mystify their discourses. Therefore, the prophetic records are mostly nonsensical. Huan Tan certainly knew how odd and false they were. 90

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87 *Hou Hanshu* 49:1912-1913.
88 *Hou Hanshu* 82A:2705.
89 *Jinshu* 18:566-567.
90 *Songshu* 13:307. Zu Chongzhi may rightly be considered one of the most interesting figures of medieval China. His *Daming* 大明 calendar was the first Chinese almanac which also took into account the precession of the equinoxes. See Ho (1985), 76-77. On the difficulties Zu Chongzhi
Ritualists challenged the influence of the apocrypha as well. Under the Liang 梁 dynasty, Xu Mao 許懋 addressed a memorial to the throne on the Feng and Shan sacrifices in open contradiction to the chenwei, maintaining that the ambiguous wordings (qushuo 曲說) of the wefts did not correspond to the deep significance of the real and correct classics (fei zhengjing zhi tongyi ye 非正經之通義也). 91 Both the cases of Zu Chongzhi and Xu Mao reflect the crisis of the apocrypha during the medieval age. 92 In the following centuries, a number of intellectuals followed this path and accused the apocrypha of being misleading, superstitious, and useless. Some Tang scholars, for instance, did not draw on the chenwei. The Yinyi 音義 [Pronunciation and Meaning] commentary on the classics by Lu Deming 陸德明 (446-527), the Tang Shiji zhengyi 史記正義 [Correct Significance of the Records of the Historian] by Zhang Shoujie 張守節; the Hanshu zhu 漢書注 [Commentary on the Book of the Han] by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (AD 541-645) are among the many works which consistently ignored the apocrypha. The scholarly aversion for the chenwei peaked under the Song when Han thought, and, in particular, its holistic cosmology was vehemently criticized. 93 With regard to the chenwei, the versatile scholar Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) wrote:

自周衰，禮樂壞于戰國而廢絕于秦，漢興，六經在者，皆錯亂、散亡、雜偽，而諸儒方共補緝，以意解詁，未得其真，而讖緯之書出以亂經矣。

Since the decline of the Zhou, Rites and Music deteriorated in the period of the Warring States and [their tradition] was abruptly interrupted under the Qin. When the Han rose, encountered in defending his calendar before the court, see Sivin (1986), 158-159. He has also been one of the greatest Chinese mathematicians thanks to his work on the value of π. Like Archimedes (287?-212), he identified an approximate value of 22/7. Later, he refined this figure to 3.1415929 and finally he fixed the value of π between 3.1415926 and 3.1415927. This last figure was not formulated in Europe until the sixteenth century by the French mathematician Francois Viète (1540-1603). In this regard, see Ho (1985), 76-77. For He Chengtian’s negative judgement on the apocrypha, see Songshu 12:231.

91 Liangshu 40:575.
92 In this regard, it is also important to stress that even Fan Ye did not hide his aversion to the chenwei by praising people like Huan Tan and Zheng Xing and by explicitly stating that they were not “classics”. See Hou Hanshu 82A:2705.
93 As Lamont has argued, the end of the Tang period saw the definitive crisis of Han holistic cosmology and, in particular, of the idea that Heaven showed its condemnation or approval of political action through calamitous events such as fires or astronomical phenomena like eclipses. In examining the ways in which these themes are treated within the monographs (zhì 志) of the dynastic histories, Lamont writes “[…] the losses suffered by this type of monograph in the Sui shu proved to be irreversible. […] None of the subsequent dynastic histories contained the amount of material on this subject included in pre-T’ang histories.” See Lamont (1973), 193-194. The American sinologist certainly grasps a very important facet of the development of Chinese culture. Yet, at least with regard to the Tang, one should notice that some themes of Han thought certainly survived. In this regard, see, for instance, Yisizhan 6:37 for a defence of the well-known “resonance” theory, according to which nature and man form two interdependent spheres.
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the extant [versions of the] six Classics were chaotic, disarrayed, and spurious. Nevertheless, scholars and technicians together mended them and with their understanding [wrote] explanations and glosses without grasping their true [meaning]. Finally, books as the apocrypha appeared and [definitively] confused the official canon.94

Ouyang Xiu’s radical rejection of the *chenwei* as part of the cultural heritage found several loyal followers who tended to regard these books as a sort of heresy, which could seriously undermine the comprehension of the canon. In a few cases, scholars who had used the apocrypha to comment on the classics were criticized as well. Liu Yan 刘炎, for instance, wrote:

或問六經讖緯之是非。曰：夫子不語怪力亂神。讖緯不足信明矣。用以釋經，是則漢儒之罪也。

One may ask about the correctness or faultiness of the apocrypha. I answer: Confucius did not speak of strange forces and chaotic spirits.95 Therefore, it is clear that the apocrypha should not be trusted. To use them in order to explain the classics has been the substantial error of Han scholars.96

Ouyang Xiu had brought the discussion to an end, at least from a formal point of view. While the wefts connected to the *Yijing* in some way managed to fascinate a few scholars, the apocryphal phenomenon in a wider sense fell into oblivion. The definitive success of Neo-Confucianism also played a key role in this process: the advent of a new way of approaching the classical canon soon led scholars to disregard alternative interpretative strategies. Consequently, the use of the *chenwei* became mainly an instrument for distinguishing the true meaning of the classics from the spurious additions of later epochs.

2.3 The scholarly world: quoting the *chenwei*

In spite of political persecution and scholarly condemnation, large sectors of the intellectual community saw in the apocryphal corpus a valuable source of information on several facets of China’s past. The influence of this aspect cannot be overestimated: the works of those scholars who continued to use the Han corpus form the basis which led to the gathering of apocryphal fragments in late imperial China. In this sense, a brief look into the *Choshu Isho Shusei* suffices for us to notice the quantity and diversity of

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94 禮樂壞于戰國而廢絕于秦 Ouyang Xiu is undoubtedly one of the most famous Chinese scholars. His genius has been acknowledged in several fields. As historian, we owe to him the composition of several important official chronicles, including the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New Book of the Tang] and the *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史 [New History of the Five Epochs]. For an analysis of his life and work, see Liu (1967).
95 See *Lunyu* 7.21.
96 *Eryan* 10:646.
sources which, in the post-Han period, systematically quoted from the apocrypha. Apart
from short treatises of the medieval age, the interpreter of the chenshu regularly finds
prestigious Tang commentaries on the classics as well as astrological handbooks or
Song encyclopaedias. These texts, usually referred to as “cover sources” in the
discourse on fragmentology, encompass the last textual traces of the Han corpus. It is
perhaps appropriate to consider first their permanence in the field of classical studies.

When in 638 emperor Taizong 太宗 (r. 627-650) of the Tang entrusted the most
eminent scholars of the time — Kong Yingda 孔颖達 (574-648) is perhaps the most
famous of them — with the project Wujing zhengyi 五經正義 [Correct Significance of
the Five Classics], his objective was to pass down to the posterity a standardized
version of the classics. Accordingly, the zhengyi -scholars were ordered to correct the
discrepant interpretations which emerged in the course of previous centuries. Despite
the political condemnation of private study of the apocrypha and by ignoring the
growing intellectual aversion to these texts, Kong Yingda systematically drew from the
chenwei in order to gloss classical excerpts. It follows that the collections of apocryphal
fragments extensively use the material taken from collections of commentaries like the
Zhouyi zhushu 周易注疏 [Collectanea of Commentaries on the Changes] or from the
Gongyang zhushu 公羊注疏 [Collectanea of Commentaries on the Gongyang
(Tradition)]. This tendency greatly diminished under the Song, in part because of the
advent of Neo-Confucianism and in part because of Ouyang Xiu’s appeal for avoiding
the use of the apocryphal texts in exegetical activities.

Even Tang commentaries on the dynastic chronicles testify the survival of the chenwei.
While Zhang Shoujie refused to use these texts for glossing the Shiji, Sima Zhen 司馬
貞 adopted a diametrically opposed strategy: his Shiji suoyin 史記索隱 [Expounding the
Hidden Meaning of the Record of a Historian] is a valuable source for tracing excerpts
and testimonia on the apocrypha. In writing an additional chapter to Sima Qian’s
masterpiece, Sima Zhen drew widely from the contents of the apocrypha: hence his
defence of these texts which, in his opinion, could not be totally expunged from the
cultural community (bu ke quan qi 不可全棄).100

97 In the discourse on fragmentary texts, the term “cover sources” is used to refer to the quoting texts.
The term, as well as the technical word “fragmentology”, was used in the congress on aspects and
problems of working with fragmentary texts, held in Heidelberg in 1995. In particular, see the
proceedings of the conference in Most (1997).

98 The zhengyi project was concluded in 641 and the revised texts were released in 653. According to
the official edict, it was intended to provide the scholarly world with a standard edition of the
classical canon. See Jiu Tangshu 4:71. For additional information on the zhengyi project, see
McMullen (1988), 73-84.

99 The term testimonia refers to the mentioning of a certain text without the introduction of proper
quotations. For the term “testimonia”, see Dionisotti (1997), 2.

100 See Zhao Mingzheng (2003), 126.
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On the basis of these few notes, we may assume that several Tang scholars regarded the apocrypha as useful working material, while large sectors of the academic community saw in them superstitious and heretical books. This tension grew stronger in the following centuries, in particular under the Song dynasty. In judging the ambiguous attitude of the Song scholars towards the apocrypha, for instance, Xu Xingwu 徐興無 aptly recalls that the Song intellectuals applied theories and doctrines of the apocrypha while formally condemning them. The Neo-Confucian ideology, for instance, certainly applied some exegetical theories traceable in the *Yiwei*. Even if the exegetical studies undoubtedly constitute an important area in which the apocrypha continued to play a small role, an analysis which aims to show the liveliness of these texts after the downfall of the Han cannot avoid mentioning works dealing with the calendar and astrology. These two disciplines may well exemplify the impressive vitality of sources repetitively condemned and proscribed. As we have already mentioned, the *chenwei* were used during the calendrical reforms of the first and second century AD. In the following centuries, these texts, already banned and proscribed under different rulers, exercised a remarkable fascination on scholars working in the field. Song Jingye 宋景業 of the Qi 齊, for instance, drafted a calendar by following the technical guidelines expounded in the apocrypha. Slightly later, then, Zhang Bin 張賓 of the Sui dynasty elaborated an almanac which was also consistent with the *Chunqiu-Minglixu* 春秋命曆序 [The Annals. The Sequence: Scheduling the Mandates].

As in the case of the calendar, astrologists continued to draw from the apocrypha despite the bans and proscriptions. In fact, texts focusing on the interpretation of heavenly phenomena, and especially those written under the Tang, constitute some of our most important cover sources. In all probability, private researchers compiled some of the texts which have been passed down to us: the *Tianwen yaolu* 天文要錄 [Essential Records of Astrology], written by the almost unknown Tang scholar Li Feng 李鳳, constitutes an apt example. Further works, on the contrary, were conceived and drafted at the centre of the astronomical activity of the empire: the *Yisizhan* 乙巳占 [Yisi Divination] by the famous astronomer Li Chunfeng 李淳風 and the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 [Divination Classic of the Kaiyuan Period] by the Indian monk Qutan Xida 瞿曇悉達 (Gautama Siddhārtha) are good examples. Both these cases are noteworthy because they signalise that the apocrypha were very much alive in the astrological field. This fact is much more worth of note since Li Chunfeng was surely one of the most

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101 Xu Xingwu (1992). Xu Xingwu aptly recalls the words of the Qing scholar Liao Pingceng 廖平曾 who wrote that the Song intellectuals used the apocrypha while refusing to explicitly mention them (yin yong qi shi er yang bi qi ming 隱用其實而陽避其名). See Xu Xingwu (1992), 135.

102 The calendar was called *Tianbaoli* 天保曆 [Calendrical System: The Protection of Heaven]. See *Suishu* 17:417, 17:426-430.
outstanding personalities of the seventh century.\textsuperscript{103} Even if the Tang astronomer prefers
to quote mainly from sources accredited by the tradition, such as the manuals of
divination attributed to early astrologers Shi Shen 石申 and Gan De 甘得,\textsuperscript{104} he certainly
acknowledges that the apocrypha are significant astrological sources.\textsuperscript{105}
In regard to the role played by the \textit{chenwei} in astrology, the case of Qutan Xida is still
more relevant: as chief of the Tang astronomical bureau between the end of the seventh
century and the beginning of the eighth, the Indian monk had access to the copies of the
Han prognostication books which were still available at the court. Unlike Li Chunfeng,
who showed a deep interest in canonical sources, Qutan Xida drew widely from the
\textit{chenwei}: his \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing} is among the most important sources for approaching
and better understanding the fragments of these texts.\textsuperscript{106}
A further group of scholars who actively worked with the apocrypha includes the
compilers of encyclopaedias (\textit{leishu 類書}). The \textit{Yuhai 玉海} [\textit{Sea of Jade}], for instance,
is a fairly rich repository of fragments. The \textit{Taiping yulan 太平御覽} [\textit{Imperial
Overview of the Taiping Era}] deserves a special mention since it is today one of the
most important cover sources.

\textsuperscript{103} Apparently, there is no doubt the Li Chunfeng wrote the \textit{Yisizhan}. Both the \textit{Jiu Tangshu} and the \textit{Xin Tangshu} quote the book in their bibliographical chapters and in Li Chunfeng’s biography. In this regard, see \textit{Jiu Tangshu} 47:2037; 79:2719; \textit{Xin Tangshu} 59:1544; 204:5798. The Tang astronomer has bound his name to an impressive chain of successes. In the historical field, we owe to him several technical treatises in the official medieval chronicles. In this regard, see \textit{Jiu Tangshu} 79:2718. From a scientific viewpoint, Li Chunfeng’s activity involved theoretical reflections on ancient books as well as the development of techniques and methods in astronomy. Therefore, he not only glossed and commented technical texts, but also managed to substitute the old armillary sphere with a new and better instrument. With regard to the armillary sphere, see \textit{Jiu Tangshu} 79:2717-2718, where the astronomer tries to convince the emperor that the old observational instrument was not good enough to keep in tune with the motion of heavenly bodies. The new instrument was finished in 633. For a detailed explanation of it, see Needham (1959), 343, 350. Moreover, in the second half of the seventh century, Li Chunfeng drafted a new calendar, the \textit{Linde li 麟德曆} \textit{(Calendrical System of the Virtue of the Unicorn)}, which had to be adopted as official time-keeping system in 664. On this almanac, see Needham (1959), 123-125. If considered among all these results, the drafting of the astrological text surely represents a minor aspect of Li Chunfeng’s career.

\textsuperscript{104} Li Chunfeng was well aware that several texts dealing with astrology passed down to the Tang could not be regarded as authoritative sources since they were often the work of private circles. The Tang astronomer explicitly states that there were forgeries among the many astrological schools: the inherited corpus was not trustworthy in its entirety (\textit{buke xicong 不可悉從}). See \textit{Yisizhan} 3:27.

\textsuperscript{105} Li Chunfeng’s (partial) acceptation of the apocrypha is testified also in the numerous excerpts and testimonia traceable in the treatise on astrology of the \textit{Jinshu}. See, for instance, \textit{Jinshu} 12:322.

\textsuperscript{106} The career of the monk was surely not as outstanding as the path followed by Li Chunfeng. Qutan Xida was certainly the most famous member of the Gautama clan, which attained a certain success in the astronomical work of the Tang dynasty. See Needham (1959), 202-203.
3. INVESTIGATING THE APOCRYPHA: THE MEDIEVAL ERA AND THE UNCERTAINTIES OF TANG SCHOLARSHIP

In this paragraph, we shall focus on the birth and development of a critical work on the chenwei. First, we will consider the scholarly way of analysing the apocrypha during the medieval age and underscore the work of the bibliographers. Second, we will turn to the Tang scholars and stress the uncertainties and contradictions in their analyses.

3.1 The medieval age and the classification of the apocrypha as technical books

3.1.1 Liu Xie

By drawing inspiration from people such as Huan Tan and Zhang Heng, several scholars endeavoured to interpret and explain the apocryphal phenomenon. In the medieval period, the main raison d'être for investigating the chenwei were legends and myths surrounding their origins. In his Wenxin diaolong 文心雕龍 [Mind of Literature and Carving of Dragon], Liu Xie rejects the apocrypha as revealed texts and writes:

昔康王河圖，陳於東序，故知前世符命，歷代寶傳，仲尼所撰，序錄而已。伎數之士，附以詭術，或說陰陽，或序災異，若鳥鳴似語，蟲葉成字，篇條滋蔓，必假孔氏，通儒討覈，謂偽起哀平。

The Diagram of the Yellow River of king Kang was placed in the Eastern Hall. For this reason, we know that it was the “mandate through the tallies” of former times which was treasured and passed down from generation to generation. The writings of Confucius were only prefaces and records [of the classics]. Scholars [working with diverse] techniques [wrote] appendices [to the Diagram of the Yellow River and to the classics] resorting to deceitful practices. Some of them spoke about yin and yang, whereas others scheduled calamities and anomalies. The twittering of birds resembled human language and the worms in the leaves completed characters. These writings, in spite of their disorder, were all attributed to Confucius. The research and the analysis of outstanding scholars have shown that they were forgeries that appeared between the reigns of emperor Ai and emperor Ping.\(^\text{107}\)

\(^{107}\) Wenxin diaolong 4:110-113. The complexity of the legends relating to the origins of the chenwei is well portrayed in the Wenxin diaolong, where Liu Xie succeeds in exploding several similar myths and highlighting the unsystematic way in which the legendary origins of these texts were presented. In particular, he listed and rejected four false notions (wei 備) in the common discourse on the relationship between chenwei and the classics. Liu Xie’s first point, for instance, is about the meaningless of regarding the apocrypha as a sort of completion of the jing. As a completion, in fact, the chenwei should be some sort of explanation and therefore their wordings should be clearer than those we find in the classics. This assumption, yet, clashes with the clarity of the official canon and the ambiguousness the apocrypha. The second argument advanced in the Wenxin diaolong concerned
A few details in Liu Xie’s arguments are well worthy of note. As we are told in the Han bibliography, the Master of Lu was believed to have written a few sections of the classical corpus of the *Yijing* and the foreword of the *Shujing*. In this way, technicians used these documents for their own interests by speaking about *yin/yang* theories or about calamities and anomalies. As far as the question of birth-time is concerned, Liu Xie concurs with Zhang Heng — called *tongru* in the text — and fixes the origin of the texts in the last decades BC. A further interesting and important detail is the use of *wei* to refer to the 81 chapters of the Han corpus, which suggests that Liu Xie was simply following Zheng Xuan’s tradition. This aspect may appear to be a trivial detail since it seems to be bound exclusively to the terminological portrayal defining the apocrypha. Yet, as we shall see, this marked the beginning of a long and heated controversy which was to deeply influence the destiny and nature of research on the apocrypha.

### 3.1.2 Medieval librarians and the apocrypha

Apart from Liu Xie’s remarks, the medieval era is interesting from a further perspective. As we know from several references in the chronicles, a few scholars of the time worked on the classification and cataloguing of books conserved at the imperial libraries. Unfortunately, most of these bibliographies were lost quite early and only short summaries and excerpts from the generic index (*mulu* 目録) are still traceable in works of the time or in later sources. In regard to the *chenwei*, two names are of interest:

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108 The bibliography of *Hanshu* attributes to Confucius ten chapters of the *Yi* canon and precisely the sections *Tuan* 象, *Xiang* 象, *Xici* 繫辭, *Wenyuan* 文言, and the *Xugua* 序卦. See *Hanshu* 30:1704. In regard to the *Shujing*, the bibliography of the *Hanshu* explicitly says that Confucius wrote the foreword (*wei zhi xu* 為之序). See *Hanshu* 30:1706.

109 *Chen*, on the contrary, is used only three times in the chapter: the first is for referring to the appendices of the *Lunyu*, the second for speaking about the apocrypha as prophecies of the talismans (*fuchen*), and the third for hinting at a Later Han re-elaboration of the ritual canon carried on by following the apocrypha scripts. See *Wenxin diaolong* 4:99; 4:103; 4:118.
the first is the already mentioned Ruan Xiaoxu, who lived between the fifth and sixth century and wrote the *Qilu* 七錄 [*Records of the Seven (Categories)*]; the second is Wang Jian 王儉, a Song scholar who compiled the catalogue *Qi zhi* 七志 [*Seven Treatises*].

The *Qilu* had a specific heading for the apocrypha (weiwenbu 緯讖部) under the section “Techniques” (shujilu 術伎録); specifically, the chenwei were listed between the astrological (*Tianwenbu* 天文部) and the calendrical (*lisuanbu* 歷算部) subsections.\(^{110}\) Wang Jian followed a similar path, since he classified the chenwei under the heading “yin/yang”, which corresponds to Ruan Xiaoxu’s *shuji* or to what Liu Xiang called “computational techniques” (*shushu* 數術) in his well-known catalogue of the Han imperial library.\(^{111}\) In conclusion, it is clear that medieval bibliographers classified the apocrypha as technical books dealing with disciplines like astrology and calendar.

3.2 The uncertainties and anachronisms of Tang scholarship

3.2.1 Li Xian

Under the Tang, the commentator of the *Hou Hanshu* Li Xian 李賢 tried to reconstruct the group of the 36 Han wefts. The following table presents his list, which, for unknown reasons, includes “only” 35 titles.\(^{112}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIC</th>
<th>WEFTS</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Jilantu</em> 稽覽圖</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Qianzaodu</em> 乾鑿度</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Kunlingtu</em> 坤靈圖</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Tongguayan</em> 通卦驗</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Shileimou</em> 是類謀</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Bianzhongbei</em> 辨終備</td>
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<td><strong>Yijing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Xuanqijian</em> 環機鈐</td>
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<td><em>Kaolingyao</em> 考靈曜</td>
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<td><em>Xingdefang</em> 刑德放</td>
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<td><em>Dimingyan</em> 帝命驗</td>
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<td><em>Yunqishou</em> 運期授</td>
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\(^{110}\) In regard to Ruan Xiaoxu’s *Qilu*, see *Suishu* 32:907.

\(^{111}\) For Wang Jian’s cataloguing of the chenwei, see *Guang Hongmingji* 3:17a, *Suishu* 32:906-907. For yin/yang as category substituting the traditional shushu heading, see *Guang Hongmingji* 3:10b. Here, the author explicitly says: “Computational techniques [of Liu Xiang’s bibliography] correspond to the yin/yang [group]” (*shushu wei yin/yang 數術為陰陽*). For Liu Xiang’s and Liu Xin’s catalogue, see *Hanshu* 30:1701-1784.

\(^{112}\) *Hou Hanshu* 82A: 2721-2722.
In 1994, Zhong Zhaopeng tried to complete Li Xian’s list and convincingly spoke of the *Minglixu* 命曆序 [The Order: The Scheduling the Mandates] as the missing 36th text. The hints given by the Tang commentator are certainly useful and valuable. In fact, the catalogue has been regularly accepted as a mirror reflecting the corpus of the wefts under the Han. Yet, in all probability, what we have here is an attempt at reconstruction since Li Xian certainly had rather confused idea about the Han apocryphal phenomenon. As the table above highlights, Li Xian did not include the texts linked to the *Analects* among the *wei* while incorporating, on the contrary, the books affiliated to the *Xiaojing*. Yet, in a brief comment to the expression *qi jingchen*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLASSIC</th>
<th>WEFTS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shijing</td>
<td><em>Tuiduzai</em> 推度災</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Fanlishu</em> 沈歷樞</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Hanshenwu</em> 含神霧</td>
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<td>Liji</td>
<td><em>Hanwenjia</em> 含文嘉</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Jimingzheng</em> 穂命徵</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Douweiyi</em> 斗威儀</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xiaojing</td>
<td><em>Yuanshenqi</em> 援神契</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Goumingjue</em> 鉤命訣</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yuejing</td>
<td><em>Dongshengyi</em> 動聲儀</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Jiyaojia</em> 稽耀嘉</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Xietuzheng</em> 叶圖徵</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chunqiu</td>
<td><em>Yankongtu</em> 演孔圖</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Yuannimgbao</em> 元命苞</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Wenhaogou</em> 文耀鈞</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Yundoushu</em> 運斗樞</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Shuotici</em> 說題辭</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Ganjingfu</em> 感精符</td>
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<td><em>Hechengtu</em> 合誠圖</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Kaoyiyou</em> 考異郵</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Baoqiantu</em> 保乾圖</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Hanhanzi</em> 漢含孳</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Youzhuqi</em> 佑助期</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Wochengtu</em> 握誠圖</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Qiantanba</em> 雳潭巴</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

113 Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 59-60.
114 Similar tabular representations may be found in several modern researches on the apocrypha. See, for instance, Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 35.
Chapter One. A review of the apocryphal phenomenon through history

The commentator writes that the corpus of the *jingchen* encompassed the *Lunyu*. In view of this contradiction, it is surely safer to consider Li Xian’s list of the wefts a hypothetical reconstruction of the Han corpus.

Li Xian’s arguments hinge on his belief in the existence of seven kinds of wefts, a phenomenon which in the *Hou Hanshu* is summarized by *qi jingchen* or *qi wei*. A brief look into the dynastic chronicle reveals that binomials such as *qi wei* or *qi jingchen* were used by medieval historians and never by Han scholars. Accordingly, as we shall see in detail elsewhere, early sources testify that there were eight categories of texts attached to canonical works: *Yijing*, *Shujing*, *Liji*, *Yuejing*, *Shijing*, *Xiaojing*, *Lunyu*, and *Chunqiu*. In this way, the use of “seven wefts” as referring to the Han *chenwei* should be regarded as anachronistic.

3.2.2  Wei Zheng

A further description of the Han corpus is traceable in the bibliographic treatise of the *Suishu*, where the historian Wei Zheng clearly contradicts Li Xian and states that the apocryphal corpus of the Han had actually a more complex structure:

The Changes say: “The Yellow River disclosed a Diagram and the Luo River brought forth a script.” When this happens, [this means that] a sage has received the Mandate. [...] Diagrams and Scripts emerged from the Yellow and from the Luo in the mouth of a...

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115 *Hou Hanshu* 35:1196. In a further passage of his commentary, Liu Xian also maintains that the wefts to the *Chunqiu* encompassed 12 chapters (*Kongzi zuo Chunqiu wei shier pian*孔子作春秋緯十二篇). If we do not regard “twelve” as a textual mistake, we are once again faced with a contradiction. The table above, in fact, lists 13 titles as weft of the *Annals*. See *Hou Hanshu* 67:2201.

116 *Hou Hanshu* 35:1196; 82A:2721. It is also interesting to notice that binomials like “seven classics” (*qi jing*七經) appear only towards the end of the Later Han dynasty. See *Sanguozhi* 38:973. Since it is not safe to assume that Han scholars spoke about “seven classics”, the hypothesis concerning the existence of “seven wefts” appears to be quite implausible.

117 The uncertainties of Tang scholarship in dealing with the *chenwei* emerge also in Li Shan 李善’s commentary to the medieval anthology *Wenxuan* 文選 [Literary Anthology]. First, he suggests that the prognostication books (*chenshu*) are the books related to the Yellow and Luo River (*He Luo suo chu shu yue chen*河洛所出書曰讖). *Wenxuan zhu* 13:21B; Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 2. Yet, in a further gloss, Li Shan maintains that all the *wei* connected to the Five Classics have to be regarded as Diagrams of the Yellow River (*wu jingwei jie Hetu ye*五經緯皆河圖也). See *Wenxuan zhu* 1A:6A.

turtle and on the back of a dragon, so as to record the evidence of the changing eras. Their principles were cryptic and exhausted the Way of the spirits. The rulers of the past feared that they could confuse the people. [For this reason], they hid them without passing them down. Those who speak [about the matter] also said that Confucius had already fixed the six classics in order to enlighten the Way of Heaven and of man, when he realized that the future generations would not have been able to grasp his meaning. Therefore, he separated and established the wefts and the prognostication books to pass them down to posterity. [Actually] these books appeared during the Former Han. The *Hetu* had nine chapters and the *Luoshu* six. They are said to be the texts received from the sages from Huangdi up to King Wen of Zhou. Moreover, there are also thirty additional chapters and they are said to be what the nine sages from the beginning up to Confucius added and illustrated in order to explain their meaning. There are also the wefts in thirty-six chapters. And they too are supposed to be what Confucius wrote. All together, they number 81 chapters.

Wei Zheng’s description of the legendary origins of the apocrypha is perhaps one of the most precise accounts in this regard. According to the excerpt above, then, the apocryphal corpus in 81 chapters was divided into three sections. First, there is the *Hetu/Luoshu* section, namely the celestial gifts for the great sovereigns of the Chinese past. The second part encompasses thirty *pian* which were said to have been written by the sages of the past; the final section includes the appendices to the classics which were allegedly written by Confucius in order to elucidate the mysteries embodied in the classical canon. At this point, it is important to underscore the arbitrariness of Wei Zheng’s reconstruction. As maintained in the *Wenxin diaolong*, all of 81 chapters of the corpus were formally attributed to Confucius. Thus, Wei Zheng’s account should be regarded more as a late attempt to systematise the legends surrounding the origins of the chenwei than as a mirror reflecting the opinions of the Han scholars.

Wei Zheng’s uncertainties in dealing with the Han chenwei are also reflected in the following excerpt:

> 而又有尚書中候、洛罪級、五行傳、詩推度災、汜曆樞、含神務、孝經勾命決、援神契、雜讖等書。今錄其見存,列于六經之下,以備異說。

Moreover there are still books like the [appendices to] the *Documents: the Forewarning of the Middle (Rising)*, the *Levels of the Crimes of the Luo*, and the *Lore of the Five Agents*. [There are appendices to] the *Odes* [such as] *Predicting Calamities*, *The Pivot: Schedule of Floods*, *The Fog: Encompassing the Spirits*. [There are appendices to] the *Classic of Filial Piety* [such as] *The Recipe: Hooking the Mandate*, the *Talisman: Quoting the Spirits*. [Finally, there are] miscellaneous prognostications. Now, I shall

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119 Usually, expression *jiu sheng, nine sages*, refers to Fuxi, Shennong, Huangdi; Yao, Shun, Yu, king Wen of Zhou and Confucius himself. In this regard, see *Suishu* 32:940-941.

120 On this excerpt, see also Kaltenmark (1947), 364; Lippiello (1997), 195.
record [here] those (i.e. the texts) still extant and arrange them under the heading of the six classics so as to complete the heretical discourse [about the canon].

Evidently, the titles above were not regarded as belonging to the original canon but rather were texts developed outside of the Han *chenwei* corpus. A few details, however, inform us that Wei Zheng, like Li Xian, had a quite confused idea about the composition of the Han corpus: among the texts mentioned above, in fact, are books explicitly qualified as *tuchen* under the Han. As we shall see, this is true of the *Mingliu*, of the *Zhonghou*, of the appendices to the *Xiaojing* and to the *Shijing*. A further interesting detail is the inclusion of the *Wuxingzuan*, which is usually regarded as extraneous to the apocryphal tradition. In conclusion, it is evident that Wei Zheng was simply trying to give a partial systematisation of the canon, aware that a clear solution of the problem was far beyond reach.

3.3 The uncertainties of Tang scholarship and the classification of the apocrypha as exegetical studies

The above comments have hopefully shown that the Tang scholars were at pains to reconstruct the Han apocryphal corpus. First, the gradual disappearance of the apocrypha and, second, the appearance of new prophetic books similar to the Han *chenwei* must have reduced the possibilities of access to the original canon. Thus, it is probable that Tang scholars did not know exactly which apocryphal texts belonged to the 81 chapters released in AD 56. A few hints from the Liang catalogue conserved in the commentary on the *Suishu* are extremely helpful in understanding the complexity of the problem faced by the Tang scholars. As we have already mentioned, this bibliographic treatise, now sadly lost, listed numerous works considered to be *chenwei*. Most of the texts, however, are to be regarded as pseudo-apocrypha: even works such as the already mentioned *Liu Xiang chen* should obviously be considered as a generic prognostication book developed outside of the Han apocryphal corpus. From this perspective, it is safe to assume that even as early as the Tang the reconstruction of the original canon was an unrealistic task. We may now perhaps better understand why Wei Zheng maintained that “there is no possibility of restoring the (apocryphal) teaching (*wu fu qi xue* 無復其學)”.

Apart from these considerations, there is another point which deserves to be emphasized. As noted in the preceding pages, the apocrypha were regarded as technical books during the medieval era. From this perspective, Wei Zheng’s listing of the *chenwei* under the heading classic is a break with tradition. As we shall see, this was to considerably

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121 *Suishu* 32:941.

influence later researchers.

4. INVESTIGATING THE APOCRYPHA IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

The role that Ming and Qing scholarship have played in investigating the apocrypha cannot be overestimated. From the beginning of the Ming, several scholars have tried to elaborate a better description of the features and development of the *chenwei* corpus. Two themes, in particular, were the subject of a heated debate: the alleged difference between prognostication books (*chenshu*) and wefts (*weishu*) and the origins of the apocrypha. As we will often stress, the opinion of Ming and Qing scholars has deeply influenced all research dealing with the apocrypha in the modern Chinese-speaking academic world.

4.1 Late Imperial scholarship and the *chen/wei* controversy

The Tang analyses of the apocrypha generated a long lasting scholarly controversy. In particular, Wei Zheng’s classification of the apocrypha as exegetical studies was to assign to the wefts a very particular role within the corpus. In this way, the tendency to interpret the binomial *chenwei* in terms of a generic label encompassing books belonging to different cultural phenomena slowly emerged. Below the words of the well-known Ming scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551-1602):

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世率以讖緯並論二書，雖相表裏而實不同。緯之名所以配經。故自六經語孝而外無復別出。河圗洛書等緯皆易也。讖之依附六經者，但論語有讖八卷，餘不槩見，以為僅此一種偶間經籍志注附見十餘家乃知。【…】
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Usually the scholars speak about two [categories of] texts — prognostication [books] and wefts — as one. Even though they [often] intersect, they are substantially different. The term “weft” is [only for the books] which are attached to the classics. Therefore, apart from [the text attached to] the six classics, the *Analects*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety* there is no further [appendix]. Wefts such as [those named after the] *Diagram of the Yellow River* and the *Script of the Luo River* belong to the [group of books associated with] the *Changes*. As to the prognostication [texts] that rely on the six classics, only the *Analects* have eight scrolls of prognostication [books]: the remaining are no longer extant. I believe that only this belongs to this kind. I realized it when I fortuitously came across the ten schools that are mentioned in the explanatory supplements of the *Bibliographical Treatise of the Book of the Sui*. […]

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123 *Jingyikao* 298:8A.
Chapter One. A review of the apocryphal phenomenon through history

The Ming scholar focuses on terminology and defines the *wei* as the apocryphal texts linked to the classics. Moreover, he classifies the *Hetu/Luoshu* texts as wefts associated with the *Yijing*. Therefore, in Hu Yinglin’s opinion, appendices to the classics and the *Hetu/Luoshu* books clearly belonged to the same cultural phenomenon. As to the *chen* texts, the Ming scholar suggests that they were already lost, with the exception of the Lunyu chen. Some of them were listed in the commentary on the bibliographic treatise of the *Suishu*: the above-mentioned *Liu Xiang chen* is a case in point.\(^{124}\)

A slightly different opinion was expressed by Sun Jue 孫穎, a practically unknown Ming scholar who compiled the first collection of the apocryphal fragments:

> 今讀其文大類讖詞，豈河圖主緯，洛主讖耶？
> Nowadays, their phrasing (i.e. of the books named after the Script of the Luo River) mostly belongs to the category “prophetic statements”. Might it be that [the texts named after] the Diagram of the Yellow River head up the wefts and [the texts named after] the Script of the Luo River head up the prognostications [books]?\(^{125}\)

Thus, according to Sun Jue, the Diagrams should be regarded as wefts, whereas the Scripts are better classed under the heading *chen*.

The official solution to the scholarly uncertainties arrived as late as 1781. In the famous bibliographic notes of the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 [Complete Collection of the Four Treasuries], a clear judgement was finally pronounced.

> 儒者多稱讖緯，其實讖自讖，緯自緯，非一類也。讖者，詭為 隱語，預決吉凶，【…】緯者，經文支流，衍及闕義【…】
> Today, the scholars often speak about prognostication books and wefts. In reality, the prognostication books belong to the prognostication books and the wefts belong to the wefts. They do not belong to the same category. The prognostication [books] are deceitful and construct riddles in order to predict fortune and misfortune. […] The wefts are the branches of the classics: By [first] flowing [alongside the classics] and [then] departing [from them], they develop their side-meaning.\(^{126}\)

The arguments presented in the bibliographic notes to the *Siku quanshu* are undoubtedly complex and need to be reviewed carefully. First, we know that for the compilers of the Qing collectanea the binomial expression *chenwei* was used inaccurately since *chen* and *wei* denote two different cultural phenomena. Consequently, the *chen* are books of prophecies and the wefts are works which develop some marginal theories of the classics. More precisely, the *Siku* scholars understood *chen* in two different ways. First,

\(^{124}\) See the commentary in *Suishu* 32:940.

\(^{125}\) See *Gu weishu* 35 in *Weishu jicheng*, vol. I, 375.

\(^{126}\) *Siku quanshu zongmu* 6:47.
the *Hetu/Luoshu* books were *chen*: the *Hetu-Chifufu* is explicitly labelled *tuchen*.\(^{127}\)

Second, it is probable that the *Siku*-scholars used the term *chen* to refer to the prophetic layer traceable in the apocrypha. The texts attached to the *Odes*, for instance, are called both *Shiwei* and *Shichen*.\(^{128}\) What apparently the Qing scholars left aside was the dynamism of the apocryphal corpus: differently from Hu Yinglin, they did not consider the possibility that some texts developed *outside* of the Han *chenwei* canon. They preferred to follow an improbable thematic distinction, neglecting the fact that, under the Han, even the texts named after the classics were called *chen*.

How did the Qing scholars interpret the guidelines expounded in the *Siku quanshu*? Most of them, obviously, accepted the dogma of differentiating several strata within the Han apocryphal corpus. Yet, on the meaning of *chen* opinions differed widely. Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735-1815), for instance, explicitly wrote in his commentary on the *Shuowen jiezi* that the term *chen* denotes the *Hetu/Luoshu* books.\(^{129}\) The famous scholar Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1849) opted for a more cautious approach:

> 《七緯》之外復有候、有圖，最下而及于讖，而經訓愈漓。不知緯自緯，讖自讖，不得以讖病緯也。

Outside of the seven wefts, there are the “talismans” and “diagrams”. At the lowest level, there are generic prognostication books: yet, the explanations of the classics and the commentators used them as well. People do not know that the wefts belong to the wefts and the prognostications belong to the prognostications. It is not acceptable to contaminate the wefts with the prognostications.\(^{130}\)

Ruan Yuan’s consideration of the categories outside the wefts was evidently much more complex than the notion put forward in the bibliography of the *Siku quanshu*. The space between *chen* and *wei*, which are at the two extremes of a hypothetical scale, is occupied by the books having in the title terms as “Diagram” and “Forewarning”, namely the texts associated with the Diagram of the Yellow River and those called “Forewarning” (*Zhonghou*).

One of the scholars who dared to challenge the fashionable tendency of distinguishing the wefts from the *chen* was Xu Yangyuan 徐養原, who said that the expressions *chen*, *tu*, and *wei* had to be regarded as synonyms (*tongshi yiming* 同實異名).\(^{131}\) Yet, as the remarks above have tried to explain, Ming and Qing researchers largely agreed on the coexistence of different cultural phenomena under the generic term *chenwei*. The *Siku*

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\(^{127}\) *Siku quanshu zongmu* 137:1164; 143:1215.

\(^{128}\) *Siku quanshu zongmu* 186:1686; 149:1281;197:1804.

\(^{129}\) *Shuowen jiezi* 90B. Some researchers take Duan Yucai’s viewpoint as trustworthy. See for instance, Wang Keqi (1994), 48.

\(^{130}\) See Ruan Yuan as quoted in Zhong Zhaopeng (1992), 4.

\(^{131}\) *Weihou bu qi yu Ai Ping bian*, page 347.
scholars have been particularly explicit in pointing at the need to bisect the apocryphal corpus. In their opinion, the prognostication books cannot be considered together with the exegetical studies. The criterion behind this distinction essentially is thematic: the prognostication books speak about prophecies and the wefts deal with exegetical subjects. This over-generalization soon led to the formulation of questionable theories which, as we shall see, continue to play a role in contemporary scholarship. Duan Yucai’s distinction between the books named after the classics and the texts having “Diagram” or “Script” in the title is a case in point. Here it is perhaps useful to recall that both the appendices and Diagrams/Scripts were called chen under the Han: thus, we are not allowed to bisect the corpus.

The late imperial chen/wei controversy would have made sense if the scholars had considered issues such as the origins of the single texts, regardless of their formal association. It would have made sense if they had reflected on the possibility that not all the books named after the classics were originally conceived as exegetical studies. It would have made sense, if they had pondered on the dynamism of the corpus. As we shall discuss later, the emphasis on the exegetical layer and the appendices to the classics as well as the accent on the prophetic stratum and the prognostication books have certainly contributed to seriously confuse the scholarly work on the chenwei.

4.2 Late Imperial scholarship and the problem of the origins

Several late imperial scholars discussed the origins of the Han apocryphal phenomenon. For the aims of the present study, two approaches — the thematic and the philological — are interesting. The scholars who adopted the first strategy used the contents of the apocrypha in order to connect them to specific tendencies of Chinese culture. The researchers who opted for the philological approach focused on the similarities between the wordings of the chenwei and the phrasing of other sources.

The Ming scholar Zhang Jiushao 張九韶 applied the thematic strategy and concluded that the first example of tuchen was the short text submitted by the magician Lu Sheng:

【…】始皇時，方士盧生入海還奏録圖書，曰：「亡秦者，胡也。」此其圖讖之所始乎。

Under [Qin] Shi Huangdi, the magician Lu Sheng penetrated in the sea and brought back a transcribed Diagram and Script which said: “What will bring the Qin to ruin will be Hu.” This is the starting point of the prognostication books [named after] the Diagram [of the Yellow River].

132 Shuowen jiezi 90B.
133 See Jingyikao 298:7A-7B.
The possibility of pushing the drafting of the *chenwei* back in time fascinated Qing scholars. Liu Tongxun (1699-1773) advanced one of the most interesting hypotheses. Recognizing the importance of the “five agents” framework within the fragments, he concluded that the Warring States books which addressed similar cosmological themes should be considered as forbears of the *chenwei* (*chenwei suo zushuo* 論緯所祖說).134

The Ming scholar Huang Bingshi 黃秉石 chose a different approach to the issue:

【…】謂起于哀平之世，然公孫卿稱黃帝鼎書其作俑者也。《史記天官書》曰：「雖有明天子，必視熒惑。」所在《注》言：「春秋文曜鉤有此語是」則讖緯之說久矣。

[...] People say that [the apocrypha] rose during the reigns of emperor Ai and Emperor Ping. [Yet,] the Tripod-Script of the Yellow Emperor [submitted by] Gongsun Qing is the starting point of this bad practice. The *Book on Astrology* in the *Records of a Historian* says: “Even under an enlightened son of Heaven, it is necessary to look at Mars”. The commentary adds: “The (Weft of the) Annals-The Hook: Luminaries and Patterns has the same wording.” Therefore, the themes of the apocrypha are extremely old!135

Huang Bingshi’s point of view is noteworthy. First, he mentions a historical fact happened at Wudi’s court: Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 was in fact the magician who submitted a brief document which had apparently been dictated by Huangdi. This should then be regarded as the starting point of the apocryphal phenomenon. Huang Bingshi finds a proof for his theory in a sentence of the *Shiji* which is presented as a quotation from the apocryphal text *Chunqiu-Wenyaogou*.136

The last word on the question was once again pronounced during the work on the compilation of the *Siku quanshu*. The *Siku* scholars took Lu Sheng’s *lutu* to be the starting point of the *chen* literary genre. Accordingly, the wefts were regarded as exegetical studies written by Qin and Early Han scholars who also resorted to technical material (*shushu* 術數) or political prophecies. This is the main reason for the merging of *chen* scripts and wefts. Even textual arguments were used to demonstrate the validity of this line of reasoning. According to the *Siku* scholars, a few early Han documents clearly “quote” from the apocrypha. Sima Qian, for instance, mentions the *Changes* as saying “When a centimetre is missed, 1000 li have been skipped (shī zhī huá lì chā zhī qiān lǐ 失之毫釐，差之千里)”. Since the *Yijing*, as passed down to the Qing, did not contain such wording, this expression was interpreted by the *Siku*-scholars as a

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134 *Pinjian chanyao* 1.

135 *Jingyikao* 298:9B. For the quotation from the Han chronicle, see *Shiji* 27:1347. This sentence is introduced by the introductory formula “therefore, it is said” (*gu yue* 故曰). The Tang commentary explains that this *gu yue* actually refers to the *Chunqiu-Wenyaogou*. See *Shiji* 27:1348. For Gongsun Qing’s document, see *Shiji* 12:467-468.

136 For Gongsun Qing’s document, see *Shiji* and commentary in 12:467-468.
The excerpt above highlights that Jin E took a thematic similarity between Zou Yan’s...
famous doctrines on geography and the apocryphal text known as Kuodixiang as the basis for dating the latter back to the Warring States period.

5. COLLECTING THE APOCRYPHA IN LATE IMPERIAL CHINA

Contemporary interpreters of the apocryphal phenomenon owe much to the efforts of Ming and Qing scholars to gather, edit, and publish collections of the apocryphal fragments. Any research striving to portray the chenwei phenomenon must necessarily devote attention to this issue.

How does a collection of fragments come into existence? According to Dionisotti, the process of reconstructing fragmentary texts can only begin when there is certainty that the book in question has actually been lost and when there are plenty of quotations in the secondary sources. In trying to adapt these reflections to the case of the apocrypha, it is perhaps useful to recall that the academic world was well aware of the disappearance of the chenwei. As we have seen, Wei Zheng, writing at the beginning of the Tang, excluded the possibility of restoring the apocryphal tradition. As for quotations, textual evidence of the chenwei abounds in Chinese texts. Accordingly, we can assume that the conditions suggested by Dionisotti were fully satisfied by the time of Song rule: theoretically, the collecting of the apocryphal fragments could effectively have begun in this period. Yet, several more centuries passed before Chinese scholars finally took the initiative. The development of scholarly interest for the collection of the chenwei fragments, in fact, is linked to two further factors. First, the cultural circles had to be more or less confident in the possibility of reconstructing philologically lost texts. From this perspective, the history of the hunt for the apocryphal fragments must necessarily be regarded as an integral part of the history of Chinese philology and, in particular, of that branch of philology devoted to fragmentary texts. A second important point is the low prestige of the chenwei: besides facing the damages of history, the collector of apocryphal fragments also had to contend with the disapproval of their fellow-scholars. The gathering of the chenwei could begin only when academic circles were finally prepared to accept unofficial and heterodox ways of conceiving culture.

5.1 The path towards the first collections of apocryphal fragments

The Chinese world has always faced the threat of a vanishing cultural past. From the dawn of the imperial era onwards, rulers and scholars have tried to halt the

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140 Dionisotti (1997), 2.
impoverishment of the central libraries. The methods they initially turned to were mainly of a practical nature: each time a scholar raised the problem, the ruler released an imperial edict to launch a massive search for books. This happened for example towards the end of the first century BC, when emperor Cheng of the Former Han dynasty ordered an empire-wide search for lost texts (qiu yishu yu tianxia 求遺書於天下). Later, such operations became quite frequent. From the Han up to the Qing, the histories document several attempts to trace lost books. In the twelfth century, then, the famous Song scholar Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1108-1166) recognised the need to conceive alternative methods of saving parts of the cultural legacy. In his Tongzhi 通治 [Comprehensive (Treatise of) Politics and Regulations], he aptly underscored that some books which were deemed lost were actually still extant (shu you Ming wang shi bu wang 書有名亡實不亡). Even though Zheng Qiao did not portray a completely new strategy for the salvaging of books, he was undoubtedly the first to consider the possibility of looking into available sources in order to trace excerpts of vanished works. By suggesting that the San li mulu 三禮目錄 [Catalogue of the Three (Traditions) of Rites] could be reconstructed by looking into the corpus of the Rites, Zheng Qiao was trying to shift the attention of his colleagues from the whole lost book to the last textual evidence of it.

The first step towards a new strategy was undoubtedly important; yet, an additional problem still needed to be considered. Did all lost books warrant such painstaking work? This issue was probably resolved under the Ming. As Wagner has stressed, the opposition to the intellectual dictatorship of Neoconfucianism led many Ming scholars to develop a deep interest in an alternative cultural tradition. This interest, in turn, was mainly responsible for the study of exegetical works written before the aftermath of neoconfucianism and for the philological effort to recover such scripts. This, however, remained a marginal occupation of the Ming scholars. In this context, the intellectual who changed the destiny of Chinese philology is Wang Yinglin 王應麟 (1223-1296), who, in Wagner’s opinion, must be regarded as the first collector of fragments in China. From this perspective, the value of Wang Yinglin’s work assumes two dimensions. First,

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141 See Hanshu 10:310; 30:1701; 57B:2600.
142 See, for instance, Beishi 72:2493; Suishu 1:19; Songshi 30:559; Mingshi 1:14.
144 Actually, Zheng Qiao and his work should be considered as a meeting point between the traditional searches for lost books and the new emerging philological strategy. That Zheng Qiao does not provide a completely new approach to the salvaging of lost texts is evident in the discussion on the methods for finding books (qiu shu zhi dao 求書之道). The Song scholar in fact suggests which strategies should be followed in order to find lost texts. When searching for books dealing with astrology and calendars, for instance, one should first look for them within the Imperial Observatory. The last chance was to look for them in the private collections of commoners dealing with these disciplines. See Tongzhi 71:832—833.
he proves the feasibility of Zheng Qiao’s suggestions. Second, he implicitly encourages his contemporaries to rehabilitate ancient works which did not enjoy the approval of official scholarship. The decision to collect Zheng Xuan’s commentaries, which were regarded as unorthodox works, is particularly indicative of a need to recover also “heretical” texts. This is a very important aspect in regard to the collecting of the apocryphal fragments. We may even say that Wang Yinglin’s philological activity actually opens the door to the possibility of rescuing the apocrypha from irreversible extinction. As in the case of Zheng Xuan’s work, the chenwei were considered heretical books but unlike Zheng Xuan’s writing, the apocrypha had been repeatedly banned and burnt. Moreover, it is interesting to recall that Wang Yinglin began his philological work in the decades between the downfall of the Song and the arrival of the Mongols, when he retired to private life. If such a great scholar decided to face the despised aspect of the tradition, only after leaving the echelons of power, the collections of apocryphal fragments were obviously destined to wait a little longer. The bans that had been imposed on them under the Yuan dynasty certainly did not contribute to calming down the general intellectual situation. However, by the last decades of the Yuan rule, the situation was almost ripe.

The first attempt to save at least some fragments of the apocryphal texts was undertaken between the end of the Yuan 元 dynasty and the beginning of the Ming rule. It was at this time that the outstanding scholar Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1316-1403) compiled his famous Shuofu 說郛 [The Outer City of the Discourses], a work known as repository of lost texts. Even if the apocryphal material gathered in the Shuofu is extremely scarce, this work is a milestone in the history of the gathering of apocryphal fragments. The eminent Ming scholar was the first to approach the apocrypha from a new viewpoint and to regard them as lost works which deserved their place within a collection of forgotten texts. Moreover, Tao Zongyi’s effort did not remain solitary for long: at the end of the Ming, Sun Jue 孫穀 drafted his now partially lost Gu weishu 古微書 [Secret Books from the Past]. This largely uncelebrated intellectual, who possibly lived at the time of emperor Xiaozong 孝宗 (r. 1488-1505), is remembered mainly for his attempt to collect the scattered quotations of the apocryphal texts. Even though the biggest part of the Gu weishu disappeared quite early, the surviving foreword tells reader that the main intent of the Ming scholar was to collect all lost texts which did not enjoy the

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146 Wagner (1997), 38.
147 Tao Zongyi, for instance, catalogues 10 titles under the wefts of the Annals, whereas the Choshu isho shusei lists 17 titles. The case of the Hetu is clearer, since the texts identifiable as Hetu are only six for the Yuan scholar and forty-one for the Japanese. This aspect reflects the general tendency, given that the Shuofu contains thirty-five titles of lost apocryphal books, a number that will greatly increase in the collections compiled in the following centuries. See the index of the Shuofu in Weishu jicheng vol. I, 1-2.
Chapter One. A review of the apocryphal phenomenon through history

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Sun Jue was convinced of the historical value of each ancient work; only in this way could the veil of mystery that surrounded many aspects of ancient China be finally lifted. Su Jue’s realization that the fragmentary evidence of the past could no longer be ignored converges with a deep interest in the Han writings which extended to the chenwei. The 36 chapters he devoted to this lost literary corpus encompass 91 titles. The main features of Sun Jue’s work are illustrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shangshuwei — Wefts of the Documents</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chunqiuwei — Wefts of the Annals</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yiwei — Wefts of the Changes</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liwei — Wefts of the Rites</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuewei — Wefts of the Music</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiwei — Wefts of the Odes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunyuchen — Prognostications of the Analects</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaojingwei — Wefts of the Classic of Filial Piety</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hetu — Diagrams of the Yellow River</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luoshu — Scripts of the Luo River</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apocryphal texts listed and included in the Gu weishu: 91

Judged from our modern viewpoint, the Gu weishu does not count as one of the best anthologies. Its most serious weakness is the scarcity of gathered material since the Ming scholar avails himself of only few cover sources. Besides historical material, taken mostly from the dynastic chronicles, we only find quotations from some

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148 The work was originally divided into four main sections. The first part was called “banned secrets” (fan wei 樣微) and collected all the lost words prior to the Qin dynasty, whereas the “burnt secrets” (xian wei 緊微) section was dedicated to the lost texts of the Han and of the Jin dynasty. The third part, the “deficient secrets” (que wei 靜微) assembled words from very ancient texts and the fourth, aptly called “proscribed secrets” (shan wei 刪微), gathered all the fragments of the apocryphal texts. See the introduction to the Gu weishu in Weishu jicheng, vol. I, 135-137. Unfortunately, the first three sections were lost before the compilation of the Siku quanshu. See Siku quanshu zongmu 6:46.

149 Gu weishu in Weishu jicheng vol. I, 134.

150 For the interest of Ming scholars in the writings of Han thinkers, see Wagner (1997). In regard to the chenwei, Sun Jue wrote: “Yet, today the warp survives and the weft is lost; this is as if the earth would have south and north, and lack east and west.” (di nanbei wei jing dongxi wei wei. jin ye jin cun er wei wang 地南北為經.東西為緯.今也經存而緯亾). See the introduction to the Gu weishu in Weishu jicheng, vol. I, 134. Sun Jue’s “rehabilitation” of the apocrypha is much more remarkable if we consider that the political condemnation of the apocrypha was still very strong, as the ban imposed in 1504 shows. In all probability, he was quite free to pursue his own interests by virtue of his being far away from the centres of political power.

151 See the index of the Gu weishu in Weishu jicheng vol. I, 3-6. In this and in the following tables, generic entries such as Yiwei, Hetu, and Luoshu have not been considered.
encyclopaedias as the *Taiping yulan* and the *Yuhai 玉海*; the Tang commentaries on the classics are used only to a minor extent, and thematic works such as astrological handbooks are ignored completely.\footnote{For the list of cover sources used for the compilation of the *Gu weishu*, see the introduction of the *Gu weishu* in *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 137.} Moreover, a reader hoping to trace the fragments presented in the anthology, will find no bibliographic information: as Wagner points out, the practice of explicitly mentioning the cover source, was not to develop until the Qing.\footnote{Wagner (1997).}

Sun Jue’s work also presents some interesting features. Among the weeds of the *Documents*, for instance, there are two texts which actually do not belong to the *chenwei* corpus, namely the *Hongfan wuxing zhuan* [*The Great Plan: Tradition of the Five Agents*] and the *Shangshu dazhuan* [*The Book of Documents: the Great Tradition*].\footnote{The text is traditionally attributed to Liu Xiang. According to Qian Mu, it already existed at the time of Han Wudi. See Qian Mu (1958), 34-36.} Apart from these shortcomings, the *Gu weishu* clearly is a valuable work. Sun Jue’s commentaries, for instance, are occasionally of great help for the readers.\footnote{This point was already made by Jack Dull in Dull (1966), 449.} Moreover, the *Gu weishu* may well be regarded as a turning point: Sun Jue, in fact, clearly shows that the collecting of the last textual evidences of the *chenwei* was not illusory.

5.2 Collecting apocryphal fragments under the Qing

The philological passion that characterized Qing scholarship was one of the forces behind the impressive advances in the gathering of apocryphal fragments. The three centuries of Manchu rule witnessed the composition of several anthologies. Initially, the collecting of *chenwei* fragments was probably carried out by private scholars. In this regard, it is worthwhile to mention a lost work which is simply referred to as *Qinghe Jun Ben* 情河郡本 [*Edition of the Qinghe commandery*]. In all probability, it was compiled at the beginning of Qianlong’s reign and survived for about a century, before it was lost in the turmoil caused by the war against the Taiping 太平 (1840-1856). In spite of these adverse circumstances, we are able to reconstruct some of its characteristics since later collectors of apocryphal fragments saw and used it for their work. In this way, we know that it encompassed 122 titles, surely a remarkable advance on Sun Jue’s collection. The most interesting point concerns the kind of fragments it quoted or collected. In many cases, in fact, it is the only source for this evidence, as the fragments are not mentioned in other anthologies. This suggests that the compilers of the Qinghejun used local material which was not available to later collectors and which
today remains simply unknown.\textsuperscript{156}

The most noteworthy event of the eighteenth century, as far as the 
chenwei are concerned, is undoubtedly the inclusion in the Siku quanshu of the apocryphal appendices to the Yijing. For the first time in centuries, then, the leading academic circles consciously decided to save part of the chenwei corpus from the traditional refusal. Yet, the rehabilitation concerned only the wefts:

《乾鑿度》等七書，皆《易緯》之文，與圖讖之熒惑民志、悖理傷教者不同。以其無可附麗，故著錄於《易》類之末焉。

The Measure: Chiselling the Qian and the other seven books are all the text of the wefts of the Changes. They differ completely from the superstitions, vulgarities, heresies, and unorthodoxy of the prognostication books [named after] the Diagram [of the Yellow River]. [The wefts of the Changes] cannot be connected to them. Therefore, we list them at the end of the section of the Changes.\textsuperscript{157}

This way of proceeding was partly dictated by the treasure trove of eight weft-texts attached to the Yijing in the world-famous Ming encyclopaedia Yongle dadian 永樂大典 [Great Encyclopaedia of Yongle].

案七經緯皆佚於唐，存者獨《易》，逮宋末而盡失其傳。今《永樂大典》所載《易緯》具存，多宋以後諸儒所未見【…】

The seven wefts were lost as early as the Tang. Only the [wefts of the] Changes were still extant. Then, towards the end of the Song, their tradition was completely lost. Now, what the Great Encyclopaedia of Yongle includes are the extant [copies of the] wefts of the Changes: this is something that the scholarly world has not seen since the Song dynasty.[…]\textsuperscript{158}

What the Siku scholars apparently underestimated was the fact that some of the titles collected in the Ming work were untraceable in earlier catalogues. It is generally accepted, for instance, that the Qianyuan xu zhiji 乾元序制記 is a Song forgery.\textsuperscript{159} Yet, in spite of this, it is evident that the inclusion of at least a part of the chenwei canon in the collectanea had to work as a sort of rehabilitation. Consequently, the period after the compilation of the Siku quanshu saw the emergence of great collections of apocryphal

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\textsuperscript{156} A second private attempt to collect the apocrypha must have been carried out in the latter of part of Kangxi’s 康熙 reign (1662-1722), when an otherwise unknown scholar, Yin Yuanzheng 殷元正, worked at his Weishu 緯書 [The Weft-texts], known also as Jiwei 集緯 [Collected Wefts]. Even if his anthology is far from being a useful working instrument for studying the apocrypha, it surely testifies the existence of a private scholarly interest in these texts. In this regard, see the introductory notes of the Weishu jicheng vol. I, 2.

\textsuperscript{157} Siku quanshu zongmu 6:47.
\textsuperscript{158} Siku quanshu zongmu 6:45.
\textsuperscript{159} Deng Ruiquan (1998), 57-60.
Approaching the apocrypha

texts. One of the most important tendencies in this phase was undoubtedly the need to formulate a theoretical framework, which could enable the philologers to better comprehend the corpus. Not surprisingly, the authoritative opinions portrayed in the foreword to the *Siku quanshu* — and especially the negative judgement on *chen* and the rehabilitation of the wefts — served as the main reference points.

To Zhao Zaihan 趙在翰, an official resident in Fujian 福建 during the first half of the nineteenth century, we owe the first attempt to organize the apocryphal fragments on the basis of a precise theoretical framework. His *Qi wei* 七緯 [The Seven Wefts] in 36 *juan* was probably the most famous collection at the time. Evidently, Zhao Zaihan accepted the sharp division of the apocryphal corpus in two distinct and different categories by collecting the fragments of the *chenwei* linked to the classics and ignoring the *Hetu/Luoshu* texts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of texts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Yiwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Changes</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shangshuwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Documents</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shiwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Odes</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Liwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Rites</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yuewei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Music</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Chunqiuwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Annals</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Xiaojingwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Classic of Filial Piety</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hetu</em> — The Diagrams of the Yellow river</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Luoshu</em> — The Scripts of the Luo River</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Apocryphal texts listed in the *Qi Wei*: 37

The table above suggests two important facts. First, it is certain that Zhao Zaihan regarded the *Hetu/Luoshu* books and the texts associated with the *Lunyu* as belonging to the category *chen* or “prognostication books”. Still more important is the number of titles presented in the work. From the Qinghejun edition and from the *Gu weishu*, we know that the texts, even those simply attached to the classics, were far more numerous than the 37 examples given by Zhao Zaihan. It is uncertain whether the Fujian scholar ever saw the mysterious collection from the Junhe prefecture. Yet Zhao Zaihan certainly saw and analysed the *Gu weishu* since he quotes the text in his introductory remarks.161 Therefore, he surely knew that a text called *Xiaojing zhongqi* 孝經中契 [(Weft-appendix to the) *Classic of Filial Piety: The Tally of the Middle*] was considered a weft appendix to the *Classic of Filial Piety*.162 Nevertheless, this work was not included in the

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160 See the index of the *Qi wei* in *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 13-17.
161 See the introduction to the *Qi wei* in *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 773.
162 This text, in fact, is included in the *Gu weishu*. See *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 344.
Qi wei. Evidently, Zhao Zaihan was following the guidelines of the Tang commentator of the *Hou Hanshu*, who, as the reader will remember, had listed the 35 titles of the books which had to be regarded as the official wefts of the Han apocryphal corpus. Mostly because of the list of Yiwei included in the *Siku quanshu*, Zhao Zaihan added two titles, the *Qian Yuan Xu Zhiji* and the *Qiankunzaodu*. Thanks to his valuable notes and to the clear, even if incorrect, theoretical framework, Zhao’s work was to become one of the most famous collections at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It even inspired the well-known philologist Ma Guohan 馬國翰 (1794-1857) for the *chenwei* section of his *Yuhan shanfang ji yishu 玉函山房輯逸書* [*Collection of Lost Texts from the Treasury Chamber “Jade Slipcase”*]. Like Zhao Zaihan, Ma Guohan excluded the *Hetu/Luoshu* texts. Yet, unlike the compiler of the *Qi wei*, Ma Guohan did not adhere to the list of “seven wefts” compiled by Li Xian. Consequently, the titles he presents in his work are more numerous than those included in the *Qi wei*. While from this perspective the new anthology seems to be more reliable than Zhao Zaihan’s work, the *Yuhan shanfang ji yishu* surely represents a loss when compared to the *Qiwei*. Ma Guohan’s collection, in fact, does not include subcommentaries. This tendency was to become stronger in the following decades when philological work became the first priority of the scholars dealing with the *chenwei*. In this new phase, the tendency to exclude *Hetu/Luoshu* books on the basis of the *chen/wei* theoretical framework theory slowly petered out. The apocrypha became historical material and, as such, any division of the corpus into wefts and prognostication books was unnecessary. This line of reasoning is manifest in the *Weijun 緯攟* [*Collection of Wefts*] by Qiao Songnian 喬松年.

The *Weijun* is undoubtedly one of the most important collections of apocryphal texts: it even served as a model for the compilation of the *Choshu isho shusei*. It was published in 1877 and was intended principally as an extension and correction of the Ming collection *Gu weishu*. However, Qiao Songnian modified the original anthology in

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163 Moreover, Ma Guohan’s work does not include the appendices to the *Yijing*. This exclusion was dictated by practical reasons. The *Yiwei*, already completely rehabilitated, had already been included in the *Wuying dian juzhen ben* 武英殿聚珍本 [*Collections from the Hall of Martial Spirit*]. In detail, the *Yuhan shanfang* includes 24 titles under the heading *Shuwei*; three texts each for the *Shiwei*, *Liwei*, and *Yuewei*; 15 titles are marked as weft appendices to the *Chunqiu*; 11 titles are presented as *Xiaoqijingwe* and 8 texts are listed under the heading *Lunyu chen*. For the index of Ma Guohan’s collection of the apocrypha, see *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 21-23. For the part of Ma Guohan’s work dealing with the apocrypha, see *Weishu jicheng* vol. II, 1193-1400.

164 The *Weijun* was not the only attempt at correcting and improving extant anthologies. Liu Xuelong 劉學竇, for instance, compiled the *Zhujing weiyi 緯緯遺* [*The Residues of the Wefts of the Classics*] by broadening the material of the *Shuofu*. The value of the collection, however, is rather limited since it only lists 34 titles. For the index of this anthology, see *Weishu jicheng*, vol. I, 17-18. For a short presentation of this anthology, see *Weishu jicheng*, vol. I, 3. The *Qiwei Shexi* 七緯拾遺 [*The Residues of the Seven Wefts*] by Gu Guanguang 餘觀光 is much more remarkable since the author rejects the approach adopted by Zhao Zaihan. In introducing his work, Gu Guanguang vehemently
many respects. First, he included the sources of the fragments in the compilation; second, he greatly widened both the number of quoted texts and the number of collected fragment. It is appropriate to give some examples here in order to clarify the enormous amount of work involved in the compilation of this new collection. While Sun Jue listed 15 titles under the heading *Hetu*, in the *Weijun*, this number is practically doubled to thirty-one titles. While Sun Jue collected 69 Fragments under the heading *Chunqiu: Ganjingfu*, the *Weijun* puts the number at 124. The main features of this anthology are illustrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td><em>Shangshuwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Documents</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Chunqiuwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Annals</em></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yiwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Changes</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Liwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Rites</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Yuewei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Music</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Shiwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Odes</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Lunyuwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Analects</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Xiaojingwei</em> — Wefts of the <em>Classic of Filial Piety</em></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Hetu</em> — The Diagrams of the Yellow river</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Luoshu</em> — The Scripts of the Luo River</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The texts of the *Weijun*\(^{165}\)

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\(^{165}\) See the index of *Weijun* in *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 23-28. For the anthologies compiled at the end of the Qing dynasty, see *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 4-5.

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...argues with Zhao in regard to the inclusion of only 37 seven texts. Moreover, he stresses the historical value of all the sections of the *chenwei* corpus. See the introduction of the *Qiwei Shiyi* in *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 1067.\(^{165}\)
CHAPTER TWO

TOWARD THE CONTENTS OF THE APOCRYPHA

1. WORKING ON THE APOCRYPHA

1.1 Modernizing the research on the apocrypha in China

On the eve of the Qing collapse, several studies of traditional exegesis devoted space to the apocryphal phenomenon. The analysis by Liu Shipei 刘师培 (1884-1919), one of the scholars who witnessed the downfall of the Qing and the difficult birth of modern China, is worthy of note mainly because it describes the apocrypha within their Han cultural environment:

董、劉大儒，競言災異，實為讖緯之濫觴【...】哀平之間，讖學日熾，而王莽公孫述之徒，亦稱引符命，惑世誣民。

Great scholars such as Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 and the Liu competed in the discussion of calamities and anomalies: this was actually the fountainhead of the chenwei. Between the reigns of emperor Ai and Ping, the study of the chen blossomed. Moreover, Wang Mang’s and Gongsun Shu’s followers used and quoted the tokens of the Heaven’s mandate as well so that thy misled their contemporaries and cheated people.¹

Thus, the main peculiarity of the apocrypha is the well-known Han disaster theory according to which catastrophes such as fires and anomalous phenomena like eclipses were to be regarded as heavenly warnings for the ruler. This framework, which achieved an enormous success thanks to scholars like Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 BC), Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin must be understood as the “fountainhead” of the chenwei.

Finally, Liu Shipei wrote:

【...】乃世之論讖緯者，或謂溯源於孔氏，或謂創始於哀平。吾謂緯讖之言，起源太古，然以經淆緯，始於西京，以緯儷經，基於東漢。【...】

[...]In the contemporary discussion on the chenwei, somebody says that the origins [of these texts must be traced back] to Confucius’s lineage; another says that they were written during [the reigns of emperor] Ai and [emperor] Ping. I say that the discourses of the apocrypha arose in remote antiquity; the practice of using the classics to assemble the

¹ See the commentary on the Wenxin dialong in Wenxin dialong 4:123.
wefts began in the Western Capital (i.e. during the Early Han); the habit of using the wefts to comment on classics started on under the Eastern Han. […]\(^2\)

Thus, according to Liu Shipei, the themes treated in the apocrypha can be connected to ancient discourses and theories. The *chenwei* texts were written during the reigns of emperor Ai and emperor Ping. The habit to use the wefts in the exegetical field developed during the Later Han. Accordingly, even if Liu Shipei continues to differentiate between *chen* and *wei*, we owe to him the important statement that at least the wefts are to be regarded as Han works.

1.1.1 Jiang Zhongkui and Gu Jiegang

Among the scholars who studied the apocrypha in the twentieth century, we should recall Jiang Zhongkui 姜忠奎 (1897-1945), Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 (1893-1980), and Chen Pan. In his *Weishilun lüe* 緯史論微 [*Outline of the Discussion about the History of the Weft-texts*], Jiang Zhongkui, for instance, rightly argues that the centenary discussion about *chen* and *wei* was mostly a terminological issue:

緯，共名也。圖 、讖、符、籙皆別名。觀其所戴，皆以天人感召之徵，物理玄祕之徵。無由畫分也。

“Weft” is the general name. “Diagrams”, “prognostications”, “forewarnings”, and “records” are all alternative labels. The analysis of their contents [reveals that] all [the books] rely upon the proofs of [the theory according to which] Heaven and Man attract and solicit [each other] and the obscure evidence of the principles of things. [Therefore] there is no reason to distinguish among them.\(^3\)

Thus, Jiang Zhongkui did not distinguish among the apocryphal texts since labels such as “Diagrams”, “wefts”, and “prognostications” were synonymic expressions for books which had the idea of the interaction of man and nature at their core. This line of reasoning appears in Gu Jiegang’s work as well.

As one of the most prominent Chinese historians of the twentieth century, Gu Jiegang hardly needs any introduction. In his work on historiography, this distinguished scholar invited the academic community to challenge the tradition and to approach the inherited cultural corpus from a critical and sceptical perspective. Besides making with the *Gushibian* 古史辨 project [*Critic of Ancient History*] a groundbreaking contribution to a better understanding of Chinese past and culture, he also enormously enhanced the comprehension of social and cultural mechanisms of the Han dynasty. In particular,


\(^3\) Jiang Zhongkui (n.d.) 1:16.
Approaching the apocrypha

with regard to the chenwei, his \textit{Handai xueshu shilüe} 漢代學術史略 [Outline of Han Scholarship] plays a central role.

As Jiang Zhongkui, Gu Jiegang has the merit of having described the chen/wei controversy in terms of a terminological issue:

這些兩種在名稱上好像不同，其實內容並沒有什麼區大分別。實在說來，不過讖是先起之名，緯是後起的罷了。

These two categories seem to be different from a terminological perspective. Their contents, actually, do not present a sharp difference and if we follow the reality, chen is the name which emerged first and wei is a later denomination!\footnote{Gu Jiegang (1948), 186-187.}

Even when dealing with the origins of the apocrypha, Gu Jiegang does not follows the path of Ming and Qing scholars. Differently from the compilers of the \textit{Siku quanshu}, for instance, he refused to take political prophecies of the Qin period as the starting point of the apocryphal phenomenon. Hence, the chenwei where officially born when Gan Zhongke 甘忠可 arrived at the court of emperor Cheng to announce the resurrection of Han dynasty after a phase of decline.\footnote{See Gu Jiegang (1948), 177-189.}

1.1.2 Chen Pan

Despite the contributions of prominent scholars like Gu Jiegang, the chenwei remained a peripheral theme within the academic world for a long time. Before the eighties, Chen Pan alone extensively worked on the apocrypha: therefore, he has undoubtedly had the merit of saving these texts from the academic oversight. The several articles he published in the 1940’s in the \textit{Guoli zhongyang yanjiuyuan li shi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan} 國立中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 have effectively showed that the chenwei could be analysed and understood.

As Jiang Zhongkui and Gu Jiegang, Chen Pan rightly underscores the complex terminological issues hidden behind the binomial chenwei. Accordingly, he suggests that expressions as chen, wei, tu, and shu were used as synonyms under the Han.\footnote{Chen Pan (1944\textsuperscript{a}), 297-308.} In respect to the approach adopted by his precursors, however, Chen Pan’s assumptions are more articulated and complex. First, the fact that chen and wei were used interchangeably under the Han as labels for the apocrypha does not necessarily mean that they originally designated the same cultural phenomenon. Political prophecies (chen) named after the Diagram of the Yellow River and the Script of the Luo River were already fashionable under the Qin, when Lu Sheng submitted his famous lutu.
Chapter Two. Towards the contents of the apocrypha

Later, this written material was used to compose prognostication texts and finally exegetical studies attached to the classics. With regard to the chenwei still extant, Chen Pan rightly highlighted to their thematic complexity, pointing out that the texts, as they have been passed down to us, encompass several layers of contents such as the legends related to the Hetu, political prophecies, and exegetical discussions. This insight is, perhaps, one of the most brilliant results achieved by the Chinese scholars. He has undoubtedly been the first to consider the relevance of the contents of the apocrypha when confronted with the issue of their birth time or when discussing the main peculiarities of the books. This contribution can also be seen as proof of the feasibility of a thematic approach to the apocrypha. Accordingly, his studies are still today among the few works which try to sketch a model of development of the apocryphal phenomenon which combines the understanding of the chenwei layers with the information given in the chronicles.

Chen Pan’s role in the history of chenwei scholarship cannot be considered only as far as the traditional issues such as birth-time of the texts and chen/weī controversy are concerned since he also dwelled on the cultural context of the apocrypha, trying to shed some light on the people who wrote the chen books. As we shall see in detail in the third part of the present study, even if a number of ancient and contemporary scholars allude to the fangshi when discussing the chenwei, Chen Pan has been one of the few researchers who justifiably analysed the meaning of this term, instead of simply using and connecting it to the apocrypha. Thus, he concluded that the chenwei, as we know them today, were written by people referred to as fangshi under the Han who should be seen as the intellectual heirs of Zou Yan.7

1.2 Contemporary scholarship

The studies by Jiang Zhongkui, Gu Jiegang, and, above all, Chen Pan, may be rightly regarded as a kind of crucial point in the history of researches focused on the apocrypha, especially because of their accent on the terminological dimension of the chen/weī controversy and Chen Pan’s attempt to work with the contents of the texts. This does not mean, however, that their results were immediately acknowledged and accepted. From the 1950’s onwards, several scholars working in this field preferred to turn back to the guidelines of the Siku quanshu. In his Zhongguo zhexue shi [History of Chinese Philosophy], for instance, Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990) refers once again to the Siku-scholars, focusing exclusively on those chen books named after the

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7 See Chen Pan (1944a), (1944b).
Approaching the apocrypha

classics. As we shall see in the following pages, this tendency continues to be strong even in more recent studies.

1.2.1 Investigating the apocrypha outside China: Japan

In this section, we shall briefly recall the analytical work carried out on the apocrypha in Japan. The Japanese academic community deserves a particular mention since it has been in the forefront in cultivating a deep interest in the chenwei. From the 1960’s through the 1980’s, when the Chinese-speaking world was first devastated by political turmoil and later simply unaware of the scholarly challenge represented by the chenwei, Japanese researchers made an intensive effort to reorganize, preserve, and analyse the fragmentary traces of the apocryphal phenomenon. This effort mainly assumed two forms, namely the compilation of the often-mentioned anthology Choshu isho shusei by Yasui Kozan and Nakamura Shohachi and a long analytical work. Unfortunately, owing to my non-existent knowledge of Japanese, I have not been able to cover this part of the work on the apocrypha. It is only thanks to the very generous help of friends that I have been able to take into consideration some of the studies published by Yasui Kozan. If considered as part of the history of the anthologies of apocryphal fragments, the Choshu isho shusei clearly represents a noteworthy step forward, especially from a quantitative viewpoint. The Japanese scholars even manage to outdo the Qing collection Weijun by including apocryphal fragments from further sources Japanese sources. Other remarkable features of the Choshu isho shusei are the data given for each fragment: besides including the cover sources, the Japanese also mentions earlier anthologies in which the fragment is included. Moreover, the indexes at the end of each volume are particularly useful. Finally, the authors have carefully signalized whenever a fragment occurs under different apocryphal titles. Without denying the evident merits of the Japanese collectors, it is however appropriate to dwell a while on the limitations of this work. If the Choshu isho shusei is by far the most complete and most readable collection of fragments, this does not necessarily imply that the Japanese work is flawless. As we shall see in detail in the next paragraphs, the philological work involved with the chenwei is a task of enormous difficulty in which a fair amount of mistakes simply has to be accepted. The Choshu isho shusei, for example, misunderstands from time to time the content of the cover sources by presenting excerpts from Han texts as parts of the chenwei books. Moreover, the punctuation of the fragments is often unreliable.

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8 Feng Youlan (1956), 89-90.
9 In this regard, see Zhang Yiren (1964). In the following pages and sections, the present study shall not rely on the punctuation proposed in the Choshu isho shusei.
Besides having contributed greatly to promoting and (re-)discovering the apocrypha, Yasui Kozan also deserves to be mentioned in regard to his analysis of the *chenwei* since we owe to him the insight that astrology plays a role of central importance in the material still extant.

When faced with the problem of organizing the different strata of contents, Yasui Kozan classifies the apocryphal thematic strands as either *chen* or *wei*. *Chen* is widely understood as a term encompassing loose political prophecies, such as those concerning Liu Xiu, or astrological prognoses. *Wei* refers to the exegetical layer. Yasui Kozan has certainly played a primary role in the history of the analysis of the *chenwei*. Let me stress two of his many achievements. First, he was undoubtedly the one who has clearly demonstrated the feasibility of analysing the *chenwei* fragments. This thematic approach allowed him to define the apocrypha as Han texts linkable to *jinwen* scholarly groups, such as those working with the Qi version of the *Odes* and with the *Gongyang* tradition of the *Annals.*

1.2.2   Investigating the apocrypha outside China: the West

The work on the apocrypha in the West is actually a very short story which officially begins in 1947, when Marc Kalternmark introduced the Western audience to Chen Pan’s studies on the *chenwei*. However, to get a generic description of the apocrypha, the Western reader had to wait until the end of the forties, when Tjan Tjoe Som published his well-known *Po hu t’ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*. Not surprisingly, the approach adopted in this work echoes the traditional viewpoint, in particular with regard to the understanding of *chen* and *wei*. Yet unlike later scholars, Tjan Tjoe Som could look at the apocrypha from a privileged viewpoint. To translate the fragmentary proceedings of the congress held in AD 79, in fact, essentially means coming to terms with the complex thematic structure of the *chenwei* since the scholars who convened at the White Tiger Hall quoted these texts in respect of countless themes.

After Tjan Tjoe Som, work on the apocrypha virtually stopped for about fifteen years. It is thanks to Jack Dull that the theme was saved from extinction in Western scholarship. Jack Dull’s doctoral thesis on the *chenwei* was submitted in 1966, and since then it has been the primary reference work for all those people dealing in some way with these...
obscure texts. Dull’s *A historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch'an-Wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty* is a remarkable piece of historical research deepening some interesting facets of Han culture. First, the author carefully reviews and analyses the often confusing historical accounts dealing with the apocrypha. Moreover, the book presents interesting portrayals of several Early Han scholars such as, for instance, Yi Feng or Jing Fang. Finally, and above all, Jack Dull resists the temptation of using later sources to fathom the formation of the Han *chenwei* books. This means that the American sinologist only worked with Han material. Accordingly, a theme such as the *chen/wei* controversy is rightly neglected.

For a long time, Jack Dull’s work remained the only Western study on the apocrypha. This changed in the nineties when Hans van Ess analysed the *chenwei* in his work on Han scholarship (1993) and discussed their link to *jinwen* exegetical groups in an article appeared in *T'oung pao* (1999). Moreover, the apocrypha are discussed at length in Joachim Gentz’s analysis of the *Chunqiu* exegesis and in some studies by Tiziana Lippiello. Finally, Neo Pengfu’s doctoral thesis on the *Yiwei* and Lü Zongli’s work on the medieval history of the *chenwei* represent a remarkable step forward in our understanding of the texts. Neo Pengfu has successfully demonstrated that several strata of contents traceable in the appendices to the *Changes* can be linked to Early Han thematic strands. Lü Zongli’s analysis has unveiled some important facet of the history of the *chenwei* by dwelling at length on medieval proscriptions and bans.

1.2.3 Research on the apocrypha in contemporary China

Since the 1980’s, the Chinese academic world has been gradually re-discovering the *chenwei* phenomenon as a constantly growing number of studies testifies. In order to provide an overview of this work, we shall begin with an analysis of the ways in which modern scholars approach traditional issues such as the question of birth-time or the *chen/wei* controversy.

The Ming/Qing distinction between *chen* texts and wefts still exercises an enormous influence on contemporary studies. Several scholars loyally reproduce Qing arguments, by simply classifying the apocryphal texts on the basis of their titles. It follows that the *chen* are the books called *Hetu/Luoshu*, whereas the *wei* refers to the appendices to the classics. These studies evidently distinguish between texts on the basis of terminological criteria, without paying any attention to the fact that, as Huang Fushan has clearly demonstrated, *wei* came to be used as label for the apocrypha only towards

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12 Neo Pengfu (2000).
the end of the Later Han dynasty. A few researchers have opted for a more cautious approach, preferring to understand *chen* and *wei* as terms referring to the prophetic and exegetical layers of contents. This tendency, which obviously echoes Yasui Kozan’s strategy, is well distinguishable in an article written at the beginning of the nineties by Ding Ding 丁鼎.

A very important tendency in modern research on the apocrypha in China is a growing awareness of the contents of the apocrypha. In this context, a few scholars are well worth mentioning. Even if Wang Bugui 王步贵 tends to separate the wefts from the *Hetu/Luoshu* texts, his analysis has well highlighted the relevance of cosmology as well as well-known Han trends of thought such as the resonance theory and correlative thinking within the fragments. Zhong Zhaopeng’s 钟肇鹏 work is perhaps more ambitious since, besides introducing the readers to traditional issues such as the *chen/wei* controversy, it also offers a detailed analysis of several thematic layers of the fragments. Moreover, Yi Xuan 易玄 has successfully carried out an intriguing research on early prophetical discourse in China and Leng Dexi 冷德熙 has probably written one of the best available studies on the contents of the *chenwei*, focusing on a much-neglected aspect of these texts, namely mythology. Finally, Xiao Dengfu 萧登福 has analysed the relevance of the apocryphal contents for studies dealing with religious daoism. In fact, a few fragments can be aptly understood when linked to later daoist texts.

To conclude this short excursus into contemporary Chinese research on the *chenwei*, we shall briefly consider the often-mentioned work by Huang Fushan. Differently from his colleagues, the Taiwan scholar does not deepen issues concerning the contents of the *chenwei*, focusing on themes such as the history of the texts and unreliability of the collections of apocryphal fragments. Apart from the emphasis on the several fallacies of the collections, the main conclusion is that the apocrypha, as we know them today, are essentially the product of the editing of the first century AD. The Later Han scholars working on the codification (*jiaoding*) of the Early Han *chen* books essentially rewrote the texts by drawing extensively from Han exegetical studies.

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15 Huang Fushan (2000).
16 See Ding Ding (1992), 90-91, Lü Zongli (2003), 77.
2. ACHIEVEMENTS AND SHORTCOMINGS OF CHENWEI SCHOLARSHIP

2.1 On chen and wei

The study carried out in the twentieth century has considerably contributed to shed some light on the chenwei phenomenon. On the one hand, scholars such as Jiang Zhongkui, Gu Jiegang, Chen Pan, Zhong Zhaopeng, and Huang Fushan have finally explained that terms such as chen and wei were used interchangeably under the Han. Thus, the distinction between chen books and appendices to the classics is useless for a modern interpreter: the fragments still extant are the last traces of a literary corpus which was perceived as homogenous under the Han. On the other hand, most of the interpreters agree on seeing the chenwei as Han books. Thus, even if one can reflect on possible precursors of the apocryphal phenomenon, the texts, as we have them today, are to be dated back to the Han dynasty. These two points certainly are among the most important scholarly achievements in the field since they finally wiped out stereotypes and misunderstandings of the preceding centuries. Therefore, it is not unfair to complain that contemporary studies seldom take into account these insights when analysing the chenwei. We shall here focus on the chen/wei controversy and show the relevance of the traditional approach even in studies published in the last few years.

The reflection on chen and wei has recently assumed two main forms. Apart from the already mentioned trend to distinguish between the texts named after Hetu/Luoshu and the appendices to the classics, several scholars appear to rely upon Yasui Kozan, using wei to refer to the exegetical stratum of the chenwei and chen as a generic label for those thematic layers such as astrology which are hardly classifiable under “exegesis”\(^\text{18}\). This approach reflects the traditional way of framing the issue, not only as far as the focus on chen and wei is concerned, but also with regard to the classification of the apocrypha. Many contemporary scholars, in fact, simply substitute the reference points of the Siku scholars — exegesis and technical disciplines (shushu) — with the key-terms wei and chen, where wei is the link between chenwei and classics and chen is a kind of collective noun which should describe all the fragments with a “prophetical” content. A few objections undermine this line of reasoning.

From a terminological viewpoint, the use of chen and wei to define the apocrypha should be rejected as historically inaccurate. First, as Huang Fushan has clearly demonstrated, the term wei became fashionable as late as the second century AD. Second, the analysis of the apocrypha in terms of chen and wei layer is highly confusing. First, what do we exactly understand under chen? Following Yasui Kozan, chen could

\(^{18}\) See, for instance, Neo Pengfu (2001), Lü Zongli (2003), Ding Ding and Xue Lifang (2004).
be used to describe all the fragments which have a “prophetical” content, from those dealing with astrology to those announcing the restoration of the Han dynasty. The accent on astrology is certainly important since, as we have seen, the first examples of chen books were listed under the heading tianwen in the bibliography of the Hanshu. At this point — one could object — why bother to find another term given that the Han bibliographers offer us the label tianwen and the Siku scholars underscore the role of shushu themes within the chenwei? In all probability, Yasui Kozan, as well as a number of contemporary Chinese scholars, emphasized the importance of the chen layer in order to be able to classify in some way the generic political prophecies of the apocrypha which allude, for example, to the restoration of the Han. Here, we may refer to Lü Zongli who rejects the translation of chen as “prognostication”. In his opinion, in fact, “prognostication” implies a given training in a specific mantic art. The meaning of chen, on the contrary, is close to “prophecy”, a statement without any technical training. This line of reasoning, however, cannot be adequately proven, at least as far as the Han chen are concerned. Both the chenwei and the prophecies mentioned in the chronicles are fragmentary. Accordingly, we cannot know whether statements, which on first sight appear to be generic political prophecies, were based or not on specific mantic practices. Moreover, as we shall see in the following chapters, the chenwei are often linkable to a few techniques (shushu), such as tianwen and time-based mantic practices, which under the Han were referred to as wu xing 五行 arts. Here, it is perhaps also interesting to recall that one of the wefts of the Shujing bears the title Xingdefang. As we know from the unearthed Xingde B — a Mawangdui manuscript — the terms xing 刑 (Punishments) and de 德(virtue) refer to two mantic operators used in the divinatory practice known as Xingde 刑德. Finally, even historical accounts suggest that the term chen should also be understood as prognostication based on a specific training. In the third part of the present study, we will suggest that the understanding of chen during the first centuries AD was often that of “astrological prognosis”. Here, we can consider the case of Li Yan 李焉, an official who wrote a prognostication book (chenshu) by relying upon the teaching of the diviner (buzhe 卜者) Wang Kuang 王况. How did Wang Kuang cast his horoscopes? Let us read what he told to Li Yan:

20 For an introduction to the Han wu xing practices, see Li Ling (2000),21. For a detailed analysis of the later development of such mantic methods, see Ho (2003).
22 Hanshu 99C:4166.
The house of the Han will flourish once again. Your name, Lord, is Li. The sound of *li* is close to [the note] *zhi*. *Zhi* belongs to Fire. You will become the Assistant of the Han.  

Evidently, Wang Kuang formulated his prognosis by linking the surname Li with one of the fifth notes of Chinese music and the Five Agents. Later sources suggest that the association surnames/notes may have also been a strategy applied by mantic practitioners, namely those working with the *wu xing* arts.

The remarks above have shown, it is hoped, the inappropriateness to associate *chen* with generic political prophecies, at least under the Han. Accordingly, the Han *chen* books should not be primarily regarded as books encompassing un-technical prophetic statements. This point, in turn, leads us to look at the history of the apocrypha from a different stance. In fact, if *chen* books cannot be regarded as texts of prophecies, loose predictions traceable in the chronicles should not be taken as starting point of the apocryphal phenomenon. The famous document submitted by Lu Sheng to Qin Shi Huangdi’s court is a case in point. Since the *Shiji* only alludes to a very short statement, it is safer to leave it aside when working with the Han apocrypha.

Turning to *wei*, it is perhaps appropriate to underscore that the exegetical layer of the apocrypha should not lead us to neglect the relevance of the astrological stratum or the role of calendrical issues. Moreover, we cannot be sure that all the appendices to the classics were originally conceived as exegetical studies. Here, it is important to keep in mind that the formal aspects of the corpus — the 81 chapters and in all probability the definitive association of the single *chen* texts with *Hetu/Luoshu* or with the classics — were fixed during the Later Han editing. Finally, as we shall discuss in the third part of the present study, whether conceived as exegetical studies or not, the *chen* books formed a cultural phenomenon which, as we shall discuss at the end of the present study, was perceived as peculiar and homogenous.

2.2 On the anthologies: philological shortcomings and interpretative weaknesses

The collections play a central role in the understanding of the *chenwei*: they are comparable to a kind of vehicle which allows the researcher to come closer to the
complex architecture of these lost texts. Nevertheless, a reader approaching the Gu weishu or the Choshu Isho Shusei should not look at them as a mirror of the apocrypha which allows a direct approach to these texts. When using the anthologies in this way, we are blindly trusting the collector, his analysis of the apocryphal phenomenon, and his philological skills. This uncritical strategy can be hazardous since, as Huang Fushan has rightly argued, mistakes abound in the anthologies, even in the relatively recent Choshu isho shusei. Despite the incontestable improvements made by the Japanese scholars in respect to Qing anthologies, this recent collection often presents suspicious texts as apocrypha and questionable fragments as textual evidence of the chenwei. Here, we shall shortly summarize some of the most relevant fallacies by classifying them as philological shortcomings and interpretative weaknesses.

2.2.1 The collections and the philological weaknesses

When approaching the titles of the apocryphal texts collected in the anthologies, the reader must consider a very simple and yet enlightening fact. The corpus released by Guangwudi towards the middle of the first century AD was composed, as we have seen, of 81 chapters, whereas the Choshu Isho Shusei lists 164 titles. Evidently, the Japanese collectors included in their anthology a number of texts which did not belong to the Han official corpus. Even assuming that the Han chen texts were more numerous than those gathered and edited under Guangwudi, the figure given in the Choshu isho shusei is clearly unreliable. The scanty historical information definitively makes the reconstruction of the 81 titles of the Han corpus an unfeasible task. Nevertheless, we may individuate at least a few titles which in all probability did not belong to the ancient apocryphal canon.

The first group of texts which may safely be left aside when dealing with the Han apocryphal phenomenon have titles quoted twice under two or more different headings. The title Kaolingyao, for example, is listed in the Japanese collections under the heading Shangshuwei, Chunqiu, and Hetu: in all probability, this is the same text. The following table presents some titles which may fall under this category:

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26 The analysis of the fragment corroborates this line of reasoning. The Chunqi-Kaolingyao, for instance, has only two fragments: the first is also quoted under the heading Shangshu-Kaolingyao (Choshu isho shusei 4B:133, 2:35), whereas the second is given as sentence from the Chunqi-Kaolingwen 春秋考靈文 [(Apocryphal Appendix to the) Annals. The Patterns: Examining Heavenly Patterns] in a very late cover source, namely the Qing encyclopedia Yanjian leihan 淵鑑類函. In this regard, see Choshu isho shusei 4B:133. The Hetu-Kaolingyao presents two fragments as well. The first is also listed under the heading Hetu-Tianling 河圖天靈 [The River Diagram. Heavenly Treasures]. See Choshu isho shusei 6:113; 6:109. The second fragment is quoted in the Tang encyclopedia Chuxueji 初學記 [The River Diagram. Heavenly Treasures] simply as Hetu. In this regard, see Choshu isho shusei 6:113.
### Title Headings

<table>
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<th>Title</th>
<th>Headings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Kaolingyao</td>
<td>Shangshuwei - Chunqiuwei - Hetu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhenyaodu</td>
<td>Chunqiuwei - Luoshu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jimingzheng</td>
<td>Liwei-Hetu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guimingpian</td>
<td>Chunqiuwei – Hetu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shengqiafu</td>
<td>Chunqiuwei – Hetu</td>
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</table>

Further suspicious titles listed in the anthologies are generic labels. Headings such as *Yiwei* and *Hetu* should not be understood as titles of books but rather as generic labels referring to all the wefts of the *Changes* and to all the *Hetu* texts. Accordingly, we may speak of explicit collective titles. Further books seem to belong to this typology. We could recall the *Yiwei neizhuan* [*Yiwei neizhuan* ([Apocryphal Appendix to the) Changes. Inner Tradition]](footnote) and the *Yiwei ji* [*Records of the (Apocryphal Appendix to the) Changes*](footnote). Most likely, we have here a case in which the author of the cover source has quoted from the apocryphal books without specifying the title of the texts.

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27 The *Chunqiu-Zhenyaodu* presents only a fragment. See *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:134. Moreover, I have not been able to trace such a text in the cover source mentioned by the Japanese scholar, namely the introduction to the Tang commentary on the *Zhouli*. The most convenient option is to regard this title as a replica of the *Luoshu-Zhenyaodu*, which, as we shall see, is a book which certainly existed under the Han.

28 Most of the fragments quoted under the heading *Hetu-Jimingzheng*, appear in other apocryphal texts as well. See *Choshu isho shusei* 6:106-107.

29 The *Chunqiu-Guimingpian* contains one fragment which is also quoted under the heading *Hetu-Guimingpian*. See *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:132; 6:108. The *Chunqiu-Hetu-Guimingpian* is quoted only once in the Tang commentary on the *Wenxuan*. See *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:132.

30 The *Chunqiu-Shengqiafu* encompasses three fragments which are quoted in the same cover source. We have here probably a mistake on the part of the author of the *Changxiang wanzhan* [*Observing the Simulacra and Enjoying the Prognoses*]. See *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:134.

31 See *Choshu isho shusei* 1B:127. See also *Hou Hanshu* 30A:1054-1055 and, in particular, the valuable notes of the commentator who understands “Yi neizhuan” as a collective noun used to refer to the apocrypha of the *Yijing*.

32 *Choshu isho shusei* 1B:130. The *Choshu isho shusei* lists some texts including the term *ji* in the title. We have, for example, the *Yiwei jibiao* [*Records and Charts of the (Wefts of the) Changes*], the *Hetu biaoj* [*Records and Charts of Diagram of the Yellow River*] and the *Luoshu ji* [*Records of the Luo Script*]. See *Choshu isho shusei* 1B:130; 6:128-131; 6:190. Interestingly, almost all the fragments presented under these titles come from the Tang astrological treatise *Tianwen yaolu*. It is therefore possible that the Tang astrologer quoted generically from apocryphal texts, or perhaps from a summary of them, without specifying the title.
2.2.2 *The collections and the interpretative weaknesses*

From the very beginning, the *chenwei* phenomenon has been a rather ambiguous cultural trend and the chain of proscriptions during the post-Han centuries further increased its equivocalness. When the Song scholar Zheng Qiao formulated the criteria for reconstructing ancient texts philologically, he also underscored the need to “search by category” (*ji lei yi qiu* 即類以求). Theoretically, the first task of the collector of the apocryphal fragments consisted in clearing up the meaning of the “category” *chenwei*. This assignment was extremely demanding. Apart from the gradual disappearance of the texts, the problem was further aggravated by two factors. On the one hand, Wei Zheng’s cataloguing of the texts under the heading “classics” had virtually eliminated the demarcation line between apocrypha and the Han exegetical tradition. On the other hand, the production of books similar in content and form to the Han books had made it increasingly difficult to establish what in effect belonged to the apocryphal corpus. With scanty historical information, the subjective understanding of the phenomenon becomes a criterion of primary importance.

An interpreter who fails to recognize the dynamic character of the apocryphal phenomenon tends to underestimate the role of the late *chenwei* texts. Not surprisingly, several anthologies include books which, in all probability, did not belong to the Han apocryphal corpus. Most likely, texts such as the *Chunqiu neishi* 春秋內事 [*Inner Matters of the Annals*], the *Xiaojing-Cixiongtu* 孝經雌雄圖 [*Classic of Filial Piety. The Diagram ci and xiong*], and the *Xiaojing neishutu* 孝經內事圖 [*Classic of Filial Piety. The Diagrams of the Inner Matters*] did not belong to the Han *chenwei* canon since the Liang catalogue lists them outside of the wefts.33

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33 See the commentary in *Suishu* 32:940. Further titles which probably did not belong to the Han apocryphal corpus are the *Xiaojing-neishi* 孝經內事 [*Inner Matters of the Classic of Filial Piety*], the *Xiaojing-Youqi* 孝經右契 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Talisman of the Right*], the *Xiaojing-Zuoqi* 孝經左契 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Talisman of the Left*], the *Xiaojing-Gumi* 孝經古祕 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Secrets of the Past*], and the *Xiaojing cixiongtu sanguang zhan* 孝經雌雄圖三光占 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Divination of the three Luminaries of the Diagram of ci and xiong*]. The Liang catalogue lists titles resembling these headings outside of the Han apocryphal corpus. For the *Xiaojing-Neishitu* 孝經內事圖 [*Classic of Filial Piety. The Diagrams of the Inner Matters*], see *Suishu* 32:940. The *Xiaojing-Youqi* and the *Xiaojing-Zuoqi* should probably be identified with the Liang entries *Xiaojing-Zuoyouwo* 孝經左右握 [*Classic of Filial Piety. The Grasping of the Mandate: Left and Right*] or with the *Xiaojing-Zuoyouqi tu* 孝經左右契圖 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Diagrams of the Left and Right Talismans*]. See *Suishu* 32:940. The Liang catalogue has a *Xiaojing-Gumitu* 孝經古祕圖 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Diagrams of the Secrets of the Past*] quoted in the Liang catalogue. *Suishu* 32:940. The *Xiaojing-Cixiongtu* sanguang zhan 孝經雌雄圖三光占 [*Classic of Filial Piety. Divination of the three Luminaries of the Diagram of ci and xiong*] seems to be a re-creation of the *Xiaojing-Cixiongtu*. For all these titles, see the concise notes of the Liang catalogue conserved in the commentary on *Suishu* 32:940.
An interpreter believing in the strong exegetical nature of the chenwei tends to include in his anthology texts and statements belonging to the Han official exegetical tradition. Accordingly, in his Shuofu, Tao Zongyi listed the Chunqiu fanlu 秋秋繁露 [Luxuriant Dew of the Annals] in the same chapter of the apocrypha. In the Gu weishu, Sun Jue catalogued the Wuxingzhuang. Even the Choshu isho shusei lists Han exegetical studies. The Yiwei-Tongtongtu 易緯通統圗 [The Weft to the Changes: the Diagram which penetrates the Unity] is a case in point. The Suishu, in fact, mentions it among the official commentaries to the Yiijing.35 The Yiwei: Taichupian 太初篇 constitutes a further example since the Hou Hanshu does not mention it as an apocryphal appendix of the Changes but rather as a book belonging to the official exegetical tradition (zhuan 傳): in fact, it is cited as Yizhuan taichupian 易傳太初篇. The interpretative weaknesses of the anthologies become noticeable even when dealing with the fragments. As we shall see at the end of this work, ancient and contemporary scholarly world tends to consider the wefts to be part of the Han exegetical tradition, without any significant difference. Therefore, we find in the anthologies statements which originally are quoted under entries as “the Rites say (li shuo 禮說)” or “the lore says (zhuan shuo 傳說)”. These statements should not be regarded as apocryphal statements. Even several fragments quoted in the Tang commentaries on the Gongyangzhuang are very suspicious.37

2.3 On the textual approach

2.3.1 On the apocrypha and philology

After having briefly presented the textual complexity of the chenwei corpus, we are now coming close to a crossroads. We could certainly continue to dissect the still extant fragmentary body in the search for further faults or mistakes: attentive readers of the anthologies will unquestionably be able to find a few of them.38 Therefore, it is certainly

34 See Shuofu 5B. See also Gu weishu 5 in Weishu jicheng, vol. I, 170-173.
35 For the Tongtongtu, see Choshu Isho Shusei 1B:126-127. For the mention of this text in the bibliographic treatise of the Suishu, see Suishu 30:1036. As far as I have been able to ascertain, the Tongtongtu has never been presented as a weft appendix to the Yiijing.
37 On this point, see Huang Fushan (2000), 229-374.
38 A text like the Chunqiu-Xuanjishu 璇機樞, for instance, has probably never existed since its two textual evidences also appear in the Shangshu-Xuanjiquan. Obviously, there is a mistake here ascribable either to the authors of the cover sources or to the collectors. In this regard, see Choshu isho shusei 4B:132.
appropriate to agree with Huang Fushan about the fallacies of the anthologies. The role to assign to this insight when working with the chenwei is, however, questionable. Huang Fushan attaches a considerable importance to the untrustworthiness of the anthologies and to the misunderstandings of the collectors. Yet, the confusion into which the user of the anthologies is often plunged is not attributable to the philological inaccuracy of Sun Jue or of the Japanese scholars but rather to the complexity of the chen phenomenon itself. Often, in fact, an interpreter dealing with a suspicious title or fragment will only run into blind alleys. In this regard, the Yiwei-zhongfuzhuan (Weft of the) Changes. The Lore of the Hexagram zhongfu is a case in point. This text is explicitly quoted in the Hou Hanshu simply as Yi zhongfuzhuan.39 Cases where the elements are either too few or too contradictory to classify the text or the fragments are unfortunately frequent. How shall we proceed, for instance, when dealing with fragments listed in the anthologies and mentioned in later texts without any evident link to the apocrypha? A number of chenwei fragments, for example, describe some asterisms located in the southern quadrant of the sky: the same wordings also appear in the Treatise on Astrology of the Jinshu:40 The striking fact is that the author of this document, namely the Tang astronomer Li Chunfeng, does not present these descriptions as contents of the apocrypha. At this point, the interpreter could classify these parts of the chenwei as spurious or as later interpolations. Yet, this fact could be explained in many different ways by arguing, for instance, that the Tang astronomer used the same sources that were available to the author of these parts of the apocrypha. Moreover, as we have seen, Li Chunfeng was familiar with and drew from the apocrypha to compile his Yisizhan: accordingly, we may make clear the resemblance between apocrypha and the Jinshu by simply maintaining that the Tang scholar did not see the need to expressly mention the chenwei.

The remarks above have shown, it is hoped, that philology, while being a necessary coadjutant instrument when working with the apocrypha, cannot always help to explain the origin of a specific fragment or title. Therefore, while agreeing with Huang Fushan about the several fallacies of the anthologies, the present study shall try to develop some general guidelines to deal with the collections in order to finally go beyond the textual analysis.

2.3.2 The titles: reference material

In this paragraph, we shall present the reference material and discuss the criteria used to select it. Let me first recall a few basic facts. The medieval centuries witnessed the
production of “new” apocryphal texts. By the Tang, the commentator of the *Hou Hanshu*, Li Xian, compiled a list of 35 wefts. As already stressed, Li Xian’s list should not be regarded as a mirror of the Han corpus but rather as an *attempt* at reconstruction: the uncertainties behind the inclusion of the books attached to the *Xiaojing* and *Lunyu* as well as the non-inclusion of the *Minglixu* are the most important factors behind this warning. Therefore, the present study shall use Li Xian’s list only partially. Above all, we will countercheck it against Han sources and consider only those texts quoted within early books or provided with (traces of) early commentaries as those written by Zheng Xuan or by the early medieval scholar Song Jun 宋均.\(^{41}\) The following tables and remarks present the reference material and the specific problems connected to the selection of the texts.\(^{42}\)

\(\text{(a) \quad First group of texts: unproblematic cases} \)

In this paragraph, we shall first consider the unproblematic cases and present in tabular form the wefts to the *Rites*, *Music*, *Odes*, *Classic of Filial Piety*, and *Annals*. As the remarks in the third column of the tables show, several of them are quoted in Han sources. Alternatively, they have a commentary written by Zheng Xuan or by the medieval scholar Song Jun. Moreover, as indicated in the fourth column, most of the titles belong to the list 36 wefts made by the Tang scholar Li Xian.

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<tr>
<th>Hanwenjia</th>
<th><em>Encompassing the Auspiciousness of (Heavenly) Patterns</em></th>
<th><em>BHT</em> 13:33</th>
<th>LX</th>
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<td><em>BHT</em> 43:79</td>
<td>LX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Douweiyi</td>
<td><em>The Norm: the Authority of the Dipper</em></td>
<td>Song Jun: <em>CSI</em> 3:69</td>
<td>LX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{41}\) For a summary of the issues concerning the commentators of the apocrypha, see Neo Pengfu (2000), 87-88.

\(^{42}\) The following abbreviations will be used in the tables below. *HHS:* *Hou Hanshu*; *CIS/Choshu isho shusei*; *BHT:* *Baihutong*. The references to the *Hou Hanshu* are to be understood as referring to memorials or further documents written under the Han. Besides Chinese titles and sources, the tables also offer tentative translations. For the *Yiwei*, I partially follow the translations adopted in Neo Pengfu (2000), 80.
Chapter Two. Towards the contents of the apocrypha

The apocryphal appendices to the *Music*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dongshengyi 動聲儀</td>
<td><em>The Norm: Moving Sounds</em></td>
<td>HHS 35:1197 LX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jiyaojia 稽耀嘉</td>
<td><em>Examining the Auspiciousness of the Luminaries</em></td>
<td>Song Jun: CSI 3:93 LX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xietuzheng 叶圖徵</td>
<td><em>The Evidence: The Representation of Harmony</em></td>
<td>Dongguan Hanji 5:31 LX</td>
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The apocryphal appendices to the *Classic of Filial Piety*

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<td><em>The Talisman: Quoting the Spirits</em></td>
<td>HHS 13:538 LX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goumingjue 鉤命決</td>
<td><em>The Recipe: Hooking the Mandate</em></td>
<td>HHS 30B:1073 LX</td>
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The apocryphal appendices to the *Odes*

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<td>Song Jun: CSI 3:21 LX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuiduzai 推度災</td>
<td><em>Predicting Calamities</em></td>
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<td>Fanlishu 汰歷樞</td>
<td><em>The Pivot: Schedule of Floods</em></td>
<td>HHS 30B:1065 LX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The apocryphal appendices to the *Documents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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<th>Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaolingyao 考靈曜</td>
<td><em>Examining the (Heavenly) Luminaries</em></td>
<td>HHS (zhi) 2:3027 LX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xingdefang 行德放</td>
<td><em>The Positionement of Punishments and Rewards</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Xuanjiqian 璇機鈐</td>
<td><em>The Seal of the Xuanji (Stars)</em></td>
<td>HHS 35:1201 LX</td>
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<td>Dimingyan 帝命驗</td>
<td><em>The Verification of the Imperial Mandate</em></td>
<td>HHS 35:1202 LX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunqishou 運期授</td>
<td><em>The Bestowing of the Revolving Phase</em></td>
<td>Song Jun: CSI 2:66 LX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43 In the bibliographical chapter of the *Suishu*, both the *Goumingjue* and the *Yuanshenqi* are considered as extern to the apocryphal corpus. In this regard, see *Suishu* 32:940. As the table illustrates, however, these texts are mentioned in the *Hou Hanshu*. With regard to the wefts of the *Xiaojing*, it is perhaps also useful to recall that the *Choshu isho shusei* lists further titles. However, none of them is quoted in Han sources and only one, the *Xiaojing neishi*, presents a commentary by Song Jun. In this regard, see *Choshu isho shusei* 5:79. Most likely, this heading is a collective title: it is very probable that whoever assembled excerpt of the apocrypha in this source also quoted the glosses written by Song Jun.

44 In the bibliographical chapter of the *Suishu*, these wefts to the *Odes* are all considered extraneous to the apocryphal corpus. See *Suishu* 32:940. Nevertheless, as the table show, at least the *Fanlishu* is mentioned in the *Hou Hanshu*. Thus, it is safe to trust the presence of a commentary by Song Jun and consider them all as Han chenwei texts.

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### The Apocryphal Appendices to the *Annals*

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><em>The Net of Origin and Mandate</em></td>
<td>HHS 59:1912</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yankongtu 演孔圖</td>
<td><em>Portraying Confucius’ Diagram</em></td>
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<td>Wenyaogou 文曜鉤</td>
<td><em>The Hook: Luminaries and Patterns</em></td>
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<td>Yundoushu 運斗樞</td>
<td><em>The Pivot: Shifting Dipper</em></td>
<td>HHS (zhi) 2:3037</td>
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<td>Ganjingfu 感精符</td>
<td><em>The Token: Attracting the Essence</em></td>
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<td>Hechengtu 合誠圖</td>
<td><em>The Diagram: Matching Sincerity</em></td>
<td>Caizhong langji 7:39</td>
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<td>Kaoyiyou 考異郵</td>
<td><em>The Stamp: Examining Anomalies</em></td>
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<td>Baoqiantu 保乾圖</td>
<td><em>The Diagram: Protecting the Hexagram Qian</em></td>
<td>HHS (zhi) 2:3035</td>
<td>LX</td>
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<td>Hanhanzi 漢合孳</td>
<td><em>The Han Encompass the Flourishing</em></td>
<td>HHS (zhi) 16:3328</td>
<td>LX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zuoquhuqi 佐助期</td>
<td><em>The Phase: Assistance and Support</em></td>
<td>Song Jun: CSI 4B:63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wochengtu 握誠圖</td>
<td><em>The Diagram: Grasping Sincerity</em></td>
<td>Song Jun: CSI 4B:71</td>
<td>LX</td>
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<td>Qiantanba 潛潭巴</td>
<td><em>The Hope: The Hidden Pool</em></td>
<td>BHT 16:37</td>
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<td>Shuotici 說題辭</td>
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<td>Song Jun: CSI 4B:100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minglixu 命曆序</td>
<td><em>The Sequence: Scheduling the Mandates</em></td>
<td>HHS (zhi) 2:3033</td>
<td>LX</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Two. Towards the contents of the apocrypha

(b) Second group of wefts: Forewarnings and appendices to the Analects

The most intriguing aspect of the wefts of the Shujing is the subsection Zhonghou, which appears in almost every collection of apocryphal fragments. The Tang scholar Li Xian, however, makes no mention whatsoever of this part. At this point, we have two possibilities. Either the Zhonghou-texts did not belong to the apocryphal corpus or, alternatively, they actually were part of the Han canon but were known under further headings such as, for instance, Hetu and Luoshu. I consider the second option to be the more probable explanation. One element, in particular, seems to speak in favour of this hypothesis. Up to the Tang, commentaries on the classics appear to ignore the fact that the Zhonghou was an appendix to the Documents: while quoting from this section of the chenwei corpus, they do not use the heading “Shangshu-Zhonghou”. I suspect that the affiliation of the Zhonghou to the Shangshu was proposed in the apocryphal texts themselves but not taken into account during the editing of the first century AD. Later, Zheng Xuan accepted this fact. The Tang introduction to the Odes, in fact, says:

鄭作書論依尚書緯云孔子求書得黃帝 孫帝魁之書迄於秦穆公凡三千二百四十篇斷遠取近 定可以為世法者百二十篇。以百二篇為尚書十八篇為中候。【…】

When Zheng [Xuan] wrote the discussion about the Documents, he said in accordance with the wefts of the Documents: “Confucius went to look for [lost] books. He found the texts of Huangdi’s descendants Diku. They dated back to Mu, duke of Qin. All together, [he found] 3240 chapters. He discarded what was far and accepted what was close. Thereafter, he fixed 120 chapters which were to be used as model for the world. With 102 chapters, he assembled the Documents and 18 chapters become the Zhonghou. […]”

If we choose to give credence to Zheng Xuan, the Zhonghou was the outcome of Confucius’s search for books. It seems to me that the words above can only be interpreted as an explicit allusion to the existence of a Zhonghou corpus in 18 chapters under the Han. Hence, this study will accept as part of the reference material those texts which include at least a fragment provided with a commentary by Zheng Xuan.

45 See, for instance, Lunyu zhushu 9, Zikan 2490 (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. II, 2490); Liji zhushu 1A, Dianli (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 1232-1233). It is perhaps worthwhile to add that this fact cannot be explained by assuming that other apocryphal texts were always quoted without the formal affiliation. See, for example, the introduction to the Erya zhushu (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. II, 2538). The entry Shangshu-Zhonghou appears in medieval dynastic histories. See, for example, Nan Qishu 18:350.

46 See the introduction to the Shangshu zhengyi in Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 110.
The Forewarnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zhonghou</th>
<th>The Forewarning of the Middle (Rising)</th>
<th>Zheng Xuan: CIS 2:88</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Woheji</td>
<td>Holding the Mark of the River</td>
<td>Zheng Xuan: CIS 2:92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Woying</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Kaoheming</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Luoyuming</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Ceshengtu</td>
<td>The Diagram in Plans and Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Jiqi</td>
<td>The Rise of (Hou) Ji</td>
<td>Zheng Xuan: CIS 2:105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhonghou Zhunchenzhe</td>
<td>Standardizing The Prophecies of the Wise</td>
<td>Zheng Xuan: CIS 2:105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The texts attached to the *Lunyu* certainly constitute a problematic case since neither Han sources nor Li Xian’s counting mention any text connected to the *Analects*. Yet, a *chenwei* section attached to the *Lunyu* undoubtedly existed under the Han, as the occurrence of *Lunyuchen* in the *Baihutong* testifies.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the table below shall present the texts which in all probability were associated with the *Lunyu* under the Han.

The texts attached to the *Analects*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bikao</th>
<th>Analysis of the Hexagram Bi</th>
<th>Song Jun: CIS 5:118</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Xuankao</td>
<td>Analysis of the Hexagram Xuan</td>
<td>Song Jun: CIS 5:120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhaifaxiang</td>
<td>The Simulacrum: Selecting the Assistant</td>
<td>Song Jun: CIS 5:121.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhaishuaisheng</td>
<td>The Sage: Pointing at the Decline</td>
<td>Song Jun: CIS 5:125.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

⁴⁷ *Baihutong* 15:35.
Third group of wefts: the Changes

The wefts to the *Changes* constitute the most problematic group of texts within the apocryphal corpus. We face here a logical problem rather than textual issues. It is in fact questionable whether the development of the *Yiwei* actually fits the history of the apocryphal phenomenon. In previous paragraphs, we have seen that complete versions of eight appendixes to the *Changes* along with commentaries by Zheng Xuan appeared in the *Yongle dadian*: later, they were even included in the *Siku quanshu*. By assuming that the copies included in the Ming encyclopedia were in effect the original texts, an interpreter inevitably wonders why the Tang librarian Wei Zheng emphasized the gradual disappearance of the apocrypha and ignored the astonishing survival of the *Yiwei*. Here, it is perhaps worthwhile to recall that Wei Zheng explicitly ruled out the possibility of restoring the doctrines of the *chenwei*. Thus, by the Tang, the *Yiwei* were fragmentary just like other apocryphal titles. Moreover, as we have seen, at least one *Yiwei* included in the *Siku quanshu* was regarded as a Song forgery, namely the *Qianyuanxu zhiji*. At this point, it is necessary to re-consider Li Xian’s list of the wefts to the *Changes*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The apocryphal appendices to the <em>Changes</em></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qianzaodu</strong> 乾鑿度</td>
<td><strong>The Marking: Chiselling the Qian</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jilantu</strong> 棟覽圖</td>
<td><strong>The Diagram: Examining the Viewing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kunlingtu</strong> 坤靈圖</td>
<td><strong>The Diagram: the Treasure of the Kun</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tongguayan</strong> 通卦驗</td>
<td><strong>Apprehending the Verification of the Hexagrams</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shileimou</strong> 是類謀</td>
<td><strong>Contemplation Pertaining to Milfoil Divination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bianzhongbei</strong> 辨終備</td>
<td><strong>Discernment Ensues Preparedness</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from the *Qianzaodu*, all the wefts to the *Changes* listed by Li Xian are problematic cases. As Neo Pengfu highlights, the Qing scholar Zhang Huiyan 張惠言, who wrote the *Yiwei lüeyi 易緯略義* [Outline Explanation of the Wefts to the Changes],

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48 See *Choshu isho shusei* 1A, 1B.
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passes a very harsh judgement on several texts. In his opinion, only the Jilantu, Qianzaodu, and Tongguayan can be considered relatively complete. The Kunlingtu, the Shileimou, and the Bianzhongbei are mostly incomprehensible since the biggest part of them is lost. Moreover, Sun Yirang even denied the authenticity of Zheng Xuan’s commentary to the Shileimou. Thus, it is unsafe to regard the list presented above as the Han corpus of the wefts to the Changes. These elements make clear that it is necessary to use attention when dealing with these texts.

(d) Hetu and Luoshu

The analysis of the Hetu and Luoshu texts will not require a long discussion, mainly because, apart from the quotations in Han sources and the presence of a commentary by Zheng Xuan or Song Jun, we have no additional reference points.

|-----------------------------|------------|------------------|------------------|----------|------------------|------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|

49 Neo Pengfu (2000), 97-98.
50 Neo Pengfu (2000), 97.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luoshu texts</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><em>Lingzhunting</em> 靈準聽</td>
<td><em>The Obedience: Treasures and Rules</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Song Jun: <em>CIS</em> 6:171</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Zhenyaodu</em> 頤曜度</td>
<td><em>The Measure: Observing the Luminaries</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>HHS (zhì)</em> 7:3165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Zhaiwangbi</em> 摘亡辟</td>
<td><em>The Punishment: Pointing at the Collapse</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Jun: <em>CIS</em> 6:185</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.3 On the cover sources

Material belonging to suspicious texts — late apocrypha, collective titles, even the wefts to *Changes* — must be used with attention within a study on the Han chenwei. These fragments, in fact, should work as supporting material and not as reference point when starting a discussion about a specific topic. Neo Pengfu’s recent study has demonstrated the feasibility of this approach. Despite the suspiciousness of many wefts attached to the *Changes*, it is still possible to analyse these texts by reflecting on those thematic threads linkable to the Han cultural landscape. By constantly comparing the contents of the *Yiwei* with similar argumentations in the apocrypha and in the Han sources, we can limit the risk of running into thematic anachronisms and, at the same time, enrich our understanding of the chenwei under the Han. The interpreter of the apocrypha can follow this strategy even when dealing with collective titles or with late chenwei. By regularly taking reliable fragments as starting point for beginning a discussion on a specific theme, we can sometimes turn to generic headings as *Hetu* or *Luoshu* or even use material coming from suspicious texts. Finally, we can rely upon the cover sources.

Generically, we may list three advantages of working with quoting texts. First, they undoubtedly help to identify mistakes on the part of the collectors in including given fragments in their anthologies; second, they may sometimes help to individuate spurious material; third, they give to the reader a better grasp of the content of an apocryphal fragment.

In order to illustrate the first advantage of the cover source, namely the possibility of identifying errors on the part of the collectors, we may consider a fragment collected in the *Choshu isho shusei* under the heading *Yiwei-Tongtongtu*: it discusses the solar motion over a year. In all probability, this sentence did not belong to the Han corpus. The cover source which quotes this fragment, namely the *Hou Hanshu*, makes no mention of the *Tongtongtu*. This is unquestionably a mistake since the listing of this fragment in earlier compilative works is the only reason for its inclusion in the Japanese anthology. This case shows how the use of cover sources may shed some light on the

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51 For the *Tongtongtu*, see *Isho Shusei* 1B:126-127. For a fragment quoted as *Tongtongtu* in the
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interpretable mistakes of the collectors. The matter becomes more complicated when we try to identify spurious or later material in the anthologies. A few apocryphal texts quoted in the Han sources are suspected of having been practically re-written in the centuries after the downfall of the Liu. This is the case with the *Hanwenjia*, an appendix to the *Liji* which apparently was heavily re-worked by the unknown Southern Song scholar Zhang Shiyu 張師禹. Accordingly, when approaching this text, it is appropriate to observe a few rules of textual analysis and avoid those fragments which come from books written after the Tang. Finally, in regard to the contents, it is perhaps useful to stress that the anthologies are merely an attempt at reconstruction, and the portrayal they offer must not be confused with the original context of the apocrypha. In this sense, the cover sources are far more reliable. Certainly, at a first sight, these texts appear to be much more chaotic than the *Choshu isho shusei*. One of the most obvious consequences is a loss in immediacy, which however, helps the reader of the *chenwei* to identify whether a term encountered in the apocrypha has to be regarded as a generic expression or whether it refers to a specific context. This proves to be a very rewarding method for identifying, for instance, names of stars or of specific heavenly phenomena.

2.4 On the thematic analysis

As mentioned before, some helpful studies have explored the exegetical layer of the *chenwei* by shedding light on the relevance of *jinwen*-bound theories and, in particular, of the Qi school, in the fragments still extant. Moreover, Zhong Zhaopeng has successfully described some important thematic threads such as the *chenwei* portrayal of Confucius. Finally, Neo Pengfu has deepened the strands of the *Yiwei*. This “re-discovery” of the thematic analysis must be regarded as one of the most important results achieved in the field of the apocrypha. In particular, the strategy of analysing the *chenwei* fragments by regularly taking into account further Han sources, is, in my opinion, a very rewarding way of proceeding. First, it allows us to overcome the fragmentariness of the material by reconstructing the context of the *chenwei* sentences. Second, it enables us to comprehend the apocryphal approach to a given theme by finally understanding in what way this can be considered original or simply different in respect to the approach adopted in other Han sources. Thus, the present study shall follow the example given by scholars like Zhong Zhaopeng and Neo Pengfu and approach the apocrypha thematically, turning to further Han sources whenever they prove to be useful for the comprehension of a given layer of *chenwei* contents.

collections, see *Hou Hanshu* (zhi) 3:3055.

52 *Siku quanshu zongmu* 33:280.
The thematic approach to the *chenwei* must allow us to elaborate a definition of the Han apocrypha which also takes into account the historical context in which the texts were written and the cultural milieu which produced them. Accordingly, the analysis of the contents should at least deal with the most representative layers of the books. We can safely leave aside themes which have already been treated at length in further studies, such as the exegetical strategies adopted in the *Yiwei* or the relevance of the Qi interpretation of the classics in the *chenwei*. The issue that we cannot neglect is the technical stratum of the corpus.

The definitive Tang classification of the apocrypha as exegetical studies has considerably influenced the destiny of modern and contemporary scholarship. When Wei Zheng listed the *chenwei* under the heading “classics”, he substantially compelled generations of researchers to look at them exclusively as commentaries on the canonical works. Thus, the fact that medieval bibliographers regarded the apocrypha as technical (*shushu*) books has completely been neglected. This stance is simply incorrect since Han sources abound of allusions to the technical relevance of these texts. Let us consider, for example, the case of calendar. According to the *Hou Hanshu*, the Superior Origin of the Later Han official almanac was based on the wordings of two apocryphal books, namely the *Yuanmingbao* and the *Qianzaodu*. The Later Han calendar certainly was a highly technical system which considerably improved the Chinese way of scheduling time.\(^{53}\) An interpreter which endeavours to define the *chenwei* should necessarily dwell on questions like: how is it possible that texts, which were often considered to be heretical, encompassed an advanced technical layer? Unfortunately, such issues have not received scholarly attention. In the same way, the huge astrological layer of the apocrypha is neglected in most of the cases. Yet, the short entry *tushu miji* 圖書秘記 at the end of the astrological section in the bibliography of the *Hanshu* is, in my opinion, a clear allusion to the necessity of dealing with astrology.\(^{54}\) One could here also recall that scholars who harboured some interest in Confucius’s secret classics generally were also fond of different divinatory texts, as for example, *tianwen*.\(^{55}\) Moreover, post-Han rulers appear to connect the apocryphal texts or even generic prophetic books to astrology. The Jin proscription of 276 is a case in point, since emperor Wu prohibited the study of the *chenwei* connected to the interpretation of stars (*xingqi chenwei* 星氣讖緯).\(^{56}\) Finally, if we consider the role of the apocrypha in Tang

\(^{53}\) Sivin (1969). Here, we can also recall that the calendrical reform of AD 85 was sponsored by some of the most important and skilful Han technicians.

\(^{54}\) *Hanshu* 30:1765.


\(^{56}\) *Jinshu* 3:56.
2.5  How to approach the apocryphal contents: the discourses of the *chenwei*

An interpreter approaching the contents of the *chenwei* quickly becomes aware of the thematic complexity of the material still extant. Besides fragments speaking about mythical beasts, we have astrological prognoses, calendrical disquisitions, allusions to mantic practices, anecdotes about the birth of Confucius, and stories on the bestowals of the Heaven’s mandate. An interpreter confronted with the task of organizing such discrepant thematic threads could certainly follow the sinological tradition and focus on the exegetical layer. Yet, as already mentioned above, it is highly questionable whether this approach is rewarding: on the one hand, the exegetical layer of the apocrypha has already been thoroughly investigated; on the other hand, such an approach is limiting when dealing with the whole corpus. The rebuff of this option has, however, rather significant implications. If we reject the possibility to analyse the apocrypha in terms of exegetical works, we automatically forego the opportunity to interpret the texts by using the parameters of traditional classification of Chinese culture, since “exegesis” is a standard category in ancient and modern bibliographies. This, in turn, obliges us to leave aside even the option of approaching the contents of the *chenwei* in accordance with those medieval scholars who listed the texts under the heading *shushu* or “techniques”. This choice, in fact, would simply reproduce the limits of those works which defined the apocryphal books only through the analysis of their exegetical layer. An interpreter wishing to define the contents of the apocryphal texts in line with the standard categorization of Chinese culture should necessarily consider both “techniques” and “exegesis” as the main discourses of the *chenwei*. The suitability of this approach, however, is questionable. In fact, it depends, first, on our ability to use “techniques” and “exegesis” as thematic keys and, second, on the workability of this strategy for gathering the several subjects treated in the apocrypha under these main headings, without extending the field covered by “techniques” and “exegesis” or stretching the meaning of the *chenwei* fragments.

We know that “techniques” and “exegesis” are not only labels which describe the contents of a book but also categories for placing this text within Chinese written culture. A thematic analysis of the apocrypha, however, does not aim to classify the *chenwei* but rather to portray the topics treated in these texts. When combining this scope with our hypothetical reference points, we must necessarily ask which are the themes discussed within the fields “techniques” and “exegesis”. The bibliography conserved in the *Hanshu* is certainly a valuable help since it dissects our main reference points into a chain of subfields. Thus, in respect to “techniques”, we could proceed with...
the analysis of the layers linked to astrology or calendar. In respect to “exegesis”, we could link the fragments to the subfields of the exegetical realm, namely the study of the single classics. In this way, for instance, speculations on the significance of the hexagrams should be understood within the subfield “Changes”.

Even if the strategy depicted above may occasionally work well, it often becomes a trap, especially when trying to categorize a few apocryphal subjects under the heading “exegesis”. Several themes are classifiable as exegetical threads only at the cost of stretching the meaning of “exegesis” or the contents of the fragments. Which branch of the exegetical realm was concerned with the role of stars in cosmology? And which exegetical tradition was interested in presenting the mythic sovereign Fuxi 伏羲 as an individual with a dragon-body? As we shall see, both these strata are traceable in the wefts to the Annals, whereas other Han exegetical and historical sources are extremely reticent. Accordingly, it becomes difficult for us to link such themes to an exegetical discussion of the time. Certainly, we will occasionally meet the name of some ru: Jing Fang, for example, may well have been interested in issues concerning astral cosmology. Yet, ru was not always synonym with “exegete”: while being educated in the canon, the cultural interests of a ru could well go beyond the exegetical reflection on a given classic. In other words, the intellectual activity of a ru was not necessarily limited to the drafting of an exegetical study. This point is particularly important for an interpreter of the apocrypha. When we finally keep “ru” separated from “exegete”, we can also approach some of the texts formally attached to the classics from a broader perspective.

In this regard, it is perhaps necessary to stress that an overestimation of the exegetical character of the books marked as “wefts” leads the interpreter into a cul de sac since the collocation of the Hetu/Luoshu texts becomes problematical. In the familiar dichotomy “exegesis/Techniques”, for example, they inevitably turn to “technical books”. As we shall see, the text with the most technical context is the Kaolingyao, which is formally presented as an appendix of the Documents. Only some Hetu/Luoshu texts, on the contrary, show a strong “technical” character.

The remarks above suggest the ambiguousness of a thematic analysis centred on “techniques” and “exegesis”. It is therefore convenient to look for different thematic keys which, while allowing us to stress the link to specific exegetical or technical circles whenever needed, do not compel us to constrict all the relevant fragments under these headings. In this context, we could also recall that several interpreters of the chenwei have rightly stressed the importance of well-known Han trends of thought such as correlative thinking or the resonance theory within these texts. Yet, it seems to me that

57 Texts such as those written by Huan Tan or Xun Yue, for example, were listed under the ru entry of official bibliographies. In this regard, see Suishu 47:2024.
such keys only grasp the very basic facet of the contents of the apocrypha. As texts assembled under the Han, they understandably reflect the main philosophical framework of that period. Thus, when discussing the contents of the chenwei, it is convenient to try to go beyond such all-encompassing keys.

The interpreter of the chenwei can identify the main discourses of the apocrypha by looking into early sources, in particular those written under the Han and during early medieval centuries. To begin, we may rely on the history of the apocrypha under the Later Han when these books were certainly seen as related to the idea of Heaven’s Mandate. Thus, one could pose the following questions: who bestows the Mandate? Who receives it? The answers to these queries — tian and shengren — will serve as the main thematic keys of the present study.
3. TOWARDS THE CONTENTS OF THE APOCRYPHA

3.1 Toward Han interdisciplinarity

Once Zigong 子貢 said of Confucius:

「夫子之文章, 可得而聞也; 夫子之言性與天道, 不可得而聞也。」

„The Master's personal displays of his principles and ordinary descriptions of them may be heard. His discourses about man's nature, and the way of Heaven, cannot be heard.”

By the end of the Early Han dynasty, the general understanding of the duties of Confucius admirers and intellectual disciples had changed remarkably. The famous scholar Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC – AD 18) defined ru 儒 as the intellectuals who grasped Heaven, Earth, and Man (tong tian di yue ru 通天地人曰儒).

The path from Confucius’ refusal to discuss matters concerning the natural order up to Yang Xiong’s willingness to grasp Heaven and Earth does not only reflect the transformation of the Confucian lineage from its classic formulation to the Han re-elaboration but it is also a sign of the heavy interdisciplinary discourse which grew in the last centuries BC.

Between Confucius’s refusal to speak about Heaven and Yang Xiong’s appeal for a multi-layered knowledge, the interpreter of Chinese culture finds Xunzi 旬子 and his Tianlun 天論 [On Heaven]:

列星隨旋，日月遞炤，四時代御，陰陽大化，風雨博施，萬物各得其和以生，各得其養以成，不見其事，而見其功，夫是之謂神。皆知其所以成，莫知其無形，夫是之謂天〔功〕。唯聖人為不求知天。

The stars revolve and the sun and moon shine one after another. The four seasons rule one after another. *Yin* and *yang* are behind the transformations; rain and wind are behind the dispensation. Each of the ten thousand things get what it needs to be born, each of them gets its nourishment in order to ripen. To notice its completion without seeing its working: this is what is called [natural] sprite. Everybody knows the means through which it brings things to ripeness but nobody knows that it is without form. This is what is called Heavenly completion. Only the sage manages to renounce to understand

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59 *Fayan* 12:33. This work shall adopt as main definition of Han ru-ism the description given in the bibliography of the *Hanshu* and consider the ru to be the group which venerated Confucius as master (zongshi Zhongni 宗師仲尼), skilled in the classics (you wen yu liujing zhi zhong 游文於六經之中), and concerned with politics (zhu renjun shun yin yang ming jiaohua ye 助人君順陰陽明教化也) and with ethics (liu yi yu renyi zhi ji 留意於仁義之際). See *Hanshu* 30:1728.
Approaching the apocrypha

Heaven.60

Xunzi’s sage refused, as Confucius did, to look into natural mysteries. Yet, while Confucius had opted for a meaningful silence on the heavenly path (tiandao 天道), his disciple Xunzi wrote a lengthy document on this subject. This implicit incongruity reflects a change in the cultural landscape. In the third century BC, the voice of those advocating the importance of grasping the heavens could no longer be ignored: with the Tianlun, Xunzi implicitly admitted and explicitly condemned the growing influence of those people wishing to bring tian into the philosophical arena. Who were these people and what did they teach? The interest in the natural world on the part of people belonging to daoist groups and the endeavour to interpret heavenly phenomena on the part of fortune-tellers may have provoked Xunzi’s outburst in the Tianlun. In Han jargon, these diviners were masters of “numbers and methods” (shushu 數術): astrologers, calendarists (libu 曆譜), diviners skilled in physiognomy (xingfa 形法) or in interpreting milfoil and tortoise shells (shigui 著龜), and experts in mathematical divination (wu xing 五行).61 These technicians were gradually coming out of their niches and specialist fields. They strived to play in the wider arena of political courts in order to take part to the public debate. A figure which may fit into this constellation is that of Zou Yan.

Much has been written about the enigmatic figure known to students of Chinese thought by the name of Zou Yan. Beyond doubt, Zou Yan gained the attention of the courts of the Warring States rulers not least thanks to his well-known theory wu de zhongshi, according to which each period of Chinese history had to be seen as being governed by a specific cosmic force, namely one of the five agents. Han sources link Zou Yan to the yin/yang school which, according to Huang Kejian 黃克劍, was mostly a techniques-rooted community.62 This point is also made by Liu Lexian 劉樂賢. In his analysis of the Yanshi wusheng 閻氏五勝 [The Five Conquerors by the Yan lineage] — a bamboo text from the Early Han tomb of Wu Yang 吳陽 (d. 162 BC) excavated in 1999 — Liu Lexian alludes to the close ties between yin/yang school and the wu xing 五行 circles, underscoring the theoretical ambitions of the former and the technical/mantic milieu of the latter.63 Finally, Graham regarded Zou Yan as a sort of progenitor of those

61 These were the main disciplines gathered under Han “shushu”. In this regard, see Hanshu 30:1763-1775; Li Ling (2000), 19-26.
62 Under the heading Yinyang, the bibliographical chapter of the Hanshu lists a book in 49 chapters simply called Zouzi 鄒子 and a text in 56 chapters entitled Zouzi zhongshi 鄒子終始 [Master Zou’s Revolution (of the Five Powers)]. See Hanshu 30:1733. With regard to the technical facets of the Yinyang school, see Huang Kejian (2005), 39-40.
63 Liu Lexian (2003), 68-69.
variegated Han groups known as *fangshi*. However, his interests went well beyond technical skills, and he certainly spoke about ethics. In fact, according to the *Yantielun* [Discussions about Salt and Iron], he also used “Confucian methods” (*ru shu* 儒術). In all probability, these discrepant designations — a member of the *Yinyang* group, only a technician, even a Confucian — mean that Zou Yan was skipping among the cultural communities of his time to attract the attention of contemporary politicians. Evidently, the specialist groups, with their well-defined intellectual focuses, were evolving into complex intellectual communities who went beyond their traditional interests.

3.2 Correlative strategies and their interdisciplinary success

3.2.1 The Yueling

The development of an interdisciplinary debate in the last centuries BC also stand out in the growing success of what Needham used to call “correlative thinking” in his *Science and Civilization*, a well-known term used to refer to schemata which integrate features and aspects pertaining to different realms — political, human, natural— by means of a few leading classificatory categories, as the famous *yin/yang* or the five agents. For a long time, Marcel Granet’s interpretation of this cultural phenomenon as an everlasting and eternal peculiarity of Chinese *sagesse* has had a remarkable influence on the academic community. Since the nineties onwards, a greater historical awareness has led many distinguished scholars to review correlative thinking against the background of documented history. In particular, a few groundbreaking studies such as those by

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64 Graham (1989), 325.
65 Wang Aihe stresses the importance of ethical issues in the cultural identikit of Zou Yan. See Wang (2000), 140-141.
66 *Yantielun* 2:15. According to the text, Zou Yan first tried to attract the attention of politicians by means of Confucian theories. His failure (*bu yong* 不用) prompted him to argue on the basis of the Revolution of the Five Powers. For a full discussion of this facet of Zou Yan’s cultural background, see Xiu Jianjun (1995), 31-32.
67 In the *Yantielun*, Zou Yan is presented as a man who certainly did not deserve the label “sage” (*Yan fei shengren* 衍非聖人) since he concocted strange theories (*zuo guaiwu* 作怪詛) and puzzled the rulers of the Six States (*huo liuguo zhi jun* 惑六國之君). See *Yantielun* 9:67.
69 The growing importance of this historical approach already appears in Graham who wrote that correlative thinking “entered the main current of Chinese thought only at the very end of the classical period” mainly thanks to technicians. Graham (1989), 320. In his review of Graham’s work, Sivin challenged this approach by strongly emphasizing that correlative thinking was an intellectual contribution of philosophical circles. See Sivin (1992). On this debate, see also Harper (1998), 48. Wang (2002).
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John B. Henderson or by Wang Aihe have demonstrated that correlative tendencies assumed different facets over the centuries. Finally, according to a recent study by Henderson, the increasing level of literacy and the rapid spread of written material in the last centuries BC decisively contributed to fuel an interdisciplinary discourse and to transform the neurobiological disposition to think correlative into a cultural trend which produced “complex correlative schemata”.

One of the earliest complex correlative scheme to be passed down to us is the *Yueling* [Monthly Ordinances]. In the text, elements belonging to different realms — political, ritual, human, calendrical, cosmological, astrographical, astronomical — are presented together to suggest and demonstrate the possibility of analysing the whole cosmos by means of a few key-categories such as seasons, directions, or tastes. Below is an example of some of the categories associated to the first month of spring (mengchun 孟春):

孟春之月：日在營室，昏參中，旦尾中。其日甲乙。其帝太皞。其神句芒。其蟲鱗。其音角。律中太蔟。其數八。其味酸。【…】

[With regard to] the first month of spring, the sun is in the [lodge] House. At dusk [the lodge] Triaster is centred. At dawn [the lodge] Tail is centred. The associated day is jiayi. The associated Emperor is Taihao. The associated spirit is Goumang. The associated form of animal life is scaled. The associated sound is *jiao*. On the pitchpipes, it is *taicu*. The associated number is eight. The associated taste is sour. […]

Besides listing all the aspects linked to the seasons of the year, the *Yueling* also presents a basic construct of early culture, namely the Five Agents. For each of the four seasons, in fact, the text mentions the associated *xing*.

3.2.2 Correlative astrology

As a useful key for decoding and classifying the different realms of the cosmos, the *wu xing* framework was destined to achieve a growing success in the last centuries BC. The process which helped to transform this construct into a flourishing Han framework extended over a rather long period during which it slowly infiltrated several cultural communities. In this regard, the example of medicine is enlightening. The most famous

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71 Farmer, Henderson, Witzel (2000). The authors consider the topic from a comparative viewpoint and propose a well-working cross-cultural model of development. Two points, in particular, are well worth of note. First, the appearance of correlative tendencies in many cultures and traditions can be explained if we consider that the human brain tends to associate things belonging to different realms. The emergence of complex correlative schemata, however, depends on the necessity of combining, arranging, and harmonizing theories of different cultural groups.
72 Lüshi chunqiu 1.1:1.
Chapter Two. Towards the contents of the apocrypha

ey early medical text, the *Huangdi neijing*, certainly presents several strata which are clearly correlative in nature: the association of human organs to each of the five agents is one of the most well known examples. Yet, in the medical texts excavated at Mawangdui there is no significant influence of the *wu xing*. This can only mean that by the time the manuscripts were buried (168 BC) this framework had not yet been accepted the circles of physicians.

The success of correlative schemata is also evident in the astrological/astrographical context. Let us first consider the case of the “four heavenly animals”. It is well known that technicians of the last centuries BC relied on 28 unevenly asterisms lying in the proximity of the ecliptic — the 28 lodges (*xiu*) — when tracking the path of the sun, the moon, and the five planets through the stars. During the last centuries BC, these constellations were divided into four groups of seven asterisms stretching along the four cardinal points in the sky. These heavenly areas were finally associated with four mythical animals. Under the Han, the east was usually connected to the Green Dragon (*canglong* 蒼龍); the South to the Purple Bird (*zhuniao* 朱鳥), the West to the White Tiger (*baihu* 白虎); the North to the Dark Warrior (*xuanwu* 玄武). The tradition of the four heavenly animals assumed different forms during the last centuries BC. One of the optional schemes reveals the influence of correlative strategies. The *Tianwenxun* 天文訓 [On Heaven] chapter of the *Huainanzi* increased the number of heavenly beasts from four to five: just as the compilers of the *Yueling* created midsummer as a season associated with centre and earth, the authors of this document chose the dragon as the fifth animal for completing the five-grid scheme.

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73 On this point, see Sivin (1995).
75 Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 19. The scheme of the *xiu* had already reached full maturity by the fifth century BC since the names of the lodges appear on the lacquered box found in the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng. See Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 18-20; Needham (1959), 229–259; Chen Meidong (2003), 67-69; Cullen (1996), 46.
76 On the schematic presentation of the Five Palaces, see *Shiji* 27:1289; 1295; 1299; 1304; 1308. See also Sun, Kistemaker (1997), pp. 21-25; Ho (1985), 133.
77 On the four heavenly animals, see Ni Run’an (1999).
78 The *Shiji*, in fact, respects the plain plot: as we shall see, this document uses the labelling Yellow Dragon for referring to the Xuanyuan asterism in the southern area of the sky. *Shiji* 27:1299.
The success of correlative strategies in the astrological milieu becomes evident when comparing the astrological schemes with the model of the *Yueling*. Let us begin with an excerpt from the excavated text *Wuxing zhan* [Astrological Prognoses based on the Five Planets]. Below is an example concerning Venus:

【 […] 西方金, 其帝少昊, 其丞蓐收, 其神上為太白。【 […] 其時秋, 其日庚辛【 […]

 […] The West is Metal: its [correspondent] deity is Shaohao, its [correspondent] minister

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79 For the translation of the names of the lodges, see Cullen (1996), 18.
80 The pictures in the table represent the four heavenly animals (Early Han tiles): Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 118.
is Rushou, its [correspondent] spirit there above is Venus. […] Its [correspondent] season
is autumn and its [correspondent] days [begin with] geng and xin. […]81

We have a very similar line of reasoning in the Tianwenxun: the table below shall
summarize the correlative scheme and compare it to the Yueling.82

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th>Yueling</th>
<th>Wuxing zhan</th>
<th>Huainanzi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruling deity (di 帝)</td>
<td>Taihao 太皞</td>
<td>Taihao 太皞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helper (zuo 佐)</td>
<td>Goumang 句芒</td>
<td>Goumang 句芒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Spirit (shen 神)</td>
<td>Goumang 句芒</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal (shou 獸)</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruling deity (di 帝)</td>
<td>Yandi 炎帝</td>
<td>Yandi 炎帝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Helper (zuo 佐)</td>
<td>Zhuniao 朱鳥</td>
<td>Mars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirit (shen 神)</td>
<td>Zhuniao 朱鳥</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal (shou 獸)</td>
<td>Houtu 后土</td>
<td>Saturn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Midsummer</td>
<td>Midsummer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruling deity (di 帝)</td>
<td>Huangdi 黄帝</td>
<td>Huangdi 黄帝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helper (zuo 佐)</td>
<td>Houtu 后土</td>
<td>Saturn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Spirit (shen 神)</td>
<td>Houtu 后土</td>
<td>Saturn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal (shou 獸)</td>
<td>Huanglong 黃龍</td>
<td>Huanglong 黃龍</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruling deity (di 帝)</td>
<td>Shaohan 少皞</td>
<td>Shaohan 少皞</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helper (zuo 佐)</td>
<td>Rushou 萱收</td>
<td>Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spirit (shen 神)</td>
<td>Rushou 萱收</td>
<td>Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal (shou 獸)</td>
<td>Baihu 白虎</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Winter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ruling deity (di 帝)</td>
<td>Zhuanxu 顓頊</td>
<td>Zhuanxu 顓頊</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helper (zuo 佐)</td>
<td>Xuanming 玄冥</td>
<td>Xuanming 玄冥</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Spirit (shen 神)</td>
<td>Xuanming 玄冥</td>
<td>Mercury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animal (shou 獸)</td>
<td>Xuanwu 玄武</td>
<td>Xuanwu 玄武</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table makes clear that the correlative schemes of the Wuxing zhan and the Tianwenxun are similar to the Yueling. Nevertheless, the excavated manuscript and the chapter of the Huainanzi have a clear tianwen focus. This stands out in the choice of making of the planets the spirits (shen 神) associated with directions and agents as well as in the creation of a new category — that of ministers or helpers — for those deities called shen in the Yueling. In the Huainanzi, in particular, the tianwen focus is even stronger since this text includes the category of “animals” (shou 獸) which are the above-mentioned heavenly beasts.

3.3 Introducing Han cultural world: the ru between Heaven and man

3.3.1 Knowing man, knowing Heaven

By the beginning of the Han dynasty, the merging of cultural tendencies was already well advanced. This syncretic process also played a key role in shaping the intellectual profile of those groups— which we shall hereafter loosely refer to as Han scholarship or ru— mainly concerned with ethics and politics. One point, in particular, is worthy of note, namely the increasing interest in the natural realm. Accordingly, Han scholars began to stress the importance of multi-layered knowledge which was based both on the need to know natural processes and on the necessity to comprehend the importance of human action. This shift can be better understood if we recall that, in the Lunyu, the master of Lu once defined wisdom (zhi 知) as “knowledge of other human beings” (知人).83 On the other hand, Xunzi emphasized that the dao 道 of a ruler is defined by “knowledge of others” (zhu dao zhi ren 主道知人).84 During the last centuries BC, this definition of wisdom was enriched by highlighting the importance of knowing natural processes. Leaving momentarily aside the of reasoning of the Xici, we can consider here the following passage from the Hanshi waizhuan 韓詩外傳 [Outer Tradition of the Odes by Han]:

上知天，能用其時；下知地，能用其財；中知人，能安樂之，是聖人者也。

Above, he knows Heaven, and is able to benefit from its rhythm; below, he knows Earth, and he is able to profit from its resources; in the middle, he knows men, and is able to pacify them: this man is surely a sage.85

83 Lunyu 12.22.
84 Xunzi 29:143. On the self, see Roetz (1992), 258-265. In the Shujing, the knowledge of human beings was taken as pointer of wisdom and, at the same time, as the main feature of the government of emperor Yao 堯. See Legge (1960), vol. III, 71. Accordingly, a man able to know others was called sage, whereas the figure of an ideal ruler was characterized through his ability to reckon and to engage the worthies in the government.
85 Hanshi waizhuan 1:5. The Huainanzi adds: “To know Heaven without understanding men makes it
It was under the reign of emperor Wu that the concept of *tian* definitively found its intellectual legitimation thanks to the foremost Early Han thinker Dong Zhongshu. The text traditionally attributed to him — the *Chunqiu fanlu* — says:

夫王者不可以不知天。知天，詩 人之所難也。天意難見也，其道難理。

Now, an ideal sovereign cannot but know Heaven. To know Heaven is what even the men of the *Odes* found difficult. The will of Heaven is difficult to see and its Way is difficult to map.

What did Han scholars mean “knowledge of *tian*”? A technical knowledge of the heavens — astrology, cosmography, astrography, calendar — certainly played a role and some of these aspects will be reviewed individually in the next chapter. On a theoretical level, however, “knowing *tian*” implied to grasp all those interdependencies which transformed the human sphere into a realm resounding with the natural world.

### 3.3.2 Heaven and man

As is well known, the most remarkable aspect of the cultural transformation of the *ru* was undoubtedly the absorption of several different strata of thought and the adoption of a complex cosmology based on the cardinal idea that the human being forms a continuum with the natural realm. In the *Chunqiu fanlu*, this basic idea is described in the following ways: “the crevices between *tian* and *ren* fuse as to become a unity (*tianren zhi ji he er wei yi 天人之際合而為一*)”. Thus, Han *ru*-ism believed in the idea that man and nature were two inter-reliant spheres. They were the main powers of the cosmos and were primarily presented in the light of the “three powers” (*san cai 三才*), a well-known expression used to refer to Man, Heaven, and Earth.

What does *tian* mean in the Three-Powers framework? The *Chunqiu fanlu* summarizes a portrayal of Heaven which was certainly popular under the Han. The primordial *qi* 氣 was a combination of heavenly and earthly *qi* (*tiandi zhi qi he er wei yi 天地之氣合而為一*) which subsequently splits into *yin* and *yang* (*fen wei yin yang 分為陰陽*). The *qi* of these two cosmic forces broke down as to form the Four Seasons (*bang wei sishi 判為四時*). Finally, the seasonal *qi* split in the five agents (*lie wei wu xing 列為五行*).

Let us now consider the following memorial by Dong Zhongshu:

> impossible to get in touch with the world. To understand men without knowing Heaven makes it impossible to travel along the Way.” (*知天之所為，知人之所行，則有以任於世矣。知天而不知人，則無以與俗交；知人而不知天，則無以與道遊*). *Huainanzi* 18:621.

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86 On the issue about the authorship, the reader may refer to Arbuckle (1989); Queen (1996).
87 *Chunqiu fanlu* 81:467.
88 *Chunqiu fanlu* 35:288.
89 *Chunqiu fanlu* 58:362.
The greatness of the Heavenly Path stands out in the yin and in the yang. The yang stays for Virtue whereas the yin expresses punishments. Punishments are in charge of death and virtue is in charge of life. Therefore, the constant position of the yang is in the apex of summer but [from this position it] takes cares of life, growing, nourishment, and ripening. The constant position of the yin in the apex of winter but [from this position it can only] stores the surplus in empty places. This is how one realizes that Heaven handles virtue without handling punishments. [First,] Heaven let the yang arise and spread above: then, it will control the accomplishments of the year. [Then, it] let the yin retreat and hide below: it will rise at the right time as to assist the yang. If the yang did not get the help of the yin, it, alone, cannot bring the year to completion. “killing the yang for fulfilling the year”: this is the denomination. And this is the meaning of Heaven.\(^90\)

Hence, Heaven was seen as natural seasonal cycle (tiandao 天道) which combines the positiveness of the yang and the negativity of the yin. This line of reasoning is illustrated in detail in the Chunqiu fanlu:

陽天之德，陰，天之刑也，陽氣暖而陰氣寒，陽氣予而陰氣奪，陽氣仁而陰氣戾，陽氣寬而陰氣急，陽氣愛而陰氣惡，陽氣生而陰氣殺。

The yang is the virtue of Heaven and the yin is its punishment. The qi of the yang is warm whereas the qi of the yin is cold. The qi of the yang is there to dispense life while the qi of the yin is there to take it away. The qi of the yang is benevolence whereas the qi of the yin is offence. The qi of the yang is relief while the qi of the yin is uneasiness. The qi of the yang is life whereas the qi of the yin is death.\(^91\)

The twofold heavenly structure in which the positive and the negative manifest in the perfection of the seasonal cycle was a basic step for linking tian to man. In this context, the concept of category (lei 類) plays a key role. Essentially, tian and ren share basic aspects which belong to the same lei: body, blood-and-qi, morality, feelings are all factors which can be analysed on the basis of heavenly categories such as yin/yang and the four seasons. By means of lei — a key concept which summarizes the correlative strategies of the ru— Han cultural world managed to transform the human world in a mirror of nature: it was a sphere which “rely on Heaven” (pei tian 配天). Thus, as the Chunqiu fanlu says, the yang of spring and summer as well as the yin of autumn and

\(^{90}\) Hanshu 56:2502.

\(^{91}\) Chunqiu fanlu 43:327.
winter lie not only in Heaven but also in the human being (chun xia zhi yang qiu dong zhi yin bu du zai tian yi zai yu ren)春夏之陽，秋冬之陰，不獨在天，亦在於人):92

The one who makes life cannot be the human being. The one who makes the human being is undoubtedly Heaven. The human roots of man lie in Heaven and Heaven is the ancestor of man. This is the reason why man gets higher to share the same category as Heaven. In regard to the form and body of man: [first, there is] the transformation of the Numbers of Heaven and [then they] blossom. With regard to the blood and qi of man: [first, there is] the transformation of the Heavenly Will and [then] there is humanity. Concerning the virtue and proper behaviour of man: [first, there is] the transformation of the Heavenly lines and [then] there is righteousness. Concerning the feeling of love and hate of man: [they derive from the] transformation of the cool and the warm qi of Heaven. With regard to the feeling of pleasure and rage of man: [they derive from the] transformation of the cold and hot qi of Heaven. With regard to human destiny: [it derives from the] transformation of the heavenly four seasons. When man is born, he has the answers of pleasure, rage, melancholy, and joy; [these] belong to the category of spring, autumn, winter, and summer. Pleasure is the answer of spring, rage is the answer of autumn, joy is the answer of summer, and melancholy is the answer of winter. The fact that Heaven relies on man depends on the fact that human feelings derive from Heaven. [...]93

3.4 Theory and praxis: The ganying theory and the zaiyi framework

The belief in the structural similarity between Heaven and Man led Han thinkers to reflect on the ways in which these two spheres interact. This point is particularly well explained in the Chunqiu fanlu:

人主以好惡喜怒變習俗，而天以暖清寒暑化草木。喜怒時而當則歲美，不時而妄則歲惡。天地人主一也。然則人主之好惡喜怒，乃天之暖清寒暑也，不可不審其處而出也。當暑而寒，當寒而暑，必為惡歲矣。人主當喜而怒，當怒而喜，必為亂世矣。是故人主之大守，在於謹藏而禁內，使好惡喜怒，必當義乃出，若暖清寒暑之必當其時乃發也。人主掌此而無失，使乃好惡喜怒未嘗差也，如春秋冬夏之未嘗過也，可謂參天矣。

Through love and hate, pleasure and rage, the ruler of human beings changes routines and

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92 Chunqiu fanlu 46:335.
93 Chunqiu fanlu 41:318-319.
habits, just as Heaven affects vegetal life [lit: grass and trees] through warmth and freshness, coldness and heat. If pleasure and rage respect the [natural] order and fit [the seasons], then the year will be good. But if they neglect the order and become disharmonious, then the year will be bad. Heaven, Earth and the ruler of human beings form a unity. Hence, love and hate, pleasure and rage of the ruler correspond to the warmth and freshness, coldness and heat of Heaven. Thus, one cannot but examine their [temporal] location and then manifest them. It should be hot and yet it is cold; it should be cold and yet it is hot: this must indeed be a bad year! The sovereign should be pleased and yet he becomes enraged. He should be enraged and yet he becomes pleased: this must indeed be a chaotic era! Therefore, the supremacy of the sovereign lies in concealing and carefully restraining the inner sphere. He brings into play the feelings of love and hate, pleasure and rage, so that they must fit the proper [time] and then manifest [themselves], just as warmth and freshness, coldness and heat must fit their [proper] seasons and then flourish. If the [ideal] sovereign holds all this in his hand and never registers losses, if [his manifestation] of love and hate, pleasure and rage is never faulty, [the revolving of] spring and autumn, winter and summer will know no fault. This can be called “sharing Heaven”.94

The excerpt presented above makes clear that we now face one of the most important dogmas of Han culture, namely the well-known theory of resonance or ganying 感應 which entails a spontaneous reaction in the natural world to each action in the human realm. According to Charles de Blanc, “[…] the idea of resonance means all things in the universe are interrelated and influence each other according to pre-set patterns, so that interaction appears as spontaneous and not caused by an external agent. The idea of resonance thus plays the role of a cosmological principle, that is, a rational device whereby to understand the universe as a totality, man being part of that totality”.95

The ganying theory played a particularly important role during the Han not only because it deeply influenced the political discussion and the ru debate but also in view of its impact on the entire cultural community. Thanks to the ganying framework, centuries-old beliefs and disciplines were justified on a theoretical level by finally becoming part of the ru orthodoxy. This is true of astrology which had always worked on the implicit principle that the starry sky could in some way influence the destiny of humanity. Besides absorbing this dogma, the ganying scheme also served as a framework for developing a few basic corollaries. In earlier times, a solar eclipse was simply an inauspicious signal of Heaven for the sovereign; a solar eclipse, as it was understood and explained within the ganying framework, became a “reaction” of Heaven to faults or mistakes of rulers. In this way, the interaction between man and nature gained an important nuance: man contributes to provoking the upsetting of tian.

94 Chunqiu fanlu 44:333.
95 Le Blanc (1985), 8.
This active role of the human being is particularly evident in the case of auspicious omens such as the appearance of mythical animals. Thanks to the resonance theory, the credence in dragons and phoenixes as symbols of pacific eras governed by enlightened rulers ceased to be legend and became a necessary consequence of the trust in the ganying theory. Below, the words of the Chunqiu fanlu:

\[
\text{美事召美類，惡事召惡類，類之相應而起也。如馬鳴則馬應之，牛鳴則牛應之。帝王之將興也，其美祥亦先見，其將亡也，妖孽亦先見，物故以類相召也。【…】}
\]

Beautiful things solicit [things which belong to] beautiful categories, ugly things solicit [things which belong to] ugly categories. This is how [things belonging to the same] category influence each other and rise, just as [it happens when] a horse neighs and [another] horse responds to it or when a cattle neighs and [another] cattle responds to it. When emperors and kings are about to rise, auspicious signs will appear in advance.\(^96\) When emperor and kings are about to fall, inauspicious omens will appear in advance as well. Therefore, things solicit each other according to the category [to which they belong].\(^97\)

Thus, from a theoretical viewpoint, the ganying theory functioned as communication channel between the human sphere and the natural realm. This framework was reputed to work without the intervention of supernatural entities (fei you shen 非有神).\(^98\) In this regard, Le Blanc’s definition of the ganying scheme as “a rational device” (or what was supposed to be a rational device) is undoubtedly accurate. In the same way, however, one should not neglect the fact that, when arguing in accordance with the ganying theory, the human being plays a very active role since he “attracts” and thus provoke the changes in the natural field.

One of the most important applications of the ganying theory under the Han certainly was the zaiyi 災異 framework. As it is well known, catastrophes (zai 災)—earthquakes, fires, floods—and anomalies (yi 異)—the unexpected appearance of a given animal—were interpreted as abrupt natural changes (bian) which warned a sovereign of his own political and ethical shortcomings. For a lucid summary of this strategy, which was highly successful in the first century BC,\(^99\) we may turn to the words of a very influential scholar of the time, namely Gu Yong 谷永:

\[
\text{臣聞災異，皇天所以譴告人君過失，猶嚴父之明誡. 畏懼敬改，則禍銷福降；忽然}
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\(^96\) Here, I do not consider qi 其. This seems also to respect the structure of the following sentence.

\(^97\) Chunqiu fanlu 57:358.

\(^98\) Chunqiu fanlu 44:333.

\(^99\) For a discussion of the zaiyi framework and its influence at the court of the Han emperors, see Bielenstein (1977); Wang (2000).
I have heard that catastrophes and anomalies are the means by which the Supreme Heaven warns the ruler of failures and faults: they are just like the clear admonitions of a rigorous father. If [the ruler] corrects [his behaviour] with due respect, awe, and fear, then the disasters will disappear and luck will descend. Yet, if [he opts for] hasty and superficial changes, then curses and castigations will have no end.\footnote{Hanshu 85:3450.}

When wondering about the causes of “curses and castigations” or about the form they assume, Gu Yong adds:

【…】失道妄行, 逆天暴物, 窮奢極欲, 遨湎荒淫, 婦言是從, 誅逐仁賢, 【…】災異婁降, 日月薄食, 五星失行, 山崩川潰【…】。

When the sovereign] loses the right way and behaves outrageously or when he clashes against Heaven and yields to violence; when he pursues extravagancies and fulfils his desires or when he indulges in drinking and sexual pleasures; when he follows the words of women and has worthies and sages killed or banned […], [in all these cases] catastrophes and anomalies will occur in number. Sun and moon will be eclipsed, the five planets will lose their regular path, mountains will collapse, and rivers will break [their bans]. […]\footnote{Hanshu 85:3467.}

Hence, the immoral behaviour of a sovereign in both his private and public life provokes the rage of tian which punishes these shortcomings with catastrophes such as floods or eclipses. These chastisements are not to be considered in a religious perspective, at least from the viewpoint of the ru. Catastrophes and anomalies were a facet of nature, which is understood as an organism in which different realms rely on one another and react to one another.

The zaiyi framework was simply a corollary of the ganying theory according to which the qi of different things in different realms of the perceptible world interacted. In this regard, the principle of category (lei 類) plays a particular role. Since things belonging to the same lei will react to one another, natural castigation will not strike randomly and shortcomings in given fields will result in specific punishments: as it was said at the end of the first century BC, each catastrophe or anomaly is the mirror of specific mistakes (zaiyi zhi fa ge xiang guo shi 災異之發各象過失).\footnote{Hanshu 85:3444.} This is the theoretical pillar of the Wuxing zhi 五行志 [Monograph on the Five Agents] of the Hanshu in which Han ru examine and discuss political and ethical shortcomings in the present and in the past in order to demonstrate the relation between a given error and its zaiyi castigation.\footnote{For a schematic presentation of the contents of the Wuxing zhi, see Mansvelt Beck (1991). For a detailed featuring and discussion of this document, see Wang (2000).}
CHAPTER THREE

THE DISCOURSE ON THE SHENGREN: BETWEEN MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY

1. THE REN AS MIRROR OF TIAN

1.1 Defining the human being

In the last centuries BC, the human being was supposed to belong to the group of the *chong* 蟲), animated entities that were made up of blood and *qi*. The *chong* class encompassed five subgroups: each of them was linked to one of the *wu xing* 五行 and associated with peculiar physical characteristics. Besides hairy (*mao chong* 毛蟲), scaly (*lin chong* 鱗蟲), feathered (*yu chong* 羽蟲) and armoured (*jie chong* 介蟲) *chong*, the scholars considered the group “naked animated entities” (*luochong* 倮蟲) which, at least in imperial era, was often connected to the human being.

While providing thinkers and scholars with a well-working framework for defining the position of *ren* 人 in the natural realm, the *chong* taxonomy substantially left unsolved the question of distinction between men and animals. This issue probably worried several early thinkers, especially those who considered ethics to be the core of their intellectual activity.

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1 For classification of human beings when considered within the animal reign, see Sterckx (2002), 73-75. Sterckx highlights that the fact of having “blood and *qi*” was a “distinctive criterion of animacy” (page 73). While adopting the definition proposed by Manfred Porkert as “configurational energy”, the English sinologist highlights the tie existing between blood, *qi*, heart-mind, and spiritual dimension and concludes that *xue qi* was “more than a biological or physical property”. See Sterckx (2002), 75.

2 For this classification, see *Lüshi chunqiu* 1.1:1, 4.1:17, 6.1:28, 7.1:33, 10.1:47; *Dadai liji* 5.5:35; *Lun heng* 22:84. For translation of the terms designating the five categories and for a thoroughly analysis of this topic, see Sterckx (2002), 78-80.

3 In the *Lunyu*, Confucius clearly shows his unconcern with the beasts. In *Lunyu* 10:11, “The stable being burned down, when he was at court, on his return he said, ‘Has any man been hurt?’ He did not ask about the horses.” For the translation, see Legge (1960), vol. I, 234. Moreover, in *Lunyu* 3:17, when Zigong 子貢 proposed “to do away with the offering of a sheep connected with the inauguration of the first day of each month”, Confucius answered: “you love the sheep; I love the ceremony”. For the translation, see Legge (1960), vol. I, 161. On the separation between man and animals, see Roetz (1992), 203. The daoists adopted a different approach. Zhuangzi, for example, sings the golden time when men and animals used to live together. See *Zhuangzi* 9:23, Roetz (1984), 251-254. On the dominion of the human being over the natural realm in classical Confucianism, see Roetz (1984), esp. 309-322.
From a Confucian viewpoint, the path, which led to the detection of the boundaries between man and animal, went through morality. Mengzi, who reckoned the thinness of the line separating man and beast, saw in the ethical potential of the individual the most important characteristic of the human being.⁴ Xunzi presented ren as the most valuable thing of the universe (zui wei tianxia gui 最為天下貴), making of him the only creature which had qi, animacy (sheng 生), knowledge (zhi 知),⁵ and, finally, righteousness (yi 義).⁶

The aftermath of correlative thinking and the full blossoming of yin-yang theories in the last centuries BC gradually led the scholarly community to re-examine the issue “human being” in the new framework and advance a structural argument. In the Huainanzi, the human being is supposed to be composed of a polished and refined form of qi (jingqi 精氣), whereas animals are presumed to be made up of muddled qi (fanqi 煩氣).⁷ This approach achieved a remarkable success during the following decades. In the Chunqiu fanlu, for example, the superiority of man over other things of the universe is described in the following way:

天地之精所以生物者，莫貴於人。人受命乎天也，故超然有以倚。物疢疾莫能為仁義，唯人獨能為仁義；物疢疾莫能偶天地，唯人獨能偶天地。

Among the things born from the essence of Heaven and Earth, nothing is more valuable than man. The human being receives the span of life [directly] from Heaven. Therefore, [the human being] is extraordinary and has a foothold. Things are flawed and defective: none of them can develop humanity and righteousness. Only the human being is able to get as far as humanity and righteousness. Things are flawed and defective: none of them can match Heaven. Only the human being is able to match Heaven.⁸

In the passage presented above, the author explains the reasons behind man’s superiority. The accent on human ethical potential obviously is a re-elaboration of a

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⁴ See Roetz (1992), 128. On the thinness of the difference between man and beast, see Mengzi 4B:19; Roetz (1992), 340.
⁵ Both the Liji and the Xunzi state that, with regard to knowledge, none of the members of blood-and-qi class can ever compete with a man (gu you xueqi zhi shu mo zhi yu ren 故有血氣之屬莫知於人). See Xunzi 19:96, Liji 58, San nian wen (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 1663). On this point, see Roetz (1992), 185. Moreover, in the Shiji, the human being is explicitly defined as a member of the Blood-and-qi class with knowledge in the heart-mind (ren you xueqi xinzhi zhi xing 人有血氣心知之性). In this regard, see Shiji 24:1206.
⁶ See Xunzi 9:39; Roetz (1992), 185.
⁷ Huainanzi 7:218. According to the medieval scholar Gao You 高誘, fan 煩 has to be understood as luan 亂, chaotic, confused. In this regard, see also Sterckx (2002), 75. A similar line of reasoning appears in the Liji, where we read that the human being is the meeting point of yin and yang (ying yang zhi jiao 陰陽之交). Moreover, the text says that a man has received the flourishing qi of the Five Agents (wu xing zhi xiaqi 五行之秀氣). See Liji 22, Liyun (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 1423).
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha.

A typical Confucian argument. Unlike thinkers and philosophers of the past, however, ethics is here associated with the human intrinsic ability to match Heaven (*neng ou tian* 能偶天). This new point is part of a wider argument which serves as one of the main theoretical pillars of the text, namely the conviction that *ren* is a living creature rooted in *tian* (*ren zhi renben yu tian* 人之人本於天). Thus, we will now discuss the ways in which the human being reflects Heaven by focusing first on the structure of the body and last on the ethical potential of an individual.

1.2 Analyzing the human body

1.2.1 The human body as mirror of Heaven

In the *Chunqiu fanlu*, the human body is a mirror reflecting the structure of *tian*:

人有三百六十節，偶天之數也；形體骨肉，偶地之厚也。上有耳目聰明，日月之象也；體有空竅理脈，川谷之象也；心有哀樂喜怒，神氣之類也。觀人之體一，何高物之甚，而類於天也。物旁折取天之陰陽以生活耳，而人乃爛然有其文理。是故凡物之形，莫不伏從旁折天地而行，人獨題直立端尚，正正當之。是故所取天地少者，旁折之；所取天地多者，正當之。此見人之絕於物而參天地。

The human being has 360 knots: [this is how] he matches the numbers of Heaven. [He has] ox and flesh in the physical outline: [this is how] he matches the density of Earth. Above, he has the keenness of ears and the insight of eyes: [they are the human] simulacra of sun and moon. In the body, he has holes and vessels: [they are the human] simulacra of rivers and valleys. The heart has melancholy and joy, pleasure and rage: they belong to the category of the incorporeal *qi*. In examining the body of a man, one [may wonder] why it is the pinnacle of the superior things [of the world]: [this is simply because] it is arranged on the basis of Heaven. Things twist sideways: they [merely] take *yin* and *yang* from Heaven in order to exist. The human being, on the contrary, evidently has patterns and lines of Heaven. For this reason, among all things with a form, nothing moves without bending down and following, without twisting sideways in respect to Heaven and Earth. Only the human being has an erect posture and a straight direction; he stays uprightly and uprightly faces it (i.e. Heaven). For this reason, the one whose loan from Heaven and Earth is slight will twist sideways in respect to them whereas those whose loan from Heaven and Earth is considerable will correspond to them. Here one can grasp how the human being is detached from other things and how he joins Heaven and Earth.

9 *Chunqiu fanlu* 41:318.

10 Su Yu 苏舆 writes that the binomial *tiandi* is a textual mistake. See *Chunqiu fanlu* 56:355. Yet, since in the following sentence the verb *zhe* 折 has *zhi* 之 as object, we may assume that the position of animals and man is judged by using nature as term of comparison. In this way, the man is seen as a superior entity in virtue of his ability to stay and walk erect: this, in turn, enables him to look directly to heaven, without needing to “twist sideways”.

11 The sentence *ti shi li duan shang* 题直立端尚 should be read as *tingli duanxiang* 题立端向. *Ting*, in turn, means to stay erect (*zhi* 直). In this regard, see *Chunqiu fanlu* 56:355.
The passage above lists several facets which man shares with tian. These structural similarities explain why ren should be regarded as a kind of pinnacle among the creatures of the universe. The text even provides the readers with a key for deciphering and organizing all the possible symmetrical aspects traceable in nature and man. Most of the facets mentioned above, for instance, could be summarized by the expression “corresponding in category” (fu lei 副類): eyes and ears are the human counterpart of sun and moon since they provide light and understanding. Other human peculiarities, however, can be quantified: thus, ren will correspond to tian in “numbers” (fu shu 副數). The passage below shall introduce this point:

天以終歲之數,成人之身,故小節三百六十,副日數也;大節十二分,副月數也;內有五臓,副五行數也;外有四肢,副四時數也。【...】

Heaven completes the body of a man with the number [of days] of a full year. For this reason, the small knots are 366: they correspond to the number of days. The big knots are 12: they correspond to the number of the months. Inside, there are the five viscera: they correspond to the number of the five agents. Outside, there are the four arts: they correspond to the number of the four seasons. [...]14

The Chunqiu fanlu offers here a theoretical re-elaboration of a leitmotiv of the last centuries BC. This frame of mind is traceable in the apocryphal text Xiaojing-Yuanshenqi as well:

人頭圓像天，足方法地，五臓像五形，四胑法四時，九竅法九分，目法日月，【...】髪法星辰，節法日嵗，腸法鈐。

With regard to the human being: the head is round and resembles the heavens, the feet are square and pattern the earth. The five viscera resemble the five forms and the four arts pattern the four seasons. The nine holes pattern the nine parts and the eyes pattern sun and moon. [...] The hairs pattern the stars and the knots pattern the [days] of the solar year. The intestine pattern [the star] Qian.16

This passage must be read in the context briefly described above. The link established between intestine and the star Qian, however, suggests that we have here an expansion

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13 Chunqiu fanlu 56:357. Thus, as the text concludes, “those aspects which cannot be quantified correspond to tian in category” (bu ke shu zhe fu lei 不可數者副類).
14 Chunqiu fanlu 56:356-357.
15 The same point, in fact, is made in Lushi Chunqiu (20.5:133) and Huainanzi (7:218-220). On this point, see Henderson (1984), 11.
16 Choshu isho shusei 5:30-31.
of the arguments proposed in the Chunqiu fanlu. Evidently, after having accepted the theoretical guidelines expounded in this text, the author of the Yuanshenqi developed this correlative line of reasoning, associating specific parts of the human body with heavenly stars and asterisms.

1.2.2 Five tastes and human inner viscera

The attempt of the authors of the apocrypha to apply and expand the analysis of the human body of the Chunqiu fanlu went well beyond a simple list of correspondences between natural facets and human features. Numerous fragments, for instance, clearly link the five viscera (wu zang 五藏) to the five agents so that the liver (gan 肝) corresponds to Wood (mu 木), the heart (xin 心) to Fire (huo 火), the spleen (pei 脾) to Earth (tu 土), the lungs (fei 肺) to Metal (jin 金), and the kidney (xian 腎) to Water (shui 水). In this paragraph, we shall explore this point, focusing first on the process of formation of human viscera and last on the correlative implications of this line of reasoning. In approaching these fields, sources with complex correlative schemata such as the Yuenling and, above all, the Huangdi neijing [Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor] are valuable interpretative counterparts of the fragments. The medical classic, in particular, offers us an appropriate starting point since it describes the natural process which leads to the formation of the organs:

東方生風，風生木，木生酸，酸生肝，肝生筋，【…】南方生熱，熱生火，火生苦，苦生心，心生血，【…】中央生濕，濕生土，土生甘，甘生脾，脾生肉。【…】西方生燥，燥生金，金生辛，辛生肺，肺生皮毛，【…】北方生寒，寒生水，水生鹹，鹹生腎，腎生骨髓【…】

The east produces wind and wind generates Wood. Wood produces sourness and sourness generates the liver. The liver produces the muscles and the muscles generate the heart. [...]. The south produces warmth and warmth generates Fire. Fire produces bitterness and bitterness generates the heart. The heart produces the blood and the blood generates the spleen [...]. The centre produces dampness and dampness generates Earth. Earth produces sweetness and sweetness generates the spleen. The spleen produces the flesh and the flesh generates the lungs [...]. The west produces dryness and dryness generates Metal. Metal produces spiciness and spiciness generates the lungs. The lungs produce haut and hairs and haut and heirs generate the kidney [...]. The north produces coldness and coldness generates Water. Water produces saltiness and saltiness generates the kidneys. The kidneys produce the bones and the bones generate the liver. [...]

This passage from the Huangdi neijing clearly highlights that the human body is the result of a complex generative process which starts from nature. Thus, for instance, the
east is regarded as the cardinal direction which produces wind. Wind, in turn, is the qi which generates the agent Wood and the taste sourness. Finally, the action of sourness engenders the human liver. This line of reasoning transforms the body into a microcosm bound to tian. Evidently, whoever wrote the medical classic was following the scholarly approach adopted in the Chunqiu fanlu. The authors of the Huangdi neijing, however, were obviously interested in clarifying the relationship between ren and tian with regard to physiology: hence, the formation of human organs becomes a natural process which links directions, agents, tastes, and, finally, viscera. For the purposes of the present study, the association tastes/viscera is particularly relevant. Even if this theory is not frequently mentioned in early sources, it must have achieved a certain success in the last centuries BC.

(a) Tastes and viscera in correlative schemata

Before discussing in detail the relationship between tastes and viscera, let us briefly recall that the array “five tastes” (wu wei 五味) is mentioned in several early correlative schemes and that the association tastes/seasons or tastes/agents did not change in the last centuries BC. The table below shall help the reader to visualize this point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colours</th>
<th>Guanzi Seasons</th>
<th>Guanzi Tastes</th>
<th>Yueling Seasons</th>
<th>Yueling Tastes</th>
<th>Taixuanjing Seasons</th>
<th>Taixuanjing Tastes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>青 Turquoise</td>
<td>春 chun</td>
<td>酸 suan</td>
<td>肝 guan</td>
<td>春 chun</td>
<td>酸 suan</td>
<td>春 chun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>赤 Red</td>
<td>夏 xia</td>
<td>苦 ku</td>
<td>心 xin</td>
<td>夏 xia</td>
<td>苦 ku</td>
<td>夏 xia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>黄 Yellow</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>甘 gan</td>
<td>土 tu</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>甘 gan</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>白 White</td>
<td>冬 dong</td>
<td>酸 xian</td>
<td>脾 pi</td>
<td>冬 dong</td>
<td>酸 xian</td>
<td>冬 dong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>黑 Black</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>盐 xian</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 The chapters two, three, and fourteen of the Huangdi neijing describe in detail the structural similarity between Heaven and man. On the presentation of the body as a microcosm, see Sivin (1995).

19 For the association models presented in the table, see Lǎshī chunqiu 1.1:1, 4.1:17, 6.1:28, 7.1:33, 10.1:47; Guanzi 39, Shuǐdī (Zhuzi jicheng, vol.5, 236), and Taixuanjing 88:65-66. Similar schemes appear in Baidihong 9:23. The Chunqiu fanlu, on the contrary, plays here a marginal role. The tastes, in fact, are mentioned only twice. Moreover, the text makes it difficult to detect their link to agents or seasons. The only ascertainable point is that this book considered sweetness to be the taste associated with Earth. See Chunqiu fanlu 42:323.
A few apocryphal fragments suggest that even the authors of the *chenwei* followed the scheme described in the table when associating tastes with other realms of the cosmos. Even though the *Yuanmingbao* does not explicitly connect the *wu wei* to the agents, the link to seasons is still devisable. In this way, for example, saltiness is explicitly related to the arrival of the coldest *qi*, which obviously is a paraphrase for winter.\(^{20}\)

**Five tastes and human viscera: the case of the Chunqiu-Qiantanba**

A few early texts seem to associate the tastes with the human viscera.\(^{21}\) Among them, one should certainly consider the case of the apocrypha. A short passage from the *Yuanmingbao* maintains that the “liver creates muscles” (*gan sheng jin* 肝生筋);\(^{22}\) this echoes the words of the *Huangdi neijing*. In all probabilities, this text adopted the association model tastes/organs presented in the medical classic. The *Qiantanba*, however, follows a different line of reasoning:

五味生五藏者，鹹生肝，酸生心，苦生脾，甘生肺，辛生腎。

That the five tastes generate the five viscera [means that] the salty produces the liver, the bitter produces the heart, the sour produces the spleen, the sweet produces the lungs, and the pungent generates the kidney.\(^{23}\)

The *Qiantanba*, besides explicitly connecting the tastes to organs, highlights an important aspect. This apocryphal text, in fact, echoes what is said in the *Huangdi neijing*, with regard to the formation of the viscera through the action of the tastes. In this way, instead of simply building a big frame of correlations, this apocryphal

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\(^{20}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:71. In the fragments from the *Yuanmingbao*, the taste of sourness (*suan*) is glossed as “beginning” (*duan*), which could be an allusion to spring. The taste of bitterness (*ku*) is associated with “nurturing” (*yang* 养): this element is often linked to summer. See, for example, *Hanshu* 56:2502. Sweetness is regarded as the most important taste (*wu wei zhi zhu* 五味之主). In fact, as the text says, it plays a role comparable to that of Earth which, thanks to its central role in the *wu xing* grid, brings to completion the other four agents or four seasons (*tu zhi he cheng yu sixing ye* 土之和成於四行也). Finally, spiciness is bound to the time in which the *yin* hits (*yin hai* 陰害), which could mean autumn.

\(^{21}\) In the *Guanzi*, the tastes are the forces which rule over the viscera (*zhu 主*). The *Taiping yulan* attributes to Guanzi a similar wording: here, the five tastes are supposed to generate (*sheng 生*) the organs. Whatever version we choose to consider, it is evident that Guanzi saw a connection between tastes and the *wu zang*. Confronted with the Han line of reasoning, however, he opted for a different association model. See *Guanzi* 39, *Shuidi* (*Zhuzi jicheng*, vol.5, 236); *Taiping yulan* 360:1657. Finally, one should also recall that the viscera are mentioned in the correlative scheme of the *Yueling*. Yet, as Aihe Wang has convincingly argued, the *zang* of this document mostly refer to the organs of sacrificial victims. In this regard, see Wang (2000), 122.

\(^{22}\) As Xiao Ji says, in fact, the tendons of the *Yuanmingbao* are produced by Wood. See *Wuxing dayi* 4:71. The fragment proposed in the *Isho shusei* is much longer than the quotation included in the *Wuxing dayi*. The Japanese collectors may have confused Xiao Ji’s comments with the wording of the *Yuanmingbao*. In this regard, compare *Wuxing dayi* 4:71 and *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:66.

\(^{23}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:93; *Wuxing dayi* 3:67.
appendix to the *Annals* tries to explain the reason lying behind this association. Despite this evident similarity in the theoretical premises — the tastes generate the viscera — there is a noteworthy difference in the association model used for linking the *wu wei* to the *wu zang*:

The table illustrates the different association models adopted in the *Huangdi neijing* and *Qiantanba*. The heart, for example, is taken as counterpart of Fire in the medical classic and as distillate of Earth in the apocryphal text. Different hypotheses could explain this fact. We could assume, for instance, a different way of linking agents/tastes or agents/viscera. Nevertheless, as we have just seen, at least the association tastes/agents was rather fixed. Actually, it is probable that the model applied in the *Qiantanba* is a sort of generative process based on the “mutual birth” (xiangsheng 相生) theory of the *wu xing* according to which the *xing* generate each other finally producing the following sequence: Wood (spring), Fire (summer), Earth (mid-summer), Metal (autumn), and Water (winter). The five tastes are simply a muted form of the five agents (or seasons). Therefore, the taste of sourness, which corresponds to Wood, cannot produce the liver, which is itself the Wood in the body; it must produce the heart, namely Fire. 24 The tables below shall help us to understand the line of reasoning of the authors of the *Qiantanba*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Huangdi neijing</th>
<th>Qiantanba</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>木木</td>
<td>酸</td>
<td>肝</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Soursness</td>
<td>Liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>火火</td>
<td>苦</td>
<td>心</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Bitterness</td>
<td>Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>土土</td>
<td>甘</td>
<td>脾</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Sweetness</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>金金</td>
<td>辛</td>
<td>肺</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Spiciness</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>水水</td>
<td>鹹</td>
<td>腎</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Saltiness</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables below shall help us to understand the line of reasoning of the authors of the *Qiantanba*:

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24 Similar generative association schemes are also described in later sources. Xiao Ji, for instance, mentions the *Yangshengjing* 養生經, a text which adopted the model of the *Huangdi neijing*. Yet, when speaking about nutrition, this lost source opted for the line of reasoning presented in the *Qiantanba*. Thus, liver, which corresponds to Wood, is associated with salty (Water) food since, in virtue of the mutual birth-theory, it is appropriate to nurture the Wood with food containing the principles of Water. In this regard, see *Wuxing dayi* 3:68.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taste = Agent</th>
<th>generates</th>
<th>Agent=Organ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>酸 suan Sourness 木 mu Wood</td>
<td>→ 火 huo Fire 心 xin Heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>苦 ku Bitterness 火 huo Fire</td>
<td>→ 土 tu Earth 脾 pi Spleen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>甘 gan Sweetness 土 tu Earth</td>
<td>→ 金 jin Metal 肺 fei Lungs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>辛 xin Spiciness 金 jin Metal</td>
<td>→ 水 shui Water 腎 shen Kidney</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>咸 xian Saltiness 水 shui Water</td>
<td>→ 木 mu Wood 肝 gan Liver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By applying the xiangsheng succession of the wuxing, the resulting association model Agents/Organs matches the scheme of the Huangdi neijing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Organ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>木 mu Wood</td>
<td>肝 gan Liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>火 huo Fire</td>
<td>心 xin Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>土 tu Earth</td>
<td>脾 pi Spleen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>金 jin Metal</td>
<td>肺 fei Lungs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>水 shui Water</td>
<td>腎 shen Kidney</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.3 Correlative physiology and exegesis

The remarks above have shown that whoever wrote the fragments dealing with human structure was relying upon correlative frameworks. While providing the reader with a good introductive description of this thematic thread, this statement is, perhaps, too generic. It is certain, for instance, that the Chunqiu fanlu also belongs to the group of texts which interprets the human being on the basis of correlative criteria. Yet, as seen above, this book is helpful only to the extent that it gives us some insight into the theoretical guidelines of the chenwei. When turning to specific issues, the Huangdi neijing is a more appropriate tool. We should now explain whether this juxtaposition is accidental or on purpose. In this paragraph, we shall opt for the second hypothesis and show how the authors of the apocrypha were probably re-asserting fashionable ideas of the first century BC and, to a lesser extent, re-organizing material coming from circles dealing with medicine.
As mentioned in the first part of the present study, the traditional view of Chinese medicine as a monolith ruled by holistic and cosmological facets has been seriously challenged in the last few decades, mainly thank to excavated manuscripts. The cosmological framework familiar to the readers of the *Huangdi neijing* very probably took form during the last two centuries BC. In this crucial period, physicians borrowed ideas and theories from theoretical circles and further technical communities. In the same way, however, a few principles commonly accepted by physicians must have deeply influenced the *ru* theoretical discourse on the human being. The association model used for linking agents and viscera is a case in point.

A fragment from the *Wujing yiyi* [On the Different Interpretations of the Five Classics] suggests that Han exegetical tradition could rely upon two alternative association models when connecting human organs to the *wu xing*. The first is labelled “*jinwen*” and the second is attributed to *guwen* scholars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th><em>Guwen</em></th>
<th><em>Jinwen</em></th>
<th><em>Huangdi neijing</em></th>
<th>Apocrypha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>木 <em>mu</em></td>
<td>脾 <em>pi</em></td>
<td>肝 <em>gan</em></td>
<td>肝 <em>gan</em></td>
<td>肝 <em>gan</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>火 <em>huo</em></td>
<td>肺 <em>fei</em></td>
<td>心 <em>xin</em></td>
<td>心 <em>xin</em></td>
<td>心 <em>xin</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>土 <em>tu</em></td>
<td>心 <em>xin</em></td>
<td>脾 <em>pi</em></td>
<td>脾 <em>pi</em></td>
<td>脾 <em>pi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>金 <em>jin</em></td>
<td>肝 <em>gan</em></td>
<td>肺 <em>fei</em></td>
<td>肺 <em>fei</em></td>
<td>肺 <em>fei</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Liver</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>水 <em>shui</em></td>
<td>肾 <em>shen</em></td>
<td>肾 <em>shen</em></td>
<td>肾 <em>shen</em></td>
<td>肾 <em>shen</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table illustrates, the *jinwen* association model matches the line of reasoning of the *Huangdi neijing* and the apocrypha. Let us focus on the organ associated with Earth, since this agent was considered to be the fulcrum of the *wu xing* array. In complex correlative schemata, facets listed under this heading play a basic role. Thus, from the

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25 Among unearthed manuscripts, only one text mentions the *wu xing* in a technical context since it connects the agents and a sixth “lost” *xing*, namely the stone, to the development of the foetus in the womb. In this source, the agents, which are not related to the viscera, are presented in the mutual birth sequence. In this regard, see Harper (1998), 79. For the translation of the manuscript, see 372-384.

26 *Bo wujing yiyi*, page 17.

27 As is said in the *Chunqiu fanlu*, in fact, Earth is the chief of the five agents (*tu zhe wu xing zhi zhu ye* 土者五行之主也): accordingly, sweetness is given a particular position in the five tastes grid. See *Chunqiu fanlu* 42:322. Moreover, the text says: “with regard to the five agents, there is nothing more valuable than Earth (*wu xing mo gui yu tu* 五行莫貴於土)”. See *Chunqiu fanlu* 38:316. On the
viewpoint of *guwen* scholars, heart — the counterpart of Earth in man — must be regarded as the pivot of the human body. Followers of *jinwen* disagreed on this point and substituted the heart with the spleen.

The *guwen* position echoes the Confucian philosophical tradition: in the *Xunzi*, for instance, the heart is called “heavenly ruler” (tianjun 天君).28 Moreover, even though the *Chunqiu fanlu* does not reveal much concern for detailed association models, a very short passage reminds us of the *guwen* approach: in fact, heart is presented as the organ which regulates the other four viscera (xin zhi you gan fei pei xian 心之有肝肺脾腎).29 Han sources suggest that the *jinwen* association model was based on medical theories. In the *Shiji*, the legendary medic Taishigong 太倉公 explicitly states that the stomach (wei 胃), probably an early antecedent of the spleen, contains a yellow qi.30 Moreover, Zheng Xuan clearly defined the *jinwen* approach as the method adopted by physicians (yi bing zhi fa 醫病之法).31 Towards the middle of the first century BC, this frame of mind achieved a considerable success in the academic circles. Both the *Wujing yiyi* and Xiao Ji’s 蕭吉 *Wuxing dayi 五行大義* [General Principles of the Five Agents] suggest that Early Han *jinwen* lineages like Ouyang 歐陽 and Xiahou 夏侯 used this scheme to comment on the *Shujing*.32

If we try to sum up the remarks presented above, we should stress the possibility that Early Han exegetical circles were drawing from medical theory. This interdisciplinary dialogue probably fuelled the interest in a detailed description of the human body. Such an approach must have deeply influenced some of the authors of the *chenwei*. A fragment from the *Hetu*, in fact, encompasses a quotation from the *Huangdi neijing*:

肺合大腸,大腸為傳道之府。心合小腸,小腸為受盛之府。肝合膽,膽為中精之府。脾合胃,胃為五穀之府。腎合膀胱,膀胱者津液之府也。少陽屬腎,腎上連肺。故將兩藏,三焦者孤立【…】

The lungs are in tune with the colon; the colon is the repository which broadens the way. The heart is in tune with the intestines; the intestines are the repository for receiving and growing. The liver corresponds to the gall bladder and the gall bladder forms the

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28 *Xunzi* 17:80. On heart as “thinking organ” in the *Xunzi*, see Roetz (1992), 256-257.
29 In the *Chunqiu fanlu*, the heart-mind is supposed to give instructions to the whole body, including feelings and thoughts. In chapter 35, it is defined with ren 根, to employ. See *Chunqiu fanlu* 78:460. This argument does not differ very much from the classic approach traceable in the *Xunzi*, where heart-mind is presented as the “prince” of human body. See *Xunzi* 17:80. For a similar line of reasoning, see also *Taixuanjing* 88:66.
30 *Shiji* 105:2807. The stomach as antecedent of the spleen is also mentioned in chapter four of the *Huainanzi*, where the author lists the illnesses of the people from the five cardinal directions. As in the *Shiji*, this document links the stomach to Earth and centre. See, for example, *Huainanzi* 4:146.
31 *Bo Wujing yiyi*, page 18.
32 For the *Shangshu* commented by Ouyang and Xiahou, see van Ess (1993), 36, 39, 43.
repository of the middle essence. The spleen corresponds to the stomach and the stomach forms the repository of the five cereals. The kidney corresponds to the bladder and the bladder is the repository of the liquids. The kidneys are in tune with the urinary bladder and the urinary bladder is the repository of the human fluid. The small yang belongs to the kidneys and the superior [part] of the kidneys is connected to the lungs. Therefore, the viscera are always two. Only the triple entrance stays alone [without no corresponding organ].

This fragment is undoubtedly one of the explicit quotations traceable in the apocrypha. A similar line of reasoning appears in the Baihutong as well. This suggests that sectors of the scholarly community were interested in analysing in detail the structure of the human body. These jinwen groups, in turn, influenced the writers of a few chenwei texts.

### 1.2.4 Beyond the exegetical discourse: The development of correlative physiology in the apocrypha

The precedent section has focused on the influence of exegetical theories on the apocrypha. Here, we will consider a few fragments which suggest that the reflection on physiology in the chenwei probably went beyond the discussion carried by classicists.

(a) Macrobiotics

The following fragment from the Hetu applies correlative thinking to the field of macrobiotic.

人食無極鹹, 使腎氣盛、心氣衰, 令人發狂喜衄吐血, 心神不定。無極辛, 使肺氣盛、肝氣衰, 令人懦怯悲愁, 目盲髮白。無極甘, 使脾氣盛、腎氣衰, (令)人癡淫泄精腰背痛, 利膿血。無極苦, 使心氣盛、肺氣衰, 令人果敢經輕死, 欩逆胸滿。無極酸, 使肝氣盛、脾氣衰, 令人榖不消化, 喃聾癥固。

When a man eats, he should not overdo with salty [food]: it provokes the arousal of the qi of kidney and the decline of the qi of heart. [This, in turn,] turns a man in someone mad of joy who bleeds from the nose since the spirit of the heart is not stable. One should not overdo with spicy [food]: it provokes the arousal of the qi of lungs and the decline of the qi of liver. This turns a man in a coward and in a melancholic. He will become blind and his hairs will whiten. One should not overdo with sweet [food]: it will provoke the arousal of the qi of spleen and the decline of the qi of lungs. [This, in turn.] turns a man in

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33 Choshu isho shusei 6:165. For fragments with a similar content, see Choshu isho shusei 4A:66; Choshu isho shusei 6:164-165.

34 See Huangdi neijing-Lingshu 2:575. The only difference between the wording of the Hetu and the statement of the medical classic is the last sentence “Only the triple entrance stays alone” (san jiao zhe guli 三焦者孤立).

35 Baihutong 30:56.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

a foul and lascivious. He will have problems in ejaculation and in the dorso-lombar region. [However], it will advantage the bloody pus. One should not overdo with bitter [food]: it will provoke the arousal of the qi of heart and the decline of the qi of lungs. This turns a man in a resolute individual ready to face death. The cough will turn back and [provoke] oppression in the chest. One should not overdo with sour [food]: it will provoke the arousal of the qi of liver and the decadence of the qi of spleen. [This, in turn,] will cause problems with digestion and problems as deafness and muteness.36

These macrobiotic prescriptions seem to echo a deeper interest towards physiology and the human body. In the evident correlative framework, each taste ascribed to an agent damages the organ according to the “mutual conquest” (xiangsheng 相勝) theory of the wuxing. The table below shall help to visualize this process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taste = Agent</th>
<th>damages</th>
<th>Agent=Organ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>鹹 xian</td>
<td>水 shui</td>
<td>火 huo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saltiness</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>辛 xin</td>
<td>金 jin</td>
<td>木 mu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiciness</td>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Liver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>甘 gan</td>
<td>土 tu</td>
<td>水 shui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetness</td>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Kidney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>苦 ku</td>
<td>火 huo</td>
<td>金 jin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitterness</td>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Lungs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>酸 suan</td>
<td>木 mu</td>
<td>土 tu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourness</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Spleen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, the fragment above presents two noteworthy peculiarities. On one hand, it applies correlative thinking to the field of macrobiotics; on the other hand, it deepens the physiological argument discussed in the preceding pages. The Huangdi neijing presents an analogous discussion.37 Thus, it is evident that the author of this text was very attentive to the ideas coming from circles of physicians.

(b) Measuring the body

A few fragments of the Chunqiu-Yuanmingbao discuss further themes, which probably did not belong to the common threads of discussion of Han scholarship:

(1) 口之為言，達也。陽立於三，故舌在口中者長三寸，象斗玉衡。陰合有四。故舌淪入嗌內者長四寸。

The meaning of “mouth” is “to reach”. The yang stands in the Three and therefore the

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tongue within the mouth is three cun long. It resembles the Yuheng stars of the Dipper. The yin harmonizes and has the Four. Therefore, the tongue, when falling into the throat, is four cun long.

(2) 心者火之精，上為張星。火成於五，故人心長五寸。

The heart is the essence of Fire. There above it corresponds to the star Zhang. The Fire blossoms in the Five and therefore the human heart is five cun long.

(3) 頭者神所居。上員象，天氣之府也。歲必十二，故人頭長一尺二寸。

The head is home to the spirit. Above it is round and resembles the heavens: it is the repository of the Qi. The year must [have] 12 months and therefore the head of a man is one chi and two cun long.

(4) 腰上者為天尊高陽之狀。腰而下者為陰豐厚地之象。數合於四，故腰周四尺。

【…】

[In the human body, the part] above the waist [gives] form to the venerable and high yang of Heaven. [The part] from the waist below is the simulacrum of the fecund and dense yin of Earth. The numbers harmonize in the Four and therefore the circumference of the waist measures four chi. […]

(5) 陽立於三，故人脊三寸。【…】

The Yang stands in the Three and therefore the human vertebra are three cun. […]

(6) 在天為文昌，在人為顔顙，太一之謂也。顔之言，氣畔也。陽立於五，故顔博五寸。天有攝提，人有兩眉，為人表候。陽立於二，故眉長二寸。

In Heaven is the star Wenchang; in the man is the forehead of the face, which is what is called Taiyi. Face (yan) means that the qi is insubordinate. The yang stands in the Five and therefore the face is five cun wide. The heavens have Sheti and the man has two eyebrows: they are pointers and markers of the [destiny of the] human being.38 The yang stands in the Two and therefore they are two cun long.39

Even if the lack of context seriously jeopardizes a deep comprehension of the fragments, it is interesting to note a few generic aspects. Certainly, we have here a thematic strand of the Yuanmingbao since the fragments reveal a similar content, namely the cosmological interpretation of parts of human body. Moreover, whoever wrote these sentences was surely applying the theoretical guidelines of the Chunqiu fanlu: we could read the sentences above as a demonstration of the idea that the human

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38 The terms biao 表 and hou 候 might allude to the Han technique of physiognomy. We shall consider this point in the following pages.

Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

body is rooted in Heaven. Finally, it cannot be ruled out that the fragments, despite the cosmological reading, hide a very technical substratum. The allusions to the dimension of tongue, heart, and vertebra recall the “data” gathered in a few sections of the *Huangdi neijing* where, for instance, it is said that the stomach is one chi and five cun long. According to Yamada Keiji, these data were the fruit of the famous human dissection of AD 16, after that Wang Mang had the rebel Wangsun Qing 王孫慶 killed.\(^{40}\) Given the scarcity of the relevant material, we cannot safely connect the data from the *Yuanmingbao* to this official dissection. Yet, the precision in describing the inner parts of a body suggest that whoever wrote these parts of the texts was re-interpreting some medical data in a cosmological framework.

1.3 Analysing the moral potential of the human being

1.3.1 Human nature in the yin/yang framework

The inner fabric of an individual — inborn character (*xing* 性) and emotional sphere (*qing* 情) — was an important thematic thread of Han *ru-*ism. Owing to the blossoming of correlative thinking, however, the well-known Warring States debate on *xing* had evolved into a reflection on the ways in which Heaven engenders moral potential and emotional luggage of an individual. Accordingly, Han thinkers interpreted the key-terms *xing* and *qing* in the light of *yin/yang* theories. The *Chunqiu fanlu* says:

身之有性情也，若天之有陰陽也。言人之質而無其情，猶言天之陽而無其陰也。\(^{41}\)

The body with [its] human [moral] nature and emotions is just like Heaven with [its] *yin* and *yang*. Discussing the raw essence of human beings without taking into consideration its emotions is tantamount to speaking about the *yang* in Heaven and ignoring the presence of the *yin*.\(^{41}\)

As discussed in the first part, the *Chunqiu fanlu* presents Heaven as an entity characterised by the eternal struggle of the positive pole *yang* — which manifests itself in the creative force of spring and summer — against the negative pole *yin*, which supervises the destruction of life in autumn and winter. The inborn character of a man mirrors this structure: hence, the (unpolished) heavenly *yin* produces the human negative pole — feelings\(^{42}\) — whereas the (refined) heavenly *yang* engenders the human

\(^{40}\) Yamada Keiji (1991), 39-52.
\(^{41}\) *Chunqiu fanlu* 35:299.
\(^{42}\) In the classical tradition, human feelings had been regarded as source of chaos (*luan* 亂) in society and obstacle for the ethical development of individuals. Both the *Huainanzi* and the *Chunqiu fanlu* urge placing feelings under strict and rigorous control. In the former text, pleasure and rage were supposed to be the “shame of the Way” (*xinu zhe dao zhi xie* 喜怒者道之邪), grief and sorrow the “failure of the Virtue” (*youbei zhe de zhi shi* 悲懼者德之失), and love and hate the “faults of the
positive pole, namely \textit{xing}. This point is explicitly made in the following \textit{chenwei} fragment:

\begin{quote}
情生於陰，欲以時念也。性生于陽，以就理也。陽氣者仁，陰氣者貪。故情有利欲，性有仁也。
\end{quote}

Emotions are born in the \textit{yin}: as for the desires, [the human being must] care about [them] at the right time.\textsuperscript{43} The human [moral] nature is born in the \textit{yang}: [as for the moral virtues, the human being must] frame [them] according to the [own] accomplishments. The \textit{qi} of the \textit{yang} is benevolent and the \textit{qi} of the \textit{yin} is greedy. Accordingly, emotions encompass the [desire] for profit and the human [moral] nature encompass humanity.\textsuperscript{44}

Thus, \textit{xing} and \textit{qing}, when taken as counterparts of \textit{yin} and \textit{yang}, form the source of good and evil in the human being. At this point, however, the interpreter runs into a short passage from the \textit{Chunqiu fanlu} where human emotions, too, are said to belong to basic nature (\textit{qing yi xing ye 情亦性也}).\textsuperscript{45} Therefore, \textit{xing} must be understood in two different ways. The first meaning is very generic: \textit{xing} is life or, more properly, the substance that a man receives at the moment of birth. In Chapter 35, in fact, the author rhetorically asks why \textit{xing} should not be related to \textit{sheng}, to live or life (\textit{xing zhi ming fei sheng yu 性之名非生與}).\textsuperscript{46} This basic vital endowment encompasses two branches. Besides the negative \textit{yin} of the feelings, the human being also receives the positive \textit{yang} of the second \textit{xing}, namely the roots of human morality:

\begin{quote}
董仲舒覽孫、孟之書，作《情性》之説曰：「天之大經，一陰一陽；人之大經，一情一性。性生於陽，情生於陰。陰氣鄙，陽氣仁。曰性善者，是見其陽也。謂惡者，是見其陰者也。」若仲舒之言，謂孟子見其陽，孫卿見其陰也。
\end{quote}

Dong Zhongshu read Mengzi’s and Xunzi’s works, [finally he] wrote a discourse on feelings and human [moral] nature. It said: “The great threat of Heaven: one \textit{yin} and one \textit{yang}. The great threat of man: one [part of] feeling and [one part of] human [moral] nature. Human [moral] nature is born in the \textit{yang} and emotions are rooted in the \textit{yin}. The

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\textsuperscript{43} According to the \textit{Chunqiu fanlu}, the manifestation of emotions should match the seasonal cycle so that pleasure corresponds to spring and rage to autumn, joy responds to summer and sadness to winter. See \textit{Chunqiu fanlu} 41:318. It follows that emotions should be considered as a natural facet just like the \textit{yin} of Heaven which grows during autumn and winter. In providing the topic with a theoretical foundation, the author also notes that Heaven has to calm down the action of the \textit{yin} in the natural world in order to promote the positive action of the \textit{yang}. Therefore, as far as human beings are concerned, it would be appropriate to reduce the negative impact of desires in order to fit the structure of nature. As Heaven has to bind the negative force of \textit{yin} in nature, so must the heart, the inspector inside the human body, restrict the sphere of influence of the emotions.

\textsuperscript{44} See also Dong Zhongshu’s biography in \textit{Hanshu} where \textit{xing} is defined as the basis of life (\textit{xing zhe sheng zhi zhi ye 好者生之質也}). \textit{Hanshu} 56:2501.
qi of the yin is corrupted and the qi of the yang is benevolent. Those who say that human nature is good simply focus on its yang [part]. Those who speak about its evilness, only see its yin [component]. According to Dong Zhongshu’s words, Mengzi saw the yang part and Xun Qing grasped its yin [component].

Thus, from a Han viewpoint, Mengzi, who underscored the goodness of human basic nature, saw its xing/yang part whereas Xunzi, who emphasized the inborn wickedness of men, focused on the feelings/yin component.

The ethical meaning of xing is discussed in the proceedings of the congress held at the White Tiger Hall in 79 AD:

情性者何謂也？性者陽之施，情者陰之化也。人稟陰陽氣而生，故內懷五性六情【…】五常者何謂？仁、義、禮、智、信也。

What do we call emotions and basic nature? Basic nature is what yang has arranged [in our body] and feelings are what yin has altered. The human being is born endowed with the qi of the yin and the qi of the yang. Therefore, a man contains inside the five [components of] the human [moral] nature and the six emotions. […] What do we call “Five Constants”? [The Five constants are] humanity, righteousness, etiquette, wisdom, and trustworthiness.

This passage from the Baihutong explains that the term xing must be understood as an allusion to the moral/emotional inborn endowment of an individual.

1.3.2 Ethics and correlative thinking

The “five constants” (wu chang 五常) mentioned in the Baihutong appear in a correlative scheme of Chapter 58 of the Chunqiu fanlu as well:

東方者木，農之本。司農尚仁【…】南方者火也，本朝。司馬尚智【…】中央者土，君官也。司營尚信【…】西方者金，大理司徒也。司徒尚義【…】北方者水，執法司寇也。司寇尚禮【…】

The East is Wood: root of agriculture [and minister of revenue]. The minister of revenue respects humanity. […] The South is Fire: the court and [and minister of war]. The

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47 Lun heng 13:38. According to Sarah Queen, Dong Zhongshu’s viewpoint clashes with the contents of the Chunqiu fanlu. In particular, the American sinologist argues that both xing and qing encompass positive and negative sides. In this regard, see Queen (1996), 52. Yet, as suggested here, it is probable that the term xing, as is used in the Chunqiu fanlu, has to be understood in two different ways.

48 Baihutong 30:55; Tjan (1952), 2:565. A similar point is made in earlier documents. On the one hand, the inborn virtues resemble the Mencian seeds of morality (duan 端), namely those of humanity, righteousness, wisdom, and etiquette. See this passage as quoted in Roetz (1992), 322-323. On the other hand, the allusion to five ethical qualities reminds one of the excavated text Wuxing pian 五行篇, which mentions the virtues of the Baihutong with the only difference that trustworthiness is substituted with sagehood (sheng 聖). See Tian Wenjun and Li Fuchun (2003).
minister of war holds wisdom in the highest regard. [...] The Centre is Earth: the post of the prince. He is in charge of state [organization] and venerates trustworthiness. [...] The West is Metal: great principles and minister of education. The minister of education regards righteousness as the highest virtue. [...] The North is Water: enforcement of law and minister of justice. The minister of justice venerates the etiquette.49

Turning to the table below, the interpreter easily notices the importance of the correlative approach to ethics:50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wood</th>
<th>Fire</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Metal</th>
<th>Water</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chunqiu fanlu</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Trustiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang Xiong</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Trustiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing Fang</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Trustiness</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi Feng</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Trustiness</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingdefang</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Trustiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shiwei</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuanshenqi</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Trustiness</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaojingwei</td>
<td>Humanity</td>
<td>Etiquette</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Righteousness</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlative framing of ethics is a peculiarity of Han ru-ism. Besides the Chunqiu fanlu, the Taixuanjing, and the chenwei, we have in the table two famous scholars of the first century BC: Jing Fang and the student of the Qi Odes Yi Feng. Evidently, Han ru adopted different association models: this discrepancy appears in the apocrypha as well. The scheme of the Xingdefang, with wisdom connected to Earth, reproduces the line of reasoning of the Chunqiu fanlu whereas the writers of the other chen texts — Yuanshenqi and Shiwei — followed Jing Fang and Yi Feng, linking Earth to trustworthiness.51 Interestingly, this difference hides a divergence in the Han approach to ethics.

1.3.3 Ethics and physiology in the first century BC

Chapter 58 of the Chunqiu fanlu connects directions and agents to specific posts in the

49 Chunqiu fanlu 58:362-365.
51 See, for instance, Baihutong 30:56-57; Tjan (1952), 2:565. As the medieval scholar Xiao Ji suggests, those who associated wisdom with Earth, among them the author of the Shiwei and the Later Han scholar Zheng Xuan, considered it to be the most important human quality for understanding the surrounding world, See Wuxing dayi 4:124.
bureaucracy: those in charge of these posts, in turn, were supposed to be able to behave according to a specific virtue. Therefore, humanity and wisdom are not explicitly qualified as counterparts of Wood or Earth in the human being. Some apocryphal fragments, on the contrary, unambiguously allude to a direct tie between moral qualities and agents. In the *Yiwei-Qianzaodu*, man is supposed to be endowed with five qi (wu qi 五氣) which, in turn, develop the five virtues. We may read wu qi as an expression hinting at the *wu xing* within the human body.\(^{52}\) The *Xiaoqingwei* adds:

性者，生之質也。若木性則仁，金性則義，火性則禮，水性則信，土性則智也。

With regard to human nature, [I say that this] is the substance of life. Therefore, the Wood-basic nature produces humanity; the Metal-basic nature produces righteousness; the Fire-basic nature produces etiquette; the Water-basic nature produces trustworthiness; the Earth-basic nature produces wisdom.\(^{53}\)

The link between virtues and agents probably reflects the tendency of interpreting ethics in a physiological framework. In this perspective, the work of Yi Feng is enlightening. A few passages conserved in the medieval treatise *Wuxing dayi* offer a very suggestive and clear presentation of the ways in which this Former Han scholar approached the problem of ethics.

五行在人為性，六律在人為情。性者，仁、義、禮、智、信也。情者，喜、怒、哀、樂、好、惡也。五性出內御陽，喻收五藏；情者，處外御陰喻收六體。

In man, the five agents turn into the [five moral] dispositions, the six notes develop into feelings. The human [moral] nature [encompasses] humanity, righteousness, rites, wisdom, and trustworthiness. Feelings are pleasure and rage, melancholy and joy, love and hate. The five moral dispositions emerge inside and ride the yang: they instruct and control the Five Organs. The emotions are located outside and ride the yin: they instruct and control the six [basic parts of the body].\(^{54}\)

Yi Feng’s words are interesting from at least three viewpoints. First, we have here again the strong bipartition of the human psychic endowment since xing is identified with the yang whereas the feelings are said to “ride the yin”. Second, Yi Feng explicitly says that the virtues derive from the action of the agents in the human body. Finally, the link between moral qualities and viscera suggests a physiological interpretation of human moral potential:

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52 The expression *wu qi* also occurs in the *Shiji*: the Tang commentator explains it as an allusion to the *qi* of the Five Agents. See *Shiji* 1:3-4.

53 *Choshu isho shusei* 5:113.

54 *Wuxing dayi* 18:106; Kalinowski, (1991), 287. The meaning of *liu ti* very probably refers to body, head, and four arts of the human being. In this regard, see *Hanshu* 75:3173, where it is said that the liuti are the “image of the earth (*liu ti xiang di* 六體象地)".
Chapter Three. The discourse on the shengren: between myth and philosophy

翼氏五性：肝性靜，靜行仁；心性躁，躁行禮；脾性力，力行信；肺性堅，堅行義；腎性智，智行敬。

The five moral dispositions of Yi [Feng’s] group: in the liver, the basic nature is quiet. If [this] quietness [is made to] move forwards, there is humanity. [...] In the heart, the basic nature is agitated: [if this] agitation [is made to] move forwards, there is etiquette. [...] In the spleen, the basic nature is vigorous: [if this] vigour [is made to] move forwards, there is trustworthiness. [...] In the lungs, the basic nature is firm: [if this] firmness [is made to] move forwards, there is righteousness. [...] In the kidney, the basic nature is insightful: [if this] insight [is made to] move forwards, there is respect. [...] 55

Thus, the five virtues emerge when the organs are stimulated. This frame of mind characterizes a few apocryphal fragments as well. The Yuanmingbao says: 56

【…】肝仁，肺義，心禮，腎智，脾信也。肝所以仁者何？肝，木之精也。仁者好生，東方者陽也，萬物始生，故肝象木，色青而有柔。肺所以義者何？肺者，金之精。義者能斷，西方殺成萬物也，故肺象金，色白而有剛。心所以為禮何？心者火之精也，南方尊陽在上，卑陰在下，禮有尊卑，故心象火，色赤而光也。腎所以智何？腎，水之精，智者進而不止，無所疑惑，水亦進而不惑，故腎象水，色黑水陰，故腎雙。脾所以信者何？脾，土之精，土主信，任養萬物為之象，生物無所私，信之至也。故脾象土，色黃。

Liver is [linked to] humanity, lungs are [linked to] righteousness, heart is [linked to] etiquette, kidneys are [linked to] wisdom, and spleen is [linked to] trustworthiness. Why is the liver [linked to] humanity? The liver is the essence of Wood. The one with humanity takes care of life; the east is yang: here, the ten thousand things gradually come to life. Therefore, the liver is the image of Wood, the colour is turquoise, and it is pliant. Why are the lungs [linked to] righteousness? The lungs are the essence of Metal. The one with righteousness is able to give [the right] judgement. The West kills the [already] mature ten thousand things. For this reason, the lungs are the image of Metal: they are white and compact. Why is the heart [linked to] etiquette? The heart is the essence of Fire: in the south, the high-ranking yang stays above and the low-ranking yin stays below. [With regard to] rites, there are high-ranking and low-ranking [ceremonies]. Therefore, the heart is the image of Fire: it is red and luminous. Why are the kidneys [linked to] wisdom? The kidneys are the image of Water and the wise advances without ever stopping or doubting, just like Water, which advances without hesitation. Why is the spleen [linked to] trustworthiness? The spleen is the essence of heart and earth rules over trustworthiness. It employs and nourishes the ten thousand things and serves as image for them. It brings things to life without any trace of egoism: this undoubtedly is the peak of

55 In the memorial conserved in the Hanshu, Yi Feng speaks of five moral dispositions (wu xing 五行) and six feelings (liu qing 六情). The scholar does not explain the meaning of wu xing: yet, the medieval commentator Jin Zhuo 晉灼 alludes to the five virtues. See Hanshu 75:3171. A similar point is made in Shiji 24:1236.

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trustworthiness. For this reason, the spleen resembles Earth and it is yellow.\footnote{Choshu isho shusei 4A:65-66. On this point, see also Kalinowski (1991), 297. A passage from the Baihutong is very similar to this fragment. See Baihutong 30:56-57; Tjan (1952), 2:567-568. In this case, then, we may rely on the text which quotes from the Yuanmingbao, namely the Wuxing dayi. In this regard, see Wuxing dayi 14:69. Since Xiao Ji refers to this apocryphal treatise without alluding to the Baihutong, we can assume that the apocryphal text contained a thematic layer focused on viscera and ethical virtues.}

The fragment above makes clear that the tie linking the \textit{wu xing} to the \textit{wu chang} is a physiological tie: the organs, namely the image of the five agents within the human body, produce the ethical potential of an individual. Thus, human characters were though to be rooted in physiology:

膀胱者，肺之府也。肺者，斷決。膀胱亦常張有勢，故膀胱決難也。

The bladder is the repository of the lungs. The lungs are in charge for taking decisions. Since the bladder is also long and strong, it is in charge for puzzling out difficulties as well.\footnote{For the fragment from the Yuanmingbao, see Choshu isho shusei 4A:63.}

The evident link between ethical potential of an individual and his inner structure should not be regarded as the approach of a single scholar but rather as the general tendency of the first century BC. Only in this way, in fact, we may understand the following statement of the proceeding of the White Tiger Hall conference:

人本含六律，五行氣而生。故内有五藏，六府。此情性之所由出也。【…】

The human being is born endowed with the six notes and the \textit{qi} of the five agents. Therefore, he has inside five organs and six repositories. These are the place wherefrom feelings and virtues enter and exit.\footnote{Baihutong 30:55; Tjan (1952), 2:565.}

The first century AD saw the aftermath of the physiological interpretation of ethics according to which the human psychological structure was bound to parts of the body.

The discussion above, while illustrating the different approaches adopted under the Han, leaves unsolved the problem of ethics. In other words, what did ethics mean in the last centuries BC? Was it still the primary facet of the human being or were the \textit{ru} rather following alternative paths?
Chapter Three. The discourse on the shengren: between myth and philosophy

2. FROM REN TO SHENGREN

2.1 The development of the theory “ethical predestination”

When we admit that the basic vital endowment of the human being (xing) is constituted by the different kinds of qi which produce organs, feelings, and seeds of virtues, we intuitively ask whether the cosmic material allotted to men at the moment of birth is the same for everybody.

In a very famous aphorism, Confucius maintained that, as far as human nature is concerned, the human beings are close to each other (xiang jin 相近): it is only due to experience (xi 習) that they will finally drift apart (xiang yuan 相遠). In the same way, the Master of Lu explicitly accepted the existence of particular cases and maintained that the best and the worst among men do not change.60 One could even draft a kind of scale of talents. People born with an innate knowledge occupy the first position; those who need to study to reach this stage build the next step; the individuals with limited inborn faculties are the lowest level.61 Despite these statements, we can safely rule out that the basic endowment of an individual was at the core of Confucius’s intellectual interests.62 Classical Confucianism focused on the ways in which an individual grew up to become a “moral being” since, as Xunzi later stressed, even “a man on the street” can actually become like Yu 禹.63 This approach changed in the following centuries, mainly because of the success of correlative thinking and the development of cosmological theories. This process slowly developed under the Former Han, it was already mature in the first century AD, and it probably reached the peak during early medieval era.

2.1.1 Ethical predestination under the Han: The case of the Chunqiu fanlu

Like Confucius, the author of the Chunqiu fanlu presupposes the existence of average people (zhongmin 中民), persons with extraordinary inborn talents (shengren), and incapables (doushao 斗筲).64 Nevertheless, the text reveals the seeds of a trend of thought which was to achieve a remarkable success in the following centuries. First, the interpretation of human basic nature in the light of the yin/yang theories led the author to emphasize the structural exceptionality of the shengren. The sage, in fact, is supposed to embody the most refined essence (jing zhi zhi 精之至).65 Moreover, a few passages

60 Lunyu 17.2; See Roetz (1992), 205, 317; Roetz (1995), 13-14.
61 Lunyu 16.9.
62 See Lunyu 5.13, where it is said that the masters did not speak about subjects like human nature.
63 Xunzi 23:116; Roetz (1992), 357.
64 Chunqiu fanlu 36:311-312.
65 Chunqiu fanlu 82:469.
from the *Chunqiu fanlu* suggest that the writer had a fairly negative opinion about those who are referred to as *zhongmin* 中民.

Chapter 35 of the *Chunqiu fanlu* explains a theory of language development which has been designed as “naturalistic”.\(^\text{66}\) The sages of the past, in fact, are presumed to have “invented” human language by imitating the sounds of nature. The names assigned to things in this remote antiquity grasped their intrinsic nature. The flowing of time, however, led humankind to forget the true meaning of the designations. The recovering of the original significance presupposed the analysis of semantically and phonetically related words: the real meaning of “human nature” is life (*sheng* 生) and that of “people” is “to be in sleep” (*min* 瞑). Thus, when describing the basic endowment of this kind of individuals, the text says:

> 性有似目，目臥幽而瞑，待覺而後見。當其未覺，可謂有見質，而不可謂見。今萬民之性，有其質而未能覺，譬如瞑者待覺，教之然後善。

Human nature has [something which] is similar to the eyes. With closed eyes, it [first] becomes dark and then one falls asleep. You [have to wait to] wake up to see [again]. If you are not awake yet, I can say that you have the potential to see but I cannot say that you see. Now, with regard to the human nature of the ten thousand people, they have the potential [to see] but they do not manage to wake up: [they are] just as sleepers who wait for awakening. [However,] if you teach them, they will become good.\(^\text{67}\)

This passage from the *Chunqiu fanlu* explains that those who belong to *min* wait for “teaching” in order to evolve into moral persons: *jiao* 教 — the teachings of the *shengren* — are the conditio sine qua non for the ethical development of humble people. Thus, the *min* is not autonomous when it comes to the capacity to grow morally. Does this point imply that people were fated to be part of this indistinct mass? The text does not offer further arguments, making it difficult to reach such a definitive conclusion. As the following remarks will show, however, later sources remarkably developed this line of reasoning.

### 2.1.2 Ethical predestination under the Han: The case of the apocrypha

Theories asserting the supremacy of the *shengren* over other human beings were further developed during the first century BC. A few apocryphal fragments testify to this assumption:

> 【…】其精之清明者為聖人，最濁者為愚夫。【…】

> […] When the essence [of a man] is clean and clear, he will become a sage. When the

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\(^{67}\) *Chunqiu fanlu* 35:297.
essence is muddy, he will become a stupid person. [...] 68

The *Yuanmingbao* explains that the success of an individual depends on the quality of the essence he has received at the very beginning: a refined *jing* will turn a man into a *shengren* and an unpolished *jing* will lead him to silliness. Apparently, this viewpoint mirrors the statement of the *Chunqiu fanlu* about the inborn essence of a sage. Yet, it is safe to assume that the *Yuanmingbao* was written against a different cultural background in which the ideas concerning ethical predestination were becoming influential. The *Chunqiu-Yankongtu*, for instance, states that a flourishing *qi* forms an (ordinary) man (*xiuqi wei ren* 秀氣為人), an “upright *qi*” moulds an emperor (*zhengqi wei di* 正氣為帝), and a “middle *qi*” forms a minister (*jianqi wei chen* 間氣為臣). 69

Hence, a man essentially is a distillate of cosmic essences: this, in turn, determines his growth within the society. Finally, one could consider the following passage:

大戴禮及樂緯云鱗蟲三百六十龍為之長。羽蟲三百六十鳯為之長。毛蟲三百六十麟為之長。介蟲三百六十龜為之長。倮蟲三百六十聖人為之長。  

The *Rites* by Dai and the wefts of the *Music* say: “There are 360 [kinds] of scaly animals: [the dragon] is the head of them. There are 360 [kinds] of feathered animals: the phoenix is the head of them. There are 360 [kinds] of hairy animals: the unicorn is the head of them. There are 360 [kinds] of armoured animals: the tortoise is the head of them. There are 360 [kinds] of naked animals: the sage is the head of them.” 70

The point made in the *Dadai liji* 大戴禮記 [Records of the Rites by Dai Senior] and the apocryphal appendix to the *Music* is fairly clear: just as the phoenix is the peak of the group of feathered animals, so is the *shengren* the head of the class “human beings”. 71

Therefore, it is safe to assume that a few Early Han thinkers underscored the differences among human natures and advanced arguments in favour of ethical predestination.

2.1.3 Later development of the theory ethical predestination

The *Lun heng* testifies to the existence of an Early Han theory dealing with the predetermination of individual moral growth. Here, the reflection on *ren* is essentially a mixture of pre-imperial philosophical ideas and a few Han dogmas. The influence of

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68 Choshu isho shusei 4A:58.  
69 Choshu isho shusei 4A:9.  
71 Dadai liji 13:3:79. A similar point is made in chapter five. Here it is said that the *shengren* is the essence of the “naked animals” (guochong zhi jing zhe yue shengren 倖蟲之精者曰聖人). See Dadai liji 5:5:35. For a short introduction to the composition and textual problems of the *Dadai liji*, see Deng Ruiquan (1998), 152-154.
classical Confucianism becomes noticeable in the accent on experience (xi 習) as tool which shapes the character of a man.\footnote{Wang Chong, in fact, quotes Confucius and says that, with regard to human nature, the human beings are close to each other: it is only due to experience that they drift apart. See \textit{Lun heng} 13:37; Forke (1962), vol. I, 387.} Moreover, different from the authors of the apocrypha, Wang Chong refuses to assign a special role to the sage, maintaining that \textit{ren} is the peak of the class “naked animals” (luochong... ren wei zhi chang 倮蟲...人為之長).\footnote{For Wang Chong’s viewpoint, see \textit{Lun heng} 22:84. It is also interesting to notice that Wang Chong presents the \textit{luochong} as a homogeneous group. Thus, differently from the \textit{Dadai liji} and the \textit{chenwei}, the Later Han thinker does not follow the habit of dividing the classes of the animal reign in subgroups.} Yet, while underscoring these points, the Later Han scholar does not reject the cosmological approach to ethics:

小人君子，稟性異類乎？譬諸五穀皆為用，實不異而效殊者，稟氣有厚泊，故性有善惡也。殘則授（受）（不）仁之氣泊，而怒則稟勇渥也。【…】人受五常，含五臟，皆具於身。稟之泊少，故其操行不及善人【…】

[With regard to] mediocre man and gentleman: do their endowed natures belong to different categories? It is as in the case of the five cereals: each of them has [its own] function. That [men] succeed in a different way despite their similar [inborn] substance [depends on the fact that] the inborn \textit{qi} is thick or thin. Accordingly, human nature will be good or bad. In the wicked [man], the endowed \textit{qi} of benevolence is thin; in the irascible man, the endowed \textit{qi} of fierceness is thick. […] The human being receives the \textit{qi} of the five constants and embodies the five viscera: they are all provided in the body. [When] the endowed \textit{qi} is thin or scarce, the moral conduct of a man will not stand the comparison [with the behaviour] of a man with a good [basic nature]. […]\footnote{\textit{Lun heng} 8:21; Forke (1962), vol. I, 380-381.}

The emphasis on the human basic endowment obliged Wang Chong to depart from the path of early Confucian thinkers: since each human being is endowed with the cosmic \textit{qi}, the possibility that it actually varied from person to person could not be ruled out. Accordingly, the merits of a man strongly depend upon the quality of his innate \textit{qi}.\footnote{\textit{Lun heng} 8:21. Forke (1962), vol. I, 144.} This point is made also in Liu Shao’s \textit{Renwu zhi} [\textit{Monograph on Human Qualities}], an early medieval text which focuses on the inborn endowment of individuals and, more generally, on human characters.\footnote{According to his biography in the \textit{Sanguozhi}, Liu Shao began his official career at the Han court of emperor Ling 靈 (r. 168-189). During the Three Reigns, he was appointed for important mansions. In particular, he dealt with regulations for the examination of officials. For Liu Shao’s biography, see \textit{Sanguozhi} 21:617-622; Shryock (1966), 20-26. This experience may have led him to write the \textit{Renwu zhi}. The text, in fact, was written with the intent to provide a guide to recruit capable and honest officials. According to Liu Shao, this task requires the ability to know and reckon human}
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for example, discusses the different kinds of qi traceable in human characters.77

2.2 The discussion on ethics as facet of the human being

A strong hub on the inborn qualities of men substantially invalidates basic Confucian dogmas such as self-cultivation and moral growth. A man provided with a refined qi will automatically turn in a talented individual whereas those endowed with a deficient qi will be fated to become mediocre person. Accordingly, a thinker who consistently applies this line of reasoning might tend to neglect issues dealing with human ethical development or with the actualization of ethics. The Renwu zhi seems to testify to this assumption since Liu Shao even denies the possibility to effectively change the nature of an individual through education.78 Did Liu Shao’s forefathers adopt a similar approach or did they rather try to stay in balance between the logical consequences of the cosmological framing of ethics and the need to believe in human moral growth?

2.2.1 The Chunqiu fanlu

Wang Chong’s uneasiness in dealing with the implications of a cosmological approach to ethics emerges in the contradiction between the accent on the inborn qi and the negation of the innate superiority of the shengren over ordinary human beings. In the Chunqiu fanlu, this point is treated in a much more ambiguous way.

As mentioned in the last section, the Chunqiu fanlu maintains that the basic vital endowment of man encompasses the natural forces yin and yang. Apart from a few remarks, themes such as the variety of inborn natures do not receive much attention in the text. Why does this source, which even characterizes min negatively, neglect the implications of a naturalistic description of basic human endowment? The reticence on

characters. Therefore, Needham wrote: “It is significant to find that the Jen Wu Chih (Study of human abilities) (…) has nothing whatever to say about physiognomy. It is based entirely on a rationalistic observation of psychological traits and their effects in human affairs”. See Needham (1962), 386. Alfred Forke, a few years before the publication of Shryock’s translation (1937), followed a different line of reasoning since he underscored the centrality of physiognomy and the lack in scientific method. See Forke (1934), 197. In my opinion, given the strong empirical hub of the text, it is safer to follow Needham’s viewpoint.

77 See Renwu zhi 1:1-10; Shryock (1966), 46-48. The Later Han thinker Wang Fu 王符 made a completely different point, maintaining that “Basic natures and emotional spheres of human beings cannot be distinguished in hundred sorts (ren zhi qing xing bu neng xiang bai 人之情性未能相百)”. In this regard, see Qianfulun 1:2.

78 In the Renwu zhi, “study” is defined as a method which does not penetrate the Way (bu ru dao 不人道). Accordingly, someone who is only moderately gifted shall not succeed to change his inborn character: Even if he will be educated so that parts of his talents will be effectively improved, he will anyway fail since “natures with mediocre talents cannot be completely changed” (piancai zhi xing bu ke yi zhan yi 偏材之性不可移轉矣). See Renwu zhi 2:32.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

the part of the author to consider issues like the diversity of innate characters suggests
the marginality of similar subjects in the reasoning pursued in the text. This, in turn,
leads us to assume that the theoretical focus lied elsewhere.
The cosmological description of human nature could be seen as part of an intellectual
discourse which endeavoured to justify ethics on a naturalistic level. Accordingly, we
should assume that the documents conserved in the Chunqiu fanlu were written also
with the intent to demonstrate the “naturalness” of human ethical behaviour. In other
words, since the working of nature can be described in moral terms, the human being is
called to live an ethical life.
As often emphasized, tian and ren form an organic ensemble since these two spheres
present many facets which belong to the same category (lei). Besides being a tool for
anchoring the inner structure of the human being to tian, lei also was the device for
transforming Heaven in a mirror of man:

天無喜氣，亦何以暖而春生育？天無怒氣，亦何以清而秋殺就？天無樂氣，亦何以
疏陽而夏養長？天無哀氣，亦何以激陰而冬閉藏？故曰：天乃有喜怒哀樂之行，人
亦有春秋冬夏之氣者，合類之謂也。

If Heaven did not have the qi of pleasure, how could it become warm and nurture
creatures in spring? And if Heaven did not have the qi of rage, how could it turn fresh and
kill its accomplishments during the autumn? If Heaven did not have the qi of joy, how
could it develop the yang and grow up in summer? If Heaven did not have the qi of
sorrow, how could it rouse the yin and store during the winter? Therefore, I say: “[Just
like the human being,] Heaven acts according to pleasure and rage, joy and sorrow. [Just
like Heaven,] the human being has the qi of the spring and autumn, of the winter and
summer”. This is what is called “sharing the category”.

Besides being able to feel, Heaven also has the capability of expressing its own
morality. The most important aspect is the ethical characterization of the cosmic forces
yin/yang. In this way, the positive yang, which emerges in spring and summer, is
described as a moral force, which expresses humanity (yangqi ren 陽氣仁), since it
provides care (yangqi ai 陽氣愛) and life (yangqi sheng 陽氣生). The yin, on the
contrary, is portrayed as an evil force (yinqi li 陰氣戾), since it is the pole of hate (yinqi
e 陰氣惡) and death (yinqi sha 陰氣殺). Finally, the will of Heaven is unmistakably
presented as expression of humanity (tianzhi ren 天志仁), and its manner of acting is
described as righteous (qi dao ye yi 其道也義) since it establishes what is right at a
certain time through its seasonal cycle.

The accent on the morality of tian does not explain the reasons for which the human

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79 Chunqiu fanlu 46:335-336.
80 Chunqiu fanlu 81:467.
being should behave ethically. The *Chunqiu fanlu* solves the point by underscoring the structural similarity between Heaven and man. Given that men embody the heavenly *yin* and *yang*, they are potentially able to reproduce the harmonious working of nature. The duty of *ren*, in fact, essentially consists in imitating Heaven, by committing to the enhancement of his positive *yang* side (the seeds of morality) and restriction of his negative *yin* part (the emotions).

The accent on heavenly morality and the emphasis on the structural similarity between *tian* and *ren* are among the most important themes treated in the *Chunqiu fanlu*. In this mindset, a detailed analysis of human inborn endowment becomes superfluous. The use of *yin/yang* theories alone could guarantee a satisfactory explanation of the link between man and Heaven. Themes such as the association of the virtues with facets of *tian* like the five agents and the physiological origin of morality were, on the contrary, unessential additions. Accordingly, the text neither examines the nature of the bond between agents and moral qualities nor gives importance to the organs. The attention of the author is rather turned to the human potential to behave like nature by reproducing the benevolence of the *yang* and the righteousness of the heavenly path (*tiandao*) in the human realm. Accordingly, in his relation with others, a man will respect the value of humanity: *ren* (仁), in fact, is the ideal reference point when interacting with other human beings. In his relation with himself, a man should regard righteousness as leading principle: *yi*, in fact, refers to the personal individual sphere with its components self-cultivation and self-respect.\(^{81}\) At least theoretically, even those who were not born as *shengren* were deemed to be able to reach this goal. The text, in fact, explicitly defines ethics as the function of the human being in the cosmos:

天道施，地道化，人道義。

The way of Heaven is to prepare, the way of Earth is to transform, and the way of Man is to be righteous.\(^{82}\)

### 2.2.2  The role of ethics in the apocrypha

Turning to the role of ethics within the *chenwei* fragments, let us first focus on those (few) elements which suggest that moral virtues were an appealing issue for the authors of the texts. According to the *Chunqiu-Shuotici*, a text which applies the theory of language of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, the true meaning of *ren* is humanity (*ren zhe ren ye* 人者仁也). Thus, an individual must live a life based on humanity in order to be able to

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\(^{81}\) *Chunqiu fanlu* 29.

\(^{82}\) *Chunqiu fanlu* 82:468. In this regard, see also *Chunqiu fanlu* 56:354, where it is said that the power of Heaven is that of arranging (*Tiande shi* 天德施); the power of earth is that of transforming (*dide hua* 地德化) and that the power of man is that of being righteous (*rende yi* 人德義).
call himself “man”. In addition, the Yue-Dongshengyi defines ren and yi as the forces which regulated the action of the junzi, whereas desire for beauty and richness are behind the deeds of a mediocre person (xiaoren). Finally, the Qianzaodu says:

三才之道，天地人也。天有陰陽，地有柔剛，人有仁義。

The way of the Three Powers: Heaven, Earth, and Man. Heaven has yin and yang; Earth has softness and hardness; Man has humanity and righteousness.

These words remind us of the statement in the Chunqiu fanlu. Both the texts, in fact, explicitly define ethics as the first distinguishing trait of the human being. Yet, as we will discuss in the chapter on tian, the main attention of the authors of the Qianzaodu was turned to the idea of time. Accordingly, whoever wrote this text focused on the elaboration of time-related schemes without dwelling at length on subjects dealing with human moral behaviour.

Ethics certainly is not an important thematic layer of the chenwei. It is even questionable whether this facet can be explained by simply emphasizing the fragmentariness of the corpus. First, since we know that the chenwei came to play a role in the drafting of post-Han tianwen treatises, encyclopaedias, and exegetical studies, we may certainly wonder why the apocrypha were consistently ignored in the ethical field. Second, the chenwei fragments which discuss the theme “human being” are readable in a correlative and cosmological framework which, in some cases, also brings to light the alleged physiological origins of moral virtues. In the last pages, we have seen that the texts which offer a detailed analysis of human basic endowment, establishing, for example, a direct link between virtues and wu xing, present a somewhat surprising mindset when it comes to ethics. In particular, we have underscored the development of a theory dealing with ethical predestination and emphasized Wang Chong’s uneasiness in treating this theme in the Lun heng as well as Liu Shao’s radicalism in the Renwu zhi. At this point, one could hypothesize that the lack of reflection on ethics in the chenwei depends rather on a substantial unconcern for moral issues on the part of the authors than on the fragmentariness of the texts.

The Chunqiu-Yuanmingbao has been here presented as one of the books which emphasize the structural similarities between Heaven and man. Moreover, this apocryphal appendix to the Annals has been particularly useful, mainly because it explicitly alludes to the different basic nature of sage and silly persons. Let us now see how this work characterizes the human being:

人與天地並為三才，天以見象，地以效儀，人以作事。
The human being together with Heaven and Earth form the Three Powers. Heaven is there to show its images, Earth is there to imitate the model, Man is there to perform actions.85

The fragment introduces a topic which has already been discussed with regard to the Chunqiu fanlu and the Qianzaodu, namely the presentation of the three spheres of the cosmos and their respective functions. It is evident that whoever wrote the Yuanmingbao defined man in a different way: the fragment neither alludes to “righteousness”, which was taken as symbol of ren in the Chunqiu fanlu, nor speaks of humanity and righteousness, which were mentioned in the Qianzaodu. The author of the Yuanmingbao manifestly regarded “action” as the most important facet of the human being. The problem is to circumscribe the meaning of “performing actions” (zuo shi). It is probable, for instance, that this zuo shi encompassed an ethical dimension.86 Yet, before reaching any conclusion, it is advisable to consider the following fragment:

天人同度, 正法相受, 天垂文象, 人行其事, 謂之教。教之為言，效也。上為下效。道之始也。

Heaven and man share the measure: by correcting the model [which is to be imitated], they carry each other. [Heaven] hangs its patterns and simulacra; man carries out his action: this is what is called “teaching”. The meaning of teaching is to imitate. That above acts and that below imitates: this is the starting point of the Way.87

Here, the author speaks again about the structural similarity between Heaven and man. Moreover, he says that a form of communication between tian and ren (xiangshou 相受) is possible after that (man) “corrects the model”. This obscure passage may be interpreted in the following way. The realm of human action does not entail freedom of choice but rather a process of imitation of those who are above. In a naturalistic framework, men are supposed to examine (and interpret) heavenly patterns, namely the starry sky; in a political community, subjects are demanded to obey the sovereign; in an ethical community, men are required to follow the teaching — the model to be imitated — of the shengren.

Let us first consider the possible political implications of this fragment. It is evident, for instance, that the Chunqiu fanlu does not stand the comparison with the Yuanmingbao. Even though the author presents “average people” as “sleeper”, they are granted, at

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85 Choshu isho shusei 4A:58
86 In this regard, it is worthwhile to notice that the text also ties the human being to “being human”. The character of humanity, in fact, contains “two men” (er ren wei ren 二人為仁). Moreover, humanity is explained as love for life and care for other people (hao sheng ai ren 好生愛人). See Choshu isho shusei 4A:56.
87 Choshu isho shusei 4A:57.
least, the opportunity to “awake”. This idea seems to be absent from the “performing actions” of the Yuanmingbao. We have here a kind of break with the ethical tradition, mainly because the autonomy of the human being appears to be denied. Accordingly, if we trust this statement, we should maintain that issues such as the moral growth of individuals did not play a central role in the reasoning of the authors. A reader wondering about their main intellectual interests should keep in mind the attention with which the correspondences man/Heaven are described and be aware of the supremacy of “what stays above”, namely the starry sky. In the next chapter, we will also dwell on the astrographical layer of the Yuanmingbao and underscore that this text gives priority to the analysis of tian. Moreover, the human being of the Yuanmingbao often is the one who mirrors Heaven in his structure. This line of reasoning is a peculiarity of many chenwei. The relevance of thematic layers loosely connected to the technical field — astrology or time scheduling strategies — in fact, suggests that the attention of the writers of the chenwei was turned to the natural realm. When confronted with the need to reflect on the third Power of the cosmos — the human being — the authors underscored his heavenly roots. When asked to deepen the link between tian and ren, the writers usually focused on a very particularly kind of human being, namely the shengren. When we finally ask who is the shengren of the apocrypha, we should answer “the sovereign of the past”.

3. TOWARDS THE SHENGREN OF THE APOCRYPHA

3.1 Introducing the shengren of the Han

Ancient rulers with their social, political, and ethical achievements have generally been presented as icons of perfection in pre-imperial philosophical circles. As Lewis puts it, Confucians considered Yao or Shun to be the heroes who helped humankind to gradually emerge from a savage state. The label “culture hero” obviously is a generic etiquette which encompasses several meanings. Lewis highlights the importance of three aspects, namely “the physical separation of men from animals, the transformation of the material conditions of existence through the invention of tools and technological processes, and the introduction of a specifically human code of conduct”.

During the Warring States period, the portrayal of the culture heroes varied in accordance with the philosophical standpoint of the cultural groups: if legalists praised the rulers of antiquity for the creation of law, Confucians emphasized the political ability, technological cleverness, and moral superiority of Confucian icons such as Yao

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88 Lewis (1990), 169.
Chapter Three. The discourse on the shengren: between myth and philosophy

The culture hero is the one who contributes to transform the human community into a well-ordered society. A different stance was taken in the Zhuangzi: here, ancient sovereigns turn into felons guilty of having widened the chasm between man and nature. These different viewpoints about the shengren of the past stimulated the intellectual work of the thinkers of late Warring States period and early imperial China. The arguing of the “hundred schools” soon produced a generation of theorists who tried to harmonize the discrepancies of the past, blending the accent on nature of the daoists with the Confucian mindset. In the Xici, for instance, it is said:

古者包犧氏之王天下也仰則觀象於天,俯則觀法於地,觀鳥獸之文與地之宜。近取諸身,遠取諸物。於是始作八卦以通神明之德,以類萬物之情。作結繩而為罔罟以佃以漁。

In the antiquity, Fuxi ruled over the world. With his face upward [to the sky], he observed the images in Heaven and, with his face downward [to the ground], he observed the models on Earth. Finally, he examined the patterns of beasts and the suitability of Earth. Nearby, he grasped it in [his] body and, at a distance, in the things. Then, he began to draw the eight trigrams in order to penetrate the intangible and shiny powers and to classify the basic substance of the ten thousand things. He made nets for hunting and fishing by tying knots.

This excerpt from the corpus of the Changes clearly describes the endeavour of culture hero — Fuxi 伏羲 — to promote humankind. The reference to the nets is an explicit allusion to what Lewis calls “invention of tools and technological progress”. Yet, it is “observation” — of the sky, of the earth, of nature in its whole — which plays a central role here. Unlike Yao or Shun, as they were portrayed by Confucians, the Fuxi of the Xici does not actively organize the world: he simply portrays it by drawing the Eight Trigrams (ba gua 八卦). In this framework, nature is not an exterior realm which needs to be “domesticated”: for the hero, it is rather a source of inspiration to order the world.

In the last two centuries BC, Han thinkers developed the syncretistic reasoning of the scholars who drafted the Xici, emphasizing the civilizatory role played by the shengren, his ethical stature, and his deep knowledge of the natural world.

89 See Roetz (1992), 422; Lewis (1990), 169-172.
90 History, for instance, is presented as a process of declining virtue (de xia shuai 德下衰). Zhuangzi 16:41; Roetz (1984), 228. On the contradictory portrayals of the shengren in the Zhuangzi, see Roetz (1984), 272.
91 Zhouyi 7B, Xici (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 82); Legge (1966), 382-383.
92 For the excerpt from the Xici, Michael Puett stresses that the ordering of the world in the Xici was carried in accord with nature, without any idea of transgression. See Puett (1997), 511-516.
In the *Wudi benji* 五帝本記 [Annals of the Five Emperors], the Sima historians often underscore the civilizatory role of mythic rulers. Huangdi, for instance, is said to have planted seeds according to the seasonal cycle (*shi bo baigu caomu* 時播百穀草木),93 Yao was the one who unified pitchpipes and units of measurement.94 In the *Classic of Ages*, Liu Xin recalled groundbreaking inventions or discoveries made in the golden past.95 Finally, this aspect appears in the apocryphal fragments as well. As Leng Dexi has convincingly argued, for instance, it is certain that whoever wrote the *chenwei* attributed to the ancient sovereigns several technological innovations; Nü Wa invented musical instruments; Shennong discovered the hundred cereals; Chi You, the rival of Huangdi, fabricated weapons; Yao invented carriages.96

Turning to the ethical dimension of a *shengren*, it is important to keep in mind that in the last centuries BC, Han *ru* came to increasingly emphasize the importance of “knowing Heaven”. This ability certainly characterized the portrayal of the *shengren*: as is said in the *Hanshi waizhuan*, a sage is able to know Heaven, Earth, and Man.97 What does the *shengren* know about *tian*? The interpreter of Han culture may well distinguish two important lines of reasoning. On the one hand, we have an ethical/political reading of this issue: accordingly, the *shengren* is the one who succeeds to fully grasp the morality of nature, reproducing it in the human realm. On the other hand, we may approach the theme “knowledge of Heaven” from a technical standpoint: the shengren is the one who comprehends the handling of *tian* and, above all, his patterns (*tianwen* 天文), and his temporal cycles (*lipu*曆譜).

3.2 Knowing Heaven: the ethical and political approach

3.2.1 *Dong Zhongshu*

The ethical characterization of *tian* plays an important role on a political level. *Tian*, in fact, was considered to be a model of political action: with its balanced seasonal cycle, it expressed the best way of administering life. This point is made by Dong Zhongshu in a memorial to the throne:

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93 In the *Wudi benji* 五帝本記 [Annals of the Five Emperors], the Sima historians often emphasize the civilizatory role of mythic rulers. Huangdi, for instance, is said to have planted seeds according to the seasonal cycle (*shi bo baigu caomu* 時播百穀草木); Yao was the one who unified pitchpipes as well as units of measurement. *Shiji* 1:6. *Shiji* 1:24. In the *Classic of Ages*, Liu Xin recalled groundbreaking inventions or discoveries made in the golden past. See, for instance, *Hanshu* 21B:1012.

94 *Shiji* 1:24.

95 *Hanshu* 21B:1012.

96 In this regard, see Leng Dexi (1996), 116-135. For inventions and discoveries, see, in particular, 126-127.

97 *Hanshi waizhuan* 1.25:5

127
臣聞天者羣物之祖也，故徧覆包函而無所殊，建日月風雨以和之，經陰陽寒暑以成之．故聖人法天而立道，亦溥愛而亡私，布德施仁以厚之，設誼立禮以導之。

I have heard that Heaven is the ancestor of the myriad things. Therefore, it is everywhere for covering, embracing, and wrapping so that the reasons for differentiations disappear. [Heaven] put there the sun, the moon, the wind, and the rain in order to harmonize things. He set up the yin, the yang, the cold, and the heat as standard in order to develop them. For this reason, the sage takes Heaven as model and sets up the way. He also widens care and puts aside the private [sphere]. He spreads around [his] virtue and arranges humanity in order to give more significance to things. He establishes the meaning and sets up the rites in order to lead them. [...]

The point here is that the shengren and tian are nearly at the same level: Heaven arranges the conditions to harmonize and complete the things of the universe; the sage is the one in charge of leading them. Thus, the greatness of the shengren lies in his ability to carry out the work of nature. A question, at this point, is mandatory: how does the sage succeed to fulfil the work of nature? The hint at “taking Heaven as model” (fa tian 法天) in Dong Zhongshu’s biography reminds us of the passage of the Xici, there where Fuxi began to organize the world, observing and patterning inner and outer world.99

Dong Zhongshu’s fa tian implies a moment of discovery and a moment of action. First, the shengren comprehends why tian and ren have to be regarded as an organic whole. He “discovers” the moral perfection of nature: he understands that the qi of the yang expresses the benevolence of tian and realizes the righteousness of the seasonal cycle. Secondly, after having detected the perfection of Heavenly handling, the shengren takes it as model for his own demeanour (fa tian): as the Chunqiu fanlu says “a sage acts only after having looked at Heaven (shengren shi tian er xing 聖人視天而行)”.100

The fact that the shengren is the one who carries out the work of tian has rather significant implications at a political level:

98 Hanshu 56:2515.
99 A reader of these ancient sources, however, should keep in mind a few basic differences. First, Fuxi was supposed to have observed the contours of the beasts in order to pattern them. In the Chunqiu fanlu, it is explicitly said that the sage shows his unconcern with animals, speaking exclusively about humanity and righteousness. See Chunqiu fanlu 13:147. Moreover, one should also notice that the Chunqiu fanlu strongly emphasizes human action. Here, we can consider the theory of language. As the Fuxi of the Xici, the shengren who “invented” human language “imitated” the sounds of nature. The sages of the past, in fact, reproduced the shouting (hao 謞) and yelling (ming 鳴) listenable in the natural world in order to emulate tian. Thus, human language is a kind of translation of the sounds of tian. Finally, as the text says: “Heaven does not speak: it lets the human being enunciate its will (tian bu yan shi ren fa qi yi 天不言使人發其意)”. Chunqiu fanlu 35:285. On this point, see Roetz (2006), 206.
100 Chunqiu fanlu 45:333.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

Hence, the ruler, a shengren ruler, takes Heaven as his model (fa tian) and impresses upon it his own political action. This essentially means to reproduce in the governmental field the characteristics of the seasonal cycle, by showing benevolence or by punishing in an appropriate way. As the Chunqiu fanlu says:

天志仁，其道也義，為人主者，予奪生殺，各當其義，若四時；列官置吏，必以其能，若五行；好仁惡戾，任德遠刑，若陰陽；此之謂能配天。

The will of Heaven is humanity and its path is righteousness. With regard to the ruler of humankind, he rewards and nourishes, grants life and death: each [of these actions] conform to their proper [time], just like [in the case of] the four seasons. He arranges the posts and place (i.e. appoint) the officers: this must be done on the basis of their capabilities, just like [in the case of] the five agents. He favours humanity and despises perversity, applies virtue and takes distance from punishments, just like [in the case of] yin and yang. This is what is called “being able to match Heaven”.103
3.2.2 The apocrypha

Before turning to the technical understanding of the knowledge of *tian*, it is appropriate to wonder whether traces of the ethical/political approach to “knowledge of Heaven” appear in the apocryphal fragments. We should answer in the negative to this question. The *Qianzaodu*, perhaps, offer some hints in this sense, since it states that the Way flourishes thanks to humanity (*xing yu ren* 興於仁), it sets up in the rites (*li yu li* 立於禮), and acquires a contour through righteousness (*li yu yi* 理於義). Finally, it becomes firm because of trustworthiness (*ding yu xin* 定於信) and it blossoms thanks to wisdom (*cheng yu zhi* 成於智). Once again, then, the *Qianzaodu* displays a certain attention towards the role of ethics: it was used as to better define the position of the human being within the cosmos and it is used again as to characterize the Way. Yet, as already mentioned, the text does not deepen issues bound to human morality.

Turning the attention to other apocryphal texts, we may easily notice the conventional role attributed to ethics as facet of the *shengren*. In the appendix to the *Rites*, for instance, Yu is presented as the one who embodied an “arrived humanity” (*zhi ren* 至仁) whereas the *Hetu* describes Huangdi in terms of *renyi* (*huangdi renyi* 黃帝仁義). Yet, apart from these scant remarks, the texts do not explain why the sovereigns of the past have to be regarded as icons of morality.

3.3 Knowing Heaven: the technical approach

3.3.1 The technical approach under the Han

The concern with observation of the sky and knowledge of earth has often characterized the portrayal of the *shengren*. The *Yaodian* [Canon of Yao] chapter of the *Documents* narrated that Yao commanded the Xi 羲 and He 和 brothers “to calculate and delineate the movements and appearances of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the zodiacal spaces; and so to deliver respectfully the seasons to the people”.

The *Yugong* 禹貢 [The Tribute of Yu] chapter is a description of Yu 禹’s effort to map the “Nine Regions (*jiu zhou* 九州)” of the Chinese territory. As to introduce the Han approach, we could here recall that mythic rulers like Huangdi 黃帝, Yao, and Shun, as they were...
portrayed in the *Shiji*, were concerned with a technical explanation of Heaven.\(^{107}\) The *Dadai liji* adds:

聖人慎守日月之數以察星辰之行，以序四時之順逆，謂之厯。

The sage cautiously holds the number of sun and moon in order to examine the motion of the astral bodies and schedule the cycle of the four seasons. [All] this is called “calendar”.\(^{108}\)

The wording of the *Dadai liji* signalizes that the drafting of the calendar belonged to the field of action of the *shengren*. Finally, Yi Feng said:

臣聞之於師曰，天地設位，懸日月，布星辰，分陰陽，定四時，列五行，以視聖人，名之曰道。聖人見道，然後知王治之象，故畫州土，建君臣，立律曆，陳成敗，以視賢者，名之曰經。賢者見經，然後知人道之務，則詩、書、易、春秋、禮、樂是也。

I have heard from the masters [the words which] say: when Heaven and Earth set up, they hanged the sun and the moon and scattered planets and stars [in the sky]. They separated the *yin* from the *yang*, fixed the four seasons, and arranged the five agents. They [finally] showed [all this] to the sages who called [it] the “Way”. The sages saw the Way: thus, they became aware of the simulacra of royal politics [in the natural realm]. Accordingly, they portrayed regions and territory and instituted [the posts of] princes and ministers. They introduced pitchpipes and calendars, described accomplishments and defeats. [Finally,] they showed [all this] to the worthies who called [it] the “Thread”. It was right that they patterned [it in] the *Odes, Documents, Changes, Annals, Rites*, and *Music*.\(^{109}\)

Thus, the field of action of the *shengren* is the way of Heaven (*tiandao*) since he grasps the secrets of nature. The human path (*rendao*) is the field of action of the worthies, who knew the duties of the human beings and spoke about them in the classics. As the Fuxi of the *Changes*, the *shengren* presented above is the one who organizes the world after having seen the Way. Yi Feng also underscores the results of Fuxi’s civilizatory efforts: the creation of political institutions and the regulation of technical matters such as calendrical issues. In this framework, the drafting of the classics is a second step. It is only after the intervention of the sages in the world that the worthies took into account their results and elaborated the teachings of the canon. Thus, under the Han, some *ru* emphasized the importance of grasping the handling of Heaven in its many dimension.

\(^{107}\) *Shiji* 1:6, 17, 24.  
\(^{108}\) *Dadai liji* 5.5:35.  
\(^{109}\) *Hanshu* 75:3172.
3.3.2  The technical approach in the apocrypha

The scholars who worked on the drafting of the *Xici* depicted wisdom as a bidirectional movement: the looking upward (yang 仰) led to the analysis of heavenly patterns (Tianwen 天文) while the bending down (fu 俯) brought on the examination of the earthly lines (dili 地理). Those who wrote the apocrypha discussed this point as well:

通天文者明，審地理者昌。明者天之時也。昌者地之財也。明王之治，鳳凰下之。110

The one who penetrates the patterns of heaven is enlightened; the one who discerns the lines of earth will rise to the glory. Enlightenment lies in the seasons of heaven. Glory lies the resources of earth. In an epoch governed by an enlightened king, the phoenix will descend.110

The wise king of the *Kaolingyao* — a king able to attract the phoenix in his reign — knows forms and meaning of the patterns (wen 文) depicted in the sky by stars and asterisms. He scrutinizes the astral line-ups and decodes their hidden messages, translating them in warnings and advices to be used in the human realm; he then turns to the earth for individuating those lines (li 理) which draw up the boundaries among the regions and areas of the earth. He will finally connect patterns in heaven and lines on earth by translating the starry phenomena into a set of prescriptions concerning specific spots in his dominion. Thus, from the viewpoint of the authors of the *chenwei*, the technical knowledge of Heaven and Earth is an important feature of the sage. With regard to the mapping of the territory, we will see in next chapter how ancient astrologers managed to connect heavenly areas to earthly regions. Moreover, the *Hetu-Kuodixiang* almost completely focuses on the analysis of the territory.111 Finally, we could recall that some apocryphal fragments appear to echo the wording of the *Shanhaijing* [The Classic of the Mountains and of the Sees]. The *Yuanshenqi*, for instance, says:

包羲氏盡地之制，凡天下山五千三百七十，居地五十六萬四千五十六里，出水者八千里，受水者八千里，出銅之山四百五十七，出鐵之山三千六百九。112

Fuxi’s clan completed the form of the earth. In all, there are 5370 mountains in the world. The inhabited earth measures 564,056 li. The stream of the tributaries covers 8000 li. The stream of the rivers covers 8000 li as well. The mountains with cupper are 456, those with iron 3690.112

Here, the ancient myth involving Yu acquires a new main character, Fuxi.113 In the same

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110  *Choshu isho shusei* 2:41.
111  See, for instance, *Choshu isho shusei* 6:43-44.
113  The *Minglixu* and the *Yuanmingbao*, on the contrary, attribute description organization of Chinese
way, however, one can still notice the emphasis on the knowledge of the territory on the part of the sages.

Turning to the knowledge of Heaven, let us consider the following fragment of the Hetu-Shikaitu:

伏羲氏以木徳王。天下之人未有宅室，未有水火之和。於是乃仰觀天文，俯察地理，始畫八卦，定天地之位，分陰陽之數，推列三光，建分八節。【…】

Fuxi’s clan ruled by means of the potency Wood. [At that time,] the people of the world had neither houses nor the harmony of fire and water. With his face upward [to the sky], he observed the images in Heaven and, with his face downward [to the ground], he observed the lines on Earth. [Finally,] he began to draw the eight trigrams. He fixed the position of Heaven and Earth, split the numbers of the $yin$ from [those] of the $yang$, calculated and arranged [in a calendrical system the motion of] the three luminaries, established the “eight knots”. […] 114

Besides the evident allusion to the Xici, we have a clear explanation of the meaning which is to be given to “observe the heavenly patterns”. Fuxi did not simply observe the heavens. He calculated the motion of the Three Luminaries, namely sun, moon, and five planets. He fixed the eight knots, a term with, in all probability, refers to eight of the 24 solar terms (jieqi 節期).115 Summing up, Fuxi was credited with the understanding of astronomical events.

The knowledge of Heaven on the part of the shengren is a facet which is often underscored in the apocrypha. In the Wenyaogou, Chong 重 and Li 黎 — two famous figures of Chinese mythology116 — are said to have discussed questions concerning the patterns of Heaven or, in other words, astrology (shuo tianwen).117 The Qianzaodu attributes to Yao the draft of a calendar which started from a jiazi 甲子 year.118 Finally, even Confucius, the one who did not speak about subjects dealing with Heaven,
becomes here an expert of the art of tianwen and lipu. He is said to have been able to understand the patterns of Heaven and forecast auspiciousness and adversities (ming tianwen zhao yoaxiang 明天文占妖祥).\textsuperscript{119} The Minglixu even makes of him the man who edited and transmitted the Han almanac known as Yin li 殷曆 [Calendrical System of the Yin].\textsuperscript{120} Thus, the shengren of the apocrypha is the one able to understand and interpret the heavenly patterns and to translate time flow into a calendrical system. As we shall see in detail in the next chapter, the relevance of the apocryphal astrological layer and the concern with time-scheduling strategies on the side of the authors certainly testify to this assumption.

4. THE SHENGREN OF THE APOCRYPHA BETWEEN MYTH AND PHILOSOPHY

Besides stressing the knowledge of Heaven on the part of the sage, a conspicuous group of apocrypha fragments is devoted to portray the ways in which the shengren is connected to tian. The chenwei, in fact, abound with stories about miraculous births, facial and body structure of the sages, and heavenly talismans. The problem of the interpreter in dealing with these new thematic layers is essentially the characterization of similar subjects. The fragments that we will analyse in the following pages do not convey theoretical ideas about the shengren: they simply recount a tale. These anecdotes will provide us with some information about their authors only on condition that we “dissect” them and distinguish the mythic core from successive re-elaborations: we are now approaching the “slippery” world of myth.\textsuperscript{121}

As the French scholar Calame stresses, ancient Greeks never formulated an absolute definition of múthos: Aristotle, for instance, consistently used this term to refer to the plot of a story.\textsuperscript{122} Modern and contemporary scholars underscore that myths are traditional tales, usually involving superhuman characters and set in the past. Yet, when confronted with the need to elaborate a complex definition, which could specify meaning, functions, and ways of working of mythic tales, the scholarly world is far from being unanimous. In the last two centuries, scholars active in difference disciplines — folklore, psychology, ethnology, history of religion, Greek studies — investigated this complex concept by analysing its functions and delimitating its boundaries. As Kirk puts it, this led to the birth of several “universalistic theories” which explicitly strove to

\textsuperscript{119} Choshu isho shuset 4B:71\textsuperscript{120} Choshu isho shuset 4B:127.\textsuperscript{121} See Burkert (1979), 23. For the appropriate labelling of myth as “slippery word”, see Rogerson (1984), 62.\textsuperscript{122} Calame (2003), 1.
explain features, origins, and functions of all myths. The English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), for instance, made of myth a mode of thinking traceable in primitive societies which were supposed to conserve a more original (“childlike”) way of recounting old stories. Freud assimilated myths to dreams and considered them to be mirrors reflecting instincts, fears, and desires of human psyche. The search for a global theory of mythology continued with the social anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942), to whom we owe the accent on fieldworks. He developed the functionalist approach by presenting myths as sacred stories used to illustrate (“charters”) ethical or practical beliefs of a given society. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-1990) greatly enriched some of Malinowski’s ideas: by regarding myth as stories representing the structure of human mind, which is presumed to consist in conflicting dualities, the French structuralist considered them to be a tool to represent and solve contradictions and oppositions in a society.123

While helping intellectual communities to overcome a few problematic approaches,124 universalistic theories often are too intimately linked to specific disciplines and given cultures.125 The danger of adopting narrow definitions of myths is exemplified in the work of folklorists. William Bascom (1912-1981) insisted on distinguishing between legends, myths, and folktales. In this way, parameters such as “belief”, “time”, “place”, “attitude” and “principal characters” lead to the following definition: myths are tales (1) which are recounted as true facts within a given society (2), are set in the remote past (3) or in a world other than ours (4), and are sacred stories (5) with non human characters (6).126 At the end of the seventies, Burkert stressed the vagueness and ambiguity of these criterions. This reasoning, in fact, inevitably leads the reader of the Odyssey or Iliad to classify the tales told in these texts as legends since the temporal setting of most of them is not the remote past.127 Likewise, such objections are valid for the stories recounted in Chinese sources. As is well known, in fact, the ancestors of both Shang and Zhou ruling clans were presented in the Odes as fruits of miraculous births. Jiandi 簡狄, the mother of the Shang ancestor Xie 契, for instance, became pregnant by

123 For a review of the several approaches to myth, see Kirk (1970), 1-41. See also Honko (1984), 46-48.
124 Structuralism, in particular, has played a great role in definitively rejecting the classification of mythic thinking as an early stage in the exercise of human intellects. On this point, see Kirk (1970), 42-83. On the uselessness of a distinction between “rational” against “irrational” way of thinking, see also Kirk (1984), 58-59.
125 Even Eliade once acknowledged the difficulty of finding a “definition of myth that would be acceptable to all scholars and at the same time intelligible to nonspecialists”. Eliade (1963), 5.
126 Bascom (1984). Bascom’s approach has achieved a certain success in the fields of Chinese mythology. See, for instance, Birrell (1999), 9. The American sinologist, understandably, does not consistently apply Bascom’s guidelines since even stories set in “historical time” are presented as part of Chinese mythology.
127 Burkert (1979), 22.
eating an egg of a black bird (xuanniao 玄鳥). Jiang Yuan 姜嫄 gave birth to the Zhou’s ancestor Houji 后稷 after having stepped on a footprint of a di 帝, which is understood as “High Lord” by Sarah Allan. How should we classify the stories of the Odes? Are they myths or rather legends? With Bascom’s criteria, we run into several difficulties. Even though Xie and Houji are both imaginary personages, they surely belong to what Bascom would have called “historical time” so that we come to place these tales in some kind of limbo between myth and legend.

Bascom’s analysis of myths certainly underscores the risks hidden behind the elaboration of work-limiting definitions. It is just as if myth abruptly becomes a status that we confer on a few tales: when relying upon narrow parameters, the interpreter inevitably tends to exclude a large amount of material from his field of research. Even a thematic characterization of myth often incurs in the risk of turning into a work-limiting definition. The well-known folklorist Alan Dundes, for instance, has recently presented myths as “sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form”. This labelling heavily depends on the meaning that is given to the term “sacred”. Accordingly, the American classicist G.S. Kirk, who stressed that a myth simply is a traditional story, warns mythologists about the risks of emphasizing this point since many tales cannot be rewardingly analysed in a religious context. Even a story with divine characters and a supernatural setting cannot guarantee us that it was considered to be “sacred” by the society which recounted it.

Turning to Chinese mythology, Sarah Allan has tried to apply some of the reflections of western specialists in her groundbreaking studies. In particular, she has demonstrated that traditional Chinese tales can be dissected in mythic motifs — Levi-Strauss’s mythemes — in order to gain a deeper understanding of the societies which recounted them. In the Shape of the Turtle, she has also argues that mythic tale includes events which not only did not happen but “which could not have happened.” Hence, in the opinion of the American sinologist, myths portray a “breach with reality”. In the next pages, we shall meet several tales which perfectly fit the definition of the American

128 Allan (1991), 44. For an analysis of the myth concerning Shang and Zhou ancestors, see Yuan Ke (1986), 208-218. For myths on miraculous births in China, see also Birrell (1999), 9-11.
130 On other hand, it is noteworthy that many contemporary studies try to dissect this ambiguous word and to identify the different components it is constituted of. As the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko has recently stressed, several aspects play a basic role for making of a tale a “mythic story”. In particular, he highlights the role of their form — the narratives are set outside of historical time and are usually believed to be true from the society which recounts and passes them down — of their function as models for explaining origins the word, and, finally, of their context, which, for Honko, is to be identified in rituality. See Honko (1984), 50-51.
131 On this point, see Kirk (1984), 57.
sinologist: women fecundated by dragons, emperors with head of an ox, spirits coming from the Yellow River. In this way, the “breach with the reality” is a thematic specification which often proves to be extremely useful.  

The apocrypha certainly contain examples of mythic narratives as the fragments dealing with Fuxi 伏羲 or Shennong 神農 testify. In the same way, however, several chenwei sentences are not readable in such a context since they reveal the attempt to explain and interpret pre-existent myths.

Allan has forcefully reminded us of the dynamic character of myths. Myths, in fact, change. Old myths are used to create new myths, older and newer myths evolve in order to match a changed political or cultural environment. Therefore, a myth does not only recount an anecdote on the past but also says something about the present of those people who were writing or re-writing it down. This assumption plays a central role, when the object of the analysis is the group of stories of the chenwei. In the next pages, we will illustrate that many tales of the apocrypha, while encompassing ancient mythic motifs, show clear signs of reorganization, interpretation, and philosophical re-elaboration. This, at the end, is quite understandable: The Han society was a high-developed community which, to say it with Allan, had already learned to think about myths and was centuries far from the thinking in myths of the Shang.  

As Walter Burkert once wrote, myth is a “traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance”. From our modern perspective, the stories of the apocrypha can considered to be “myths”, since they contain references to central themes such as the shengren of the past, their political and social achievements. The problematic point rather concerns the application of the label “traditional tale” to the stories of the chenwei, since this facet compels us to reflect on the ways in which Chinese society classified such stories.

When Bascom wrote his criteria for the identification of myths, he also stressed the fact that mythic narratives were believed to be true. A reader of ancient sources should, perhaps, rather compare myths to granted dogmas that people pass down without calling

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133 It is questionable, however, whether this facet can be regarded as a facet of all myths. Stories about Cang Jie’s 蒼頡 invention of Chinese characters or Fuxi’s fishing nets are similar to anecdotes about Prometheus inventing Fire. They may perhaps include an element of sacred. Yet, it is debatable whether they refer to events which breach with the reality. It would perhaps be more appropriate to regard them as tales which encompass the idea of a break with what was before. Thus, it is advisable to acknowledge that Sarah Allan has given an important characterization of myth and, at the same time, to be cautious in regarding this point as a criterion applicable to all mythic tales.

134 Sarah Allan, for instance, has used some of Levi-Strauss ideas in order to see how different mythic themes merged to form the story about Xie’s miraculous birth. See Allan (1991). On the changes of mythic accounts, see also Van Baaren (1984), 217-224.


136 Burkert (1979), 23.
into question their reliability: as Sarah Allan writes, “the Shang must have known that a woman cannot become pregnant by swallowing a bird egg, just as we know that man cannot walk on water”.\textsuperscript{137} This, in turn, leads us to notice that myths, in their basic dimension of traditional tales, certainly develop over a long span of time. They go through infancy, when their evocative and authoritative power is valid in a small group. In a second time, they fascinate wider strata of a society. Finally, they become dogmas that survive despite explanations and elucidations. This is, at least, what emerges when dealing with the apocryphal anecdotes on the \textit{shengren} of the past. Several \textit{chenwei} stories were not Han “traditional tales”: they are rather the fruit of the exchange between mythology and philosophy. Yet, such tales certainly developed until they became myths. Accordingly, they appear in several later sources such as, for example, Shen Yue’s monograph on mirabilia in the \textit{Songshu}.\textsuperscript{138} From this viewpoint, it is preferable to look at the stories of the apocrypha as examples of myths in construction.

5. \textbf{THE \textit{SHENGREN} AND HEAVEN: THE BIRTH OF THE SAGE}

5.1 \textit{The birth of the shengren}: evolving myths

A myth, while conserving a few distinctive features such as its evocative flavour, is subject to transformations. This statement, however, explains neither the modalities of change nor the reasons lying beneath such alterations. Here, we will reflect on the evolution of the already mentioned stories dealing with miraculous births. To begin this discussion, it is useful to recall that the original nucleus of a mythic account has been often enriched by adding suggestive details. The account about the birth of the Shang ancestor in the \textit{Lüshi Chunqiu}, for example, is an enlivened version of the story narrated in the \textit{Odes} since the text gives details about location and circumstances of the miracle. Accordingly, the egg of the black bird becomes object of competition between Xie’s mother and her sister and the scene is embellished thanks to the mentioning of dances and music.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{137} Allan (1991), 125.
\textsuperscript{138} See, for instance, Huang Zhengyun (2006) for the survival of the apocryphal tales in Wang Fu’s work. For the role of the \textit{chenwei} anecdotes in the \textit{Furui zhi} of the \textit{Songshu}, see Lippiello (2001), esp. 150-154.
\textsuperscript{139} See \textit{Lüshi chunqiu} 6.3:30. For an analysis of the motifs of these stories, see Birrell (1999), 9-10. According to Sarah Allan, the account given in the \textit{Lüshi chunqiu} should be interpreted as a later version of Xie’s miraculous birth. See Allan (1991), 40. One should also keep in mind that such forms of enrichment greatly varied in details. The \textit{Gu lienü zhuan} \textit{古列女傳} [\textit{Biographies of Exemplarious Women}], for instance, ignores elements such as dance and music and enriches the geographical setting by locating the place of Xie’s conception in the stream of the Black Hills. See \textit{Gu lienü zhuan} 1.3:2. In all probability, this element was introduced to strengthen the pathos of the
The enrichment of pre-existent tales is perhaps the simplest form of “evolving myths”. As this section will show, traditional stories often changed in a much more radical way. Such “updated” accounts, in turn, may reveal interesting details about the people who wrote, diffused, or re-elaborated the original anecdotes.

Unlike other mythic motifs that we shall analyse in the following sections, the theme “miraculous birth” offers several textual clues for documenting changes. First, let us notice that the anecdotes about the birth of the Shang and Zhou ancestors mention a fecundating force — the black bird or the footprint of God — and a main character — Xie or Houji. In the last centuries BC, the evolution of the tales led to the alteration of one of these elements. The interpreter can observe such changes by focusing on two kinds of modalities: the first form of change simply consists in updating the basic stories; the second implies attempts to interpret and explain them.

We may immediately focus on the first tendency and see how both the relevant components — fecundating force and main character — change when the story is updated. With regard to the fecundating force, for instance, it is not hazardous to hypothesize that the identification of the magic or supernatural entity responds to the beliefs — it does not matter how organised — of a given society. A society which gives credence to gods will make of them the superhuman fathers of its prophets; a society which believes in dragons will see in them the genitors of its heroes. When even the main character of the story is a novelty, we have a more substantial modification of the original myth: this suggests the creation of new tales which might or might not become new myths.

When approaching Han sources, it is legitimate to expect a further way of recounting or transforming myths from the past. Han centuries, in fact, are well known for the systematic attempt of re-organizing the cultural heritage and for the high grade of intellectual finesse reached by the thinkers of period. Accordingly, it would be surprising that the Han intellectual world ignored the possibility of interpreting and explaining myths in the light of the fashionable ideas of the time. Also in this case, then, it is appropriate to see whether Han theoretical principles influenced the change of fecundating force and main character of a story about miraculous births.

tale since this place belongs to the mythological geography of the Shanhaijing. See Shanhaijing 18:76. It is also interesting to notice that the hills are said to be black, exactly like the “bird” which fecundated Jiandi. Finally, the apocrypha, too, show the tendency to strengthen the evocative character of a tale. The Shiwei-Hanshenwu, for example, encompasses a fragment which echoes the wording of the Gu lienii zhu. See Choshu isho shusei 3:24.
5.2 Updating myths under the Han

5.2.1 Changing the fecundating force

To visualize how ancient mythic accounts became tales which mirrored beliefs of the last centuries BC, let us consider once again the story about Houji. In the Odes, the fecundating force is the footprint of a deity (di); in the Shiji and in the Gu lienü zhuan, the di turns into a giant:

【…】當堯之時行，見巨人跡，好而履之，歸而有娠【…】

[...] At Yao’s time, during a walk, [Jiang Yuan] saw the footprint of a giant. She liked it and stepped on it. She was pregnant when she went back. [...] 140

We will begin by asking wherefrom the identification of Houji’s father in a footprint of a giant comes. Early dynastic chronicles encompass a few accounts about footprints of enormous men. In the last centuries BC, they were considered to be extraordinary events. According to the medieval historian Xu Guang 徐廣, for instance, a giant was seen in the 18th year of reign of Qin Shi Huangdi (228 BC). 141 Ban Gu mentions a similar anecdote:

史記秦始皇帝二十六年，有大人長五丈，足履六尺，皆夷狄服，凡十二人，見于臨洮。天戒若曰，【…】是歲始皇初並六國，反喜以為瑞，銷天下兵器，作金人十二以象之。

According to the Records of a Historian, giants appeared during the 26th year of Qin Shi Huangdi’s rule (220 BC): they were five zhang tall and [their] footprints covered six chi. They were all dressed as barbarians: all together, there were twelve [of them]. They were sighted in Lintao. Tian Jieruo said 142: “[...] In this year, Shi Huang had just begun unifying the six states. Contrary to what expected, [Qin Shi Huangdi] was pleased since he consider [this event] to be a propitious sign. He [first] had the weapons of the whole world melted and [last gave the order to] make twelve metal statues in order to portray them. 144

We have here three basic elements: the giant, the footprint, and the evident Qin

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140 Shiji 4:111; 13:505. See also Gu lienü zhuan 1.2.1.
141 See Xu Guang's commentary in Shiji 6:233.
142 Tian Jieruo was very probably a Chinese scholar active of the first century BC. The Monograph on the Five Agents (Wuxing zhi) suggests that he worked with the zaiyi framework. See, for instance, Hanshu 27A:1321, 1323, and 1329. Later works testify to this assumption. See Jinshu 27:807.
143 The appearance of giants was considered to be an inauspicious sign under the Han. Ban Gu, in fact, recalls the cruelty of the Qin reign and concludes that the giant was a symbol pre-announcing the beginning of chaos (ming huoluan zhi qi 明禍亂之起). Hanshu 27:1472.
144 Hanshu 27:1472.
interpretation of it as an auspicious sign. This belief did not die out in the following decades and centuries. About one hundred years later, under emperor Wu of the Han, Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 had a dream about a giant who left an enormous footprint. These elements seem to suggest that the fecundating force in the tale about the Zhou ancestor was changed in order to match beliefs of the last centuries BC.

5.2.2 Writing new stories

A few excerpts from Qin and Han sources testify that “miraculous birth” was a very appealing theme in the last centuries BC. In the Lüshì chunqiu, for example, we have the story about the famous Shang statesman Yi Yin 伊尹:

「其母居伊水之上，孕，夢有神告之曰：『臼出水而東走，毋顧。』明日，視臼出水，告其鄰，東走十里，而顧其邑盡為水，身因化為空桑。」

His mother lived on the banks of the Yi River. When she was pregnant, she dreamt of a spirit telling her: “When the mortar produces Water, move eastwards and do not look back.” The next day, she noticed that the mortar was producing water and she spoke of it with her neighbours. Then, she walked 10 里 eastwards. When she gave a look back, [she saw that] her village had been inundated. Her body was transformed into a hollow mulberry."

The excerpt does not explicitly mention Yi Yin’s miraculous birth: yet, the circumstances under which this ancient statesman came to the world are, at least, unusual. Moreover, the mentioning of the hollow mulberry, a mythic motif of basic importance, is noteworthy. Let us now turn to the Shiji and read the story about the Qin’s progenitor Daye 大業:

秦之先，帝顓頊之苗裔孫曰女脩。女脩織，玄鳥隕卵，女脩吞之，生子大業。

With regard to the ancestors of the Qin, among the descendants of emperor Zhuanxu there was a woman called Nü Xiu. [One day,] while Nü Xiu was weaving, a black bird dropped an egg. Nü Xiu swallowed it and generated a son: he was Daye.

The stories dealing with Yi Yin and Daye show the tendency to compose tales about miraculous births by borrowing ancient mythic motifs. The following anecdote will corroborate this assumption:

145 The stories about giants continued to be popular during the post-Han era. In the Songshu, for instance, it is said that in AD 472 a giant was seen in the west: his footprint was seven meters long. See Songshu 34:1009. See also Nanshi 3:83.
147 For an analysis of the myths concerning the hollow mulberry, see Allan (1991), esp. 44-45.
148 Shiji 5:173.
Chapter Three. The discourse on the shengren: between myth and philosophy

Gaozu came from Yangli in the middle of Peifeng. He belonged to the Liu clan and his style was Ji. His father was Taigong and his mother Liu Ao. [One day,] while resting on a slope [close to] a big marsh, his mother Liu Ao dreamed to meet a spirit. At that very moment, thunders and lightening broke the darkness: Taigong went to give a look and saw a *jiao* dragon on her body. At the end, she was pregnant; later she brought Gaozu to the world.\(^{149}\)

The stories about Yi Yin, Da Ye, and Gaozu add an important point to our understanding of the evolutive process of the mythic theme “miraculous birth”: evidently, besides enriching, updating, and explaining older stories, new tales were composed along the same lines. The account above reveals, on the one hand, the vitality of the mythic theme and, on the other hand, the richness of forms it could assume.

5.3 Understanding myths under the Han

5.3.1 Explaining myths

The modification of one of the constituent parts of stories about miraculous births did not alter their magical character: the new tales still had that peculiarity called “breach with the reality” by Sarah Allan. How did thinkers and scholars deal with such material? Educated people active at the Han courts probably accepted the authority of the classics and the prestige of their myths. In some cases, however, Han intellectuals must have tried to explain such stories. A dialogue conserved in the *Shiji* is extremely interesting:

張夫子問褚先生曰：「詩言契、后稷皆無父而生。今案諸傳記咸言有父，父皆黃帝子也，得無與詩謬秋？」褚先生曰：「不然。詩言契生於卵，后稷人跡者欲見其有天命精誠之意耳。【...】一言有父，一言無父【...】」

Zhang Fuzi asked to Mister Pu: “The *Odes* say that both Xie and Houji were born fatherless. Nevertheless, all the records maintain that they both had fathers: they were Huangdi’s sons. Does this not clash with the *Odes*?” Pu replied: “Not necessarily. Those who, in accordance with the *Odes*, say that Xie was born from an egg and Houji from a human footprint want to demonstrate that Xie and Houji had the Heaven’s mandate and earnest purposes. [...] Someone say that [Xie and Houji] had a father and someone says that they were fatherless. [...] \(^{150}\)

Han scholars, evidently, did not always interpret the myths concerning the birth of

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\(^{149}\) *Shiji* 8:341.

\(^{150}\) *Shiji* 13:504.
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Shang and Zhou progenitors literally. In this regard, Zhang Fuzi is particularly explicit since he states that all the records considered Xie and Houji to be Huangdi’s descendants. In all probability, however, a few individuals gave credence to similar tales, since the excerpt speaks of two interpretations. Finally, the scholar called Pu explained the extraordinariness of Xie and Houji in political terms: they had simply received the Heaven’s mandate.

5.3.2 Interpreting myths

Under the Han, the political interpretation of ancient myths developed at the same rate as the philosophical re-elaboration. A short sentence from the Chunqiu fanlu, in fact, testifies to the existence of a re-readings based on Han theories. In chapter 23 it is said that “Jiang Yuan stepped on the footprint of Heaven and generated Houji (Jiang Yuan fu tian zhi chi er sheng Houji 姜原履天之跡而生后稷)”. If we understand tian as an allusion to a religious entity which fecundates Jiang Yuan, we have here again a story which updates old myths by changing the fecundating force. Nevertheless, the philosophical pillars of this text — resonance theory, correlative thinking, the interdependence of tian and ren — authorize us to look for a different solution. In all probability, in fact, tian refers to the cosmic counterpart of the human being. In this sense, the story of Houji ceases to present only a mythic facet and becomes a tale which interprets a myth along precise theoretical lines. Later Han texts testify to this assumption. In the Lun heng, Wang Chong says that the shengren is the product of heavenly intervention since, at the moment of birth, he did not receive the human (ordinary) qi but rather heavenly essences (shengren zhi sheng buyi renqi geng oujing yu tian 聖人之生不因人氣更稟精於天). In the Wujing yiyi, Xu Shen explicitly says that the birth of a sage must be understood in the light of the ganying theory:

According to the Qi, Lu, and Han versions of the Odes and to the speeches of the Gongyang tradition of the Annals, all the sages were born fatherless: they came to the world because of [a phenomenon of] attraction [and response with] Heaven. [On the contrary,] according to the speeches of the Zuo tradition, all the sages had fathers.

Xu Shen’s words mirror the viewpoint of the Chunqiu fanlu: the “father” of the shengren is Heaven. An “explainable” phenomenon of attraction and response (ganying) guarantees the fecundation of “earthly” women. Thus, from the viewpoint of Han scholars, the magic birth of the sage ceases to be an event which “breaches reality”

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151 Chunqiu fanlu 23:212.
152 Lun heng 15:42.
153 Bo Wujing yiyi, page 37.
and turns into an event which is understandable on the basis of the interaction between human realm and natural world.

If we compare Xu Shen’s remarks with the dialogue on miraculous births of the *Shiji*, where it was explicitly maintained that the exegetical tradition did not give credence to similar stories, we easily notice a mutation of scholarly attitude. Even if students of the *Zuozhuan* ignored such tales, a few *jinwen* classicists — people working with the *Gongyanzhuan* or with the *Qi Odes* — considered such stories to be a valid theme of discussion. Evidently, the theory explained in the *Chunqiu fanlu* had achieved a considerable success between the downfall of the Early Han and the founding of the Later Han. In this new framework, old myths were re-interpreted in the light of fashionable philosophical theories. This provoked once again a change of the fecundating force: in this case, unlike updated stories, the criterions for the alteration were mainly of philosophical nature. At this point, it is advisable to wonder whether Han sources also reveal interpretative attempts justified on the basis of stories involving new main characters. As we will see below, most of these tales were written in the *chenwei*.

5.4 Introducing the miraculous births of the apocrypha

5.4.1 Stories concerning miraculous births: the discrepancies of the apocrypha

A conspicuous number of apocryphal fragments can be classified under the heading “miraculous births” since they portray and describe the unusual and superhuman circumstances under which legendary rulers and key historical figures were conceived and born. We could certainly deal with this part by presenting the fragments in a chronological sequence. This approach, however, risks to overemphasizing the narrative character of the *chenwei* and underestimating facets and functions of the tales. Therefore, we shall begin with a warning against the danger of considering this theme as a feature which characterizes the whole corpus. In fact, Xu Shen says:

> 堯典以親九族。即堯母慶都感赤龍而生堯。堯安得九族而親之？禮讖云：唐五廟，知不感天而生。

> According to the *Canon of Yao*, [Yao] “proceeded to the love of the nine classes of his kindred”.\(^{154}\) Yao’s mother Qingdu attracted (i.e. there was a phenomenon of attraction and response between her and the heavenly) red dragon. Later, she brought Yao to the world. How could then Yao have nine classes of his kindred and love them? A prophetic appendix to the *Rites* says: “Tang\(^ {155}\) had five Ancestral Temples.” [Thus], we know that he came to the world without [a phenomenon of] attraction [and response with]

\(^{154}\) Legge (1960), vol. III, 17.

\(^{155}\) Tang is the dynastic denomination of Yao. See *Shiji* 1:45 and the commentary in *Shiji* 1:46.
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Heaven.\textsuperscript{156}

Xu Shen’s words are interesting from two viewpoints. First, they inform the interpreter that the a few chenwei texts (lichen 禮讖) neglected stories concerning miraculous births. Second, the example given above is very interesting: instead of focusing on ancient myths, Xu Shen mentions an anecdote involving Yao. This story was apparently very popular during the Han. Steles of the period, for instance, often present Qingdu 慶都 as the one who attracted a red dragon and generated Yao. As Lü Zongli convincingly argues, this belief was rooted in the apocrypha.\textsuperscript{157} At this point, it is safe to maintain that the Han chenwei corpus also contained tales which do not appear in other extant sources.

5.4.2 Embellishing the stories concerning miraculous births

In discussing the tales about miraculous births in Early Han sources, we have noticed their evolutive character. This tendency is evident in the apocrypha as well. The chenwei, however, also embellish the already updated version by adding further mythic motifs. The Yuanmingbao, for example, says:

周本姜嫄遊閟宮，其地扶桑。履大跡，生后稷。

The Zhou are rooted in Jiang Yuan’s travelling in the Hidden Palace in the Fusang territory. She stepped on the footprint of a giant and brought Houji to the world.\textsuperscript{158}

This fragment is noteworthy because of two elements. First, the mentioning of the hidden palace reminds us of Ode 300 of the Shijing. On a first sight, the interpreter hypothesizes a loan from this classic. Yet, the hidden palace is not the solemn place of the Odes but rather a mysterious spot located in the Fusang 扶桑 territory. We obviously have here one of the most fascinating and well-known Chinese mythic motifs. Originally, the Fusang was the tree in the place where the ten Shang suns went to bath at the end of their daily travel.\textsuperscript{159} Thus, it is evident that a myth originally linked to the

\textsuperscript{156} Bo Wujing yiyi, page 37.
\textsuperscript{157} Lü Zongli (1984), 117. The Lun heng, too, seems to confirm this hypothesis. According to this text, the chen books of the time maintained that a dragon fecundated Qingdu. See Lun heng 15:42.
\textsuperscript{158} Choshu isho shusei 4A:29. See also Choshu isho shusei 6:193.
\textsuperscript{159} Moreover, according to the groundbreaking reconstruction attempted by Sarah Allan, the mulberry tree should be regarded as a hidden counterpart of the grounding myth of the Shang dynasty, which entails a magical conception through a black bird. In the Classics of the Mountains and of the Seas, for instance, the Fusang was supposed to be the rest place of the ten suns on the top of the Tang 湯 Valley. See Shanhaijing 9:54. For a detailed analysis of this story and of the myths concerning the “ten suns”, see Allan (1991), 27-38.
power of the Shang is used to strengthen the evocative force of the myth about the Zhou ancestor.

5.5 Applying the theme “miraculous birth”

5.5.1 Sons of dragons and giants

After having highlighted the apocryphal tendency of embellishing pre-existent motifs, it is necessary to wonder whether the authors of the chenwei also wrote new stories, changing the main characters of the tales about miraculous births. The Sima historians, for instance, spoke about the extraordinary circumstances under which Gaozu’s father came to the world: do we find a similar tendency in the fragments? The answer must be in the positive since the corpus encompasses several anecdotes about the birth of figures such as Fuxi, king Wen, Shennong, and even Confucius. The tale about king Wen, for example, mentions once again the giant. Evidently, the updated version of Houji myth was used to assemble a story which magnified one of the key-figures in Chinese political past.160 This facet characterizes a few apocryphal fragments. The giant, for example, appears again in an anecdote about Fuxi:

大跡出雷澤。華胥履之，生伏羲。

A big footprint appeared in the marshes of the thunders. Huaxia stepped on it and brought Fuxi to the world.161

Some apocryphal stories connect the birth of the shengren to dragons. The Xiaojing-Goumingjue, for instance, maintains that Rensi 任已 attracted a dragon (gan long 感龍) and generated Shennong.162 A similar tale concerns Confucius:

孔子母徵在遊大冢之陂。睡夢黑帝使請已已往夢交語曰：「女乳必於空桑之中」。覺則若感，生丘於空桑。

Zheng, Confucius’ mother, was travelling along the slope of a big hill. She felt asleep and dreamed that the Emperor of Black had her invited to copulate with him.163 He said: “Your child must be born in a Hollow Mulberry.” When she woke up she felt as affected

160 Choshu isho shusei 6:107. This fragment comes from the Hetu-Jimingzheng. As mentioned in the first part, we should probably read this title as a reference to the appendix of the Rites called Jimingzheng. In any case, this fragment has been commented by the medieval scholar Song Jun. See Choshu isho shusei 3:65; 6:107. For this reason, it is safe to maintain that the original Han apocrypha contained material discussing the birth of King Wen.

161 Choshu isho shusei 3:23. A very similar fragment also appears under the generic heading Hetu. See Choshu isho shusei 6:139.

162 Choshu isho shusei 5:67.

163 Here, I use the version of the Gu weishu which says: “shui meng Heidi shi qing yu ji jiao 睡夢黑帝使請與已(己)交”. See Gu weishu 8 in Weishu jicheng vol.I, 190.
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and she bore Confucius in the Hollow Mulberry.\footnote{Choshu isho shusei 4A:12.}

5.5.2 Sons of stars and rainbows

The apocrypha contain a second kind of stories about miraculous births: several great rulers of the past are presented as “sons” of natural phenomena.

大電光繞北斗樞星，照郊野，感附寶而生黃帝。
An enormous thunder flashed: [its light] encircled the star Shu of the Dipper and lighted up the fields in the countryside. This attracted (i.e. there was a phenomenon of attraction and response between this and) Fubao. Later, she brought the Yellow Emperor to the world.

瑤光如蜺，貫月正白，感女樞，生顓頊。
A jade-like light similar to a rainbow crossed the moon and accentuated [its] white [glow]. This attracted (i.e. there was a phenomenon of attraction and response between this and) the woman Shu. [Later,] she brought Zhuanxu to the world.

握登見大虹，意感而生帝舜。
Wo Zheng saw a great rainbow. She felt attracted [to it] (i.e. there was a phenomenon of attraction and response between this and Wo Zheng). Later, she brought Shun to the world.

禹白帝精。以星感修紀。山行見流星貫昴，感生姒戎文命禹。
Yu is the essence of the White Emperor. Through the stars, [Heaven] attracted (i.e. there was a phenomenon of attraction and response between Heaven and) Xiu Ji. She was walking in the mountains when she saw a flowing star crossing [the lodge] Mane. [This] attracted [Xiu Ji].\footnote{In the commentary to the fragment, liran is glossed as weimao 威貌. See Choshu isho shusei 2:54.} She generated Wenming\footnote{The personal name of Yu was Wenming. See Shiji 2:49.} Yu of the Si\footnote{According to the commentary to the fragment Si 姬 was the name of Yu’s clan. In this regard, see Shiji 2:45; Rong 戎 apparently referred to Yu’s birthplace. See Sun Ku’s remarks in Gu weishu 3 in Weishu jicheng vol. I, 158.} [clan] in Rong.\footnote{For the first three fragments, see Choshu isho shusei 3:23. For the last sentence, see Gu weishu 3 in Weishu jicheng vol. I, 158. On this point, see also Choshu isho shusei 2:54.}

Thus, Huangdi was born after a thunder enlightened the Dipper; Zhuanxu came to the world thanks to a light crossing the moon; Shun was the son of a rainbow, and Yu of a flowing star. In conclusion, the shengren of the past were the offspring of natural phenomena.
5.6 The philosophical dimension of the apocryphal tales

Whoever presented the *shengren* of the past as sons of stars and rainbows was simply applying the viewpoint of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, transforming *tian* into the force who gave birth to ancient sovereigns. Accordingly, the stories cannot be considered to be mythic accounts: they rather apply the theory according to which “Heaven generates the *shengren*”. Probably, the solution of the *Chunqiu fanlu* was not completely satisfying for the authors of the *chenwei* tales: hence, the choice of multiple natural phenomena instead of the univocal *tian*. In this sense, the *tian* of the *Chunqiu fanlu* evolves into its manifestations: rainbows, flowing stars, and thunders.

While explaining the second typology of apocryphal tales, the reading proposed above hardly helps the reader of the *chenwei* to understand the accounts with characters such as giants and dragons. In a recent study, Yang Jianjun 杨建军 has brilliantly highlighted a very important aspect hidden behind this layer the *chenwei*, namely the *wu de* or “five potencies” framework, according to which each phase of human history is associated with one of the five agents.

The *wu de* undoubtedly play a role in the stories about miraculous births. According to Yang Jianjun, the Dipper which generated Huangdi should be regarded as the counterpart of the agent Earth whereas the “flowing star crossing Mane” stays for Metal. By extending this line of reasoning, the Chinese scholar argues that the rulers who shared the potency came to the world under similar circumstances. In the scholarly scheme of the first century BC, for instance, both Huangdi and Shun were associated with Earth. Even if the apocryphal accounts about Shun present are different — one mentions the great rainbow, one the Dipper — both these elements may well be connected to the potency Earth. A further example concerns Zhuanxu 顓頊 and the first Shang emperor Tang 汤. In the apocryphal stories, the birth of these two ancient rulers is linked to the moon, which, as we have seen in the part on astral cosmology, is often associated with the agent Water. In this framework, the “dark bird” which is mentioned in a few stories cannot be simply seen as the reproduction of older myths since the black is the colour of Water.169

Even the anecdotes dealing with the footprint of giants encompass an allusion to the *wu de* framework, since the giant corresponds to the ruling deity (*di* 帝) associated with the eastern sector of the sky and with Wood.170 Turning to dragons, let us consider the following anecdotes:

執嘉妻含始遊雒池，赤珠出，刻曰：玉英，吞此者為王客，以其年生劉季，為漢皇。


170 *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:30; Yang Jianjun (2000), 183.
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Zhijia’s wife Han Shi went to swim in the pool of the Luo [River]. A red zhu pearl emerged. The inscription [on it] said: “[This] is the flower of jade.” The one who will swallow it: He will become guest [at the table of] kings.” In that year, she brought Liu Ji to the world: He became the thearch of the Han.

含始吞赤珠,刻曰:玉英,生漢皇,後赤龍感女媪,劉季興。

Han Shi swallowed a red zhu pearl. The inscription [on it] said: “[This] is the flower of jade. [You will] generate the thearch of the Han”. Thereafter a red dragon attracted the woman Ao and Liu Ji flourished.

The stories above narrate the circumstances in which the first Han emperor Gaozu, whose personal name was Liu Ji, came to the world. The influence of the wu de in these fragments is evident. The aftermath of the Han, which in the first century BC was connected to the red of Fire, is signalised by the arrival of a red pearl. Moreover, the dragon which fecundated Zhijia is explicitly called “red dragon” (chi long). If we now link these tales with the account given in the Shiji, we may immediately recognise that the apocryphal versions express a later re-interpretation since the Sima historians did not mention the colour of the dragon. In this case, we may surely conclude that the accounts above are a re-reading of a pre-existent story based on the wu de framework.

5.7 Old myths in the apocrypha

The relevance of the potencies in the chenwei tales cannot be denied. It is however debatable whether it is correct to maintain, as Yang Jianjun explicitly does, that the apocryphal stories on miraculous births and the mutual-birth succession of the wu de form an inseparable binomial. Two facets characterize this line of reasoning. First, it is clear that the Chinese scholar assumes that the survived apocryphal fragments are the last traces of a homogeneous corpus. Accordingly, each tale about miraculous births is taken as a monolith which cannot be dissected in sub-elements and which must be constrained within the wu de framework. Second, when we accept the premise that the

171 Under the Han, the term yu ying 玉英 refers to an auspicious sign for an enlightened ruler. See Lippiello (2001), 139. For accounts speaking of yu ying, see, for example, Shiji 10:430.

172 Here we have probably a correction of the name of Gaozu’s mother. This point has often been object of debate. In the Shiji, the Sima historians say that she was named Ao. See Shiji 8:341. The name Han Shi given in other apocryphal fragments probably derives from Han fashionable legends. According to the Tang commentators of the Shiji, this was not the stance of official historical sources (fei zhengshi suo chu 非正史所出). See Shiji 8:342.

173 For the first fragment, see Choshu isho shusei 4B:71; for the second. Choshu isho shusei 3:25. The Chunqiu-Wochengtu encompasses a different version of the story. In this text, Ao, Gaozu’s mother in the Shiji, becomes Gaozu’s grandmother. Accordingly, the son of the dragon was Gaozu’s father Liu Zhijia. See Choshu isho shusei 4B:71.

apocryphal tales are monoliths which portray a coherent system, we have also to accept the consequence that they reflect the idea of a specific cultural group. In the case of tales about miraculous births, for example, we have to hypothesize the intervention of the ru. As we shall see elsewhere, the wu de scheme hidden behind the stories matches the scholarly model of the first century BC: The Zhou are associated with Wood and the Han with Fire. At this point, we should conclude that these ru were systematically applying the theories of the Chunqiu fanlu, relying upon their scholarly background. Such a reading, while well describing several fragments, overshadows the fact that several chenwei stories are re-readings of old myths. The story about Fuxi’s birth is a case in point. Besides containing an allusion to the updated version of Houji’s myth, this tale suggests a re-elaboration of some ancient motifs. According to the Liezi [The Book of Master Lie], a text presumably written after the Han but usually considered to be a repository of older myths, the territory of Huaxia 華胥 was the reign of spontaneity where human and social patterns had lost their importance.  

Huaxia was probably one of the mythic places of China: whoever wrote the apocryphal account about Fuxi’s birth probably used this motif to strengthen the evocative flavour of the story. Even the “marsh of thunders” belongs to mythic geography. According to the Shanhaijing, it was in the Eastern Zone within the sees (Haineidong 海內東). The God of Thunder inhabited this mysterious place: he had a dragon body and a human head. As Yuan Ke notices, it is well probable that the original myth presented him as the son of the God of Thunder and not as the heir of a giant. This story, however, was certainly marginal in ru groups since we find trace of it only in the Shanhaijing. Further fragments appear to suggest that whoever assembled the chenwei corpus also revisited old myths:

少典妃安登遊于華陽。有神，龍首感之於常羊，生神子。人面龍顔好耕是為神農。

Shaodian’s wife Anzheng travelled to Huayang. There was a spirit [there]. The head of the dragon attracted (i.e. there was a phenomenon of attraction and response between this and) her in Changyang. She brought to the world the son of the spirit (i.e. Shennong). He had with a human face and the countenance of a dragon. He loved ploughing and, for this

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175 In the Liezi, Huaxia is connected to Huangdi’s travelling. According to this text, this place was not controlled by “masters or overlords (wu shichang 無帥長)”; the inhabitants lived here according to the principles of spontaneity (ziran er yi 自然而已). Moreover, this place is connected to the Yellow Emperor. See Liezi 2:6-7.

176 Shanhaijing 13:60. According to Strassberg, the God of Thunder “is a dragon who causes thunder by using his stomach as a drum.” See Strassberg (2002), 48. For a detailed analysis of this myth, see also Yuan Ke (1986), 50-51.

177 In this regard, see Yuan Ke (1986), 50-51.
reason, he became the holy peasant.\textsuperscript{178}

This fragment from the *Chunqiu-Yuanmingbao* describes Shennong’s birth. Instead of the “red dragon” mentioned in other fragments, we have here a spirit with a dragonhead. This may be an older story re-elaborated during the drafting of this apocryphal treatise.\textsuperscript{179} Finally, let us consider the following fragments:

禹母脩己吞薏苡而生禹【…】
Yu’s mother Xiu Yi swallowed a pearl barley and brought Yu to the world. […]

夏姒祖以薏苡生。
The progenitor of the Si clan of the Xia was born thanks to a pearl barley.\textsuperscript{180}

Since it is difficult to constrain these anecdotes within the *wu de* framework, it is advisable to point at the survival of mythic elements in the apocryphal corpus. In most of the cases, these ancient motifs were revisited in the light of the *wu de* framework. This, in turn, suggests that the authors of the *chenwei* were applying the line of reasoning of the *Chunqiu fanlu* and presenting the *shengren* of the past as offspring of Heaven.

6. THE LOOK OF THE *SHENGREN*

6.1 On physiognomy

A conspicuous group of apocryphal fragments describes the physical appearance of ancient sages, attributing to Shun or Yu specific physical features. This paragraph shall analyse these tales by also taking into account their convergences and deviances in respect to the official cultural landscape.

Physiognomy (*xiangren* 相人), or the art of inferring the future of an individual on the basis of his facial features and body structure, greatly developed during the Warring

\textsuperscript{178} See *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:26.

\textsuperscript{179} In the attempt of systematizing texts which very probably were quite inhomogeneous from the very beginning onwards, Yang Jianjun incurs in a few basic misunderstandings. As a matter of facts, he connects the accounts about Shennong to the apocryphal story about Yao and Gaozu’s father, both supposed to be sons of a dragon. See Yang Jianjun (2000), 184. Yang Jianjun essentially interprets the dragon of the stories above as a red dragon, concluding that the generative force must be necessarily connected to Fire. Yet, external and internal arguments dissuade the interpreters from considering each mentioning of a dragon to be an allusion to a red dragon. As we have seen above, the colour of the dragon varied: in the case of Confucius, for example, it was black.

\textsuperscript{180} The first fragment comes from the generic title *Liwei* and the second from the *Hanwenjia*. See *Choshu isho shusei* 3:82, 50.
Chapter Three. The discourse on the shengren: between myth and philosophy

States period. In this regard, the *Xunzi* offers a few noteworthy remarks.

相人，古之人無有也，學者不道也。古者有姑布子卿，今之世梁有唐舉，相人之形縊，顏色，而知其吉凶妖祥，世俗稱之。古之人無有也，學者不道也。故相形不如論心，論心不如擇術。形不勝心，心不勝術。術正而心順之，則形相雖惡而心術善，無害為君子也；形相雖善而心術惡，無害為小人也。【…】蓋帝堯長，帝舜短；文王長，周公短；仲尼長，子弓短。

With regard to the art of evaluating men, the men of antiquity certainly did not have it and educated people do not speak about it. In the antiquity, there was Gubu Ziqing and today there is Tang Ju from Liang.\(^1\) They analyse the countenance and the body of people and [pretend to] know their [upcoming] fortune and misfortune, their luck and troubles. [Accordingly] the vulgar world praises them. The men of antiquity certainly did not have [such a technique] and educated people do not speak about it. Therefore, evaluating forms is not as good as an analysis of heart-mind and the analysis of heart-mind cannot stand the comparison with the choice of the method. Form does not win over heart-mind just as heart-mind cannot prevail over the method. When the method is suitable, the heart-mind will adjust to it. Thus, the evaluation of the form [of an individual] may even be negative but, with a good education of the heart-mind, he will certainly turn into a gentleman. Therefore, the evaluation of the form [of an individual] may be positive but, with a bad education of the heart-mind, he will certainly become a mediocre person. […] Yao was tall and Shun short. King Wen was tall and the duke of Zhou was short. Confucius was tall and Zi Gong was small.\(^2\)

Xunzi’s words are explicit: the art of evaluating men (*xiang ren*) — physiognomy — is not a decorous activity for educated people. Moreover, it is completely unfounded, since the talents of ancient rulers were not inferable from their body structure: Despite their different physical statures, Yao and Shun were both outstanding personalities. The vehemence of Xunzi’s outburst suggests, however, that this mantic practice was quickly fascinating large social groups.

Early sources testify that singular facial and body features were considered to be anomalous. In Confucius’s biography, for example, the Sima historians recall that the height of the Master of Lu often surprised his contemporaries.\(^3\) Towards the end of the third century BC, the credence that individuals with unusual characteristics were fated to have an extraordinary life must have been rather common. Gaozu was described as an

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1. According to later sources, Gubu Ziqing lived at the time of Confucius. On Gubu Ziqing, see *Hanshi waizhuan* 9.18:68-69; *Lun heng* 64:283; *Shiji* 43:1789. Tang Ju was a famous expert of physiognomy. See *Shiji* 79:2418.


3. For Confucius’ description as a “tall man”, see *Shiji* 47:1909;
individual with a prominent nose (long zhun 隆準), the facial expression of a dragon (long yan 龍顏), beautiful beards (mei xuran 美須髯), and 72 black spots on his left thigh (zuogu you qishier heizi 左股有七十二黑子). In all probability, some singular physical markers were used to describe outstanding figures of the past. Tang of the Shang, for instance, was described as a man with a long face with beard which was sharp-edged above and wide below (ruì shāng fēng xià 兌上豐下). The Chunqiu fanlu says:

至舜形體，大上而員首，而明有二童子，【…】至禹【…】，形體長，長足舄，疾行先左，隨以右，勞左佚右也，【…】至湯體長專小，足左扁而右便，勞右佚左也，【…】至文王形體博長，有四乳而大足。

With regard to Shun’s form and body, he was big in the superior part with a round head and two pupils in the eye. […] Up to Yu: He was tall with long flat feet. He used to walk hurriedly, moving the left [foot] first, followed by the right. When he worked, the left foot left behind the right one. […] Tang was tall but small in extension. The left foot was slow and the right quick. When he worked, the right foot left behind the left one. […] And up to king Wen: He was a tall man with four nipples and big feet.

The excerpt from the Chunqiu fanlu makes clear that Yao, Shun, or Tang were supposed to have had a very particular physical outlook. At this point, it is mandatory to wonder about the role of such tales in Han ru-ism.

6.2 The interpretation of stories on the physical appearance of the shengren

6.2.1 Han exegetical tradition

Several Early Han thinkers interpreted the physical peculiarities of the ancient sages in an ethical framework. The Huainanzi, for instance, says:

若夫堯眉八彩，九竅通洞，而公正無私，一言而萬民齊；舜二瞳子，是謂重明，作事成法，出言成章；禹耳參漏，是謂大通，興利除害，疏河決江；文王四乳，是謂大仁，天下所歸，百姓所親【…】。

Then, the eight colours of Yao’s eyebrows as well as the depth of his nine apertures [mean that] he was impartial without any trace of egoism: a word from him and the ten

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184 For Gaozu’s description, see Shiji 8:342. In this regard, see also Leng Dexi (1996), 103. In a further anecdote recounted in the Shiji and Lun heng, Lü Gong 呂公 — the father of the empress Lü Hou 呂后— predicted to Gaozu that he would one day become emperor. Shiji 8:344-345; Lun heng 11:29-30; Gumbrecht (2002), 180.

185 Yanzi chunqiu 22:80. In the same passage, the famous statesman Yi Yin was said to have been a short hunchbacked man with a face which was wide above and sharp-edged below.

186 Chunqiu fanlu 23:212.
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thousand people were well organized. The double pupil of Shun is what is called “twofold enlightenment”: with his [way of] acting he became a model; with his [way of] speaking, he established the patterns [of polished discourses]. The three holes in Yu’s ear is what is called “great intelligence”. He secured profits and averted damages: He dredged the River and dug the Stream. The four nipples of king Wen refer to what is called” Great Humanity”: he was the one to whom the world turned back and the one loved by the hundred surnames. […] 187

Thus, peculiarities in facial and body structure were metaphors alluding to the extraordinary ethical stature of ancient sages. This approach must have been very successful in scholarly circles since the Baihutong says:

The sages all had anomalous [physical] markers. 188 According to the [exegetical] lore, Fuxi had sun-horn [protuberances] on his forehead, in balance like a string of pearls, big eyes, a nose [big] as a mountain, and the countenance of a dragon. He made the eight trigrams of the Changes in order to respond to the star Shu [of the Dipper]. The Yellow Emperor had a dragon-[like] face: he had received the [stars] Heavenly Assistance. In the superior part [of his] body, he was modelled upon the lodges of the centre [of the sky]: he had received the simulacrum of the stars Patterned Glory. Zhuanxu had a shield-[protuberance on his head]: 189 this is what is called “pure enlightenment”. […] Yao had eyebrows of eight colours: this is what is called “penetrating enlightenment”: He scheduled and represented [the motion of] sun and moon with the “pearl-adorned turning sphere, with its transverse tube of jade”. 190 […] king Wen’s four nipples hint at what is called “arrived humanity”: he was the one to whom the world turned back and the one loved by the hundred surnames. […] 191

The body of a sage, besides being a microcosm which reproduces the starry sky, is also a chart which maps the exceptional ethical virtues of a man: king Wen’s four nipples —


188 Tjan Tjoe Som translates *yibiao* as “(ways) of displaying”. Tjan (1952) 2:531. It is better to regard *biao* as the technical term which designates markers or aspects which reveal a few hidden properties of a thing. On this point, see also *Lüshi chunqiu* 20.8:137.

189 Here I accept Tjan tjoe Som’s solution and read *wu* as *gan*. See Tjan (1952) 2:531, n. 33. Even if several texts, and among them a few apocrypha, have *wu* as distinguishing trait of Zhuangxu, other sources explicitly say that Zhuangxu had on his head “shield and spear” (*gange* 干戈). See, for instance, *Songshu* 27:761; *Beishi* 35:1293.

190 Here, we have an allusion to the *Shujing*. In the *Documents*, in fact, Yu “examined the pearl-adorned turning sphere, with its transverse tube of jade, and reduced to a harmonious system (the movements of) the Seven Directors’ pearl-adorned turning sphere, with its transverse tube of jade” (*zai xuanji yuheng yi qi zheng* 在璇璣玉衡，以齊七政). See Legge (1960), vol. III, 33.

the marker of humanity and benevolence — certainly is a case in point. Later Han scholarship must have given credence to this reasoning since the excerpt presented above introduces the physical characteristics of the sages with the words “the lore says” (zhuan yue). Even the Lun heng corroborates this stance:

people say that the destiny is hard to know. [I say that] the destiny is extremely simple to know. How does one succeed to know it? You should use bones and body. With regard to human destiny, [we know that] it is bestowed by Heaven. Therefore, there are pointers and markers in the body. The analysis of pointers and markers leads to know destiny just as to look at the dou and hu (i.e. weighing instruments) leads to know the amount [of grain]. With regard to pointers and markers, the bones pattern them. According to the exegetical lore, Huangdi had the countenance of a dragon and Zhuanxu had a shield-like protuberance. Diku had a double tooth and Yao’s eyebrows were of eight colours. Shun had the double pupil and Yu’s ear had three holes. Tang had double elbows, king Wen four nipples, and King Wu’s glance [resembled that of] a sheep. The duke of Zhou was hunchbacked, Gao Yao had a horse-mouth, and Confucius’ arms were turned backwards. These twelve sages all held the position of emperor and king or helped the sovereign to care for the world. The world knows [these stories] and all the scholars narrate them. What is in the classics and the lore is clearly written and [therefore] can be trusted.

Wang Chong, besides giving credence to the art of “evaluating men”, trusted the stories about the physical eccentricity of the sages of the past: Yao and Shun were not only ethical and political icons, they differed from commoners also because of their facial and body structure. After all, this accent on the look of an individual must have been a rather important feature of the culture of the first century AD, since even the choice of empresses and concubines was carried on according to physiognomic criteria.

6.2.2 The importance of unofficial material

Both the Baihutong and the Lun heng testify to the success in exegetical circles of tales dealing with the outlook of the sage. Wang Chong, however, also noticed the existence of a different kind of anecdotes:

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192 Yang 阳 has to be read yang 羊. On this point, see Songshu 27:765; Lippiello (2001), 280.
194 In this regard, see Gumbrecht (2002), esp. 184-194.
若夫短書俗記，竹帛胤文，非儒者所見，眾多非一。蒼頡四目，為黃帝史。【…】項羽重瞳，云虞舜之後，與高祖分王天下。

In short books, vulgar records, and documents on silk and bamboo — all things which the scholars do not read — [these stories] are extremely numerous and contradictory. Cang Jie had four eyes and became minister under the Yellow Emperor […] Xiang Yu had the double pupil: [he said] that he was the descendants of Shun and competed with Gaozu for the rulership over the world.195

Wang Chong’s remarks are noteworthy: unofficial documents — short books and vulgar records, documents on silk and bamboo — contained stories about the physical peculiarities of mythic and historical figures such as the inventor of Chinese characters Cang Jie or Gaozu’s rival Xiang Yu. These anecdotes could also decisively emphasize far-fetched facets such Cang Jie’s four eyes. Significantly, this material was neglected by the ru of the time (fei ru suo jian).

6.3 Introducing the apocryphal stories on the physical appearance of the shengren

Several apocryphal fragments can be read in the context briefly delineated above since they describe the physical peculiarities of the sages of the past:

黃帝身逾九尺【…】河目，隆顙，日角，龍顔。

Huangdi was more than nine chi tall. […] He had [the glance of] the eyes deep as [the waters of] the Yellow River, a prominent forehead with a protuberance resembling the sun, and a majestic countenance.

仰劉季：日角，戴北斗胷，龜背，龍眼，長七尺八寸。明聖而寛仁，好任士。

The emperor Ji of the Liu had a sun-horn [protuberance] and the chest with the [character] “Dipper”. His back [had a curvature as that] of a turtle and his glance was that of dragon. He was seven chi and eight cun tall. Brilliant virtue and large humanity: he loved to employ the shi.196

This short description of the Yellow Emperor presents a few noteworthy facets. First, the stature, which was surely among the distinguishing traits of a particular individual, explicitly reminds us of the anecdote concerning Confucius in the Shiji. Evidently, whoever was diffusing the story about Huangdi pondered the necessity of presenting him as a tall man. This is testified in several further apocryphal fragments from the Hechengtu. A further apocryphal text strengthens the factor “stature” when portraying

196 Choshu isho shusei 5:33.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

Confucius.\(^{197}\) Evidently, this aspect had become a standard element when describing the sages of the past.

The use of physiognomic data in the apocryphal portrayal of the sage reveals a further aspect of the *chenwei*: numerous facets were used to describe several personages. The wideness of the mouth, the protuberances on the forehead, and facial expressions are presented as characteristics of many ancient sages. One of the most impressive examples in this sense is Confucius’ portrayal in the *Chunqiu-Yankongtu*. Below, we shall consider some of the peculiarities attributed to the Master of Lu:

孔子長十尺海口尼首，方面月角，日準河目。龍顟，斗脣昌顱，均頤，輔喉，駢齒。龍形，龜脊，虎掌。【…】谷竅，雷聲，澤腹。【…】立如鳳峙，坐如龍蹲，手握天文，足履度字。【…】

Confucius was 10 *chi* tall. [With regard to his head,] the mouth was [wide as] the see and the head [big as] the Ni (- qiu 尼 mountain).\(^{198}\) The face was square with a moon-horn [protuberance], a nose [shiny as the] sun, [the glance of] the eyes deep as [the waters of] the Yellow River, the forehead of a dragon, the lips as [the character] Dipper, a beautiful facial expression, with the cheeks [forming perfect] halves, and the throat as support. He had a double tooth. [His body] had a form [like that of a] dragon, the back [had a curvature like that of] a turtle, and the palm of hands [were strong like the foots of a] tiger. […] His apertures were as valleys, his voice was like [the sound of a] thunder, the stomach was as a marsh. […] In standing, he stood up as a phoenix; in seating, he crouched as a dragon. In his hand, he snatched [lines reminding one of] the patterns of Heaven; with his foots, he covered [lines which formed] the character “measurement”.[…]\(^{199}\)

As in the case of stories about miraculous births, whoever wrote this passage must have used contemporary anecdotes to sketch the physical portrayal of Confucius. In other words, older stories merge to form new tales. Moreover, the *Yankongtu* reminds us of the *Baihutong* since the portrayal of Confucius’s contains many allusions to the natural world: The abdomen is compared to mountains, the apertures to valley, the voice to thunder. Thanks to the lines in his hands and foots, Confucius is the sage able to dominate the cosmos: The patterns on the hands resemble the constellations in the sky and the patterns of the foot entail the character *measurement*. In this way, even the behaviour of the master of Lu is not comparable to the manner of a commoner.\(^{200}\)

As the reader shall remember, the parallelism established between starry sky and the

\(^{197}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:13

\(^{198}\) The Niqiu 尼丘 Mountain was the place where Confucius mother went to pray. See *Shiji* 47:1905.

\(^{199}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:13.

\(^{200}\) A few further fragments actually reveal the same frame of mind. See, for instance, *Choshu isho shusei* 6:171.
body of the *shengren* was one of the feature which characterized the approach to the matter of the scholars gathered at the White Tiger Hall. Do the apocrypha encompass further signals in this direction and, above all, do they combine this aspect with an ethical reading?

### 6.4 The exegetical dimension of the apocryphal stories

If the surviving fragments are to be trusted, a few apocryphal fragments reveal a striking contiguity with the exegetical works of the time. Two apocryphal appendices to the *Annals* — the *Yankongtu* and the *Yuanmingbao* — explain the meaning of signs such as Shun’s double pupil or Yao’s eyebrows, offering an ethical reading and linking these aspect to the starry sky. The *Yankongtu*, in particular, can be seen as a mirror of the exegetical work of the Han period:

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文王四乳，是謂至仁，天下所歸，百姓所親。
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King Wen’s four nipples allude to what is called “arrived humanity”: he was the one to whom the world turned back and the one loved by the hundred surnames.\(^{201}\)

From the fragment from the *Yankongtu* we may easily infer that we are in front of the Han exegetical tradition: the words above perfectly reflect what we have already read in the *Baihutong*. In some cases, the authors of the apocryphal proposed a different explanation:

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文王四乳，是謂含良。蓋法酒旗，布恩舒惠。
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King Wen’s four Nipples mean what is said “congenital kindness“. They model the asterism Banner of Wine.\(^{202}\) He spread kind-heartedness and unfolded clemency.\(^{203}\)

Evidently, the *Yuanmingbao* offered a different ethical interpretation of king Wen’s four nipples. From a theoretical viewpoint, however, the fragment read above echoes the wordings of the *Baihutong* and the *Yankongtu*: all these sources explain the physical features of the *shengren* in an ethical and cosmic framework.

### 6.5 The apocryphal stories and unofficial material

Differently from Han leading *ru*, the authors of the *chenwei* also relied upon popular sources, such as those mentioned in the *Lun heng*:

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目勇敢重童。天雨刀於楚之邦。
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201 *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:12.
202 The asterism Banner of Wine is in the southern quadrant of the sky. See *Jinshu* 11:299.
203 *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:30.
Upright eyes, fierce boldness, and double-pupil: Heaven rained knives in Chu.\(^{204}\)

This fragment requires a few explanatory notes. First, the medieval commentator Song Jun identifies the man with a double-pupil with Gaozu’s rival Xiang Yu. Second, the context of the fragment is likely to be negatively interpreted: the rain of knives is presented as an inauspicious sign in a further apocryphal fragment.\(^{205}\) Third, the double-pupil belonged to Xiang Yu’s propaganda since he presented himself as the descendants of Yu.\(^{206}\) From Wang Chong’s remarks, we do know that the stories magnifying Xiang Yu came from popular literature. Scholars working with exegesis were not likely to be interested in such anecdotes since Xiang Yu certainly was not regarded as *shengren*. This probably compelled the author of this wording to add the ominous event “rain of knives”. Thus, we have here once again the attempt to stay in balance between fashionable legends and *ru* tradition. The following fragment, on the contrary, explicitly clashes with the *ru* viewpoint:

秦距之帝, 名政。虎口日角, 大目隆鼻。【…】

With regard to the emperor from Qin, his name was Zheng. He had the mouth of a tiger and a sun-horn [protuberance], big eyes and a prominent nose. […]\(^{207}\)

This anecdote about Qin Shi Huangdi’s facial and body structure obliges us to a few basic reflections. First, a negative context should be ruled out since, as we have seen above, features such as “sun-horn protuberance”, “prominent nose”, and “large mouth” were also connected to the Yellow Emperor and Confucius. This, in turn, clashes with the *ru* condemnation of the Qin.\(^{208}\) Second, this is not the only fragment which presents Qin Shi Huangdi as a legitimate ruler. As we shall see, the Qin are connected to the revolution of the potencies in some apocryphal texts. Evidently, the Han *chenwei* corpus contained material which implicitly or explicitly was not in tune with the official *ru* framing of the figure of the *shengren*. In a few cases, the authors must have tried to read these unofficial tales within a *ru* framework. A short fragment from the *Yuanmingbao*, for example, says:

蒼頡四目，是謂並明。

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\(^{204}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:139. For Cang Jie, see also *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:26.

\(^{205}\) *Choshu isho shusei*

\(^{206}\) For Song Jun’s commentary, see *Choshu isho shusei* 6:139. For the “knives rain”, see *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:21. For Xiang Yu’s propaganda, see *Shiji* 7:338.

\(^{207}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:139. The name *zulong* was also used by Qin Shi Huangdi. In this regard, see *Shiji* 6:259 and the commentary in *Shiji* 6:260.

\(^{208}\) For the *ru* rejection of Qin government, see *Hanshu* 21B:1022.
Cang Jie had four eyes: This is what is called “double enlightenment”.\footnote{Choshu isho shusei 4A:26.}

We have here an allusion to Han unofficial tales, since Wang Chong explicitly connects this story to popular sources. The second part of the fragment makes clear that the author of the Yuanmingbao was trying to make this popular tale more acceptable to ru circles, presenting the “four eyes” as a metaphor alluding to Cang Jie’s extraordinary cleverness.

6.6 The mythic dimension of the apocryphal stories

The Luoshu-Lingzhunting says:

天皇頎羸，三舌驤首鱗身【…】。地皇十一君，皆女面龍顙馬踶虵身。人皇龍身【…】。

[The people of the clan of] the Heavenly Thearch were tall and thin. They had three tongues, the head of a fine horse, and a fish body. [...] The Earthly Thearch: eleven princes. They all had the face of a woman, the forehead of a dragon, foots of a horse, and the body of a snake. [The people of the clan of] the Human Thearch had a dragon body. [...] \footnote{Choshu isho shusei 6:173.}

The main characters of this tale are hybrid creatures. In all probability, they were deemed to have been the first rulers of human history. Here, it is interesting to mention that the Minglixu speaks about them within a (pseudo-) chronological scheme, in which Fuxi’s rulership is placed during the time of the human thearch. \footnote{See, for instance, Choshu isho shusei 4B:118-119. On these three prehistorical thearches, see also Xiao Dengfu (2000), 201-202.} Thus, it may be that the authors of the Linzhunting were freely borrowing from ancient stories in order to outline a historical scheme in which zoomorphic and hybrid creatures abruptly become legitimate rulers of China.

The hybrid creatures of the Lingzhunting remind us of a short excerpt from the Liezi 列子 which says that rulers like Shennong or Fuxi had a snake body and a human face, an ox-head, and a tiger nose. Finally, the text defines them as “non-human” (you fei ren zhi zhuang 有非人之狀). They, however, had the virtue of the great ancient sages. \footnote{Liezi 2:14}

Thanks to Han stone relief and paintings, we know that stories about hybrid creatures were very popular under the Han since relief portraying Fuxi with a dragon body are to be found in several regions of China. \footnote{See Li Chenguang (1992).}
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

At least some of the authors of the apocrypha used to give credence to stories portraying mythic sovereigns of the past like Fuxi as hybrid creatures. The Chunqiu-Hechengtu, for example, says:

伏羲龍身牛首，渠肩達掖，山準日角，麤目珠衡，駿髦翁鼠，龍唇龜齒，長九尺有一寸【…】。

Fuxi had the body of a dragon and the head of an ox, shoulder as a dig and a wide armpit, the nose as a mountain, and a sun-horn [protuberance], big eyes in balance as pearls, fine long hairs of a horse and hairs of a birds-neck, lips of dragon and teethes of a turtle. He was nine chi and one cun tall. […]

This fragment testifies that the authors of some chenwei texts were ready to accept myths portraying culture-heroes in terms of hybrid creatures. It is however questionable whether this mindset characterizes all the apocryphal texts. Interestingly, the Yuanmingbao says:

【…】而其首目手足，皆相同者，有不同於常者，則為禽獸矣。

[…] Nevertheless, head, eyes, hands, and feet [of shengren and untalented persons] are the same. If they have something [in their facial and body structure] which differs from the standard, they are beasts.

Whoever wrote the Yuanmingbao explicitly refuses to transform a sage in a hybrid creature. We have here a typical Han ru framework. It is significant, in fact, that the Baihutong does not allude to such stories, making clear that the scholars who took part to the congress of AD 79 preferred to give an ethical reading of stories about the physical peculiarities of the shengren and to reject the anecdotes dealing with half-human and half-beast sovereigns.

7. THE SHENGREN AND HEAVEN: THE TOKENS OF THE SAGE

As we have seen in the first part of the present study, the idea that an ideal ruler receives signs of heavenly favour is a significant trait of Chinese perception of political authority. From the well-known mentioning of the Hetu in the Shujing to the apocryphal stories on diagrams and scripts, countless scholars and politicians highlighted the importance of such events. This new section shall present and discuss the tokens of the shengren in order to finally approach the meaning of fu 符 in the apocrypha.

214 For the first fragment, see Choshu isho shusei 4B:9. In this regard, see also Jiang Zhigang (2006), 84.

215 Choshu isho shusei 4A:58.
7.1 Heavenly tokens and politics in Early Han China

The famous story of the *Mozi* about the red bird with a jade tablet in the beak encompasses two important elements: we have a herald (the bird) and an object. At the end of the third century BC, such stories probably enjoyed a certain success since even commoners must have been aware of them. Interestingly, the two peasants who organized and led the uprising of 209 BC — Cheng Sheng 陳勝 and Wu Guang 武光 — did not neglect the role of political propaganda. They spoke of a cinnabar writ on silk (danshu bo 丹書帛) found in the stomach of a fish. It said, “Chen Sheng will be the king” (Chen Sheng wang 陳勝王). Evidently, in the attempt to promote their royal ambitions, Chen Sheng and Wu Guang developed a story which essentially reproduced the tale of the red bird: the herald becomes a fish and the object turns into a silk document. In this case, we also have a message, namely an apparently generic prophecy announcing the success of the rebels.

Among the Han rulers who were attentive to issues dealing with political tokens, one should certainly recall Wudi and, above all, Wang Mang. Under Wudi, numerous tales concerning tripods as symbols of political authority became fashionable. Under Wang Mang, the tendency of connecting political power to heavenly regalia had already reached the peak.

Homer Dubs once described the usurper of the Han as “one of the cleverest moulders of educated public opinion that China has ever had”. This judgement certainly matches Wang Mang’s portrayal in Han sources since he was the one who highly stressed the importance of *fuming* 符命 or the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate through tokens. In AD 5, for instance, a few individuals submitted a white stone which was round above and square below. The stone was inscribed with red characters (danshu) and the text said: “I announce that Mang, the Duke who pacifies the Han, will be thearch (gao An Han gong Mang wei huangdi 告安漢公莽為皇帝).” According to Ban Gu, from this moment onwards, there was a proliferation of heavenly talismans (fuming zhi qi zi ci shi yi 符命之起自此始矣).

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217 *Shiji* 48:1950
218 Finally, the binomial danshu 丹書 is probably an allusion to emblems of political authority. Ban Gu narrates that Gaozu oath and split the tokens (poufu zuoshi 剖符作誓) — “cinnabar scripts” (i.e. characters) on “contracts” or tallies made out of metal (danshu tieqi 丹書鐵契) — with his high-ranking ministers. Moreover, as the text says, when Gaozu chose his feudatories, he used to sign the alliance with the “trustworthiness of the cinnabar script “(yi danshu zhi xin 以丹書之信) and “with the pact of the white horse” (zhong yi baima zhi meng 重以白馬之盟). See *Hanshu* 1B:81. For a danshu found in a wine jug, see also *Yanzi chunqiu* 5.19:46.
219 In this regard, see Schaab-Hanke (2002).
220 Dubs (1955), 219.
Ban Gu was certainly right: in a memorial written in AD 9, Wang Mang mentions several extraordinary events. In the Ba 巴 prefecture, for instance, people found a stone resembling an ox. Here, Wang Mang found a token made out of copper (tongfu 銅符) and a diagram on silk (botu 帛圖) which said: “Heaven has sent the imperial token. The one who consigned it will be enfeoffed as marquis. Carry on the Heaven’s mandate and fulfill the instructions of the spirits (tian gao difu xianzhe fe nghou cheng tianming yong shenling 天告帝符獻者封侯承天命用神令).” Roughly in the same period, the otherwise unknown Ai Zhang 哀章 made a copper casket (tong gui 銅匱) which had two inscribed “labels” (liang jian 兩檢):

The first writing said: “Diagram of the metal casket: the Seal of the intervention of the heavenly emperor.” The second proclaimed: “The Seal of the intervention of the Red Emperor. Somebody has passed down Huangdi’s document of the Metal (casket)”. The “somebody” mentioned in the writing was Gaozu: in the wu de framework of the first century BC, the Han were associated with the potency Fire and the colour red. Thus, the Han — the red emperor — was about to transmit the mandate to rule over China to his successor, the Earth of Wang Mang.

Wang Mang was undoubtedly aware of the relevance of fu: he even sponsored the publication of Fuming 符命 [The Mandate of the Tallies], a voluminous book in 42 chapters. Twenty-two chapter of it were devoted to list the tokens which were regarded as tangible proof of the bestowal of the mandate: Ban Gu recalls Ai Zhang’s copper casket as example.

7.2 Han ru-ism and Heavenly tokens

7.2.1 Heavenly tokens and ethics

Tales about heavenly tokens certainly fascinated some early thinkers. In the last centuries BC, some philosophers used them as parables in order to advance arguments in defence of their theories. Here, we may recall that Zou Yan alluded to the tale about the red bird of the Zhou to promote his interpretation of the wu de framework. In

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224 *Hanshu* 99B:4112. Besides the fuming section, the book also encompassed a part dealing with the auspicious signs of the potencies (dexiang 德祥) and a section describing the response of the fortune (Fuying 福應). On the Fuming, see Dull (1966), 160-161.
some cases, Han *ru* rearranged old stories in order to convey a specific message. Huan Tan, for instance, wrote:

文王以紂時為岐侯，躬修道德，執行仁義，百姓附親。是時，紂為無道【…】其後有鳳凰銜書於郊。文王曰：「殷帝無道，虐亂天下，皇命已移，不得復久。」【…】

At the time of Zhou [of the Shang], king Wen was Marquis of Qi. Personally, he cultivated the virtues of the ethical way and behaved according to [the principles of] humanity and righteousness. The hundred surnames gathered around him. At that time, Zhou behaved immorally. […] Thereafter, a phoenix with a document in the mouth appeared in the suburbs. King Wen said: “The emperor of the Yin does not follow the Way. With cruelty, he has thrown the whole world into chaos. The mandate of the [heavenly] thearch has already shifted [to another person]: it is impossible to revert to the old [times].” […] 226

Huan Tan’s account explicitly links king Wen’s political aftermath to a script brought by a phoenix. It is however important to keep in mind that Huan Tan was also the one who underscored the centrality of issues dealing with human beings and the futility of themes connected to Heaven. 227 Accordingly, in the excerpt presented above, Huan Tan does not describe form and content of the document brought by the phoenix, focusing on king Wen’s words and, in particular, on ethics: He highlights the cruelty and the immorality of the last Shang king and underscores king Wen’s ethical virtues.

7.2.2 *Fu* as events and the role of the ganying theory

Some Han *ru* might have understood *fu* in terms of exceptional events. The *Chunqiu fanlu*, for instance, follows an edulcorated version of the tale about Zhou tokens: a flock of red birds brought grain to the Zhou altar. 228 Thus, the “miracle” of the jade tablet in the beak of the red bird becomes an ordinary event which, however, still is an auspicious sign.

In some cases, the scholarly world was ready to accept tales about fabulous beasts, especially when they were linked to the classics: the story about Confucius’s unicorn is a case in point.

As mentioned in the first part of this work, in the fourteenth year of duke Ai in Lu, Confucius captured a unicorn in the west. The present study shall often underscore the relevance of this tale in the apocryphal fragments. In particular, we will allude to its implications in calendrical field. Here, it is interesting to notice that the *Chunqiu fanlu*

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226 *Taiping yulan* 84.
227 See *Hou Hanshu* 28A:959.
228 The story is mentioned in the chapter on the “naturalness” of political auspicious signs. See *Chunqiu fanlu* 57:361.
presents the unicorn as a token announcing the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate (*huo lin shou ming zhi fu* 獲麟受命之符).\(^{229}\) Students of the Gongyang add that appearance and capture of this animal was, on the one hand, the anomalous event (*yi* 異) which announced the end of Zhou rulership (*Zhou wang shi tianxia* 周亡失天下) and, on the other hand, the auspicious sign (*rui* 瑞) which heralded the imminent conferral of *tianming* on the Han (*Han jiang shou ming* 漢將受命).\(^{230}\)

From a theoretical viewpoint, Han *ru* explained the *fu* in the light of the *ganying* theory. In a memorial to the throne, Dong Zhongshu wrote:

臣聞天之所大奉使之王者, 必有非人力所能致而自至者, 此受命之符也。【…】

I have heard that when Heaven is about to entrust [an ideal] king, something lying beyond the reach of human effort must spontaneously appear. This “something” is the token which bestows [Heaven’s] mandate. […]\(^{231}\)

Thus, a virtuous sovereign is able to “communicate” with Heaven: accordingly, he “provokes” the appearance of auspicious signs. As it happened in the case of tales on miraculous births, this theoretical device noticeably contributes to “explain” anecdotes speaking of far-fetched events.

### 7.2.3 Liu Xin

Despite the scanty information given in the sources still extant, the Han period certainly witnessed the proliferation of stories concerning heavenly tokens. After centuries of allusions to diagrams and scripts, at the end of the first century BC, the Han *ru* Liu Xin felt obliged to spend some words on *Hetu* and *Luoshu*.

劉歆以為虙羲氏繼天而王, 受河圖, 則而畫之, 八卦是也; 禹治洪水, 賜雒書, 法而陳之, 洪範是也。【…】凡此六十五字, 皆雒書本文。

Liu Xin believed that the Fuxi carried on [the work of] Heaven and became king. He received the Diagram of the Yellow River, took it as model, and depicted it. The eight trigrams were the result! When Yu won over the waters, he received the Script of the Luo River. He took it as a model and explained it. The [chapter] Great Plan [of the *Classic of Documents*] was the result! […] The first 65 characters [of this chapter] constitute the original text of the Luo script.\(^{232}\)

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\(^{229}\) *Chunqiu fanlu* 16:157. The same point is made in *Jiaoshi Yilin* 16:75.

\(^{230}\) *Bo Wujing yiyi*, page 18.

\(^{231}\) *Hanshu* 56:2500.

\(^{232}\) *Hanshu* 27A:1315-1316. The commentators on the *Yijing* suggest that Han scholars like Kong Anguo 孔安國, Ma Rong 馬融, and Tiao Xin 姚信 agreed with Liu Xin. See *Zhouni zhushu* in *Shisanjing zhushu*, vol. I, 8.
Chapter Three. The discourse on the shengren: between myth and philosophy

Here the Han librarian links *Hetu* and *Luoshu* to Fuxi and Yu 禹. He does not explain what these binomials actually meant. Apparently, in Liu Xin’s mindset, all what a Han *ru* needed to know was the association *Hetu/trigrams* and *Luoshu/Great Plan chapter* of the *Documents*. Moreover, Liu Xin says that there was one *Hetu*, namely that received by Fuxi, and one *Luoshu*, namely that received by Yu. Finally, it is also interesting to notice that the scholar does not mention mythic animals like phoenixes or dragons.

7.3 Heavenly *fu* in the apocrypha: the tokens

At the end of the first century BC, tales about *fu* as objects were probably enjoying a large success. In this period, Liu Xin explained the *Hetu/Luoshu* tradition; Wang Mang used many *fu* in the political field; Huan Tan gave an ethical interpretation of an ancient myth. Many anecdotes having a similar thematic focus have been passed down to us thanks to the *chenwei*.

The authors of the apocrypha were greatly interested in tales about the *fu* of sages and sovereigns. The structure of these anecdotes is often modelled on the story concerning the jade tablet of the Zhou: we have a herald and an object. In the apocrypha, the herald is seldom an ordinary animal since the corpus still extant often mentions phoenixes and dragons. The object varies from fragment to fragment. Finally, differently from many anecdotes recounted in further *ru* sources, whoever wrote the apocrypha often attached a considerable importance to “the message” of the tokens.

Tiziana Lippiello has well explained a basic meaning of the binomials *Hetu/Luoshu* in the apocrypha: engravings or patterns (*wen* 文) on the back of turtles and dragons. Several survived fragments testify to the exactness of this hypothesis. A story told in the *Shangshu-Zhonghou*, for instance, says that Yao received the Luo writ from a dragon-horse: on its back, there were red patterns and cinnabar characters.233 A fragment from the *Zhonghou* says:

武王觀於河，沈璧禮，畢至於日昧光塞河青雲浮，洛青龍臨壇，銜元甲之圖，吐之而去。

King Wu observed the River and performed the ceremony “dropping the *bi* disc”.234 [The ceremony] was completed [only] when the darkness [of the evening arrived]. [Then], a glorious light filled the river and turquoise clouds floated. On the Luo river, a turquoise dragon approached the altar. He held in the mouth the diagram of the shell of the origin. He spat it out and left.235

In this case, the dragon did not have patterns on its back but it rather brought an object

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233 See Lippiello (2001), 52. See also, for example, *Choshu isho shusei* 2:75.
234 This ceremony consisted in dropping a *bi* jade into the river. See Lippiello (2001), 281.
235 *Choshu isho shusei* 2:86.
called “the shell of the origin”.

Sealed documents form a second typology of apocryphal tokens. The *Hechengtu* contains the following story about Yao:

> 堯坐中舟與太尉舜臨觀鳳皇負圗授堯。圗以赤玉為匣，長三尺，廣八寸。黃金椏，白玉繩，封兩端，其章曰：「天赤帝符璽」五字。

Yao was in a boat with the Great Commander Shun. They saw a phoenix: it offered to Yao the diagram on its back. The diagram was in a red jade casket, [it was] three chi long and eight cun wide. The labels [of the diagram] were in golden and the string with white jade was sealed at the two extremities. The inscription in five characters said: “The Seal-Token of the Red Emperor of Heaven.”

The anecdote from the *Hechengtu* suggests that the *Hetu*, as it was understood by the author of this apocryphal text, was a sealed diagram. Stories about Confucius’s tokens appear to testify to this line of reasoning. In fact, several apocryphal fragments connect the Master of Lu not only to the capture of the unicorn but also to the appearance of a diagram or script. The *Xiaojing-Yuanshenqi*, for instance, says that the unicorn spitted out a diagram which consisted of three scrolls.

### 7.4 Heavenly *fu* in the apocrypha: the political messages

The apocryphal fragments about heavenly tokens often suggest that the *fu* conveyed a specific message for the sage who received it. Even the *chenwei* stories that simply present the *Hetu* as patterns on the back of animals can be read in this way. In fact, we have often sentences such as “the patterns formed characters” (*wen cheng zi* 文成字) or “the patterns resembled characters” (*wen xiang zi* 文像字). In the *Zhonghou*, for instance, the Yellow Emperor is said to have received a Luo Script from a tortoise: the pattern on its back formed the character Yuan, namely the name of the emperor.

The message of the *fu* often announced the political success of ancient sovereigns. In the *Yundoushu*, for instance, Shun received the *Hetu* with a seal which said “talisman of the heavenly thearch” (*tianhuang fu* 天皇符); in the *Hetu*, the seal said: “the seal of the Talisman of the heavenly Yellow emperor” (*Tian Huangdi fu xi* 天黄帝符璽).

Finally, we can consider the following story from the *Yankongtu*:

> 得麟之後, 天下血書魯端門。曰: 趙作法，孔聖沒，周姬亡。彗東出，秦起政，胡破術，書記散孔不絶。【…】

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236 *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:10-11. See also Lippiello (2001), 281.
237 *Choshu isho shusei* 5:58.
238 *Choshu isho shusei* 2:74.
239 *Choshu isho shusei* 6:137.
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After the capture of the unicorn, [red]-blood characters appeared on the Duan Door of Lu. [The characters said:] “Hurry to write the model. The [period of] Kong’s sagesness is due to finish. Ji of the Zhou will decline. A broom will appear in the east: The Qin will rise and govern. Hu (i.e. the second Qin Emperor) will destroy the method [adopted under the Qin]. Books and records will scatter but Confucius’s [legacy] will not be interrupted.”

According to the *Yankongtu*, Confucius’s *fu* was a prophecy announcing the decline of the Zhou, the aftermath of the Qin dynasty, and even its collapse. The fragment continues:

子夏明日往視之，血書飛為赤鳥，化為白書。【…】

The day after, Zixia went to see this (i.e. the script on the Duan door). The [red]-blood characters flew away and turned into a red bird. The metamorphosis produced (i.e. left behind) a book on silk […].

Thus, after having seen the message on the door of Lu, Confucius even received a document written on silk. At this point, one should wonder about the content of this writ.

7.5 Heavenly *fu* in the apocrypha: the self-presentation of the *chenwei*

Several apocryphal fragments present the River Diagram or the Luo Script as books with a specific context. A few fragments, for example, connect the *Hetu* to texts describing Heaven and earth. In the *Yundoushu*, the diagram bestowed upon Shun is described as containing a model of the form of the Earth (*di xing zhi zhi* 地形之制) and data about the width in *du* 度 of heavenly constellations (*tianwen fendu zhi cha* 天文分度之差). This motif appears in a story about Yao-*fu* book as well: It encompassed data about asterisms (*liexing zhi fen* 列星之分) and the Dipper (*Dou zheng zhi du* 斗政之度). Besides describing Heaven and earth, the *fu*-books also dealt with chronological matters. According to the *Yundoushu*, in fact, the *River Diagram*, which Shun received as token of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate, was a book which contained information about the “72 emperors” (*zhong you qi shi er di* 中有七十二帝). This reminds us of an anecdote of the *Guanzi*. Once, Guanzi said that 72 ancient lineages (*qi shi er jia* 七十二

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240 Choshu isho shusei 4A:14.
243 Choshu isho shusei 2:75.
244 Choshu isho shusei 4A:157.
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家) celebrated the feng and shan ceremonies after having been bestowed with the Heaven’s mandate.245 Accordingly, the Hetu mentioned in the Yundoushu may have also spoken about these 72 ancient ruling clans. It is certain, in fact, that whoever wrote the apocrypha was very interested in reconstructing the past of China. Yao’s fu book, for instance, contained “the records of emperors and kings” (diwang luji) and the “numbers concerning their rise and decline” (xingwang zhi shu 興亡之數).246 The Hetu-Tingzuofu says that the Hetu encompassed the records of the emperors (ji dilu 紀帝錄) and arranged the periods of the sages as well as the time of their political aftermath (lie shengren zhi ji xinghao xing 列聖人之紀姓號興). Finally, we have a sentence explaining that the Hetu scheduled political phases by fixing their ending and beginning (zhongshi cunwang zhi qi 終始存亾之期).247 At this point, it is safe to assume that the belief in a Hetu as book speaking about chronology plays a remarkable role in the apocrypha.

An interpreter dealing with the fragments presented in this section inevitably tends to regard them as a description of the apocrypha themselves. In other words, whoever wrote the sentences mentioned above was presenting or submitting a book which, besides speaking about the shengren, his birth, and tokens, also dealt with themes like chronology, tianwen, and geography. Here, we should recall that the Kuodixiang is an apocryphal treatise which focuses on the analysis of the Chinese territory. With regard to tianwen and chronological matters, we may now turn to the apocryphal discourse on tian.

245 Guanzi 5, Fengshan (Zhuzi jicheng, vol.5, 273).
246 Choshu isho shusei 2:75.
247 See Choshu isho shusei 6:177.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE DISCOURSE ON *TIAN*: TECHNIQUES AND BEYOND

1. OBSERVING AND PORTRAYING THE HEAVENS

1.1 Observing the starry sky

Were the authors of the final versions of the apocrypha diligent and qualified sky-watchers? Were they able to measure the shadows cast on the solstices or to use clepsydras for observing stars on the meridian? Could they even have been among the people who worked on the elaboration of that armillary sphere which had to become a symbol of Han progress? These questions constitute the first step in our review of the apocryphal fragments dealing with the heavens. When considering the early medieval classification of these texts under the heading *shushu*, in fact, a modern interpreter is almost compelled to reflect on the possibility that their authors were skilled technicians proficient in the observation of the sky and practiced in tracking, describing, and interpreting the motion of astral bodies. Such tasks, however, required specific abilities. One was required to know how to measure shadows in order to keep note of the seasonal cycle or how to use the stars to fix reference points in the heavens: the skilful use of gnomons and clepsydra certainly characterized the cultural identikit of early skywatchers. Finally, informed technicians active at the end of the first century BC, and especially those at the imperial court, should at least have been aware of the advances in the field of observational instruments: the first documented tests with the armillary sphere are without doubt one of the most important and impressive achievements of Han China.

1.1.1 Centred stars and lodges

In the *Yaodian* 堯典 [Canon of Yao] chapter of the *Shujing*, the mythical ruler Yao commanded the Xi 羲 and He 和 brothers “to calculate and delineate the movements and appearances of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the zodiacal spaces; and so to deliver respectfully the seasons to the people”.¹ The Xi and the He hastened to implement the royal directives by observing the rising and setting of the sun and by looking at the four seasonal markers: the Bird-star (*niao* 鳥) in spring, the Man-star (*ren* 人) in summer, the Barrens-star (*xu* 虛) in autumn, and the Mane-star (*mao* 轲) in

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winter. This short list of asterisms has made out of this document “the foundation chapter of Chinese astronomy”. Apart from the steady improvements in observational practice, the tasks of astronomers did not change considerably in the following centuries. Like the Xi and He brothers or “like the archetypal Chinese emperor on his throne, the Chinese astronomer ‘faced south’ and observed which heavenly bodies crossed his north-south sightline as the diurnal rotation of the heavens carried them from east to west”. Chinese sky-watchers referred to this phenomenon—stars crossing the meridian, namely that imaginary circle linking the south and north celestial pole through the point in the sky directly above the observer — as of “centred stars” (zhongxing 中星). Besides enabling Chinese astronomers to locate the position of the sun among stars and asterisms, the tracking of the centred stars was of crucial importance for fixing the width of the most famous stellar clusters of the Chinese sky: the 28 lodges. Since the sun was believed to need 365 ¼ days to return to the starting point of its yearly path against the background of the starry sky, Chinese astronomers active in the last centuries BC came to perceive the 28 xiu as a belt marking the legs of solar path and measuring 365 ¼ du 度. Thus, du had strong temporal connotations: it was only with the development of spherical astronomy during the Later Han that the term gradually acquired its standard meaning of “degree”. Moreover, du was also used to quantify the width of the individual lodges: in this context, it probably referred to the time that a lodge needed to cross the meridian. An ancient Chinese astronomer, then, was required to fix his north-south sightline, to observe which stars crossed the meridian at dusk and dawn, and to measure the time a given asterism remained at this point. In the implementation of these tasks, gnomons and clepsydra were his basic tools. While the shadows cast by gnomons — straight vertical sticks placed in the ground—helped to ascertain the time of day, to track the seasonal cycle, and to identify the four directions, clepsydras were used by technicians to observe the appearance and fading of stars and asterisms and to measure the time they are on the meridian.

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2 On the seasonal markers of the Yaodian, see Chen Meidong (2003), 8-10; Ho (1985) 116-117; Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 16. Several scholars have tried to date the Yaodian by means of the asterisms mentioned above. For a summary of the different hypotheses, see Ho (1985), 116; Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 16.
3 Cullen (1996), 3-4.
4 Cullen (1996), 41-42.
5 On centred stars, see Cullen (1996), 19-20; 41-42.
7 For the use of clepsydras in early China, see Needham (1959), 313-314.
1.1.2 Centred stars in the apocrypha

A number of pre-Han and Han sources contain references to and lists of centred stars. Apart from the catalogues of the *Yueling* or the *Hou Hanshu*, the reader may also rely on a few additional remarks embodied in the *Tianwen zhi* 天文志 [Monograph on Heavenly Patterns] of the *Hanshu*. In spite of their undeniable importance in the Han technical context, the theme of centred stars is rarely found among the apocryphal fragments. Certainly, however, whoever wrote the *Kaolingyao* must have been at least aware of the contemporary astronomical practice. Let us first read the following statement:

主春者鳥星，昬中可以種稷。主夏者心星，昬中可以種黍。主秋者虛星，昬中可以種黍。主冬者昴星，昬中則入山可以具器械。王者南面而坐視四星之中者而知民之緩急。急則不賦力役，敬授民時。

The [star] which controls spring is the Bird-star. When it is centred at dusk, it is time to plant millet. The [star] which controls summer is the Heart-star. When it is centred at dusk, it is time to plant glutinous millet. The [star] which controls autumn is the Barren-star. When it is centred at dusk, it is time to plant barley. The [star] which controls winter is the Mane-star. When it is centred at dusk, [for those] getting into the mountains it is time to use [their] tools [to chop wood]. The sovereign faces south and sits to observe the centring of the four stars in order to figure the exigencies of people. Confronted with [seasonal] tasks, he will not levy labour service and will respectfully grant to the people [their] seasons.

The reader finds here the four seasonal markers of the *Yaodian*. This portrayal of the seasonal sky must have been part of the standard representation of the yearly cycle, at least when such themes were treated within exegetical works. This, however, should not lead the interpreter to emphasize the convergences between this apocryphal text and the canonical traditions. In fact, the *Kaolingyao* seems to follow its own way. While endorsing the four seasonal markers of the *Yaodian*, the unknown author also writes:

春一日，日出卯入酉，昴星一度中而昏，斗星十二度中而明。仲夏一日，日出寅入戌，心星五度中而昏，營室十度中而明。秋一日，日出卯入酉，順女四度中而昏，

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8 For the centred stars in the *Yueling*, see, for instance, For the centred stars in the *Yueling*, see, for instance, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 1.1:1; 2.1:6; 3.1:11. In this regard, see also Chen Meidong (2003), 82-84. For the centred stars listed in the *Hou Hanshu*, see *Hou Hanshu (zhi)* 3:3077-3079.

9 *Hanshu* 26:1295.

10 *Choshu isho shusei* 2:36. The last four characters come from the version given in *Gu weishu* 2 in *Weishu jicheng* vol. I, 149. The stars mentioned in the excerpt undoubtedly are the seasonal markers of the *Yaodian*. Han texts usually substituted the Man-star of the classic with the Heart-star mentioned above. In this regard, see *Shangshu dazhuan* 1:1.

東井十一度中而明。仲冬一日，日出辰入申，奎星一度中而昏，氐星九度中而明。【…】

On the first day of [the second month of] spring, the sun rises in [the sector] mao (i.e. due east) and sets in [the sector] you (i.e. due west). [The star] at the first du of [the lodge] Mane is centred and it is dusk. [The star] at the twelfth du of [the lodge] Dipper is centred and it is dawn. In the second month of spring, the sun rises in [the sector] yin (i.e. in the northeast) and sets in [the sector] xu (i.e. in the northwest). [The star] at the fifth du of [the lodge] Heart is centred and it is dusk; the star at the tenth du of [the lodge] House is centred and it is dawn. On the first day of [the second month of] autumn, the sun rises in mao (i.e. due east), and sets in you (i.e. due west). [The star] at the fourth du of [the lodge] Woman is centred and it is dusk, the star at the eleventh du of [the lodge] Well is centred and it is dawn. On the first day of [the second month of] winter, the sun rises in chen (i.e. in the southeast) and sets in shen (i.e. in the southwest). [The star] at the first du of [the lodge] Straddler is centred and it is dusk, the star at the eighth du of [the lodge] Base is centred and it is dawn.12

Let me immediately emphasize that this fragment from the Kaolingyao presents the stars centred on the days of solstices and equinoxes.13 The asterisms mentioned above differ from those listed in further Han sources. The table below helps to visualize the discrepancies:14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kaolingyao</th>
<th>Yueling</th>
<th>Hanshu</th>
<th>Hou Hanshu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring Equinox</strong></td>
<td>Mane</td>
<td>Bow</td>
<td>Willow</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mao 昴 (1st du)</td>
<td>Hu 弧</td>
<td>Liu 柳 (1st du)</td>
<td>Gui 鬼 (4th du)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer solstice</strong></td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Gullet</td>
<td>Base</td>
<td>Base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xin 心 (5th du)</td>
<td>Kang 亢</td>
<td>Di 氐 (13th du)</td>
<td>Di 氐 (12th du)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autumn Equinox</strong></td>
<td>Woman Shunnü 順女 (4th du)</td>
<td>Ox Qianniu 牵牛</td>
<td>Ox Qianniu 牵牛 (3,7th du)</td>
<td>Ox Niu 牛 (5th du)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kui 奎 (1st du)</td>
<td>Wall 壁</td>
<td>Straddler Kui 奎 (8th du)</td>
<td>Straddler 奎 (8th du)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hence, the Kaolingyao neither anticipated the list of the Hou Hanshu nor did it use the

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12 Choshu isho shusei 2:45. For the translation of the names of the asterisms which appear above, see Cullen (1996), 18.

13 Rising and setting spots for equinoxes and solstices are given, for instance, in Jinshu 11:282, 285, 286. For the translation of these passages, see Ho (1966), 63-65.

14 For the data in the table, see Choshu isho shusei 2:45; Lüshi chunqiu 2.1:6, 5.1:22, 8.1:37, 11.1:52; Hanshu 26:1295; Hou Hanshu (zhi) 3:3077-3078.
figures of the *Hanshu* or of the *Yueling*. In other words, the fragments under examination show striking signs of inconsistency with the official data. It is difficult to reconstruct with precision the source or origin of the data mentioned in the *Kaolingyao*. This text — we shall discuss this point elsewhere — contain quite explicit hints at the calendrical system in use under the Qin. Could it be that the values presented in the table above derived from the observational data gathered during the drafting of this almanac? A further surviving fragment of the *Kaolingyao* which seems to explain how to calculate by means of mathematics which stars will cross the meridian at a given time during the year could be a hint in this direction.\(^{15}\) As we shall recall in the section on Chinese calendrical techniques, a traditional almanac was essentially a cluster of mathematical formulae by means of which ancient Chinese technicians not only scheduled days, months, and years but also forecast the position of astral bodies in the sky. Even in this case, however, it would have to be assumed that pre-existent material was used in the drafting of the *Kaolingyao*: thus, in all probability, the authors of this text were not speaking about observational data.

No reference is found about the use of water clocks as instrument for clocking stars on the meridian in the apocrypha. A fragment of the *Kaolingyao* simply hints at the introduction of a new way of tracking daily time: the 100 quarters (*ke* 刻), which composed a day under the Han, are here replaced by a unity of measurement called *qing* 頃. More specifically, a day was believed to last 36 *qing*.\(^{16}\)

### 1.1.3 The lodges in the apocrypha

As mentioned above, the observation of centred stars allowed Chinese technicians to fix the width in *du* of the twenty-eight basic asterisms of the Chinese sky. Though the apocrypha contain little robust data concerning the transit of the stars across the meridian, a number of fragments reveal that whoever wrote these texts was at least informed about the width of the lodges. Before focusing on the relevant apocryphal statements, let us first recall a few basic facts concerning this topic.

Textual evidence as well as archaeological findings testify that different schemes of the 28 lodges were in use during the last centuries BC. A list of *xiu* with their width in *du* is found on lacquer ware excavated in 1977 in Fuyang 阜陽 (Anhui 安徽) in a tomb which dates back to 165 BC.\(^{17}\) According to Wang Shengli 王胜利, this scheme may represent

\(^{15}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 2:50.

\(^{16}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 2:50. Extant sources do not give any details about a system which divided the day in *qing* rather than in *ke*. Even the Liang dynasty, which used the *Kaolingyao* to change the way of tracking the days, did not abandon the *ke* system: according to the *Suishu*, the astronomers of the time simply divided a day into 108 *ke*, which means 3x36. In this regard, see *Suishu* 19:52.

\(^{17}\) For use and features of the *liuren* astrolabe, see Kalinowski (1983), 323-352.
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the system of lodges used as a reference point for the calendar adopted under the Qin.\textsuperscript{18} As late as the end of the first century BC, this system may still have enjoyed some popularity since it seems to influence the data mentioned in Liu Xiang’s *Hongfan zhuan*.\textsuperscript{19} Without doubt, however, this was not the only reference scheme available to Early Han scholars and technicians. The *Huainanzi*, for instance, relies on different data with regard to the dimensions of the *xiu*: if compared with the sayings conserved in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, these match the work of those astronomers who followed the teaching of the pre-imperial technician Shi Shen.\textsuperscript{20} This scheme is very similar to the set officially adopted during the calendrical reform of 104 BC, when emperor Wu promulgated the *Taichu li [Calendrical System of the Great Beginning]*.\textsuperscript{21}

Which system do the apocrypha use? In the calendrical debate of AD 85, for instance, the Later Han scientist Jia Kui quoted an excerpt from the *Kaolingyao* which said:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
斗二十二度,無餘分,冬至在牽牛所起。
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

The [lodge Southern] Dipper covers 22 *du*: there is no rest. On the day of the winter solstice, the sun rises from the beginning of [the lodge] Ox.\textsuperscript{22}

Hence, the width of Ox in the system of the *Kaolingyao* was 22 *du*. This fits the Qin system, while differing quite considerably from the usual 26 *du* \(\frac{1}{4}\) given in the standard scheme of the Han.\textsuperscript{23} Hence, it cannot be ruled out that this apocryphal treatise contained the older width-table. Let us now consider what the Later Han technician Liu Hong said in the calendrical debate of AD 175:

\begin{center}
\begin{verbatim}
而光、晃曆以考靈曜為本,二十八宿度數及冬至日所在,與今史官甘、石舊文錯異,不可考校; 以今渾天圖儀檢天文,亦不合於考靈曜。
\end{verbatim}
\end{center}

Yet, [Feng] Guang and [Chen] Huang take the *Examining the Luminaries* as reference point. [The data of this text on] the width in *du* of the twenty-eight lodges or on the position of the sun [against the stars] on the day of the winter solstice differ from [the data of] the ancient documents [written by] Gan [De] and Shi [Shen] [available] nowadays in the offices of the [Grand] Historian. Hence, they cannot be confirmed. [The data obtained by a] counterchecking of the heavenly patterns with the modern armillary

\textsuperscript{18} See Wang Shengli (2004), 51-52.
\textsuperscript{19} Even if this work has been lost, fragments of it are often mentioned in the Tang astrological handbook *Kaiyuan zhanjing*. On this point, see Chen Meidong (2003), 70.
\textsuperscript{20} *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 106, 107, 108, 109, 110; Chen Meidong (2003), 70.
\textsuperscript{21} According to the Later Han technician Jia Kui, the *Taichu* calendar, which was inaugurated in 105 BC, calculated the width of the Lodge Niu and Dipper just as Shi Shen did. *Hou Hanshu (zhí)* 2:3027. In this regard, see also Cullen (1996), 18.
\textsuperscript{22} *Hou Hanshu* 2:3027.
\textsuperscript{23} See Wang Shengli (2004), 51-52.
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sphere likewise do not match [those of the text] Examining the Luminaries.24

Here Liu Hong blames the two court officials and technicians Feng Guang 馮光 and Chen Huang 陳晃 for the use of the Kaolingyao as valid reference text. The Later Han technician is particularly explicit in stressing that this book presented values relating to the width of the xiu which were incompatible with the scripts of ancient technician, and with the data obtained by means of observation with the armillary sphere. The only possible conclusion is that this text contained a different system. Since the value for the width of Ox given in the Kaolingyao fits the old scheme of the Qin, we could hypothesize that the authors of this text were simply re-proposing the data used in the past. As in the case of the centred stars, then, we must once again consider the possibility that whoever wrote the Kaolingyao was working with ancient technical sources.

The remarks concerning the width of the lodges in the Kaolingyao should not be regarded as valid for the whole apocryphal corpus. Numerous fragments mentioned under the heading Yuanmingbao, for instance, testify that this text adhered to Han official guidelines since the data presented here are perfectly consistent with the values adopted under the Early Han.25 This, in turn, introduces a feature of the apocryphal corpus which we shall meet again and again, namely the discrepant positions defended or maintained within the corpus.

1.2 Measuring the shadows

The brief discussion concerning the presentation and analysis of centred stars and lodges has highlighted the dependence of a few apocryphal texts from pre-existent sources. It is now time to turn to gnomons and shadows in early astronomical praxis.

When measured at noon, the length of a shadow will be at its shortest on the day of the summer solstice and at its longest on the day of the winter solstice:26 Chinese sky-watchers and calendrical experts used this method to schedule these days of technical, religious, and social importance.27

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24 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3039.
25 Choshu isho shusei 4A:78, 81.
26 On the use of gnomon in ancient astronomy, see Wilson (1997), 8-9; concerning the use of gnomon for fixing the Chinese solstices, see Cullen (1996), 109-110. See also Needham (1959), 284-294.
27 On the cultural importance of the solstices, see Frazer (1994), 361. In regard to China, see Bujard’s analysis of the jiao sacrifice which was usually connected to the day of the winter solstice. Bujard (2000). With regard to the summer solstice, Needham writes “In the Hou Han shu (History of the Later Han dynasty) we find that the summer solstice (late June) was then considered the right time for ‘changing the water’, i.e. digging new wells and cleaning out the old ones. From the solstice until August, making big fires and melting or casting metals were prohibited. This cleaning out of wells in the summer was again analogised with the obtaining of new fire by boring of wood or the use of a burning-mirror at other times of the year, especially the winter solstice.” See Needham (2004), 80.
The use of gnomons for measuring the length of solstice shadows is testified in many early texts which, however, also reveal that empirical data played a rather ambiguous role in Han China. In the calendrical system inaugurated in AD 85, for instance, the values concerning the length of shadows on the day of the winter and summer solstices are, at least, surprising. The $1.5 \text{ chi}$ and $13 \text{ chi}$-long shadows for the summer and winter solstices respectively certainly do not derive from direct measurement since they are simply the values given in the *Zhouli* [Rites of the Zhou]. The fact that even an advanced time-system could rely, at least officially, on dogmatic values certainly testifies to the influence of classical tradition on technical disciplines. This, however, does not imply that Chinese technicians were generally unaware of the discrepancy existing between data gathered by means of observation and the canonical prescriptions. In the *Zhoubi suanjing* [Arithmetic Classic of the Zhou Gnomon] — a composite technical text probably assembled towards the end of the Early Han dynasty — the reader finds different data: $13.5 \text{ chi}$ is the length of the shadow of the winter solstice and $1.6 \text{ chi}$ is the length of the shadow of the summer solstice. Moreover, the *Hanshu* says:

中道者，黃道，一曰光道。【…】夏至至於東井，北近極，故晷短；立八尺之表，而晷景長尺五寸八分。冬至至於牽牛，遠極，故晷長；立八尺之表，而晷景長丈三尺一寸四分。春秋分日至婁﹑角，去極中，而晷中；立八尺之表，而晷景長七尺三寸六分。

The Way of the Middle is the Yellow Path: somebody calls it the Shining Way. At the summer solstice, [the sun] reaches the [lodge] Eastern Well. Its distance from the [celestial] pole is minimal and therefore the shadow is the shortest [of the year]. Place an $8 \text{ chi}$ gnomon and the shadow will be $1 \text{ chi} 5 \text{ cun}$ and $8 \text{ fen}$ long. At the winter solstice, [the sun] reaches the [lodge] Eastern Well. Its distance from the [celestial] pole is maximal and therefore the shadow is the longest [of the year]. Place a $8 \text{ chi}$-gnomon and the shadow will be $1 \text{ zhang} 3 \text{ chi} 1 \text{ cun}$ and $4 \text{ fen}$ long. At the autumn and spring equinoxes, the sun reaches the [lodge] Harvester and Horn. Its distance from the [celestial] pole is medium and therefore the [length of the] shadow is the mean [value]. Place a $8 \text{ chi}$

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28 For the data concerning the length of the solstitial shadows, see *Zhouli* 10, *Diguan dasitu* (*Shisanjing zhushu*, vol. I, 704); *Hou Hanshu* (zh) 3:3077-3078; Cullen (1996), 104-111. See also Needham (1959), 290-291. According to the *Suishu*, a number of Han and post-Han calendrical systems were based on these dogmatic values, a sure sign of the importance of classical studies even within a strictly technical context. In this regard, see *Suishu* 19:524. With regard to the Later Han calendar and to its superiority over early Han almanacs, see Sivin (1969).

29 *Zhoubi suanjing* 2A:18; Cullen (1996), 104-111.

30 As is well known, the term *huangdao* usually refers to the ecliptic. However, as Cullen suggests, it is necessary to exercise caution when adopting this rendering for Han sources. In the case of Ban Gu, in particular, there is no safe proof for assuming that he was fully aware of the importance that the ecliptic had gained in the technical circles of his time. In this regard, see Cullen (1996), 55-59.

31 The use of an $8 \text{ chi}$ gnomon was apparently standard in Han China. Nevertheless, a different length ($10-\text{chi}$) is mentioned in the *Huainanzi*. On this, see Cullen (1993), 272.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

gnomon and the shadow will be 7 chi 3 cun and 6 fen long.32

The excerpt above shows clearly that Early Han values for the length of solstitial shadows could diverge from the classical tradition. Without doubt, the acceptance of different data did not depend from the cultural background of the people who applied them. Liu Xiang, certainly one of the most influential ru of his time, used the values given in the Hanshu for his Honglan zhan 洪範傳 [Tradition of the Great Plan]. Interestingly, even in a work which was conceived as an exegetical reflection on a chapter of the Documents, the Han scholar evidently preferred to trust empirical data rather than relying on the canon.33

When wondering about the apocryphal description of the use of a gnomon, the interpreter may easily recognize the ties between these texts and data presented in contemporary works. Apart the shadow-table given in the ambiguous text known as Tongguayan,34 we do find in the chenwei a tendency to reproduce the wordings of other sources. The Kaolingyao, which even belongs to those apocryphal texts concerned with technical issues, echoes the Zhouli:

日永，景長尺五寸。日短，景長尺三寸。

On the longest day [of the year], the shadow is one chi and five cun long. On the shortest day, the shadow measures one zhang and three chi.35

A different approach was followed by those who worked at the drafting of the apocrypha of the Xiaojing:

日立八尺竿於中庭，日中度其日晷。冬至之日，日在牽牛之初，晷長丈三尺五寸，晷進退一寸，則日行進退千里。【…】

Place an eight-chi long stick in the middle courtyard and wait until the sun is centred in order to measure the length of the solar shadow. On the day of the winter solstice, the sun is at the beginning of the [lodge] Ox. The shadow is 1 zhang 3 chi and five cun long. The

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32 Hanshu 26:1294, Cullen (1996), 55-56. As for the equinoctial shadows, it is important to stress that they were simply the arithmetic mean of the values for the solstices. A similar point is made in the Zhoubi suanjing. In this regard, see Cullen (1996), 109.

33 Suishu 19:523

34 For the table of the Tongguayan, see Choshu isho shusei 1B:49-69. As mentioned in the first chapter of this work, the Tongguayan is one of the problematic wefts attached to the Changes. In a recent study, Wu Jiabi 武家璧 has convincingly argued that the figures for the length of the shadows given in this text cannot be regarded as empirical values. In this regard, see Wu Jiabi (2007).

35 Choshu isho shusei 2:36. The fragment must be incorrect in regard to the data concerning the length of the shadow on the day of the summer solstice. In all probability, the second chi has to be read as zhang and the second cun as chi. Only in this way, in fact, may we get a verisimilar value for the length of the shadow of the summer solstice.
shadow increases and decreases by a \textit{cun}: the sun increases and decreases by 1000 \textit{li}.\textsuperscript{36}

This apocryphal fragment is interesting at least from two viewpoints. First, it introduces a value for the winter solstice shadow which differs from the dogmatic 13 \textit{chi} of the \textit{Zhouli}. Nonetheless, we cannot conclude that we have here a result of direct observation: as mentioned above, the 13.5 value was proposed in the \textit{Zhoubi suanjing}. This element, which is only the first hint at the link between \textit{chenwei} and this technical text, seems to suggest that the authors of the apocrypha, at least as we know them today, relied on pre-existent sources when dealing with the solstitial shadows.

The second interesting aspect of the fragment presented above concerns the statement about the decrease in the length of the shadow. We have here one of the most important postulates of ancient Chinese astronomy, namely the “gnomon rule”, on the basis of which the shadow cast by a gnomon was assumed to decrease by one \textit{cun} 寸 for every 1000 \textit{li} due south.\textsuperscript{37} In the \textit{Suishu} we read:

又考靈曜、周髀、張衡靈憲及鄭玄注周官，並云：「日影於地，千里而差一寸。」

Moreover, the \textit{Examining the Luminaries}, the \textit{Zhou Gnomon}, the \textit{Sublime Decrees} by Zhang Heng and even the commentary to the \textit{Rites of Zhou} by Zheng Xuan maintain: “The solar shadow on the earth: for every 1000 \textit{li}, it decreases by a \textit{cun}.”\textsuperscript{38}

Evidently, the apocrypha to the \textit{Xiaojing} as well as the \textit{Kaolingyao} reflected a deep conviction of the Han technical world. We shall review elsewhere in this chapter the importance of this principle and, above all, the role it played in fixing the distance between sun and earth.

1.3 The armillary sphere

During the Han, Chinese technicians gradually came to perceive the cosmos in terms of a huge revolving sphere with the astral bodies attached to it, with the sun following the ecliptic, and with the earth at its centre. In spite of the undeniable advantages that a spherical cosmos offers to technicians endeavouring to keep track of astral motion,\textsuperscript{39} the success of the “celestial sphere” model (\textit{huntian} 滾天), was not straightforward, nor did it lack contradictions: it began to be fully accepted and acknowledged only in the second century AD. Among the factors which contributed decisively to the success of this way of conceiving the cosmos, the use of armillary spheres has played a role of

\textsuperscript{36} Choshu isho shusei 5:116.
\textsuperscript{37} Cullen (1996), 111-115.
\textsuperscript{38} Suishu 19:525.
\textsuperscript{39} On the celestial sphere model, see Kaler (1996), 14-18. For a detailed discussion of the success of the \textit{huntian}, see Cullen (1996).
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primary importance. From Wudi’s reign onward, Chinese technicians successfully worked at the improvement of observational instruments: the first documented experiments with armillary spheres were probably carried out in this period. According to Yang Xiong, three technicians were involved in the construction of the armilla: Luoxia Hong, Xianyu Wangren, and Geng Shouchang. By the middle of the first century BC, then, technicians were already using the armilla to track solar and lunar motion or, as the technicians said, “to check the form of the revolution [of astral bodies] in the heavens” (kaoyan tianyun zhuang). Since the apocrypha must have been written in the following decades, it is interesting to wonder whether the still extant fragments contain some references to this new instrument. In this regard, the Tang astronomer Li Chunfeng gives us some interesting information:

虞書曰：「在璇璣玉衡，以齊七政。」考靈曜云：「【…】昏明主時，乃命中星觀玉儀之遊。」鄭玄謂以玉為渾儀也。春秋文曜鉤云：「唐堯即位，羲和立渾儀。」此則儀象之設，其來遠矣。

The Book of Yu [in the Documents] says: “Shun examined the pearl-adorned turning sphere, with its transverse tube of jade, and reduced to a harmonious system (the movements of) the Seven Directors”. The Examining the Luminaries says: “[…] [The stars centred] on dusk and dawn rule over the seasons: [Yao?] named the centred stars and observed [their] flowing with the jade-tube.” Zheng Xuan said that the “jade-tube” was nothing but the armillary sphere. The [text attached to the] Annals, The Hook: Luminaries and Patterns says: “When Tang Yao was enthroned, Xi and He built the armillary sphere.” All these wordings concern the construction of the armilla: this is the proof that its origin is very ancient.

In the excerpt above, Li Chunfeng tries to demonstrate the ancient origins of the armillary sphere: hence, he quotes from the Shujing and from the chenwei. The Kaolingyao speaks of a “jade tube” which is glossed by Zheng Xuan as a hint at the armillary sphere. Given the context of the fragment, we may be certain that the yu yi

40 Cullen forcefully stresses that the slow development of the huntian derived from the combined action of technical progress — the armilla — and theoretical effort. In this regard, see Cullen (1996), esp. 37-39. For the early Chinese armillary spheres, see Needham (1959), 339-343.
41 Fayan 10:24; Cullen (1996), 61. According to the Shiji, Luoxia Hong —a technician from Sichuan— contributed to the calendrical reform of 104 BC. In this regard, see Shiji 26:1260. Xianyu Wangren was active during the calendrical debate of 78 BC. See Hanshu 21A:978. Geng Shouchang was a high official of the same period. In this regard, see Hanshu 24A:1141.
42 Hou Hanshu (zhì) 2:3029.
44 According to the Hou Hanshu, the Wenyaogou simply said: “Xi and He established the “hun” (Xi He li hun 羲和立渾). See Hou Hanshu (zhì) 2:3037.
45 Jinshu 11:284.
was a tool for observing the sky. Moreover, the use of the term *yi*, which was certainly used for referring to the armilla under the Han,\(^{46}\) seems to suggest that whoever wrote the text was aware of the existence of this instrument. The fragment of the *Wenyaogou* as well as a *chenwei* statement listed under the heading “Observational Instruments” (*hunyi* 渾儀) in the *Taiping yulan* further corroborate this hypothesis.\(^{47}\) It still has to be clarified whether this awareness implied the acceptance of the idea “spherical cosmos”.

### 1.4 Portraying the cosmos: germs of cosmography under the Han

The brief discussion on the armillary sphere brings us to one of the most outstanding achievements of the Han era, namely the emerging of the idea of a spherical cosmos. Chinese technicians used to present the development of the *hunyi* by comparing it to the decline of the allegedly older model, namely the *gaitian* 蓋天 cosmography. Traditionally, the *gaitian* is linked to the *Zhoubi suanjing*:

天體古言天者有三家，一曰蓋天，二曰宣夜，三曰渾天。漢靈帝時，蔡邕於朔方上書，言「宣夜之學，絕無師法，周髀術數具存，考驗天狀，多所違失。惟渾天近得其情，今史官候臺所用銅儀則其法也【…】」蔡邕所謂周髀者，即蓋天之說也。

Concerning the Structure of the heavens, in antiquity, three schools spoke about the heavens. The first was the Canopy of Heaven, the second was the Announcement of the Night, and the third was the Spherical Heavens.\(^{48}\) Under emperor Ling of the Han, Cai Yong wrote in a letter to Shuofang: “About the form of the cosmos: The teachings of the Announcement of the Night have been interrupted and there is no master and no model. The techniques of the [school] “Zhou Gnomon” are still extant. Yet, the observation (i.e. the examination and verification of the form) of the heavens [makes clear that] it has many mistakes and misunderstandings. Only the “Spherical Heavens” comes close to grasp the facts [of the heavens]. The bronze armilla which is now used by the officials at the imperial observatory is modelled on it. […]” What Cai Yong calls “Zhou Gnomon” is identical to the Canopy of Heaven. […]\(^{49}\)

Before addressing the role played by cosmographical matters in Han scholarly circles, it is appropriate to recall a few basic facts with regard to the text mentioned in the excerpt above, namely the *Zhoubi suanjing*. Even if Chinese tradition has usually presented this work as a sort of *manifesto* of the *gaitian*, recent studies have demonstrated that it actually encompasses several strata of contents. More specifically, the *gaitian*

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46 See, for instance, *Hou Hanshu (zhí)* 2:3029.
47 *Taiping yulan* 2:10.
48 For the translation of the name of the three schools, see Ho (1985), 49. For an updated portrayal of the ways in which ancient Chinese depicted the cosmos, see Chen Meidong (2003), 137-143.
49 *Jinshu* 12:278; Ho (1985), 49.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

cosmography, which is traditionally linked to the idea of flat heavens, seems to characterize only a part of the text, namely that illustrating the dialogue between Master Chen 陳 and his disciple. According to Cullen, other parts of the texts often reveal an attempt to work with spherical astronomy. In fact, it is probable that a few technicians active in the last decades BC tried to combine the *huntian* with other models: as we shall see in this section, this line of reasoning also appear to characterize the apocrypha.  

Even if later technicians seem to hint at a heated debate among Han followers of different cosmographic models, Han sources bring to light the relative marginality of such issues. As for the technical impact, it is undeniable that the *huntian* gained the attention of a few outstanding technicians. Its influence, for instance, stands out in the work of the Later Han scholar Jia Kui, who compelled his colleagues in the calendrical field to realize the importance of the ecliptic. Nevertheless, it is important to recall that cosmography — the representation in space of the cosmos — certainly was not the focus of Han technicians. As Cullen forcefully emphasizes, the primary concern of these ancient sky watchers was to track heavenly motion in order to draft a better and more effective calendar. Thus, the interest in a portrayal of the cosmos was of secondary importance: the undeniable advantages in the calendrical field were among the most important factors which led to the success of the *huntian* model.

The functional importance of the *huntian* under the Han must be regarded as significant since it may imply a somewhat limited interest in cosmography. Interestingly, the bibliography of the *Hanshu* does not quote titles which could suggest a cosmographic content. This, obviously, does not mean that works on the subject did not exist at all: rather, it implies that people active in this field were unable to reach a wide audience among those engaged in other disciplines relating to the heavens, such as astrology or calendrical practice. Only in this way may we understand why apparently well-known alternative cosmographies like the *xuanye* 宣夜 often recalled in later sources are barely mentioned in Han documents. In the same way, the *Zhoubi suanjing* — a text which must have existed in some form as early as the beginning of the first century AD — is completely ignored in the official chronicles.

If the technical community seems to attach importance to cosmography mostly because of the advantages it offered in calendrical activity, how did the wider cultural community view the issue? Interestingly, one of the few debates explicitly concerned

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50  The *Zhoubi suanjing* is not mentioned in the bibliography of the *Hanshu*: the analysis of its contents suggests that the text, as it has been passed down to us, was assembled during Wang Mang’s interregnum. For the reconstruction of the path which may have led to the formation of this work, see Cullen (1996), 138-156.


with the form of the cosmos took place between two well-known exponents of *ru* circles, namely Yang Xiong and Huan Tan. Initially sceptical about the workability of the *huntian*, Yang Xiong finally acquiesced to the arguments proposed by Huan Tan who vehemently attacked older models.\(^53\) As for other prominent *ru* of the time, it seems certain that Liu Xiang was well acquainted with the *huntian*. We do know, in fact, that he is also credited with the drafting of the *Wujilun* [On the Five Markers], a treatise which aimed to illustrate the shortcomings (*lie shi fei* 列是非) of unofficial calendrical systems circulating at the time.\(^54\) A short excerpt from this text quoted during the Later Han calendrical debates testifies to Liu’s knowledge of the celestial sphere.\(^55\)

The concern of a few outstanding exponents of the *ru* circles for issues relating to the heavens will be a recurrent theme in this study. Nevertheless, it is improbable that each scholar active under the Han was able to carry on a discussion on the advantages of the *huntian* and the shortcomings of the *gaitian*. Several *ru*, while noticing the advancements of the time, were unfamiliar with the specific facets of the issue. This is certainly so in the case of Ban Gu. Cullen has noted that the *Hanshu* does not reveal the awareness of the *huntian*.\(^56\) More generally, one could say that Ban Gu shows a remarkable lack of interest in such questions.\(^57\)

### 1.5 Traces of cosmography in the apocrypha

#### 1.5.1 Traces of cosmography in the apocrypha: in search of the *huntian* model

An interpreter of the apocrypha cannot avoid dwelling for a while on the possibility that these texts encompassed a layer dealing with the portrayal of the cosmos. Since the *chenwei* phenomenon flourished at the end of the Early Han, one could rightly expect to find some reference to the ecliptic, or, more generally, to the possibility of describing the form of the heavens in different ways. Obviously, the fragmentariness of the still extant corpus is a serious obstacle when looking for a precise reconstruction of the apocryphal heavens. At first sight, for instance, the relevant fragments are few. The

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\(^{53}\) Yang Xiong initially favoured the *gaitian* scheme. He even drew a diagram to portray it. Huan Tan managed to convince his friend of the unreliability of the *gaitian* and of the trustworthiness of the celestial sphere model. For a full discussion of the debate between Huan Tan and Yang Xiong, see Cullen (1996), 59-60. The force of the technical arguments advanced by Huan Tan later led Yang Xiong to totally repudiate the *gaitian*. In this regard, see the discussion in *Songshu* 23:679.

\(^{54}\) *Hanshu* 21A:979.

\(^{55}\) The *Wujilun* was quoted by Jia Kui during the debate concerning the calendrical reform of AD 85. See *Hou Hanshu* (zhi) 2:3029.

\(^{56}\) Cullen (1996), 55-57.

\(^{57}\) The Song historian Shen Yue, for instance, complains about the scarcity of accounts given in the *Hanshu*. *Songshu* 23:673.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

*huntian* model, as it was understood by scholars such as Huan Tan and Jia Kui, seems to be virtually absent from the still extant saying of the *chenwei*: the ecliptic is explicitly mentioned only once.\(^{58}\) Nevertheless, from the calendrical debates of the first century AD, we know that the *Dilanxi* and the *Zhenyaodu* discussed in some detail the yearly motion of the moon.\(^{59}\) In regard to the form of the cosmos, it is essential to take into account what Cullen has pointed out in his work on the *Zhoubi suanjing*: a few fragments are actually explicit quotations of themes discussed in this technical work.\(^{60}\) The *Yuansheng*, for instance, mentions the theme “seven heng (qi heng 七衡)” which is discussed at length in the *Zhoubi suanjing*. The seven barriers were imaginary circles centred on the celestial pole which portrayed the daily solar path at specific times of the year.\(^{61}\) A few authors of the apocrypha, then, could have been at least acquainted with texts dealing with cosmographic issues. Moreover, a few extant fragments reveal the attempt to work with the idea of a spherical cosmos. Only in this way, for instance, may we understand a number of sentences speaking of a heavenly circle (*zhoutian* 周天) measuring 1,071,000 *li*. Let us immediately stress that this value also occurs in the *Zhoubi suanjing*. Besides marking the extension of the fourth barrier, namely the imaginary circle centred on the pole designed by the sun on the equinoctial days, this value also is used for defining the circuit of the solar path among the 28 lodges, in other words the ecliptic.\(^{62}\) Let me now cite the early medieval astronomer Wang Fan 王蕃:

【…】洛書甄燿度、 春秋考異郵皆云周天一百七萬一千裏，一度為二千九百三十二里七十一步二尺七寸四分四百八十七分之三百六十二。【…】

[...*The Script of the Luo River-The Measure: Observing the Luminaries* and the [*text attached to the*] *Annals, The Stamp: Examining Anomalies* both maintain that the heavenly circumference measures 1,071,000 *li*. Consequently, one *du* is 2,932 *li*, 71 *bu*, 2 *chi*, 7 *cun*, and four *fen* 362/487. [...]*]\(^{63}\)

Wang Fan’s words seem to testify that a few apocryphal texts worked with the idea of a 1,071,000 *li* circle: it is now necessary to dwell on this point.

1.5.2 The “celestial sphere” of the Han and the celestial sphere of the apocrypha

Apocryphal fragments dealing with cosmography have already received a certain amount of attention in scholarly circles.\(^{64}\) Thus, we shall recall only two thematic

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58 Choshu isho shusei 6:54.
59 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3035.
60 Choshu isho shusei 5:21; Cullen (1996), 125.
61 Cullen (1996), 70-71, 183-188.
62 Cullen (1996), 179.
63 Songshu 23:675.
64 Readers will find discussions on the apocryphal fragments dealing with the form of the heavens in
peculiarities of the *chenwei*: the multi-layered heavens and the moving earth. A long quotation in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* — ambiguously listed under the entry *Zhoubi* — seems to be a summary of the portrayal of the cosmos traceable in several apocryphal fragments and, above all, in the *Kaolingyao*.

A *du* of the sun [in one day] is equivalent to slightly more than 2,932 *li*. On the summer solstice, the shadow is one *chi* and four *cun*. On the winter solstice, it is one *zhang* three *chi* and five *cun* long. The heavenly circumference is 1,071,000 *li*: the diameter is 357,000 *li*. Within the four corners, there are 15,000 *li*. Outside, there are likewise 15,000 *li*. Therefore, the four paths of the sun in the sky cover 30,000 *li*.65

One of the particularities of this excerpt concerns its convergence with several fragments gathered under the heading *Kaolingyao*.66 In this apocryphal text, in fact, the reader finds the 1,071,000 *li* celestial sphere with the value of a *du* fixed at 2,932 *li*. As we have seen above, this occurred both in the *Zhenyaodu* and in the *Kaoyixie*. The *Kaolingyao* seems to mention a few other themes briefly mentioned in the excerpt presented above. Besides speaking of the “four corners” (*si biao* 四表) or the four paths (*si you* 四遊), the text also stresses that outside the 28 lodges there are 15,000 *li* in each direction (*er shi ba xiu zhi wai ge you wan wu qian li* 二十八宿之外各有萬五千里).67

The cosmos described above seems to be a spherical one because both the excerpt of the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* and the fragment from the *Kaolingyao* mentions the central position of the earth in the heavens.68 In the same way, it seems hardly conceivable that we have here a standard description of the Han *huntian*. The heavens of the *Kaolingyao* clearly form a multi-layered structure.69 The value of 1,071,000 *li*, for instance, simply refers to the circuit of the 28 lodges. Yet, the whole heavenly circumference also encompasses the zones beyond the lodges which extend 15,000 *li* in each direction. Hence, the stars are not viewed as bodies attached to the celestial vault, as in the case of the *huntian* model. This applies to the sun as well, since the *Kaolingyao* says that in the first month

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66 *Choshu isho shusei* 2:32, 34. The only difference between these wordings and the quotation from the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* seems to be the name given to the pillars of the heavens: they are the arrival spots of the “four paths” (*si you zhi ji* 四遊之極) for the *Kaolingyao* and the limits of the circuit of the lodges for the text mentioned in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*.
67 The structure of the cosmos of the *Kaolingyao* has been discussed in Cullen (1977), 225-230; Chen Meidong (2003), 168-171.
68 Cullen (1977), 232.
69 Cullen (1977), 232.
the sun is 104,000 li far from the earth and 80,000 li far from the heavens.70

How did the sun move within the limits of the celestial vault? According to the obscure text mentioned in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, the sun travelled southwards in winter, eastwards in the autumn, westwards in spring, and northwards in summer. A further body accompanied the sun, namely the earth: the earth descended and ascended within the heavens (*di yi sheng jiang yu tian zhi zhong* 地亦升降于天之中). The text continues:

冬至之後，日轉北移，非專日之移也。亦由天地遊而南故物有生而不死。夏至之後，日轉南移，非專日之移也。亦由天地遊而北，故物有伏而不生。二分之日出卯入酉正與地上平。

After the winter solstice, the sun turns and moves northwards. This, however, happens not only because of solar motion: it happens also because the earth moves southwards in the heavens (i.e. cosmos). Therefore, among the things [on the earth], there is life and no death. After the summer solstice, the sun turns and moves southwards. This, however, happens not only because of solar motion: it happens also because the earth moves northwards in the heavens (i.e. cosmos). Therefore, among the things [on the earth], there is death and no life. On the two equinoctial days, the sun rises in [the sector] mao (i.e. due east) and sets in [the sector] you (i.e. due west): [the sun] is on the same level as the earth. […]71

Hence, the motion of sun and earth was in some way specular to each other. The *Kaolingyao* seems to attract the attention of the reader to the same points. The text also forcefully emphasizes the fact that the earth moves:

地有四遊。冬至地上北而西三萬里。夏至地下行南而東復三萬里。春秋分其中矣。地恆動而不止。人不知，譬如人在大舟中閉牖而坐舟，行不覺也。

The earth has the four paths. [From] the winter solstice [onwards], the earth rises to the north and [then turns to] west [by covering] 30,000 li. [From] the summer solstice [onwards], it descends to the south and then [then turns to] to the east by covering 30,000 li. At the equinoxes, it is in the middle. The earth moves constantly without ever stopping: men do not notice it. It is as if somebody was sitting in a big boat with closed windows: [the boat] moves but [he] does not realize it.72

Thus, the authors the *Kaolingyao* were not supporting the standard *huntian* model: with the presentation of the heavens as a multi-layered structure, they clashed against the

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70 Choshu isho shusei 2:45. This point, which is not explicitly mentioned in the quotation of the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, must have been an implication of the text seen by the Tang astronomer Qutan Xida. In fact, he clearly states that the solar path lies on the same level that the four corners: it does not descend and it does not ascend (*ridao yu sibiao deng bu sheng bu jiang* 日道與四表等不升不降). See *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 2:203.


72 Choshu isho shusei 2:32; Chen Meidong (2003), 168; Cullen (1977), 226.
idea of a huge revolving sphere with the astral bodies attached to it. Yet, the few remarks about the moving earth have earned them a place in every modern compendium of Chinese astronomy.  

1.5.3 The distance between Heaven and earth

Under the Liang, the technician Zu Xuan wrote in a memorial to the throne:

【…】渾天之理，信而有徵。輒遺說，附渾儀云。考靈曜先儒求得天地相去十七萬八千五百里。【…】

[…] In regard to the principles of the “celestial sphere”, they are trustworthy and demonstrable. All the wordings which have been handed down rely on what the armillary sphere says (i.e. on the data obtained by observing the heavens with the armilla). Moreover, early scholars and the [text] Examining the Luminaries found out that Heaven and earth are 178,500 li far apart.

Hence, the Kaolingyao apparently maintained that the distance between Heaven and earth was 178,500 li. This value could be regarded as a huntian facet: with the value of $\pi$ fixed at 3, in fact, the diameter of a 1,071,000 li circumference is 357,000 li. Since the earth of the huntian model is assumed to be at the centre of the celestial sphere, the length of the radius — in this case 178,500 li — also indicates the distance between Heaven and earth.

When adapting these basic facts to the cosmos portrayed in the Kaolingyao, the reader should first consider the following point: are we speaking of the heavens where the sun lies or of the four corners? Interestingly, the Tang commentator of the Zhouvi suanjing says that the value 178,500 concerns the distance between an observer on the earth and the circuit of the 28 lodges. Yet, such a statement is hardly congruent with the contents of the Kaolingyao: why should people fix the distance between earth and lodges when beyond the xiu there are still 15,000 li in each direction? This fact must have surprised Zheng Xuan as well. The Later Han scholar, in fact, tried to make some sense of the material gathered under the title Kaolingyao by shifting the reader’s attention from the distance earth/lodges to the distance earth/celestial vault and by concluding that Heaven and earth are 193,500 li apart. He probably started his own line of reasoning from the 178,500 which was mentioned in the Kaolingyao as the distance between heaven and

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73 On this point, see Needham (1959), 224.
74 Suishu 19:514
75 For the theme distance between Heaven and earth, see Needham (1959), 229.
76 In this regard, see Ho (1985), 72.
77 This is, in fact, the case of the apocryphal text Zhenyaodu. In this regard, see Choshu isho shusei 6:177.
78 Zhoubi suanjing 2A:29.
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earth. To this, he finally added the 15,000 li, namely the distance between the circuit of the lodges and the four angles of the heavens.79 Zheng Xuan’s difficulties in interpreting and explaining the Kaolingyao certainly underscore the lack of clarity of the original text. A further point which seems to fit this line of reasoning concerns the discussion of the “gnomon principle” according to which the length of the shadows decreases by one cun for each li due south. As explained by Cullen in his work on the Zhoubi suanjing, the application of the principle to a solstitial shadow measuring, for example, 1,5 chi (= 15 cun) necessarily implies that the sun will cast no shadow 15,000 li due south. Finally, an observer interested in calculating the distance between sun and the subsolar point could proceed with the following equation:80

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1,5:8=15,000:X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,5 chi (=15 cun) → length of the shadow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 chi → height of the gnomon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 li → the distance between observer and subsolar point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X li → distance between sun and subsolar point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X=80,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When reading the equation presented above within a spherical heaven in which the sun is attached to the celestial vault, we should conclude the radius of the heavenly circumference and, per extension, the distance between Heaven and earth measured 80,000 li. Thus, whoever wrote the Kaolingyao, while formally conforming to the “gnomon principle”, did not apply it for calculating the dimensions of the cosmos. During the medieval era, a few technicians highlighted this point. Wang Fan explained that the points made in the Kaolingyao could not fit the “gnomon principle”.81 Zu Xuan explicitly stated that the Kaolingyao could not stand up to a counterchecking based on the exam of shadows (yi guiying yan zhi shi yu guo duo 以晷影驗之，失於過多).82

1.5.4 Featuring the cosmography of the apocrypha

A modern interpreter is often tempted to explain the lack of clarity of the chenwei by referring to the fragmentariness of the corpus. While playing often a role, this is not the only reason for the ambiguity of the material still extant. As Christopher Cullen has emphasized and as we have recalled, early scholars — Zheng Xuan or medieval technicians — were often unable to fully grasp the thematic and argumentative threads

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79 On Zheng Xuan’s attempts to explain the wording of the Kaolingyao, see Cullen (1977), 226-227.
80 Cullen (1996), 78-79.
81 Songshu 23:675-676.
82 Suishu 19:514
of these writings. This, in turn, can only imply that even as early as the second century AD, a text such as the *Kaolingyao* did not encompass a reliable and comprehensible discussion on the working of the heavens.

After having pointed at the ambiguity and contradictoriness of the *Kaolingyao*, we should now on the ways in which the cosmographical material of the *chenwei* fits into the Han cultural landscape. From the remarks presented above, we know that a few medieval technicians considered the cosmography of the *Kaolingyao* to be invalid and substantially wrong. Their Han colleagues, however, appear to have ignored the shortcomings of this text. A reader of the chronicles could even hypothesize that some of the most talented technicians of the time gave credence to it. In fact, Jia Kui — the Chinese “discoverer” of the ecliptic — mentions the *Kaolingyao* in one of his memorials to the throne in occasion of the calendrical reform of AD 85. When dealing with these (apparent) contradictions, the reader of the *chenwei* should stress some basic points.

With regard to the theme “distance between heaven and earth”, skilled Han technicians would certainly have been able to confute the apocryphal statements by simply applying the “gnomon principle”, just as Wang Fan did in the medieval era. In all probability, however, experienced people like Jia Kui, Zhang Heng, Cai Yong, and Liu Hong, were more concerned with calendrical matters than with wrong cosmographic assumptions. This, in turn, would be consistent with the remarks at the beginning of this section, namely the secondary role played by a spatial portrayal of the heavens.

With regard to Jia Kui’s mentioning of the *Kaolingyao*, let us stress that the cosmographic model he supported is incompatible with this apocryphal treatise. While insisting on the idea of a spherical cosmos, the authors of the *Kaolingyao* betray a basic *huntian* postulate — the astral bodies are attached to the celestial vault — transforming the heavens in a multilayered structure in which sun and earth move. Thus, Jia Kui’s allusion to this text can be understood only as an attempt to please ruler and complaisant technicians: at that time, if one overlooks the fruitless complaints of rulers such as Huan Tan, the ascendancy of the *chenwei* on rulers and sectors of scholarly and technical groups was still unchallenged. Finally, at least some scholars must have placed some trust in the model presented in the apocrypha. As Zu Xuan points out, however, this was mostly a problem of intellectual laziness and a fallacious technical insight:

既不顯求之術，而虛設其數，蓋夸誕之辭，宜非聖人之旨也。學者多固其說而未之革，豈不知尋其理歟，抑未能求其數故也？

Thus, [the authors of the apocrypha] unthinkingly fixed these numbers without even

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83 Cullen (1977), 226.  
84 *Hou Hanshu (zhi)* 2:3027.
understanding the methods that they had opted for. Concerning their extravagant words, it is appropriate to not consider them to be the core of [the teaching of the] sages. [And yet,] many learned [people] rely on these wordings without changing anything. Could it be that I do not understand whether these people have managed to grasp these principles or rather that they cannot find out the basics of these numbers?85

2. DESCRIBING AND INTERPRETING THE HEAVENS: TIANWEN THEMES IN THE APOCRYPHA

2.1 Presenting the Han art of tianwen

The Han bibliographers describe the Han art of tianwen 天文 in the following way:

天文者，序二十八宿，步五星日月，以紀吉凶之象，聖王所以參政也。易曰：「觀乎天文，以察時變。」然星事凶悍，非湛密者弗能由也。夫觀景以譴形，非明王亦不能服聽也。【…】

The [art of] heavenly patterns aligns the twenty-eight lodges, tracks the five planets, the sun, and the moon in order to take notice of the simulacra [revealing] auspiciousness and misfortune: this is how a sage sovereign examines [the effectiveness of his] policies. The Changes say: “Look at the Heavenly patterns in order to scrutinize the changes over time.” Therefore, matters concerning stars are dreadful: those who do not care about insightfulness and accuracy will not be able to uncover the reasons [behind the alterations]. Thus, [one] examines the settings [in the sky] in order to voice an admonition [and point at the reasons which made them] to appear [in the sky]. If one is not an enlightened king, he will be unable to follow and listen. […] 86

In the excerpt above, the bibliographers define object, procedure, target, and modalities of the ancient art of tianwen. The object clearly consisted in astrography, namely the depicting or ordering (xu 序) of the starry sky. The procedure involved the tracking (bu 步) of the celestial bodies. By analysing the motion of sun, moon, and five planets, the ancient expert of tianwen reached his target, namely the formulation of an interpretation and a prognosis (zhan 占) based on the analysis of those astral line-ups (xiang 象) which had a meaning for the observers: here, we are obviously talking about astrology. Finally, the bibliographers stress the importance of precision, implicitly admitting the existence of a bad way of practising the art of tianwen. These three points — astrography, astrology, and evaluation of the tianwen layer — shall form the skeleton of our present discussion. The following introductory paragraph — a short historical review of the tianwen discipline under the Han — will recall some basic facts.

85 Suishu 19:514.
86 Hanshu 30:1765.
2.2 Rudiments of *tianwen* tradition under the Han

2.2.1 Introducing Han *tianwen* lineages

Han historical sources give scarce information about Han astrologers or about their way of depicting the heavenly asterisms. Sima Qian only recalls his teacher Tang Du 唐都, who combined the expertise in calendrical practices with know-how in prognostication based on stars (*xing* 星). Other specialists of the epoch were probably Wang Shuo 王朔, who was able to interpret the meaning of clouds (*qi* 氣) and Wei Xian 魏鮮, a man trained in the prognostication based on Jupiter (*zhansui* 占歲). This point may easily appear as a contradiction. In an epoch witness to the growing fascination for astrology — we shall review this point in the next section — the chronicles are actually very concise when speaking about *tianwen* practitioners. In all probability, however, Han technicians usually relied on handbooks and manuals which were not necessarily connected to their authors. In fact, looking at the books listed in the bibliography of the *Hanshu* under the heading *tianwen*, a reader immediately notices a quite interesting detail, namely the absence of names of individuals. Titles appear as *Haizhong xingzhan yan* 海中星占驗 [Verification of Astrological Prognoses from Haizhong], *Wucan za bianxing* 五殘雜變星 [The Five-Injures Star and Other Changing Stars], *Taiyi za zi xing* 泰壹雜子星 [Miscellaneous Astral Phenomena of the Taiyi deity]. Evidently, most of the books were not linked to specific persons but rather to given regions, to precise fields of analysis (the star Wucan 五殘), or to deities such as Taiyi or the Yellow Emperor. This element may imply that Han bibliographers preferred to focus on specific themes rather than on single technicians.

Despite the scanty information concerning Han *tianwen* practitioners, it is safe to assume that the Han period witnessed the growth of a number of astrological lineages. In the list of ancient Chinese practitioners of *tianwen* given in the *Shiji*, we find a few individuals who had apparently passed down this discipline to the Han (*xi zhi huan tianshu zhe* 昔之傳天數者). The traditions bound to the mythic Shang technician Wu Xian 巫咸, the Qi expert Gan De 甘德, the Wei 魏 astrographer and astrologer Shi Shen 石申 are particularly important since they were destined to achieve a growing success,

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87 In the self-presentation, Sima Qian even explicitly says to have studied the art of “Heavenly Officials” (*tian guan* 天官) with Tang Du. See *Shiji* 130:3288.
88 All these disciplines certainly belonged to Han astrology since these names are mentioned within the *Tianguan shu*. See *Shiji* 27:1349. For Tang Du’s know how in calendrical practices, see *Shiji* 112:2965.
89 *Hanshu* 30:1763, 1764. The understanding of Wucan as an ominous star is testified in *Shiji* 27:1333. The *Jinshu* lists it under the heading “ominous stars” (*yao xing* 妖星). See *Jinshu* 12:325.
90 Most of the names mentioned in the *Shiji* are mythic figures or unknown technicians. See *Shiji* 27:1343.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha especially during and after the Later Han dynasty.\(^{91}\) The *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, the Tang repository of ancient astrological works, conserves a large number of fragments listed under headings as “Wu Xian says” or “the Shi Shen lineage says”. It is generally accepted that most of these fragments are the last traces of later *tianwen* works. Parts of them may have been written during the first century BC when technicians very probably expanded and developed the original texts of earlier *tianwen* practitioners.\(^{92}\) In all probability, in the first century AD, some of the technical works attributed to Shi Shen had already reached a definitive form: during the calendrical reform of AD 85, for instance, Jia Kui quotes from the *Shishi xinjing* [Classic of Stars by the Shi Lineage].\(^{93}\)

2.2.2 The *Tianguan shu*

Han *tianwen* sources still extant play a central role in an analysis on the *chenwei*. Besides presenting the basics of Han astrography and astrology, they often serve as a kind of litmus test of the apocryphal wordings. On the one hand, they help to reconstruct a hypothetical context for several fragments; on the other hand, they certainly allow one to compare the viewpoint of the authors of the apocrypha with the stance of other Han technicians. In this perspective, it is appropriate to turn to the official chronicles and, in particular, to their monographs on astrology, namely the *Tianguan shu* of the *Shiji* and, to a lesser extent, the *Tianwen zhi* of the *Hanshu*. The *Tianguan shu* may be regarded as the most important reference point since it offers the earliest systematic description of the sky. First, as is well known, the heavens described by the Sima historians form a complex starry society: observers find in the sky personages such as emperors, empresses, and concubines; social spaces like palaces, courts, and markets; bureaucratic posts such as attendants, generals, and chancellors. The pivot of this starry world is the circumpolar region. Its labelling — Central Palace (*Zhonggong* 中宮) — is certainly appropriate: here is the polar star, the domicile of the heavenly sovereign; here is the Dipper, the director of time and space. The pivot of Heaven extends its authority over the four cardinal regions of the sky. The seasonal

\(^{91}\) In the *Jinshu*, Li Chunfeng explicitly says that Wu Xian, Gan De and Shi Shen were venerated in later epochs (*Wu Xian Gan Shī hou dài suō zuōng* 巫咸、甘、石之說，後代所宗). *Jinshu* 11:278. Han sources seldom speak about the work of these technicians. Even the bibliographic chapter of the *Hanshu*, for example, does not give any useful information. For a short analysis of relevant material traceable in Han sources, see Cai Keqiao and Guan Chengxue (2002), 67.

\(^{92}\) For the dating of the material gathered in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* and attributed to the three lineages, see Sun and Kistemaker (1997). For comments on other versions of writing attributed to Warring States technicians, see Wang Xingwen (2004), Cha Keqiao and Guan Chengxue (2002).

\(^{93}\) *Hou Hanshu* (zhī) 2:3027. For a detailed reconstruction of the astrographical traditions under the Han, see Sun and Kistemaker (1997), 37-82 (Shi lineage); 82-86 (Gan lineage); 86-88 (Wuxian lineage).
quadrants are referred to as “palace” (gong 宮) and stretch across the four cardinal directions. Each of them is associated with a few basic asterisms which usually belong to the 28 lodges. The lodges, in turn, are connected to the four heavenly animals.94

Pre-existent tianwen works must certainly have influenced the drafting of the Tianguan shu. The link with the Shi lineage, for example, often stands out in the monograph of the Shiji.95 A comparison between the fragments collected in the Kaiyuan zhanjing and the Tianguan shu, however, suggests that the Sima historians may have also adopted an original approach. When choosing the pivots of the starry sky, in fact, Han tianwen lineages mostly relied on the idea of five basic asterisms which have been called “courts” or “enclosures” (yuan 垣).96 The court of the Purple Secret (Ziwei 紫微) encompasses the circumpolar region; the court of Grand Secret (Taiwei 太微), is situated in the southern area of the sky; the court of the lodge Heart, the Grand Horn (Dajiao 大角), and the Heavenly Market (Tianshi 天市) are in the eastern quadrant.97

According to Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker, these celestial courts may have been similar to the gong structure of the Tianguan shu but, as they acknowledge, no court is associated with the western and northern areas of the heavens.98 Significantly, among the fragment tied to the three famous technicians, we do not find any mention of the gong-structure. It is certainly risky to draw definitive conclusions on the basis of these data, mostly because the material attributed to Gan De or Shi Shen is fragmentary. Yet, it is safe to assume that early astrologers did not consider the gong-structure to be important.99 This, in turn, suggests the existence of different portrayals of the starry sky under the Han: the first is bound to the chronicles of the period whereas the second is the work of unknown individuals.

We do not know which portrayal of the heavens enjoyed the greatest renown in the last centuries BC. Most likely, at that time, the portrayal of the sky still was a work in progress. Even in this case, however, it is safe to assume that the Tianguan shu conveys the Han official way of describing the starry sky. Only in this way, in fact, we can

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94 On the schematic presentation of the Five Palaces, see Shiji 27:1289; 1295; 1299; 1304; 1308. For a short presentation and discussion of the Tianguan shu, see Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 21-25; Ho (1985), 133.

95 Even if most of the stars mentioned in the Tianguan shu cannot be attributed to one of the three traditions, it is certain that several asterisms usually attributed to the Shi lineage are analyses as well in this document. The reader may refer to the table presented in the next page.


97 Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 124.

98 Sun, Kistemaker (1997), 124.

99 If one looks at the fragments conserved in the Kaiyuan zhanjing, the asterisms bound to Shi Shen and Gan De were organised in two main groups, simply called Central and Outer (Heavenly) Officials (zhongguan 中官/waiguan 外官). See Kaiyuan zhanjing 65, 66, 67, 68, 89, 70. It seems, in fact, that the gong structure was a feature of Han astrography: while characterizing Han tianwen sources, it disappears in medieval and Tang works on astrology.
understand why Ma Xu chose to follow the *Tianguan shu* when he compiled the *Monograph on Heavenly Patterns* of the *Hanshu*, and this at a time in which at least the Shi lineage was achieving an enormous success.\(^{100}\)

### 2.3 Rudiments of apocryphal astrography

#### 2.3.1 Apocryphal astrography and the *Tianguan shu*

When considering the ties between *chenwei* and further Han astrographical sources, it is almost mandatory to begin the discussion with the *Tianguan shu*. It is convenient to focus first on a few leading cases which clearly show a high level of convergence between the *chenwei* fragments and the monograph of the *Shiji*.

The portrayal of the Purple Palace (*Zigong* 紫宮), namely the area adjacent to the Polar Star (*Beiji* 北極), surely constitutes an appropriate starting point. Below, the description of the Sima historians:

```
中宮天極星，其一明者，太一常居也；旁三星三公，或曰子屬，後句四星，末大星正妃，餘三星後宫之屬也，環之匡十二星，藩臣，皆曰紫宮。
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The asterism of the North Celestial Pole in the Central Palace: the most brilliant star is the regular domicile of the Taiyi. The three stars beside it are the Three Dukes. Someone calls them “the Sons”. On the hook behind, there are four stars: the last big star is the “Wife”. The remaining three stars are the Concubines. The guard which surrounds them encompass 12 stars: they are the Ministers. All these [asterisms] are called Purple Palace.\(^{101}\)

The *Yuanmingbao* follows a very similar line of reasoning:

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天生大，列為中宮太極星，星其一明者，太一帝居。【…】
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Heaven was born big and split in order to form the Central Palace. Among the stars of the Asterism Great Pole, the most brilliant star is the domicile of the Taiyi ruling deity.\(^{102}\)

Like the *Tianguan shu*, the *Yuanmingbao* takes the Polar Star as the fulcrum of the central region of the heavens. It also presents Polaris as the domicile of the Taiyi deity. Moreover, just like the monograph of the *Shiji*, this apocryphal text does not offer any further information about the asterism Beiji. Ma Duanlin 馬端臨 (1254-1325) noticed

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\(^{100}\) At least Shi Shen was considered to be an authoritative source under the Later Han. During the calendrical debate of the first century BC, when discussing the width of the lodges, the officials of the court explicitly said that: “it is not possible to take the distance from Shi’s [teachings]” (*Shi bu ke li* 石不可離). In this regard, see *Hou Hanshu* (zhī) 2:3027-3028.

\(^{101}\) *Shiji* 27:1289.

\(^{102}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:87.
these similarities as well:

天官書前漢志及春秋合誠圖曰中宮天極星，其一明者，太乙常居；旁三星三公，或曰子屬。後勾四星，末大星正妃，餘三星後宮之屬也。孝經援神契曰辰極橫后妃，四星從端大妃光明。二説大略相類然。

The *Book on Heavenly Officials* [of the *Records of a Historian*], the monograph [on *Heavenly Patterns*] in the *Book of Early Han* and even the [text attached to the] *Annals*, *The Diagram: Matching Sincerity* say: “The asterism of the North Celestial Pole in the Central Palace; the most brilliant star is the regular domicile of the Taiyi. The three stars beside it are the Three Dukes. Someone calls them “the Sons”. On the hook behind, there are four stars: the last big star is the “Wife”. The remaining three stars are the Concubines.” The [text attached to the] *Classic of filial Piety, The Talisman: Quoting the Spirits* says: “From the Polar Star straight on, there are the Women of the Posterior Palace. These are four stars and follow the brilliance of the First Wife of the beginning.” These two records are almost identical.103

Further fragments suggest a close relationship between the astrography of the *Tianguan shu* and the *tianwen* layer of the apocrypha:

營室為清廟，曰離宮、閣道，漢中四星，曰天駟，旁一星，曰王良。

[The lodge] House is the ancestral temple for purification: it is also called Summer Palace or Palace Corridor. In the milky way, there are four stars which are called Heavenly Quadriga. The star on the side is called Wang Liang.104

元命包曰天駟四星在漢中一名天駟，傍一名王良主天馬

The *Encompassing of Origin and Mandate* says: The Heavenly Quadriga: four stars in the middle of the Milky Way. The first name is Heavenly Quadriga. On the side, there is Wang Liang which is in charge of heavenly horses.105

The case concerning the asterism called Heavenly Quadriga is particularly interesting since we have here a clear convergence between the *Tianguan shu* and the apocrypha: other *tianwen* material, in fact, presents a different line of reasoning when describing the starry clusters mentioned above. The fragments attributed to the pre-imperial lineages, for instance, do not mention the Quadriga at all and even the description of Wang Liang is discrepant. If later sources are to be trusted, it is possible that Wang Liang was understood as an asterism encompassing five stars: four of them were to be named Quadriga and one Wang Liang.106 Evidently, the Sima historians preferred to

103 Wenxian tongkao 278:2208.
104 Shiji 27:1309.
105 Kaiyuan zhanjing 65:662. This must become the standard solution. In this regard, see Jinshu 11:296.
106 See Kaiyuan zhanjing 65:662.
avoid this confusing portrayal by dissecting the asterism in Heavenly Quadriga and Wang Liang. Whoever wrote the fragment from the Yuanmingbao analysed above apparently opted for this solution.

2.3.2  Beyond the official portrayal of the sky: the apocrypha and the tianwen lineages

An analysis of the material gathered in the Kaiyuan zhanjing may quickly reveal the convergence between apocryphal fragments and the wordings attributed to the pre-imperial lineages. Stars and asterisms described by the technicians who wrote under the pennames Shi Shen/Gan De regularly appear in the chenwei. Below, we shall present a tabular portrayal of the stars mentioned by the Shi lineage and those in the apocrypha:107

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</table>

107 Given the large amount of material gathered in the Kaiyuan zhanjing under the three imperial lineages, I consider it safer to follow the list compiled by Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker. See Sun and Kistemaker (1997), 147-161 (Shi lineage). Here, the two historians of science try to reconstruct the 92 asterisms which, according to the medieval scholar Chen Zhuo 陳卓 (III century AD), formed the field of study of the Shi tradition. On Chen Zhuo and his work on early astrography, see Jinshu 11:288-289. Sun and Kistemaker (1997), 26-28. In the tables below, the presence of a given star or asterism within the apocrypha or further Han sources is signalled by the reference source: Kaiyuan zhanjing (KYZJ), Shiji (SJ), Tianguan shu (SJ*), Hanshu (HS), Tianwen zhi (HS*), Hou Hanshu (HHS).
## Chapter Four. The discourse on tian: techniques and beyond

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<tr>
<td>Taiwei 太微</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 66:672</td>
<td>\textit{SJ} 27:1299</td>
<td>Laoren 老人</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 68:695</td>
<td>\textit{SJ} 27:1306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huangdi zuo 黃帝位</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 14:304</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>Jixing 稂星</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>———</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjiang 天江星</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 82:795</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>Chuanshuo 傳說</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 68:688</td>
<td>———</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianbian 天弁</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 65:660</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>Zhuxing 柄星</td>
<td>\textit{KYZJ} 82:812</td>
<td>———</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The tables presented above show a significant convergence between the apocrypha and the Shi tradition. Likewise, stars belonging to the studies of the Gan and Wu Xian lineages appear in the apocrypha, even if to a lesser degree. Thus, whoever wrote the chenwei was rather well informed about stars and asterisms described by the groups active during the first century BC. We shall consider here a few cases which are particularly significant.

(a) **Courts vs Palaces**

As mentioned in the introductory remarks on the Tianguan shu, the gong structure of the heavens may have been a characteristic of the official astrographical discourse. The reader of the apocrypha may quickly realize that these texts appear to prefer the celestial courts as orientation points in the starry sky. Certainly, a few fragments explicitly mention the gong structure. Yet, it is questionable whether these wordings hint at a tianwen context. Let us read the following excerpt from the Wenyaogou:

東宮蒼帝，其精為蒼龍。南宮赤帝，其精為朱鳥。西宮白帝，其精為白虎。北宮黑帝，其精為玄武。


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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Asterism (Shi Shen)</th>
<th>Chenwei</th>
<th>Western Han sources</th>
<th>Asterism (Shi Shen)</th>
<th>Chenwei</th>
<th>Western Han sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hegu 河鼓</td>
<td>KYZJ 65:660</td>
<td>SJ* 27:1310 Biexing 霹星</td>
<td>KYZJ 74:753</td>
<td>———</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lizhu 雩珠</td>
<td>KYZJ 73:741</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>Jiukan 九坎</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>———</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baozhao 項爪</td>
<td>KYZJ 73:741</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>Baiju 貞白</td>
<td>KYZJ 74:753</td>
<td>———</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianlüxing 天津</td>
<td>KYZJ 65:662</td>
<td>———</td>
<td>Yulin 羽林</td>
<td>KYZJ 68:690</td>
<td>SJ* 27:1309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

108 *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 69:697, 701, 704, 708, 714. The prevalence of Shi’s astrography should not surprise the reader since, as Sun Xiaochun and Jacob Kistemaker have noticed, it is probable that the Shi Shen lineage was the most important alternative tradition under the Early Han and, as such, it may have remarkably influenced the work of those people belonging to the Gan De/Wuxian groups. See Sun and Kistemaker (1997), 38-39.
essence is the Dark Warrior.\textsuperscript{109}

This fragment, which clearly deals with the *gong* structure of the sky, is not mentioned in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*: evidently, Qutan Xida did not consider such wording to be relevant in a *tianwen* context. Hence, when describing the heavens, the authors of the apocrypha, while drawing from time to time from court-astrography, essentially ignored the five starry palaces. This also stands out when one deals with the circumpolar region. As we have seen above, Sima Qian label this heavenly area “Purple Palace” and makes out of it the pivot of the Central Palace and, obviously, of the entire sky. A number of apocryphal fragments opted for the denomination “Purple Secret” (*Ziwei* 紫微), hence evidently relying on the idea of celestial courts.\textsuperscript{110}

(b) \textit{The stars Taiyi/Tianyi}

A further interesting case of discrepancy between apocrypha and court-astrography concerns the stars Taiyi 太一/Tianyi 天一. It is well known that the binomial Taiyi, and at a lesser extent Tianyi, implies a wide range of meanings which range from religion to divination, from astrography to philosophy. The *Tianguan shu* presents Taiyi as the deity inhabiting Polaris: this was regarded as the most valuable among the heavenly deities (tian shen gui zhe 天神貴者). The *Huainanzi* describes it as an itinerant deity which had its courtyard in the southern asterism Privy Council (*Taiweizhe Taiyi zhi ting ye* 太微者太一之庭也) and its domicile in the Purple Palace (*zigong zhe Taiyi zhi ju ye* 紫宮者太一之居也).\textsuperscript{111} In regard to Tianyi, the *Tianguan shu* presents it as an alternative name for the star *Yinde* and, elsewhere in the *Shiji*, as one of the “Three Ones” (*san yi* 三一), namely the Tianyi, the Taiyi, and the *Diyi* 地一.\textsuperscript{112} Later astrographical sources like the *Jinshu* explain that the binomials Taiyi/Tianyi could also refer to stars close to the Purple Palace.\textsuperscript{113} The stars Tianyi and Taiyi were known under the Han as well, since several statements

\textsuperscript{109} Choshu isho shusei 4A:101.

\textsuperscript{110} The different denomination also implies a discrepant portrayal of this key-region. In the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, we read that the Shi lineage defined the circumpolar region as an area encompassing two main asterisms: Polaris (five stars) and the six stars of the Row of the Hook (Gouchen 鈎陳). *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 67:684. Even if Han scholarship must have been aware of the existence of an asterism called Gouchen (*Hanshu* 97B:3979), the monographs on Heavenly Patterns do not mention it. On the contrary, we meet the Row of the Hook several times within the apocryphal fragments. See, for instance, Choshu isho shusei 4B:166; Choshu isho shusei 6:130.

\textsuperscript{111} Shiji 28:1386, 27:1290; Huainanzi 3:21. The religious significance of Taiyi is primarily bound to the state of Chu and, in particular, to the *Chuci* 楚辭 [*Songs of Chu*]. In this regard, see Huang Kangbin and He Jiangfeng (2004), 26.

\textsuperscript{112} For Tianyi as star, see Shiji 27:1290. For Tianyi as part of the Three-Ones, see Shiji 28:1386.

\textsuperscript{113} See Jinshu 11:289-290.
attributed to the Shi lineage are rather explicit in this context. Moreover, apocryphal treatises such as the *Shengqiafu* and the *Zhenyaodu* mention the Taiyi in a clear astrological context by automatically excluding every possible religious implication. These elements can only mean that whoever wrote these parts of the apocryphal corpus was well acquainted with astrographical sources collected under the name of Shi Shen.

(c) **The stars of the Dipper**

The existence of different Han astrographical lineages stands particularly out in the case of the stars of the Dipper (*Beidou 北斗*). In the *Tianguan shu*, the Sima historians present the Dipper as an asterism embracing seven stars and working as heavenly pivot. It is however remarkable that the Han *taishiling* did not explicitly list the names of the single stars. They simply refer to the ladle (*shao* 杓), to the star Balance (*heng* 衡), and the Spoon (*kui* 魁). Evidently, they regarded the information they gave as exhaustive for the readers. Turning to the *chenwei*, we may easily notice that the authors of these texts definitely knew the names of the seven stars. The table below shall present the labelling traceable in different apocryphal texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Star</th>
<th>Hetu</th>
<th>Luoshu</th>
<th>Yundoushu</th>
<th>Hechengtu</th>
<th>Chunqiuwei</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Kaishushou 開樞受</td>
<td>Kaishushou 開樞受</td>
<td>Tianshu 天樞</td>
<td>Shu 樞</td>
<td>Zhengxing 正星</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Tizhixu 提執序</td>
<td>Tixuanxu 提旋序</td>
<td>Xuan 旋</td>
<td>Xuan 璚</td>
<td>Faxing 法星</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Jiaoxu 瓊耀緒</td>
<td>Jiaoxu 瓊耀緒</td>
<td>Ji 機</td>
<td>Ji 機</td>
<td>Lingxing 令星</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Quanshiqu 權拾取</td>
<td>Quanshiqu 權拾取</td>
<td>Quan 權</td>
<td>Quan 權</td>
<td>Faxing 伐星</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Yuhengji 玉衡樞</td>
<td>Yuhengshu 玉衡樞</td>
<td>Heng 衛</td>
<td>Heng 衛</td>
<td>Shaxing 殺星</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kaiyangji 開陽紀</td>
<td>Kaiyangji 開陽紀</td>
<td>Kaiyang 開陽</td>
<td>Kaiyang 開陽</td>
<td>Weixing 危星</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Fuxingji 輔星紀</td>
<td>Yaoguang 揚光</td>
<td>Yaoguang 揚光</td>
<td>Biaoguang 揚光</td>
<td>Buxing 部星</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Essentially, the table presents three apocryphal solutions to the denominations of the

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114 The *Kaiyuan zhanjing* often links the Taiyi star to the Shi lineage. See, for instance, *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 67:685 where it is explicitly said that the star Taiyi lies south and very close to Tianyi (Taiyi yi xing zai tianyixing nan xiangjin 太一星在天一星南相近).

115 *Choshu isho shusei* 6:124, 183.

116 *Shiji* 27:1291.

117 For the *Hetu*, see *Choshu isho shusei* 6:156; For the *Luoshu*, see *Choshu isho shusei* 6:204-205; For the *Chunqiu-Yundoushu*, see *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:158 For the *Chunqiu-Hechengtu*, see *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:16 For the *Chunqiu-Yuanmingbao*, see *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:166
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

stars of the Dipper. The first, namely the one in the Hetu and Luoshu, may be regarded as a complex form of the second, namely the list given in the Chunqiu-Yundoushu and Chunqiu-Hechengtu. The option of the Chunqiuwei, on the contrary, is different. It is probable that the authors of the Yundoushu and the Hechengtu were following standard scheme of Han astrology. A few elements testify to this hypothesis. First, the mentioning of the Balance clearly recalls the wording of the Shiji. Moreover, later astrographical sources reveal that the names of the Yundoushu were the official denominations even as late as the Tang dynasty. Given the heretical reputation of the apocrypha from the third century onwards, it is safer to assume that whoever wrote the apocrypha was drawing from sources which were considered to be authoritative.

The version of the Hetu and Luoshu does not appear anywhere in early astrographical material: the interpreter can only notice the similarity between these labelling and the official names. The case of the Yuanmingbao is different since, according to Tang tianwen sources, this model was based on the school of Shi Shen: hence, we have an additional element to hypothesize that whoever wrote the apocrypha was drawing from several different sources which inevitably led to elaborate discrepant models.

2.4 From astrography to astrology: on the double-fold function of the simulacra

As is well known, Han China usually presented luminaries, stars, and asterism as simulacra (xiang 象) of specific aspects bound to the human realm. The starry sky of the Tianguan shu is a mirror of human society: here, the observer finds the sovereign, the inner court with its concubines, the official court with ministers, soldiers, and troops, central regions as well as peripheral areas. It is safe to assume that this approach was a feature of early imperial astrological discourse. Zhang Heng offers a schematic description of it:

文曜麗乎天，其動者有七，日月五星是也。日者，陽精之宗；月者，陰精之宗；五星，五行之精。星列布，體生於地，精成於天，列居錯峙，各有攸屬。在野象物，在朝象官，在人象事。

The patterns shine and glitter in the sky. Those who move are seven: sun, moon, and five planets. The sun is the epitome of the essence of the yang. The moon is the epitome of the essence of the yin. The five planets embody the essence of the five agents. All the stars spread across the sky. With regard to their body: it was born from earth (i.e. they are solid?), but their essences [could only] flourish in the [ethereal] sky. With regard to their arrangement and location, they stand in a confuse way. Each of them has a field of action: [it may] involve civil life [with the stars] staying for things; [alternatively, it may]

118 Jinshu 11:290.
119 Moreover, the Zuozhuqi gives a list of spirits probably associated to the stars of the Dipper. In this regard, see Choshu isho shusei 4B:66. See, for instance, Jinshu 11:290-291.
concern the court [with the stars] representing official posts; [finally, it may] concern men
[with the stars] symbolizing matters and actions.120

Hence, stars of the Chinese sky are divisible into three groups: the first encompasses
asterisms which represent official posts (zai chao), such as the Censor or the
Feudatories met above; the second includes stars which stay for aspects of the natural
life (zai ye), like the star Fish (Yu 魚) or the star Wolf (Lang 狼). The third — perhaps
the largest — encompasses all those stars which allude at human affairs (zai ren): we
could classify under this heading the numerous stars referred to as Concubines or
asterisms called after units of measurement, such as, for example, the Dou 斗 star of the
Shi lineage.121 This approach substantially characterized the whole tianwen discourse of
the time. In the Yuanmingbao, for instance, we read:

太微為天廷，理法平辭，監計授德，列宿受符，神考節書，情稽疑也。南蕃二星：東星曰左執法，廷尉之象也。西星曰右執法，御史大夫之象也。執法所以舉刺
凶姦者也。兩星之間南端門也。左執法之東左掖門也。右執法之西右掖門也。東
蕃四星：南第一星曰上相，上相之北東門也。第二星曰次相，次相之北，中華門
也。第三星曰次將，次將之北太隂門也。第四星曰上將。所謂四輔也。

The [court of the] Grand Secret is the heavenly courtyard: [here, they] solve legal matters
and calm verbal altercations; [here, they] administer the right measure and grant virtue.
[This is also the place where] the lodges receive the tally and [their] spirits examine the
knots and the documents to settle doubts. The two stars in the Southern Wall: the one on
the east is called Left Custodian of the Law: [this] is the simulacrum of the Court of
Revision. The one on the west is the Right Custodian of the Law: [this] is the simulacrum
of the Censor. The Custodians of the Law are responsible to punish the evil. Between the
two stars, there is the Door of the Southern Beginning. On the east of the Left Custodian
of the Law, there is the Left Side Door and, on the west of the Right Custodian of the
Law, there is the Right Side Door. The four stars on the east: the first is First Minister. On
the north, there is the Eastern Door. The second is Second Minister: on the north, there is
the Door of the Central Beauty. The third star is the Second General: on the north, there is
the Door of the Great yin. The fourth star is called “First General”. These are referred to
as the four helpers.122

The short remarks presented above suggest that the simulacra served as descriptive keys
in order to transform the starry sky into a mirror of human society, finally converting
the heavens into a decipherable realm. The art of tianwen, however, did not only consist
of portraying and decoding the sparkly sky: as mantic discipline, its scope was to offer a
glimpse into the future.

121 Kaiyuan zhanjing 90.872.
122 Choshu isho shusei 4A:83-84; Ho (1985), 76.
When turning from astrographers to astrologers, Han tianwen practitioners re-modelled the descriptive keys into interpretative devices. Accordingly, the connection between stars and human roles could effectively serve as a guideline for identifying the realm which was potentially threatened by a given heavenly event. This is probably the reason why given astral bodies are often associated with several human roles or posts. By associating a star with only one post or role in the human society, in fact, ancient rulers would only have had to fear phenomena involving the sun: this, obviously, is not the case. Therefore, several astral bodies could be taken as counterpart of the sovereign: among them Jupiter or, as in the apocrypha, the Dipper. 123 When considering how these guidelines worked in astrological praxis, we may consider the fragment below:

太白人守天船, 兵起舟船用, 有亡國, 期不出年。

When Venus holds the Heavenly Ship, soldiers will arise and ships will be their instrument. A country will collapse. The period [of the prognosis] will not be longer than a year. 124

Thus, the star Heavenly Ship could imply the formulation of a prognosis involving ships. A similar example concerns the star Rolling Tongue (Juan she 卷舌). Below, a fragment:

嵗星入守卷舌、有佞臣謀其君, 以口舌為害人, 主有憂。

When Jupiter enters in or holds the Rolling Tongue, some flattering minister will conspire against their prince. [They] will damage people with [their] mouths and tongues and the ruler will get in trouble. 125

The interpretative implications of xiang were strengthened by transforming the stars into entities in charge (zhu 主) of specific aspects and realms of the human world. By relying on the work of the Shi lineage, Li Chunfeng wrote:

東壁二星, 主文章, 天下圖書之祕府也。

The two stars of [the lodge] Eastern Wall are in charge of written documents. On the Earth, they correspond to the imperial library, where charts and books of the words [are conserved]. 126

Hence, the lodge Wall was presumed to be related to books. This association served as a

123 In this regard, see also Chen Jiujin (2004), 21-22.
124 Choshu isho shusei 6:119.
125 Choshu isho shusei 6:122.
126 Jinshu 11:301; Ho (1985), 66. Li Chunfeng’s interpretation is certainly based on earlier tianwen works since this line of reasoning is traceable in the fragments attributed to the Shi lineage as well as in other Han works. In this regard, see Kaiyuan zhanjing 61:628.
guideline when formulating the astrological prognosis:

石氏曰: 日在東壁而蝕, 王者不從師友失忠孝。故曰: 虧文章圖書不用。

The Shi lineage says: if the sun is eclipsed in [the lodge] Eastern Wall, the ruler will not follow masters and friends: he will lose in loyalty and filial piety. Therefore, it is said: he will destroy written documents and charts and books will become useless.¹²⁷

Thus, in their interpretative function, the simulacra are omen which announce specific events.¹²⁸

When dealing with the interpretative function of the simulacra, one soon comes to wonder about the extent to which this point was applied in astrological praxis. Did the descriptive function of a simulacrum always influence its interpretative use? We must answer in the negative:

月行犯左右執法皆為大臣有憂。

The moon in its motion opposes the Right or the Left Custodian of Law: in both cases, important ministers will get in trouble.¹²⁹

In the fragment presented here, an astral line-up involving the Custodians of the Law — the simulacrum of censorship according to the Yuanmingbao — is interpreted as an announcement for high ministers. Evidently, when shifting from description to interpretation, ancient tianwen practitioners perceived the simulacra as indicative keys denoting larger realms. This stands clearly out when dealing with the sun, which was traditionally presented as the simulacrum of the sovereign. In the Kaiyuan zhanjing, Liu Xiang is reported to have said:

日者昭明之大表光景之大紀羣陽之精衆貴之象也。【 … 】

The sun is the great manifestation of light and the grand mark of shining. It is the essence of the pure yang and the simulacrum of all [things which are] valuable.¹³⁰

Liu Xiang explains that the simulacra, when understood as interpretative devices, have a relational meaning. In this way, an astral event involving the sun could affect not only the sovereign but also somebody who was hierarchically superior. Thus, astral bodies have a multi-dimensional meaning which changed according to the field in which they

¹²⁷ Kaiyuan zhanjing 62:635.
¹²⁸ This is also often the meaning attributed to xiang under the Early Han. All anomalies and calamities could be read as xiang, omen announcing given events. Liu Xiang, for instance, considered the leaves on the tomb of a Wang Mang’s ancestor to be the xiang announcing the collapse of the Han and Wang Mang’s success. In this regard, see Hanshu 27:1412-1413
¹²⁹ Choshu isho shusei 6:67
¹³⁰ Kaiyuan zhanjing 5:222-223.
were considered.\textsuperscript{131}

We do not know how systematically astrological rules were applied. As Chen Jiujin has shown, early \textit{tianwen} prognoses mostly came up with the same previsions. Chen Jiujin, for instance, highlights that 93 cases out of 150 prognostications made in the \textit{Tianguan shu} dealt with announcements of wars and battles.\textsuperscript{132} The Chinese scholar is probably right in stressing once again that order and disorder of a state simply was the main concern of ancient astrologers.\textsuperscript{133} This, however, does not imply that early imperial practitioners of \textit{tianwen} did not try to carry out their work in a systematic way. Otherwise, we cannot explain why ancient astrological sources regularly explained which field had to be associated with given stars and astral bodies.

The probable existence of systematic guidelines behind \textit{tianwen} praxis also emerges from two aspects which, while being absent from a number of prognoses, often grab the attention of the reader, namely the issues concerning time and space. As for time, several fragmentary \textit{zhan} indicates the period (qi 期) in which a given prognosis will come true.\textsuperscript{134} As for space, ancient astrologers tried to define the geographic boundaries affected by given astral events in a more precise way: we are now going to approach the \textit{fenye} 分野 theory.

2.5 \textit{Tianwen} themes in the apocrypha: the \textit{fenye}

2.5.1 Introducing the \textit{fenye} theory

Besides linking stars and asterisms to given fields of action or significances, Han \textit{tianwen} experts also endeavoured to formulate a prognosis, linking specific heavenly area to given terrestrial regions. The scheme which helped them to translate astral phenomena into imminent earthly events is usually referred to as \textit{fenye} or, in a very successful translation, “allotted fields”.\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Fenye} schemes appear in several early sources.\textsuperscript{136} The \textit{Tianguan shu}, for instance, introduces a model based on the stars of the Dipper:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{131} As said in the \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing}, “the sun is the simulacrum of the son of Heaven and it represents the category of father, man, elder brother" (rizhe tianzi zhi xiang jun fu fu xiong zhi lei 日者天子之象君父兄之類). See \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing} 5:224.

\textsuperscript{132} Chen Jiujin (2004), 21.

\textsuperscript{133} Chen Jiujin (2004), 20.

\textsuperscript{134} See, for instance, \textit{Choshu isho shusei} 6:55, 126-127, 160.

\textsuperscript{135} Major (1993), 14. On this point, see also Pankenier (1999), 262-266.

\textsuperscript{136} Traces of a \textit{fenye} model appear in the \textit{Zuo zhuan} as well. See, for instance, \textit{Zuo zhuan}: Zhao gong 15 (\textit{Shisanjing zhushu}, vol. II, 2077). See also the related commentary. For an account on early association schemes between heavenly areas and terrestrial regions, see Pankenier (1995), 132-144; Pankenier (1999), 263-266.
\end{quote}
At dusk, the indicator is the ladle of the Dipper. [The stars of the] Ladle [correspond to the area] between the Hua [mountain] and the southwest. At midnight, the indicator is the [star] Balance. Balance [corresponds to] the central region between [the Yellow] River and the Qi [River]. At dawn, the indicator is the [star] Spoon. The Spoon [corresponds to] Northeast: from the sea to the Tai [mountain].137

In the last centuries BC, the plot based on the stars of the Dipper evolved in complex schemes with the lodges serving as main reference points. As Li Zhijun has shown, Han tianwen experts could draw from a number of different plots.138 Even if the lodges had to become the most important asterisms of the Chinese sky — hence substituting the stars of the Dipper — strategies of association varied from school to school.

2.5.2 The States-model

A very fashionable fenye scheme associated pre-imperial states with specific heavenly regions. The Tianguan shu, for example, says:

In regard to the territory of Qin, the observation is focused on Venus and the astrological prognoses are based on [the asterisms] Wolf and Bow. In regard to the territory of Wu and Chu, the observation is focused on Mars and the astrological prognoses are based on the [Red] Bird and on Balance. In regard to the territory of Yan and Qi, the observation is focused on Mercury and the astrological prognoses are based [on the lodges] Barrens and Rooftop. In regard to the territory of Song and Zheng, the observation is focused on Jupiter and the astrological prognoses are based on [the lodges] Chamber and Heart. In regard to the territory of Jin, the observation is focused on Mercury as well: [yet,] the astrological prognoses are based on [the lodge] Triaster and on the [asterism] Punishment.139

We do not know how popular Sima Qian’s line of reasoning was. Further Han tianwen sources suggest that the association model based on the lodges was very fashionable as well. The Shi lineage must have followed this strategy and the Huainanzi shows very clear traces of this approach.140 Moreover, we may refer to apocryphal fragments similar to the one presented below:

137 Shiji 27:1291.
138 Li Zhijun (2005).
139 Shiji 27:1346.
140 See Yisizhan 3:64; Huainanzi 3:20.
虚危之精流為青州；分為齊國；立為菜山。

The essences of [the lodges] Barrens and Rooftop flow in order to form the Qing region, split in order to form the state of Qi, and set up in order to form the Cai mountain.\(^{141}\)

The wording of the Yuanmingbao hint at a few interesting points. It is evident, for instance, that the authors of this apocryphal treatise were not only concerned with technical matters. In respect to several fenye schemes of the time, one soon notices that the author apparently “explained” the reasons staying behind the connection between asterisms and geographical regions. Here, the focal terminus is jing, essence, which transforms in order to create given areas or specific mountains. This point, to which we shall return in the next section, does not necessarily imply that the fenye models presented in this text were somewhat “un-technical” or invalid from the viewpoint of a tianwen practitioner. Actually, all the models presented above — stars/states, stars/regions, stars/mountains — may have played a role in tianwen circles. Let us first focus on the states-model. The table below proposes a comparison between this apocryphal treatise and the plot of the Huainanzi.\(^{142}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Huainanzi</th>
<th>Yuanmingbao</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zheng 鄭</td>
<td>Horn (Jiao 角)/ Gullet (Kang 鬆)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song 宋</td>
<td>Base (Di 氐)/Chamber (Fang 房)/Heart (Xin 心)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan 燕</td>
<td>Tail (Wei 尾)/Winnower (Qi 簈)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qi 齊</td>
<td>Barrens (Xu 虚)/Rooftop (Wei 危)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yue 越</td>
<td>Southern Dipper (Dou 斗)/ Ox (Qian niu 牽牛)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu 吳</td>
<td>Woman (Shunnü 須女)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chu 楚</td>
<td>Wings (Yi 翼)/Axletree (Zhen 軸)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wei 衛</td>
<td>House (Shi 室)/Wall (Bi 壁)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lu 魯</td>
<td>Straddler (Kui 角)/Harvester (Lou 蓬)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wei 魏</td>
<td>Stomach (Wei 胃)/Mane (Mao 昴)/Net (Bi 午)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhao 趙</td>
<td>Beak (Zizui 角)/Triaster (Shen 參)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qin 秦</td>
<td>Eastern Well (Dongjing 東井)/Ghost (Yugui 鬼)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhou 周</td>
<td>Willow (Liu 柳)/Star (Xing 星)/Spread (Zhang 繫)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table makes clear, the authors of the Yuanmingbao were working with a technical fenye scheme which echoes the strategy proposed in the pages of the Tianwen xun of the

\(^{141}\) Choshu isho shusei 4A:79.

\(^{142}\) Huainanzi 3; Choshu isho shusei 4A:79.
Huainanzi. Hence, in spite of the few discrepancies, it is safe to hypothesize that the authors of the Yuanmingbao may have been acquainted with tianwen practices or, at least, with tianwen sources.

2.5.3 The Region-models

After having reviewed the states-model, it is appropriate to turn to the fenye scheme based on the regions (zhou 州) of the earth which appear in a few Han works. In the table below, we will compare the model of the Tianguan shu with the scheme the Yuanmingbao:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGIONS</th>
<th>LODGES</th>
<th>Tianguan shu</th>
<th>Yuanmingbao</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aizhou 兖州</td>
<td>Horn (Jiao 角)/ Gullet (Kang 角)/ Base (Di 氓)</td>
<td>Five Stars (Wu xing 五星)\textsuperscript{144}</td>
<td>Five Stars (Wu xing 五星)\textsuperscript{144}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuzhou 豫州</td>
<td>Chamber (Fang 房)/Heart (Xin 心)</td>
<td>Seal of the Hook (Gouqian 鉤鈐)</td>
<td>Seal of the Hook (Gouqian 鉤鈐)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youzhou 涿州</td>
<td>Tail (Wei 尾)/Winnower (Qi 箕)</td>
<td>Winnower (Qi 箕)</td>
<td>Winnower (Qi 箕)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jianghu 江湖</td>
<td>Southern Dipper (Dou 斗)</td>
<td>Southern Dipper (Dou 斗)</td>
<td>Southern Dipper (Dou 斗)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangzhou 扬州</td>
<td>Ox (Qianniu 牵牛)/ Woman (Shumnü 須女)</td>
<td>Ox (Qianniu 牵牛)</td>
<td>Ox (Qianniu 牵牛)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qingzhou 靑州</td>
<td>Barrens (Xu 虚)/Rooftop (Wei 危)</td>
<td>Barrens (Xu 虚)/Rooftop (Wei 危)</td>
<td>Barrens (Xu 虚)/Rooftop (Wei 危)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bingzhou 并州</td>
<td>House (Shi 室)/ Wall (Bi 壁)</td>
<td>House (Shi 室)</td>
<td>House (Shi 室)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuzhou 徐州</td>
<td>Straddler (Kui 奎)/Harvester (Lou 總)/ Stomach (Wei 胃)</td>
<td>Heavenly Bow (Tiangong 天弓)</td>
<td>Heavenly Bow (Tiangong 天弓)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jizhou 冀州</td>
<td>Mane (Mao 驚)/ Net (Bi 綜)</td>
<td>Mane (Mao 驚)/ Net (Bi 綬)</td>
<td>Mane (Mao 驚)/ Net (Bi 綬)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yizhou 益州</td>
<td>Beak (ZiZui 齒觜)/Triaster (Shen 参)</td>
<td>Beak (ZiZui 齒觜)/Triaster (Shen 参)</td>
<td>Beak (ZiZui 齒觜)/Triaster (Shen 参)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yongzhou 雍州</td>
<td>Eastern Well (Dongjing 東井)/ Ghost (Yugui 輿鬼)</td>
<td>Eastern Well (Dongjing 東井)/ Ghost (Yugui 輿鬼)</td>
<td>Eastern Well (Dongjing 東井)/ Ghost (Yugui 輿鬼)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San He 三河</td>
<td>Willow (Liu 柳)/Star (Xing 星)/Spread (Zhang 張)</td>
<td>Heavenly Bow (Tiangong 天弓)</td>
<td>Heavenly Bow (Tiangong 天弓)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingzhou 荊州</td>
<td>Wings (Yi 翼)/Axletree (Zhen 軸)</td>
<td>Axletree (Zhen 軸)</td>
<td>Axletree (Zhen 軸)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{143} For the table, see Choshu isho shusei 4A:79-80; Shiji 27:1330.

\textsuperscript{144} The association between the Ai region and the Five Stars must be regarded as a mistake. In fact, still extant tianwen sources do not testify to the existence of this asterism.
As Li Zhijun has convincingly argued, the scheme of the *Tianguan shu* may be regarded as a political plot based on Wudi’s division of the empire in 13 regions. According, it is it is safe to assume that Sima Qian simply adapted the States-model to the political geography of the time. The table makes evident that the authors of the *Yuanmingbao*, while attaching a remarkable importance to the regions, followed a different tradition. This stands particularly out in the choice of the stars. Let us for instance consider the asterism Heavenly Bow which according to the Shi lineage was westwards of the lodge Triaster. This choice appears to be correct since the Tiangong belonged as well to the western area of the sky. However, it is somewhat surprising that a minor asterism is chosen as a celestial counterpart of a terrestrial region. This cannot be regarded as a mistake since we have a further similar case, namely the one involving the asterism Seal of the Hook (Gouqian 鉤鈐). According to further sources, this constellation belonged to the lodge Chamber: hence, we have again a valid choice since the Yu region was associated to this *xiu* in the *Tianguanshu* as well. Evidently, then, whoever wrote the *Yuanmingbao* was relying on alternative traditions in which the tendency of taking the lodges as main reference points in the sky was still not well established.

### 2.5.4 Further fenye schemes

At the end of the Early Han dynasty, astrologers and technicians worked with very refined *fenye* schemes. Liu Xiang, for instance, must have “updated” the states-model by also listing Han prefectures. The association between states and 12 heavenly regions, which were referred to as the 12 “stations” of the 12-year Jovian cycle, is noteworthy as well: this model, which had to achieve a remarkable success in the following centuries, is presented in the *Hanshu*:

自東井六度至亢六度，謂之壽星之次，鄭之分野，與韓同分。

[The heavenly area which stretches] from the sixth *du* of Eastern Well to the sixth *du* of Gullet, it is called the station of the Longevity Star. This is the allotted field of Zheng, [Zheng] shares the partition with Han.  

The success of refined *fenye* schemes at the end of the Early Han period apparently did not fascinate the people who worked on the apocrypha. Tang astrological sources, for instance, do not mention the *chenwei* when discussing the association of lodges with

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145 Li Zhijun (2005), 66.
146 *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 68; *Jinshu* 11:306.
147 *Jinshu* 11:295.
148 *Hanshu* 28B:1650. In the *Yisizhan*, Li Chunfeng explicitly attributes the association between lodges, states, and prefectures to Liu Xiang. See *Yisizhan* 15:54.
149 See *Hanshu* 28B:1655.
prefectures. In the case of the Jovian stations, a long passage listed under the heading *Luoshu* introduces this theme. This apocryphal fragment differs from the model traceable in the *Hanshu* from at least three viewpoints: first, the heavenly space assigned to terrestrial regions; second, the combination of states and regions models; third, the inclusion of the points on the horizon (*chen*). Evidently, people active in the last decades BC were combining traditions which were originally separated.\(^{150}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jovian Stations</th>
<th><em>Hanshu</em></th>
<th><em>Luoshu</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heavenly Region</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Qin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Qin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Wei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Lu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Zhao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Jin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Beginning: Well (10度) End: Willow 柳 (3度)</td>
<td>Qin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Beginning: Willow (3度) End: Spread (12度)</td>
<td>Zhou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Jingzhou 荆州</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>————</td>
<td>Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Beginning: Rooftop (4度) End: Southern Dipper (6度)</td>
<td>Yan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{150}\) For the data presented in the table, see *Hanshu* 28B: 1646, 1651, 1655, and 1659. *Choshu isho shusei* 6:193-194.
The table above makes clear that the model partially presented in the *Hanshu* and the scheme survived in the fragments of the *Luoshu* are very different. When looking for an explanation, we may perhaps stress that the scheme of the *Hanshu* is discussed within the *Dilizhi* 地理志 or *Monograph on Earthly Lines*. It is therefore possible that it was used by people working with the ideal portrayal of Han territory, which were unaware of the transformations of the astrological *fenye* schemes. The *Luoshu*, in fact, presents the correct sub-division of the Jovian stations since the data considered in the table coincide with those given in the monograph on calendar of the *Hanshu*. The schemes considered here reveal a valid approach to the *fenye* theory. This, however, may be hardly seen as a feature distinguishing all the apocryphal texts. In the *Yisizhan*, in fact, Li Chunfeng mentions the link established in the apocrypha to the *Odes* between regions of the sky and the areas of the earth considered in the *Shijing* as well as the attempt of the authors of the *Luoshu* to connect the mountains of the *Yugong* chapter of the *Shujing* to the lodges in the heavens. These strategies, obviously, should be considered as part of the exegetical discourse rather than as *tianwen* methods.

### 2.6 Tianwen themes in the apocrypha: looking at the starry sky

#### 2.6.1 On solar eclipses

The sun played a central role in the traditional *tianwen* art. The reflection on its astrological significance, for example, opens the *tianwen* discussion in Tang works such as the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* and the *Yisizhan*. In particular, solar eclipses — undoubtedly one of the most astonishing and awe-inspiring events in the sky — exercised an enormous fascination on Han educated community. While the *ru* tried to explain them in accordance with the *zaiyi* framework, astrologers focused on their astrological implications. Even if they were aware that eclipses were to happen at the beginning of the lunation, a few technicians apparently preferred to link these phenomena to further heavenly events. Jing Fang, for instance, was convinced that an imminent eclipse was signalized by the appearance of “dragons”, a term which here probably refer to clouds. A similar line of reasoning characterizes a few *chenwei* texts. We shall consider here two examples:

北斗第一星率色數赤不明，七日内日蝕。

When the first star of the Dipper appears to have always the same colour, when it turns

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151 *Hanshu* 21B:1005-1006.
152 *Yisizhan* 3:60, 62.
153 See *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 9:254. At least an apocryphal fragment shows a similar awareness. See *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 9:254-255.
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... often to red, when it does not shine, [in all these cases,] there will be an eclipse within seven days.

日紫色出二十日以上則蝕。

When the sun at dawn is purple colour [for a period longer than] 20 days, there will be an eclipse.\textsuperscript{155}

Even if a large number of fragments deal with the generic significance of eclipses, several apocryphal wordings reveal that the authors of the astrological stratum of the chenweı also focused on precise aspects. Below, we shall present three main points which belonged to the Han art of tianwen, namely modalities, time, and position of eclipses.

(a) Modalities

Modalities of eclipses have been relevant for Han astrologers. First, technicians understandably differentiated between full and partial eclipses: below, the approach followed by the Shi lineage and the line of reasoning which appears in the Hetu.

石氏曰：日蝕盡，其國大人亡，不盡相去。

The Shi lineage says: “When the solar eclipse is full, a great man of the correspondent country will be lost. When it is partial, a chancellor will be removed.”

河圖曰：日蝕盡王位也，不盡大臣位也，近期三月，遠期三年。

The Diagram of the Yellow River says: “When the solar eclipse is full, [the response involves] the position of the king. When it is partial, it affects an important minister. The period [of the prognosis varies from] a minimum of three months to a maximum of three years.”\textsuperscript{156}

The modalities of eclipses also encompassed further aspects. The Gan lineage, for instance, cast an astrological response on the basis of the portion of the sun which vanished first.\textsuperscript{157} We have traces of this approach in the apocrypha as well:

日以上蝕者，子為害。

When the sun is first eclipsed in its superior part, a son will cause troubles.

\textsuperscript{155} Choshu isho shusei 2:62. For further apocryphal examples, see Kaiyuan zhanjing 9:253-254. The attempt of tying solar eclipses to further astral phenomena stands out also in Later Han astrological works, as the text known as Jingzhou zhan and the wordings of Xi Meng. In this regard, see Kaiyuan zhanjing 9:254.

\textsuperscript{156} Kaiyuan zhanjing 9:260.

\textsuperscript{157} This method was followed by Jing Fang and the Later Han technician Xi Meng. See Kaiyuan zhanjing 9:258-259.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

When a solar eclipse begins from below, troubles in couples are imminent.\(^\text{158}\)

(b) **Time of eclipses**

The second important aspect considered by *tianwen* experts when casting an astrological response involving solar eclipses was the time in which they happened. The *Kaiyuan zhanjing* testifies that Han technicians paid attention to season, month, day and in some cases even hours of the astral phenomenon.\(^\text{159}\) As for the apocrypha, we do not have any relevant fragments for the first two fields. Yet, concerning the day of eclipses, the numerous fragments listed under the title *Qiantanba* testify to the relevance of this method — called *liu jia* 六甲 under the Tang — in the *chenwei*. The text says, for example, that an eclipse on a *jiazi* 甲子 day announces wars and uprisings of foreign tribes.\(^\text{160}\) This kind of time-based prognoses must have been quite popular under the Han. The *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, in fact, attributes to the Gan Lineage and Jing Fang a similar line of reasoning.\(^\text{161}\)

(c) **Spot of eclipses**

If the *Qiantanba* focused on the factor “time”, the *Ganjingfu* analysed the astrological implications of the location of eclipses. We can consider here the following example:

> 日蝕亢中，其邦君有憂。【…】日在心而蝕，兵喪並起。

When the sun is eclipsed in [the lodge] Gullet, the ruler of the correspondent [earthly] place will run into troubles. When the sun is eclipsed in [the lodge] Heart, troops and pains will rise together.\(^\text{162}\)

Even this method was apparently well known under the Han, since numerous responses attributed to the Gan and Shi lineage are listed in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*.\(^\text{163}\)

2.6.2 **Planetary conjunctions**

Planetary conjunctions are among the most important events in the Chinese sky. In the chapter on calendar, we will see that such alignments were regarded as symbols marking the beginning of human history. Similar events may have also played a significant role as early as the second millennium BC. According to Pankenier, the

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\(^{158}\) *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 9:258.

\(^{159}\) In this regard, see *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 10:265-270.

\(^{160}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:78.

\(^{161}\) See *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 9:266-270.

\(^{162}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:196.

\(^{163}\) See, for instance, *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 10:270-272.
conjunction of 1159 BC — roughly the period of the Zhou conquest of the Shang — may have contributed to the formation of the idea of Heaven’s mandate (*tianming*). In 205 BC, the planetary alignment in the lodge Well was regarded as an auspicious sign ratifying the imperial destiny of the Liu clan. In this regard, the *Tianwen zhi* of the *Hanshu* says:

漢元年十月，五星聚於東井，以曆推之，從歲星也。此高皇帝受命之符也。

In the tenth month of the first year of the Han, the five planets gathered in the lodge Eastern Well. According to calendrical calculations, they all followed Jupiter. This tally marks the bestowal of the mandate upon Gaozu.

Therefore, the planetary conjunction in the lodge Well was regarded as the event that legitimized the founding of the Han.

The casting of a prognosis for a planetary alignment involved the analysis of a few additional aspects such as the individuation of the spot of the conjunction or the identification of the leading planets. Pankenier has already remarked the importance of the heavenly area where the phenomenon takes place. With regard to the planet which first arrived on the spot of conjunction:

五星皆從而聚於一舍，其下之國可以義致天下。【…】五星皆從而聚于一舍，其下國可以禮致天下。【…】五星皆從而聚于一舍，其所舍之國可以法致天下。

When all the five planets gather in a mansion in the wake of [Jupiter], the corresponding state can allure the world with [its attentiveness to] righteousness. When all the five planets gather in a mansion in the wake of [Mars], the corresponding state can allure the world with [its attentiveness to] etiquette. When all the five planets gather in a mansion in the wake of [Saturn], the corresponding state can allure the world with [its attentiveness to] solemnity. When all the five planets gather in a mansion in the wake of [Venus], the corresponding state can allure the world with [its attentiveness to] military affairs. When all the five planets gather in a mansion in the wake of [Mercury], the corresponding state can allure the world with [its attentiveness to] law.

These elements apparently belonged to standard *tianwen* practice. Below, Sima Qian’s

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165 *Hanshu* 26:1301.
166 The necessity to associate Liu Bang’s conquest of the Qin capital with this astral phenomenon even brought early historians to change the datum of the conjunction which was accordingly fixed at 206 BC. See Huang Yinong (1990).
account of the *tianwen* interpretation of the alignment of 205 BC:

漢王與我有舊故，而項羽又彊，立我，我欲之楚。」甘公曰：「漢王之人關，五星
聚東井。東井者，秦分也。先至必霸。楚雖彊，後必屬漢。」

[Zhang Er said:] “There is an old friendship between the king of Han (i.e. Liu Bang) and
me, yet Xiang Yu is stronger and appointed me as king: I am on the side of Chu. The
duke Gan said: “When the king of Han entered the region of Guan, the five planets
gathered in [the lodge] Eastern Well. Eastern Well is the field allotted to Qin. The first
who arrives must prevail. Even if Chu is strong, at the end the power shall belong to
Han.”

Planetary conjunctions are treated in the apocrypha as well. Besides ratifying the link
between alignments and the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate, the fragments also
underscore the importance of specific features of the phenomenon, such as spot and
leading planet. As example, we can consider here the following fragment from the wefts
of the *Annals*:

五星從辰星聚北方七宿，黑帝起。以宿占國。

When the five planets gather in [one of] the seven northerly lodges in the wake of
Mercury, the Emperor of the Black will rise. On the basis of the [involved] lodge, cast a
prognosis for the state.

2.6.3 Ominous stars

A consistent number of apocryphal fragments focuses on comets, novae — often
referred to as guest stars (*kexing* 客星) — and meteors, which were usually called
“flowing stars” (*liu xing* 流星). Thus, the *chenwei* testify to the well-known concern of
ancient Chinese sky-watchers for such astral phenomena.

When casting a prognosis based on the appearance of comets or meteors, Han
technicians paid attention to the number of days in which an inauspicious astral body
crossed the Chinese sky, its dimensions, and its position against the background of the
stars. Several apocryphal fragments mention inauspicious stars. Let us see what Li
Chunfeng wrote in the *Jinshu*:

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169 *Shiji* 89:2581.
170 According to the *Hanshenwu*, for instance, this phenomenon was bound to a “change of the mark”
(*geng ji* 更紀). *Choshu isho shusei* 3:27.
171 *Choshu isho shusei* 4B:156.
172 For an analysis of the ways in which comets were analysed within Han chronicles, see Loewe
(1994),75-77

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Among the books on astrology there are] the old sayings of the apocrypha as well as [the handbook] called *Divination from Jingzhou*, which was compiled at the end of the Han, when Liu Biao — the viceroy of Jingzhou — ordered the governor of Wuling Liu Hui to collect all the prognostications [dealing with] astrology. Their part on miscellaneous stars include auspicious stars, ominous stars, guest stars, flowing stars, auspicious vapours ominous vapours, and vapours close to sun and moon.

Hence, by the Tang, the *chenwei* encompassed a part devoted to analyse anomalous stars and vapours. While the still extant material is rather reticent on auspicious stars (*ruixing*), numerous fragments dealing with comets and meteors seem to testify to Li Chunfeng’s statement.

Han *tianwen* sources testify to the habit of associating the appearance of comets with anomalies in the planetary motion. In the *Tianguan shu*, for instance, we read:

> 其失次舍以下，進而東北，三月生天棓，長四丈，末兌，進而東南，三月生彗星，長二丈，類彗，退而西北，三月生天槍，長四丈，末兌，退而西南，三月生天欃，長數丈，兩頭兌.

> [This happens] when [Jupiter] misses its station or mansion. When it advances turning northeast, after three months, it generates the [star] Heavenly Staff, which is four *zhang* long and without a point. When it advances turning southeast, after three months, it generates the Broom Star, which is two *zhang* long and resembles a broom. When it advances turning northwest, after three months, it generates the [star] Heavenly Point, which is four *zhang* long and without a point. When it advances turning southwest, after three months, it generates the [star] Heavenly Spear, which is several *zhang* long and sharpened on both sides.

According to the *Kaiyuan zhanjing*, the same line of reasoning was followed by a number of Han technicians. The *Jinshu* records two catalogues of comets, the first

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174 Ho Peng Yoke translates this sentence from the *Jinshu* in a different way: “According to the accounts in the old apocryphal treatise, towards the end of the Later Han dynasty, when Liu Piao was viceroy of Ching-chou he ordered Liu Jui […] to collect astrological data […]” See Ho (1966), 129. Yet, it seems to me that this translation risks to lead us in problematic direction, since we should assume that the apocrypha recount how the *Jingzhou zhan* was compiled. This would necessarily imply that the *chenwei* were composed at the end of the Later Han period. As we have seen in the discussion on the armillary sphere, Li Chunfeng quotes from the apocryphal treatise *Kaolingyao* in order to demonstrate the antiquity of this observation instrument. Hence, he must have been convinced that the *chenwei* were ancient books.

175 *Jinshu* 12:322; Ho (1966), 129.

176 The term *huixing* is often used in Han sources as a generic label for comets. Yet, here it seems rather to identify a specific kind of comet. For the words used under the Han for designating comets, see Loewe (1994), 67-75.


178 For the Gan lineage, see, for instance, *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 85:324.
presented under the heading *Hetu* with the second attributed to Jing Fang. Both lists appear to adopt a similar classificatory system, since the comets are divided into five groups associated with planets and colours.\(^{179}\)

As we know from the list of comets given in the Mawangdui manuscript *Tianwen qixiang zazhan* 天文氣象雜占, ancient *tianwen* practitioners attached a considerable importance to cataloguing and astrological interpretation of these astral bodies.\(^{180}\) A number of similar catalogues may have existed under the Han. Several names of inauspicious stars mentioned in the *Hetu*, for instance, differ from those listed by Jing Fang.\(^{181}\) In all probability, whoever compiled the catalogue of the *Hetu* was rather well informed about the appearance of unusual astral bodies. Some of the ominous stars mentioned in this apocryphal text, in fact, are discussed in the fragments ascribed to the Shi and Gan lineages in the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* and occasionally mentioned in sources like the *Shiji* or the *Hanshu*.\(^{182}\) A further case concerns the ominous star known as Beginning of the *xun* (Xunshi 旬始). The *Tianguan shu* says:

句始出於北斗旁，狀如雄雞，其怒青黒，象伏鼈．

[The ominous star] Beginning of the Xun appears beside the Dipper. As for [its] form, it looks like a pheasant. When it is enraged, it is azure and black and resembles a turtle which hides [in its shell].\(^{183}\)

In some cases, the stars mentioned in the *Hetu* catalogue occur in other apocryphal fragments. On the Beginning of the Xun, the *Wenyaoogou* says:

旬始見行起北斗傍，期六十日，兵大起上。【…】

When [the ominous star] Beginning of the Xun appears and rises from the proximities of the Dipper, there will be a big military uprising within 60 days.\(^{184}\)

The catalogue of the *Hetu* also mentions ominous stars unknown to the readers of the official sources such as the Heavenly Savage (Tiancan 天殘) or the Beaten Woman (破女) on which the *Hetu* says:

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\(^{179}\) *Jinshu* 12:326-327. On this point, see also Loewe (1994), 79; Ho (1966), 129.

\(^{180}\) For the Mawangdui’s manuscript *Tianwen qixiang zazhan*, see Loewe (1994), 61-85. Some of the names mentioned in this manuscript certainly played a role for Han sky-watchers. This is the case, for instance, of the Chiyou Banner (Chiyouqi 貅尤旗), which is often mentioned in the chronicles and in the apocrypha. See, for instance, *Shiji* 27:1335, 1348. *Hanshu* 27B:1517; *Hou Hanshu* 9:371. On the Chiyou Banner, see Loewe (1994), 77-79.

\(^{181}\) *Jinshu* 12:326-327.

\(^{182}\) The Heavenly Dog (Tiangou 天狗), for instance, is mentioned in the *Tianguanshu* as well as in the works of the Shi lineage. *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 86:833. Similar cases involve several *yao* stars known as Crooked Arrow (Wangshi 枉矢).

\(^{183}\) *Shiji* 27:1336.

\(^{184}\) *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 66.
The essence of Mercury spreads out and generates the Beaten Woman. When the Beaten Woman appears, all the ministers will be executed.\textsuperscript{185}

The catalogue of the \textit{Hetu}, then, could also differ from official or well-known \textit{tianwen} sources of the Han epoch.

2.7 Featuring the \textit{tianwen} layer of the apocrypha: handbook astrology and the issue “periodic phenomena”

2.7.1 From exceptional events to regular phenomena

After having reviewed themes concerning the \textit{tianwen} reading of exceptional phenomena, let us turn to the ways in which the apocrypha dealt with periodic astral line-ups, such as those involving the moon or the position of the planets against the background of the stars. When discussing this topic, however, it is advisable to change the approach adopted in the review of highly impressive phenomena, like planetary alignments or comets. Proceeding in such manner would inevitably lead the interpreter to compile a rather boring list of \textit{tianwen} prognoses given for planets holding (\textit{shou} 居), entering (\textit{ru} 入), opposing (\textit{fan}), or proceeding towards (\textit{zhi}) a given constellation.

These are only some of the astral events considered in early \textit{tianwen} praxis and regularly mentioned in the apocrypha.\textsuperscript{186} The \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing} might help to clear up this point. By simply taking into account the case involving the position of the planets (5) in respect to the lodges (28), we meet here 140 astrologically significant events which are commented on by early technicians or famous scholars. In more than sixty cases, we discover at least an apocryphal statement.\textsuperscript{187} This overabundance is not the only source of discomfort to the reader of the \textit{chenwei}, since a simple description of 60 astral events involving planets and lodges risks leading us to conclude that “the astrological layer of the apocrypha is very detailed”. A quick look into the collections of fragments or into the \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing} is certainly all that is required to reach this conclusion. It is therefore appropriate to look at this part of the astrological layer from a broader perspective, avoiding issues such as “what did Jupiter holding Heart mean”. The basic question is how we may expand the viewpoint, managing in the meanwhile to guarantee an adequate description of this thematic stratum. In my opinion, the simplest

\textsuperscript{185} Choshu isho shusei 6:155,159.

\textsuperscript{186} For an analysis of these terms, see Ho (1985).

\textsuperscript{187} Moreover, one should also consider the case of apocryphal fragments mentioned in the parts of the \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing} devoted to reconstruct the portrayals of the sky made by the Shi/Gan/Wu Xian lineages. In these chapters, in fact, the apocrypha are mentioned several time. See, for instance, \textit{Kaiyuan zhanjing} 65:650, 656, 664.
way is to ask which kind of phenomena are the astral events we are faced with. Since Han sources describe the motion of the planets and refer to methods for predicting lunar eclipses, it is safe to assume that we are now leaving the realm of erratic astral events and approach the much more delicate field of regular or periodic line-ups. An interpreter could even use Han vocabulary and assert that we are now turning to those phenomena which, besides being the object of *tianwen* practice, were also — at least theoretically — the field of calendrical experts. Traditional almanacs (*li* 历), in fact, were complex mathematical systems which endeavoured not only to arrange days, months, and years but also to calculate in advance the inception of relevant heavenly phenomena like those involving the planets\(^{188}\)

### 2.7.2 The theoretical hindrance

Han sky-watchers were already aware that given astral events, which provoked the awe of their ancestors, were periodic phenomena. As Sima Qian for instance said, lunar eclipses belonged to the realm of “what is ordinary” (*yueshi chang ye* 月蝕常也) and, therefore, profoundly different from solar eclipses which did not leave any hideaway (*rishi wei bu zang ye* 日蝕為不臧也).\(^{189}\) During the first century BC, Chinese experts must have nurtured a certain confidence in the possibility of predicting the eclipses of the moon, since the monograph on calendar of the *Hanshu* also includes a calendrical constant which was supposed to enable Han technicians to schedule such events in advance.\(^{190}\) As for planetary astrology, we are confronted with a similar case. Even if early imperial sky-watchers were far from fully understanding the motion of the planets in the sky, they were probably aware that given astral line-ups involving these astral bodies were regular and periodic. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the care with which early technicians tracked the planetary motion. The reader of Han chronicles may even notice a significant discrepancy between the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*. The Sima historians offer their comments on planetary motion only in the *Tianguan shu*. In the *Hanshu*, the motion of the planets is object not only of the *Monograph on Heavenly Patterns* — where it is discussed in a very concise way — but also of the chapter dealing with calendrical techniques.\(^{191}\) Evidently, Early Han technicians were gaining confidence in the possibility to track the revolving of the planets against the background of the starry sky. This leads us to ponder a rather interesting point; how could a society, which nurtured some self-belief in its own ability to discover certain regular patterns in

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\(^{188}\) On this point, see Sivin (1969).

\(^{189}\) *Shiji* 27:1332.

\(^{190}\) This is the cycle called *Shuowang zhi hui* 朔望之會. In this regard, see *Hanshu* 21B:992. For a thoroughly discussion of the eclipse cycles of the *Hanshu*, see Sivin (1969).

\(^{191}\) See, for instance, *Shiji* 27:1312, 1320, 1322; *Hanshu* 21B:998-1000.
the sky, continue to place trust in political astrology? This question must have fascinated a few early imperial thinkers as well:

When dealing with computation and forecasting [of the motion of] the five planets, ancient calendrical systems neglected [the issue concerning their] retrograde motion. [This did not change] until the canonical scripts of the Gan and Shi lineage considered the retrograde motion of Mars and Venus. Thus, [people mean that] since these [events] can be [predicted in advance and] calendrically scheduled, they [belong to the realm of] “standard motion”. […] The astrological lore says: “The sun stays for virtue and the moon stays for punishment. Therefore, repair the Virtue when the sun is eclipsed; repair the punishments, when the moon is eclipsed.” Hence, [the case involving] lunar eclipses, which can be predicted and calendrically scheduled, does not differ from [the case concerning] the two planets. Mars is in charge for inner troubles, Venus is in charge for military matters, and the moon is in charge for punishments. Since the decline of the Zhou clan, rebel, bandits, and troops have often risen; [the distribution of] punishments has often missed [the proper] middle way. Even without the alterations [involving] rebel, bandits, and soldiers, the ministers were unable to govern anyway, the barbarians from the four directions were unquiet anyway, the soldiers did not rest anyway, and punishments were not mitigated anyway. Therefore, when the two planets and the moon miss the right position, these three [kinds of] alterations often appear. When there are rebels, bandits and troops with [their] carnages and bloodbaths, then [these are] the great alterations which finally become manifest. Gan [De] and Shi [Shen] recognized the periodicity [of these events]: accordingly, they regarded them as “periods”. They [however] never considered them [in terms of] “standard motion”. […] The tradition of the Odes say: “A lunar eclipse is not “ordinary”. It is just more ordinary than a solar eclipse is. When the sun is eclipsed, there is no hideaway.” Thus, it is certainly possible to call [these astral events] “Small Alterations”. It is however wrong to classify them [in terms of] “standard motion”.

The point made in the Tianwen zhi of the Hanshu is clear: sectors of Han educated world must have cast doubt on astrological prognoses based on phenomena which could be regarded as regular and standard (zheng xing 正行). These people, evidently, considered the unpredictability of heavenly line-ups to be the minimum requirement

192 Hanshu 26:1290-1291.
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when it came to the tianwen analysis of a given astral event. Whoever wrote the excerpt presented above had a different mindset: astral phenomena, no matter how predictable or ordinary, carry a tianwen significance. Especially if compared to astonishing events like comets or meteors, they certainly provoke “small alterations”. This, however, does not transform them into regular and ordinary phenomena without any astrological implications. The Sima historians must have been of the same opinion: even if they explicitly admit that lunar eclipses belonged to the realm of “ordinary” (Gu yueshi chang ye 月蝕常也), they attribute to them an astrological meaning involving generals and chancellors (jiang xiang dang zhi 將相當之). Thus, at least on a theoretical level, several Han technicians regarded even routine-phenomena as bearers of specific tianwen meaning. How did Han astrologers deal with the issue of periodic phenomena? Under the Han, there were certainly attempts to formulate some kind of guidelines: as the Sima historians say, whenever an astral body misses the proper position (guo du 過度), the astrologer should proceed with the interpretation and formulation of a prognosis (nai zhan 乃占). This passage can be explained by considering the role of calendarists and astrologers at early imperial courts. Those in charge of drafting official almanacs were required to elaborate a mathematical system which enabled technicians to schedule in advance relevant heavenly phenomena, such as lunar eclipses and line-ups involving the planets. Thus, whoever worked with Han almanacs was presumed to be able to preannounce the position of Jupiter against the background of the stars or the inception of a lunar eclipse. Whenever such scheduling-methods failed, the astral body was supposed to have missed its proper position (guo du 過度). At this point, the astrologer replaced the calendarist. Hence, tianwen practitioners were required to propose an astrological reading of a given phenomenon whenever scheduling-techniques were ineffective. As Sivin has demonstrated, this must have happened quite often since the

193 Shiji 27:1332-1333.
194 Most likely, similar debates accompanied the improvements of observational astronomy. At the beginning, as we have just seen, the core of the problem concerned lunar eclipses and the retrograde motion of Venus and Mars. Later, when Han astronomers became well aware of planetary retrogradation, the discussion probably expanded. By the Tang, the self-trust in the understanding of heavenly phenomena was already so developed that Li Chunfeng was even obliged to defend the astrological significance of solar eclipses. In the Yisizhan, in fact, Li Chunfeng says: “Even if these (i.e. solar and lunar) eclipses depend on regular patterns, calamities will nonetheless pour on the sovereign of a state and [his] ministers. Some people doubt this [fact]: they believe that eclipses can be thoroughly investigated by means of mathematics: since they are predictable, [...] does it make sense to interpret them as calamities sent by heaven? (其蝕雖依常度，而災害在于國君大臣。或人疑之，以為日月之蝕，可以算理推窮，皆先期知之，[...] 此豈天災之意耶？). See Yisi zhan 6:37.
techniques of the time were certainly not able to guarantee an absolute reliability.196

2.7.3 Interpreting predictable phenomena: official astrology

When analysing Han tianwen practices, the interpreter should assume the existence of two ways of analysing the starry sky. The first reflects the position of tianwen practitioners at the imperial court: besides carrying out their interpretative work, they were also responsible for associating given heavenly phenomenon with contemporary events. The second is a much more fleeting dimension in which astrologers were only required to give an interpretation of an astral phenomenon and formulate a prognosis, without concern for the political backstage. We will hereafter refer to these two approaches as “official” and “handbook” astrology.

In the analysis of solar eclipses and comets, we have often run into generic zhan. Let us consider here an example of the official tianwen:

始皇之時，十五年間彗星四見，久者八十日，長或竟天，後秦遂以兵內兼六國，外攘四夷【…】

Under Qin Shi Huangdi, comets were seen four times within fifteen years: The longest [was visible] for eighty days. [Some of them] were so long as to cross the sky. Thereafter, Qin turned to armies: within [the boundaries], it unified the Six States; without, it pillaged the foreign tribes in all the four [directions]. [...]197

Most likely, the association of heavenly and earthly events was also a strategy of official tianwen circles for playing a role in the political scene and in the interdisciplinary debate. As we have just seen, in fact, at least a few individuals cast doubts on the tianwen reading of periodic phenomena. These suspicions embodied a potentially disruptive threat to tianwen practitioners. Astrological prognoses were appealing exactly because they usually concerned the future of politics: accordingly, the dangers coming from an explainable Heaven were actually rather consistent. The doubts on the validity of astrological zhan necessarily implied a loss in prestige and political relevance of tianwen circles. Thus, when people defended the idea that a given heavenly phenomenon carried an astrological significance anyway, they were securing their own position on the cultural as well as on the political scene. To secure the position, however, did not necessarily mean to play a role at the court. As to distinguish themselves among the crowd of officials and outsiders, tianwen practitioners must also demonstrate the utility and efficacy of their job: hence, the link between astral phenomena and political events.

197 Hanshu 26:1301.
2.7.4 Interpreting predictable phenomena: handbook astrology

Astral events were not equally relevant in a political context. While exceptional phenomena like comets very probably stirred up the attention of the rulers and officials, phenomena such as wrongly scheduled lunar eclipses were quite insignificant, if used as tool to increase the prestige of tianwen and tianwen practitioners at the court. As we have just seen, in fact, these belonged to the realm of those predictable events which were occasionally even regarded as “ordinary”. It is however certain that court astrologers would have been able to formulate a prognosis based on every kind of astral event, independently from its periodicity. They could simply turn to what has been here loosely called handbook astrology.

In respect to official astrology, the art of tianwen in handbooks such as those written in name of the Shi Shen and Gan De, those appearing here and there in the monographs of the chronicles, or those that survive in the apocryphal fragments, did not have any political nor theoretical constraint. Let us first shortly dwell on the political limitations and consider the following excerpt from the Tianwen zhi of the Hanshu, where a generic prognosis is quoted:

四年四月丙申，金、木合於東井。占曰：「為白衣之會。井，秦也。」其五年四月乙巳，水、火合於參。占曰：「國不吉。參，梁也。」其六年四月，梁孝王死。

[Under emperor Wen,] in the fourth year, on the day bingshen of the fourth month, Venus and Jupiter joined in [the lodge] Eastern Well. The prognosis says: “This means mourning. Well corresponds to Qin”. In the fifth year, on the day yisi of the fourth month, Mercury and Mars joined in [the lodge] Triaster. The prognosis says: “This is inauspicious for the state. Triaster corresponds to Liang.” On the fourth month of the sixth year, king Xiao of Liang died.

Hence, tianwen practitioners who worked at astrological handbook were unconcerned about associating their zhan with specific political events. Handbook astrology considered all kinds of phenomenon, regardless of their periodicity. We may consider here the following excerpt:

故甘、石曆五星法，唯獨熒惑有反逆行；逆行所守，及他星逆行，日月薄蝕，皆以為占。

198 This line of reasoning might explain what Sivin has called “underreporting” of lunar eclipses in the tianwen monograph of the Hanshu. See Sivin (1969). Here Sivin hypothesizes that heavenly phenomena may have been “a mere instrument for the manipulation of power” which astrologers and scholars used only when they needed it. This line of reasoning, however, does not explain why astrologers neglected solar eclipses. In the Hanshu and in the Hou Hanshu, these phenomena are mentioned and commented on in the Monograph on the Five Agents. See, for instance Hanshu; Hou Hanshu.

199 Hanshu 26:1305.
Therefore, when Gan [De] and Shi [Shen] scheduled the rules behind [the motion of the] five planets in accordance with the calendar, only Mars was supposed to retrograde. They [also] cast prognoses based on the place held [by Mars] when it moves backwards, on the retrogradation of the other planets, on the eclipses of sun and moon.200

Thus, by the time Gan De and Shi Shen worked at their tianwen works, the retrogradation of Mars was already known. This awareness, however, was not supposed to be a hindrance to the elaboration of a zhan since, as said above, they formulated a prognosis by relying on the constellation touched by Mars, when the planet moved backwards. Accordingly, this strategy was applied to all those astral events which were regarded as periodic:

石氏占曰: 月蝕，其鄉有拔邑大戰。
The Shi lineage says: in case of a lunar eclipse, there will be violent fights in the occupied cities of the corresponding [earthly] area.201

The astrological layer of the apocrypha can be aptly described as example of handbook tianwen. We can consider here two examples, the first dealing with a zhan based on lunar eclipses and the second involving the consequences of planetary motion.

月蝕從上始，謂之失道，國君當之。從下始，謂之失法，將軍當之。從傍始，謂之失令，相當之。
If a lunar eclipse begins from above, it is called “the lost Way”. The Prince of a state will match it. If a lunar eclipse begins from below, it is called “the lost model”. A general will match it. If a lunar eclipse begins from the sides, it is called “the lost order”. The chancellor will match it. 202

熒惑守角下，土逆謀，兵乃出。
When Mars hold the [lodge] Horn, in [the corresponding] territory, there will be riots and plots. Finally, troops will arise.203

Such examples of zhan form the tianwen layer of the apocrypha. Despite of the fragmentariness of the corpus, it is safe to maintain that the chenwei encompassed a stratum that fitted what has been here loosely referred to as handbook astrology. Thus, these parts of the apocrypha should be regarded as similar to the tianwen manuals attributed to Gan De and Shi Shen. This point, together with the themes analysed in this section, testifies to the astrological know-how of the authors of the apocrypha. The

200 Shiji 27:1349.
201 Kaiyuan zhanjing 17:322-323.
202 Choshu isho shusei 6:64.
203 Choshu isho shusei 6:201.
nnumerous quotations in Tang astrological manuals — primarily the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* — may be then considered as a further proof of the validity of this thematic layer.

3. **BEYOND TIANWEN**

3.1 **Going beyond tianwen: from tianwen prognoses to tianwen strategies**

A reader convinced of the technical character of the apocrypha will find substantial evidence in the *tianwen* layer to corroborate his judgment. The bewilderment of the interpreter mostly arises in connection with a rather large number of fragments which, while assigning a central role to the starry sky, are certainly not classifiable under the heading *tianwen*. The following wording from the *Wenyaogou* may be of some help in illustrating this point:

東宮蒼帝，其精為蒼龍。南宮赤帝，其精為朱鳥。西宮白帝，其精為白虎。北宮黑帝，其精為玄武。春起青受制，其名靈威仰，夏起赤受制，其名赤熛怒。秋起白受制，其名白招拒。冬起黑受制，其名叶光紀。季夏六月土受制，其名含樞紐。

In the Eastern Palace, there is the Emperor of Green. Its essence is the Green Dragon. In the Southern Palace, there is the Emperor of Red. Its essence is the Vermillion Bird. In the Western Palace, there is the Emperor of White. Its essence is the White Tiger. In the Northern Palace, there is the Emperor of Black. Its essence is the Dark Warrior. When the spring rises, the Azure (i.e. the Green) receives the wand: its name is “The Treasury which dominates upwards” (*Lingweiyang*). When the summer rises, the Red receives the wand: its name is “The Red which stirs the anger” (*Chibiaonu*). When the autumn rises, the White receives the wand: its name is “The White which holds the carpenter’s square” (*Baizhaoju*). When the winter rises, the Black receives the wand: its name is “The Period which enlightens the mark” (*Yeguangji*). In the sixth month, last month of summer, Earth receives the wand: its name is “The Pivot which covers the handle” (*Hanshuniu*).  

On first sight, the reader may well be tempted to simply underline the correlative character of the fragment. One could be even more precise and emphasize the link to the *Yueling* tradition where the cosmos is organized according to the seasons and Five Agents. Yet the *Yueling* does not mention the Heavenly Palaces or the four mythical animals of the heavenly quadrants. The accent on astral regions inevitably leads us back to the *tianwen* framework.

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204 Reading 拒 as 矩. See *Jinshu* 11:292.
205 Here, I read 含樞紐 as 樞含紐. For the fragment, see *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:101.
The fragment of the *Wenyagou* cannot be understood as a “technical” statement: while the main characters may be the same, the line of reasoning is entirely different. When dealing with cases as this, the interpreter of the *chenwei* is intuitively obliged to take into account the existence of a thematic layer which, while assigning a role of primary importance to the starry sky, seems to alludes to a different context. In other words, astrology becomes an argumentative tool and astrological prognoses are no longer the target. In this chapter, therefore, we shall consider the influence of *tianwen* on fields as exegesis, cosmology, and rituality.

An effective discussion of a “beyond *tianwen*” layer of the apocrypha cannot be carried on without considering the Han cultural landscape. The fact that such a thematic stratum appears in the *chenwei* implies, first, that a beyond-*tianwen* discourse actually existed under the Han and, second, that it influenced the authors of the apocrypha. This underlines the need to reflect for a while on the mechanisms which nurtured and fuelled the birth of an interdisciplinary discourse which also involved astrology.

### 3.1.1 Tianwen under the Han: the crossroads and the strategic framework

The fact that cultural communities meet to speak about a given technical theme implies the existence of some sort of principle or idea which worked as crossroads between them. In the case of astrology, to clear up this point seems to be rather unproblematic since it has always worked with the implicit idea that astral phenomena influenced the state. Thus, at least theoretically, the art of *tianwen* was appealing not only for trained technicians but also for members of different groups such as politicians and thinkers interested in political philosophy. As long as thinkers remained indifferent to the implicit principle of astrology, the art of *tianwen* probably remained confined to circles of specialists and a few amateurs. Under the Han, the *ru* were already ready to accept the existence of a *trait d’union* linking the human being to nature: hence, the increasing scholarly interest in *tianwen* themes.

The existence of a theoretical crossroads, while enabling a dialogue between *ru* and *tianwen* practitioners, could not automatically lead to the development of an interdisciplinary discourse. Members of the two groups could have shared opinions about the cosmos and exchanged ideas concerning the relation between the human field and the natural realm. Yet, this convergence of beliefs in itself may have hardly persuaded those who worked with the classics, ethics, and politics to consider the details of *tianwen* practices or to approach a technical study of heavenly phenomena. Thus, one comes to hypothesize the existence of a framework which worked as conveyor of *tianwen* techniques. In this regard, it is difficult to overestimate the role played by the *zaiyi* framework.

The success of the *zaiyi* framework in interpreting such natural phenomena as
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earthquakes or eclipses as heavenly warnings to a vicious and wicked sovereign must have been one of the factors behind the evident success of tianwen techniques in Han scholarly and philosophical circles. From the perspective of a thinker interested in the exegetical or political interpretation of catastrophes and anomalies, the starry sky was clearly an infinite source of material of study. Astrology became a sort of crucible on which Han officials and thinkers could draw when trying to connect the natural realm to the human world, when explaining the accounts on heavenly phenomena in the classics, or, more practically, whenever they felt the need to criticize the handling of political power. Unsurprisingly, then, by the end of the first century BC, several high-ranking officials as well as ru were able to argue on an astrological level. A few names are well worthy of note. If the quotations conserved in the Kaiyuan zhanjing are to be relied upon, Jing Fang 京房 was very familiar with the Han art of tianwen. The already mentioned scholar Li Xun was also trained in astrology. Even Liu Xiang showed a keen interest in this discipline. Several surviving fragments from his Hongfan wuxing zhuan testify to the importance of tianwen for the intellectual identikit of this illustrious scholar. The growing interest in astrology was not limited to the most prominent intellectuals of the time since it also infected the lower strata of the ru community of the time. The cases concerning Su Jing 蘇竟 and Zhi Yun 齊雲, who were active at the beginning of the first century AD, are certainly worthy of mention. Su Jing, who held a position at the Imperial University, had gained a certain celebrity thanks to his explanations of the Changes. Several letters and memorials conserved in his biography testify to an enormous interest in the technical aspects of astrology. Zhi Yun — a devoted student of the Odes — was able to “understand the heavenly patterns” (ming tianwen 明天文). According to the Hou Hanshu, he even prognosticated the restoration of Han power after Wang Mang’s interregnum:

王莽時，寇賊 發，雲乃仰占玄象，歎謂友人曰：「方今鎮、歲、熒惑並在漢分翼、軫之域，去而復來，漢必再受命，福歸有德。」

Under Wang Mang, dangerous bandits rose in number. [Zhi] Yun observed and interpreted the cryptic simulacra [in the sky]. Sighing, he told a friend: “Now, Jupiter and Mars are both in the area of [the lodges] Wings and Axletree [which corresponds to] the territory of the Han. The planets first departed and then came back: the Han must receive

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207 Hanshu 75:3179.
208 See, for instance, Kaiyuan zhanjing 4:345; 10: 640.
209 Hou Hanshu 30A:1041.
210 Hou Hanshu 29:1023.
once again the mandate and luck will return to the ones who have the potency. [...]  

Thus, by the end of the Early Han, astrology was also able to awake the interest of people who did not strictly belong to the technical community.

### 3.1.2 Tianwen prognoses and zaiyi strategies

The fact that eclipses, comets, and planetary line-ups became the object of cross-disciplinary attention leads us to dwell on a significant issue: where exactly was the demarcation line between the zaiyi framework and the realm of tianwen? Han intellectuals, in fact, must have conceived some sort of boundary between these two fields. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand why several dynastic histories encompass two monographs (zhi 志) dealing, at least partially, with the interpretation of heavenly phenomena: the wu xing monographs (Wuxing zhi 五行志) and the treatises on astrology (tianwen zhi 天文志). In the Wuxing zhi, for instance, we have many accounts about solar eclipses and comets. The zaiyi framework is the object of the wu xing monographs: here, the historian mentions or quotes the opinion of scholars on natural phenomena of the recent and remote past. The art of tianwen is the object of the tianwen zhi: interpretations and prognoses concerning a given astral line-up are simply introduced with the formula “the prognosis says” (zhan yue 占曰).

A comparison between the Wuxing zhi and the monograph on astrology in the Hanshu quickly reveals that the technical spectrum of astral phenomena considered in the second document is considerably larger than the array noticed or commented on by a wider public in the former. Actually, the astronomical phenomena mentioned in the Monograph on the Five Agents are mostly eclipses or comets: further astral lines-ups are barely mentioned. Even towards the end of the first century BC, when the zaiyi framework was enjoying an enormous success and astrology was becoming more important, several astral phenomena continued to be ignored. In 29 BC, for instance, the moon hid Mercury: according to the tianwen prognosis, this announced the arrival of masses of “floating people” (liu min 流民): as the monograph recalls, this actually happened shortly afterwards. The chronicles do not suggest that officials or scholars interpreted this astral line-up. This is all the more interesting if we consider that the arrival of a huge number of floating people must have been an event of a certain importance since it is also mentioned in the annals of emperor Cheng.  

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211 Hou Hanshu 29:1024.

212 Hanshu 26:1310. For the annals of emperor Cheng, see Hanshu 10:313. In the same way, scholarly communities seem to have ignored the conjunction of three planets which took place in 27 BC.
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this one may imply that less impressive astral phenomena, perhaps because they were considered to be periodic or even ordinary, did not attract the attention of a wider public, even when they were linked to important social events.

In case of phenomena that were considered disruptive and dangerous, the boundary between zaiyi and tianwen inevitably becomes blurred. The well-known line-up “Mars holding Heart” (Yinghuo shou xin 熒惑守心) — one of the most famous ominous phenomena — in the last decades BC was explained and commented on by the scholar Li Xun who, as we have seen, took a deep interest in astrological matters. Even in such cases, however, the targets and strategies of thinkers using the zaiyi framework differed profoundly from those of astrologers. The objective of tianwen was to interpret an astral event and to formulate an astrological prognosis. Thus, trained astrologers were mostly not concerned with the causes underlying given heavenly happenings. The focus of a tianwen expert was always on the alleged consequences of such events, namely those involving the future of kings, ministers, and the people. Scholars and officials moving within the zaiyi framework usually went beyond the technical zhan, connecting different disciplines, such as politics, astrology, and exegesis. Thus, besides considering a given astral phenomenon, they pondered about the causes behind it, unfolding political mistakes and moral weaknesses on the side of rulers. Finally, they could also allude to the occurrence of similar line-ups in the past. This obviously implies a substantial thematic richness of the zaiyi strategy. Besides knowing the contemporary social situation, the scholars applying this method were greatly concerned with ethics as well as politics and were able to look for precedents in the numerous accounts on calamities of the Chunqiu. The Wuxing zhi gives us a very apt example for visualizing this point.

七月癸未，先晦一日，日有食之，在翼八度。劉向以為前年高園便殿災，與春秋御廩災後日食於翼、軫同。其占，內有女變，外為諸侯。

On the day guiwei of the seventh month, there was a solar eclipse one day before the last day of the month: it was in the 8th du of [the lodge] Wing. Liu Xiang believed that this was the calamity [related to] the fire in the restroom of the High Garden happened in the preceding year. This is similar to the fire in the royal granary of the Annals and to the consequent solar eclipse in [the lodges] Wing and Axletree. According to the [related] astrological prognosis, within [the court] there must be changes [concerning] women, outside [the changes] had to involve feudatories.

In the excerpt above, attention is drawn to an eclipse in Wing for which we have the

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213 See Hanshu 84:3421. Huang Yinong offers a historical review and a detailed analysis of this line-up in the last decades BC. See Huang Yinong (1991).

214 Hanshu 27C:1502.
zaiyi judgement of Liu Xiang and an astrological prognosis. The zhan simply focuses on the eclipse and forecasts the consequences. As a ru and zaiyi expert, Liu Xiang was asked to establish connections. First, he links the eclipse to a fire in the High Garden. Second, he traces a precedent: the simultaneous occurrence of fire and eclipse in Wing and Axletree had already happened in the Chunqiu period. Third, he mentions the zhan by finally transforming these unusual events into the heavenly reaction to the licentious behaviour of women of the royal family.215

The boundaries between tianwen and zaiyi deeply influence the ways in which Han scholars classified a work: even with a strong astrological layer, texts inspired by the zaiyi strategy could hardly find a place among books listed under the heading tianwen. This is, for instance, the case with the Hongfan wuxingzhuan, which is traditionally attributed to Liu Xiang. In the imperial bibliography, this document is catalogued among the exegetical works; however, as we know from the fragments conserved in the Kaiyuan zhanjing, this text also contained highly technical excerpts.216 As the discussion below shall show, even the apocrypha combine the tianwen layer with fields which cannot be understood within a technical context.

3.2 Beyond tianwen: astrology and cosmology

3.2.1 Cosmology applied to the starry sky.

The first common ground between tianwen and other branches of learning that we shall review is cosmology. Let us begin by briefly recalling that the Han cosmological discourse was based on ying/yang theories as well as on the wu xing framework. The chenwei certainly reveal traces of this typical trend. The Qianzaodu, for instance, dwell on the primordial qi (yuan qi 元氣) and portray the birth of the cosmos.217 Moreover, a number of apocryphal fragments suggest that the authors of the chenwei applied the cosmological principles of the time to shed light on the origins of natural phenomena such as thunder or rain.218 In this regard, for instance, it is significant to recall that sweet dew is defined as the product of the breaking of the essence of the Xuanyuan asterism (xuanyuan zhi jing sanwei ganlu 軒轅之精散為甘露).219 Finally, the writers of the

215 The fire in the fourteenth regnal year of Duke Huan 桓 (ca. 711-693 BC) was interpreted by Liu Xiang as the heavenly reproach against the sexual intercourse between Duke Huan’s wife and the marquis of Qi. In this regard, see Hanshu 27A:1321 and the glosses of the commentators in Hanshu 27A:1322.

216 For the cataloguing of the Wuxingzhuan in the Han imperial bibliography, see Hanshu 30:1705.


218 Some fragments of the Yuanmingbao, for instance, are devoted to explaining the yin or yang derivation of natural phenomena such as thunder or rain. See, for instance, Choshu isho shusei 4A:44.

219 Choshu isho shusei 3:71.
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apocrypha, just as other Han thinkers, applied the cosmological principles in vogue in the last centuries BC to the heavens in order to explain facets and working of the astral bodies. From the *Huainanzi* to the *Baihutong*, from Liu Xiang to Ban Gu, almost everybody was ready to acknowledge that the sun, moon, and five planets were visible and concrete manifestations of the cosmic forces. The sun was a mass of *yang* and the moon a mass of *yin*; the five planets were presented as the materialization of the Five Agents. This line of reasoning is also found in some apocryphal fragments. The link between planets and agents is mentioned in a number of wordings. In the *Kaolingyao*, for instance, the planets are explicitly presented as the essences (*jing* 精) of the *wu xing*.

We shall consider below the cosmological description of the sun and moon conserved in the wordings of the *Yuanmingbao*:

日之為言實也，節也。含一開度，立節使物咸別。故謂之日。言陽布散合如一。故其立字四合共一者為日【…】

The meaning of “sun” is “full”. It [also means] “limit”. It embodies the [primordial] One and opens the Measure (?). It sets the limits and causes things to diversify from each other. Therefore, it is called “sun”. This means that the *yang* [first] branches off and then converges into one [point]. [This is the reason why] they made a character with four [sides] converging in one [stroke in the centre] to mean “sun”.

天尊精為日。陽以一起,日以發紀。尊故滿,滿故施,施故仁,仁故明,明故精,精故外光。故火日外景,陽精外吐。

The high-ranking essence of Heaven makes the sun. The *yang* rises with the [primordial] One, the sun fixes the marks [of the calendar] with [its] rising. The sun is the high-ranking [among the astral bodies], therefore is full. Since it is full, it gives [life]. Since it gives [life], it expresses benevolence [in its working]. Since it expresses benevolence [in its working], it is shiny. Since it is shiny, it sparkles outside. Therefore, the sun — just like fire — has an exterior light. [This is how] the essence of the *yang* is spitted outside.220

With regard to the cosmological analysis of the moon, the authors of the *Yuanmingbao* tried to explain in the light of *yin/yang* theory its monthly working, also dwelling on the fact that the radiance of the moon is reflected sunlight.

月者陰精，為言闕也。中有蟾蜍與兔者。陰陽兩居，相付託抑諳，合。陽結，治其內光炬。中氣似文耳。兔善走，象陽動也。兔之言僖呼，僖呼溫暖名也。月水之精，故內明而氣冷。陰生不滿者，詘於君也。至望，而盈者，氣事合也。盈，而確者，詘尊也。其氣卑，卑故修表成緯。陰受陽精，故精在內，所以金水內景，內景故陰精。月為陰精體自無光，藉日照之乃明，猶如臣自無威，假君之勢乃成其威。月初未政對日故無光缺。月半而與日相對，故光滿。十六日以後漸缺亦漸不對日也。

220 *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:36.
The moon is the essence of the \textit{yin}. It means “defective”. At the centre, there are a hare and a toad. The \textit{yin} and the \textit{yang} coexist: they supplements and oppress each other. [Finally], they unite. The \textit{yang} coagulates: it rules over the torch of brilliance in its interior. The \textit{qi} of the middle resembles what is patterned. The toad loves running: it portrays the motion of the \textit{yang}. The meaning of “toad” is “sound of joy” and the sound of joy is the name for warmth. The moon is the essence of Water, it is brilliant on the inside whereas [its original] \textit{qi} is cold. When the \textit{yin} rises, it is not complete and it crouches down in front of the prince (i.e. the sun). It reaches [its] full [phase]: its being filled means that [the potential of its interior \textit{yang} \textit{qi}] and fact finally converge. The moon is filled: its steadfastness means that it bows in front of the High-ranking. The \textit{qi} of the moon is the Low-ranking: in view of this, it corrects the chart (i.e. the calendar?) and completes the [set of the] weft-[astral bodies]. The \textit{yin} receives the essence of the \textit{yang}: therefore, the essence lies within. This is the reason behind the inner reflection of metal and of water. They reflect inside and therefore are the essence of the \textit{yin}. The moon is the essence of the \textit{yin}, the body does not have brilliance per se. It receives the light of the sun and then shines, just like the ministers, who do not have authority per se, complete their authority after having borrowed the force of the prince. At the beginning [of the lunation], the moon is not yet in front of the sun. Therefore, it does not have brilliance or [its brilliance] is scarce. In the middle of the lunation, [the moon] is just in front of the sun and therefore its brilliance is complete. After 16 days, it gradually fades. In the same way, it gradually becomes more distant from the sun.

Even if formulated in somewhat obscure terms, the fragments of the \textit{Yuanmingbao} are rather unsurprising from the viewpoint of an interpreter of Han culture. The points made above appear here and there in sources of the period. The definition of the sun as “filled” (\textit{shi} 實) and of the moon as “defective” (\textit{que} 閣) appears, for instance, in the \textit{Baihutong}.\textsuperscript{223} This, in turn, implies that, by the Later Han, these labels certainly were the standard definitions sun and moon. On the other hand, the terms high-ranking (\textit{zun} 尊) and low-ranking (\textit{bei} 卑) are among the key-concepts of the period, when dealing with hierarchical models.\textsuperscript{224} Even the evident awareness that the moon does not shine with light of its own must have been a well-known fact at the time. These convergences between the \textit{chenwei} and the surrounding cultural landscape however, do not imply that the apocrypha simply followed the main tendencies of their epoch when dealing with cosmology applied to the starry sky. In fact, these texts reveal some traces of a very unfamiliar framework which we will refer to as “astral cosmology”.

\textsuperscript{221} Reading \textit{qu} 諤 as \textit{chu} 黜.
\textsuperscript{222} \textit{Choshu isho shusei} 4A:37.
\textsuperscript{223} \textit{Baihutong} 9:424-425.
\textsuperscript{224} See, for instance, chapter 13 of the \textit{Chunqiu fanlu}. 
3.2.2 Astral cosmology in the apocrypha

The apocryphal fragments reveal a less familiar contribution to the cosmological discourse of the time, namely a sort of astral cosmology which strongly emphasizes the active role of astral bodies in shaping the sky as well as the earth.

In the Jinshu, Li Chunfeng briefly summarizes Jing Fang’s viewpoint on the birth of comets:

漢京房著風角書有集星章，所載妖星【…】各有五星所生【…】三十五星，即五行氣所生【…】

In the book on the [technique] fengjiao by the Han [scholar] Jing Fang, there is a chapter which collects [names] of stars. [...] In regard to the ominous stars mentioned here, each [of them] has what the five planets generate. These 35 [ominous] stars are the product of the qi of the Five Agents.225

If Li Chunfeng’s account can be relied upon, comets were created by the action of the five agents through the intervention of the five planets. Therefore, it seems that astral bodies play a very active role in the formation of the known world. A similar point is made in the Lun heng, where Wang Chong writes:

天有倉龍，白虎朱鳥，玄武之象也。地亦有龍虎鳥物之物。四星之精降生四獸。

Heaven has the four simulacra: the Green Dragon, the White Tiger, the Purple Bird, and the Dark Warrior. Likewise, the earth has things (i.e. creatures) such as dragon, tiger, bird, and turtle. The essences of the four asterisms descend and generate these four animals.226

Hence, apparently, Wang Chong attributes the power of creating life on earth to the starry clusters. The use of the term jing is surely an interesting confirmation that we are moving here in a cosmological context. Thus, even though the text hardly deepens this point, it cannot be ruled out that Han thought assigned an active role to the astral bodies: the asterisms contribute to the creation of the cosmos by virtue of their being masses of cosmic forces like yin/yang or wu xing. As such, they would act as a sort of medium in the process which led to the formation of the world.

We know virtually nothing about the cultural relevance of astral cosmology under the Han: the scarce references to it in the sources still extant may well suggest that it constituted a side issue for many intellectuals of the time. It is certain, however, that the people who wrote the chenwei were aware of this argumentative possibility. Let me immediately emphasize that texts linked to the Hetu loyalty follow Jing Fang’s

225 Jinshu 12:326-327.
226 Lun heng 22:84.
viewpoint. Moreover, in dividing the comets into five groups, the still extant fragments have them correspond to the relative planets. This, however, does not mean that we have here a plain association scheme: the terms used suggest that the authors were thinking about the ways in which these comets were generated. The essence of Jupiter, for instance, “flows so as to form” (liu wei 流為) comets like the Heavenly Dog; Mars is said to “break up so as to form” (san wei 散為) the Chiyou Flag.\textsuperscript{227} Apparently, the authors of the chenwei did not take only the five planets into account. Meteors, for instance, are said to embody the essence of the asterism Gouchen (鉤陳之精).\textsuperscript{228} The Yuanmingbao adds:

1. 虛危之精流為青州，分為齊國，立為菜山。

The essence of [the lodges] Barrens and Rooftop flows so as to form Qing province, splits up so as to form the state of Qi, sets up so as to form Cai mountain.

2. 天弓星主司，弓弩流為徐州，別為魯國。

The [essence of] the Celestial Bow is in charge of control. It splits so as to form the Xu province and splits up so as to form the state of Lu.

3. 鉤鈐星別為豫州，豫之為言序也，言隂陽分布；各得處也。

The [essence of the] star Hook splits so as to form Yu Province. The meaning of yu is xu, order. It means that the yin and the yang split and expand: each of them gets its [proper] location.\textsuperscript{229}

Hence, essences of stars and asterisms transform in order to create given regions of the earth. Here, obviously, we have some kind of cosmological explanation of the fenye theory: evidently, whoever wrote the Yuanmingbao felt the need to justify the reasons for the association between heavenly areas and earthly regions. Unfortunately, the scarcity of Han material addressing this topic does not allow us to decide whether it was the standard viewpoint of the time: very probably large sectors of the Han community were simply indifferent to such themes. It is, however, possible that the authors of the apocrypha pushed this kind of astral cosmology to the extreme. The awareness of a theory that focused on the active role of astral bodies in the shaping of the cosmos most certainly led a few individuals to make of stars and asterisms a sort of fulcrum in natural life. Let us now consider the following statement:

樞星散為䴉為虎為象為橘為薑又為雲母。璣星散為雉為鷃為鶉為菝葜。玉衡星散為雞為鸹為兎為芫又散為李為桃為椒為荆為榆又為菖蒲。維星散為蘮蕪。瑶光散為象

\textsuperscript{227} Jinshu 12:326.
\textsuperscript{228} Choshu isho shusei 4A:79.
\textsuperscript{229} Choshu isho shusei 4A:79.
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When the star Pivot [of the Dipper] breaks up, it becomes roebucks, tigers, images, tangerines, ginger: moreover, it is the mother of the clouds. When the star Pearl [of the Dipper] breaks up, it becomes pheasant, small quail, quails, and greenbrier. When the star Jade [of the Dipper] breaks up, When the star Pearl [of the Dipper] breaks up, it becomes chicken, sparrow, rabbit, and mouse. Among plants, it breaks as to form plums, peaches, hot pepper, chaste trees, elms, and sweet sedges. When the star Net [of the Dipper] breaks up, it forms the seeds of Mi. When the star Light of the Green Jasper [of the Dipper] breaks up, it forms Mi birds, sparrows, magpies, eagles, and ginseng. 230

Hence, a consistent part of the animal and vegetal realm seems to derive from the stars of the Dipper. We cannot know for certain whether the author of this fragment was simply associating animals and plants with astral bodies or whether we should understand the term san within a cosmological context. The latter possibility is certainly a valid option: whoever wrote the chenwei often preferred to focus on the active contribution of astral bodies in the formation of several realms of the cosmos.

Before turning to the ways in which astrology influenced the exegetical discourse, it is appropriate at this point to summarize the remarks presented above. The fragments analysed up to now have revealed the active role of stars and asterisms in the cosmological discourse. This theme, which appears from time to time in other Han sources, seems to have been stressed with an unparalleled vigour within the apocryphal corpus where even natural phenomena as the dew are seen as the products of stellar emanations. It would be at least hazardous to classify the wordings presented above as tianwen. Even in the presence of a valid fenye scheme — such as the one sketched in the fragments of the Yuanmingbao — we are here obliged to focus on the cosmological implications and to consider the tianwen simply as a part of and not as the focus of the argumentation.

3.3 Beyond tianwen: astrology and exegesis

After having reviewed the fragments suggesting the importance of tianwen themes in a cosmological context, we shall dwell here on the role that the tianwen played in the exegetical field. We have already seen how at least one apocryphal fragment linked the fenye theory to the states of the Odes. In the same way, the Luoshu associates stars and asterisms to the mountains listed in the Yugong chapter of the Shujing. 231 In the following remarks, we shall explore in more detail how astrology became part of the ru exegetical discourse by discussing mutations and misunderstandings of the tradition of

230 Choshu isho shusei 4A:162-165.
231 See Yisizhan 3:62.
the Four Quadrants.

3.3.1 The cosmological updating of the astrological Four Simulacra

The tradition of the four heavenly animals of the quadrants — Green Dragon, Purple Bird, White Tiger, Dark Warrior — apparently characterized not only the astrological discussion of the second century BC but also other disciplines or fields. It is undeniable, for instance, that experts in military strategy widely used this reference system. The Liji testifies that the Four Simulacra were used for the displacement of troops on the battleground. Geographers and architects likewise had a predilection for them. The Sanfu huangtu, a text quoted at the court under Han Wudi, illustrated the layout of the imperial buildings by using them as reference points. In spite of the success enjoyed in different cultural communities, the tradition of the four animals did not remain completely unchanged during the Han. In the introduction to the contents of the apocrypha, we have recalled that the correlative scheme of the Tianwenxun increased the number of mythic beasts from four to five, including the Yellow Dragon among the heavenly animals. As already mentioned, this was not a standard option at the time. The Tianguan shu, in fact, respects the traditional grid: moreover, this document uses the labels Yellow Dragon for referring to the Xuanyuan asterism in the southern area of the sky. Unfortunately, we cannot know whether the “Yellow Dragon” of the Huainanzi referred to the Xuanyuan cluster or, as slightly later tianwen sources suggest, to the circumpolar area.

Examining the apocryphal portrayal of the four heavenly animals, the reader finds a few fragments which reflect the standard position of astrology. The Kaolingyao, for instance, simply gives a list of the animals by associating them with the lodges. Other apocryphal wordings, however, reproduce the predominance of the wu xing framework. In the fragment from the Yundoushu considered at the beginning of this section, for instance, the animals were four: yet, the mentioning of Earth (jixia liu yue tu 土) certainly signalizes the important role played by the Agents. A similar approach is traceable in the Xingdefang:

東方春，蒼龍，其智仁。南方夏，朱鳥，好禮。西方秋，白虎，執義。北方冬，元龜。主信。會中央土之精。

232 In this regard, see Li Zhijun (1994).
233 Shiji 27:1299.
234 The Jingzhou zhan, one of the fragmentary astrological texts often mentioned in the Kaiyuan zhanjing, links the Yellow Dragon with the Gouchen asterism, which, as we have seen, belonged as well to the central area of the sky. In this regard, see Kaiyuan zhanjing 67:762.
235 Choshu isho shusei 2:51.
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The East: Spring and the Green Dragon. Its [wisdom] is humanity. The South: Summer and the Red Bird. It loves etiquette. The West: autumn and the White Tiger. It holds in hand righteousness. The North: winter and the Turtle of the Origin. It gives priority to sincerity. They meet in the centre which is the essence of Earth.\(^{236}\)

Clearly, we have here a complex correlative scheme in which a typical human element, ethics, is interpreted within a cosmological model which brings together directions, seasons, and the four heavenly animals. It is interesting to notice that the tradition of the four quadrants is respected since the allusion to Earth does not imply the “creation” of a new symbol. The writer of the following fragment must have had a different opinion:

風后曰: 予告汝帝之五旗。東方法青龍, 曰旗。南方法赤鳥, 曰旗。西方法白虎, 曰典。北方法蛇, 曰旗。中央法黃龍曰常。

Feng Hou said: “I have informed you about the imperial Five Flags. The eastern takes the Azure Dragon as model and it is called \(qi\). The southern models takes the Red Bird as model and it is called \(yu\). The western takes the White Tiger as model and it is called \(dian\). The southern takes the Dark Snake as model and it is called \(qi\). The central takes the Yellow Dragon as model and it is called \(chang\).\(^{237}\)

The reference here is to the five flags which adorned the troops on the battleground. A second element here is the presence of the Yellow Dragon: evidently, whoever wrote this fragment was simply fitting an older model to the \(wu \ xing\) scheme. Like the \(Huainanzi\), the \(chenwei\) hardly help the interpreter to solve the puzzle concerning the identification of the heavenly region called “yellow dragon”. Clearly, the authors of texts were well aware that an asterism of the southern area was also known by this name.\(^{238}\) On the other hand, however, it cannot be ruled out that \(huanglong\) could also designate the circumpolar area: this would explain the link between the Yellow Dragon and the heavenly region of the Dipper.\(^{239}\)

\(^{236}\) Choshu isho shusei 2:65.
\(^{237}\) Choshu isho shusei 6:32.
\(^{238}\) Choshu isho shusei 4B:95.
\(^{239}\) See, for instance, Choshu isho shusei 3:23; 2:54. We shall return on this point at the end of this chapter.
3.3.2 The si ling: political and taxonomy

An analysis of the apocryphal portrayal of the four heavenly animals cannot be based only on the astrographical tradition or its applications: the tradition of the “four numinous animals (si ling 四靈) must also be taken into account. In the Rites we read:

以天地為本，故物可舉也。【…】四靈以為畜，故飲食有由也。何謂四靈？麟鳳龜龍謂之四靈。故龍以為畜，故魚鱉不淰。鳳以為畜，故鳥不獝。麟以為畜，故獸不●。龜以為畜，故人情不失。

[The sage] takes Heaven and Earth as the origin: this is the way by means of which things can rise. […] He takes the four numinous animals as domestic beasts: this is the way by means of which drink and food originate. What is meant by „Four Treasuries“? Unicorn, phoenix, dragon, and tortoise are the so-called “Four Treasuries”. When the dragon is domesticated, fish will not scatter. When the phoenix is domesticated, birds will not fly away. When the unicorn is domesticated, the running beasts will not run away. When the tortoise is domesticated, human feelings are not lost.

This excerpt from the Rites presents four kinds of animals which are collectively referred to as si ling. Obviously, we are not moving here in an astrographical context. On the one hand, the Liji presents to us a centuries-old tradition concerning auspicious and mythical beasts which, as is well known, symbolized a peaceful era of good government: early sources abound of references to dragons or phoenixes marking the beginning of enlightened rulership. On the other hand, as Sterckx has suggested, the passage must also be considered for its philosophical implications. The sage is viewed as domesticator of the world: he is the one able to bring dragon and phoenix, unicorn and turtle under control. Moreover, just as the sage is connected to human beings, these extraordinary creatures are associated with specific classes of animals: as Mengzi said, the class relationship (lei 類) that exists between sage and people (min 民) is the same as that which binds the unicorn to the running beasts (tu shou 走獸) or the phoenix to birds (fei niao 飛鳥). In other words, the Rites seem to suggest an early taxonomical model of the animal reign: the connections dragon/fishes, phoenix/birds, unicorn/quadrupeds may clearly be read as an early incomplete attempt of classifying fauna. This reasoning was considerably developed under the Han, when the ru could already rely on the wu xing taxonomy.

As we have seen in the chapter of the shengren, some early texts reveal the existence of a tendency to classify the animal world on the basis of the wu xing scheme and

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240 “Four Numinous Animals” is the standard translation that Sterckx uses for si ling. See Sterckx (2002), 103.


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according to their physical features. In the Yueling chapter of the Lüshi chunqiu, we find a first complete taxonomy based on the Five Agents scheme, which is presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGENT</th>
<th>SEASON</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Scaly (lin chong 鱗蟲)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Feathered (yu chong 羽蟲)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>Mid-summer</td>
<td>Naked animals (luo chong 僂蟲)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>Hairy (mao chong 毛蟲)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Armoured (jie chong 介蟲)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Han scholars attached a certain importance to the relationship that existed between these classes and the group of the si ling. As we have seen, the Dadai liji transformed the numinous animals into the most important members of a specific class. Accordingly, the dragon, the phoenix, the unicorn, and the tortoise are presented as the most refined of scaly, feathered, hairy, and armoured class respectively.

Turning attention now to the apocrypha, we may examine the following wording from the Goumingjue:

失仁,則龍麟不舞。失禮,則鸞鳳不翔。失智,則黃龍不見。失義,則白虎不出。失信則元龜不見。

When [the sovereign] loses humanity, dragon and unicorn will not dance. When he loses etiquette, the luan bird and the phoenix will not fly. When he loses righteousness, the white Tiger will not come outside and when he loses trustworthiness, the Turtle of the origin will hide.

This fragment from the Goumingjue could seem unproblematic at first sight. As in the preceding case, we have here an advanced correlative scheme which links the ethical virtues to the heavenly animals. Yet, when we look at the mentioned animals, we cannot but notice some confusion in the analysis. The east is associated not only with the dragon but also with the unicorn. Moreover, instead of being related to the Red Bird or the Red Sparrow, the south is linked to the luan bird and to the phoenix. It is therefore evident that whoever wrote this fragment was simply mixing the astrographical tradition with the si ling scheme. A further example of this syncretic approach is in the material collected under the title Yankongtu: here, the unicorn is also seen as essence of Wood (mu jing 木精), whereas the Tiger is presented as essence of Metal (jin jing 金精).

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243 Lüshi chunqiu 1.1:1, 4.1:17, 6.1:28, 7.1:33, 10.1:47. On this point, see also Sterckx (2002), 78-80.
244 See Dadai liji 5.5:35. For a short introduction to the composition and textual problems of the Dadai liji, see Deng Ruiquan and Wang Kuanying (1998), 152-154.
245 Choshu isho shusei 5:77.
246 Choshu isho shusei 4A:23.
Finally, a short fragment of the *Douweiyi* presents the unicorn as the counterpart of metal. We could certainly classify this strategy as an example of a hybrid form of correlative thinking: this, however, would not explain the frame of mind of the people who chose it.

### 3.3.3 The four quadrants of the apocrypha against the Han cultural background

The remarks in the precedent sections have shown, it is hoped, that the portrayal of the Four Quadrants in the apocrypha was influenced by a few discrepant cultural traditions. Besides the astrological framework or its cosmological version, the reader of the *chenwei* finds here fragments that echo the political and the taxonomical line of reasoning. At this point, it is worthwhile to stress once again that the cases examined above do not allow an interpreter to trace a demarcation line between the wordings reflecting a *tianwen* background of the sayings clearly classifiable in the tradition of the *Liji* or of the *Lüshi chunqiu*. In other words, the people behind several apocryphal fragments were simply trying to combine different trends of thought.

The *Wujing yiyi* demonstrates that the mixing of traditions was one of the features of exegetical activity.

公羊說麟木精。左氏說麟中央。軒轅大角之獸。陳欽說麟是西方毛蟲。謹案禮運云麟鳯龜龍，謂之四靈。龍東方也。虎西方也。鳯南方也。龜北方。麟中央也。" According to the discourse of the [people dealing with the] *Gongyang* [tradition], the unicorn is the essence of the Wood. According to the discourse on the [people dealing with the] *Zuozhuan* [tradition], the unicorn is the [heavenly] animal of the great Horn and Xuanyuan [asterism] of the centre. Chen Qin used to say that the unicorn is the animal [corresponding] to the west. According to the chapter *Liyun* of the *Rites*, phoenix, unicorn, turtle and dragon form the Four Numinous Animals. The dragon is the east, the tiger is the West; the phoenix is the south, the tortoise is the North; the unicorn, then, [must] be the centre.

This excerpt from the *Wujing yiyi* testifies that the portrayals of the four heavenly animals also concerned classicists. Evidently, by the end of the Early Han dynasty, some people tried to combine the astrographical tradition with the exegetical reflection on the *Rites*. Who were these people? Exponents of the *Zuozhuan*-lineage must have been responsible for associating the unicorn with the centre, whereas the *Gongyang* tradition preferred to link it to the west. Finally, a third hypothesis formulated by Chen Qin, an almost unknown scholar who was said to have taught the *Zuozhuan* to Wang

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247 *Choshu isho shusei* 3:75.
248 *Bo Wujing yiyi*, pp. 19-20.
Mang,\(^{249}\) considered the unicorn to be associated with the west, hence reflecting the zoological taxonomy mentioned in the last section. As we have seen in the preceding paragraph, these discrepant positions are also found in the apocrypha. Han stone engravings and mural paintings appear to testify to the large success of this syncretic trend.

3.4 Beyond tianwen: astrology and rituality

A reader of the chenwei often encounters fragments presenting or discussing those five heavenly ruling deities (wu di) which, as is well known, played a central role in early imperial cultic life. In this section, we shall dwell on the ways in which a tianwen understanding of the cult seems to have profoundly influenced the greater part of the authors of the apocrypha.

3.4.1 The Han cult of the Five Ruling Deities: a summary

The reader of the Shiji quickly recognizes that the worship of ruling deities (di) characterized Qin cultic life. Duke Wen (r. 755-716 BC), for instance, had the Fu shrine (fu zhi) built and offered a sacrifice to the Emperor of White (Baidi); Duke Xuan 宣 (r. 675-664BC) is reported to have offered a sacrifice to the Emperor of Azure (Qingdi 青帝); Duke Ling 灵 (r. 424-415BC) is linked to the worship of the Emperor of Yellow (Huangdi 黄帝) and of the Burning Emperor (Yandi 炎帝).\(^{250}\) In all probability, these ceremonies were among the most important events of the Qin ceremonial system since, according to the chronicles, the di of these sacrifices worked as heavenly intermediaries for “communicating” with one the most important deities of pre-imperial China: Shangdi 上帝.\(^{251}\) This mediated form of worship could have been linked to Zhou ritual practice. Han sources report that the Zhou were accustomed to performing their most important ceremony — jiao 郊 — in honour of Hou Ji in order to reach Heaven (jiao si Hou Ji yi pei tian 郊祀后稷以配天) and to carry on the zong 宗 in honour of king Wen in order to reach Shangdi (zong si Wen wang yu Mingtang yi pei Shangdi 宗祀文王於明堂以配上帝).\(^{252}\)

The cult of the heavenly di survived under the Han.\(^{253}\) Shortly after the end of the war

\(^{249}\) *Hanshu* 88:3620.


\(^{251}\) Duke Wen, for instance, performed the sacrifice after having dreamed of a yellow snake: the dream was interpreted as a manifestation of Shangdi (shangdi zhi zheng 上帝之徵). See *Shiji* 28.1358.

\(^{252}\) *Shiji* 28:1357.

\(^{253}\) When the Qin empire collapsed and Liu Bang managed to defeat his main rival Xiang Yu, the new-born Han empire still lacked a well-defined religious dimension. In initiating the lengthy process which was to lead to the codification of the Han state-cult, the new emperor followed two main paths. On the one hand, he tried to unify the different religious trends co-existing on Chinese
Then, at the time of the Qin, to which ruling deity did [the ruler] sacrifice [when revering] Shangdi? Somebody answered: “Four ruling deities: there were the sacrifices to the ruling deity of the White, of the Azure, of the Yellow, and of the Red”. Gaozu said: “I have heard that Heaven has five ruling deities and yet there are only four [sacrifices]. Why? Nobody could explain this. Then Gaozu said: I know the reason! It was waiting for me: I will complete [the set of the] five. Thereafter, he erected the sacrificial [place] of the Black Emperor and called it the Northern Shrine.254

After a phase of enormous success under emperor Wen 文 (r. 150-133), 255 the Han cult of the heavenly di loses its central role at the court of Wudi.

From Wudi’s reign onwards, there were several attempts to codify and systematize Han cultic life. While on the one hand, outsiders tried to introduce new forms of worship, scholarly circles, on the other hand, began to urge emperors to unify state cults by stressing the importance of worshipping heaven and earth. As for the outsiders, it is attested that a certain Miu Ji 謬忌 from Hao 亳 promoted the cult of Taiyi 太一.256 This gradually came to play a central role to the detriment of the five heavenly deities.257
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Even if the five *di* survived,258 Wudi’s introduction of the *jiao* sacrifice to a heavenly deity — Taiyi — and, slightly later, to an earthly divinity — Hou Tu 后土 — was a step which was to mould the following decades and centuries.259 From Wudi’s reign onwards, a growing activity on the side of the *ru* becomes noticeable in the cultic field. Dong Zhongshu, for instance, highlighted the importance of the *jiao* sacrifice to Heaven: known as one basic part of Zhou cultic system, the *jiao* was treated in several excerpts of the classics.260 Hence, for Han *ru* it became the sacrifice which “serait offert au plus puissant des dieux, le Ciel, par la premiere des hommes, l’empereur, au premiere jour de la nouvelle année, donc avant tous les autres sacrifices.”261 The *Chunjiu fanlu* is very explicit in this regard:

故春秋凡譏郊乃不郊而祭山川，失祭之敘，逆於禮，不祭天者，乃不可祭小神也。郊因先卜，不吉，不敢郊；百神之祭不卜，而郊獨卜，郊祭最大也。

Therefore, during the Spring and Autumn period, almost everyone ridiculed and neglected the *jiao* sacrifice and worshipped mountains and rivers. [In this way,] they lost the [written] accounts [concerning the performance] of the sacrifice and contravened [the proper] etiquette: the one who does not worship Heaven surely cannot worship minor spirits. The *jiao* presupposes divination. [If the response] is inauspicious, one does not even dare to perform the *jiao*. In the sacrifices to the hundred spirits, divination is not required: only the *jiao* [presupposes it]: [hence], among the ceremonies, the *jiao* is the most important one.262

Whoever wrote this part of the *Chunjiu fanlu* was evidently maintaining the necessity of introducing a verticalization in state cults by assigning to the sacrifice to Heaven the most important role. In the last decades BC, the *ru* gradually promoted a depersonalized cult of Heaven and Earth, based in the capital, and performed according to the wordings of the classics.263 In this period, the position of the *ru* at the court became much more important. Gu Yong 谷永 vehemently complained about the favour accorded to the *fangshi* in the previous decades;264 Kuang Heng 匡衡 proposed and initially obtained permission to close all the temples located outside of the capital.265 In all probability, the

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258 A sacrifice to them was offered in the new Hall of Light (*mingtang*) erected in the southern suburbs of Chang’an. *Shiji* 12:480.
259 *Hanshu* 22:1045. After Wudi, both Xuandi and Yuandi repeatedly visited the site of Ganquan to perform the *jiao* to the Taiyi. Evidently, the cult of the Taiyi deity had finally gained the supremacy over the cult of the Five Emperors. *Hanshu* 8:258,264,268,271,273; 9:285,287,293,294.
262 *Chunjiu fanlu* 69:409.
264 *Hanshu* 25B:1260.
main target of part of the *ru* community towards the end of the first century BC was a re-organization of Han cultic life on the basis of the principles already suggested by Dong Zhongshu. While maintaining different forms of cults such as the one devoted to the five *di*, several scholars aimed to make of the sacrifices devoted to Heaven and Earth the most meaningful part of the Han cultic life. Their efforts were eventually rewarded. Under the Later Han, the influence of *ru* becomes more and more evident. Cults as those devoted to the Taiyi deity disappear from the sources whereas the ceremonies in honour of Heaven and Earth seem to have played an increasingly important role.

3.4.2 The official meaning of the cult: the influence of the Yueling tradition

After having briefly reviewed the most important facets of Early Han cultic life, it is appropriate to focus now on the meaning of the ceremonies devoted to the five *di*. In the last section, this word has been intentionally translated simply as “ruling deities” or left as *di*. A rather complex problem is behind this decision: actually, what deities did early imperial rulers exactly worship? According to Yang Ying 杨英, for instance, the Qin ceremonies devoted to the *di* could be understood as a derivate of the sacrifice to the cardinal directions which, in the *Liji*, was also due to the feudatories. This approach in turn could help to explain the account in the *Shiji* where Duke Xiang is presented as the one who was self-convinced (*zi yiwei* 自以為) to master the spirit of Shaohao (*zhu* Shaohao *zhi shen* 主少皡之神): as briefly recalled above, Shaohao was the deity (*di*) bound to the West and autumn.266

At least from the last decades BC onward, the seasonal tradition of the *Yueling* must have been the official understanding of the cult. Kuang Heng, for example, said:

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「王者各以其禮制事天地，非因異世所立而繼之。今雍鄜、密、上下畤，本秦侯各以其意所立，非禮之所載術也。漢興之初，儀制未及定，且因秦故祠，復立北畤。今既稽古，建定天地之大禮，郊見上帝，青赤白黃黑五方之帝皆畢陳，各有位饌，祭祀備具。諸侯所妄造，王者不當長遵。及北畤，未定時所立，不宜復修。」
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An [ideal] sovereign serves Heaven and Earth according to his own rites and regulations: he definitively does not carry on what was established in other epochs. Thus, [sacral sites like] the shrine in Yong or [and as] the High and the Down temple in Mi were originally erected at a request of Qin feudatories. They certainly did not match the prescriptions passed down in the *Rites*. When the Han rose, the ritual system was not yet fixed. Therefore, [the court] adopted the ancient sacrifices for ancestors in use under the Qin and erected in addition the Northern Shrine. Now, however, the past has been [adequately] explored and the chief rites [of the ceremonies devoted to] Heaven and Earth have been systematized. In the *jiao* sacrifice, [the ruler] meets Shangdi and all [the rites devoted to

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the] Emperors of the five directions — the Azure, the Red, White, the Yellow, the Black — have been explained in full. Each of them has [a proper] site and [prescribed] offerings. Likewise, the ceremonies for the ancestors are well arranged. An [ideal] sovereign must not continue to revere the absurd [rites] instituted under the feudatories. As for the Northern Shrine, it was erected at a time in which these matters were not yet explained. Accordingly, it is not necessary to repair it again.267

Kuang Heng evidently defends the cult of the Emperors of the Five Directions (wu fang zhi di 五方之帝) which seem to be related to Shangdi. Thus, towards the end of the first century BC, the heavenly di were the Five Emperors of the Five Directions (East, West, North, South, and Centre) which are mentioned in the Yueling. A brief look at the Hou Hanshu may testify to this viewpoint. In the Jisizhi 祭祀志 [Monograph on Sacrifices], Sima Biao describes the ceremonies for welcoming the seasonal qi (yang qi 迎氣) that were performed at the beginning of each season.268

迎時氣，五郊之兆。自永平中，以禮讖及月令有五郊迎氣服色，因采元始中故事，兆五郊于雒陽四方。中兆在未，壇皆三尺，階無等。立春之日，迎春于東郊，祭青帝句芒。車旗服飾皆青。[...] 立夏之日，迎夏于南郊，祭赤帝祝融。車旗服飾皆赤。[...] 先立秋十八日，迎黃靈于中兆，祭黃帝后土。車旗服飾皆黃。[...] 立秋之日，迎秋于西郊，祭白帝 蓊收。車旗服飾皆白。[...] 立冬之日，迎冬于北郊，祭黑帝玄冥。車旗服飾皆黑。[...]

[The ceremonies for] welcoming the seasonal qi [are performed] in the sacral sites of the Five jiao. Since the middle of the Yongping era (58-75 AD), the colour of clothes [during the ceremonies for] welcoming the seasonal qi [in the five outskirts] has been fixed according to the apocrypha of the Rites and the Monthly Ordinances: by following the long-standing decisions of the middle of the Yuanshi regnal period, in the five directions of Luoyang. The Sacral Site of the Centre has been placed in the wei sector (i.e. in the Southwest). All the altars are three chi and the steps which lead to them are not equal. On the day of the Establishing of Spring, [the ruler] welcomes spring in the eastern outskirts and offers a sacrifice to the Emperor of the Azure and to Gou Mang: the flags of the carts, clothes and ornaments are all azure. [...] On the day of the Establishing of Summer, [the ruler] welcomes summer in the southern outskirts and offers a sacrifice to the Emperor of the Red and to Zhurong: the flags of the carts, clothes and ornaments are all red. [...] Eighteen days before the Establishing of Autumn, [the ruler] welcomes the Yellow Treasure in the sacral site of the Centre and offers a sacrifice to the Emperor of the

267 Hanshu 25B:1257-1258. The main problem concerns Kuang Heng’s opinion on the Northern Shrine which was erected on Gaozu’s order: according to the chancellor, the beisi did not deserve to be repaired. At this point, the conclusion is almost foregone: scholars of the first century BC did not regard the shrines of Yong as being devoted to the cult of the Five Emperors, at least those worshipped in the Mingtang or at Weiyang. It is perhaps useful to add that Kuang Heng’s opinion was by no means an eccentric way of considering the cult of the Five Emperors. The beisi disappears from historical sources. During the Later Han dynasty, nobody considered it worthy of mention.

268 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 8:3182.
Chapter Four. The discourse on tian: techniques and beyond

Yellow and to Houtu: the flags of the carts, clothes, and ornaments are all yellow. [...] On the day of the Establishing of Autumn, [the ruler] welcomes autumn in the western outskirt and offers a sacrifice to the Emperor of the White and to Rushou: the flags of the carts, clothes and ornaments are all white. [...] On the day of the Establishing of Winter, [the ruler] welcomes winter in the western outskirt and offers a sacrifice to the Emperor of the Black and to Rushou: the flags of the carts, clothes and ornaments are all black.  

Hence, it seems that the ceremonies for welcoming the seasonal qi also entailed the cult of the Five Emperors which was carried on according to the wordings of the Monthly Ordinances and, significantly, according to the apocrypha connected to the Rites.

3.4.3 The astrological understanding of the cult of the Emperors of Colours in the apocrypha

After having reviewed the meaning of the cult in the official chronicles, it is appropriate to dwell on the ways in which the apocrypha present and discuss the Five Ruling Deities. As we have seen above, some of the texts connected to the Rites followed the main stream and made out of the wu di the Five Directional Deities. This approach, however, is by no means the typical apocryphal way of analysing the cult since several fragments interpret it in a tianwen framework. The Wenyagou, for instance, explicitly presents the di as heavenly deities connected to specific regions of the sky. This fragment, for which a translation was proposed at the beginning of this section, is summarized in the following table:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palace (gong)</th>
<th>Ruling Deity</th>
<th>Its essence is: (qi jing wei)</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Deity which receives the wand</th>
<th>Name of the ruling deity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Palace</td>
<td>Cangdi 蒼帝</td>
<td>Green Dragon</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Azure</td>
<td>Lingweiyang 靈威仰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Palace</td>
<td>Chidi 赤帝</td>
<td>Purple Bird</td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Chipiaonu 赤熛怒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Palace</td>
<td>Baidi 白帝</td>
<td>White Tiger</td>
<td>Autumn</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Baizhaoju 白招拒</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Palace</td>
<td>Heidi 黑帝</td>
<td>Dark Warrior</td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Yeguangji 叶光紀</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Earth)</td>
<td>Hanshuniu 含樞紐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

269 Hou Hanshu (zhì) 8:3181-3182.
Thus, whoever wrote the *Yundoushu* was giving a *tianwen* interpretation of the cult of the five *di* which was based on a *tianwen* correlative scheme. This point becomes more evident when we compare the line of reasoning of the *Yundoushu* with the *Yueling* and the *tianwen* correlative scheme of the *Tianwenxun* chapter of the *Huainanzi*. These documents work with different reference points. The schemes of the *Yueling* and the *Tianwenxun* are based on seasons and agents; the *Yundoushu* is based on the Heavenly Palaces. Moreover, the apocryphal treatise offers a different interpretation of *di*. Below, we shall consider the case of the Eastern Palace:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORIES</th>
<th><em>Yueling</em></th>
<th><em>Tianwenxun</em></th>
<th><em>Wenyagou</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eastern Palace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruling deity (<em>di</em>)</td>
<td>Taihao 太皞</td>
<td>Taihao 太皞</td>
<td>Emperor Of the Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of the Ruling Deity</td>
<td>Lingweiyang 煞威仰</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Canglong 蒼龍 (Green Dragon)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>Spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirits 神</td>
<td>Gou Mang 句芒</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal 獸</td>
<td>Canglong 蒼龍 (Green Dragon)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above helps us to understand that the authors of the *Wenyagou* were interpreting the Han cult of the five ruling deities in a *tianwen* context. In this regard, it is possible to build a sort of scale. The *Yueling* is a seasonal correlative scheme; the *Tianwenxun* is a *tianwen* reading of the seasonal model. Finally, the *Wenyagou* offers a religious re-elaboration of the *tianwen* scheme with the clear intent of underscoring the astral significance of the Han cult of the *di*. The target was to promote a different understanding of the cult in which the focus was no longer the venerable tradition of the *Yueling* but rather asterisms and astral bodies. In this portrayal, however, the authors of the *Wenyagou* made a far from marginal error: under the early Han, the term *wu di* referred to five stars in the asterism Privy Council.271

Hence, at least a part of the community behind the apocrypha must have thought that a successful promotion of the *tianwen* understanding of the cult needed not only to simply correlate deities to astral bodies but also to respect the current astrographical tradition. Thus, in the *Yuanshenqi*, the Five *di* become the deities of the Asterism Five Ruling

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271 For the Privy Council and the asterism Seat of the Five Emperors, see *Shiji* 26:1299.
Deities. Unlike the *Wenyagou*, however, the *Yuanshenqi* seems to follow a strict astrographical approach. Instead of correlative linking the *di* to the key regions of the heavens, the people who wrote this text choose to follow the main *tianwen* tradition by locating them in the asterism Seat of the Five Emperors.  

3.4.4 The Han and astral cults: conclusive remarks

The apocryphal fragments considered in this section suggest the existence of groups which pleaded for a *tianwen* understanding of the cult of the five ruling deities. We can safely rule out that the astral character of the *di* received much political and scholarly attention under the Early Han and, especially, in the first century BC. The *ru* certainly neglected the *tianwen* implications of the *di*: as Kuang Heng said, the most important reference point was the *Yueling* tradition. Moreover, the *ru* of the time were attempting to unify the countless ceremonies of the empire by introducing a verticalization through the worship of Heaven and Earth. In this context, astral cults played a minor role: while being part of the ritual profile of the state, they were not considered key ceremonies. Finally, thanks to the development of a correlative understanding of rituality, astral cults became part of the official state religions. When Wang Mang re-organised the cultic profile of the imperial capital by building five ritual quarters, he did not completely ignore the tendencies of the time. While conserving the focus on the Five Directional Emperors—they are mentioned first—he also took into account the “Treasuries” (*ling*) of the five colours. The table below presents a tabular description of ritual Chang’an under Wang Mang.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shrines</th>
<th>Deity (<em>di</em>)</th>
<th>Treasure</th>
<th>Helpers</th>
<th>Asterisms</th>
<th>Planet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>Deity (帝)</td>
<td>Yellow Treasure</td>
<td>Houtu (后土)</td>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>Polaris-Dipper-Circumpolar stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>Taihao (太昊)</td>
<td>Azure Treasure</td>
<td>Goumang (勾芒)</td>
<td>Eastern Palace</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>Yandi (炎帝)</td>
<td>Red Treasure</td>
<td>Zhurong (祝融)</td>
<td>Southern Palace</td>
<td>Mars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>Shaoahao (少皞)</td>
<td>White Treasure</td>
<td>Rushou (蓐收)</td>
<td>Western Palace</td>
<td>Venus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>Zhuanxu (顓頊)</td>
<td>Black Treasure</td>
<td>Xuanming (玄冥)</td>
<td>Moon</td>
<td>Northern Palace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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272 *Choshu isho shusei* 5:27  
273 *Hanshu* 25B:1268.
The reorganization of Han cult towards the end of the first century BC was evidently carried out in the light of the *wu xing* framework. If we look at the cults performed in the five sacral sites of the capital, we recognize the influence of the astrological correlative schemes. Unlike the disposition of the temples in Yong, which were generically devoted to planets or to all the 28 Mansions, the Chang’an of Wang Mang’s time had to be ritually organized in order to respect the association between temporal elements, terrestrial directions, and heavenly regions.

4. TRACKING THE HEAVENS: LIPU THEMES IN THE APOCRYPHA

The discipline listed in the bibliographic chapter of the *Hanshu* immediately after *tianwen* is the art of “calendars and almanacs” (*lipu* 曆譜). In the section on cosmography, we have often remarked on the importance of time-scheduling techniques in Han China, especially in comparison to the relative marginality of the spatial description of the cosmos. It is now time to address this complex discipline in detail. First, let me immediately stress that a *li*, especially under the Han, was often a device for grasping the meaning of time in its different dimensions. It certainly worked as a tool for scheduling days, months, and years; it was used to reconstruct the chronology of the past; finally, as we will discuss in the next section, it also played a role in mantic practices by inspiring those people seeking to foresee future.

As in the case of the art of Heavenly Patterns, it is appropriate to begin with the Han description of the *lipu* technique by turning to the introductory remarks written by the Han bibliographers:

曆譜者，序四時之位，正分至之節，會日月五星之辰，以考寒暑殺生之實。故聖王必正曆數，以定三統服色之制，又以探知五星日月之會。凶阨之患，吉隆之喜，其術皆出焉。

Calendars and almanacs schedule the position of the four seasons and fix the knots of equinoxes and solstices; they compute the location of the sun, moon, and five planets as to [finally] check whether the [scheduling of the seasonal] cold and warmth, killing and living matches the actual [phenomena in the sky]. Therefore, a sage king must correct the numbers (i.e. numerical constants) of the calendar in order to establish the precepts [concerning] the three concordances and the colour of [official] clothes. Moreover, by means of them, [it is possible] to know in advance the conjunctions of the sun, moon, and five planets. All the methods [for predicting] the evil [coming from] inauspicious adversities or the happiness [deriving from] auspicious events originate in these
Hence, a Han calendrical expert was required to put in order the seasonal cycle and to keep track of astral motion in the sky by observing the moon, the sun, and the planets. In the following pages, we shall discuss the Han art of *lipu* by examining those aspects which are particularly relevant for understanding the calendrical layer of the apocrypha. The almanacs presented in these texts as well as the source of one of the most puzzling themes of the apocrypha — the Superior Origin (*shangyuan*) — are some of the themes which will be discussed. When taken alone, however, these topics barely help the reader to understand the complex facets of the calendrical layer of the *chenwei*. As the following remarks will hopefully make clear, technical duties, while forming a central part of the curriculum of a *lipu* skilled master, were certainly not his only tasks. The understanding of *Yijing* theory must have played a very significant role in the drafting of a calendrical system, especially in regard to the computation of the Superior Origin. The Lüli zhi [Monograph on Pitchpipes and Calendar] of the *Hanshu*, for instance, may hardly be regarded exclusively as a document based on empirical observation since data and concepts from the *Yijing* tradition considerably enrich both the technical and theoretical background of at least one of the most important Han almanacs. Moreover, especially towards the end of the Former Han, an increasing concern for chronology may have been felt by a few sectors of the *lipu* community. The *Lüli zhi* [Monograph on Pitchpipes and Calendar] of the *Hanshu* includes a short document known as *Shi jing* [Classic of Epochs] which is nothing but an attempt to reconstruct the chronology of China by means of the official calendars of the time. The *Shi jing*, for instance, is the document which fixes the “holy grail” of sinology in the last two millennia—the identification of the year of the Zhou victory over the Shang—at the well-known 1122 BC. Besides, the Early Han imperial library conserved 606 scrolls focused on *lipu*. Besides technical works bearing titles which suggest a clear calendrical context, there were also texts like the Diwang zhuhou shipu 帝王諸侯世譜 [Table of Feudal Princes, Kings and Emperors] or the Gulai diwang nianpu 古來帝王年 [Chronological tables of Emperors and Kings from the Past to the Present]. Evidently, the Han cultural world considered calendrical techniques and chronology to be strictly related disciplines. In order to understand the many facets of a Han calendrical system it is now appropriate to present some essential information about the early imperial art of *lipu* and briefly

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274 *Hanshu* 30:1767.

275 In this regard, see for instance Pankenier (1981), 3. In regard to ancient attempts of dating the year of King Wu's victory over the Shang, see Peng Lin (2001).

276 *Hanshu* 30:1765-1766. Among the technical works, we may recall texts such as the *Lüli shufa* 津曆數法 [Methods and Numerical Constants of Calendar and Pitchpipes] and the *Huangdi wujia li* 黃帝五家曆 [Calendrical System of the Five Huangdi Schools].
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

examine its basic features.

4.1 Introducing the Han art of Lipu

4.1.1 Rudiments of Han calendars

Early Chinese technicians tracked the flow of time by means of a lunisolar calendar which focused on the apparent movement of the sun through the year and on the waning and waxing of the moon from one month to another. When looking at the sun, the year was counted as the span of time between two winter solstices; when looking at the moon, it became a cycle of 12 synodic months. The discrepancy between solar and lunar cycle — the solar year numbered 365.2422 days whereas a cycle of 12 synodic months totals 354 days — was solved by means of leap months. During the Chunqiu period, the incongruity between these two cycles was solved by means of the metonic cycle according to which seven leap months (run 閏) are distributed over a period of 19 years.277 The metonic cycle was one of the pillars of the Quarter Remainder System (Sifen li 四分曆), a calendrical method which worked with a solar years of 365 ¼ days and a lunation of 29 499/940 days.

A Han calendar was essentially a cluster of numerical constants and formulae, hence the standard definition of lipu as mathematical astronomy. 278 The numerical constants expressed the cyclical nature of given astronomical phenomena; they formed the main structure of a system which helped to calculate by means of mathematical operations several different aspects of time flow such as, for instance the position of a leap month within the year or the datum of the winter solstice. Thus, besides being a tool for tracking the flow of days, months, and years and for naming them by means of the tiangan dizhi 天干地支 counting system, a Han calendrical system was an ambitious almanac which aimed to describe and quantify heavenly phenomena.279

The smallest and simplest cycle used in Han calendrical systems was the zhang 章 or, as it is usually translated, the metonic cycle: 19 years were the shortest interval of time

277 The metonic cycle is named after the Greek scientist Meton (V century BC) who discovered that 235 lunations corresponded to 19 solar years. As Neugebauer writes “after three years a deficiency of about 33 days has accumulated, making it necessary to add a 13th month to one of the three lunar years in order to bring the beginning of the lunar year roughly back to the beginning of the solar year. More accurate recording of the beginnings of lunar months and the beginnings of solar years shows that 19 solar years contain 235 lunar months, i. e., 12 ordinary lunar years of 12 months each and 7 intercalary lunar years of 13 months each.” See Neugebauer (1969), 7. For the metonic cycle in China, see Ho (1985), 153; Chen Meidong (2003), 55-60.


279 For a presentation of Han calendrical techniques, see Cullen (1996), 20-35; Eberhard (1970); Chen Meidong (2003), 109-111; 123-126; 175-178.
between two occurrences of a new moon and a winter solstice on the same day. With
the year fixed at 365 ¼ days, however, a time span of 19 years cannot contain a whole
number of days. This can happen only after 76 years (4*19=76). Thus, the 76 cycle,
called *bu* 部 under the Han, signalized the simultaneous occurrence of a new moon and
winter solstice on the midnight of a new day. 20 *bu* generate a *ji* 紀, a cycle of 1520
years (76*20=1520). Besides witnessing the simultaneous beginning of a new solar
year, a new month, and a new day, the first day of each *ji* will fell under the *jiazi* 甲子
combination of the sexagesimal counting system. Finally, three *ji* cycles will form a
*yuan* 元: 4560 years is the concordance period for the solar year, the lunation, the day,
the sexagesimal counting of the day, and, finally, the sexagesimal count of the year. In
other words, 4560 is the shortest interval of time which combines the simultaneous
occurrence of the astronomical phenomena mentioned above with the beginning of a
new sexagesimal cycle used for naming years. The table below summarizes these basic
cycles of the *Sifen* almanacs: 280

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Beginning of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhang 章</td>
<td>19 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bu 部</td>
<td>76 years (19x4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ji 紀</td>
<td>1520 years (76x20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuan 元</td>
<td>4560 years (1520x3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table helps us to figure out a few important facets of early imperial calendars. First,
it is evident that Chinese technicians aimed to translate the flow of time in a set of
numerical constants which exemplified the cyclical character of given astronomical
phenomena. Second, the running of such a scheme obviously needs a starting point. In
other words, technicians were required to specify the moment at which a given cycle
began: in technical terminology, this is the origin (*yuan* 元) of the time system. The Qin
calendar *Zhuanxu li* 顓頊曆 [Calendrical System of Zhuanxu]— apparently the first
*Sifen* system on which we have some generic information—took as starting point the
26th year of the reign of Duke Xian, roughly 367-366 BC. This year marked the
beginning of a *bu* cycle thanks to the simultaneous starting of the lunation, of the day,
and of the solar year. 281

280 For a presentation of the *Sifen* cycles, see Cullen (1996). For a list of these calendrical periods, see *Hou Hanshu*.

4.1.2 Early Han calendars

Han calendars are the first almanacs on which we have some detailed information. Even if the development of this discipline in the last centuries BC still presents a number of obscure points, it is generally acknowledged that the Han initially adopted the Qin Zhuanxu calendar. One of the most peculiar traits of this almanac was the choice of the period marking the beginning of the solar year. Unlike other Sifen schemes which focused on the winter solstice, the Zhuanxu li defined the year as the span of time between two li chun 立春, namely the fourth of the 24 yearly solar periods known as jieqi 節氣.282 This almanac was finally substituted in 104 BC, when emperor Wu inaugurated a new time-system which is known as Taichu li 太初曆 [Calendar of the Great Beginning]: like each new almanac, the Taichu adopted a new starting point — the origin — which was fixed at 104 BC, namely the year in which the calendar was officially promulgated.

Which kind of calendar was the Taichu li? According to the sinological tradition, this almanac was not a Sifen system. Nevertheless, both Rao Shangkuan 饒尚寬 and Christopher Cullen have suggested that Wudi’s calendar was a Sifen almanac.283 More specifically, Rao Shangkuan maintains that the calendar of 104 BC was the Yin li 殷曆 [Yin Calendar], a variant of the Quarter Remainer which took 427 BC as beginning of a bu cycle (76 years).284 Recently, however, Cullen has convincingly argued that the Taichu li took 104 BC as start of a ji cycle (1520 years) and 1624 BC as start of the yuan (4560 years).285

According to Rao Shangkuan 饒尚寬, a second calendrical reform took place after Sima Qian’s death. The new almanac — probably the Santong li [Three Concordances Calendrical System] described in the Lülizhi 律曆志 [Monograph on Calendar and Pitchpipes] of the Hanshu — changed the Sifen values for the length of lunation and solar cycle.286 More specifically, this system worked with a different Day-rule (rifa 日法), namely the value which expressed the fraction of the day used for calculating the number of days of the lunation. If the Sifen li was based on a Day-rule 4, the Taichu li

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283 Rao Shangkuan (1988) Cullen (2001). This hypothesis is convincing because it finally explains the structure of the Li shu 曆書 [Book on Calendar] of the Shiji. This document, in fact, is understandable only in a Sifen context.
286 The Santong li has been traditionally attributed to Liu Xin. See, for instance, Sivin (1969), Cullen (1996). Nevertheless, it is probable that this kind of almanac was developed between the end of the second century BC and the beginning of the first century BC. In this regard, see Hanshu 21A:975-976; Rao Shangkuan (1988).
worked with the cosmological value 81. Consequently, the length of the solar cycle was fixed at 365 385/1539 days whereas a lunation was assumed to last 29 43/81 days. The modification of solar and lunar values provoked an alteration of the basic Sifen cycles. Besides the unmodified zhang of 19 years, followers of the Taichu system worked with a ji cycle of 1539 years (19x81) and with a yuan of 4617 years (1539x3). The table below will help the reader to visualize the differences between the Sifen and the Santong li.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SANTONG LI</th>
<th>SIFEN LI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day-rule (rifa 日法)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang-rule (zhangfa 章法)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bu-rule (bufa 部法)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tong-rule (tongfa 統法)</td>
<td>1539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuan-rule (yuanfa 元法)</td>
<td>4617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several calendrical systems were conserved in the imperial library at the end of the first century BC. Most of them probably were Sifen almanacs. While being based on the same calendrical constants and cycles, they adopted different starting points. Where the Zhuanxu li began to count the flowing of time from 367 BC, the Yin li relied on 427 BC. Finally, Wudi’s calendar took 104 BC as beginning of the ji (1520) cycle and 1624 as opening of the yuan cycle (4560). The table below shall present some of the most important Early Han almanacs.

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287 81 is the square of 9 which was the highest number associated to the yang in the tradition of the Changes. On this point, see Chen Meidong (2003), 124.
288 On the Taichu system, see Chen Meidong (2003), 124-27.
289 Names and values of the numerical constants listed in the table refer to the monographs on calendar in the Hanshu and in Hou Hanshu. In this regard, see Hanshu 21B:991; Hou Hanshu (zhì) 3:3058-3059. In spite of the different names assigned to the cycles, the line of reasoning behind them was the same. The differences concerning the values were exclusively a consequence of the change of the day-rule.
290 Apart from the almanacs presented in the table, the bibliography of the Hanshu also lists texts such as the Huangdi wujia li 黄帝五家历 [Huangdi Calendar of the Five Schools] and the Xia Yin Zhou Lu li 夏殷周魯歴 [Calendars of Xia, Zhou, Yin, Lu]. Hanshu 30:1765-1766; 21B:1014. We have very little information about these calendrical systems. They may have been Han forgeries: the Xia li was explicitly regarded as a fake by Liu Xiang (houren suo zao 後人所造). In this regard, see Songshu 13:307. Moreover, it must have been based on a portrayal of the heavens which, by the end...
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almanac</th>
<th>Calendrical system</th>
<th>Beginning of the reference cycles</th>
<th>Peculiarities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhuanxu li</td>
<td>Sifen system (Year = 365 ¼ days)</td>
<td>367 BC: Beginning of the bu cycle (76 years)</td>
<td>Official calendar: (Qin/Beg of the Han)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yin li</td>
<td>Sifen system (Year = 365 ¼ days)</td>
<td>427 BC: Beginning of the bu cycle (76 years)</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almanac</td>
<td>Calendrical system</td>
<td>Beginning of the reference cycles</td>
<td>Peculiarities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taichu li</td>
<td>Sifen system (Year = 365 ¼ days)</td>
<td>104 BC: Beginning of the ji cycle (1520 years)</td>
<td>Official calendar (104 BC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santong li</td>
<td>Santong system (Year = 365 385/1539 days)</td>
<td>104 BC: Beginning of the tong cycle (1539 years)</td>
<td>Official calendar (First century BC?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Before introducing the issue “Superior Origin”, let us shortly recall that a new Sifen calendar was promulgated in AD 85. This new almanac essentially recalculated the starting point of the Sifen cycles. The beginning of the ji was fixed at 161 BC: hence, the yuan cycle had begun in 1681 BC (1681-1520=161).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Almanac</th>
<th>Beginning of the yuan cycle (4560 years)</th>
<th>Beginning of the ji cycle (1520 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhuanxu li</td>
<td>1506 BC</td>
<td>AD 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yin li</td>
<td>1567 BC</td>
<td>47 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taichu li</td>
<td>1624 BC</td>
<td>104 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Han Sifen li</td>
<td>1681 BC</td>
<td>161 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shall help the reader to visualize the discrepancy of the starting points of the yuan and ji cycles of the Han Sifen systems. Even if we do not know whether all the almanacs presented in the table worked with such long spans of time, it is

of the Early Han, was clearly obsolete. The reader may find a discussion of this point in Songshu 23:679. On the doubts of medieval technicians on these “ancient” almanacs, see also Songshu 13:307-308; Suishu 17:416.

291 For a full discussion of the Later Han Sifen li, see Sivin (1969).
convenient to calculate these moments since, as we shall see, this point will considerably simplify the understanding of some basic features of the apocrypha.292

4.2 Early Han calendars: the Superior Origin

In the history of Chinese traditional calendar, the Han centuries play a very important role since the almanacs of this period were probably the first to introduce the idea of a Superior Origin (shangyuan 上元), namely that moment far back in time when several heavenly phenomena occurred simultaneously. The Superior Origin essentially worked as starting point of the most important calendrical cycles: the new day, month, and year were supposed to coincide with the beginning of the sexagesimal counting system of days and years and even with the conjunction of the five planets. Below a standard presentation of it:

【…】月首甲子冬至日月五緯俱起牽牛，初日月若懸璧五星若編珠。【…】

 [...] At the beginning of the month, on the day jiazi of the winter solstice, the moon, the sun, and the five planets rose together in [the lodge] Ox. At that very beginning, the sun and the moon resembled hanging jades and the five planets looked like woven pearls.293

From the Han up to the Song, the Superior Origin constituted one of the most important facets of official and unofficial almanacs. As late as 1280, the famous scientist Guo Shoujing 郭守敬 (1231-1316) finally freed Chinese technicians from the task of reducing the calendrical cycles to a unitary starting point.

In all probability, most of the Han Sifen almanacs were not provided with a Superior Origin.294 The Han Santong li is the first calendar which explicitly introduces the idea of a shangyuan: as we shall see in detail in the following pages, the biggest cycle of this system encompassed 23,639,040 years. The beginning of this calendrical period was fixed at 143,127 years before 104 BC.295 Finally, one should also keep in mind that a few apocryphal statements fixed the Superior Origin at 2,760,000 years before Confucius captured the unicorn in the 14th regnal year of Duke Ai in Lu (481 BC). As we have recalled in the first part of the present study, this apocryphal figure was to be adopted during the calendrical reform of AD 85.

292 For the inferences of the beginning of the closest yuan cycle of the Yin li and the Zhuanxu li, see also Rao Shangkuan (1988).
293 Choshu isho shusei 2:31.
294 Under the Tang, Qutan Xida eventually calculated the Superior Origins of a number of calendrical systems. In this regard, see Kaiyuan zhanjing 105:980.
295 Hanshu 21A:975; 21B:1023. On calculations based on this system, see Eberhard (1970).
4.3 Towards the apocryphal art of *lipu*: the *Santong li* and its issues

Before turning to the analysis of the *lipu* layer of the *chenwei*, it is of central importance to dwell a while on the *Lüli zhi* of the *Hanshu* which illustrates Liu Xin’s *Santong li*. Let me immediately stress two salient features of this system: the concern for calendrical chronologies and the influence of theories and ideas bound to the *Changes*.

4.3.1 The issue of calendrical chronologies

When addressing the ways in which the Early Han cultural community dealt with the temporal ordering of the past, one should distinguish between absolute and relative chronology. The former designates the reconstruction of the past according to a given time system in which events can be dated on the basis of specific temporal reference points. The latter simply refers to annalistic chronology in which sequential data are interdependent but free from any further temporal constraint. The annals of the emperors (*ji*) and the chronological tables (*biao*) of the *Shiji* are outstanding examples of the second approach. Nevertheless, when wondering whether Early Han thinkers tried to reflect about chronology by quantifying, for instance, the years that elapsed between two given historical events, the reader of Han sources may remain perplexed by the doubts and uncertainties which not only concern remote dates but also events of a more recent past. Significantly, for instance, the Sima historians seem to have had some difficulty in locating the moment of the capture of the unicorn, namely 481 BC in our time. They certainly knew that it took place in the fourteenth regnal year of Duke Ai in Lu; yet, the distance between this event and their own lifetime remained a rather problematic point. In the *Shiji*, in fact, we read that more than 400 years elapsed between this episode and Sima Qian’s life: this misses the mark by about 60 years. We should view this statement as evidence of a certain tolerance for wrong data and lack of concern about chronological precision. Actually, indications of an interest in the reconstruction of a chronological history are rare in the Han chronicles. It is significant, for instance, that as late as 78 BC, Zhang Shouwang 張壽王 still deemed it necessary to state that more than 6000 years had elapsed since Huangdi’s time. Even if he held the post of *taishiling*, Zhang Shouwang’s stance should not be regarded as the official viewpoint but rather as the attempt of an individual to quantify the past. In fact, some time later, a few other officials rejected Zhang’s viewpoint. Before contradicting the *taishiling*, however, they had to “study the beginning and the ends” (*zhi zhongshi* 治終

296 For a description of the structure of annals and chronological tables of the *Shiji*, see Hardy (1999) 28-32.

297 *Shiji* 14:481; 47:1942.

298 *Shiji* 130:3295. On this point, see also Hardy (1999), 116.
Besides testifying to the existence of different estimations of the length of Chinese history, this anecdote also leads us to wonder about the methods used for constructing such temporal schemes. Han scholars and technicians most likely relied on annalistic chronologies which were certainly available at the time. During the first century BC, at least a few scholars may have approached the issue from a different standpoint, namely the calendrical one.

When speaking about chronology, it is difficult to underestimate the role of the already mentioned *Classic of Epochs* by Liu Xin’s. For the purposes of this work, it is sufficient to stress that this document can also be read as an ambitious attempt to reconstruct an absolute chronology of the Chinese past using the calendrical cycles of the *Santong* calendrical system. Hence, the day of the winter solstice in 655 BC is not only the day *xinhai* 辛亥 of the fifth year of the duke Xi 歲 in Lu fixed in the *Zuozhuan* but also the day *xinhai* of the 989th year of the third *ji* (1539 years) of the 31st *yuan* (4617 years) in a system with a Superior Origin fixed at 143.127 years before 104 BC. Thus, the relative chronology of the *Zuozhuan* is taken as the basis for the drafting of an absolute chronology where the main reference point is the number of years that have elapsed since the beginning of the cycle called Superior Origin.

Such calendrical chronologies apparently were a useful tool since they theoretically freed Han users from the cumbersome task of consulting the available annalistic tables in order to count the years which separated two given historical facts. Thus, hypothetically, everyone could easily quantify the time between two events by means of a Superior Origin and calendrically fixed temporal cycles. Yet, for such a system to function effectively, technical and scientific expertise was required which far exceeded Han standards. It is not surprising that, as early as the second century AD, Liu Xin’s attempt to compile an absolute chronology was regarded as inaccurate and manipulative:

【…】歆欲以合春秋，橫斷年數，損夏益周，考之表紀，差謬數百。

[Liu] Xin wished to combine [the calendrical system] with the *Annals*: he manipulated (i.e. crossed and cut) the number of years [between the events of the past]; he shortened [the reign of] the Xia and prolonged [that of] the Zhou. A check of this [chronology] by means of [chronological] tables and annals reveals that deficiencies and mistakes are

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299 *Hanshu* 21A:978.

300 Cullen has already highlighted the complexity of this document in which Liu Xin also aimed “to display the success of his Triple Concordance system in retrodicting known astronomical circumstances in historical periods for which he was able to establish a chronology based on non-astronomical considerations, such as a count of regnal years of successive rulers.” See Cullen (2001), 30.

301 *Hanshu* 21B:1019.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

Hence, Liu Xin’s chronology was sharply criticized for its serious shortcomings. Evidently, the Early Han scholar must have often neglected the importance of relative chronologies: as stated in the quotation, he even changed the length of the Xia and the Zhou rule.

Many Han calendrical experts of the time must have been well aware of the inefficacy of contemporary lipu techniques for reconstructing a calendrical chronology. The main problem of Han almanacs, in fact, was their inability to respect the natural flow of time. According to the Jin technician Liu Zhi 劉智, for instance, the Sifen calendars inevitably remained a day behind natural time after three hundred years. Among the people who would have subscribed to this statement, Liu Xiang deserves to be mentioned. His Wuji lun 五紀論 [On the Five Marks], which has sadly been lost, was highly praised under the Later Han. The same technician who denigrated Liu Xin’s attempt at “cutting and crossing the number of the years”, wrote that this book was very accurate also because it did not use calendrical techniques for dealing with the past (wei ji yu gu 未稽於古). A number of Later Han scholars supported this viewpoint. Jia Kui, for instance, said:

【…】聖人必曆象日月星辰，明數不可貫數千萬歲，其間必改更，【…】太初曆不能下通於今，新曆不能上得漢元，一家曆法必在三百年之間。【…】

[…] The sages must schedule and portray [the motion of] sun, moon, and planets by realizing that the [the contemporary calendrical] methods cannot be effectively used for counting tens of thousands years. In this span of time, [a sage ruler] must change and modify [the almanac]. […] The Calendar of the Great Beginning cannot extend up to today (i.e. cannot be used now); the new almanac cannot extend back to the beginning of the Han (i.e. cannot effectively frame the past). A given calendrical system must be applied within a span of three hundred years. […]

The passage above is explicit: Later Han scholars were strongly against any attempt to compile perpetual calendars. The same point was made by Cai Yong:

故有古今之術，今術之不能上通於古，亦猶古術之不能下通於今也。

Therefore, there are ancient and modern methods. The modern methods cannot extend back to the antiquity just as the ancient methods cannot extend up to today.

302 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3035.
303 Jinshu 18:562; Songshu 12:260. For a similar viewpoint, see Jinshu 12:231.
304 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3035.
305 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3028.
306 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3038.
When considering the wordings of the Later Han technicians together with the *Classic of Epochs*, one easily comes to the conclusion that Han cultural community was very probably split on the issue concerning the feasibility of absolute chronologies. Whereas a number of scholars must have considered this approach to be unsound, a group of technicians or chronologists insisted on its validity. For a modern interpreter, it is not difficult to acknowledge the reasons of Jia Kui and Cai Yong, especially when considering the methods for computing the Superior Origin, namely the temporal pivot of absolute chronologies.

4.3.2 The Santong li and the Changes: toward the Superior Origin of the Santong li

By the end of the Early Han, the *Yijing* had already been given the definition of “source of all classics”. As Nylan and Sivin say, “for its most dedicated students, since the time that the Ten Wings were written, the Changes was a model of the Tao in all its aspects, to be mastered and contemplated as a guide through the complexity of experience, back to the hidden center in which all tensions and contradictions are resolved, and all sound decisions imperceptibly set in motion.” This venerable text with its early commentaries was also assumed to embody the key for deciphering the flowing of time. In *Shuogua zhuan*, the four Trigrams 震, 离, 坎, and 兑 symbolized the eternal revolving of the four seasons. Moreover, the authors of the *Xici* spoke of the 360 days of the year and connected them to the most important operators of the *Yijing* tradition, namely the hexagrams *qian* and *kun*.

乾之策二百一十有六坤之策百四十有四凡三百有六十當期之日

The numbers [of the milfoil stalks which form the Hexagram] Qian is 216; the number [of the milfoil stalks which form the hexagram] Kun is 144. Together, they add up to 360: [this] matches the days of the period (i.e. a year).  

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307 *Hanshu* 30:1723. The privileged position of the *Yijing* may also be inferred from the fact that the section devoted to it was listed first in the catalogue of the works conserved in the imperial library.

308 See Nylan and Sivin (1987), 46.


310 The numbers 216 and 144 are obtained by the number of stalks necessary to form the *qian* and *kun*. *Qian* is the expression of the *yang* since it is composed of six *yang* (unbroken) lines (yao 縫). *Kun* is the counterpart of the *yin* since it is composed of six *yin* (broken) lines. Each *yang* line encompasses 36 milfoil stalks: hence, six lines give 216 stalks; each *yin* line is composed by 24 stalks: hence, six broken *yao* give 144 stalks. In this regard, see Song Huiqun (2002), 33; Neo Pengfu (2000), 266. In regard to the *qian* and *kun*, Shaughnessy writes: “just as the *Zhouyi* or *Yijing* has been regarded by the Chinese since the time of the composition of the "Wenyan" commentary down to the contemporary philosopher Xiong Shili as the essence of Chinese thought and wisdom, so too has there never been an intellectual who has doubted that the essence of that essence is to be found in the first two hexagrams, "Qian" and "Kun". Shaughnessy (1997), 197.
In the first century BC, the Changes had already become the guidebook for explaining the mysteries of time not only to scholars but also to technicians: this classical text, in fact, considerably influenced the Han art of lipu. The role of Yijing-related numerological methods in the calendrical field is still a rather neglected field of research which undoubtedly warrants more detailed analysis and discussion than the short remarks presented here. It is certain, in fact, that the venerable tradition of the Changes moulded and influenced the Chinese art of lipu. In this regard, Han almanacs may be considered as the first examples of a framework which was destined to achieve an enormous success even under the Tang, when the celebrated astronomer Yi Xing 一行 also used the Yijing to compile the Dayan 大衍 calendar.\footnote{For an introduction to the bonds between the Changes and Chinese calendrical techniques, see Le Aiguo (2005).}

A reader of the Hanshu will quickly notice that the Changes play two main functions within the Han Santong li. The first is genuinely theoretical since concepts expounded in this classic are used to justify the numerical constants of this almanac; the second is much more technical since the numerology of the Yijing works as source of inspiration for developing additional “calendrical” cycles. Let us immediately address the first point and see why the classic can be considered to be the theoretical platform of the Santong li. The following excerpt explains the origin of the metonic cycle (19 years):

故易曰：「天一地二, 天三地四, 天五地六, 天七地八, 天九地十. […]」并終數為十九, 易窮則變, 故為閏法.

Therefore, the Changes say: “Heaven is one, Earth is two. Heaven is three, Earth is four; Heaven is five, Earth is six. Heaven is seven, Earth is eight. Heaven is nine, Earth is ten. […]”The addition of the end-numbers [of Heaven and Earth] is nineteen.\footnote{In the Changes, the last number connected to Heaven is 9 and the last figure linked to Earth is 10. By adding these numbers, one obtains 19. In this regard, see also the explanation of the Tang commentators in Hanshu 21A:986.} When the cycles of the Changes finish, there is an alteration: therefore, [nineteen] is the Leap Rule (i.e. metonic cycle).\footnote{Hanshu 21A:983; Le Aiguo (2005).}

Give the effort to relate the data of the Santong li to the wording of the Changes, the reader of the Hanshu very soon comes up against the rather delicate issue of the extent to which this classic influenced the drafting of this almanac. In all probability, the numerical values associated with the Qian and Kun hexagrams — 216 and 144 — played a central role in the elaboration of fictive planetary constants. Below, the case involving Mars:

【…】故二歲而過初，三十二過初為六十四歲而小周。小周乘乾策，則太陽大周，
為萬三千八百二十四歲，是為熒惑歲數。

[...] Therefore, after two years, [Mars] goes across the starting point. [Mars] passes over the starting point 32 times: [this] gives 64 years (i.e. 32x2) which is [the value of] the Small Revolution. Multiply [the value of] the Small Revolution by the stalks of the qian: [the result is the value of] the Grand Revolution of the Great Yang (i.e. Mars). [The value of the Grand Revolution] is 13,824 years: this is the year-number of Mars.\(^{314}\)

The reference to “two years” probably is a value derived from the observation that Mars requires approximately two years for returning in the same point against the background of the stars (\(guo\ chu\) 過初). What follows, however, may hardly be seen as data based on direct observation. The multiplication by 32 and by the “stalks of the qian” suggests that the drafters of the \(Santong\ li\) were tying the planets to the operators of the \(Changes\). Thus, we have here a fictive planetary cycle: the table below shall help the reader to visualize this point.

As the table below illustrates, the line of proceeding, which stands out in the case involving Mars, applies to each planet:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planet</th>
<th>Small Circle ((xiao\ zhou) 小周 - (xiao\ )fu 小復)</th>
<th>Multiplication by</th>
<th>Year-Number ((sui\ shu) 歲數)</th>
<th>Least common multiple of the planetary year-numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jupiter</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>144 ((kun) stalks)</td>
<td>1728</td>
<td>→</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venus</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>216 ((qian) stalks)</td>
<td>3456</td>
<td>→</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturn</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>144 ((kun) stalks)</td>
<td>4320</td>
<td>→</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>216 ((qian) stalks)</td>
<td>13824</td>
<td>→</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>144 ((kun) stalks)</td>
<td>9216</td>
<td>→</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{314}\) \textit{Hanshu} 21B:995.
Finally, let me emphasize that the least common multiple of the constants called “year-number” — 138,240 — plays a basic role for the elaboration of the Superior Origin of the Santong li.

4.3.3  The Superior Origin of the Santong li

In the short review of the rudiments of Han calendrical methods, we have seen that the common understanding of the Superior Origin of a li was that of a very remote moment in history which witnessed the simultaneous occurrence of several phenomena, including the conjunction of the five planets. Recently, doubts have been advanced about the role played by the planets in the calculation of the shangyuan. Ho Peng Yoke, for instance, stresses that “any attempt to find a common multiple for the lunar and planetary cycles would be a matter of great complexity. These cycles expressed in units of the earth’s rotation about its own axis, or revolution round the sun, would give numbers that are incommensurable.” 315 The main point here is whether we have to consider early calendrical systems exclusively as almanacs based on empirical facts. The remarks presented above suggest that the motion of the planets was explained within a numerological framework based on the Changes. Hence, as we shall discuss below, the elaboration of the Superior Origin of the Santong li derived from the Yijing-bound planetary periods examined above. Let us first consider the following passage from the Hanshu:

After 138,240 [years], there is the “grand completion”. There will be a conjunction of the five planets. As to prolong [the cycle] according to category (i.e. by inference), multiply it by the metonic year. This gives 2,626,560 [years]: [the cycles of the planets] meet with the [cycles] of the sun and moon. Three [such] coincidences make 7,879,680 [years]: it coincides with the Three Concordances. Three [such] concordances make 23,639,040 [years]: we return to the Supreme Superior Origin. 316

This excerpt describes how to calculate the “Supreme Superior Origin”, an enormous value which is also based on numerical constants concerning the five planets. Specifically, 2,626,560 is the result of the multiplication of the metonic cycle (19 years) by the (fictive) constant for the planetary alignment (wu xing huizhong 五星會終 → 138,240 years); 7,879,680 is the meeting point between the cycle of the (fictive) planetary conjunction and the tong period (1539 years). Finally, 23,639,040 is the

315  Ho (2003), 31.
316  Hanshu 21A:985-986.
period of time necessary for the simultaneous occurrence of the beginning of the planetary cycle based on the *Yijing* and the start of the *yuan*-cycle (4617). These points are summarized in the table below:\(^{317}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planetary (fictive) cycle</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>138,240 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coincidence between the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planetary (fictive) cycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the <em>zhang</em> cycle</td>
<td>2,626,560</td>
<td>(138,240*19=2,626,560)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(19 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coincidence between the</td>
<td>7,879,680</td>
<td>(3*2,626,560=7,879,680)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planetary (fictive) cycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the <em>tong</em> cycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1539 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coincidence between the</td>
<td>23,639,040</td>
<td>(3*7,879,680=23,639,040)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planetary (fictive) cycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the <em>yuan</em> cycle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4617 years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the numbers mentioned above seems to be used in the calendrical computations of the *Santong li* which take as reference value an undefined Superior Origin fixed at 143,127 before 104 BC.\(^{318}\) According to Ho Peng Yoke, a Superior Origin based on the constants of the five planets should have been the *taiji shangyuan*.\(^{319}\) Yet, it is probable that the ties between the *taiji shangyuan* and the Superior Origin were closer than they actually appear to be. A possible solution to this puzzle, for instance, is to keep in mind that the *taiji shangyuan*, diversely from the *shangyuan*, did not refer to a specific year: it should rather be understood as a calendrical cycle, just like the metonic period. Hence, it is possible to consider the Superior Origin used in the *Hanshu* to be the beginning of the *taiji shangyuan* cycle closer to the lifetime of the authors of the *Santong li*. In other words, from the viewpoint of Han experts, the last *taiji shangyuan* period had begun 143,127 years before 104 BC. A few calculations may help us to corroborate this hypothesis. If we add 143,127 to 23,639,040, which is the *taiji shangyuan* cycle, we obtain 23,782,167: 23,782,167 years separate the beginning of the next-to-last *taiji shangyuan* period from the temporal reference point of the *Santong li*, namely 104 BC. Since this value is a multiple of *Santong* constants such as the *yuan* (4617), 104 BC should be the start of the *yuan* cycle. This perfectly fits the *Santong* system. In conclusion, the *taiji shangyuan* must be understood as the biggest calendrical period which summarized the most important cycles of given almanacs.

If we now try to summarize the points made here above, we should highlight that the


\(^{318}\) *Hanshu* 21B:985; Sivin (1969), 18.

\(^{319}\) Ho (2003), 31.
Santong li worked with Yijing-based (fictive) constants for the five planets which generated a fictive alignment period (huizhong). The planetary huizhong played a role of primary importance in computing the “Supreme Superior Origin” of the system, which simply was the coincidence between the alignment and the yuan cycle. A similar period of time came to an end 143,127 years before 104 BC: this value was taken as Superior Origin of the system. At this point, we may finally turn to the calendrical system of the apocrypha to see whether these remarks can help us to make some sense of the shangyuan used in these texts.

4.4 The art of Lipu in the apocrypha: the issue of the Superior Origin

4.4.1 Introducing the Superior Origin of the apocrypha

This cryptic fragment from the Yuanmingbao, for which a tentative translation has been proposed above, may well serve as an introduction to the remarks presented in the next pages. In spite of the puzzling wording, whoever wrote this apocryphal text apparently wished to draw the attention of the reader to a specific issue, namely the flowing of time. The hint at “spring” could, for instance, be interpreted in this way. Above all, the mentioning of yuan leads the interpreter towards a calendrical reading.

The Superior Origin of the almanac promulgated in AD 85 was an apocryphal loan to Han culture. Liu Hong is particularly explicit: the Yuanmingbao and the Qianzaodu were the texts which fixed the distance between the shangyuan and the capture of the unicorn at 2,760,000 years. The fact that the Superior Origin of the Yuanmingbao and the Qianzaodu was accepted as part of the Later Han Sifen li can only mean that the value of 2,760,000 years before the year of the unicorn was considered to be a “valid” technical factor which allowed Han technicians to schedule time in an appropriate way. Here, it is mandatory to recall that one of the most famous Later Han calendrical

320 Choshu isho shusei 4A:53.
321 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3038.
experts, Zhang Heng, was also one of the most influential adversaries of the chenwei.322 When considering the striking contradiction that exists between Zhang Heng’s condemnation of these texts and his activity as expert in a lipu system also based on a chenwei statement, the interpreter of the apocrypha is inevitably obliged to reflect on the origin of this datum. As the following remarks will show, it is probable that the Superior Origin traceable in the chenwei was based on the Supreme Superior Origin of Wudi’s Sifen almanac. As in the case of the Santongli, the computation of this value was based on a few basic calendrical cycles and fictive planetary periods.

4.4.2 The Superior Origin of the Quarter Remainder

In trying to fathom the Superior Origin of the apocrypha, we can usefully turn again to the table which illustrates the taiji shangyuan of the Santongli:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planetary (fictive) cycle</th>
<th>138,240 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coincidence between the planetary (fictive) cycle and the zhang cycle (19 years)</td>
<td>2,626,560 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(138,240x19=2,626,560)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coincidence between the planetary (fictive) cycle and the tong cycle (1539 years)</td>
<td>7,879,680 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3x2,626,560=7,879,680)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coincidence between the planetary (fictive) cycle and the yuan cycle (4617 years)</td>
<td>23,639,040 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3x7,879,680=23,639,040)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to use this table to approach the apocrypha, we should first ask which calendrical system the authors of these texts used. Did they work with the values of the Santong li or did they rely on the traditional Sifen constants? Let us turn to the Qianzaodu. Even if the still extant version of this book includes an allusion to the values of the Santong li, it has been demonstrated that it works with the Sifen constants.323 On first sight, this makes it difficult to use the data of the table since the Santong li worked with different calendrical cycles. Nevertheless, the Santong and the Sifen systems had a point in common: the metonic cycle. This leads us to focus on the value 2,626,560 which is presented as the concordance period of metonic and planetary cycles. Interestingly, this figure also is a multiple of Sifen constants such as the ji (1520) and the yuan (4560). Thus, 2,626,560 could be the taiji shangyuan cycle of a Sifen calendar. The Shi jing by Liu Xin may help us to identify this almanac. Let us first

322 On Zhang Heng’s expertise in the Later Han official almanac, see Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3034.
323 On this point, see Neo Pengfu (2000), 380-381.
consider the following statement:

According to the Quarter Remainder [methods], there are 132,113 years between the [year of the] Superior Origin [of this system] and the [year in which Tang of Shang] defeated Jie [of the Xia]. The first (i.e. jiazi) bu cycle (i.e 76 years-cycle) of the 88th ji (i.e. 1520 years-cycle) of this system begins 127 years after the victory over Jie.324

In this excerpt, Liu Xin states that the ji cycle (1520 years) of this unnamed Sifen calendar began 127 years after Tang’s victory over the Xia. According to Liu Xin’s chronology, this happened in 1751 BC. Thus, the starting point of the Sifen cycles was 1624 BC: we have here an explicit reference to Wudi’s almanac.325

The Shi jing makes clear that the Taichu li worked with a shangyuan fixed at 132,113 years before 1751. Accordingly, the key-year 1624 BC was 132,240 years from the Superior Origin (132,113+127=132,240). In all probability, this moment was considered to be the beginning of a taiji shangyuan cycle. In fact, if we add 132,240 to the Sifen taiji period (2,626,560 years), we obtain a figure which is divisible by the most important Sifen constants.

4.4.3 The Superior Origin of apocrypha

How exactly do these remarks on the Superior Origin influence our understanding of the apocrypha? Let us read the following excerpt from the Qianzaodu:

Thus, 2,759,280 years after [the beginning] of the Heavenly (i.e. Supreme Superior) Origin, Chang as Patriarch of the West received the [Heaven’s] mandate: [this happened] during the seventh (i.e. wuwu) bu cycle [of a 1520 year-period]. In the 29th year [of the seventh bu cycle, Chang] defeated Chong, erected the Observatory, changed and corrected the beginning of the year, and finally spread his appellation as King all over the world. Hence, he received the chart and [adequately] responded [to the bestowal of] the Diagram of the Yellow River.326

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324 Hanshu 21B: 1014.
325 Cullen (2001), 46. This element can be counterchecked by simply considering the Superior Origin given in the passage above. Since there are 132,113 years between the Superior Origin and the victory over Jie of the Xia, we know that the distance of 1624 from the shangyuan is 132,240 years (132,113+127). By dividing this number by the ji constant (1520), we get 87 full ji periods. Hence, by following Liu Xin’s chronological considerations, the 88th ji must have begun in 1624 BC.
326 Choshu isho shusei 1A:48.
Besides recounting the story concerning the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate upon king Wen of the Zhou, the excerpt presented above also helps us to reconstruct the chronology of the Qianzaodu since it contains the distance between the year of the bestowal of the mandate and the “Heavenly Origin”. Evidently, whoever wrote this text believed that that king Wen ascended to the throne 720 years before the capture of the unicorn (2,760,000-2,759,280=720). Let us now locate the year of king Wen’s mandate within the Sifen calendrical cycles: a few undemanding calculations tell us that king Wen was bestowed with the Heaven’s mandate during the 481st year of the 606th yuan. The table might help the reader to visualize this point:\(^{327}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sifen formulae for locating a year within a calendrical chronology</th>
<th>Explication of the values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance from the Superior Origin: yuan constant ↓ 2,759,280:4560= → ↓ quotient 605, remainder 480 →</td>
<td>2,759,280 → Distance of the year of king Wen’s mandate from the year of the Superior Origin yuan constant → 4560 Quotient → 605 concluded yuan from the Superior Origin → King Wen receives the mandate during the 606th yuan Remainder → 480 concluded years from the beginning of the yuan → King Wen receives the mandate in the 481st year of the yuan cycle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To translate the chronological data of the table in our time-system, we obviously need a starting point. By adopting Wudi’s almanac — the only Sifen system explicitly linked to the idea of Superior Origin in Liu Xin’s Shi jing — we should conclude that king Wen received the Heaven’s mandate in 1143 BC (1624-481=1143). Do these assumptions fit the concise information given in the Shi jing? We already know that 132,240 years separated 1624 BC from the beginning of the taiji shangyuan cycle. The following table shall present the way of proceeding:

---

\(^{327}\) The formulae are based on the Sifen formulae in the monograph on calendar of the Hou Hanshu which are a valid reference point since the Later Han official almanac worked just like the Yinli, with Sifen cycles. See Hou Hanshu (zhi) 3:3060.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

| Data | 132,240 → The number of years between 1624 BC and the beginning of the taiji shangyuan cycle. 480 → The number of (concluded) years between king Wen’s mandate and the beginning of the yuan cycle |
| Calculations | 132,240+480=132,720 |

| Data | 132,720 → Distance in years between king Wen’s mandate and the beginning of the taiji shangyuan cycle (2,626,560) 2,626,560 → Taiji shangyuan cycle (Sifen value) |
| Calculations | 132,720+2,626,560 =2,759,280 Distance in years between king Wen’s mandate and the beginning of the next-to last taiji shangyuan cycle (2,626,560) |

The table makes clear that, when king Wen received the mandate, 2,759,280 years had elapsed from the beginning of the most remote taiji shangyuan cycle. Thus, the Qianzaodu worked with the Superior Origin of Wudi’s Sifen system.

4.4.4 The Superior Origin of the apocrypha: implications

If we rely upon the reconstruction presented here, we must conclude that the Qianzaodu worked with a pre-existent Superior Origin which had been calculated for Wudi’s Sifen system. At the same time, the shangyuan of the apocrypha was taken as reference point for the Later Han official almanac which fixed the beginning of the yuan cycle at 1681 BC with the incipit of the second ji in 161 BC. Here, we have just discussed that the Qianzaodu worked with a system in which the closest yuan cycle began in 1624 BC with the second ji fixed at 104 BC. Should this imply that this Supreme Origin matched each Han Sifen system? The answer to this query must be affirmative on condition that we subordinate the shangyuan to the reference points of the single almanacs.

The similarities between the (Wudi’s) Sifen Superior Origin of the apocrypha and the shangyuan of the Later Han Sifen li are only apparent. The table below shall illustrate this point by calendrically scheduling the years 1624 and 1143 on the basis of Wudi’s and the Later Han almanac.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Distance from the beginning of the Taiji shangyuan period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wudi’s Sifen system (and Qianzaodu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624 BC</td>
<td>2,758,800 years(^{328})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1143 BC</td>
<td>2,759,280 years(^{330})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{328}\) 132,240 + 2,626,560=2,758,800. 132,240 is the distance between the beginning of the Taiji cycle and the start of the yuan cycle according to Wudi’s Sifen li. As mentioned above, 2,626,560 years is the Taiji cycle of Wudi’s almanac.

\(^{329}\) The Later Han Sifen li deemed the year 481 BC to be 2,760,000 years from the beginning of the Taiyi cycle. Thus, between the start of the Taiji and 1624 BC there were 2,758,857 years.
This difference in the calendrical scheduling of the years 1624 BC and 1143 BC derives from the fact that Wudi’s and Later Han technicians, while agreeing on the length in years of the calendrical cycles, scheduled them in a different way. Wudi’s Sifen li took 1624 BC as beginning of the metonic cycle, the bu (76), and the ji (1520), and of the yuan (4560). The Later Han Sifen li considered it to be simply the beginning of the metonic cycle. Thus, the Superior Origin was subordinated to the reference points of the single calendars. In a study on the apocrypha, this essentially implies that we must always focus on periods as the yuan or the ji of the single calendars. At this point, let us turn to a very particular moment of Chinese history, at least when considered from the viewpoint of the apocrypha: the year of the unicorn. As we know from Later Han sources, both the apocrypha and the almanac of 85 AD fixed the distance of this moment from the Superior Origin at 2,760,000 years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Distance from the beginning of the preceding Taiji shangyuan period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified year of the unicorn</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wudi’s Sifen system</td>
<td>Apocrypha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>481 BC (Year of the unicorn according to the Later Han Sifen li)</td>
<td>2,759,942 years (^{332})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later Han Sifen</td>
<td>2,760,000 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table illustrates a central issue of the chenwei: the dating of the year of the unicorn. As often mentioned, this year corresponds to 481 BC in our time-system when relying upon Chinese annals and chronological tables. This also was the line of reasoning of the Later Han technicians who relied upon chronological tables and annals. \(^{333}\) This, however, was not the approach adopted by the authors of the apocrypha since the Qianzaodu implicitly says that Confucius captured the unicorn 720 years after the bestowal of the Heaven’s Mandate upon king Wen. \(^{334}\) Accordingly, the year of the unicorn is calculated as follows:

\[132,720 + 2,626,560 = 2,759,280.\]  
As mentioned above 132,720 is the distance between the beginning of the Taiji cycle and king Wen’s mandate according to Wudi’s Sifen li.

\[2,626,560 - 2,759,280 = 720.\]  
The Later Han Sifen li deemed the year 481 BC to be 2,760,000 years from the beginning of the Taiji cycle. Thus, between the start of the Taiji and the star of the year of king Wen’s mandate there were 2,758,857 years.

\[2,759,280 + 662 = 2,759,942.\]  
As calculated above 1143 BC — the year of king Wen’s mandate according to the Qianzaodu — was 2,759,280 years from the beginning of the Taiji cycle. Between 1143 BC and 481 BC, there are 662 years. 2,759,280 + 662 = 2,759,942.

\[^{330}\] 132,720 + 2,626,560 = 2,759,280. As mentioned above 132,720 is the distance between the beginning of the Taiji cycle and king Wen’s mandate according to Wudi’s Sifen li.

\[^{331}\] The Later Han Sifen li deemed the year 481 BC to be 2,760,000 years from the beginning of the Taiji cycle. Thus, between the start of the Taiji and the star of the year of king Wen’s mandate there were 2,758,857 years.

\[^{332}\] As calculated above 1143 BC — the year of king Wen’s mandate according to the Qianzaodu — was 2,759,280 years from the beginning of the Taiji cycle. Between 1143 BC and 481 BC, there are 662 years. 2,759,280 + 662 = 2,759,942.

\[^{333}\] See Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3036, 3038.

\[^{334}\] 2,760,000 (distance of the year of the unicorn from the last Taiji period) - 2,759,280 (distance of the year of King Wen’s mandate from the last Taiji period) = 720. Alternatively, one could say that Confucius captured the unicorn 1200 years after the beginning of the yuan. When working with the Later Han Sifen li (1681), this gives exactly 481 BC. It is then probable that the strategy of the Qianzaodu (1200 years after yuan = unicorn) was also derived from some numerological (Yijing ?) mechanism of Wudi’s Sifen system, according to which the 1200th year after the start of the yuan...
unicorn, which corresponds to 481 BC when following those Han scholars who relied upon annals and chronological tables, moves to 423 BC (1143-720=423) in this calendrically based scheme. Hence, when using Sifen almanacs to reconstruct the past, the discrepancy in the arrangement of calendrical cycles is highly significant. But were Later Han scholars interested in these calendrical chronologies? By keeping in mind the remarks made in the preceding pages, we should reply in the negative. When dealing with the past, Later Han technicians simply relied on annals and chronological tables. If we try to sum up the reflections presented here, we should conclude that the Qianzaodu worked with a pre-existent Superior Origin which was later re-adopted within an official system with a different starting point. The apocryphal shangyuan, in fact, could actually fit each Sifen system known to the Han on condition that we do not use the calendrical cycles for framing the events of the past or, alternatively, on condition that we subordinate chronology to the temporal reference points of the single almanacs. At this point, it is interesting to ask whether Han texts offer consistent elements for corroborating this line of reasoning.

4.5 Manipulating calendars: the Yin li of the apocrypha

4.5.1 The Qianzaodu and the Yin li

Besides being associated to Wudi’s Sifen system and besides having inspired the Superior Origin of the Later Han calendar, the Qianzaodu once again surprises the reader by bringing into the discussion a third calendar, namely the Yin li. Let us consider this point in detail and begin with the following sentence:

元歴無名。推先紀曰甲寅。

As for the [year of the Superior] Origin, in the calendar there is no [detail about] name. If one calculates the beginning of the first ji-cycle [concludes that the year of the Superior Origin] was a jiayin year.335

The excerpt above states that the year of the Origin had to fall under the combination jiayin of the sexagesimal counting system. The proceedings of the Later Han calendrical debates might help us to shed light on this statement: in the first centuries AD, lipu specialists associated the sexagesimal combination of the year of the Superior Origin to specific almanacs.

was an important moment in history. Most likely, however, the drafters of this almanac did not speak about Confucius or the unicorn. The association between a calendrically relevant moment and the Master of Lu was probably a later addition.

335 Choshu isho shusei 1A:46
Now [about the year of the Superior Origin], [Feng] Guang and [Chen] Huang consider the [combination] *gengshen* to be wrong and the [combination] *jiayin* to be correct. In regard the calendrical methods, all the six [calendrical] schools — [those linked to the emperors] Huangdi and Zhuanxu, [the royal clans of the] Xia, Yin, and Zhou, and [the state of] Lu — have their peculiar origin. [The *jiayin* Origin] on which Guang and Huang rely is the Origin of the *Yin* almanac.

Thus, the calendar working with *jiayin* as starting combination was the *Yin li*. Accordingly, we have to interpret the short passage from the *Qianzaodu* as a reference to this *Sifen* system. At this point, it becomes evident that this apocryphal treatise embodied Wudi’s calendrical system and a successive re-elaboration which classified it as a *jiayin/Yin li* scheme. When reflecting on the accuracy of this line of reasoning, we should consider once again the only dated entry of the *Qianzaodu* and read it in a *Yin li* framework:

今入天元二百七十五萬九千二百八十嵗，昌以西伯受命，入戊午部。二十九年【…】

Thus, 2,759,280 years after [the beginning] of the Heavenly (i.e. Supreme Superior) Origin, Chang as Patriarch of the West received the [Heaven’s] mandate: [this happened] during the seventh (i.e. *wuwu* bu) cycle [of a 1520 year-period]. The 29th year […]

When using the *Yin li*, we should keep in mind that we are now working with a *Sifen* system which fixed the beginning of the *yuan* at 1567 BC. Thus, king Wen received the mandate 481 years after this incipit, namely 1086 BC. After 720 years, and precisely in 366 BC, Confucius captured the unicorn. The relevance of the remarks in the last section becomes evident: different *Sifen* almanacs generate different calendrical chronologies. The table below illustrates this point:

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336 The year of the Superior Origin of the Later Han *Sifen* li was a *gengshen* 庚申 year. For a full discussion of this point, see *Hou Hanshu* (zhi) 2:3036. The choice of the Origin of the Later Han *Sifen* li provoked a number of debates during which some technicians vehemently pleaded for the adoption of an almanac based on a *jiayin* Origin. According to the *Hou Hanshu*, the first attempt to substitute the official *gengshen* origin dates back to 123 AD, when Dan Song 亶誦 maintained that an almanac with *jiayin* as Origin matched the heavens (*yu tian xiangying* 與天相應) and was consistent with the apocrypha (*he tuchen* 合圖讖). *Hou Hanshu* (zhi) 2:3034. *Hou Hanshu* (zhi) 2:3038.

337 On this point, see also the remarks of the medieval astronomer Zu Chongzhi in *Songshu* 13:307.

338 *Choshu isho shusei* 1A:48.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wudi’s Sifen</th>
<th>Yin li</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incipi-year of the yuan cycle</td>
<td>1624 BC</td>
<td>1567 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of king Wen’s mandate in the Qianzaodu: 481 years after the beginning of the yuan</td>
<td>(1624-481=1143) 1143</td>
<td>(1567-481=1086) 1086 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of the Unicorn in the Qianzaodu: 720 years after king Wen’s mandate.</td>
<td>(1143-720=423) 423 BC</td>
<td>(1086-720=366) 366 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The line of reasoning presented here sheds light on the distrust for chronologies based on calendrical cycles on the side of Later Han technicians. When asked for a judgement on attempts to promote the apocryphal Yin li as official calendar of the Later Han, Liu Hong said that such an almanac could even “move” the date of the capture of the unicorn from the accepted 14th year of Duke Ai in Lu, namely our 481 BC.339

4.5.2 Reading the Zhuanxu li as Yin li

The analysis of the Qianzaodu has revealed an attempt to make a Yin li calendar out of a pre-existent almanac very probably based on the unanimous Sifen system mentioned in the Classic of Epochs. Hence, we understand the link that Later Han scholars seemed to make between the apocrypha and a time system based on a jiayin origin. At this point, it is legitimate to wonder whether other apocryphal texts show a predilection for this almanac. Let us first briefly discuss the Kaolingyao and see how, as in the case of the Qianzaodu, the original text was probably corrected and read within a Yin li framework. In his Yuelinglun 月令論 [On the Monthly Ordinances], Cai Yong describes the conditions of the Origin of the Qin calendar Zhuanxu li:

蔡邕月令論曰：『顓頊曆術曰：『天元正月己巳朔旦立春，俱以日月起於天廟營室五度。』』

In [his work] On the Monthly Ordinances, Cai Yong says: “According to the methods of the Zhuanxu calendar, the Heavenly Origin is in the day jisi of the first month of the year in which the lunation coincides at dawn with the Establishment of Spring: the sun and the moon rise in the fifth du of [the lodge] House which is the Heavenly court.”340

Hence, as already mentioned at the beginning, the Zhuanxuli took the solar term lichun as reference point instead of relying on the winter solstice like other Sifen almanacs. He also stresses that at the moment of the origin of this calendar, the sun was in the fifth du of the lodge House: this moment was the beginning of a month, day, and astronomical

339  Hou Hanshu (zhì) 2:3039.
340  Hou Hanshu (zhì) 2:3042-3043.
year. Let us now consider the following sentence from the *Kaolingyao*:

正月已巳朔旦立春日月五星皆起营室至度。

On the day *jisi* of the first month of the year in which the lunation coincides at dawn with the Establishment of Spring: the sun, the moon, and the five planets rise in the fifth *du* of [the lodge] House. 341

When reading this fragment of the *Kaolingyao*, the reader cannot fail to notice that this apocryphal text contained a section on calendar, no matter how short, which was based on the *Zhuanxu li*. A few further elements corroborate this conclusion. As we have seen, the data presented in this treatise on the width in *du* reflect the system used in the Qin official almanac. Moreover, in the calendrical debate of AD 175, Liu Hong explicitly links the *Kaolingyao* to the *Zhuanxuli*. 342

As in the case of the *Qianzaodu*, the calendrical section of the *Kaolingyao* must have been reinterpreted in a *Yin li* framework. This text, in fact, explicitly mentions the *jiayin* Origin. 343 Moreover, Later Han technicians active during the debates of 103 AD linked the *Kaolingyao* to the *Yin li*. 344 The reason for this evident contradiction is that, like the *Qianzaodu*, a pre-existent almanac—in this case the *Zhuanxuli*—was reinterpreted and corrected in the light of the *Yin li* framework.

4.5.3 The *Minglixu* and *Yin li* chronology

When looking for fragments discussing or presenting the *Yin li*, the interpreter must often accept that the *chenwei*, while clearly showing a formal predilection for this almanac, actually offer very few and extremely discrepant information about it. Apart from a few generic and problematic statements which seem to impose the *Yin li* on pre-existent calendrical systems, only a small group of fragments listed under the heading *Chunqiu: Minglixu* consistently refers to this almanac. The *Minglixu* is simply a reconstruction of Chinese chronology based on the *Yin li*.

Whoever worked on the drafting of the *Minglixu* certainly shared Liu Xin’s confidence in the possibility of using calendrical techniques to schedule the past. Nevertheless, while following Liu Xin’s strategy, the authors of this apocryphal treatise preferred to use the *Yin li* to bring some order to the dates of Chinese history. Below, we shall compare Liu Xin’s statements about the dating of the *Yin li* and a few testimonia of the *Suishu* dealing with the *Minglixu*:

341 *Choshu isho shusei* 2:51.
342 *Hou Hanshu (zhī)* 2:3042-3043.
343 *Choshu isho shusei* 2:31.
344 *Hou Hanshu (zhī)* 2:3033.
(1) 655 BC: the fifth year of Duke Xi 僖 in Lu.\(^{345}\)

(Shi jing) 鬲公立五年正月辛亥朔旦冬至，殷曆以為壬子

During the fifth year of Duke Xi (655 BC), the Winter solstice coincided with the lunation on the morning of the day xinhai in the first month. According to the Yin Calendar, this was a renzi day.

(Suishu) 春秋繹命曆序云：「魯僖公五年正月壬子朔旦冬至 ·」

The apocryphal appendix to the Annals The Sequence: Scheduling the Mandates says: “During the fifth year of Duke Xi, the Winter solstice coincided with the lunation on the morning of the day renzi in the first month.”

(2) 579 BC: the twelfth year of Duke Cheng 成 in Lu.\(^{346}\)

(Shi jing) 成公十二年正月戊寅朔旦冬至，殷曆以為辛卯

In the twelfth year of Duke Cheng, during the first month on the day gengyin there was the winter solstice and the beginning of the lunation. According to the Yin Calendar, this was a xinmao day.

(Suishu) 命曆序天正辛卯朔旦日至

According to The Sequence: Scheduling the Mandates, on the day xinmao of the Heavenly corrector (i.e. first month) there was the winter solstice and the beginning of the lunation.

The two examples above testify that whoever wrote this part of the Minglixu was using the Yin li to re-calculate the dates of the past. These excerpts also help the interpreter to recognise a significant discrepancy between Liu Xin’s strategy and the line of reasoning adopting in the apocryphal text. While Liu Xin tried to match his own dating with the wordings of the classics, the authors of the Minglixu apparently regarded this point as marginal and essentially unimportant. As we have discussed in the precedent pages, Liu Xin’s dating of the Winter solstice in 655 BC respects the dated entry of the Zuozhuan: whoever wrote the Minglixu simply refused to adopt it by preferring to rely on the Yin system. Below is a further example of this point:

昭公二十年，春秋左氏傳二月己丑朔日南至，準命曆庚寅朔旦日至．

The twelfth year of Duke Zhao (522 BC): according to the Zuo tradition of the Annals on the day jichou of the second month, there was the simultaneous occurrence of lunation.

345 For the excerpt from Liu Xin’s Shi jing, see Hanshu 21B:1019; for the passage of the Suishu, see Suishu 17:426

346 For the excerpt from Liu Xin’s Shi jing, see Hanshu 21B:1019; for the passage of the Suishu, see Suishu 17:426
and winter solstice. On this point, The Sequence: Scheduling the Mandates says: “On the
dawn of the day gengyin, there was the simultaneous occurrence of lunation and winter
solstice.”

Hence, we may be certain that the Minglixu attached no importance to the dated entries
of the Zuozhuan. When looking for the motivations, we can read the following
fragment.

命曆序曰：孔子為治春秋之故，復修殷之故曆，使其數可傳於後，如是，春秋宜用
殷曆正之。

The Sequence: Scheduling the Mandates says: Confucius in order to fix the principles of
the Annals, adopted the old calendar of the Shang. He had its methods passed down to posterity.” Hence, as for the Annals, it is appropriate to use the Yin Calendar as to correct it.

Thus, as the excerpt suggests, the right calendar for the chronicles of Lu was the Yin殷
system — Confucius’s personal choice — a variant of the Sifen method whose origin
was supposed to fall under the combination jiayin 甲寅.

4.6 Evaluating the lipu layer of the apocrypha

After having dwelled on the most important features of the calendrical layer of the
apocrypha, we are now ready to draw some conclusions concerning its technical value.
Let us first consider the elements which apparently testify to a certain lipu expertise of
the authors of these texts. It is safe to assume that whoever wrote the texts mentioned in
this section was quite conversant with Early Han almanacs. First, as we have seen, the
Superior Origin mentioned in the Qianzaodu and in the Yuanmingbao is the shangyuan
used in Wudi’s sifen, which took 1624 BC as the beginning of the yuan cycle (4560
years). Evidently, the authors were well acquainted with sifen techniques for scheduling
years, days, months, and full time cycles. Second, in the case of the Minglixu, we
clearly have an attempt at constructing absolute chronologies. Even if a considerable
part of the technical community of the time must have viewed with suspect at such a
way of considering and calculating time, it is undeniable that Liu Xin acknowledged
their validity. Thus, we are compelled to consider this layer of the Minglixu as a valid
line of reasoning. Third, the Kaolingyao also worked with a pre-existent calendar,
namely the Zhuanxuli. Finally, according to Later Han technicians, Liu Xin used the
Hetu Dilanxi and the Luoshu Zhenyaodu to compute the motion of the moon.

347 Suishu 17:430.
348 Jinshu 18:166.
349 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3035.
Evidently, there were parallels between Liu Xin’s line of reasoning and the wordings of the apocrypha. All the elements listed above suggest a knowledge of complex matters dealing with the drafting of a *li*. The question, at this point, is whether these elements are enough to conclude that the authors of the *chenwei* were calendrical experts. Given the reliance on pre-existent almanacs, we can safely exclude this possibility: while knowing the different Han calendars, whoever wrote the apocrypha certainly was not drafting a new time-keeping system. In other words, the aims of these people were often different from those of *lipu* experts. When wondering about their goals, one should stress the role of chronologies more or less closely related to official calendrical systems.

The interest in reconstructing the political history of China by, among other things, taking into account Han time-scheduling systems stands out in a number of fragments. If the *Minglixu* preferred to follow Liu Xin’s official line of reasoning, some fragments certainly suggest the influence of alternative methods which often revealed a tendency to manipulate pre-existent calendars or the annalistic chronologies of the time.

When coming to the apocryphal manipulation of calendrical techniques, the reader should keep in mind that the almanacs of the *chenwei* all adopted the Four Parts method. Thus, they worked with the idea that four metonic cycles, which total 76 years, was the span of time between two synchronized occurrences of lunation and winter solstice: hence, the labelling *Sifen* or Quarter Remainder system. These two cycles, when intersecting the sexagesimal counting for days and years, generated the biggest cycles of a *Sifen* almanac: the *ji* (1520 years) and the *yuan* (4560 years). While sharing the basic structure, the almanacs behind the *chenwei* differed profoundly from each other in regard to the temporal reference points. A *Yin li* practitioner, for instance, would fix the beginning of a 76-year cycle at 123 BC. The same date would simply be the beginning of a metonic (19 years) cycle for those working with Wudi’s almanac. Similarly, when applying the *Yin li*, one should fix the beginning of the 4560-year cycle (*yuan*) at 1567 BC; when working with Wudi’s calendar, one should use 1624 BC as start of the *yuan* and, consequently, as temporal reference point.

The discrepancies in the temporal reference points profoundly affected the chronology given in the *Qianzaodu*. The fixing of the beginning of the *yuan* cycle, which depends on the calendrical system used, played a role of basic important for the people who wrote this text: since they stated that king Wen began to rule 481 years after the beginning of the *yuan* cycle, we necessarily need to know when the *yuan* was presumed to have begun. This, in turn, is rather important for individuating the year in which Confucius was supposed to have captured a unicorn: as we have seen, this aspect plays a crucial role for the authors of the apocrypha. The ambiguity and the invalidity of this layer of the *Qianzaodu* stands out in the fact that the text, while using the Superior
Origin of Wudi’s *sifen* system, constantly refers to the *Yin li*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wudi’s <em>Sifen</em></th>
<th><em>Yin li</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start-year of the <em>yuan</em> cycle</td>
<td>1624 BC</td>
<td>1567 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of king Wen’s mandate in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 481 years after the beginning of the <em>yuan</em></td>
<td>(1624-481=1143) 1143</td>
<td>(1567-481=1086) 1086 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of the Unicorn in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 720 years after king Wen’s mandate.</td>
<td>423 BC</td>
<td>366 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the use of two different *Sifen* systems generated two different chronologies. The consequences of this point are rather important. First, we are certainly far from annalistic chronologies, since the year of the unicorn (481 BC) is here fixed at 423 BC and 366 BC. Second, the insistence on the *Yin li* can be regarded as a manipulative since the Superior Origin mentioned in the text belonged to Wudi’s almanac. In this regard, we should stress that the apocrypha generally show a preference for the *Yin li*: this tendency also stands out in the *Kaolingyao* in which data referring to the *Zhuanxuli* are presented as parts of the *Yin* almanac. The apocryphal emphasis on chronology and the manipulation of official calendars lead the reader of the *chenwei* to go beyond the *lipu* layer.

5. **BEYOND LIPU**

5.1 Going beyond the Han art of *lipu*:

As in the case of the Han art of Heavenly Patterns, a number of apocryphal fragments apparently dealing with calendrical techniques could be classified under the heading “beyond”. While strongly suggesting the influence of ideas linked to time-scheduling techniques, the wording of these sentences also conveys an association with fields such as exegesis or mantic practices. As in the case of the “beyond *tianwen*” layer, we shall first document and provide evidence of the existence of disciplines, people, and fields which in some way favoured or even encouraged the development of trends of thought influenced by themes linked to the scheduling of time. Hence, the following sections shall focus on the same questions that were posed in regard to the “beyond *tianwen*” stratum. What was the theoretical crossroads between calendar and other fields? What caused the growing interest in this technical discipline? Can we really speak of calendrical techniques or should we rather talk about time-scheduling strategies?
5.1.1  Lipu within the Han cultural community: the crossroads

Just as astrology fascinated scholars and officials thanks to the embedded principle that nature could influence the destiny of men and states, calendrical techniques, too, must have worked with some notions or themes which could attract people working in different cultural fields. When looking for this crossroads linking the Han art of *lipu* to the wider cultural community, the attention of the reader tends to focus immediately on the very basic point that a calendar is simply a model which organizes spans of time. In particular, a Chinese almanac could fix the current date by scheduling its location within time-cycles: in this way, people knew their position in respect to the past or to the future. Besides the political and ritual importance of this point, an interpreter of Chinese culture should not forget its cultural implications. The possibility of organizing the flowing of time in sets of cycles very probably fascinated peoples and individuals working within different fields. Here we shall shortly present two cultural groups: practitioners of mantic arts and scholars working with the *Yijing*.

In introducing the Han art of *lipu*, we have stressed that a Han almanac could also work as instrument for unfolding the past, the present, and the future. The relationship between calendar and the idea of future, however, did not only concern the possibility of scheduling the months and days of the years to come. In this regard, the introductory words to *lipu* in the bibliography of the *Hanshu* are very explicit since they recall that “all the methods [for predicting] the evil [coming from] inauspicious adversities and the happiness [deriving from] auspicious prosperity develop from these techniques (*xiong fan zhi huan jilong zhi xi qi shu jie chu yan* 凶阨之患吉隆之喜其術皆出焉).” Hence, calendrical techniques were in some way bound to divinatory methods. The interpreter may find confirmation of this point when he considers how Han bibliographers described the mantic practices gathered under the labelling *wu xing* 五行:

【…】五行之序亂，五星之變作，皆出於律曆之數。【…】

Moreover, order and disorder of the five agents as well as the regular and irregular working of the five planets emerge from the numbers of calendars and pitchpipes.

Which of the mantic arts were regarded as part of the *wu xing* section of the imperial library? Here, the reader finds books such as the *Taiyi* 泰一 [On the Taiyi] or *Xingde* 刑德 [On Punishment and Virtue]. Thanks to excavated texts and later sources, we can understand why Han bibliographers connected these mantic practices to calendrical

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350 In this regard, see Cullen (1996), 5-6.
351 *Hanshu* 30:1767.
352 *Hanshu* 30:1769. On the *wu xing* section of the Han technical bibliography, see Li Ling (2000), 25-27.
techniques. In the “Virtue and Punishment” method, which is illustrated in the Xingde B manuscript from Mawangdui, forecasting was based on the motion of the two mantic operators Xing and De against an imaginary space divided in nine sections called Nine Palaces (jiugong 九宮). As Kalinowski has clearly shown, the position of Xing and De relative to the “Palaces”—possibly the earliest mention of the homonymous diagram familiar to reader of later sources—shifted in accord with the daily and yearly revolution of the sexagenary cycle. Hence, calendrical functions and calculations formed a basic part of this mantic practice. Also very interesting is the case of the Taiyi method which was already well developed by the fifth century AD. The spirit of Polaris already met in the chapter on tianwen becomes here an itinerant deity which moves against the background of a complex chart represented on a cosmic board (shi 式). Practitioners of the Taiyi method were required to ascertain the position of the deity relative to the already mentioned Nine Palaces at a given time. Time was certainly an essential component of the practice: later sources attest that this method worked with cycles of six sets of 60 years and five sets of 72 years. Moreover, just like lipu experts, Taiyi practitioners needed a starting point for the orientation among the cycles: hence, the adoption in a mantic context of a typical lipu facet, namely the Superior Origin. The scheduling of time in sets of cycles also played a role in circles working with the Yijing. As mentioned in the section on the Han art of lipu, in the last centuries BC, the 64 Hexagrams (gua 卦) and their 384 constitutive lines (yao 爻) became symbols of time-unities as, for instance, those 360 days which were supposed to form a year. This approach to the old handbook of milfoil divination was destined to achieve a remarkable success under the Han, when scholars like Meng Xi 孟喜 and Jing Fang 京房 associated the Yijing operators (hexagrams or lines) with temporal cycles, they endeavoured to transform the Changes into a parable explaining the flowing of time. Noticeably, instead of slavishly following older association models, Meng Xi and Jing Fang opted for the official technical values based on the Quarter Remainder data. Hence, trigrams and hexagrams were connected to the 365 ¼ days of Han calendars. By the end of the

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353 On the Nine Palaces, see Ho (2003), 19-23.
355 Recently, Ho Peng Yoke has pointed at the historian Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯 (489-537), who used this technique to interpret and explain events of the past. See Ho (2003), 36-41. The earliest source to give a detailed description of the Taiyi method is, however, the Song monograph Taiyi jinjing shijing 太乙金鏡式經 (Board Canon of the Bronze Mirror of the Taiyi Deity). At this time, the Taiyi-system constituted together with the Liuren 六壬 and the Qimen dunjia 奇門遁甲 the Three Boards (san shi 三 式) which formed the official divination system of the Song dynasty. For a comprehensive discussion of the san shi, see Ho (2003).
356 For a description of the cosmic board use in Taiyi divination system, see Ho (2003), 44-46. For early shi see Harper (1978), Cullen (1979).
357 For a description of the time-system used in the Taiyi divination system, see Ho (2003), 46.
358 Neo (2000), 153-155
first century BC, this trend had already reached its peak: Huang Kaiguo 黄开国, for instance, has well highlighted the presence of a lipu layer within Yang Xiong’s Taixuanjing.\(^{359}\)

The remarks presented here have shown, it is hoped, that the cyclical organization of time may possibly have worked as a sort of common ground between calendrical experts and the wider intellectual community. Nevertheless, one should stress that the cultural impact of lipu could have remained limited — hence impeding the birth of a “beyond lipu” discourse — had not Yijing circles worked as medium for bringing calendrical themes into the wide political arena.

5.1.2 Lipu within Han cultural community: the importance of the Yijing as strategic framework

As mentioned at the beginning of the discussion of the “Beyond tianwen” layer, the development of an interdisciplinary discourse depends not only on the existence of a theoretical crossroads but also on a framework which help members of non-calendrical groups to break through the boundaries among the disciplines. The Han art of tianwen could become object of an interdisciplinary discourse also thanks to the zaiyi framework. Nothing comparable existed in regard to lipu, at least not to the same degree. Nevertheless, it may be that mantic practices and Yijing theories drew the attention of a wider public to the possibility of using calendar-related facets in different fields, from exegesis to history, from mythology to politics. As we have seen above, in fact, such fields dealt with the idea of organizing time in sets of cycles. Accordingly, mantic practitioners and students of the Yijing might have played a relevant role in bringing the art of lipu into a wider cultural community. We have scanty information on diviners working with wu xing methods: therefore, we shall leave this point aside for the time being and consider the relevance of such practices in the third part of this work. Here, it is preferable to focus on students of the Changes and reflect on their role of conveyors of lipu themes within the ru community. In this regard, we should keep in mind that, by the first century BC, the Changes already occupied a very special position among the classics: As already mentioned, the Yijing was regarded as the “origin” (yuan) of the canonical corpus. Obviously, then, members of the ru community — and by the first century BC all those educated at the Imperial University — were required to have a basic knowledge of it. Even people with only a modest knowledge of this work must have been aware that trigrams, hexagrams, and lines could be taken as symbols of time flowing. Moreover, they were probably aware of the growing relevance of the

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\(^{359}\) Huang Kaiguo (1991). Ban Gu is even more precise since states that this work fits the Taichu system and encompasses the Zhuansu li (yu Taichu xiangying yi you Zhuansu li yan 與泰初歷相應亦有顓頊之曆焉). Hanshu 87B:3575.
exegetical trend which strongly emphasized the temporal dimension of this classic. Even if *Yijing* training, and hypothetically mantic practices, may have worked as a sort of medium for popularizing calendrical techniques — hence coming to play a role similar to the *zaiyi* for astrology — one facet seems to distinguish these fields from the working of the *zaiyi* framework. This, in fact, offered the undeniable advantage of playing a role at a political level, of offering a platform for public criticism. Could the *Yijing* — or even the mantic practices — guarantee the possibility to criticize politicians and policies? The answer to this question must be in the affirmative.

The mantic character of the Han art of *tianwen* allowed scholars and officials to open a critical memorial by simply saying: “this astral line-up has these implications”. In other words, they could rely on a field which could be presented as impartial and not involved in a specific political case. From this viewpoint, we may hypothesize that *wu xing* methods worked in a similar way since political criticism could be justified by hinting at the position of mantic operators at a given time. Even the *Yijing* could offer this advantage: Han *ru* did not only use temporal strategies to explain and interpret this classic but also to predict auspicious events or calamities. Let us consider, for instance, the following excerpt from the *Lüli zhi* of the *Hanshu*:

易九厄曰：初入元，百六，陽九；次三百七十四，陰九；次四百八十，陽九；次七百二十，陰七；次七百二十，陽七；次六百，陰五；次六百，陽五；次四百八十，陰三；次四百八十，陽三。

The Nine Knots of the Changes says: “106 [years] from the [beginning of the] yuan: this [moment] is the nine of the yang. The next is 374: this [moment] is the nine of the yin. The next is 480: this [moment] is the nine of the yang. The next is 720: this [moment] is the seven of the yin. The next is 720: this [moment] is the nine of the yang. The next is 600: this [moment] is the five of the yin. The next is 600: this [moment] is the five of the yin. The next is 480: this [moment] is the three of the ying. The next step is 480: this [moment] is the three of the yang.”

What we have here is a quotation from a work on the Changes. Some quick computations reveal that the numbers given above, when added together, give a total of 4560 years, which is simply the *Sifen* value of the yuan cycle. Hence, the numbers listed could refer to nine crucial years or critical moments within a 4560-year cycle. Obviously, the running of such a scheme depends on which calendrical system we use. The table below is a hypothetical model based on Wudi’s *Sifen li*:

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360 *Hanshu* 21A:984
Let us now turn to Gu Yong: in 12 BC, the scholar vehemently criticized the politics of the time in a long memorial addressed to emperor Cheng. Besides referring to astral phenomena, the scholar also said:

【…】時世有中季，天道有盛衰。【…】涉三七之節紀，遭無妄之卦運，直百六之災厄。【…】

[…] Epochs and periods have a middle and a final [phase] and the Way of Heaven has risings and declines. […] We will now run into the knot-mark of the “three-seven”, come across the revolution of the *wu wang* hexagram, and directly meet the calamity of the 106th [year from the beginning of the *yuan* cycle]. […]

Essentially, we have here some kind of political prognostications based on the flowing of time: Gu Yong was announcing the imminence of three dangerous moments (*zai e* 災厄). Let us leave a side the “knot-mark of the three-seven (*san qi zhi jieji* 三七之節紀)” for the time being and focus on “the calamity of the 106th (*bailiu zhi zai e* 百六之災厄)” and the “revolution of the *wu wang* hexagram (*wuwang zhi gua yun* 無妄之卦運)”.

The first probably derives from the work on the *Changes* mentioned above: Gu Yong was warning the sovereign about the imminence of a critical moment, namely the 106th year of the *yuan*. Assuming that the scholar was working within the Santong-calendar, for instance, “the calamity of the 106th” would refer to the 106th year from the beginning of the *yuan* in 104 BC, namely 2 AD. 362

In all probability, the hexagram *wu wang* 無妄 refers to some of the association schemes between time unities and hexagrams which, as we shall recall below, were very popular during the first century BC. After all, the temporal implications of *wu wang* are well documented: a certain Cui Zhuan 崔篆, who was active under Wang Mang, is

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361 *Hanshu* 85:3468
362 It seems rather improbable that Gu Yong was working with calendars such as the *Sifen li* or the *Yin li*. When using these systems, in fact, the knot of the 106th year falls in 1518 (Wudi’s *Sifen li*) or 1461 (*Yin li*). This hardly matches Gu Yong’s words since the scholar was speaking of imminent moments. Thus, it is advisable to work with the *Santong li*, the only almanac which scheduled the start of the *yuan* during the Han period.
explicitly said to have been born in the time of *wu wang* (*wu wang zhi shi* 無妄之世).\(^{363}\) Moreover, in the Han version of the *Yijing*, a period falling under this hexagram implied the imminence of catastrophes.\(^{364}\) In conclusion, Gu Yong’s words testify that the *Yijing* framework also allowed people to express political or social criticism by means of allusions to specific spans of time.

### 5.1.3 Lipu within Han cultural community: the boundary

Before finally turning to the discussion of the “beyond lipu” layer, let us recall that in the case of *zaiyi* as the medium for the diffusion of astrology we dwelled on the issue concerning the boundaries between this framework and the art of *tianwen*. When considering this point in regard to *lipu*, the interpreter can easily distinguish between people such as Gu Yong and technicians like Luoxia Hong or even Liu Xiang. While adopting and spreading the belief that time could be reduced to sets of cycles, most of the people whom we will mention in the following pages might hardly have been able to draft a calendrical system with its numerical constants for astral motion or with its complex formulae. Such tasks required, in fact, a special training: after all, a calendrical expert was able to measure the length of the shadows and to fix the incipit of the winter solstice; he was able to use water clocks and to predict the phases of the moon. As we have seen, the authors of the apocrypha were most likely intellectually far from circles accustomed to handling clepsydras or to placing gnomons. Hence, in the following pages we shall refer to time-scheduling strategies: this expression will allow us to emphasize the importance of temporal cycles in fields such as exegesis, history, or politics and, at the same time, to stress the difference between this approach and Han time-scheduling techniques.

### 5.2 Time-scheduling strategies in the exegetical fields

#### 5.2.1 The Changes, the Qianzaodu, and the hexagrams as time-operators

Neo Pengfu has clearly demonstrated that the *Yiwei* can be read as a collection of schemes in which the operators of the *Yijing* — trigrams, hexagrams, lines — are associated with time-unities such as days, months, and years. Thus, some strata of the apocryphal corpus can be safely connected to an exegetical tradition which was very popular under the Han especially during the first century BC. In particular, it is interesting to recall that whoever wrote the *Qianzaodu* was aware of Meng Xi’s and Jing Fang’s attempts to connect *Yijing* operators to the *Sifen* calendrical cycles. As Neo Pengfu has argued, however, the apocrypha cannot be reduced to imitations of Early

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\(^{363}\) For Cui Zhuan’s statement, see *Hou Hanshu* 52:1704.

\(^{364}\) In this regard, see *Hanshu* 45:3149, *Hou Hanshu* 52:1704.
Han exegetical studies. The *Qianzaodu*, for instance, follows an original line of reasoning since it combines older and newer association models. Hence, if Meng Xi and Jing Fang preferred to take the official 365 ¼ days as value of the solar year, the authors of the *Qianzaodu* also considered the traditional association between *Yijing* operators and the flowing of time by relying upon a 360 days-year.\(^{365}\)

Since Neo Pengfu has reconstructed in detail most of the association schemes of *Yiwei*, we will here briefly consider only the so-called “method of the trigrams governing the year” (*gua zhu sui shu* 卦主嵗術) of the *Qianzaodu* in order to see how temporal cycles based on *Yijing* numerology are framed within an official calendrical system. As is well known, this method presupposed the association of the 64 hexagrams with a cycle encompassing 32 years. Thus, a pair of *gua* becomes the symbol of the solar year:

求卦日：常以太歲紀年。七十六為一紀。二十紀為一部首。即積置部首歲數
加所入紀歲數以三十二除之，餘不足者以乾坤始數，二卦而得一歲。末筭即主歲之卦。

The method for obtaining the hexagram in control of the year says: “the rule is to rely upon Taisui (i.e. the counterpart of Jupiter) for scheduling years. 76 [years] form a *bu*. 20 *bu* form a *ji* (i.e. 1520 years). Then, fix the number of the years of the *ji* and add the [remaining] years of the *bu*. Divide [this] by 32. In case of a remainder, begin to count from the hexagrams *qian* and *kun*: two hexagrams form a year. The [hexagram which] has not been counted is thus the hexagram of the year.\(^{366}\)

By means of computations whoever worked with this scheme tried to form bigger cycles. Let now see the arrival point of this line of reasoning.

二十九萬一千八百四十, 以三十二除之, 得九千一百二十周, 此謂卦當歲者。得積
月三百六十萬九千六百月, 其十萬七千五百二十月者閏也。即三百八十四文除之,
得九千四百日之二十周, 此謂爻當月者。得積日萬六百五十九萬四千五百六十八
萬, 一千五百二十析, 除之得三千二百五十三周, 此謂析當月者。

[In regard to the cycle of] 291,840 years: divide this by 32 and you obtain 9120 revolutions [of the 32-year cycle]. This is [the principle] called “matching of hexagrams and years”. [In a time of 291,840 years,] there are 3,609,600 accumulated months: 17,520 of these are intercalary months. Divide [this figure] by 384 [which stay for the 384] lines [of the hexagrams]: [you] obtain 9400 revolutions. This is [the principle] called “matching of lines and months”. [In a time of 291,840 years] there are 106,594,560 accumulated days. Divide [this figure] by 11,520 [which stay for the] parts of the lines:

\(^{365}\) Neo Pengfu (2000), 341-342. As the text says, the methods of calendar and those of the Changes work with different values as reference points: The calendar takes 365 ¼ days as a year; the Changes take 360 parts in order to match the days of a period of time (i.e. a year).歴以三百六十五日四分度
之一為一歲易以三百六十析當月之日 Choshu isho shusei 1A:45.

\(^{366}\) For a full description of this model, see Neo (2000), 291-306.
you obtain 9253 revolutions. This is [the principle] called “matching of parts of the lines and days”\textsuperscript{367}

The operations presented above are simply an illustration of the ways in which hexagrams, lines, and parts of the lines are taken as counterparts of years, months, and days. The hint at a time span of 291,840 years is a very interesting element since it seems to be a sort of end point. When considering this fact, we should keep in mind that the Qianzaodu worked within the Sifen system. The calculations made above, for instance, certainly match the numerical constants of the Quarter Remainder. We also know that the Qianzaodu was one of the books with the Superior Origin fixed at 2,760,000 years before the capture of the unicorn. As we learned in the last chapter, this value derived from Wudi’s Sifen li. A few undemanding calculations may reveal that even the figure 291,840 years is connected to this almanac. The period of 2,626,560 — the Sifen taiji period — is a multiple of 291,840. Unfortunately, we cannot know whether this cycle also belonged to the Yijing-based theoretical framework of Wudi’s Sifen li: however, we can be certain that whoever wrote the Qianzaodu was elaborating schemes based on the operators of the Yijing by relying on an official time-keeping system.

5.2.2 The “five crevices” of the Odes

Under emperor Yuan 元 (r. 48-33 BC), the scholar Yi Feng 翼奉 from spoke about the “five crevices” (wu ji 五際) of the Odes\textsuperscript{368}. The meaning of this term is difficult to untangle. Under the Later Han, Ying Shao 應劭 believed it to be a label for the five fundamental human relationships.\textsuperscript{369} Contemporary scholars prefer to rely upon the unfortunately lost Shi neizhuan 詩內傳 [Inner Tradition of the Odes] where wu ji refers to the five earthly branches mao 鬱, you 酉, wu 午, xu 戌, hai 亥. As Tan Dexing 譚德興 emphasizes, these terms must be understood as operators of a time-scheme based on cycles of 360 years where the branches refer to periods of 30 years (12 branches × 30 = 360). Accordingly, the binomial wu ji refers to the most important 30-years time spans: in fact, the phases falling under mao, you, wu, xu, and hai were thought to be periods in which groundbreaking social changes could happen.\textsuperscript{370}

According to Tan Dexing, a group of apocryphal fragments can be safely connected to the temporal scheme mentioned by Yi Feng and briefly described in the lost Shi

\textsuperscript{367} Choshu isho shusai 1A:48.

\textsuperscript{368} Hanshu 75:3172.

\textsuperscript{369} See the commentary in Hanshu 75:3173. The five relationships — usually called wu lun 五倫 — are those between ruler and subject, father and son, elder brother and younger brother, husband and wide, friend and friend.

\textsuperscript{370} Tan Dexing (2000), (2001). For the Shi neizhuan see the commentary in Hanshu 75: 3173.
neizhuan 詩內傳. Given the scarcity of relevant material, it is difficult to shed light on the apocryphal interpretation of the wu ji. Nevertheless, an aspect should be emphasized in this context, namely the evident discrepancy between the apocrypha and the official exegetical tradition. In the apocrypha of the Odes, we read:

卯天保也，酉祈父也，午采芑也，亥大明也。然則亥為革命一際也，亥又為天門出入聴，二際也。卯為陰陽交際，三際也。午為陽謝隂興，四際也。酉為隂盛陽微，五際也。

Mao: [the section] “Heaven Protects” [of the Odes]; you: [the section] “White Millet” [of the Odes]; hai: [the section] “Great Brilliance” [of the Odes]. Thus, hai is [the period] of the change of the [Heaven’s] mandate: [this] is the first crevice. In addition, hai is the Door of Heaven: [therefore, this] is [also] the second crevice. Mao is the [temporal] crevice where the yin meets the yang: [this] is the third crevice. Wu is [the period in which] the yang meets the yin and the yin rises: [this] is the four crevice. You is [the period in which] the yin flourishes and the yang vanishes: [this] is the fifth crevice.

Like the Shi neizhuan, this apocryphal wording clearly understands “Five Crevices” to be a hint at five time spans. Yet, the list given in the apocryphal fragment differs from the one of the Shi neizhuan since it does not mention the branch xu and makes of hai a symbol occupying two positions in the scheme of the wu ji. We cannot know with certainty the reasons for this variation. If Later Han and early medieval sources are to be trusted, however, the option followed in the chenwei did not reflect the official position.

5.3 The tianming cycles: the application of time-scheduling strategies to past and present

5.3.1 The tianming cycles

After having briefly reviewed the use of time-scheduling schemes in exegetical circles, we shall turn to the application of such models. As the remarks in this section will show, these strategies often worked as a tool to frame the past and predict the future. Both these approaches presuppose the comprehension of a basic idea, which we shall hereafter refer to as “tianming cycle”.

Several Han intellectuals endeavoured to analyse politics in terms of temporal cycles by relying upon time-scheduling schemes. In these frameworks, political authority

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371 Choshu isho shusei 3:29. In this regard, see also Liu Yuqing (2005).
372 Choshu isho shusei 3:31
373 Later Han and Early medieval material, in fact, seem to imply that the orthodox list of the five ji included xu. Hanshu 75: 3173.
becomes subordinate to time flow. Accordingly, the tianming evolves into a natural cycle spanning a given number of years: it begins, goes through critical moments, and finally comes to an end. A ruler must necessarily pay attention to these aspects, since the inception of a specific critical moment or the beginning of a given cycle can also imply the transmission of Heaven’s mandate to a new sovereign or a new clan.

The chenwei encompass two kinds of “tianming cycle”. The first kind is based on calendrical values and, in particular, on the metonic cycle. In the Qianzaodu and in the Mingliuxu, for instance, we read that 760 years form the period of the “revolution of the epoch” (daigui}: the figure 760 in fact, is a multiple of 19 and the half of the Sifen ji cycle (1520). Thus, after 760 years on the throne, a ruling clan runs into a sort of dangerous period which can even imply the loss of political power.

The second kind of “tianming cycle” — undoubtedly the most fascinating one— is loosely related to the Jovian period (12 years) and, per extension, to the sexagesimal counting system. The scheme of the “five crevices”, with its 360-years based scheme, works with this idea. In this regard, we may read the following apocryphal fragment:

建四始五際而八節通。卯酉之際為革政。午亥之際為革命。神在天門出入侯 聽。  
Establish the Four Beginnings and the Five Crevices: then the Eight Knots will open. Mao and you are the periods for changing policy; wu and hai are there to change the mandate. When the spirit is in the Door of Heaven, inside and outside the marquis will listen.

In spite of the rather obscure wording, the Fanli shu seems to imply that the phases mao, you, wu, and hai are critical junctures in the political field: they can bring a change in political action (ge zheng) or even a revolution in the highest spheres (ge ming). If we now focus on the ge ming phases, we might assume that the dangerous moments arrive around the 150th and the 210th year from the beginning of the mandate-period (360 years). The table below shall illustrate this point:

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374 Choshu isho shusei 1A:46.
375 Choshu isho shusei 3:30.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>JUNCTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. period (30 years)</td>
<td>hai 亥</td>
<td>JUNCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. period (30 years)</td>
<td>zi 子</td>
<td>210 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. period (30 years)</td>
<td>chou 丑</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. period (30 years)</td>
<td>yin 寅</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. period (30 years)</td>
<td>mao 卯</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. period (30 years)</td>
<td>chen 辰</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. period (30 years)</td>
<td>si 巳</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. period (30 years)</td>
<td>wu 午</td>
<td>JUNCTURE 150 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. period (30 years)</td>
<td>wei 未</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. period (30 years)</td>
<td>shen 申</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. period (30 years)</td>
<td>you 西</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. period (30 years)</td>
<td>xu 戌</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End of the 360-year cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Branch</th>
<th>JUNCTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. period (30 years)</td>
<td>hai 亥</td>
<td>JUNCTURE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This time-scheduling strategy has the undeniable advantage of enabling us to hazard an explanation for Gu Yong’s Three-Seven knot. As the commentators of the *Hanshu* say, this expression referred to a period spanning 210 years: the table above makes clear that this matches the distance in years between a hai and a wu phase (7 branches→7x30=210 years). Thus, we may assume that such schemes were not only tools for explaining the classics but also strategies which could be applied to the current political situation. In the following section, we shall dwell on this point by first reviewing the application of time-scheduling strategies to the past and by finally turning to their mantic implications.
5.3.2  Applying time scheduling strategies to the past

Time-scheduling strategies occasionally worked as a tool to reconstruct a chronological scheme of the Chinese past in which given historical moments are made to match the beginning (or the end) of the periods here called “tianming cycles”. Tan Dexing and Yang Guangxi, for instance, have convincingly argued that students of the Odes used models based on the 360-year cycle to frame the past.\(^{376}\) The Qianzaodu, too, perfectly illustrates this point. As we have already discussed at length, this text works with a Superior Origin fixed at 2,760,000 years before the capture of the unicorn. It also fixes the bestowal of the Heaven’s mandate upon king Wen at a year which was 2,759,280 years from the shangyuan. In the chapter on calendar, these figures have helped us to understand the origin of the apocryphal shangyuan. Here, we should rather stress that they play a marginal role from the viewpoint of a Han lipu expert: in other words, both the year of king Wen’s mandate and the year of the unicorn do not mark the beginning of calendrical cycles.\(^{377}\) Thus, the reader of the Qianzaodu quickly concludes that these dates were mentioned because of their remarkable political importance. king Wen’s mandate hardly needs additional explanation. With regard to the capture of the unicorn, we have already seen that this event was considered to be the start of the political mandate of the Han.

When accepting that the dated entries of the Qianzaodu refer to moments which were politically relevant, the reader of this text inevitably conclude that 720 years — the temporal distance between the bestowal of the Heaven’s mandate upon king Wen and the beginning of Han power (2,760,000-2,759,280=720) — might have been a temporal period with political implications. Thus, we have here once again a temporal period based on sexagesimal values and connected with the idea of the “tianming cycle”. A short excerpt from the Hou Hanshu testifies to the suitability of this line of reasoning.

Towards the end of the Later Han dynasty, the official Xu Fan 許芝 — who was also an attentive reader of the chenwei —\(^{378}\) said:

易姓之符，代興之會，以七百二十年為一軌。有德者過之，至于八百，無德者不及，至四百載。【…】

With regard to the tokens which change the [ruling] clan and the [temporal] knot which


\(^{377}\)  In other words, these values (2,760,000 and 2,759,280) are not divisible by 19, which is the figure of the metonic cycle.

\(^{378}\)  The passage concerning the tianming cycle is included in a long memorial to the throne which begins: “he presented the apocrypha in front of the king of Wei and said” (jian chenwei yu Wei wang yue 見讖緯于魏王曰). See Sanguozi 2:63. Moreover, his interest in auspicious astrological omens (tianwen xiangrui 天文祥瑞) may be a further hint at his predilection for the apocrypha. In this regard, see the memorial Xu Fan addressed to the throne conserved in Songshu 27:777. For Xu Fan’s activity as taishiling, see Hou Hanshu 2:395; Sanguozi 2:63.
substitutes the rising (i.e. the dynasty on the throne), take 720 years as a revolution. The one who has the potency overcomes it and reaches 800 years, the one who does not have the potency, stops at 400 years.379

Hence, in the second century AD, “720 years” was considered to be a kind of temporal boundary: after having reached this limit, the clan on the throne is called upon to demonstrate its right to continue to rule over China.

5.3.3 Applying time scheduling strategies to the present

Besides being tools used to reconstruct the chronology of Chinese political history, time-scheduling strategies could also have mantic implications.380 Like Gu Yong, several Han intellectuals applied such methods for announcing the imminence of groundbreaking political changes. At the end of the Later Han, Xu Fan tried to explain why the Wei 魏 clan had to substitute the Han:

【…又高祖受命，數雖起乙未，然其兆徵始于獲麟。獲麟以來七百餘年，天之曆數將以盡終。【…】】

[…] Moreover, with regard to Gaozu’s Mandate, even if the period [of the Han] began under the year yiwei (i.e. 206 BC), the corresponding [heavenly] signs began [to manifest when Confucius] captured the unicorn. 720 year are elapsed since the capture of the unicorn. The calendrical numbers of Heaven are ending up. […]381

Thus, Xu Fan applies the 720-year cycle of the Qianzaodu to formulate a forecasting concerning the destiny of a ruling clan.

The scheme of the “five crevices”, too, was used within a mantic context. In announcing the imminence of groundbreaking events for the years following 133 AD, Lang Yi 郎顗 — a student of Jing Fang’s Yijing and expert in several divinatory practices in the second century AD —382 said:

臣伏惟漢興以來三百三十九歲，於詩三基，高祖起亥仲二年，今在戌仲十年。詩氾歷樞曰：「卯酉為革政，午亥為革命，神在天門，出入候聽。」言神在戌亥，司候帝王興衰得失，厥善則昌，厥惡則亡。

I have heard that 339 years have elapsed since the beginning of the Han. According to the “three bases” of the Odes, Gaozu rose in the second year of the Middle Period of hai; now we are in the tenth year of xu. The Pivot: Schedule of Floods says: “Mao and you are the periods for changing policy; wu and hai are there to change the mandate. When the

379 In this regard, see the commentary to Sanguozhi 2:64.
381 In this regard, see the commentary to Sanguozhi 2:64.
382 Hou Hanshu 30B:1053.
spirit is in the Door of Heaven, inside and outside the marquis will listen. This means: the spirit is in xu or hai implies losses and successes or risings and declines in matters concerning ministers, nobility, emperors, and kings; the good will rise, the evil will be lost.\footnote{Hou Hanshu 30B:1065.}

Here, we do find again the strategy of scheduling time in cycles of 360 years: each 30 years fall under a given dizhi sign. The periods marked by wu or hai announce a change of the political mandate. The table below shall reconstruct the temporal scheme behind Lang Yi’s line of reasoning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branches</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Juncture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wu 午</td>
<td>367 BC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wei 未</td>
<td>337</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shen 申</td>
<td>307</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you 西</td>
<td>277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xu 戌</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hai 亥</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zi 子</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chou 丑</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yin 寅</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mao 卯</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chen 辰</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si 巳</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wu 午</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Juncture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wei 未</td>
<td>23 AD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shen 申</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you 西</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xu 戌</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hai 亥</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>Juncture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.4 The “tianming cycles”: conclusive remarks

The remarks above have suggested the relevance of time-scheduling strategies based on metonic or sexagesimal cycles in fields such as history and politics. The discussion of these points has been intentionally kept separate from the exegetical context since these time-schemes might have been used also by ru who were not commenting or explaining a given classic. Both Lang Yi and Gu Yong, for instance, were students of the Changes who occasionally turned to methods applied within the circles working with the Odes. Moreover, let us stress that it is difficult to shed light on the origins of such time-games. While enjoying a remarkable success in Han ru communities, they might have also been linked in some way to other cultural groups. In this regard, the role of wu xing mantic practitioners should not be underestimated. The flavour of these divinatory methods characterizes some chenwei texts. The title Xingdefang, for instance, certainly recalls the Xingde method. In addition, the Qianzaodu explicitly refers to the Taiyi art. In this regard, one should keep in mind that this method also worked with 360-year cycles. Before turning to the last section of this chapter, let us finally stress that the time schemes here illustrated have been connected to Han almanacs. The Qianzaodu perfectly illustrates this point since it also gives the value for the Superior Origin. Moreover, by keeping in mind the scheme “five crevices”, we must convene that the year 367 BC, which opens the dangerous wu phase, is close to the year of the unicorn, when computed by means of the Yinli almanac. As we shall see in the third part of the present study, this point may well have played a role in the history of the apocrypha.

6. BEYOND HAN TECHNIQUES: THE WU DE FRAMEWORK

6.1 Presenting the discussion on the wu de framework

In this last section on the apocryphal discourse on the heavens, we shall turn to the analysis of one very famous facet of early imperial culture, namely the wu de 五德 or five potencies. As discussed and analysed in a number of early and contemporary studies, the five potencies are usually linked to Zou Yan and traditionally presented as a framework for understanding the transformation of political power present and past. In treating this point Graham, for instance, wrote: “Tsou Yen won public attention by the arresting thought that the rise and fall of dynasties is governed by the conquest order of the Five Potencies (te), the virtues or powers of the Five Processes by which water conquers fire and so on through the cycle. The Chou reigned by the potency of fire which will be conquered by water; its successor will be recognised by its adoption of

384 Choshu isho shusei 1A:41.
the colour, number, season and so forth which correlates with water in a system of correspondences apparently already current in court ritual.”. It is also generally accepted that the pre-imperial framework changed somewhere in the first century BC when the mutual-conquest (xiang sheng) model described by Zou Yan and summarized above by Graham turned into the mutual-birth (xiangsheng) model. Hence, the Xia evolved from Wood to Metal, the Shang changed from Metal to Water, and the Zhou from Fire to Wood. As an “unworthy” ruling clan, the Qin were expunged from the succession of the Potencies and the Han became the heirs of the Zhou thanks to the protection of Fire.

A number of apocryphal fragments appear to deal with the wu de framework. On first sight, these might simply be classified as belonging to the mutual-birth theory popular in the first century BC. Such a reading, however, risks being an oversimplification. Above all, this kind of approach could seriously jeopardize the discussion concerning the early history of the apocryphal phenomenon. As already discussed in the historical introduction, in fact, the first text explicitly called chen in the histories was that famous Tianguanli submitted by Gan Zhongke — an outsider from Qi — at the court of emperor Cheng. Gan Zhongke presented himself as an envoy of the Master of the Red Essence with a message announcing crisis and resurrection of the Han. We find here a striking convergence: both Liu Xiang, the Gotha of the officialdom and scholarship of the period so to speak, and someone coming from Qi territory considered the Han as being under the protection of the potency Fire. When re-considering the historical context of the apocrypha at the end of this work, one important point will exactly be the wu de framework. An effective discussion of this point, however, presupposes an understanding of the ways in which the apocrypha treat this issue.

The reader may perhaps wonder about the link established here between the potencies and the “beyond techniques” layer of the apocrypha. A number of fragments dealing with this issue, however, should be read as tianwen tactics or, alternatively, as time-scheduling strategies based on calendrical constants. We shall discuss this point at the end of this section for the simple reason that the wu de have often been interpreted as cosmic forces linked to a dynasty. It is certainly true that the scheme once presented and discussed by Zou Yan has sometimes turned in this highly ideological direction. In the same way, however, the wu de implied a very complex cultural background. Even if a full reconstruction of the history of this well-known approach to political time and history, with the necessary exploration of themes such as its precise function in calendrical fields, necessarily lies beyond the scope of this work, a few reflections on its
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

We shall dwell briefly on the historical allusions to the calendrical significance of the potencies in order to explore later why it is legitimate to consider early *wu de* models in terms of time-scheduling strategies. We will then analyse the birth of new frameworks which were more or less connected to the lines of reasoning of the second century BC. Among these new schemes, we find the apocryphal approach which is suspended between respect for the older calendrical strategies and the attempt of using the potencies for transforming sage rulers of the past in emanations or even sons of the stars.

6.2 The calendrical scenery behind the *wu de* framework

6.2.1 The temporal implication of the *wu de* framework

The earliest account on the potencies still remains the following passage from the *Lüshi chunqiu*:

凡帝王者之將興也，天必先見祥乎下民，黃帝之時，天先見大蠍大蠅，黃帝曰「土
氣勝」，土氣勝，故其色尚黃，其事則土。及禹之時，天先見草木秋冬不殺，禹曰
「木氣勝」，木氣勝，故其色尚青，其事則木。及湯之時，天先見金刃生於水，湯
曰「金氣勝」，金氣勝，故其色尚白，其事則金。及文王之時，天先見火，赤鳥銜
丹書集於周社，文王曰「火氣勝」，火氣勝，故其色尚赤，其事則火。代火者必將
水，天且先見水氣勝，水氣勝，故其色尚黑，其事則水。水氣至而不知數備，將徙
于土【…】

Generally, when emperors and kings are about to rise, Heaven must first show to the people signs of its favour. At the time of the Yellow Emperor, Heaven first showed enormous crickets and earthworms. The Yellow Emperor said: “The qi of Earth is winning”. The *qi* of Earth won: therefore, in his colours, he honoured the yellow and in his political activities, he took Earth as model. At the time of Yu, Heaven first showed trees and grasses which did not die during autumn and winter. Yu said: “The *qi* of Wood is winning.” The *qi* of Wood won: hence, in his colours, he honoured the Azure and he took Wood as model in his political activities. At the time of Tang, Heaven first showed metal knives coming out from the waters. Tang said: “The *qi* of Metal is winning.” The *qi* of Metal won: hence, in his colours, he honoured the White and he took Metal as model in his political activities. Down to king Wen’s time: Heaven first showed a red bird with a cinnabar document in its beak which barged in the altar of the Zhou. King Wen said: “The *qi* of Fire is winning”. The *qi* of Fire won: therefore, in his colours, he honoured the red and he took Fire as model in his political activities. The substitute of Fire must be the coming Water. Heaven will again manifest that the *qi* of Water is about to win. The *qi* of Water wins and [the ruler] will honour the Black among his colours and he will take Water as model in his political activities. If however the *qi* of Water comes and [the ruler] is not to be individuated, the numbers will come to completion and the *qi* will move into
This very famous excerpt from the *Lüshi Chunqiu* presents the *wu de* model in its mutual-conquest variant. A few basic points should be briefly recalled here. First, let me stress the manifest application of the potencies to history: evidently, a few individuals of the last centuries BC used this strategy to explain the past. In this regard, the *wu de* framework may have been particularly appealing because it helped to clarify the flowing of historical time by establishing connections between different phases of human history: this kind of corollary — we could loosely call it the relational principle — seems to play an important role in the words above. A further key aspect of the excerpt is traceable in the last sentence, where we read about the coming advent of the *qi* of Water (*shui qi zhi* 水氣至) and the evidently related “completion of numbers” (*shu bei* 數備). Given the reference to famous sages of the past, we may suppose that the authors were simply stating that the possible absence (*bu zhi* 不知) of a *shengren* able to catch the *qi* of Water would not stop the cycle: thus, the inception of Earth (*jiang tu yu tu* 將徙于土). This reading, in turn, implies that the *wu de* framework under the Qin considered the potencies as forces which revolved independently from the political situation on the earth. In other words, they were not symbols of imperial power but simply periods of time: hence, the apt translation used sometimes as “phases”. Actually, the strong temporal character of the *wu de* is also implied in the way in which accounts on the *wu de* are formulated. Qin Shi Huangdi, for instance, speaks of “the time of Water” (*shui de zhi shi* 水德之時”). Elsewhere, he is mentioned for having said that his lifetime (*jin* 今) was the beginning of the power Water (*shuide zhi shi* 水德之始). In 166 BC, when the two officials Gongsun Chen 公孫臣 and Zhang Cang 張蒼 discussed the right *de* of the Han, this emphasis on a specific time appears once again: Gongsun Chen spoke of the epoch of the virtue of Earth (*jin tu de shi* 今土德時); Zhang Cang believed his time to be under Water (*jin shui de* 今水德).
6.2.2 The Potencies and the calendrical reforms

When we look at the Potencies as periods of time which revolve independently from the political situation on the earth, we intuitively tend to consider this framework in terms of time-scheduling strategies, namely as devices for organizing time in ever-returning cycles. In this section, we shall dwell on this point by first reflecting upon a few historical allusions to the links between Potencies and calendrical techniques and later turning to the demarcation line between this framework and the Han art of scheduling time.

The calendrical implications of the \textit{wu de} framework have often been mentioned in the traditional presentation of this topic mainly because the implementation of Water under Qin Shi Huangdi entailed not only the adoption of Black as the official colour of the court but also the promulgation of an almanac which took roughly our November — what the Han Chinese referred to as \textit{hai} 亥 — as the beginning of the civil year (\textit{nian shi} 年始).

Recently, Wang Aihe has argued that the adoption of a \textit{de} implied the use of a specific month as the start of the official year. We do not know whether this scheme actually existed in early China, nor can we ascertain whether it was actually part of the early imperial \textit{wu de} framework. According to Chen Meidong, for instance, the change of the beginning of the civil year was made quite arbitrarily in order to “enlarge” the pre-existent \textit{san zheng} 三正 or “Three Correctors” model, according to which the Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou had had a peculiar beginning of the civil year.

Even if the link between Qin Shi Huangdi’s change of the first month and the \textit{wu de} framework is of uncertain nature, it is safe to assume that the use of the \textit{Zhuanxu li} as official almanac progressively led to a discrepancy between calendrical and natural time. In the \textit{Shiji}, Sima Qian wrote:

\begin{quote}
[...] 而亦頗推五勝，而自以為獲水德之瑞，更名河曰「德水」，而正以十月，色上黑。然曆度甞餘，未能睹其真也。

\end{quote}

[Qin Shi Huangdi] also calculated the [revolution of the] Five Conquerors: he was personally convinced that he had grasped the tally of the potency Water. He renamed the River in “Water of the Potency” and took the tenth month as first month [of the civil year]. Among the colours, he revered black. Therefore, the grades of the calendar and the scheduling of the leap months could not fit the reality.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{394}{In this regard, see \textit{Shiji} 6:237; 26:1659. On the adoption of Water under Qin Shi Huangdi, see Loewe (2004), 497-505; Zhao Xiao (1994).}
\footnotetext{395}{Wang (2000), 148-149.}
\footnotetext{396}{Chen Meidong (2003), 86-87. According to a few scholars, it is even difficult to consider the accounts in the \textit{Shiji} on the tenth month as hints at a full calendrical (technical) reform. In this regard, see \textit{Shiji} 6:237; Rao Shangkuan (1987), 70.}
\footnotetext{397}{\textit{Shiji} 26:1259.}
\end{footnotes}
Sima Qian is actually quite explicit: the Qin calendar was unable to track the heavenly phenomena. The reference to the leap months (run 閏) seems, in fact, to point the interpreter in this direction. Essentially, this means that the official li was no longer able to predict with accuracy heavenly events: possibly, it scheduled in a wrong way the day of the winter solstice, the beginning of the lunation, or simply the start of seasons. The paucity of relevant historical information seems to suggest that the calendrical implications of the wu de framework came to play a marginal role under the Han. Technicians involved in the calendrical reform of 104 BC, however, may have used this method for keeping in tune calendrical and real time. In promulgating the new almanac, emperor Wu said:

“ […] 书缺乐弛，朕甚闵焉。朕唯未能循明也，紬绩日分，率应水德之胜。 […]”

“[...] The books are vanishing and the music is fading. I am full of regret for this. I have not yet been able to resolve the matter [of the calendar]. By spinning and weaving the partitions of the day, the average corresponds to the conqueror of the potency Water […]” 398

Hence, it seems that calendrical experts active under Wudi individuated the de of the time by relying on an analysis of the “partitions of the day” (ri fen 日分). This expression very probably refers to a check of the length of the tropical year, carried out with the intent to tune the official almanac with the real time: Here, we certainly have an operation dealing with calendrical techniques. 399

6.2.3 The lipu implications of the Potencies: the debate between Zhang Cang and Gongsun Chen

In this section, we shall discuss one of the most famous accounts dealing with the wu de framework: the debate between Zhang Cang and Gongsun Chen at the court of emperor Wen. The Shiji describes it in the following way:

鲁人公孙臣上书曰：「始秦得水德，今汉受之，推终始传，則汉当土德，土德之应黄龙见，宜改正朔，易服色，色上黄。」是时丞相张苍好律历，以为汉乃水德之始，故河决金隄，其符也。年始冬十月，色外黑内赤，与德相应。如公孙臣言，非也，罷之。后三岁，黄龙见成纪。

Gongsun Chen from Lu submitted a memorial in which he said: “Formerly, Qin caught the potency Water and now it is the turn of the Han. According to the calculations [based

398 Shiji 26:1260.
399 According to the commentators is to be understood as an operation pertaining to calendar. See Shiji 26:1261.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

on] the tradition of the Ending and Beginning [of the five potencies], the Han match the potency Earth. The reaction of the potency Earth will be the appearance of the Yellow Dragon. It is appropriate to change the first lunation of the year and to modify the colour of the clothes. Among the colours, [the ruler should] honour yellow.” At that time, the chancellor was Zhang Cang. He was good in calendar and pitchpipes and believed that the Han were at the beginning of the potency Water. “The [Yellow] River has broken the imposing embankment: this is its token. The beginning of the year is fixed at the tenth month in winter. Its colour is black outside and red inside: this fits the potency. As for Gongsun Chen’s words, they are wrong.” [Hence,] he dismissed the proposal. After three years, the Yellow Dragon appeared in Chengji.400

This well-known account concerning the debate between Zhang Cang and Gongsun Chen should probably be read as a technical debate between two people acquainted with calendrical techniques which they also used for calculating the de of the period. The li expertise of Zhang Cang is well-known and it does not have to be particularly emphasized.401 The position of Gongsun Chen, on the contrary, is more ambiguous since early chronicles only link his name to this episode. In spite of this lack of information, the reader of the Shiji may certainly hypothesize that Gongsun Chen, besides knowing the tradition concerning the revolution of the potencies, must have also had certain skills in the art of scheduling time. After the appearance of the “yellow dragon”, in fact, he discussed with other court officials the draft of a calendrical reform (gai li).402 When we assume that both the dialoguers in the debate summarized above were calendrical experts, we automatically tend to look at the diatribe Earth/Water from a technical perspective and to immediately focus on a point made in the debate, namely the opportunity for carrying out a full calendrical reform. While Zhang Cang evidently opposed any change in the calendrical field, Gongsun Chen called for a complete reform of the time-system. By using the wu de jargon, we could also speculate that the beginning of the Earth-phase necessarily entailed a technical counterchecking of the official almanac, whereas this was not necessary in the case of other de. Finally, it cannot be ruled out that Gongsun Chen was simply inviting the emperor to check the cycle of the moon and that of the sun in order to adjust the predictions of the almanac to

400 Shiji 28:1381. On the debate between Zhang Cang and Gonsun Chen, see also Yang Quan (2007), 147.

401 In the Shiji, we read that Zhang Cang, besides having a remarkable cultural background, was particularly well acquainted with pitchpipes and calendar (er you shan lüli 而尤善律曆). Shiji 96:2681. On Zhang Cang’s calendrical expertise, see Chen Meidong (2003), 109.

402 The Shiji explicitly says that Gongsun Chen discussed with other officials the question of a calendrical reform and the colour of the official clothes (yu chu sheng cao gai i fuse shi 與諸生草改曆服色事). See Shiji 28:1381. Zhang Cang was probably not part of the team, since he retreated immediately after the appearance of the yellow dragon. Apparently, he was so shocked that he (unfortunately) refuses to complete his writings. Shiji 26:1260.
Chapter Four. The discourse on tian: techniques and beyond

the heavenly phenomena. When looking for elements which could justify this line of reasoning, the interpreter finds Wang Chong’s reading of the debate:

魯人公孫臣孝文皇帝時上書言漢土德，其符黃龍當見。後黃龍見成紀。然則公孫臣知黃龍將出，案律歴以處之也。

Under emperor Wen, Gongsun Chen from Lu wrote in a memorial to the throne that the Han were the potency Earth. The corresponding token — the Yellow Dragon — must appear. Later, the yellow dragon appeared in Chengji. Therefore, Gongsun Chen was aware that a yellow dragon was to rise. He came to this conclusion by means of pitchpipes and calendar.403

Wang Chong’s words are very explicit: the Later Han thinker considered the “yellow dragon” to be a heavenly phenomenon which could be predicted by means of calendrical techniques. It is obviously difficult to understand why Wang Chong spoke of “yellow dragon” in terms of a predictable event. When reflecting on this point, an interpreter cannot but notice a rather disturbing coincidence: Sima Qian writes that the “yellow dragon” appeared in the fifteenth year of Wendi’s rule, roughly 164 BC.404 This span of time comes dangerously close to the period token as beginning of the ji cycle (1520 years) of the Later Han Sifen system, namely the winter solstice of 162 BC (Origin: 161 BC). When looking for a connection, we come across the words of a calendrical expert who in 122 AD said:

漢祖受命，因秦之紀，十月為年首，閏常在歲後。不稽先代，違於帝典。太宗遵修，三階以平，黃龍以至，刑犴以錯，五是以備。

[… ] When Gaozu received the mandate, he followed the time [-system] of the Qin and took the tenth month as the beginning of the year. The leap months were regularly scheduled at the end of the year. There was no check of the [methods adopted in] earlier epochs and [the system] clashed with the canon of earlier rulers. Taizong (i.e. Wendi) complied [with his advisors] and carried out a reform: this is how the Three Steps found their harmony, how the yellow dragon arrived, how punishments were mitigated, and how the Five came to completion.405

The opinion expressed above is comforting and discouraging at the same time. First, the Later Han calendrical expert once again seems to connect the yellow dragon to the art of scheduling time. As for the expression “Three Steps”, we may perhaps understand it as a reference to the Three Correctors (san zheng) model and the substitution of the “wrong” choice of the Qin, namely the adoption of the tenth month as the start of the

403 Lun heng 79:339.
404 Shiji 10:430.
405 Hou Hanshu (zhi) 2:3034.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

year. Nevertheless, no Early Han source states that a calendrical reform was actually
implemented under Wendi. On the contrary, Sima Qian explicitly states that the ruler
neglected calendrical and ritual reforms. 406

Even if his suggestions were not implemented, it cannot be ruled out that Gongsun Chen
was simply announcing the end of unspecified calendrical cycles, when he alluded to
the inception of Earth. These cycles, in turn, should be connected to the potencies: as
the Later Han technician said, the Five had reached completion. This reading may
reinforce the link between calendar and wu de, as they were understood at the beginning
of the second century BC. Confirmation of this viewpoint may be found in a complex
passage of the bibliographical chapter of the Hanshu, in which the librarians say:

而五行之序亂，五星之變作，皆出於律曆之數而分為一者也，其法亦起五德終始.

Moreover, order and disorder of the five agents as well as the regular and irregular
working of the five planets emerge from the numbers of calendars and pitchpipes so that
the partitions can finally find the unity. The rules of the calendar also let the ending and
beginning of the five potencies rise. 407

This passage, to which we shall return at the end of this work when dealing with the
historical context of the apocrypha, is actually explicit: the revolution of the potencies
can be reliably calculated by means of the Han art of li. At this point, however, one
could wonder why Zhang Cang and Gongsun Chen, who shared an interest in
calendrical techniques, gave a different answer when calculating (tui) the de of the
period. 408

When considering the de as calendrical cycles, we must ask when a given de cycle
begins. From the perspective of people acquainted with or simply interested in
calendrical techniques, this question cannot be answered without a reference system. As
we have learnt in the part on the Han art of lipu, early almanacs were supposed to

406 Shiji 26:1260.
408 To explain the different opinions on the de of the period, a political-ethical argument could be
advanced: only a legitimate ruler had the right to link his authority to a de. From this perspective, the
diatribe between officials proposing the adoption of Earth and those advocating the choice of Water
was attributable to a different evaluation of the Qin. A negative judgement on this dynasty implied
the implementation of Water under the Han since the Qin had not been worthy of it, both from the
political and ethical viewpoint. A milder assessment on the recent past led to the recognition of the
Qin and to the adoption of Earth. This point has been made, among others, in Yang Quan (2007). It
is well known that Jia Yi, perhaps the most famous thinker of this era, vehemently encouraged the
choice of Earth. On this point, see, for example, Gu Jiegang (1948), 18-19. Hence, he acknowledged
the legitimacy of the Qin. Yet, did Jia Yi hold the Qin in high esteem? As Aihe Wang writes, “Jia Yi
attributed the Qin’s downfall to its rule by force and its lack of morality”. Wang also specifies that
the adoption of Earth implied the acknowledgement of the Qin as a “legitimate regime”. See Aihe
embody the starting point for calculating and inferring the beginning and the end of a phase. The understanding of potencies in terms of calendrical cycles, then, leads us to conclude that people referring to the same almanac would probably calculate the revolution of the *de* in the same way. People using different time-systems, however, would also work with discrepant temporal reference points: accordingly, they would come to dissimilar conclusions, when dealing with the individuation of the *de* of a specific period. Above, we have assumed that Gongsun Chen was proposing a check of the official almanac. It is therefore not to exclude that he calculated the *de* by referring to a system which differed from the calendar of the court. The following passage from the *Shiji* corroborates this line of reasoning:

張蒼文學律曆為漢名相，而絀賈生﹑公孫臣等言正朔服色事而不遵，明用秦之顓頊曆，何哉?

Thanks to his erudition and skills in calendar and pitchpipes, Zhang Cang became a renowned chancellor of the Han. Yet, he dismissed without any regard the advice that Jia Yi and Gongsun Chen advanced about the issues concerning the first lunation of the year and the colour of the robes. This demonstrates that he was using the *Zhuanxu* calendar of the Qin: but why?409

Hence, Zhang Cang calculated the *de* by referring to the old calendrical system of the Qin. As we have seen in the section devoted to ancient time-systems, the *Zhuanxu li* was a Four-Quarter scheme: the only difference in respect to the *Yin li* or the Later Han *Sifen li* was the Origin.410 Accordingly, we may assume that Gongsun Chen and Zhang Cang relied upon different calendars which worked with different temporal reference points. This discrepancy probably led to dissimilar calculations of the *de*. At this point, however, we come across a rather delicate issue: do the remarks above imply that the computation of the *de* was a task only for those people trained in calendrical techniques and able to use gnomons and clepsydras?

6.3 The *wu de* as time scheduling strategies: Zou Yan

6.3.1 The *wude* as time scheduling-strategies

When considering the calendrical scenery behind the *wu de*, a reader of Han histories should always keep in mind that early imperial almanacs translated the flowing of time in sets of intersecting cycles, like the 19-year metonic period, the 76-year *bu* cycle and so on. In combining this basic facet of the Han art of *lipu* with several accounts in the

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409 *Shiji* 96:2685.
410 More precisely, the *Zhuanxu li* was about 60 years behind the *Yin li*. See Rao Shangkuan (1987), 71.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

chronicles speaking of the time (shi 時) or of a beginning (shi 始) of a de, the interpreter can hardly withstand the temptation to consider the potencies in terms of calendrical cycles, namely periods of time in which the number of years is fixed according to calendrical constants. By assuming, for instance, that Gongsun Chen was working within the Sifen basic framework, a de could be a period of 19 years (metonic cycle), a period of 76 years (bu cycle), or even a combination of these cycles.

Besides being attested in a few sources of the first century BC that we will analyse in the next pages, the interpretation of de as calendrical cycles has the undeniable advantage of explaining why the idea of the potencies enjoyed interdisciplinary acceptance. When understanding a de as a period spanning a given number of years, in fact, one does not necessarily need complex empirical research to calculate end and beginning of a de. Chronological tables should be enough for ascertaining which potency is due to begin. It is significant, for instance, that Zhang Cang intended to schedule the wu de in the form of chronological tables (Han xiang Zhang Cang li bu wu de 漢相張蒼曆譜五德). Moreover, Sima Qian says:

儒者斷其義, 馳說者騁其辭, 不務綜其終始; 曆人取其年月, 數家隆於神運, 譜諜記世謚, 其辞略, 欲一覧諸要難.

[With regard to chronological tables], the scholars dissect [and analyse] their meaning, the sophists roam in their wordings: [both these groups] are unconcerned with their ending and beginning. Calendar experts take their month and years (i.e. their dated entries); technicians excel in [calculating] the revolution of the spirits, chroniclers take note of the names of the eras. With regard to the fundamentals of their wording, the desire to examine all the important aspects from a single [viewpoint] is difficult [to realize].

Hence, chronological tables were used by several cultural communities which fall into two groups. On the one side, there were those who did not care about the “ending and beginning”; on the other side, there were those who evidently regarded this point as important: Calendarists, chroniclers, and generic technicians (shu jia), a term which one could understand as an allusion to mantic practitioners. If we focus on the shujia, we notice the occurrence of “revolution” (yun 運): In the Shiji, this key-word is often used in the technical field, above all in the context of calendar and tianwen. Yun is also employed in connection with the five potencies (wude zhi yun). Hence, the excerpt presented above may imply that chronological tables allowed people to calculate when a

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412 Shiji 14:510.
413 Shiji 15:511.
given phase began and finished (zhongshi). Interestingly, the term is also used in the biography of that individual traditionally associated with the wu de framework: Zou Yan.\footnote{Shiji 74:2345. According to Liu Xiang, zhuyun 主運 was a chapter of Zou Yan’s lost book. Shiji 74:2346. Given the use of the term in the Shiji, it cannot be ruled out that this work belonged to the documents dealing with the revolution of the five potencies like, for instance, the Zhongshi 终始. In this regard, see Shiji 74:2344.}

6.3.2 Zou Yan

It is now time to see why the wu de should be considered as time-scheduling strategies used by individuals who, while relying on specific calendrical facets, were pursuing targets well-beyond the effective scheduling of days, months, and years. In this section, we shall consider the case of the most famous interpreter of the wu de framework, namely Zou Yan. This work has already recalled the ambiguities that characterized the cultural identikit of this fleeting figure of Chinese culture. It is now time to discuss in more detail the ways in which he has to be linked to the framework known as wu de. Let me first stress that in all likelihood Zou Yan worked with a pre-existent model, introducing important modifications which were not well received under the Han. We shall see Sima Qian’s opinion below. Here, we can recall that the Yantielun explicitly says that Zou Yan “changed the discourse on the ending and beginning” (bianhua zhongshi zhi lun 變化始終之論).\footnote{Yantielun 2.5:15.} The Shiji leaves no room for uncertainty: It was Zou Yan who considered the revolution of the five potencies (wu de zhuanyi 五德轉移) since the “splitting of Heaven and Earth” (tiandi poupan yilai 天地剖判以來).\footnote{Shiji 74:2344. Graham (1989), 329.} But how did Zou Yan work with this model? Let us read the following excerpt from the Book on Calendar of the Shiji. In discussing the gradual deterioration of calendrical expertise during the Chunqiu period, the Sima historians write:

天下有道，則不失紀序；無道，則正朔不行於諸侯。幽、厲之後，周室微，陪臣執政，史不記時，君不告朔，故疇人子弟分散，或在諸，或在夷狄，是以其禨祥廢而不統。[…]

是時獨有鄒衍，明於五德之傳，而散消息之分，以顯諸侯。[…]

When the world follows the Way, it does not lose the order of the [calendrical] periods. When it does not follow the way, the [right] beginning of the year is not communicated to the feudatories. After the reign of Kings You and Li, the Zhou clan declined, treacherous ministers occupied politics, the scribes did not keep record of the seasons, and the ruler did not announce the [right] beginning of the year. Therefore, [calendrical] astronomers and [their] disciples scattered. Some of them remained here; some of them were among foreign tribes. For this reason, the good luck [coming from their work] decayed: it cannot
be reconstructed. [...] At this time, (i.e. during the Warring States period), there was only
Zou Yan. He understood the tradition of the five potencies. Yet, he confused the
partitions of the waxing and vanishing [of sun and moon] in order to impress the
feudatories.419

This excerpt can hardly be misunderstood: the only name worthy of being mentioned in
the calendrical field in roughly five centuries was that of Zou Yan. Hence, his cultural
background of this fleeting personage of Chinese must also have encompassed a certain
calendrical expertise which he brought to bear within the wu de framework. We do not
know how effective this know-how was. The hypothesis that Zou Yan was a skilled
technical expert seems to be rather hazardous. A similar ability would also have been
recalled in the biography. This line of reasoning seems to suggest that Zou Yan was
simply using given calendrical facets in order to work at his wu de framework. If we
trust Sima Qian’s opinion, the academician also manipulated the data of the almanacs in
order to please the courts.

Zou Yan’s work with the potencies seem to resemble the points made in the section on
time-scheduling strategies: while using some calendrical facets, he was pursuing his
own cultural interests. The Sima historians may help us to hypothesize about his goals:

【 [...] 稱引天地剖判以來，五德轉移，治各有宜，而符應若茲。】

He used to say that since the splitting of Heaven and Earth, the five potencies have
incessantly revolved. In the government, each [potency] has what is appropriate; tokens
also conform to this.420

Thus, Zou Yan used the wu de framework in order to reconstruct a history of the
cosmos: each phase is governed by a potency which dictates the configuration of the
tokens of the epochs as well as of the ritual system. This reconstruction of the past must
have been based on specific temporal constraints: as read in the Monograph on
Calendar, Zou Yan greatly relied on calendrical systems for tracing the flow of time.
Therefore, it seems that the academician was simply borrowing calendrical cycles by
making of them periods under the control of a specific potency.

6.4 The fading of the potencies

6.4.1 The potencies at early imperial courts

As early as the Qin period, the theories defended by Zou Yan were already undergoing
a gradual but substantial metamorphosis. The Shiji testify that, by the time Qin Shi

419 Shiji 26:1258-1259.
420 Shiji 74:2344.
Huangdi adopted Water as leading de, the scheme once developed by Zou Yan began to be popularized. As Dorothee Schaab-Hanke writes, “those fangshi who came from afar in order to offer their knowledge to the First Emperor of Qin were not capable of fully comprehending the teachings of Zou Yan”.\(^{421}\) Evidently, from the perspective used by the Han historians, Zou Yan’s technical scheme had become the playground of a number of individuals orbiting the imperial court and wishing to sell their favours to the rulers. We cannot exclude that such tendencies also characterized Gaozu’s reign.

The issue concerning the potency chosen by Gaozu is perhaps the most puzzling theme relating to the wu de framework. Let us now read the following well-known account:

漢興，高祖曰「北畤待我而起」，亦自以為獲水德之瑞．

After the rising of the Han, Gaozu said: “The Northern Shrine has waited for me to be erected.” Hence, he was also personally convinced that he had caught the token of the potency Water.\(^{422}\)

In the opinion of the Sima historians, then, Gaozu was self-convinced (zi yiwei) of being the emperor of Water: hence, his decision to erect a shrine to the Emperor of Black. With regard to the calendar, he followed the Qin and adopted the tenth month as start of the civil years. Finally, he chose red as colour of the robes.\(^{423}\) The Sima historians give us some information about this last point:

漢興，高祖之微時，嘗殺大蛇，有物曰：「蛇，白帝子也，而殺者赤帝子．」

At the beginning of the Han, when Gaozu was still hiding, he killed a big serpent. There was a thing which said: “The serpent is the son of the Emperor of White and the one who killed it, is the son of the Emperor of Red.”\(^{424}\)

乃立季為沛公，祠黃帝，祭蚩尤於沛庭，而釁鼓旗，幟皆赤．由所殺蛇白帝子，殺者赤帝子，故上赤．

Then, he put Ji on the throne as Duke of Pei. He offered a sacrifice to Huangdi and to Chiyou in the courtyard of Pei. Yet, when he hallowed drums and flags with blood, the banners were all in red. This derived from the story according to which the killed serpent was the son of the emperor of White while the killer was the son of the emperor of Red. This is why he revered red.\(^{425}\)

Hence, the Sima historians thought that the reason behind the adoption of red was the


\(^{422}\) Shiji 26:1260.

\(^{423}\) Shiji 28:1378.

\(^{424}\) Shiji 28:1378.

\(^{425}\) Shiji 8:347.
famous story of the serpent. 

With regard to the potency chosen by Gaozu, one question especially deserves attention, namely the possibility that incomplete or different versions of the *wu de* framework were circulating at the time. The story concerning the shrine to the Emperor of Black is by far too concise to be useful. The story of the serpent, on contrary, appears to allude to one of the most important traits of the *wu de* framework, namely the relational principle. As we have already mentioned, this doctrine was probably also conceived to link events of the past to facts of the present: the reference to white and red in the story of the serpent satisfy, at least on first sight, this basic corollary of the theory. Moreover, as we shall discuss again at the end of this work, a *wu de* model with the Qin-period falling under Metal and the beginning of the Han under Fire is mentioned in a few apocryphal fragments.\textsuperscript{426} Even in this case, however, we do not have here a complete and correct application of the theory. As we have seen above, the most important fact when discussing the *wu de*, at least from the perspective of technicians, was a check of the calendrical system. This point does not appear in the stories presented above. Possibly, then, Gaozu endeavoured to model the ritual apparatus of his dynasty upon Qin traditions and ceremonies.\textsuperscript{427} He was probably aware of the necessity of adopting a given colour in ritual practice. Thus, on the basis of the accounts we have, it cannot be ruled out that some popular version of the *wu de* framework cause him to adopt red as leading colour.\textsuperscript{428}

\textsuperscript{426} A few texts usually listed among the apocrypha seem to connect Qin to metal. In this regard, see *Choshu isho shusei* 1B:27.

\textsuperscript{427} Gaozu certainly was rather liberal when considering the ritual adjustment of the state. In fact, soon after his victory in the civil war, he summoned to the court a rather large group of experts in different local cults. In this regard, see *Shiji* 28:1378-1379.

\textsuperscript{428} One could also consider the anecdote about within a *tianwen* framework. The terminology used in the *Shiji*, in fact, is disturbingly reminiscent of the definitions given for the planets in a few early Han sources. For the Shi lineage, Mars was, for instance, the son of the Red Emperor. Even if we do not have any concrete proof that such links existed as early as the end of the third century BC, theoretically we cannot rule out that the story of the serpent was in some way connected to an astral line-up involving Mars and Venus. This line of reasoning could lead us to speculate that a given astral line-up — Mars hiding Venus? — inspired whoever fabricated the tale of the serpent. Nevertheless, we do not have any useful historical information, at least for the years in which Gaozu was still the king of Han. Thus, the planetary alignment of 205 BC seems to be the only documented evidence to support a *tianwen* reading of the tale of the serpent. Yet, the *Shiji* says that Gaozu adopted the red well before the conjunction of 205 BC. See *Shiji* 8:347. Moreover, the formulation of the astrological prognosis is, at least, surprising. Why did the astrologers focus on two given planets when analysing the *tianwen* consequences of the conjunction? As we have seen in the section devoted to the *tianwen* layer of the apocrypha, the formulation of a *zhan* based on a planetary alignment usually considered aspects like the leading planet and the spot of the conjunction. Therefore, it seems to me that the reconstruction outlined above is still the safest way to interpret the story of the serpent.
6.4.2  **Gongsun Qing**

In the autumn of 124 BC Gongsun Qing 公孫卿 from Qi said:

>「今年得寶鼎，其冬辛巳朔旦冬至，與黃帝時等。」卿有札書曰：「黃帝得寶鼎宛朐，問於鬼臾區。區對曰：『帝得寶鼎神筴，是歲己酉朔旦冬至，得天之紀，終而復始。』於是黃帝迎日推筴，後率二十歲得朔旦冬至，凡二十推，三百八十年，黃帝僊登於天，漢興復當黃帝之時。」

“This year, You have caught a precious tripod. In the [next] winter, on the day xinsi the winter solstice will coincide with the lunation at dawn. This matches Huangdi’s time-system.” [Gongsun] Qing had a document on a tablet which said: “Huangdi received the tripod at Yuanqu and he asked Guiyu Qu [for further information]. Guiyu Qu said: ‘The emperor has received the holy rods of the tripod. This year the winter solstice will coincide with the lunation on the morning of the jiyou day. You have received the marks of Heaven. [A cycle] is finished only to begin again.’ Then, Huangdi counted the days and calculated them with the rods. [He discovered] that, after about twenty years, the winter solstice would have again fallen on the morning of the first day of the month. He repeated the calculation for twenty times up [to schedule] 380 years. Huangdi became immortal and ascended to heaven. Then, the Han rose: [they] will once again adopt the time-system of Huangdi.

The anecdote above contains some noteworthy details. First, let me devote some words to the data. Essentially, Gongsun Qing was calendrically predicting the coincidence between the beginning of a new month, and the stars of a new solar year. Thus, in Chinese terminology, we have here a zhang cycle (19 years). It seems that Gongsun Qing is inviting us to read his story from a calendrical perspective. As the Shi ji testifies and as Cullen highlights, he was certainly right when he announced the imminence of the coincidence between Winter solstice and beginning of the lunation of 124 BC. The end of a metonic cycle in 124 BC — in that autumn Gongsun Qing submitted his wooden tablet — only pre-announced the beginning of a new 19-year period, which was due to finish with the Winter solstice of 105 BC, namely the incipit of a ji cycle (1520) years according to Wudi’s Sifen system. The remarks above seem to suggest that the story on the wooden tablet can be read as an attempt to encourage a necessary calendrical reform. Does this imply that Gongsun Qing was a calendrical expert? This stance may hardly fit the cultural background of this fleeting personage. Here, he has been intentionally labelled as a magician by

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429 On the discovery of the tripod and on the discussion at the court, see Schaab-Hanke (2002), 246-249.
430 On Huangdi receiving the tripod, see Shi ji 1:6.
431 Shi ji 12:467.
432 On Gongsun Qing’s role in the calendrical reform under Wudi, see Cullen (1993).
avoiding the more generic term *fangshi* sometimes used in Han chronicles. As a matter of fact, the *Shiji* tends rather to link Gongsun Qing to anecdotes about giants and immortals. Accordingly, it is rather hazardous to consider him a skilled technician. In other words, it is improbable that he belonged to the team of experts which recalculated the width of the lodges in *du*, placed gnomons in order to measure the length of the solstitial shadows, and tracked the centred stars by using clepsydras. Thus, it is safer to consider the tablet submitted to emperor Wu as an element suggesting Gongsun Qing’s awareness of the growing pressure of the court for a reform of the official almanac. It is certain, in fact, that this magician had learned very well to cope with the interests and needs of the cultural communities active at the imperial court. Evidently, he also endeavoured to play a role in the debate which certainly was ongoing at the court. When looking for additional motivations, the interpreter very soon encounters the potencies.

As we shall see below, in 104 BC, Wudi adopted yellow as official colour of the court. Given Gongsun Qing’s insistence on the Yellow Emperor, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the magician was one of the people who encouraged the emperor to take this decision.

If we focus on the data given in the anecdote on the tripod, we very soon come to realize that Huangdi, besides “discovering” the metonic cycle, even scheduled a time system for the future. He appears to have simply calculated 20 metonic cycles: these are the 380 years mentioned in the tablet (19x20=380). From Gongsun Qing’s viewpoint, this value was evidently very important. Huangdi ascended to Heaven when, and only when, he had scheduled this span of time. This line of reasoning, however, surprises a reader accustomed to working with Han calendrical cycles, since the value “380” certainly does not appear in official almanacs. From the calendrical perspective, this cycle hardly make sense since a *li* period always signalised the simultaneous occurrence of given heavenly events or the coincidence of astral phenomena with a new sexagesimal cycle. It is safe to assume, however, that the *Sifen* system was Gongsun Qing’s reference point. 380, in fact, is ¼ of the *ji* cycle of 1520 years and it encompasses five *bu* 律 cycles of 76 years. Thus, we have here a strategy which, while relying on the basic metonic period, seems to deviate from what we know of Han *li* techniques.

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433 See, for instance, 28:1397.
434 In this regard see *Shiji* 12:472, 474, 477-479, 485.;
435 During the debates about the *feng* and *shan* ceremonies, Gongsun Qing cooperated with other officials at the court such as, for instance, Sima Qian in order to persuade emperor Wu to perform these rites. See, for instance, *Shiji* 28:1397; Schaab-Hanke (2002).
436 For the debates about the calendrical reform of 105 BC, see Cullen (1993).
437 See *Shiji* 28:1397, 1402. In this regard, see also Schaab-Hanke (2002).
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The fact that a magician speaks about a span of time which is, first, loosely based on time-keeping systems and, second, which is even divisible into five phases based on calendrical constants obviously is disturbing for an interpreter dealing with the historical development of the early imperial wu de framework. Unfortunately, we have virtually no elements with which to reconstruct Gongsun Qing’s framework.438 Yet, the interest in calendrical practice even without specific skills and the emphasis on the Yellow Emperor appear to suggest that Gongsun Qing endeavoured to promote an idea of sovereignty which was based on a strong bond between given spans of time and a specific ruler. Thus, the possibility that Gongsun Qing was simply using the de in order to magnify the emperor should not be ruled out.

6.5 The ru and the potencies

During the second century BC, scholars such as Jia Yi and technicians like Zhang Cang debated about the potency of the Han. In the following decades, this theme plays a marginal role in the ru agenda. Nevertheless, two aspects deserve to be mentioned: first, the san zheng model and, second, the birth of the mutual-birth theory.

6.5.1 The san zheng model

In presenting the calendrical reform of104 BC, Sima Qian wrote:

今上即位，招致方士唐都，分其天部；而巴落下閎運算轉曆，然後日辰之度與夏正同。【…】

When the contemporary ruler came to the throne, he summoned the technician Tang Du who divided the sectors of the heaven. Moreover Louxia Hong from Ba calculated the cycles of the calendar. Finally, the steps of the sun [over a year] fitted the “corrector” of the Xia (i.e. with February as first month of the year.) […]439

438 In the edict that Wudi released for the promulgation of the new calendrical system, we read that “Huangdi reached the tuning and therefore he did not die” (Huangdi he er bu si 黃帝合而不死) and that he “developed the Five Sectors and established the things concerning the qi and the methods of the partitions.” (qi wu bu jian qiwu zhi fen 起五部，建氣物分數). Shiji 26:1260. According to Ying Shao 應劭, “all these [tasks] imply a calendrical meaning” (jie shu li zhi yi 皆敘曆之意也). See the commentary in Shiji 26:1261. Thus, Huangdi was an outstanding calendrical expert who, besides fixing knot-points of the solar year like equinoxes and solstices, also “started the [cycle of the] five Sectors” (qi wu bu 起五部). If we consider the influence of Gongsun Qing at Wudi’s court, it is perhaps feasible to assume that the cycle of the “Five Sectors” mentioned in the imperial decree simply is the phase of 380 years described in Gongsun Qing’s document. Ying Shao explicitly defined the Five Sectors as “Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth”. Certainly, the character bu 部 is close to the bu 部 used to designate the 76 year-period. This reading of the edict, which certainly deserves to be deepened, is, unfortunately, not the only possible option. We can also intend the wu bu as an allusion to the seasons and to their connection to the agents.

439 Shiji 26:1260.
The mentioning of the Xia counting should be taken as an allusion to the san zheng model.

Theoretically, the san zheng prescribed to fix the first month of the civil year by alternating the use of the so-called Xia, Shang, and Zhou “correctors”. More precisely, the first month of the year had to be the second new moon after the winter solstice (yin, roughly our February) according to the Xia zheng, the first new moon after the winter solstice (chou, roughly our January) according to the Yin zheng, the new moon which contained the winter solstice (zi, roughly our December), according to the Zhou zheng. The calendrical reform of 104 BC was very probably based on this model since from this time onwards Chinese almanacs have worked with our February as starting point. As Wang Aihe has recently suggested, the san zheng was by no means exclusively a technical model since it “was composed of a cycle of three symbolic colours, each with its related style of government, calendar, and set of institutions”. 440

The san zheng model, besides having the approval of Sima Qian,441 was also sponsored by a group that was developing its political force: the ru.

Once, emperor Wu posed the following questions to the expert of the Documents Ni Kuan 兒寛: Which month has to be taken as the beginning of the year (yi heyi wei zhengshuo 宜何以為正朔)? Which colour should be favoured (fuse he shang 服色何上)? Under emperor Wen, Gongsun Chen had responded to similar questions maintaining that “today is the time of Earth”. Ni Kuan simply stresses, “today is the time of the Xia” (jin Xia shi 今夏時).442 This suggests that the ru was using the system of the Three Correctors and neglecting the wu de framework.

The case of Ni Kuan works as a litmus test for understanding the substantial disinterest of Wudi’s ru in the wu de framework.443 It is in fact probable that the Scholarly world of the time intended to integrate or even replace the older doctrine with the san zheng model.444 In the Chunqiu fanlu, for instance, the adoption of this framework is clearly related to state ritual. Accordingly, each of the correctors is associated with a given colour: the Xia with the Black, the Shang with the White, and the Zhou with the Red. 445

How was the san zheng model implemented under Wudi?

441 Shiji 26:1258.
442 Hanshu 11A:975.
443 According to Schaab-Hanke, however, Ni Kuan as well as Sima Qian supported the wu de framework by linking Wudi’s time to Earth. It seems to me that Aihe Wang proposes a more reliable explanation in making of Ni Kuan a follower of the san zheng model. The Shiji, in fact, does not seem to link this scholar to the wu de. In this regard, see Aihe Wang (2000), 148.
444 Aihe Wang (2000), 148. Wang Aihe remarks that the san zheng actually shared many facets with the wu de framework. As a matter of fact, as the potencies, the san zheng helped to organize the past in a cyclical scheme and to put in order a few important facets concerning rituality as, for instance, the matter related to the colour to be adopted at the court.
445 On this point, see Hanshu 21B:1001 and Shiji 26:1258.
In summer, the Han changed the calendar and took the first month (i.e. our February) as beginning of the year. Of the colours, he honoured yellow. The names of the offices were changed and the official seals were engraved with five characters. Following, the ruler inaugurated the first year of the era Great Beginning.\textsuperscript{446}

In the wording above, the first month of the Han counting, namely our February, is taken as start of the year. Hence, it seems that Wudi was following the \textit{san zheng} model. Yet, the choice of colour and number was based on the \textit{wu de} framework since the \textit{san zheng} prescribed the use of black for a ruling clan which followed “the time of the Xia”.\textsuperscript{447} Thus, it seems that Wudi was combining the scholarly correctors with the potencies: as we have suggested above, magicians like Gongsun Qing may have been among the people who emphasized the importance of the \textit{wu de}.\textsuperscript{448}

6.5.2 The Mutual-birth theory: the beginning

It has been suggested\textsuperscript{449} that the preference accorded to the \textit{san zheng} model under Wudi reflected an important shift in the philosophical reflection on sovereignty. The \textit{wu de} were understood as a framework which legitimised the use of force in politics by virtue of their mutual-conquest revolution. The \textit{san zheng}, on the contrary, emphasized a “pacific” cyclicity of time by focusing on complementarity between past and present. Thus, when the \textit{ru} accepted the \textit{san zheng} model, they highlighted the “pacific” succession of rulers without renouncing to a framework which enabled them to explain the flow of time. Probably because of the success of the potencies in further cultural communities — the magicians and, as we shall see elsewhere, the \textit{wu xing} mantic practitioners — the \textit{ru} did not completely abandon the theme “five potencies”. They rather modified Zou Yan’s theory, formulating the well-known “mutual birth” model. According to Ban Gu, Liu Xiang and Liu Xin were the scholars who recalculated the whole history of mankind in the light of the “mutual birth” model.\textsuperscript{450} Several elements, however, suggest that this approach developed well before the end of the first century BC. Gai Kuanrao 蓋寬饒 and Sui Meng 眞孟 — two \textit{ru} active under the reigns of emperor Zhao 昭 (r. 87-74 BC) and Xuan 宣 (r. 74-49 BC) — may help us to corroborate this hypothesis. Gai Kuanrao, for instance, said that a ruler should transmit

\textsuperscript{446} Shiji 12:483.
\textsuperscript{447} The number five is clearly associated to Earth in the \textit{Yueling} tradition. In this regard, see Lüshi chunqiu 6.1:28.
\textsuperscript{448} This merging tendency becomes very evident at the beginning of the first century AD, when Wang Mang relied on the potencies when dealing with the choice of the colour of the robes and on the correctors in ritual matters. On this point, see Hanshu 99A:4095.
\textsuperscript{449} Wang (2000).
\textsuperscript{450} Hanshu 25B:1270-1271.
Discussing the contents of the apocrypha

political power by taking the revolution of the four seasons (sishi zhi yun 四時之運) as reference point.\footnote{Hanshu 47:3247} We might have here an allusion to the mutual-birth model.\footnote{On this point, see also Yang Quan (2006\textsuperscript{b}).} Sui Meng adds:

汉家堯後，有傳國之運．

The Han are Yao’s descendants. They are in the cycle in which one has to transmit [the power over] the state.\footnote{Hanshu 75:3154.}

We have here the first attested mention of an idea which characterizes the last decades BC and the first decades AD: the members of the Liu clan are Yao’s descendants. Interestingly, by the end of the first century BC, this point was closely related to the Potencies, since both Yao and the Han were presumed to be “red emperors” or the rulers of Fire.\footnote{See Yang Quan (2006\textsuperscript{b}).} Thus, it is certainly possible that wu de schemes based on the “mutual birth” theory and with the Han falling under the phase of Fire were circulating in China well before the end of the first century BC. The Chunqiu fanlu, in fact, explicitly associates the Han with the colour red.\footnote{Chunqiu fanlu 58:363.}

6.5.3 The Mutual-birth theory: the success

The mutual-birth theory eventually became the most important model of reference when dealing with the de. In the Classic of the Eras, Liu Xin clearly links each sovereign of the past to a given de in accordance with this model. The table below illustrates that the history of humanity was becoming a sort of cosmological process in which each ruler legitimates his successor, even when he belonged to a different ruling clan. Two exceptions are worthy of note: both Gonggong and the Qin were considered illegitimate because they did not fit the cycle of the mutual birth.\footnote{Hanshu 21A:1011}
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RULER</th>
<th>POTENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taihaoi 太昊 (Fuxi)</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonggong 共工</td>
<td>Water: Illegitimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yandi 炎帝 (Shennong)</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huangdi 黄帝</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaohaodi 少昊</td>
<td>Metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuangxu 顓頊</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diku 帝嚳</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tang 唐 (Yao)</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu 虞 (Shun)</td>
<td>Earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yu 頞 (Xia)</td>
<td>Metal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tang 湯 (Shang)</td>
<td>Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Wu (Zhou)</td>
<td>Wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qin 秦</td>
<td>Water: Illegitimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Fire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reader of the *Shi jing* finds the strategy adopted by Liu Xin rather surprising: a negative judgement on these rulers could have been expressed by simply ignoring them. The simple fact that these exceptions are at least mentioned within this document let one infer that the scheme of the *Shi jing* may have also been based on time-scheduling strategies. It may be that were spans of time caused chronological or logical problems, Liu Xin simply resorted to this expedient. Beyond all doubt, the temporal understanding of *de* was not lost: King Wen, for instance, shares the phase with King Wu: therefore, the *de* could not be some kind of personal facet of a ruler. Since they lived in the same period of time, they are associated with the same potency. However, Liu Xin does not take the time to explain how this temporal framework worked or which source he used. The key may perhaps be in the treatise on calendar of the *Hanshu*. The search for it, however, must have been difficult even for readers of the Han period since apparently nobody at that time, or later, explores the temporal implications of the mutual-birth model. Hence, the reader is obliged to conclude that the *de* strongly resembled some kind of cosmic facet of a given ruler or ruling clan: Yu was the *de* Metal (*wei jin de* 為金德) and Tang was the *de* Water (*wei shui de* 為金德). Evidently, Liu Xin, as well as the contemporary ru community, was more interested in highlighting the connection between the *de* and the virtuous rulers of the past.

457 *Hanshu* 21B:1015.
6.6 The first century BC and the *wu de* as time-scheduling strategies

6.6.1 The Santong li

The survival of the potencies as phases loosely connected to calendrical cycles is suggested in the following passage:

五星之合於五行，水合於辰星，火合於熒惑，金合於太白，木合於歲星，土合於填星。三辰五星而相經緯也。天以一生水，地以二生火，天以三生木，地以四生金，天以五生土。五勝相乘，以生小周，以乘乾坤之策，而成大周。

As to the converging of five planets and Five Agents: Water converges in Mercury, Fire converge in Mars, Metal converges in Venus, Wood converges in Jupiter, and Earth converge in Saturn. The three *chen* and the five planets mutually form the thread and the weft. Heaven created Water with the One; Earth created Fire with the Two; Heaven created Wood with the Three; Earth created Metal with the Four; Heaven created Earth with the Five. The Five conquerors multiply these values by each other in order to generate a small revolution. Multiply them by the stalks of the *qian* and of the *Kun* and they will result in a big revolution.\(^{458}\)

Even if the excerpt presented above is rather obscure, we may be certain that whoever wrote this part of the *Hanshu* connected the phases called Five Conquerors — hence, the mutual conquest cycle of the potencies — to the five planets. Two cycles seem to be described: the first, probably of 120 years,\(^{459}\) derives from the “mutual multiplication” of the values assigned to the Five Agents. The second was based on the multiplication by “the stalks of the *qian* and of the *Kun*”: here, we probably have the fictive planetary constants examined in our discussion on the Superior Origin.\(^{460}\)

6.6.2 The Qianzaodu

Turning to the calendrical model used in the apocrypha, it may be helpful to read what Lang Yi wrote in 133 AD:

又孔子曰：「漢三百載，斗歷改憲。」三百四歲為一德，五德千五百二十歲，五行更用。

Moreover, Confucius said: “After three hundred years of the Han, the system of the Dipper will change the charter.” 304 years make a potency. Five potencies make 1520 years.

\(^{458}\) *Hanshu* 21A:983.

\(^{459}\) \(1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 = 120\).

\(^{460}\) In all probability, this scheme was very different from the original *wu de* model. As we have seen at the beginning of this section, the potencies were initially associated with calendrical facets involving solar and lunar cycles. Here, Liu Xin, or whoever wrote this part, connects the *wu de* to planetary phases.
years: the [cycle of the] five agents will operate again.\(^{461}\)

Hence, a potency simply designates a span of time of 304 years. This point is made in the *Qianzaodu*:

孔子曰: 至徳之數, 先立木金水火土, 徳合三百四嵗。五徳備凡一千五百二十嵗,大終復初。【…】

Confucius said: “As for the constants of a complete potency, first set the order of Wood-Metal-Fire-Water-Earth. One potency fits 304 years. Five potencies complete 1520 years. Then, there is the Great Termination and the cycle begins again”.\(^{462}\)

The words of the *Qianzaodu* are quite explicit: the numerical constants mentioned above indicate clearly that we are now moving within the *Sifen* framework. 304 is a multiple of 76: 76 years is the interval between two occurrences of a new moon at midnight of the winter solstice. On the other hand, 1520 is the traditional *Sifen* value for twenty such occurrences. The table below should help to illustrate the argument presented in the *Qianzaodu*.

\[\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
1. & bu & 76 years \\
2. & bu & 76 years \\
3. & bu & 76 years \\
4. & bu & 76 years \\
5. & bu & 76 years \\
6. & bu & 76 years \\
7. & bu & 76 years \\
8. & bu & 76 years \\
9. & bu & 76 years \\
10. & bu & 76 years \\
11. & bu & 76 years \\
12. & bu & 76 years \\
13. & bu & 76 years \\
14. & bu & 76 years \\
15. & bu & 76 years \\
16. & bu & 76 years \\
17. & bu & 76 years \\
18. & bu & 76 years \\
19. & bu & 76 years \\
20. & bu & 76 years \\
\hline
\end{array}\]

\[\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & 76x4=304 & 1520 \\
\hline
1. & bu & 木 \\
2. & bu & 金 \\
3. & bu & 水 \\
4. & bu & 火 \\
5. & bu & 土 \\
\hline
\end{array}\]

\(^{461}\) *Hou Hanshu* 30B:1067.

\(^{462}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 1A:62.
At this point, it is evident that whoever wrote this part of the *Qianzaodu* was transforming the *de* into phases spanning 304 years. Five *de* cycles finally generate the *ji* cycle, namely a period of 1520 years.

6.7 The extinction of the *wu de* model: astro-mythological variations on the theme

By the end of the first century BC, the original *wu de* framework was probably already forgotten. Even if Zou Yan’s books were still available to the readers with access to the imperial library, the interest had probably vanished. Scholarly circles, for instance, were already working with the mutual birth model. In all likelihood, magicians and, probably, mantic practitioners used different frameworks as well. Finally, calendar experts seem to attribute to the potency a marginal role. When we look at the history of the *wu de* framework from this viewpoint, we will perhaps understand why discussions like the one between Zhang Cang and Gongsun Chen have remained an isolated case: no technician and no scholar of the first century BC, or of later times, appears to have been interested in such matters.

Both Liu Xin, to whom *Santong li* is attributed, and the anonymous writer of the *Qianzaodu* endeavoured to save the *lipu* background of the *wu de* — no matter how modified — from general oblivion, from the understanding of political power only and exclusively in terms of rulers and dynasties. In these documents, political power remains subject to the eternal flowing of time. In the case involving Liu Xin, however, his bias becomes evident when he writes the *Classic of Eras*, in which he often presents the *de* as cosmic forces embodied in one and only one man. If we compare this approach with the stance taken in the excerpt of the *Lüshi chunqiu* read at the beginning of this section, we should underscore a significant alteration. Whoever was behind the words of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, made out of Tang and king Wen two worthy sovereigns who understood the flowing of time since they were able to understand the inception of a new potency. At the end of the first century BC, mythic rulers like Fuxi, Shennong, and Yao came to be simply identified with the *de*. Even if some kind of temporal constraint probably still existed, it is undeniable that the focus of the *Shi jing* is on virtuous rulers and ethics. This point becomes evident when the *ru* is asked to solve cases in which given temporal phases come to an end without having a worthy ruler, as in the case of the Qin. There where the *Lüshi chunqiu* said that the “numbers are complete: we must move in the phase of Earth” (*shu bei jiang tu yu tu* 數備，將徙于土), Liu Xin betrays the theoretical pillar of the *wu de* —“the show must go on”—and simply eliminates politically problematic figures from the cycles. Thus, the temporal understanding of the *de* becomes subject to ethics. This line of reasoning, however, was potentially dangerous. The lifting of temporal constraints broadened that breach which
was already a facet of the original framework, namely the tendency to be applied in contexts which were far beyond standard scholarly stances on politics, on the past, and on ethics. Under the Qin, magician of dubious reputation proposed a vulgarisation of the *wu de*; during the reign of emperor Wu, Gongsun Qing may have used the potencies to promote the veneration of Huangdi or to penetrate court circles. At the end of the first century BC, a few sectors of the cultural community decided to associate the *wu de* with stars and heroes of the past. A number of apocryphal fragments, in fact, should be read as hints at an extreme simplification of the *wu de* model, even in respect to the schemes developed during the first century BC. Let us consider the following fragments from the *Ganjingfu*:

蒼帝之始二十八世。滅蒼者，翼也。滅翼者，斗也。滅斗者，參。滅參者，虛。滅虛者，房。

From the beginning of the Emperor of Green there have been 28 generations. The one who destroys the Green [corresponds to] to the [the lodge] Wing [in the south: i.e. red]. The one who destroy the [lodge] Wing [corresponds to] the Dipper [in the centre: i.e. yellow]. The one who destroys the Dipper [corresponds to the lodge] Triaster [in the west: i.e. white]. The one who destroys [the lodge] Triaster [corresponds to the lodge] Barrens [in the north: i.e. black]. The one who destroys [the lodge] Barrens [corresponds to the lodge] Chamber [in the east: i.e. green].

Thus, the authors of the *Ganjingfu* built an astrological model in which each quadrant corresponds to a given colour and a given *di*. The *di*, however, are obviously identified with the emperors of the past: the reference to “green” is an allusion to the Zhou. Hence, King Wen of the Zhou was finally connected to the eastern sector of the starry sky where the lodge House was situated. Moreover, as the text says, Confucius realized that king Wen was the essence of the emperor of Green (*Jichang wei Cangdi jing* 姬昌為蒼帝精): Thus, the heroes of the Chinese past embodied the essence of unidentified emperors of colours. Evidently, the authors of the *Ganjingfu* were trying to argue on a cosmological level by making of sectors of the sky as well as of ancient rulers the essences of the five agents.

When we read similar fragments we must conclude that the first century BC witnessed the emergence of a number of models which offered a *tianwen* reading of the potencies. Thus, ancient rulers were being presented as emanations of stars. At this point, we might better understand the apocryphal stories dealing with miraculous births, especially those involving flowing stars and asterisms. Such tales, then, derive from the

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463 *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:186.
464 This line of reasoning seems to characterize further apocryphal fragments: See, for instance *Choshu isho shusei* 4A:186.
evolution of the *wu de* framework. We are now obviously well beyond the realm of techniques and we have even overcome the field which has been described as “beyond”. Once again, we have here the emphasis on the link between Heaven and *shengren*. 
CHAPTER FIVE

FROM THEMES TO BOOKS: DEFINING THE TEXTS

1. TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF THE TEXTS: INNER BOND AND OUTER BOUNDARY

The central part of the present study has been devoted to analysing the apocryphal contents, setting them in their proper cultural context. The focus will now move from the examination of the themes to the characterization of the texts. The definition of the chenwei books, besides summarizing the most relevant aspects emerged in the preceding pages, will later help us to revisit the historical background of the apocrypha and to discuss the intellectual milieu of the people behind drafting and success of these texts. With regard to the criteria to be used to reach this objective, two aspects play a central role: the questions of inner bound and outer boundary.

The labelling “cultural phenomenon” has been used freely in the preceding sections mainly because they addressed issues in which this point was of secondary importance. When reviewing the history of the apocrypha, the attention was for Han and post-Han events involving the chenwei; when discussing their contents, the focus was on the comprehension of the mindset of the authors with regard to a specific subject. In this third and conclusive part, in which the apocrypha must be analysed against their cultural and historical background, a reflection on the feasibility of seeing the chenwei in terms of “cultural phenomenon” becomes, however, mandatory. It seems to me that the application of this label to the apocrypha depends on a few important factors. We need, for instance, the certainty that the chenwei texts were considered to be part of the same cultural phenomenon. Accordingly, the books called chen or tuchen must have shared some basic similarities, so that the Shangshu-Kaolingyao could be treated in the same way as the Chunqiu-Yuanmingbao, the Hetu-Kuodixiang, and the Luoshu-Zhenyaodu. Moreover, there must have been a kind of virtual boundary between the texts belonging to the chen corpus and other Han sources.

It is safe to assume that the Han intellectual world was aware of the existence of a chen phenomenon. We can here recall the participation of tuchen experts to the congress of AD 7, Guangwudi’s order to gather and edit the chen books, and the medieval bans imposed on the apocrypha. Therefore, we should now elaborate the criteria which, while

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1 See pp. 7-9; 17-22.
helping us to identify the *trait d’union* among the apocryphal texts, also allow us to draw a demarcation line between the *chenwei* and other Han texts. The analysis of this second point is, in my opinion, fairly relevant since, by totally smelting the apocrypha into the cauldron of Early Han culture, we cannot speak about a cultural phenomenon. To adhere to the standard interpretation according to which the *chenwei*, or at least those bearing the title of a classic, are exegetical studies written by Han *ru*, essentially implies to regard the apocrypha as works representing ideas and theories of Han *ru*-ism. This would even be possible, if it did not imply the reverse of this evident equation: If the *chenwei*, or at least those named after the classics, are identical with other Han *ru* texts, the other Han *ru* texts are identical with the apocrypha. This solution, however, is not credible: The fact that a few sinologists have succeeded to offer outstanding portrayals of the Han age without considering these texts — we could here recall Loewe’s studies — suggests that Han culture of the time can survive without the *chenwei*. Moreover, we should keep in mind that a few scholars — Huan Tan, Yin Min, and Zhang Heng — openly refused to accept the cultural supremacy of the apocrypha. Accordingly, an interpreter relying on the equation apocrypha=Han *ru*-ism should consider these scholars to be adversaries of the *chenwei* and, at the same time, of Han *ru*-ism. The evident implausibility of this hypothesis takes us to look for differences.

1.1 How to define the apocryphal texts: the traditional approach

Turning to the traditional definition of the apocrypha, one should consider again the mindset of the compilers of the *Siku quanshu*:

【…】如伏生《尚書大傳》，董仲舒《春秋·陰陽》，核其文體，即是《緯書》。特以顯有主名，故不能託諸孔子。其他私相撰述，漸雜以術數之言，既不知作者為誰，因附會以神其說。迨彌傳彌失，又益以妖妄之詞，遂與讖合而為一。

[…][The apocrypha] are just like the *Grand Tradition of the Documents* by Fu Sheng and Dong Zhongshu’s *Yin/yang of the Annals*: The analysis of text and body [of these works reveals] that they are wefts as well. They are different [only because they] clearly had prominent authors: Thus, they could not be attributed to Confucius. Other similar writings [written by] private [scholars] gradually merged with technical wordings. Since the authors were not known, they have been attributed [to Confucius] in order to sanctify their wordings. Later, some of them were passed down; some of them went lost. [During this phase] they also absorbed superstitious wordings. Thereafter, [these texts] merged with prophetic [books] and became a single [category].

The *Siku* scholars advance here a classificatory point of view, a thematic argument, a formal thesis, and an evaluative claim. Thus, when taking into account the position of

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2 *Siku quanshu zongmu* 6:47.
the apocrypha against Chinese written culture, one should define the *chenwei* as anonymous exegetical works similar to the *Chunqiu fanlu* or the *Shangshu dazhuan*. From a thematic viewpoint, the apocrypha contained a technical layer. Formally, they were attributed to Confucius. Finally, they embodied a superstitious and vulgar stratum or “weird wordings (*yaowang zhi ci* 妖妄之辭)”*:* this is the evaluative claim. Let us now see whether the *Siku*–definition can satisfy our reflections about inner bond and outer boundary.

1.1.1 *The Siku quanshu and the inner bond*

To apply the *Siku* definition to see how the *chenwei* texts are to be linked together essentially means to resort to the formal criterion, namely the association of the apocrypha with Confucius. The other four claims, in fact, appear to be vaguely formulated. To begin this review, we may first consider the classification of the *chenwei* as Han exegetical works. The main points behind this stance are a formal element, namely the association of some texts with the books of the canon, and a historical fact, that is their cataloguing in the classical section of the imperial libraries. Accordingly, the approach adopted in the *Siku* bibliography should be regarded as historically inexact and methodologically unfeasible.

With regard to the historical inaccuracies, the *Siku*-scholars consider the books named after the Diagram of the Yellow River and the Script of the Luo River to be part of a different cultural phenomenon, namely the *chen*. Here, we must keep in mind two central elements: First, as Huang Fushan has convincingly argued, the term “weft” (*wei*), when used to refer to the apocrypha, was born as late as the second century AD; second, as Chen Pan wrote, the Han cultural world did not distinguish between appendices to the classics and *Hetu/Luoshu* books. Moreover, the listing of the wefts under the heading “canon” in the catalogues of the imperial libraries became standard only at the beginning of the Tang. In the medieval centuries, these texts were considered to be technical works. Hence, it is advisable to be cautious when describing all the books named after the classics as exegetical studies. The *Chunqiu-Qiantanba* deals almost exclusively with astrology. It has never been mentioned in Tang commentaries on the classics. If the exegetical layer was not relevant at that time, why should we now feel compelled to classify this text under the heading *jing*?

Besides being historically inaccurate, the classificatory approach adopted by the *Siku* scholars does not help us to find a *trait d’union* among the apocrypha. The reticence to define the *Hetu/Luoshu* books necessarily implies that the definition is not valid for

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3 See page 39.
4 See pp. 1-2; 30-36.
each book referred to as *chen* under the Han. When confronted with these issues, even the thematic criterion (*shushu* stratum) and the evaluative claim cannot help us further. Can we be certain that each Han *chen* text encompassed a *shushu* layer? In addition, which thematic strand of the *chenwei* should be regarded as “superstitious”? With regard to the first point, it is safe to assume that at least a few books focused on different subjects. The thematic core of the *Zhonghou*-texts, for example, certainly is the figure of the *shengren* and it is significant that the *Kaiyuan zhanjing* barely mentions these works. Evidently, under the Tang, their astrological relevance was minimal.

Differently from the thematic specification, the evaluative claim — the “weird wordings” of the *chenwei* — could actually be an interesting approach, on condition that one clears the reasons for which a given apocryphal statement or layer is to be regarded as “superstitious”. All in all, the definition given by the *Siku* scholars appear to suffer from some serious limitations, at least when the interpreter deals with the issue “inner bond”.

### 1.1.2 The inadequacy of the boundary

As we have seen in the first part, the disappearance of the apocrypha during the medieval age made it more and more difficult to establish what did effectively belong to the *chenwei* corpus. Accordingly, early collectors used their own understanding of the apocryphal phenomenon to reconstruct the corpus. In the *Shuofu*, for instance, Tao Zongyi lists the *Chunqiu fanlu* immediately after the *wei*; in the *Gu weishu*, Sun Jue presents the *Wuxingzhuan* 五行傳 as part of the apocryphal corpus. Confronted with such a situation, the *Siku* scholars felt understandably compelled to trace a kind of demarcation line. Unfortunately, the list of criteria in their bibliography is confusing. As we have seen above, the classificatory criterion is historically uncertain. As for the thematic point, it risks to transform a number of works written under the Early Han in *chen* texts. Given the flourishing appeal of techniques in the Han centuries, several scholars dealt with *shushu* disciplines. At this point, when wishing to trace some kind of boundary between apocrypha and the surrounding cultural landscape, the interpreter must resort to the evaluative claim, which however is not explained at all, and the formal attribution to Confucius. Let us not turn to contemporary scholarship as to see how these points have been treated in recent studies.

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5  See page 47.
1.2 Contemporary scholarship between tradition, thematic description, and history

1.2.1 The weight of the tradition and the descriptive approach to the contents of the apocrypha

The definition of the chenwei texts given in the bibliography of the Siku quanshu still influences contemporary scholarship. Accordingly, several studies do not explore the issues of inner bond and outer boundary. This strong dependency from a judgement formulated within a bibliography which, in respect to the chenwei, is too new for being blindly trusted and, in respect to us, too old for satisfying scholarly expectations, can be explained only through the marginal role attributed to the contents. Despite the growing awareness that the apocrypha have something to say, several scholars seem to ignore the need to use the contents for reformulating a definition of the Han chenwei texts. Usually, the scholarly studies on the apocrypha approach the apocryphal themes only descriptively. On the one hand, many researchers simply opt for a list of the contents or for allusions to the thematic complexity of the apocrypha. On the other hand, several studies try to fix the most important layers of contents by highlighting the role of correlative thinking, resonance theory, and zaiyi framework. Understandably, this line of reasoning may hardly be helpful when turning to the issues of the bond among the texts and the boundary between chenwei and Han culture.

Generally, a descriptive approach to the themes of the apocrypha simply answers to the question “what do the chenwei speak about”. This strategy is not rewarding for the definition of the apocrypha since we do not know how the texts speak about a given theme. As Han compositions, it is hardly surprising that the chenwei adopt correlative strategies, speak about cosmography, use time-scheduling strategies, and glorify personages like Yao and Shun. Thus, it is difficult to use these elements when turning to a definition of the texts. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the chenwei corpus encompassed several books. The descriptive line of reasoning generates ambiguities which can, in the worst case, turn into true mistakes. If one posed a question about the contents of the apocrypha, could we really solve the issue by answering that the chenwei speak about astrology, rites, and myths on birth, outlook, and talismans of ancient sovereigns? We could interpret such an answer in two different ways. First, we could

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6 See, for instance, Shi Shaobo and Tian Jun (2003); Yu Jiang (2002); Cai Huiqing (2003), Fang Zhiping (1991). In several cases, the shushu stratum is identified with the key-word chen. See, for instance, Ding Ding (1992). In some cases, the Hetu/Luoshu texts are regarded as books belonging to a different cultural phenomenon. See Gu Lixia (2003); Bian Jiazheng (2004); Zhao Jing (2004).


8 Ding Ding (2004); Liang Zonghua (1995); Sun Rongrong (2006).
assume that each text speaks about such subjects. As a result, the reader tends to rule out the possibility that different chenwei texts had different thematic focuses. Second, we could rightly understand that the apocrypha as a corpus encompass a number of thematic focuses, without ruling out that different chenwei texts could also have a specific and peculiar theme at their core. The first interpretation generates a wrong assumption since it is not true that all the themes listed above must characterize each single chenwei book. The Qianzaodu, for example, does not contain a significant astrological layer even when the art of tianwen definitely forms one of the most important layers of the chenwei. Moreover, it is indubitable that specific texts had different thematic focuses. The texts called Zhonghou, for instance, mostly deal with the characterization of the shengren whereas the Minglixu focuses on the reconstruction of the Chinese past.

Even when we rightly understand that the apocrypha form a corpus of texts which occasionally speak about different themes, we cannot avoid the ambiguities of the descriptive analysis. Above all, this approach does not allow the interpreter to isolate the most important thematic strata of the chenwei.

1.2.2 The historical solution

The simplest way to deal with the issues of inner bond and outer boundary is to neglect them or to explicitly reject their relevance. Both these approaches are based on the assumption that the apocrypha are understandable through their history, as it is documented in the Hanshu or Hou Hanshu. When one follows this line of reasoning, the comprehension of the contents plays a marginal role since Han chronicles are regarded as the main reference point. This strategy is well known to Western scholarship thanks to Dull’s doctoral dissertation. Recently, Huang Fushan has re-proposed this approach in his Chenwei xintan.

When Jack Dull wrote his work, chenwei was an unknown word everywhere in the world, with the exception of Japan. Even in China, this part of the cultural legacy had already nearly fallen into oblivion. Even though scholars working with the apocrypha could already rely on Chen Pan’s works, dealing with the chenwei at that time was still an extremely difficult enterprise. The Isho shusei — the ancestor of the Choshu isho shusei — had been just published and the apocryphal wordings were considered to be obscure and impenetrable.

Sources like the Hanshu and Hou Hanshu, while certainly helping to reconstruct the history of the texts, are rather limiting, when the target is the definition of the book themselves. They inevitably take the interpreter to focus on generic political prophecies since they often link books such as the Chifufu to predictions about the political destiny of a clan or an individual. Unsurprisingly, Dull describes the books mainly as
Defining the apocrypha

prophetical texts connected to the idea of Heaven’s mandate. On first sight, this definition could work well since the anonymousness of the texts as well as their prophetic character might help to find the link among the chen and, at the same time, to distinguish them from other works of the period. Nevertheless, as explained in the first part of this work, it is inappropriate to consider chen only because of unspecific and, above all, un-technical predictions. Moreover, the central part of this work has shown, it is hoped, that themes such as tianwen or time-scheduling strategies play a role of central importance in these texts.

The risks of a historical approach devoid of the understanding of the contents of the apocrypha also characterize Huang Fushan’s recent Chenwei xintan. As briefly mentioned elsewhere, the Taiwanese scholar makes of the editorial process of the first century AD the turning point in the history of the chenwei. On first sight, his approach is certainly a novelty in academic scholarship. A more cautious reading of the book, however, reveals that his analysis does not deepen the issue of definition. Even though the Taiwanese researcher admits the existence of “Early Han tuchen”, he does not explain what these books were. Essentially, he follows the traditional approach by simply substituting the statement “the chenwei are appendices to the classics” with the enouncement “the chenwei became appendices to the classics in 56 AD”.

2. A MULTILEVELED DEFINITION OF THE TEXTS

The review of the treatment (or non-treatment) of the issues of the bond between the texts and their boundaries in respect to Han culture has highlighted a few important suggestions which we shall now use to define the books of the chenwei corpus. The multileveled strategy adopted in the Siku quanshu has the indubitable advantage of describing the chenwei from many viewpoints. In the following remarks, we will follow this line of reasoning and list the criteria behind the definition of the apocrypha as anonymous hybrid texts which, besides being presented as heavenly tokens or Confucius’s secret classics, conveyed the idea of a bond between tian and shengren by applying pre-existent philosophical postulates, myths, generic beliefs, and techniques with a judgeable level of competency.

2.1 The classificatory level: the apocrypha as hybrid texts

The starting point is a reflection on the classificatory level. Given the importance attributed to the “appendices to the classics” through the centuries, it is appropriate to consider the classification of the apocrypha within Chinese written culture. In the preceding pages, we have highlighted the risks of linking all the wefts to the canon. In the same way, we cannot “correct” the definition of the Siku scholars and overturn the
Chapter Five. From themes to books: defining the texts

factors by defining the *chenwei* as technical books with an exegetical layer.

It is difficult to deny a link between the apocrypha and the world of the classics, both historically and thematically. Well before the editing, for example, Su Jing, the student of the *Yijing* who spoke in favour of the Han during the civil war, mentioned Confucius’s secret classics. Moreover, the *chenwei* were mentioned in the Baihuguan congress of AD 79. The thematic analysis has strengthened this point. The correlative classification of the viscera, for example, has demonstrated once again the influence of *jinwen* theories on the authors of the apocrypha. Likewise, the fact that whoever wrote the *Minglixu* used the *Yin li* to reconstruct the chronology of the Chunqiu period, coming to clash with the dated entries of the *Zuozhuan*, can only be understood in an exegetical framework.\(^9\) These elements cannot be neglected, even though the Han bibliography lists the *tushu miji* in the astrological section. Here, we should keep in mind an interesting detail. *Tushu miji*, in fact, appears at the end of the *tianwen* catalogue and immediately before the calendrical books. This ambiguity is also noticeable in medieval catalogues. Ruan Xiaoxu’s *Qilu* had a specific heading for the apocrypha (*weichenbu* 緯讖部) between astrology and calendar.\(^10\) Evidently, early bibliographers noticed the relevance of the astrological layer and the role of calendrical techniques. The mentioning of the Superior Origin in the *Qianzaodu* is a case in point. At the same time, however, they realized that *lipu* themes served as basis to develop time-scheduling strategies: hence, the choice to classify the texts under the *tianwen* section and not under *lipu*.

As we have discussed at length in the central part of the present study, issues dealing with time flow play a crucial role in the contents of the *chenwei*. The next chapters will further strengthen this point. As noticed in the discussion of the “Beyond *lipu*” layer, however, calendrical experts did not have the monopoly when it came to the scheduling of past, present, and future time. Communities like the students of the *Yijing*, *Shijing* or even the *wu xing* mantic practitioners were also interested in this issue. We might have here a crossroads between the *tushu miji* listed in the Han catalogue and the exegetical world. Certainly, one could wonder why this crossroads did not take early bibliographers to list the texts among the exegetical studies. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that Liu Xiang had Gan Zhongke — the man who submitted the first text called *chen* — arrested. Later, Liu Xin defined his book as being not conform to the classics. Evidently, the link between the *tushu miji* and the canon was regarded as suspicious and unorthodox.\(^11\)

The remarks presented above underscore the hybrid character of the Han *chen* texts.

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\(^9\) See pp. 275-277.

\(^10\) See page 32.

\(^11\) See pp. 3-4.
Defining the apocrypha

This essentially implies that the chenwei did not fit the main headings of the official Han bibliography. This solution explains the different ways in which the apocrypha were catalogued after the downfall of the Liu clan. Medieval bibliographers evidently stressed the technical layer whereas the Tang historian Wei Zheng preferred to highlight the link to the exegetical world and rely on the formal aspects of the corpus, compelling generations of scholars to dwell on this theme.

2.2 The theoretical level: the bond between Heaven and shengren

A criterion which is not mentioned in the Siku bibliography is the definition of the main theoretical focus. This question cannot be answered by proposing thematic arguments such as astrology, the birth of the shengren, or correlative thinking since they do not describe the message conveyed in the chenwei. Even the ganying theory appears to be inappropriate since it works with two main concepts: Heaven and human being. We definitely have tian in the apocrypha: Yet, where is the human being?

As we have discussed in the discourse on the sovereign, the theme ren actually plays a minor role in the apocryphal contents since the shengren with his birth, look, and tokens is the core of the discussion. This takes us to regard the apocrypha as texts linking the shengren to Heaven. With regard to the issue of inner bond, a chenwei text can convey the message that the shengren is linked to Heaven by following different lines of reasoning. Whoever wrote the Kaolingyao underscored that an enlightened king looks at the starry patterns of the sky and understands the form of the heavens. The author of the Qianzaodu highlighted the role of the tianming cycles. The drafters of the Zhonghou texts emphasized the unusual circumstances under which the sage comes to the world, his extraordinary physical appearance, and his heavenly tokens.

With regard to the issue of outer boundary, it is certain that the message of the apocrypha does not characterize many Han texts. A work like the Chunqiu fanlu, for example, applies the ganying theory in its standard form, by attributing a role of central importance to the human being.

2.3 The thematic level: the apocrypha as applicative texts

The isolation of the theoretical message of the apocrypha, while giving a general description of the core of the texts, seems to underestimate the thematic complexity of the chenwei. If taken alone, this definition is certainly reductive. Accordingly, it is necessary to dwell for a while on the most appropriate way to define the themes of the apocrypha by keeping in mind our remarks on inner bond and outer boundary. This essentially means that we must leave aside the descriptive approach. Astrology, for instance, did not play a role in the Zhonghou texts. To emphasize the role of this layer
within the books means to clash with the contents of a section of the corpus. A possibility we have for conforming to our thematic analysis and at the same time refining it, is to label the apocrypha not on the basis of the themes themselves but on the basis of the ways in which these subjects are treated. This line of reasoning can be summarized by using the word “applicative”. This labelling, while allowing us to overcome the limitations of a descriptive approach to the contents of the chenwei, may help us to focus on an important feature of the books, namely the tendency to develop arguments or ideas already present in Han culture. This aspect, in turn, reveals the modest theoretical effort on the part of the authors when dealing with sub-themes such as astrology, time-scheduling strategies, and political talismans.

The reader of the apocrypha is often able to connect the subjects treated in these texts to other Han sources. The birth of the shengren, the tianwen interpretation of the cult of the five ruling deities (wu dì), and time-scheduling strategies, for example, were certainly thematic strands of Han culture. In this context, the chenwei are rarely supporting new ideas or advancing groundbreaking theories. Rather, they should be described as books which apply Han myths, ideas, beliefs, and, obviously, techniques. A case in point is the theme “birth of the shengren” since the authors of the apocrypha fairly systematically apply the idea written in the Chunqiu fanglu: Heaven has to be seen as force which contributes to engendering sages. Accordingly, the reader of the chenwei comes upon fragments presenting the Yellow Emperor as son of the Dipper.12 This applicative approach often reflects reluctance on the part of the authors to reflect upon theoretical issues. In the discussion on the astrological layer, for instance, we have noticed that the similarities between the chenwei astrological layer and tianwen handbooks cannot be overlooked. Interestingly, the apocrypha also dwell on the tianwen significance of those astral events such lunar eclipses which, during the Han, already belonged to the group of periodic and calendrically predictable phenomena. Evidently, whoever wrote these texts was not concerned about the theoretical hindrances that beset tianwen practice.13

The characterization of the themes of apocrypha as applicative considerably helps us when dealing with the issues inner bond/outer boundary. With regard to the first point, we do not need to focus on specific themes. In this way, for instance, the Chunqiu Shuotici, which, because of its attention to the human language and the meaning of significant key-words as “Heaven”,14 is certainly an atypical chenwei text, must not be treated separately. It can be regarded as a book which applies the theory of language expounded in chapter 35 of the Chunqiu fanglu. With regard to the outer boundary, the

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12 See page 147.
13 See pp. 220-222.
14 Choshu isho shusei 4B:99-118.
definition “applicative” helps us to trace a demarcation line between chenwei and further Han texts. By following the example presented above, for instance, we could say that the Chunqiu fanlu provides the theoretical starting point whereas the Shuotici applies it.

2.4 The evaluative level: the judgeable level of competency

While overcoming a descriptive approach to the themes of the apocrypha, the description of the chenwei as applicative texts has a second important advantage, namely that of taking us to a further level of our definition of the books. By emphasizing the applicative character of the apocrypha, in fact, one may also wonder about the validity of the ways in which an idea, a myth, a belief, and a technique is applied.

Several scholars have underscored the “weird wordings” of the apocrypha. When dealing with this issue, however, the interpreter should also explain why the chenwei are “weird” books, by elucidating the criteria he adopts in order to advance such a claim.

To evaluate the chenwei in their historical and cultural context essentially requires taking a different mindset, namely that adopted by Han intellectuals and technicians themselves, when they were dealing with these texts. Our thematic analysis considerably simplifies this approach since we have framed each layer of content within its proper historical context. From the viewpoint of a Han scholar, for instance, at least up to Zheng Xuan, the application of the theme “miraculous birth” of the sovereign was a rather suspicious line of reasoning. This explains the scanty allusions to the red dragon which engendered Yao or to the rainbow which generated Shun. This approach is particularly rewarding when confronted with the technical layer of the apocrypha since it allows us to express a judgement on the ways in which the authors of the apocrypha spoke about cosmography, astrology, and calendar. In at least two cases, we were obliged to admit that the apocryphal way of dealing with technical issues is, at least, suspicious. The Yin li reading of Wudi’s Sifen almanac certainly clashed with Han lipu praxis. In this same way, in a world which was learning to cope with the idea of a spherical cosmos, the cosmographic notes of the Kaolingyao could be easily considered as unfounded, thus invalid. Astrology, however, forms a different field: Our reference sources, in fact, testify that this layer often reveals a valid way of carrying on a tianwen discourse. When trying to sum up this contradictory situation, we could underscore the judgeable level of competency on the part of the authors in applying Han ideas, beliefs, and techniques.
2.5 The formal level: the apocrypha as anonymous books

The last level of the definition of the apocrypha implies a short reflection on the formal criterion presented in the pages of the *Siku quanshu*. The anonymousness of the texts is certainly a feature of these works. Nevertheless, when dealing with this point, it is safer to avoid alluding to Confucius. The *Chifufu*, in fact, was submitted as a heavenly token for the Han and not as “secret classic” of the Master of Lu. Finally, we could define the apocrypha as anonymous hybrid texts which conveyed the idea of a bond between *tian* and *shengren* by applying pre-existent philosophical postulates, myths, generic beliefs, and techniques with a judgeable level of competency. They were submitted as heavenly tokens in order to match the cultural and political scene of the time. At this point, the next step is obvious: what was the scene?
Chapter Six
DEFINING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

EARLY HAN MILLENNIALISM

1. ON THE SOURCES OF THE HISTORY OF THE APOCRYPHA

1.1 Why there is no history without contents

One of the most disturbing limitations in the scholarship dealing with the history of the apocrypha has been the marginality attributed to the contents of the texts. When trying to reconstruct the history of the books, the interpreters of the chenwei exclusively rely on sources like the Hanshu and Hou Hanshu. Even Zhong Zhaopeng, who has dwelled at length on the contents of the apocrypha, approaches this theme only through the dynastic histories. Especially when compared with the fragmentary and confusing textual evidence of the chenwei, the Hanshu and the Hou Hanshu appear to be more reliable or even “easier” to understand. Here, the interpreter forgets (or pretends to forget) that these sources are often as disconnected as the chenwei fragments themselves. They contain imperial edicts, memorials to the throne, and informal dialogues of which we only know the very general context. Accordingly, a reader wishing to go deeper into the meaning of these historical documents, in order to see whether they encompass allusions to the apocrypha, must decode them. Decodification, however, implies the use of an interpretative key. A student of the chenwei finds it in the apocryphal fragments. Let us consider the case involving Ai Zhang 哀章 and the copper casket (tong gui 銅匱) that he made to help Wang Mang to justify the usurpation of the throne. As discussed in the central part of the present study, the anecdote of the Hanshu mentions a seal, refers to a document, and alludes to the wu de framework.1 Ai Zhang’s strategy is certainly easier to understand, when one takes into account that stories speaking about seals, documents, and caskets were popular at the time thanks to the chen books. In all probability, Ai Zhang transformed an apocryphal tale about Yao or Shun into a propaganda tool to be

1 See page 163.
applied to the contemporary political situation.

The relevance of the contents in the analysis of the history of the chen books is easily demonstrable by turning to Huang Fushan’s analysis. According to the Taiwanese researcher, the apocrypha, as we have them today, are Later Han forgeries written by the Later Han editors who enlarged pre-existent chen texts by adding Han exegetical theories. Thus, all those thematic layers which belong to Early Han “common knowledge (Xi Han tongshi 西漢通識)” or, more precisely, to “Early Han exegetical tradition (Xi Han jingyi 西漢經義; Xi Han jingjie 西漢經解)” did not belong to the Early Han chen texts (Xi Han tuchen). This approach could even work, on condition that we explain what headings like “Han exegetical tradition” and “Early Han tuchen” exactly mean. Unfortunately, the Taiwanese researcher does not dwell on this point, probably believing that textual analysis and historical sources alone can help the interpreters to explain the Han chenwei. Yet, the reliance on the dynastic histories is often dangerous, when one does not countercheck the accounts of the chronicles against the contents of the fragments. Let us briefly consider the case of Xue Han 薛漢, the scholar who edited the apocrypha under Guangwudi. According to the Hou Hanshu, he studied the Odes commented on by Han Ying 韓嬰. In the discussion on the “Beyond lipu” layer, we have mentioned the Hanshi waizhuan, a text which, besides being traditionally linked to Han Ying’s group, also inspired some thematic threads of the chen texts associated with the Odes. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the wefts contain a different description of the issue “Five Crevices”. At this point, a reader of Huang Fushan’s study cannot understand the reasons which took Xue Han to fill the “Early Han tuchen” with wordings belonging to the Han exegetical tradition by finally clashing with the ideas of his own cultural community.

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3 Hou Hanshu 79B:2573.
4 Hanshu 88:3613.
6 Let us also recall that Huang Fushan’s emphasis on the editing appears to clash with some historical accounts. The scholar Su Jing, for instance, spoke about Confucius secret classics before the restoration of the Han. See page 7. Thus, some thematic layers of the “Early Han tuchen” resembled exegetical strands. Moreover, Guangwudi questioned the scholars Huan Tan and Zheng Xing 鄭興 about the stance of the apocrypha with regard the location of important ritual buildings. Interestingly, Zheng Xing must have met the emperor before 33 AD. For Zheng Xing’s biography see Hou Hanshu 36:1217-1223. Evidently, the apocrypha contained some parts devoted to state ritual, which, in turn, certainly is a thematic thread of “Early Han exegetical tradition”.

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1.2 Why there is no history without historical sources

As explained in the first part of the present study, the last decades BC and the first years AD form the crucial phase in the history of the apocryphal texts. At this time, several chen scripts were already circulating in the capital. Li Xueqin has convincingly pointed at the need to extend this key-time, underscoring that the period between the downfall of the Early Han and Guangwudi’s restoration is definitively too short for the development of a complex cultural phenomenon.\(^7\)

If Li Xueqin is right with his assumption on a longer development of the chenwei phenomenon, and he very probably is, the interpreter is confronted with some serious problems since it is obvious that the key-time cannot be prolonged without relying on some basic criterions.

Several scholars have usually approached this issue from a thematic perspective. The emphasis on un-technical political prophecies, for instance, has taken a few researchers to regard the famous *lutu* submitted by Lu Sheng at Qin Shi Huangdi’s court as the first example of the chen: here, we may think of the Siku scholars.\(^8\) Those who regard the *wu de* framework as the core of the apocrypha inevitably turn to Zou Yan and his followers: recently, for instance, Wang Zhongxiu 王仲修 has spoken of chenwei influence on Qin politics.\(^9\) At this point, by adopting the same approach, and by focusing on astrology, one could even link the apocrypha to early *tianwen* sources. As we have seen, for instance, the Mawangdui manuscript *Tianwen qixiang zhan* describes forms and tianwen meaning of comets. This theme appears in a few *Hetu* fragments. Should we conclude that these parts were written in the second century BC? These reflections appear to suggest that, just as it is not safe to approach the history of the apocrypha by using exclusively official histories, it is risky to rely on the thematic strands of the chenwei without having any supporting historical evidence.

The apocrypha, as we know them today, are certainly Han works. The omnipresent oscillation among different fields of knowledge, such as calendar, astrology, *Yijing* techniques, and the characterization of the shengren implies the existence of authors who were interested in many disciplines. As we have often seen in the present study, and, as we will highlight again at the end of this work, one of the most evident peculiarities of Han *ru*-ism is its ambition to act on an interdisciplinary level. After all, Yang Xiong defined the *ru* as the intellectual able to know Man, Heaven, and Earth. The apocrypha are to be understood in this context. Nevertheless, given the length of the Early Han dynasty, it is appropriate to dwell for a while on the feasibility of

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8 See page 41.
isolating a phase, which could serve as upper limit for the reconstruction of the history of the apocryphal phenomenon. This step, however, cannot be arbitrary: In other words, we need criteria.

When we assume that the chen phenomenon developed over a longer time span, we obviously consider the possibility that chen texts existed before Gan Zhongke submitted the “first” chen during the 20’s BC. Evidently, at that time, these books formed a marginal phenomenon, especially from the viewpoint of the chroniclers who worked at the imperial palace. In the last two decades BC and at the beginning of the first century AD, chen books were everywhere. Some of them were deposited in the imperial library, in 7 AD Wang Mang invited to Chang’an local experts of tuchen, and finally we have the Chifufu. Evidently, some specific factor accelerated the evolution of the chen from texts belonging to a marginal cultural phenomenon to books able to fascinate politicians and scholars active in the capital. In all probability, this specific factor is Early Han millennialism, a term which is here used in its broad sense of waiting for groundbreaking (political) events.

In this chapter, we will first explain why the period between the demise of the Early Han and Guangwudi’s restoration can be aptly described by underscoring the role of millennialist tendencies. This way of proceeding will allow us to isolate those cultural peculiarities behind the flourishing of the apocrypha. These characteristics, in turn, will help us to fix a kind of starting point for reconstructing the development of the chen phenomenon under the early Han.

2. FRAMING THE SCENE OF THE KEY-TIME: MILLENNIALISM AT THE END OF THE EARLY HAN

From Chengdi’s reign onwards, different cultural groups appear to have been in a spasmodic waiting for some exceptional event. Besides astrology, which was enjoying a considerable success, the core of this light form of millennialism was the idea of timescheduling strategies. In the discussion about this subject, we have already come upon Gu Yong, who vehemently pointed at the imminence of the crisis of the Han. He announced that the Han were running into three different time-related junctures: the “Three-Seven” moment (210 years), the inception of the period falling under the wuwang hexagram, and the Yijing-based 106th year from the beginning of the yuan (4560) cycle. As already explained, we have Yijing-based prognostications in the last two cases. The “Three-Seven” juncture probably refers to the scheme used by the Qi students of the Odes. Let us consider once again the table proposed in the section on “beyond lipu” and see the position of the last years BC:
Defining the apocrypha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Branches</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Juncture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wu 午</td>
<td>367 BC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wei 未</td>
<td>337</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shen 申</td>
<td>307</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you 西</td>
<td>277</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xu 戌</td>
<td>247</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hai 戌</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zi 子</td>
<td>187</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chou 丑</td>
<td>157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yin 寅</td>
<td>127</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mao 卯</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chen 辰</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si 巳</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wu 午</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Juncture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this scheme, the last years BC fall under the branch wu 午 which, according to the apocrypha, was the period of the change of the Heaven’s mandate. Let us now turn to this time span and see what was happening at the court.

2.1 Millennialism at the end of the Early Han: time-scheduling strategies

In the last years BC, the ru were not alone to announce the inception of a kind of crucial moment for the political destiny of the Han. In the first chapter of this work, we have already met Gan Zhongke, the man from Qi who submitted the first work explicitly called chen in the histories: the Tianguanli baoyuan taipingjing. After Gan’s death, his disciples, and, in particular, Xia Heliang 夏賀良, tried to apply the teachings of the book.

侍詔夏賀良等言赤精子之讖,漢家曆運中衰,當再受命,宜改元易號.

The attendant Xia Heliang and others spoke about the prophecy of the Master of the Red Essence [according to which] the Han [royal] house was [going through the phase of] Middle Decline in the cycles of the calendrical system. [The Han] will receive the
mandate once again. It is appropriate to change the Origin (i.e. era) and alter the Denomination.\textsuperscript{10}

Evidently, Gan Zhongke’s clique assumed that the Han were running into a dangerous and delicate juncture: The change of the era and the official denomination (\textit{hao} 號) could eventually save the ruling clan from the Middle Decline (\textit{zhongshuai} 中衰). Under emperor Ai, Xia Helian finally succeeded to persuade the emperor: Aidi inaugurated the Taichu 太初 era and called himself the “Liu Thearch of the Great Peace from Chen (\textit{Chen sheng Liu taiping huangdi} 陳聖劉太平皇帝)”.\textsuperscript{11}

The memorial submitted by Xia Helian is not the only noteworthy event of the last years BC. The \textit{Hou Hanshu} says:

以建平元年十二月甲子夜生光武於縣舍，有赤光照室中。【…】是歲縣界有嘉禾生，一莖九穗，因名光武曰秀。

During the night of the \textit{jiazi} day of the 12th month of the first year of the Jianping era (5 BC – 3 BC), when Guangwu was to be born, a red light shined in the middle of the house. In this year, auspicious grain grew within the county: each stalk had nine ears. On the basis of this, the father named Guangwu the Luxuriant.\textsuperscript{12}

Hence, several auspicious signs announced Guangwudi’s imperial destiny. Here, the relevant aspect is time. Should we classify the temporal closeness between Liu Xiu’s birth and Xia Helian’s memorial as a coincidence? The historians were certainly of a different opinion since they continue:

明年，方士有夏賀良者，上言哀帝，云漢家歷運中衰，當再受命。【…】

In the following year, among the outsiders, there was Xia Helian who said in a memorial to emperor Ai: “The Han [royal] house is [going through the phase of] Middle Decline in the rotation of the calendrical system. [The Han] will receive the Mandate once again.” […]\textsuperscript{13}

The historians saw a close connection between Xia Helian’s memorial, Liu Xiu’s birth, and the renewal of Han political mandate. Evidently, Guangwudi’s birth was artificially connected to a moment which was considered to be a kind of crucial point in Han history.

2.1.1 \textit{Aidi’s edict}

How did emperor Ai react when Xia Helian pointed at the “Middle Decline” of the

\textsuperscript{10} Hanshu 11:340.

\textsuperscript{11} Hanshu 75:3193

\textsuperscript{12} Hou Hanshu 1:86. See also Lippiello (2001), 291.

\textsuperscript{13} Hou Hanshu 1:86. See also Lippiello (2001), 291.
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Han?

【...】言大運壹終，更紀天元人元，考文正理，推曆定紀，數如甲子也。【...】惟漢興至今二百載，曆紀開元，皇天降非才之右漢國再獲受命之符，朕之不德，曷敢不通夫受天之元命，必與天下自新。其大赦天下，以建平二年為太初元年，號曰陳聖劉太平皇帝。漏刻以百二十為度。布告天下，使明知之。」

[...] This means that the Great Revolution has completed one cycle and has changed the phase from the [period of] Heaven-Origin to the [period of] Earth-Origin. I have checked the patterns [of Heaven] and the lines [of Earth]; I have computed an almanac and fixed the marks. The [calendrical] numbers follow the sexagesimal cycle. [...] 200 hundred years are gone since the foundation of the Han. Now, I have scheduled the marks and inaugurated the Origin: the majestic Heaven has showered the token of the renewal of the Han mandate upon this inept assistant. I, the one without virtue, how could I dare to oppose to this? Thus, since I have been bestowed with the mandate of the Origin, I must renew the country and myself. Let us proclaim a big amnesty everywhere. Let the second year of the Jianping era be the first year of the Taichu. Let my denomination be the Liu Thearch of the Great Peace from Chen. Let the marks of the clepsydra be 120. Announce this to the world and let everybody know it.14

Even if it is not possible to explain each passage of the edict, we may safely emphasize a few evident aspects. First, emperor Ai believed that some important cycle was coming to end: as he states, “the big revolution has terminated its first cycle”. Second, three dayun 大運 were supposed to generate a bigger cycle: the first linked to the Heaven-Origin, the second to the Man-Origin, and the third to the unmentioned but predictable Earth-Origin. Third, it is very probable that the inception of the juncture was calculated by using calendrical operators since the ruler speaks of computation of a time-system (tui li 推曆) and the fixing of the marks (ding ji 定紀). We have here calculations based on the sexagesimal cycle: The numbers, in fact, followed jiazi. Accordingly, the emperor brings the traditional 100 marks of the clepsydras to 120. In all probability, we are now working with a sexagesimal-based time scheduling strategy since the allusion to tokens suggests that we have here a tianming cycle.15

How long was the dayun of the strategy adopted by Xia Heliang? It is rather implausible that dayun alludes to a cycle spanning 120 years mostly because it is difficult to associate 125 BC (5+120) with a politically significant moment. The figure 240 is certainly very evocative since it was usually connected to the length of the Chunqiu period. Moreover, it cannot be ruled out that some kind of Han time-scheduling strategy

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14 Hanshu 75:3193.
15 In all probability, the “200 years” mentioned in the edict played a marginal role: this value does not satisfy the sexagesimal prerequisite and it is difficult to figure out the reasons for making out of this number a dayun.
was bound to this figure. Even the political implications are intriguing since, in this hypothetical scheme, the preceding *tianming* cycle started in 245 BC, Qin Shi Huangdi’s enthronization so to speak. Unfortunately, we do not have any historical evidence to corroborate this hypothesis. The 360-year cycle appears to be a safer option.

2.1.2 *The 360-year cycle*

The 360-year cycle appears to have achieved (again) a large success at the end of the Early Han. When Wang Mang dethroned the Han and inaugurated the Xin “New” dynasty, in fact, he sponsored the drafting of a calendrical system which encompassed 36,000 years. Moreover, this cycle played a role in the Qi circles of the *Odes*. When confronted with this exegetical reasoning, however, the interpreter notices that Aidi’s edict does not mention phases named after the branches, focusing instead on the “great cycle”. Finally, by interpreting *dayun* as a *tianming* cycle spanning 360 years, we may assume that the main scheme behind the edict was based on three 360-year cycles, that is 1080 years.17

According to Aidi, the Han rose (*xing* 興) in 206–205 BC, namely two hundred years before 5 BC; In 5 BC, the Liu had been bestowed with the *fu* of the renewal of the mandate. When were the Han bestowed with the first and decisive heavenly investiture? A possible answer could be 360 years before Aidi’s ban, namely 365 BC. Interestingly, this year is very close to the year of the unicorn when the interpreter applies the *Yin li* methods of the *Qianzaodu*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronological data</th>
<th><em>Yin li</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incipit-year of the <em>yuan</em> cycle</td>
<td>1567 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of king Wen’s mandate in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 481 years after the beginning of the <em>yuan</em></td>
<td>(1567–481=1086) 1086 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of the Unicorn in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 720 years after king Wen’s mandate.</td>
<td>(1086–720=366) 366 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志 — the Sichuan chronicle attributed to the Jin historian Chang Qu 常璩 — shall help us to strengthen the reasoning presented above. This medieval text contains a letter that Guangwudi addressed to the Sichuan warlord Gongsun Shu 公孫述. Here, the Later Han ruler refers to a prediction or prognostication

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16 On this point, see *Lun heng* 81:351.
17 In all probability, each *dayun* was further divided in three cycles of 120 years. This, in turn, might have been the motivation behind the proposal to bring the 100 marks of the clepsydra to 120.
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book (*chen*) about the capture of the unicorn (*Huolinchen*獲麟讖) and says:

漢家九百二十歲，以䝉孫亡，受以承相，其名當塗髙。

The Han [royal] house will last 920 years. Naïve descendants will lead it to ruin. The one bestowed with [Heaven’s mandate] will carry on [the Han]. His name will be Dangtu Gao.18

In the excerpt above, Liu Xiu says that the power of the Han clan was fated to last 920 years. Since we have here a *chen*, it is appropriate to wonder about the origins of this figure. Let us consider the figure 1080, which is the multiple of 360 closest to 920. The distance between these two figures is 160 years. We may now apply this line of reasoning to the Han dynasty and look for that significant moment calculated by means of sexagesimal strategies and separated 160 years from the founding of the dynasty. By fixing the founding of the Han to 206 BC and adding 160 years to it, we would once again be confronted with the *Yin li* year of the unicorn, namely 366 BC. Before deepening the implications of this point, let us turn to another aspect of Aidi’s edict and spend some words on a specific time-scheduling strategy, which can reasonably be regarded as a further thematic peculiarity of the period: the potencies.

2.2 Millennialism at the end of the Early Han: waiting for the emperor of Earth

The *wu de* framework was certainly one of the arguments used to justify the destitution of the Fire-Han and the enthronisation of Wang Mang’s Earth. As explained in the fourth chapter of this work, the *wu de* underwent important transformations under the Han. During the first century BC, while still being linked to time flow, the *ru* considered the potencies primarily because of their ethical and political implications, just as Liu Xin had explained in the *Shi jing*. Interestingly, the reader of Wang Mang’s biography comes often upon sentences alluding to the end of the potency Fire.19 These statements are not only part of Wang Mang’s propaganda campaign since, decades before the usurpation of the throne, Gan Zhongke had already pointed at the crisis of the fire of the Han. In all probability, in some kind of popular time-scheduling strategy, the last years BC marked the end of a cycle called Red or Fire. At this point, the reader could wonder why historical sources do not allude to an edict proclaiming the inception of the successor of Fire, namely Earth according to the mutual birth theory. A detail in Aidi’s edict can be interpreted in this way.

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18 *Huayang guozhi* 5:2B. The same prophecy was used to legitimate the destitution of the Han at the end of the Later Han dynasty. See Ding Ding (2004).
19 See, for instance, 99B:4108, 4109, and 4113.
Chapter Six. Defining the historical context: Early Han millennialism

What does the pompous label “Liu Thearch of the Great Peace from Chen” mean? Was it a rhetoric way to announce the great peace? The historians of the *Hou Hanshu* wrote:

漢家歷運中衰，當再受命。於是改號為太初元年，稱「陳聖劉太平皇帝」，以厭勝之。

“The Han [royal] house is [going through the phase of] Middle Decline in the cycles of the calendrical system. It will receive the Mandate once again” Thus, [emperor Ai] changed the denomination (i.e. era) in the first year of the Taichu-era and called himself the “Liu Thearch of the Great Peace from Chen” in order to conjure up this [phase].

Hence, the choice of the new denomination was by no means accidental: It had to “conjure up” (*yansheng*) the Middle Decline announced by Xia Heliang.

The early medieval commentator Ru Chun 如淳 explains that Chen 陳 stays for Shun’s descendants (*Chen Shun hou* 陳舜後). On first sight, this account appears to be implausible: At the end of the Early Han, the Liu were regarded as Yao’s descendants. Moreover, a few years later, Wang Mang presented himself as Shun’s heir. Thus, in the *wu de* framework, Yao and the Han were sovereigns of Fire and Shun/Wang Mang ruled by means of Earth.

The contradictory situation described above can be explained by assuming that some kind of time-scheduling strategy bound to the potencies and working with *tianming* cycles was announcing the inception of Earth in the last years BC. In the attempt to “conjure up” the risks hidden behind this temporal juncture, emperor Ai announced that he was Shun’s heir, implicitly admitting the arrival of the Earth phase. A few years later, Wang Mang profited from the belief in the imminence of groundbreaking political events and proclaimed himself “emperor of Earth” and Shun’s legitimate heir. At the end of the Later Han, Yuan Shu 袁術 applied (once again) this strategy:

又少見識書，言「代漢者當塗高」，自云名字應之，又以袁氏出陳為舜後，以黃代赤，【…】。

Moreover, when [Ai Shu] was still a child, he saw a book which said: The one who will replace the Han will be Dangtu Gao. Thus, he chose a style in order to match this. Moreover, since the Yuan clan originally came from Chen, he considered himself the descendant of Shun. With the Yellow, he had to replace the Red. […]

Given the reiterations of announcements about the imminence of groundbreaking changes bound to the inception of the *de* Earth and to time scheduling strategies, it is

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20 *Hou Hanshu* 1B:86.
22 On this point, see also Liu Min (2003); Yang Quan (2006b).
23 *Hou Hanshu* 75:2439
interesting to wonder whether we find similar accounts in the years before 5 BC.

3. EARLY HAN MILLENNIALISM AT THE COURT OF EMPEROR ZHAO

3.1 In search of an upper limit

In reframing the key-phase of the history of the chen phenomenon, we have pointed at the importance of time-scheduling strategies and wu de framework by also underscoring the role of Gan Zhongke and his disciple Xia Heliang. We will now use these elements to fix the upper limit of the history of the apocrypha.

We certainly find time-scheduling strategies and potencies during the reign of emperor Wu. Themes like the role of the potencies and the time-scheduling strategies applied by the magician Gongsun Qing has been reviewed in our discussion on the wu de framework. Moreover, as Itano Chôhachi has well underscored, “revealed” documents appear.24 Gongsun Qing submitted the short text mentioned in the discussion on the five potencies. At the same time, the magician Gongyu Dai 公玊带 presented an illustration of the Mingtang allegedly drafted under the Yellow Emperor.25

We cannot consider these documents to be chen books, as Itano Chôhachi seems to imply in the case involving Gonsun Qing’s wooden tablet. This script contained only a few sentences and it cannot stand the comparison with the thematic complexity of a chenwei text. Accordingly, it is safer to consider these elements among the factors which triggered the development of the apocryphal phenomenon. In this perspective, one should also underscore that Han ru, thanks to Dong Zhongshu’s guidelines, were evolving into intellectuals able to know Heaven, Earth, and Man, finally turning to disciplines which originally did not belong to their intellectual luggage. It is interesting to recall that the Chunqiu fanlu link the Han to red and alludes to Confucius capture of the unicorn as the token of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate. This idea, which certainly belongs to the core of the puzzle “chenwei”, probably achieved a large success during the first half of the first century BC. It must also have been object of heated debates. In the scholarly congress sponsored by emperor Xuan towards the end of his reign, Liu Xiang clearly stated that an event could not be regarded as an ominous anomaly (yi 異), which announced the end of Zhou rulership, and an auspicious sign (rui 瑞) which heralded the imminent conferral of tianming on the Han.26

Time scheduling strategies, which appear here and there in the documents datable to the

25 Shiji 12:480.
26 Bo Wujing yiyi, page 18.
end of the second century BC, appear to become relevant towards the beginning of the 70’s BC. It is safe to rule out the existence of a consistent group of chen books at this time. In fact, admitting that the chen already were a peculiar cultural phenomenon, it is rather surprising that these books did not appear between the reign of emperor Zhao and emperor Xuan. This period, in fact, is similar to the last decades BC. Among the parallels, we can recall the political atmosphere and the cultural climate.

It is well known that, despite Wudi’s policies, the Liu imperial family continued being hostage of the overwhelming power of clans bound to the inner court. Zhaodi’s mighty regent—Huo Guang 霍光—coordinated the politics of the time. When the sovereign died in 74 BC, the Huo clan also orchestrated the succession to the throne by favouring a nephew of Wudi — posthumously known as Xuandi — to the detriment of Liu He 劉賀. This historical constellation reminds one of the last years BC, when Wang Mang could freely arrange matters concerning dynastic succession. Finally, even the cultural trends of this period seem to echo what was to happen at the end of the Early Han. We shall begin this discussion by turning to the taishiling of the time: Zhang Shouwang 張壽王.

3.2 On time-scheduling strategies: Zhang Shouwang

At the beginning of the 70’s, some kind of discrepancy between real and calendrical time must have been noticed. Several experts advanced their proposals: among them, there was the almanac of the taishiling Zhang Shouwang. Emperor Zhao entrusted a group of specialists to test the efficacy of the proposals. The members of the commission — one of them was Xiangyu Wangren, the technician who actively contributed to the development of the first Han armillary sphere — carried out their work with considerable concern for observational astronomy. They apparently spent a long time to gather data, tracking the phases of the moon and the yearly solar cycle. Their final verdict was a vehement condemnation of Zhang Shouwang’s calendrical system. Besides stressing the inadequacy of his technical solutions, the technicians of the commission explicitly said that his almanac was based on the well-known Yin li, which was available at the imperial palace. Zhang was evidently pleading for the adoption of an older time-keeping system. The excerpt below explains that the taishiling did not strive to improve the official calendar but rather to promote a revised

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29 Hanshu 21A:978. Beside Zhang Shouwang, a number of individuals must have submitted their calendrical systems. The Hanshu, in fact, speaks of “eleven systems” (shiyi jia 十一家). See Hanshu 21A:978.
30 Hanshu 21A:978.
Defining the apocrypha

chronology of Chinese past.

Moreover, [Zhang] said that slightly more than 6,000 years separate Huangdi’s time from the third year of Yuanfeng period (i.e. 78 BC). The chancellor Shu Bao, Shan Anguo from Chang’an, and Fu Yu from Anling have studied “the ends and the beginnings” (i.e. chronological tables): they have concluded that 3,629 years have elapsed since Huangdi’s time. This does not fit Shouwang’s data. In addition, Shouwang has manipulated the records of emperors and kings. The lifetime of Shun and Yu does not match [the length] of human life. Shouwang says that Hua Yi became the son of Heaven after Yu. Even the Woman from the Li Peak ruled between the Shang and the Zhou. All this does not fit the teachings of the classics.31

The memorial submitted by Zhang Shouwang to the court contained not only the plea for a calendrical reform but also the draft of a reconstruction of Chinese past. This historical scheme, however, was unconventional and presented two main peculiarities. On the one hand, the political history of China abruptly acquires new main characters: Huayi ruled over China after the decline of Yu’s dynasty and a woman became empress between the Shang and the Zhou. On the other hand, the rulership of Shun and Yu is dilated in time with the obvious result that the span of life assigned to them was too long (Shun Yu niansui buhe rennian 禹年歲不合人年). Thus, Zhang Shouwang aimed not only to take part to the calendrical debate but also to draft a political — no matter how personalized and unconventional — history of China by reconstructing the sequence of rulers and reigns.

Which was the Han field in which calendar and history merged? Chronology is in my opinion a relatively obvious answer to this query. Yet, which kind of chronology? It is for instance highly unlikely that Zhang Shouwang was reconstructing the history of China by relying on the available annals and chronological tables as Zhang’s adversaries or as the Sima historians did. Was he drafting some sort of calendrical chronology based on the Yin li? This hypothesis is rather vulnerable. How could an absolute chronology like the one proposed in the Classic of Eras take Zhang Shouwang to lengthen the lifespan assigned to single rulers? Thus, let us ask which framework combined the accent on political chronology with calendrical facets. “Time scheduling strategies” working with tianming cycles could be a satisfactory answer. We already know that some of these strategies were used to locate political breaks in time. The model adopted by the Qi scholars, for instance, worked with the idea that the 30 years-

31 *Hanshu* 21A:978.
periods falling under the terrestrial branches *wu* or *hai* announced a political earthquake. As recalled in the discussion of the *lipu* layer, this scheme was also used to reconstruct Chinese history. An ambitious individual wishing to elaborate a chronological scheme in which significant political events were to fall under the headings (periods) *hai* or *wu* would inevitably run into the need to manipulate history, by shortening some phases and enlarging others. Let us now suppose that Zhang Shouwang was using some similar scheme to reconstruct the political past. The use of external temporal constraints like *tianming* cycles may have taken him to place each political change at the end of the beginning of such political periods. Shun, for example, was already old when he became Yao’s heir to the throne. Assuming that Zhang Shouwang associated the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate upon Shun with the beginning of a *tianming* cycle, we can understand the lengthening of Shun’s lifetime. The transmission of the *tianming* from Shun to Yu required the inception of a further significant phase. This reading also explains the “new entries”. The inception of a temporal significant period between the Shang and the Zhou required the inserting of an additional ruler or rulers.

### 3.3 Political millennialism: waiting for the emperor of Earth at the court of emperor Zhao

The reading suggested above reminds us of the time-scheduling strategies used in the last decade BC. In the same way, several elements suggest that even the potencies played a role at the court. Zhang Shouwang, for instance, did not only submit the *Yin li* since he also renamed this well-known almanac after the Yellow Emperor:

【…】傳黃帝調律曆，漢元年以來用之。【…】

I will transmit the *Calendrical System of the Harmonious Pitchpipes of the Yellow Emperor*. This has been in use since the foundation of the Han.32

Evidently, Zhang Shouwang was endeavouring to link the Han to this mythic figure. When wondering about the reasons, the interpreter should consider a few strange events which considerably enlivened the court at the beginning of 78 BC.

孝昭元鳳三年正月，泰山萊蕪山南匈匈有數千人聲，民視之，有大石自立，高丈五尺，大四十八圍，入地深八尺，三石為足。石立後有白烏數千下集其旁。是時昌邑有枯社木臥復生，又上林苑中大柳樹斷枯臥地，亦自立生，有蟲食樹葉成文字，曰「公孫病已立」。

In the first month of the third year of the Yuanfeng era (78 BC), in the south [side] of peak Laiwu of Mount Tai, there was a huge uproar with several thousand people making voices. The folks [rushed] to see it. There was an enormous stone standing abruptly there.

32 *Hanshu* 21A:978
It was one zhang and 5 chi high and 48 wei in breadth. It dipped in the earth and reached the depth of 8 chi. Three stones served as foots. After the appearance of the stone, several thousand white birds descended and gathered on its side. At that time, in Changyi a dried tree which lied on the ground began to live again. Moreover, in the middle of the Shanlin imperial garden, a cut willow on the ground stood up to live. Some worms ate its leaves by forming characters which said: “Gongsun Bingyi will rise”.33

On the one hand, the message of the leaves reminds one the written prophecy found in the belly of a fish during the Qin peasant uprising. On the other hand, resurrected trees and white birds look vaguely like those marvellous happenings on the eve of the enthronization of mythic rulers: the earthworms of the Yellow Emperor or the red bird of the Zhou. In some versions of these stories, these extraordinary events were linked to the revolution of the potencies. The statement “Gongsun Bingyi will ascend to the throne” might hide as well an allusion to the wu de since, at that time, it was already well known that Gongsun was Huangdi’s family name.34

In the letter addressed to the Sichuanese warlord Gongsun Shu, emperor Guangwu referred to the Huolinchen and wrote:

霍光廢昌邑王。立孝宣帝也。黄帝姓公孙，自以土德君所知也！

Huo Guang dismissed the king of Changyi and put Xuandi on the throne. Huangdi’s family name was Gongsun. You, oh Sir, must know that he ruled by means of the potency Earth!35

In the passage above, Guangwudi explicitly links the period of Xuandi’s enthronization to the Yellow Emperor and to the potency Earth. Thus, we cannot rule out that some cultural community was endeavouring to bind the years around Xuandi’s ascension to the potency Earth. If this line of reasoning is correct, we should conclude that the themes which characterized the end of the first century BC were also playing a role at the court of emperor Zhao. Only a point seems to clash with this interpretation. Why did the people only allude to the inception of Earth? Why are the historical accounts so ambiguous in treating this point? A satisfactory answer to these questions implies a shift from themes to actors.

34 _Shiji_ 1:1.
35 _Huayang guozhi_ 5:2A-2B.
4. THE CULTURAL ACTORS OF EARLY HAN MILLENNIALISM: THE 
RU OF THE ELITE, TIME SCHEDULING STRATEGIES, AND 
POLITICS

4.1 The ru and the themes of Early Han millennialism

The ru were certainly among the groups which fuelled the belief in the imminence of 
groundbreaking political changes. Sui Meng, for instance, is a well-known figure. As 
already mentioned, he has been apparently the first to explicitly say that the Liu were 
Yao’s descendants.36 We do not know with certainty whether the scholar was advancing 
a genealogical thesis or rather pursuing a wu de-based line of reasoning. The potencies, 
however, must have played a role in his strategy since, after the events of 78 BC, he 
 wrote:

孟推春秋之意，以為「石柳皆陰類，下民之象，泰山者岱宗之嶽，王者易姓告代之
處。今大石自立，僵柳復起，非人力所為，此當有從匹夫為天子者。枯社木復生，
故廢之家公孫氏當復興者也。【…】

[Sui] Meng analysed the significance of the Annals and concluded: “Stones and willows 
belong to yin category and are the simulacrum of the lower strata of the people. The 
Mount Tai is the [holy] Daizong peak. This is the place where an ideal sovereign 
[officially] changes the ruling clan and announces the [beginning of an] epoch. Now, an 
enormous stone has appeared and a dead willow has come back to life. This is not what 
human effort can accomplish. [Thus] somebody from the people will become [the new] 
son of Heaven. Dead trees live again. Therefore, someone from the discarded family of 
the Gongsun clan will rise again.37

Hence, exactly as the unknown individuals who staged the miracles of 78 BC, a student 
of the Annals believed in the arrival of a ruler bearing the family name of the Yellow 
Emperor. Given the insistence of the surrounding cultural landscape on the link between 
Han and Earth, we may well assume that the scholar believed as well in the ending of a 
given phase and in the inception of the Earth-phase. At this point, the interpreter should 
dwell on the following issues: the identification of the wu de model used by Sui Meng’s 
line of reasoning and the targets of the scholar.

From our discussion on the wu de framework, we know that the first century BC must 
have witnessed the definitive success of a model which associated the Han with the red 
of Fire. Moreover, it is safe to assume that the mutual birth theory was already 
achieving a large success among the ru. This reading explains the allusions to the 
Yellow Emperor. Since the time assigned to the Han was coming to end, the fire of the

36 Yang Quan (2006 b).
37 Hanshu 75:3153. See also Arbuckle (1995), 589.
Liu was about to leave the throne to its successor, obviously Earth. This basic idea might explain the millenialist climate at the court of emperor Zhao.

4.2 The ru: time scheduling strategies as instrument.

In all probability, the role of the potencies in the scholarly line of reasoning of the first century BC also had political implications. The *wu de* framework or, more generally time scheduling strategies, aptly served as evocative arguments when pleading for a reform of the imperial system. Sui Meng’s words above are rather explicit: the Taishan, in fact, was the place for announcing the (new) epoch and the change of the ruling dynasty (*yi xing*). The scholar also said:

孟意亦不知其所在，即說曰：「先師董仲舒有言，雖有繼體守文之君，不害聖人之受命。漢家堯後，有傳國之運。漢帝宜誰差天下，求索賢人，襦以帝位，而退自封百里，如殷周二王後，以承順天命。」

Even [Sui] Meng did not know where the *shengren* was. He added: “The former Master Dong Zhongshu used to say that even with a legitimate heir (lit. the man who carries on the body and holds the patterns) one must not impede that a wise receives the mandate. The Han are Yao’s descendants and they are in the cycle in which one has to transmit [the power over] the state. It is appropriate that the Han emperor scours the whole world in search of a good and wise man; [it is appropriate that] he abdicates [in favour of him]; [it is appropriate that] he retreats in the enfeoffed 100 li, just as the descendants of the two royal [clans] Yin and Zhou: [all this] in order to conform to Heaven’s mandate.”

Hence, the allusion to the *wu de* framework belonged to the well-known theory of the abdication (*shan 襦*) of the Han, according to which the Han clan had to abdicate in favour of worthies and sages. Evidently, the growing dissatisfaction with the hereditary system took several scholars to emphasize the need to reform the political system.

The trend to announce the imminence of a dynastic change by resorting to the miraculous character of strange events was rather successful under the Han. In 45 BC, a dead catalpa close to the tomb of one of Wang Mang’s ancestor got once again branches and leaves. Liu Xiang thought that this was the simulacrum announcing the downfall of the Han and the rise of the Wang clan. By following the interpretation of the usurper, this sign was to be connected to the *wu de* framework. Just like Sui Meng, Liu Xiang was pleading for political reforms. As he said, the Heaven’s mandate could not be the

40 *Hanshu* 27:1412.
41 *Hanshu* 99B:4112.
monopoly of a single ruling clan (fei du yi xing ye 非獨一姓也).\footnote{Hanshu 36:1950} Finally, Gu Yong said:

去無道，開有德，不私一姓，明天下乃天下之天下，非一人之天下也。

[An ideal sovereign] expels the wicked and opens the way to the virtuous. [The world] does not belong to a single clan. It is clear that the world is the world of the world [and it belongs to everybody]. It is certainly not the world of one single man.\footnote{Hanshu 85:3466-3467.}

The remarks above demonstrate the interest on the part of Han ru in the key themes of Early Han millennialism. As we already know, Gu Yong used Yijing-based time-scheduling strategies when asking for Han abdication. Sui Meng and Liu Xiang very probably alluded to the potencies. At this point, one might wonder why both the scholars did not explicitly said, the time of Fire of the Han is coming to end and the Earth phase is due to arrive. In other words, while it is safe to highlight the role of the potencies in Han ru-ism, the reticence to speak about such a subject is rather surprising. Even Zhang Shouwang did not announce the inception of Earth. To come out of this impasse we should hypothesize that a further cultural group was fuelling the millennialist climate by using the potencies and other time-scheduling strategies. The members of this group did not belong to the cultural elites of the time and they were probably viewed with suspicion within ru communities. Nevertheless, their methods or techniques, might have remarkably influenced the culture of the time. We shall finally meet the wu xing mantic practices.

4.3 Early Han millennialism: the shadow of wu xing mantic practices

4.3.1 Leaving (momentarily) the ru: the wu xing mantic practices

The bibliography of the Hanshu describes the wu xing mantic practices in a very clear way:

五行者，五常之形氣也。書云「初一曰五行，次二曰羞用五事」，言進用五事以順五行也。貌、言、視、聽、思心失，而五行之序亂，五星之變作，皆出於律曆之數而分為一者也。其法亦起五德終始，推其極則無不至。而小數家因此以為吉凶，而行於世， 以相亂。

The Five Agents are the qi of the form of the Five Constants. The Documents say: “The first is called “the five elements,” the second, “reverent attention to the five (personal) matters”.\footnote{Shangshu 12, Hongfan (Shisanjing zhushu, vol. I, 188). Legge (1960), vol. III, 325.} This means that it is necessary to use the five (personal) matters in order to conform to the five agents. [When the right way of] appearing, speaking, looking,
hearing, and thinking is lost, the order of the five agents disarrays and [anomalous] changes [in the motion of the] five planets appear. [These changes] derive from (i.e. can be calculated by) the constants of calendar and pitchpipes so that the partitions [among the realms of the cosmos] can be finally composed. These (i.e. calendrical) methods also determine the revolution of the five potencies. When one makes the most of [the possibilities that the calendrical methods offer], there is nothing which cannot be reached. Yet, mediocre technicians rely on these [techniques] and deem them to bring luck and misfortune. They even apply this to our time (i.e. cast mantic prognoses for the present). [This is why the partitions] gradually mix up.\footnote{Hanshu 30:1769.}

Thus, the \textit{wu xing} mantic practitioners were those mediocre technicians who cast prognoses for the present by relying on calendrical techniques and potencies. Far beyond doubt, whoever wrote the excerpt above — very probably a \textit{ru} of Liu Xiang’s entourage — was not sympathetic with similar practices: hence the attempt to reframe the concept of \textit{wu xing} within a scholarly milieu.

In the discussing the “beyond lipu” layer of the apocrypha, we have already met the \textit{wuxing} mantic methods. We have recalled that the \textit{Qianzaodu} clearly embodies allusions to the Taiyi system. The Taiyi worked with 360-years cycles divided in five periods spanning 72 years. A further apocryphal fragment seems to stress the importance of this cycle.\footnote{Choshu isho shusei 6:173; 1A:60.} We shall now try to combine this model with the millennialist phases described above. Even if though is unsafe to reflect on the \textit{wu de} implications of such schemes — unfortunately, we do not have any useful historical information — we may well see how the temporal models may have looked like.

4.3.2 The Taiyi calendrical schemes

(a) Toward the \textit{Yin li}

When considering the application of a Taiyi scheme, the interpreter essentially needs a temporal reference point to start. Since we know that 78 BC was a particular year at the Chinese court, let us see how a hypothetical Taiyi model based on this year looks like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significance of the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1158 BC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1086</td>
<td>King Wen’s mandate (\textit{Yin li} dating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\footnote{Hanshu 30:1769.}
Year | Significance of the year
---|---
366 | Year of the unicorn (*Yin li* dating)
294 | (History?)
222 | (History?)
150 | 
78 | The strange events at the court of emperor Zhao
6 | 5 BC: the events at the court of emperor Ai

Thus, both the periods considered in the chapter — 78 BC and 6 BC — were significant dates of a Taiyi-based scheme since they marked the beginning of a 72-year cycle. When we look back in time, we have the *Yin li* dating of king Wen’s mandate and year of the unicorn which are explicitly mentioned in the *Qianzaodu*. Finally, we come upon 222 BC, which could imply an allusion to the founding of the Qin Empire.

When dealing with the table presented above, caution is mandatory. First, we rely here on the figure 72 of the Taiyi system, simply because it is explicitly mentioned in some apocryphal fragments. The scheme, however, could work with other values since 72 is a multiple of 12 (Jupiter cycle). Thus, variants of the table based on figures like 12, 24, or 36 are thinkable. Second, it is advisable to keep separate the temporal-schemes and their calendrical re-elaborations. “Calendrical re-elaboration” essentially means to constrain a given time-model within a specific *li* system, by referring to its peculiar reference points. The table presented above, in fact, derives from a statement from the *Qianzaodu* which essentially says: 481 years after the beginning of the 4560-year cycle (*yuan*) king Wen of the Zhou was bestowed with the Heaven’s mandate. As explained in the discussion of the apocryphal *lipu* layer, Early Han almanacs worked with different temporal reference points. Different temporal reference points, in turn, generate different chronologies. The author of the *Qianzaodu* was working with the *Yin li*, which took 1567 BC as start of the *yuan* cycle. This unknown individual was probably aware of the existence of a scheme which regarded the years 222, 78, and 6 BC as disrupting moments for human society, a kind of temporal earthquakes so to speak. Thus, he decided to constrain this pre-existent scheme within a calendrical system. By counting 72 years from 78 BC (or 222 BC) backwards, he discovered that the year 1086 BC was again a temporal juncture. He was probably aware that the Zhou conquest was dated in the eleventh century BC. The *Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年 [*Bamboo Annals*], for instance, gives 1071 BC. From this, he counted the years up to the beginning of the *Yin li* 4560-year cycle. To conclude, we have here a combination of an official calendrical system

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47 For the dating of the Zhou conquest in the *Bamboo Annals*, see Peng Lin (2001).
available at the imperial palace with a mantic scheme. In this perspective, it cannot be ruled out that pre-existent mantic time-models were constrained within a calendrical framework by people acquainted with official almanacs.

(b) Wudi’s Sifen li (Origin 1624 BC)

As we know from our discussion of the lipu layer of the apocrypha, the authors of these texts were working with the Yin li reading of Wudi’s Sifen li, which essentially was a different calendrical system because it worked with dissimilar temporal reference points. Given that the Yin li could be linked to a mantic time-scheme, it is appropriate to also consider a Taiyi scheme based on Wudi’s Sifen li. In the case of Wudi’s Sifen li, we do not have any Han reference point or, better, they are obscurely formulated. Since the Yin li year of the unicorn seems to play a role in the table above, we shall here refer to the Sifen dating of this moment: 423 BC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Significance of the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1575</td>
<td><em>Bamboo Annals</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Founding of the Shang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1143</td>
<td><em>Apocrypha</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandate upon King Wen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1071</td>
<td><em>Bamboo Annals</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Founding of the Zhou dynasty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>423</td>
<td><em>Apocrypha</em> (reference point)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandate upon Confucius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td><em>History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Founding of the Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td><em>History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emperor Xuan’s reign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 AD</td>
<td><em>History</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Founding of the Xin (Wang Mang)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We have here some significant moment of Chinese history. Above all, the table intersects three sets of data. The first comes from the much-discussed *Bamboo Annals* with the years 1575 and 1071, which are respectively the year of the Shang and Zhou founding. The second set of data comes from history: 207 BC obviously reminds one of the beginning of the Han dynasty; 9 AD is the opening year of Wang Mang’s Xin dynasty. The third set of proofs come from the apocrypha since the year of the capture of the unicorn and that of King’s Wen Mandate are calculated on the basis of the methods given in the *Qianzaodu*.

4.4 *Wu xing* mantic practices or *wu xing* mantic practitioners?

The use (or misuse) of the time-schemes presented above might have played a role in Early Han millennialism. The following table will help us to understand this point:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wudi’s Sifen</th>
<th>Yin Li</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incipit-year of the yuan cycle</td>
<td>1624 BC</td>
<td>1567 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of King Wen’s Mandate in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 481 years after the beginning</td>
<td>(1624-481)</td>
<td>(1567-481=1086)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of the Unicorn in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 720 years after King Wen’s Mandate.</td>
<td>1143</td>
<td>1086 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of the Unicorn in the <em>Qianzaodu</em>: 720 years after King Wen’s Mandate.</td>
<td>423 BC</td>
<td>366 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of the Taiyi cycle (360 years after the Year of the Unicorn) under the Han</td>
<td>63 BC</td>
<td>6 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the Han, two years marked the end of the 360-year period: 63 BC under the reign of emperor Xuandi and 6 BC, the year of Guangwudi’s birth and Aidi’s edict. Interestingly, the reigns of these two rulers are both labelled as *zhongxing* 中興 or Middle Rising in the chronicles. Thus, besides the well-known political and ethical connotations alluding to a revival of the fortunes of a dynasty in a sense close to “restoration”, this term, which is never used in the *Shiji*, came also to designate precise spans of time during the first century BC. Such a line of reasoning explains why the date of birth of Guangwudi was put under the year 6 BC and why the historians tried to connect it to Xia Heliang’s message. After all the original message announced by

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48 On the *Bamboo Annals* and their troubled history, see Keightley (1978); Pankenier (1992).
49 See, for instance, *Hanshu* 94A:3744.
50 It is useful to add that Guangwudi did not see himself as the ruler blessed with Heaven’s mandate. In
Defining the apocrypha

Gan Zhongke spoke about the Middle Decline (zhongshuai 中衰), an expression which certainly recalls the term Middle Rising.

When reflecting upon the implications of the schemes presented above, some reflections are mandatory. In particular, it is safe to assume that circles loosely linked to scholarly communities and influenced by wu xing mantic practices worked out the time-models. Three points testify to this line of reasoning. First, besides fuelling the belief in the imminence of groundbreaking political events, the schemes evidently were a device to schedule significant historical events. This attention to the past, however, clashes with the words of the bibliography of the Hanshu which says that wu xing mantic practitioners were mostly concerned with the present. Second, we have already come upon a scholarly time-scheme. The model used by Qi students of the Odes was also a method to reconstruct Chinese political history. Finally, the tables above have explicitly offered a calendrical reading of Taiyi models, the first based on the Yin li and the second on Wudi’s Sifen li. In all probability, we have here later calendrical re-elaborations of simple time-schemes which worked independently from official Han almanacs. This suggests the intervention of insiders, people with access to the documents conserved within the bureaus of the imperial palace. Even if we do not know which almanacs were commonly available and consultable, it is rather suspect to believe that an outsider could easily understand the idea of metonic-related calendrical cycles.

The reflections above suggest that ru circles were absorbing elements connected to wu xing mantic practices. We do not know when this tendency began. Even though time-scheduling strategies were becoming popular in the seventies, we cannot say with certainty at what extent scholarly circles were using such models. We can safely rule out that people like Sui Meng or Liu Xiang attributed a central role to these strategies. Yet, Sui Meng and Liu Xiang can be rightly seen as some of the most important scholars of the decades between the first and second phase of Early Han millennialism. Were there ru or individuals moving in a ru field who were fascinated by such lines of reasoning? The answer must be in the affirmative. When wondering about their intellectual activities, the interpreter could simply maintain that they were writing the first apocryphal texts.

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the letter addressed to Gongsun Shu, he explicitly writes that he was simply carrying on the royal clan of the Liu. See Huayang guozhi 5:2B.
CHAPTER SEVEN

DEFINING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT:

THE AUTHORS OF THE APOCRYPHA AND THEIR MARGINALITY

1. FROM THE SCENE TO THE ACTORS

1.1 On the cultural history of the chenwei

After having reached a definition of the books and described the historical context, we are now ready to reconstruct a model of the development of the apocryphal phenomenon in the first century BC. We shall here try to combine our understanding of the texts with our reconstruction of the background by posing the following question: what is the nexus between our hybrid anonymous books and the millenialist climate of the first century BC? In all probability, the people who wrote the chenwei were using the belief in groundbreaking changes to spread their works and play a role on the broader cultural scene. With their hybrid texts, such groups fuelled the belief in the imminent appearance of a shengren.

A focus on the authorship of the apocrypha is a rewarding approach, when trying to construct a plausible historical model. Its feasibility, however, depends on two elements. First, as we have suggested in introducing the issue of upper limit and key-time, we need to rely on the contents of the apocrypha. Second, we shall wipe out some stereotypes which still characterize several scholarly works dealing with this issue.

1.2 The issue of authorship: on the ru and the apocrypha

The classificatory approach of the Siku scholars also offers a description of the theme “authorship”:

蓋秦、漢以來，去聖日遠，儒者推闡論說，各自成書，與經原不相比附。

Since the Qin and the Han, with the distance from [the time of] the sages increasing daily, the scholars discussed and debated. Each of them wrote books which did not match the original [meaning] of the classics.¹

¹ Siku quanshu zongmu 6:47.
Thus, the *chenwei*, or at least those named after the classics, were written by the *ru*. Even if for the wrong reasons — the classificatory approach to the definition of the texts — the *Siku* scholars certainly grasped an important aspect.

The problematic side of the point made in the bibliography of the *Siku quanshu* does not concern the role attributed to the *ru*. It rather deals with the kind of *ru* imagined by the Qing scholars and with the definition of the texts proposed in the same pages. As already mentioned, in fact, the *Siku* compilers considered the apocrypha to be texts similar to the *Chunqiu fanlu*. Thus, the *ru* of the apocrypha is like the *ru* who wrote this text: Dong Zhongshu. Such a line of reasoning implies that the apocrypha were written by the scholarly elite of the time or, anyway, by noteworthy intellectual personalities.

During the first century BC, the *ru* already formed a very large cultural group. When Wang Mang invited to Chang’an experts in the classics, as well as in calendar, astrology, and apocrypha, several thousand people responded to the call. Moreover, a growing number of students were being enrolled at the imperial university. This enlargement of the *ru* community makes it necessary to go beyond this label. In other words, which *ru* wrote the apocrypha?

In the last few decades, a few scholars have highlighted the undeniable link between the *chenwei* and the *jinwen* interpretation of the classics. Moreover, a growing number of studies underscore the role of Qi-bound exegetical circles. These analyses have noticeably contributed to circumscribe the circles of *ru* which might have played a role in the writing of the apocrypha. It is however questionable whether this line of reasoning alone can solve the several problematic aspects emerged in the analysis of the contents. We may safely associate the layer dealing with the magical birth of the sovereign with *Gongyang* groups, since they maintained that the *shengren* were fatherless. Yet, did the *Gongyang* scholars invent a “natural” father for each sovereign of the past, developing stories like those involving Yao and the red dragon, Huangdi and the Dipper, Shun and the rainbow? The scanty historical information about these thematic strands suggests that they were not relevant subjects of discussion, at least in official scholarly groups. Thus, in this chapter, we will try to go a step beyond the most important *ru* ranks of the time and assume that the writers of the apocrypha did not belong to official scholarly circles.

### 1.3 On the role of the *fangshi* in the history of the apocrypha

The extent of the technical layer as well as the mythic flavour of countless fragments

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3 On this point, see van Ess (1999); Zheng Jiewen (2002); Sun Rongrong (2005), Sun Rongrong (2006).
has often taken modern and contemporary scholars to imagine the contribution of a second cultural community: the fangshi. Given the centrality of this group, it is fair to complain that this term has not been object of a careful analysis in the studies on the apocrypha.

As Donald Harper has convincingly argued, the term fangshi “covered a range of specialists in natural philosophy and occult knowledge”. In the Huangdi neijing, the term is used to refer to physicians; in the Shiji, Tang Du, Sima Qian’s astrology teacher, is labelled in this way. Finally, we have magicians like Gongsun Qing and the searchers of immortality active at Wudi’s court.

Students of religious Daoism are certainly right when they link Early Han occultists to later daoists groups. In particular, Fabrizio Pregadio has highlighted the connection between the methods of Early Han occultists and the development of Chinese alchemic tradition. Nevertheless, here it is important to stress that the term fangshi, as it was used in the last centuries BC, was extremely generic and it referred to practitioners of those shushu 數術 and fangji 方技 arts listed in the bibliography of the Hanshu. According to Li Ling, these two fields summarized the technical disciplines of the Han: Shushu experts were concerned with study and interpretation of nature whereas the fangji experts focused on the human body. Each of these fields, in turn, encompassed sub-disciplines such as astrology, wu xing mantic practices, and calendar for the shushu field, and medical theory (yijing 醫經) or occultism (“Searchers of the Spirits” shenxian 神僊) for the fangji realm. At this point, it is appropriate to wonder which cultural group is exactly meant when contemporary scholars use the term fangshi in their studies on the chenwei.

Several recent analyses of the apocrypha rightly point at the merging of Han cultural communities and, in particular, at the fangshi-ization of Han ruism. This approach is certainly noteworthy since it is undeniable that Han ru communities were increasingly attracted by fangshi techniques. After all, as Yang Xiong said, the ru of the first century BC was able to understand Man, Heaven, and Earth. Unfortunately, however, the fangshi-ization of Han ru-ism is often defined in a wrong way simply because the term fangshi is erroneously understood. Wang Keqi 王克奇, for example, while explicitly connecting the apocrypha to groups of occultists (shenxian) defines the cultural background of the fangshi as a system with the ganying theory, yin/yang and wu xing

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5 Shiji 26:1260.
7 Li Ling (1993), 25-27.
cosmologies at the core and with the search of immortality (shenxian), mantic practices, and the zaiyi framework as main thematic threads. Chen Pan has certainly played a considerable role in promoting such a hybrid description of the fangshi. While rightly understanding that this term could generally refer to technicians, this outstanding scholar preferred to focus on a rather surprising point. In this way, the fangshi of Qin and Han time were all presented as people with a hybrid cultural background in which, however, the “search of the spirits” and the wu de framework played a central role. Thus, Zou Yan should be considered as the intellectual ancestor of those “vulgar” outsiders who visited Qin and Han courts.

The frameworks presented above are fairly inadequate, when it comes to the issue of the authorship of the apocrypha. Above all, it is incorrect to transform the fangshi into theoreticians speaking about everything. Did a man as Gongsun Qing really know the meaning of ganying? Can Zou Yan truly be considered as the intellectual ancestor of that Tang Du who taught the tianwen art to Sima Qian? Finally, if the Han ru were close to the occultists why did Gu Yong vehemently attack the shenxian at Chengdi’s court?

The cultural groups active during the Han were in some way distinguishable from each other. The members of these communities had had a specific training. Even though the intercultural debate must have been a salient feature of the last centuries BC, we cannot simply annihilate each boundary among the disciplines and consider the label “Searcher of the Spirits” to be a synonym of ru, astrologers, and calendarists.

Before turning to a more rewarding way of dealing with the authorship of the apocrypha, let us spend a few words on a very interesting tendency emerged in the last decades. Seidel and, more recently, Xiao Dengfu have convincingly explained that a few thematic strands of the apocrypha reflect ideas and theories belonging to religious Daoism. Actually, as Xiao clearly illustrates in his work, it is certainly possible to connect the chenwei to later daoist texts. Yet, the presence of a theme within the apocryphal corpus does not imply an active participation of the related cultural community to the writing of the chenwei. The case of calendar is here very enlightening. The apocrypha certainly embody a calendrical layer. Yet, can we maintain

9 Wang Keqi (2004). See also Sun Rongrong (2006); Ding Ding (2004). Gu Lixia explicitly mentions the occultists active at the court of Wudi. See Gu Lixia (2003), 77.

10 Chen Pan (1948 c).

11 Hanshu 25B:1260-1261. Here, it is perhaps interesting to recall a feature of the biographies of fangshi in the Hou Hanshu. Apparently, at the beginning of the first century AD, these people still formed clearly distinguishable groups. From the middle of the first century AD onwards, probably because of the success of classical learning, they began to combine their technical skills with the study of canonical texts. On this point, see Hou Hanshu 82A;82B. The first fangshi linked to the study of the classics is Yang You, who was active under emperor Ming. See Hou Hanshu 82 A:2716. For the biographies of the fangshi in the Hou Hanshu, see also Ngo (1976).

12 Xiao Dengfu (2000). For a link between the apocrypha and later daoist religious groups, see also Seidel (1983).
that calendrical experts were involved in the writing of the apocrypha? If they were, the *li* layer would have had a different form and resemble the *Monograph on Calendar* in the *Hanshu* or in the *Hou Hanshu*. Thus, when turning to a cultural history of the apocrypha one should at least try to find a kind of compromise between the contents of the *chenwei* and the information given in the historical sources.

2. **THE EARLY *CHEN***

Marginal *ru* groups might have written *chen* texts around the 70’s BC in a pervasive millennialist atmosphere. If one keeps in mind the remarks in the preceding chapter, the events of 78 BC suggest that something was definitively moving in Chinese culture. First, the role of time-scheduling strategies in Zhang Shouwang’s memorial to the throne implies the intervention of groups using such schemes. Second, the abrupt appearance of new “historical” figures in the political past of the empire entails the existence of communities dealing with tales about rulers and heroes alien to the *ru* interpretation of history. Third, the *ru* show again a considerable concern with the potencies. These elements are rather significant. In particular, Sui Meng’s concern with the *wu de* framework suggests that the scholars of this period were interested in time-scheduling strategies. In all probability, lower strata of the scholarly community were attracted by such temporal schemes in a much more significant way. Beyond the boundaries of official scholarly groups, people vaguely informed of contemporary *ru*-themes met members of other cultural communities. They encountered mantic practitioners, storytellers, and astrologers. When endeavouring to come out of their marginal cultural realms, mantic practitioners had their time-scheduling strategies, astrologers their technical know how, and storytellers their fabulous personages. In respect to their road companions, the people who qualified themselves as *ru* had a great disadvantage. They had nothing to sell. With the *ru* of the elite at the court, they were fated to stay in their marginal fields. The millennialist atmosphere of the 70’s BC was an important occasion. Books presented as talismans, while matching the spasmodic wait for the *shengren*, also were a protection for him and his mates. This scene probably witnessed the birth of the first apocryphal texts. Even though we do not know the authors — they were unfit to satisfy the expectations of later historians — we know something about the books written in this period or slightly later. In the letter addressed to Gongsun Shu, an unknown *chen* is mentioned:

【…】西狩獲麟讖曰「乙子夘金」即乙未歲授劉氏，非西方之守也。「光廢昌帝，立子公孫。」即霍光廢昌邑王，立孝宣帝也。黄帝姓公孫，自以土德，君所知也。【…】
[...] The prophecies of *In the West* [Confucius] captured a Unicorn say: “The son of yi (?) is Maojin”. This means that in the year yiwei (i.e. 206 BC) [the Mandate] was bestowed upon the Liu clan. This does not refer to the governor of the west. “Guang removed Chang [from the position of] emperor and put Gongsun, the son (i.e. descendant) on the throne.” This means that Huo Guang removed Chang, king of Yi, and put emperor Xuan on the throne. The family name of the Yellow Emperor was Gongsun and he ruled by means of the potency Earth: you must be aware of this! […]\(^{13}\)

Thus, the *Huolinchen* “predicted” the dynastic crisis between emperor Zhao’s rule and Xuandi’s troublesome enthronization. This text might be an early example of the *chen* phenomenon. The *Luoshu-Lingzhunting* 洛書靈準聽 and the *Luoshu-Zhaiwangbi* 洛書摘亡辟 probably belong to this category as well, since they are explicitly mentioned in the *chenwei* texts *Minglixu* and *Qianzaodu*.\(^{14}\) Despite the scanty material available, a few basic reflections are mandatory.

2.1 The texts

The fragments of the *Lingzhunting* reveal that the authors were deeply concerned with the figure of the *shengren* of the past. The text mentions mythic clans like those of Heavenly, Earthly, and Human Thearch as well as Confucian icons such as Shun. We have already met the pre-historical rulers. The *Lingzhunting* is the text which describes them as hybrid creatures with half-human and half-animalian features.\(^ {15}\) As in other apocryphal treatises, even Shun and Tang are described as persons with an extraordinary physical appearance. Finally, this *chen* book also contains a few tales about heavenly tokens, like the white fish of king Wu and the red bird of king Wen.\(^ {16}\)

The mention of several characters, from the pre-historical thearches to the Zhou kings takes us to assume that the authors of the book endeavoured to reconstruct a chronology of Chinese political history, focusing on the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate upon the *shengren* of the past. In order to be able to speak about chronology, however, we need time-operators. The text satisfies our expectations since it alludes to the potencies and *wu xing* mantic practices. With regard to the first point, the *wu de* framework certainly forms a further thematic thread of the *Lingzhunting*.\(^ {17}\) With regard to the second point, we have here some explicit allusions to *wu xing* mantic practices. A fragment, in fact, refers to the 72-year cycle and defines it as the time span in which the Green Diagram has to appear (*qishi er lutu qi* 七十二錄圖起). Interestingly, the relevant fragment is

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\(^{13}\) *Huayang guozhi* 5:2A-2B.  
\(^{14}\) On this point, see also *Weishu jicheng* vol. II, 2247.  
\(^{15}\) See page 164.  
\(^{16}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:174.  
\(^{17}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:174.
quoted in the *Qianzaodu*, which is also the text in which the Taiyi divination system is explicitly mentioned.\(^{18}\) Thus, the *Lingzhun\(\)g* focused on the reconstruction of the political history of China: mythic figures go along with *ru* heroes within a scheme bound to *wu xing* mantic practices and, possibly, to the potencies. Like the *Lingzhun\(\)g*, the *Zhaiwangbi* is mentioned in other apocryphal texts. The material still extant testifies that this text also focused on the chronology of Chinese political history. The fragment quoted in the *Minglixu*, for instance, mentions the arousal of six thearches (*liu huang* 六皇).\(^{19}\) Further sentences reveal that we are confronted once again with time-scheduling strategies:

建紀者嵗也。成姬倉。有命在河。聖孔表雄德。庶人受命。握麟徵。

The one which establishes the mark is the year-star. He completes the green of Ji (i.e. of the Zhou). [The Green] received the mandate along the River. The saint Confucius manifested the potency of a hero. A commoner [was due to] receive the mandate. Confucius grasped the proof of the unicorn.\(^{20}\)

The fragment quoted in the *Qianzaodu* highlights several interesting elements. First, the authors attached a considerable importance to the figure of the *shengren*, since we have here Confucius and king Wen. Second, the idea of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate plays a crucial role. Third, the text was based on a sexagesimal time-scheduling strategy, as the reference to the Year-Star *sui* 嵬 seems to suggest. Fourth, the character *cang* 倉 is a variant of *cang* 蒼, green. Thus, this book also contained a layer dealing with the *wu de* framework.\(^{21}\) In conclusion, we have here again a book which reconstructed a historical model based on the *wu de* framework and a sexagesimal time-scheduling strategy. In respect to the *Lingzhun\(\)g*, however, the *Zhaiwangbi* has an interesting peculiarity: its astrological layer. This *luoshu*, in fact, encompasses a valid *tianwen* stratum dealing with the astrological interpretation of form and colours of the clouds close to the sun or to the moon.\(^{22}\)

The themes treated in the *Lingzhun\(\)g* and the *Zhaiwangbi* certainly remind one of other apocryphal texts. The references to the *shengren* of the past take us to assume that the authors were deeply concerned with this point. The allusions to heavenly tokens as well as the extraordinary look of ancient heroes suggest that the *shengren* was a very particular kind of human being. He was able to communicate with *tian* and received tokens of heavenly support. We might have here the theoretical message of the

\(^{18}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:173; 1A:60. Moreover, Zheng Xuan’s commentary unambiguously links this fragment to the Taiyi system, the 72-year cycle, and to the 720-year cycle.

\(^{19}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:185.

\(^{20}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:185.

\(^{21}\) *Choshu isho shusei* 6:185.

apocryphal books: the *shengren* is tied to *tian*. Moreover, the texts certainly applied techniques and ideas of the time because we have explicit references to time-scheduling strategies. Finally, if the quotations from other *chenwei* texts are reliable, the *Zhaiwangbi* and the *Lingzhunting* were *Luoshu* texts. To conclude, it is safe to regard these books as early *chen*.

### 2.2 The cultural communities: the *ru* as petty official

Who wrote the *Zhaiwangbi* and the *Lingzhunting*? Despite the scanty material available, a few reflections are possible.

Some elements appear to suggest that, at least in the case of the *Zhaiwangbi*, people belonging to the entourage of officials dealing with technical issues might have played a significant role. An aspect, in particular, needs to be considered. The fragments of the *Zhaiwangbi* contain evident references to the bestowal of the Heaven’s mandate upon king Wen and the year of the unicorn. We have already come upon this line of reasoning in the *Qianzaodu*. Besides reconstructing Chinese chronology by means of *tianming* cycles, this text also mentions the *Luoshu-Zhaiwangbi*. At this point, it is important to keep in mind that the *Qianzaodu* worked with the Superior Origin and with the official almanac known as *Yin li*. Even though we do not know whether this layer also belonged to the *Zhaiwangbi*, the mention of the two key-moments — king Wen’s mandate and the capture of the unicorn — authorizes the interpreter to underscore the striking similarity between these two apocryphal texts. Probably, given the millennialist atmosphere which dominated the 70’s BC, a few people composed books by presenting them as tokens. In all probability, they were acquainted with *wu xing* methods.

Moreover, it is safe to assume that they were petty officials with access to the bureaus of the *taishiling*. Whoever wrote the time-scheduling strategies of the *Qianzaodu*, in fact, had a knowledge of the official *Sifen*-cycles. In particular, he knew the *Yin li* and the Superior Origin of Wudi’s *Sifen li*. As mentioned above, these documents were available at the court. This line of reasoning, finally, allows the interpreter of the apocrypha to explain the evident relevance of the *Yin li* in the fragments.

The discussion on the *lipu* layer of the apocrypha has shown, it is hoped, that the fragments often underscore the relevance of the *Yin li*, even though they work with data belonging to different almanacs. The *Qianzaodu*, for example, offers a *Yin li* reading of the Superior Origin of Wudi’s *Sifen sytem*. The *Kaolingyao* gives a *Yin li* interpretation of the Zhuanxu *li*. This evident predilection can be explained if we consider that the *Yin li* allowed its users to create a second millennialist phase after the period of emperor Zhao and Emperor Xuan. Let us turn back to the table proposed in the preceding

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23 Choshu isho shusei 1A:51.
chapter:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wudi’s Sifen</th>
<th>Yin li</th>
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<tr>
<td>Incipit-year of the yuan cycle</td>
<td>1624 BC</td>
<td>1567 BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year of King Wen’s Mandate in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qianzaodu: 481 years after the</td>
<td>(1624-481)</td>
<td>(1567-481=1086)</td>
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<td>beginning</td>
<td>1143</td>
<td>1086 BC</td>
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<td>Year of the Unicorn in the</td>
<td>423 BC</td>
<td>366 BC</td>
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<td>Qianzaodu: 720 years after King</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wen’s Mandate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>End of the Taiyi cycle (360</td>
<td>63 BC</td>
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<td>Unicorn) under the Han</td>
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It is safe to assume that the events in the last years BC are to be connected to this model and, per extension, to the petty officials who wrote some of the first chen texts around the 70’s BC.

When wondering about the cultural affiliation of the author of the Zhaiwangbi, the interpreter is almost obliged to turn to the ru. The reconstruction of Chinese political past, in fact, was probably the core of this early chen text. We can safely rule out that wu xing mantic practitioners were interested in history: as mentioned in the Han bibliography, they were mostly concerned with the present. In the same way, calendarists are not a feasible option since the apocryphal fragments seldom imply the intervention of people accustomed to handling clepsydras and placing gnomons.

Some fragments of the Zhaiwangbi are linkable to a ru background. First, the text calls Confucius “sheng 聖” and mentions the year of the unicorn. As we have seen in the preceding chapters, the anecdote of the Annals was certainly relevant in scholarly circles. In addition, this early chen explicitly refers to the scholarly wu de model: hence, the association of the Zhou with Wood. With regard to the astrological layer, it is perhaps useful to recall that the zaiyi framework, which assigned a crucial role to heavenly events, greatly developed during the first century BC. Finally, assuming that the Lingzhunting was written in a similar cultural milieu, the emphasis on hybrid creatures may be explained by assuming that the ru of these texts were free from the cultural constraints of official scholarly communities. In fact, even though the option “ru groups” still appears to be the safest stance when dealing with the Lingzhunting and the Zhaiwangbi, it is appropriate to underscore that we do not have here people belonging to cultural elites. The ru who wrote these texts, belonged to a lower stratum,
which was not always in tune with the official guidelines. Interestingly, for instance, the Lingzhunting appears to oscillate between the old wu de scheme, according to which the de associated to the royal clans of the past conquer each other, and the newer “mutual birth” model.\footnote{Choshu isho shusei 6:174.} Let us consider now the following fragment:

亡秦者胡也。丘以推秦白精也。其先星感。河出图。

The one who will ruin the Qin will be Hu. I, Qiu, have computed that the Qin [dynasty] was the essence of the White. The ancestor of the Qin [came to the world thanks to a phenomenon of attraction and response] with the stars. The River put forth its Diagram.\footnote{Choshu isho shusei 1B:51.}

It is evident that the authors considered the Qin to be a legitimated dynasty, which ruled by means of the potency Metal. Moreover, the sentence qi xian xing gan 其先星感 might be an allusion to a miraculous birth. This line of reasoning fits what we know of the contents of the apocrypha. As we have seen when dealing with the look of the shengren, Qin Shi Huangdi was associated with extraordinary physical features, just like those usually attributed to the culture heroes of the past. If we consider this element with the allusions to the old wu de framework, it is safe to assume that we have here individuals who were a step behind the official ru community. Finally, one could also add that they had different political opinions. While Sui Meng underscored the need to change the ruling clan, whoever wrote the Zhaiwangbi preferred to postpone the inception of the tianming juncture: hence, the creation of a second millennialist phase.

3. THE DYNAMICITY OF THE APOCRYPHAL PHENOMENON: TEXTS AND COMMUNITIES

The remarks presented above suggest that a few apocryphal texts might have been written around the 70’s BC. Petty officials loosely bound to ru circles profited from the pervasive millennialist atmosphere and submitted their token-books which combined ru themes with thematic threads connected to extra-scholarly circles such as, for instance, wu xing mantic practices or stories about mythic figures of the past. In the following decades, the chen phenomenon expanded. We will reconstruct this phase by taking the tushu miji 圖書祕記 listed in the bibliography of the Han imperial library as a kind of turning point.\footnote{Even if doubts have been advanced about the reliability of this account, it is safe to assume that we have here an entry which was added to the original Qi lüe at a very early time. See page 7, footnote 29.} Accordingly, we will speak of “towards tushu” and “after tushu”. This approach shall help us to understand features and peculiarities of expansion and
transmission of the apocryphal books.

3.1 Towards the *tushu*: the astrologers

3.1.1 On the centrality of astrology in the history of the apocrypha

The role of astrology has been regularly underestimated in the discussion about the Early Han history of the apocryphal phenomenon. Actually, several elements testify that the *chenwei* were deeply connected with *tianwen* issues. Let us consider the case of Zhang Man 張滿, one of Liu Xiu’s rivals during the civil war. In the *Hou Hanshu*, Fan Ye describes his defeat and mentions his discouraged exclamation “the prophetical texts have betrayed me (*chenwen* wu wo 彤文誤我).”27 In the *Huayang guozhi*, Chang Qu gives a similar account with a very interesting difference. The rebel is reported to have said “I am the one mislead by the heavenly patterns!” (*wei* *tianwen* *suo* *wu* 為天文所誤).28 Here, the reader finds *tianwen* instead of *chenwen*. Thus, it cannot be ruled out that Zhang Man did not mention the *chen* scripts but simply alluded to astrological prognoses. This, in turn, says much about Fan Ye’s understanding of the apocrypha.

From his viewpoint, the *chenwei* were simply astrological books. Even historical accounts suggest that astrologers played a crucial role in the development of the apocryphal phenomenon since some of the generic political prophecies in vogue at the beginning of the Later Han conceal a *tianwen* context. Wang Liang 王梁, the prefect of a small town in the modern region of Henan, was appointed to Minister for Public Affairs, certainly one of the most prestigious posts of Han imperial bureaucracy.29 Fan Ye explains his selection in the following way:

【…】及即位，議選大司空，而赤伏符曰「王梁主衛作玄武」，帝以野王衛之所徙，玄武水神之名，司空水土之官也，於是擢拜梁為大司空，封武強侯。

【…】 When Guangwudi ascended to the throne, he discussed about the appointment of the Minister for Public Affairs. The *Talisman of the Red Secret* said: “Wang Liang is in charge of the [region] Wei and forms the [heavenly area] Dark Warrior”. Thus, the emperor concluded [first] that Yewang was the [geographic] region of Wei (i.e. the place where Wei was moved30), [second that] the Dark Warrior is the name of the spirit of Water and [third that] the Minister for Public affairs is the post in charge of matters related to water and earth. Therefore, he honoured Wang Liang as Minister for Public

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27 *Hou Hanshu* 20:739.
28 *Huayang guozhi* 5:2B.
29 *Hou Hanshu* 1A:23.
30 At the beginning of the Han, the region of Wei belonged to the Yewang territory. In this regard, see the commentary in *Hou Hanshu* 22:774.
affairs and enfeoffed him as Marquis of Wuqiang.\footnote{Hou Hanshu 22:774.}

The mentioning of the Dark Warrior — the northern quadrant of the Chinese sky — is the first allusion to an astrological context. The sentence “Wang Liang controls Wei” (王梁主衛) could easily be read as the following tianwen statement “[the star] Wang Liang controls Wei” (王梁主衛). In this context, the name Wang Liang refers to a star in the southern quadrant belonging to the lodge House. As we know from the state-scheme of the fén耶 theory, this lodge was usually associated with the earthly region of Wei. Thus, in all probability, the prediction concerning Wang Liang was originally an astrological zhan and not a generic political prophecy.\footnote{In this regard, see also Huang Fushan (2001), 61-66.}

3.1.2 The role of tianwen practitioners in the transmission of the apocrypha

When considering the role of astrology in the early history of the apocrypha, the interpreter inevitably comes to wonder whether tianwen practitioners played an active role in the development of this cultural phenomenon. Actually, it is safe to assume that astrologers contributed to the transmission of the first chen texts. The Huayang guozhi, for instance, says that a man named Yang Xuan 楊宣 used to study the “apocrypha and the diagrams” (tuwei) and the art of tianwen, when he attended as a child the school of a not better identified Zheng Zihou 鄭子侯 from the Henei prefecture. The use of tuwei here is to be attributed to the historian since this term was one of the standard medieval labels for the apocrypha. Evidently, however, Chang Qu considered the material studied by Yang Xuan to be close in form and meaning to the later chenwei. Since the same teacher could act as tutor for tuwei and astrology, we may assume that the chen of the last decades BC resembled in some way astrological manuals. Interestingly, Yang Xuan reached the apex of his public life at the end of the reign of emperor Cheng and passed away in the first decade AD.\footnote{Huayang guozhi 10B:1A.} At this point, one can safely hypothesize that some books with tianwen contents and similar to the apocrypha were circulating in smaller astrological circles in peripheral China around the 40’s BC.

3.1.3 Astrological chen

Some professional astrologers may have actively contributed to the expansion of the chen phenomenon by writing astrological chen books. Even if we cannot know the extent of the tianwen layer of the early chen scripts, the remarks on the Lingzhunting
and the Zhaiwangbi suggest that astrology was not the thematic core of the texts. This might have changed during the first century BC. First, some apocryphal texts undoubtedly focus on the Han art of *tianwen*. As we have seen in the review of the *tianwen* layer, books like the *Chunqiu-Qiantanba* or the *Chunqiu-Wenyaoogou* embody strata linkable to professional astrologers. Despite their formal affiliation, these books are never quoted in Tang commentaries to the classics. Evidently, they did not encompass relevant information for scholars working in the exegetical field.

3.2 Towards the *tushu*: the *ru* and the transmission of the apocryphal texts

During the reigns of emperor Xuan and Yuan, the student of the *Yijing* Jiao Yanshou 焦延壽 came upon the apocrypha. Jiao Yanshou is rather famous since he is usually presented as Jing Fang’s teacher. According to the *Hanshu*, he had also discussed matters concerning the *Changes* with Meng Xi.34 His teachings, however, must have been different from the mainstream:

劉向校書，考易說，以為【…】唯京氏為異，黨焦延壽獨得隱士之說，託之孟氏，不相與同。

When Liu Xiang edited the books [of the imperial library], he examined the [scholarly] theories about the *Changes* and concluded that [...] only Jing Fang’s [teachings] were different. [This is because in the] group of the [students of the *Changes*] Jiao Yanshou alone had access to the theories of hidden (i.e. unofficial) masters. Later, Jing Fang attributed them to Meng Xi. Actually, they do not match at all.35

Thus, even though Jing Fang endeavoured to associate Jiao Yanshou’s teachings with Meng Xi’s theories, the two traditions were essentially different. Evidently, Jiao Yanshou did not fit the official tradition of the time. In all probability, he was more interested in technical matters than in exegetical issues. Even if he worked with the operators of the *Changes*, his primary objective was the casting of mantic prognoses (*zhan*). Finally, one of his Later Han descendants wrote:

其先故國師譙贛。深明 典䜟録圖緯, 能精微天意, 道與亰君明。

Among my ancestors, there was the Master of the Country Jiao Gan. He profoundly understood the canon, the prophetic records, and the apocrypha. He was able to perceive the will of Heaven: he transmitted his teaching to Jing [Fang] Junming.36

Since the term *tuewei* is one of the standard medieval labels of the apocrypha, it is safe to

36 See this passage as quoted in *Jingyikao* 298:7A.
assume that Jiao Yanshou saw and used some of the first apocrypha. Above, Liu Xiang has clearly stated that Jiao Yanshou was active beyond the official circles of Yijing learning. This takes us to assume that the apocrypha were circulating outside of the official scholarly groups. Perhaps, some ru active in peripheral areas even wrote new chen books with the intent to comment on the canon.

3.3 The tushu in the capital

3.3.1 The chen book of Gan Zhongke

At the beginning of the 20’s BC, the apocryphal books were in Chang’an and even within the imperial palace. In 27 BC, for instance, the apocrypha were used to justify the appointment of Wang Yanshi 王延世 to official in charge of bringing under control the floods of the Yellow River.37 Slightly later, Gan Zhongke from Qi submitted the first text explicitly labelled as chen in the chronicles. As we have seen in the first part, this provoked Liu Xiang’s vehement reaction. Let us now consider again Gan’s embassy:

初，成帝時，齊人甘忠可詐造天官曆包元太平經十二卷，以言「漢家逢天地之大終，當更受命於天，天帝使真人赤精子，下教我此道。」

At the beginning, under emperor Cheng, the man from Qi Gan Zhongke forged the Classic of the Great Peace: the Calendar of the Heavenly Officials encompasses the Origin in 12 scrolls in order to say: “The Han have run into the “great termination” of Heaven and Earth. They will receive the mandate from Heaven once again. The emperor of Heaven sent the true man, the Master of the Red Essence, to instruct me about this path.”38

It has been suggested that Gan Zhongke belonged to early daoist religious groups. Above all, the mentioning of “Great Peace” (taiping 太平) in the title of the book appears to corroborate this hypothesis.39 An interpreter of the chenwei, however, is rather concerned with the link between Gan and the chen phenomenon. Was his text called chen because of the allusion to the “Great Peace” or rather because of the prediction announcing the comeback of Fire?

It is safe to assume that the hub on “time” and “heavenly officials” took several observers of the time to label the Tianguanli as chen. In the last chapter, we have seen

37 Huayang guozhi 10B:14A. The statement of the apocrypha essentially said that somebody from the territory between the Jianwei and the He prefectures (zai Jian He zhi 在犍柯之) had to repeat Yu’s meritorious work (dang youneng xun Yu zhi gong 當有能循禹之功). Unfortunately, we have scanty information about Yang Yan. Nevertheless, the mentioning of a specific terrestrial region could take one to think of some kind of astrological prognosis and, in particular, of the application of the fenye theory. For the floods of the Yellow River in 27 BC, see Hanshu 29:1688-1689.

38 Hanshu 75:3192.

that the reforms of 5 BC were based on the time-scheduling strategies of Gan’s
disciples. Moreover, the title of the book submitted by Gan Zhongke alluded to the
“Origin” (yuan 元) of a calendrical system (li 历); the man from Qi spoke of the “Great
Termination” (da zhong 大终): under the Han, this term had calendrical nuances.  
Finally, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the Tianguan li also spoke about astrology:
hence, the occurrence of the binomial tianguan 天官. To conclude, it is safe to assume
that Gan Zhongke’s Tianguanli encompassed a chen book which dealt with astrology
and time-scheduling strategies. Was Gan Zhongke the author of this early apocryphal
text? In all probability, we must answer in the negative. 
Gan Zhongke’s line of reasoning and, in particular, the association of the Han with the
colour red reminds one of scholarly theories dealing with the potencies. As the ru of the
last years BC, the man of Qi linked the Han to Fire. The fact that the Han were deemed
to be entitled to receive the mandate once again, despite the end of the phase Fire and
the inception of Earth — Han society was waiting for the emperor of Earth — implies
that the de, as they were portrayed in Gan’s chen, had already lost part of their temporal
implications. They were rather seen as inner qualities of a ruler/dynasty. This, in turn,
fits the strategy of Liu Xin’s Classic of Eras. Accordingly, when we assume that Gan
Zhongke wrote the chen layer of his Tianguan li, we must also hypothesize that he had
some kind of contacts to exegetical communities. Otherwise, we would be compelled to
admit that Liu Xin, the Gotha of the scholarship of the time so to speak, agreed with an
outsider coming from Qi, when it came to the wu de framework. Nevertheless, this
prominent scholar explicitly underscored the incompatibility between Gan’s book and
the canonical teaching. To conclude, the only way to come out of this cul de sac is to
consider the possibility that Gan Zhongke Tianguanli also encompassed a chen text
written in a scholarly milieu.

In all probability, the chen submitted by Gan Zhongke resembled the Zhaiwangbi or the
Qianzaodu in many ways. Gan’s book, in fact, might have embodied a layer connected
to official calendrical techniques. The term yuan in the Tianguanli baoyuan taipingjing
may even mean that this chen contained the Superior Origin mentioned in the chenwei
fragments. This, in turn, could imply that the author was acquainted with Wudi’s Sifen
system since, as far as we know, this is the only Early Han Sifen system which worked
with a shangyuan. Finally, the reconstruction of the time-scheduling strategies of this
text proposed in the preceding chapter allows us to conclude that we have here a Yin li
re-reading of Wudi’s calendar. In fact, when working with 360 year-cycles, we have
come upon the Yin li year of the unicorn (366 BC). The Zhaiwangbi layer of the
Qianzaodu is in tune with this line of reasoning. In fact, the text alludes to the Taiyi
mantic practice (360-year cycles), the Superior Origin, the Yinli re-reading of Wudi’s

40 Hanshu 21B:1007
Sifen almanac, and the potencies.

3.3.2 Su Jing

At the end of the Early Han the people active in the capital could already rely on texts which, given the labelling *tushu miji*, had been presented as token-texts (*tushu*) and might have already been connected to Confucius (*miji*). Which kinds of books were the *tushu miji*? During the civil war, in a letter addressed to one of Guangwudi’s rivals, the scholar Su Jing wrote:

世之俗儒末學, 醒醉不分, 而稽論當世, 疑誤視聽。或謂天下迭興, 未知誰是, 稱兵據土, 可圖非冀。或曰聖王未啟, 宜觀時變, 倚彊附大, 顧望自守。二者之論, 豈其然乎? 夫孔丘祕經, 為漢赤制, 玄包幽室, 文隱事明。且火德承堯, 虽昧必亮, 承積世之祚, 握無窮之符, 王氏雖乘閒偷篡, 【...】天所以眷顧踟時, 憂漢子孫者也。【...】

The vulgar *ru* of this time certainly are uneducated: they [are unable] to distinguish between soberness and drunkenness. Nevertheless, they analyse what is happening today. I suspect that they are wrong in what they see and hear. Some of them say that the world has missed [the phase of the Middle] Rising. Since [people] do not know who [the sage ruler] is, they recruit soldiers and occupy territories. Some of them say that the sage ruler has not appeared. Thus, they deem it appropriate to observe the changes of the situation, rely on the strong and support the powerful in order to look after the own safeguard. Where is the logic of such points? Confucius’s secret classics were made for the Red Institution of the Han. They were secretly conserved in gloomy rooms. The text is obscure but the facts are evident. The Fire [of the Han] carries on Yao [’s heritage]. Even though now it hides, it will shine [soon again]. [The Han] carry on the blessing of the pile of epochs since they grasped the eternal talisman. Wang Mang may have ridden the time (i.e. profited from the moment) […] [but] the reason behind concern and hesitation of Heaven is the care for the descendants of the Han. […]

Su Jing’s letter is enlightening. As the official clearly says above, people were using the millenialist expectations of the time to justify the civil war. Su Jing, who supported Guangwudi and the restoration of the Han, finally mentions Confucius’s secret classics. Interestingly, he speaks of “missing the Rising”, he mentions the resurgence of a *sheng wang*, and he explicitly alludes to the *wu de* framework. In all probability, these themes belonged to the contents of the *tushu*. We can now consider Su Jing’s closing words:

圖讖之占，紅變之驗，皆君所明。

Everybody can understand that the mantic prognoses of the prognostication books [named after] the Diagram have come true in all the changes [of the recent and contemporary political situation]!
Thus, the early *chen* were books containing mantic prognoses.

### 3.4 After the *tushu*: the growth of the *chen* corpus

#### 3.4.1 Historical evidence

Several elements suggest that the writing of new-apocrypha underwent a considerable acceleration during the first decades AD. Su Jing, for instance, said that a number of people were writing texts (*zuoshu* 作書) concerned with Shi Kuang’s miscellaneous teachings (*Shi Kuang za shi* 師曠雜事). According to the commentary, “Shi Kuang” is an allusion to a book dealing with different mantic practices (*zaizhan* 雜占). Given Su Jing’s allusions to the prognoses of the *chenwei*, it is safe to follow the Tang interpretation proposed in the commentary. 41

At the beginning of the Later Han, both Huan Tan and Yin Min lamented the expansion of “Diagrams and Scripts” (*tushu*).42 Was Huan Tan speaking about object-talisman or was he rather relying on Liu Xin’s explanation according to which the *Hetu* were the eight Trigrams and the *Luoshu* the first 65 characters of the *Hongfan* chapter in the *Documents*? Both these options are implausible. Without the shadow of a doubt, Huan Tan was speaking about books since he even complained that the new *tushu* were all being attributed to Confucius. 43 Obviously, we have here an allusion to the *chenwei*. This, however, implies that even the *tushu* which were growing in number were books. To conclude, it is safe to assume that Huan Tan was referring to the first *chen* texts, those listed under the heading *tianwen* in the bibliography of the *Hanshu*. If this line of reasoning is correct, we must conclude that new *chen* books were written during the first decades AD.

#### 3.4.2 Thematic evidence

In all probability, some new *chen* books were conceived as exegetical studies. This might fit the case of the *Kaolingyao*. Besides the quotations from the *Zhoubi suanjing*, we have met in this text a shadow of an exegetical discourse. A similar case concerns the *Minglixu* since the attempt of calendringly dating the entries of the *Chunqiu* perfectly matches the cultural trends of the time. Evidently, whoever wrote this book was aware that Liu Xin had attempted to combine the *Zuo zhuan* with his *Santongli*. The anonymous writer of the *Minglixu*, however, rejected Liu Xin’s *Santong* approach to the *Annals* and clearly stated that the Chunqiu period could be explained only by using the

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41 *Hanshu* 30:1744.
43 *Dongguan Hanji* 108:16.
Yin li.\textsuperscript{44} This element adds some interesting detail to the portrayal of the ru behind the texts of this period. Besides moving in jinwen milieu, these people certainly had a knowledge of calendrical formulae since the computing of the beginning of lunations during the Spring and Autumn period required acquaintance with lipu calculation methods. Yet, this expertise must have been rather limited. The author, in fact, preferred to focus on the whole history of mankind by relying on the earlier chen texts like the Lingzhunting in order to reconstruct the chronology of Chinese past. When compared with Liu Xin’s Classic of Eras, then, the Minglixu definitively shows a predilection for the stories of the early chen books dealing with personages as the Human Thearch or the different clans which ruled over China before Fuxi.\textsuperscript{45}

The books written in this period were presented as chen texts, as books able to tell something about the future. Concerning the political position taken by the authors, some of the ru of this period might have opted for an uncritical support of the Liu ruling clan. The text aptly called Hanhanzi 漢含孳 [The Han Encompass the Flourishing] is a case in point. In the same way, however, it is implausible to assume that all chen were conceived as propaganda tool to be used during the civil war. Interestingly, in fact, the Sichuanese warlord Gongsun Shu referred to some of the books later included in Guangwudi’s apocryphal corpus in order to demonstrate his right to rule over China. This suggests that the chen were often ambiguous, when it came to the formulation of an explicit prediction.\textsuperscript{46}

3.5 The mediocre ru and the growth of the chen corpus

When wondering about the authors of the chen of the first decades AD, we can turn once again to Su Jing:

論者若不本之於天，參之於聖，猥以師曠雜事輕自眩惑，說士作書，亂夫大道，焉可信哉？

Even if the people who speak about such matters cannot root their argument in Heaven, they try to sour them up to the sage(s). In using the miscellaneous records of Shi Kuang (i.e. mantic texts), many [of them] are superficial [to such an extent that they reveal] their giddiness and trivialness. These people even write books by finally bringing the Way of Heaven into chaos. How can they be trusted?

Evidently, Su Jing was aware that people were writing texts about mantic practices despite their ineptitude. From his viewpoint, the only valid chen texts were those conserved within the imperial library. Slightly later, Huan Tan made a similar point:

\textsuperscript{44} See pp. 290-291.
\textsuperscript{45} See page 164.
\textsuperscript{46} See page 5.
Defining the apocrypha

【…】蓋天道性命，聖人所難言也。自子貢以下，不得而聞，況後世淺儒，能通之乎！今諸巧慧小才伎數之人，增益圖書，矯稱讖記，【…】

Way of Heaven, human nature, and destiny: even the sage deemed it difficult to speak about these [subjects]. Since the time of Zigong, [such themes] have not been discussed. How could the mediocre scholars of later epochs grasp them! Nowadays all those cunning people dealing with techniques increase the number of diagrams and books and falsely call their work prognostication records. 【…】

Thus, according to Huan Tan, the people who were contributing to the expansion of the apocryphal phenomenon were cunning mediocre people dealing with techniques. Given the allusion to the mediocre ru who claimed to understand those subjects which even Confucius did not dare to treat, we may assume that we have here people interested in technical matters and vaguely informed about ru trends.

A further eminent intellectual of the Later Han period pleaded for a condemnation of the apocrypha by highlighting the scarce preparation of their authors. In his famous memorial against the apocrypha, Zhang Heng wrote:

【…】尚書堯使鯀理洪水【…】而春秋讖云『共工理水』. 凡讖皆云黃帝伐蚩尤，而詩讖獨以為『蚩尤敗，然後堯受命』。春秋元命包中有公輸班與墨翟，事見戰國，非春秋時也。【…】

In the Documents, Yao ordered Gun to bring the floods under control [...]. Yet, a prognostication text attached to the Annals say: “Gonggong brought under control the floods”. Generally, all the prognostication scripts say that the Yellow Emperor fought against Chi You. Only those attached to the Odes maintain: “After Chi You’s defeat, Yao received the Mandate”. In the [prognostication script attached to the] Annals —the Encompassing the Origin and the Mandate— Gongshu Pan met Mo Di: this, however, happened during the Warring States, certainly not during the Spring and Autumn Period. 【…】

Thus, as Zhang Heng said, some of the chenwei contained some remarkable mistakes. This, in turn, could only testify to the mediocre grade of preparation on the part of the people who wrote these texts.

Zhang Heng’s and Huan Tan’s refusal of the chenwei is understandable. They, for instance, belonged to the group which strongly promoted the advantages of perceiving the cosmos in terms of a huge rotating sphere. Now, let us consider the Kaolingyao which essentially describes a hybrid of two intrinsically incompatible ways of portraying the heavens. From the viewpoint of a Han skilled scholar, this text obviously

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47 See Lunyun 5:13.
revealed high levels of incompetence. Probably, Huan Tan and Zhang Heng also noticed that old calendrical models were being manipulated in order to fuel millennialist expectations. They might have realized that the authors of the chenwei were annihilating the boundaries among Han disciplines by combining the ru idea of the Four Numinous Animals with the astrological portrayal of the Quadrants. They finally saw what the shengren was becoming: a being free from each form of human control, generated by tian, resembling tian in the outlook, and receiving signs of heavenly support.

3.6 The authors of the apocrypha and their marginality

The history of the apocrypha, as it has been reconstructed in this section, essentially is the history of the ways in which a few books, which were born in the first phase of Early Han political millennialism, inspired people belonging to different cultural communities. The chenwei, as we have them today, are the end-point of a long path along which old texts worked as model and new texts were written. The Han history of the apocrypha involves the activity of two main cultural groups: astrologers and scholars. When one strives to overcome the descriptive level and give a unitary definition of the groups which actively contributed to the writing of the texts, the interpreter should focus on the issue of marginality. In our reconstruction of the path towards the apocrypha, we have hardly come upon people belonging to the elite. With regard to Jiao Yanshou, even the bibliographer Liu Xiang deemed it difficult to find a position for him within the Yijing community. We do not have any additional information about Zheng Zihou, the astrologer from the Henei prefecture. Li Xun, the man who helped Xia Heliang in the years around 5 BC, and Su Jing are perhaps exceptions. According to the dynastic histories, they both reached rather important positions. Moreover, Li Xun was a prominent scholar of the time. It is however questionable whether they may be regarded as active contributors to the development of the apocryphal phenomenon. They should be rather presented as the readers of the early chen.

When we think about the circles which produced the first ascertainable talisman-books, we should define them as groups working in the shadow of ru circles. They were individuals informed about the development of scholarly ideas but essentially fascinated by the idea of reconstructing a political history of China where the blank spaces of the official models were filled by means of mythic figures and where the wu xing mantic practices worked as temporal framework. Finally, they certainly contributed to fuel the millennialist expectations of the seventies BC by submitting token-books.

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50 See page 4. See Li Xun’s bibliography in Hanshu 75:3179-3193. In particular, Li Xun is often mentioned as one of the most important ru active during the last decades BC. See Hanshu 75:3195. For Su Jing’s political career, see Hou Hanshu 30A:1041.
The strong concern with mantic practices probably assured the survival of the first apocrypha. People working in marginal exegetical circles such as Jiao Yanshou or in peripheral astrological communities like Zheng Zihou passed down the texts since they evidently considered them to be “valid” books. This testifies to the strong prognostication character (zhan) of the first chenwei. We do not exactly know what happened in this period. New texts might have been written by taking the early chen as a model. Astrologers must have played a considerable role in this phase since the early history of the chenwei show clear signs of connection with the Han art of tianwen. It is also possible to assume that some scholars involved in the transmission of the apocrypha enlarged the chen corpus with the intent to comment on the canonical works. This, in turn, could explain why Su Jing spoke of Confucius’s secret classics.

The last group involved in the early history of the chenwei are the mediocre ru of the beginning of the first century AD. As in the case of the petty officials who wrote the first chen, the ru of this phase were strongly concerned with techniques. Unlike the authors of the Zhaiwangbi, however, they had a rather limited insight in such subjects. If the ru of the Han were able understand Man, Heaven, and Earth, the ru of these chen texts would perhaps deserve a different denomination.
The last part of the present study has offered a definition of the apocryphal phenomenon which encompasses three main levels: texts, history, and cultural communities. The analysis of the contents has taken us to regard the chenwei as hybrid texts which, besides being presented as heavenly tokens or Confucius’s secret classics, conveyed the idea of a bond between tian and shengren by applying pre-existent philosophical postulates, myths, generic beliefs, and techniques with a judgeable level of competency. When dealing with the historical context, we have underscored that the millennialist beliefs of the first century BC allowed surfacing and success of the chen texts. Finally, in reconstructing the path of the chen during the first century BC, we have come in touch with cultural communities of secondary importance such as the petty official of the 70’s, peripheral scholarly and tianwen groups, and the mediocre ru of the first decades AD. To conclude, hybridism of the texts, millennialism of the historical context, and marginality of the cultural milieu were the main peculiarities of the chen texts at the beginning of the Later Han dynasty.

The development of the chenwei phenomenon spanned several decades. At the end of the first century BC, the texts were still a silent presence in Chinese cultural landscape. During the first decades AD, they finally became visible. In 7 AD Wang Mang invited to Chang’an the experts of tuchen. During the same period, new chen texts were being written. Moreover, Su Jing spoke of the secret classics and the Chifufu was presented as a symbol of the bestowal of Heaven’s mandate upon the Han. Slightly later, the warlord Gongsun Shu claimed the right to rule over China because of the apocryphal statements. This chain of events suggests an abrupt acceleration of the process which led to the surfacing of the chenwei.

When we wonder about the reasons behind the invisibility of the chen up to the beginning of the 20’s BC, their imperceptibleness up to the beginning of the first century AD, and their sudden success after this period of clandestineness, we should take into account cultural and historical factors. The reshaping of ru intellectual concerns undoubtedly plays a crucial role in the moulding of the Han cultural climate. In particular, the re-thinking of the ganying theory underscores the revaluation of the concept of tian within the ru discourse; the zaiyi strategies, which very often worked as a comfortable and efficacious framework for criticizing politics, enjoyed enormous popularity during the Han centuries. These
two very basic concepts of Han ru-ism essentially compelled the scholarly world to look beyond the realms of exegesis, ethics, and politics. Effective application of a zaiyi line of reasoning, for instance, occasionally required a certain acquaintance with methods and practices alien to ru tradition. A zaiyi interpretation of the abrupt appearance of a comet could presuppose awareness of the tianwen significance of this phenomenon. Accordingly, the starry sky and time flow gradually became valid threads of discussion. This, in turn, led to the integration of disciplines like astrology and calendar in the curricula of several scholars. Nevertheless, the progressive narrowing of the chasm between the theoretical world of the ru and the practical realm of techniques did not necessarily imply that each shushu discipline automatically became part of the formation of a ru. A knowledge of tianwen and lipu were often well accepted since they belonged to the intellectuals background of a ru able to know Heaven, Man, and Earth. Shushu methods like those of the occultists (shenxian), by contrast, were still beyond the interests of the scholars. Finally, the relationship between ru and wu xing mantic practices was much more ambiguous. The allure of wu xing methods must have fascinated at least some groups. Yet, the ru were aware of the cultural contention concealed behind such practices, since they were often very close to the targets and strategies of the students of the Yijing. The interpreters of the Changes also worked with time-scheduling strategies and likewise strove to decipher time and to foresee critical and dangerous moments in time. Certainly, they could rely on a canonical text which had already become the “source of all classics”; they could choose different sexagesimal cycles — this is the case of the Yi jiu e mentioned in the Monograph on Calendar of the Hanshu — or even opt for the metonic periods of the official calendar, as did Meng Xi and Jing Fang. All this notwithstanding, Yijing students and wu xing mantic practitioners often pursued similar strategies. In this context, the severe censure of the wu xing methods formulated in the bibliography of the Hanshu can be understood as the attempt to draw a clear demarcation line between those who worked with time-scheduling strategies within the scholarly boundaries and those who used such methods outside of the ru circles.

From the viewpoint of a Han scholar, the evolution of the ru into the intellectual able to understand Man, Heaven, and Earth was rewarding and risky at the same time. It was rewarding because it helped the ru as a cultural community to increase its prestige to the detriment of other groups active in the public sphere of the time and competing with the ru for cultural visibility. The zaiyi framework, for instance, certainly reduced the visibility of astrologers as a group. If one thinks of the very extensive Monograph on the Five Agents in the Hanshu and compares it with the rather brief treatise on tianwen in the same chronicle, one may well understand the effort and the success of the ru to move into the cultural territory of alien disciplines. It was risky at least from two
By chance of history

viewpoints. First, with regard to competing cultural groups, it implicitly legitimated the
desire of other communities such as the astrologers to become involved in the public
discourse of the time. Because the application of zaiyi strategies also required a
knowledge of tianwen prognoses, astrologers could lay claim to a useful cultural niche.
Second, with regard to the ru, it laid the way open to generalization and
misunderstanding. One, in fact, could not reasonably expect each single scholar to
specialize in different disciplines. Training in the art of tianwen or lipu, for instance,
required skilled guidance, and only a small number of scholars will have chosen this
option. Thus, when analysing the meaning of a specific natural phenomenon, a ru with a
standard curriculum must necessarily generalize or rely on people and sources
specialized on this field. Moreover, one could easily misconstrue the ru concern for
Heaven as a legitimation of all those disciplines which focused on the extra-human
sphere and ultimately turn to fields of research which were officially viewed with
suspicion: the wu xing arts are a case in point.
The development of the chen phenomenon under the Han was connected to the risks
concealed behind the narrowing of the chasm between ru-ism and the technical realm.
First, with regard to competing cultural groups, the development of the early chen
illustrates the virtual gaps that the Han ru were leaving for cultural rivals such as
astrologers to fill. In the first century BC, these people were very probably
endeavouring to make their mark. To contribute to the diffusion and expansion of the
chen phenomenon was a method with which assert their relevance as a cultural group.
The teaching of texts named after the River Diagram and the Luo Script was most likely
seen as an occasion to increase the “selling potential” of the group, at least on a
peripheral level.
Second, with regard to the ru, the early chen texts essentially demonstrate that people
moving in a ru field misconstrued the ru concern with techniques and turned to
heterodox disciplines. The Zhaiwangbi, in fact, shows clear traces of the influence of
wu xing methods. Moreover, the hazards behind the narrowing of the chasm between
ru-ism and shushu become evident even in the case of endorsed branches of learning
such as astrology and calendar. At the beginning of the first century AD, a group of ru,
took the early chen as a model and wrote new apocrypha. Their insight in technical
matters was inadequate. Even though they could rely on the valid “tianwen” and “time-
scheduling strategies” layer of the early chen, their limited level of preparation in
shushu and exegetical issues prejudiced the value of the books.
The success of the chen phenomenon during the first decades AD is also rooted in
history. The hazardous evolution of the ru into intellectuals who were able to know
Man, Heaven, and Earth was already at a very advanced stage when Yang Xiong
formulated this postulate. Accordingly, the apocrypha could have come to light long
By chance of history

before. Moreover, the cultural themes which had a political relevance — timescheduling strategies, millennialism, and Potencies — had been present since the crisis at the court of emperor Zhao. Yet, the chen phenomenon does not become fully visible until the first decades AD.

When we look at the two Early Han millennialist phases, we find a number of striking similarities between emperor Zhao’s rule and the end of the first century BC. Examples are the overwhelming power of clans attached to the inner court, the success of millennialist beliefs, the comeback of the potencies, and the emergence of anonymous texts binding tian to shengren. When considering the differences between the two phases, our attention is inevitably drawn to the changed historical setting. Under emperor Zhao, the political crisis was quickly resolved by Huo Guang who endorsed the enthronization of emperor Xuan. At the end of the early Han, somebody named Wang Mang radically changed the history of the Han. As Su Jing said, he was “riding the time”. In contrast with the first phase, the groundbreaking political changes were not only predicted and announced. They had come true. After all, Xu Shen explained the term chen as prognostications which had come true (yan 驗). Thus, with regard to the historical factors, by chance of history, the chen texts evolved from marginal works into authoritative texts.

Wang Mang’s interregnum, with its tokens, predictions, and wait for the emperor of Earth, should be regarded as the first turning point of the history of the apocrypha. It was undoubtedly the event which helped the marginal chen scripts to widen their cultural niche in the capital. In fact, they were the works which publicized the importance of Heaven’s mandate and tianming cycles. They were the works which underscored the ties between shengren and tian. Thus, during this phase, they certainly became popular. Some of their readers actively contributed to the growth of the phenomenon by writing new books. Finally, when the political crisis degenerated into a bloody civil war, the apocrypha fully displayed their cultural allure. The chenwei became the cultural companion of a historical setting in which each aspirant to the Chinese throne strove to demonstrate his right to rule over China. In all probability, one of the advantages of the apocrypha was their interpretability. As Su Jing said, their text was unclear (wen yin 文隱), the evidence lay in what was actually happening (shi ming 事明). The chen texts were only partially concerned with the present. They spoke about the shengren of the past, the outlook of Yao and Shun, the tokens of king Wen and Confucius. This aspect must have been one of the reasons behind Guangwudi’s decision to compose an apocryphal corpus, an event which may well be regarded as the second turning point in the history of these texts.

Guangwudi’s order to gather and edit the chen books of the time was essentially a camouflage. The millennialist facet was presented as evidence of the renewal of Han
By chance of history

political mandate. The hybridism of the texts was hidden behind the labelling “Confucius’s secret classics”, and the marginality of the cultural milieu was concealed behind the political decision to make out of the apocrypha a normative canon which had to inspire officials, scholars, and technicians. When confronted with the official pressure to consider the chenwei to be a normative corpus, the cultural communities responded to this invitation in different ways. The scholarly group was split: some were prepared to accept the chenwei, others viewed the texts with suspicion. The former appreciated the details of the apocrypha, such as the chronology of the Minglixu, the astrological layer, and the ritual stratum. The latter looked at the whole apocryphal phenomenon and at its problematic peculiarities. They certainly were not against astrology, the correlative reading of physiology, the interpretation of Yijing hexagrams as time-operators. Yet, the validity of individual thematic strata could not save a corpus which glorified Yao but at the same time attributed even to Qin Shi Huangdi the appearance of a shengren. They could not accept a group of texts which often annihilated the role of ethics in politics by making of the shengren a demigod born of the stars or natural phenomena; they could not use books which embodied faults such as those listed by Zhang Heng. When Huan Tan and Zhang Heng vehemently criticized these texts, they were simply protesting against a political power which was trying to make out of the mediocre ru of the apocrypha the standard way of being a ru.

In the technical field, the political promotion of the apocrypha became evident during the debates on the calendar promulgated in AD 85. Even if the Superior Origin of the official Sifen calendar of the time is not an apocryphal contribution to the Han art of lipu, there is no doubt that a number of Later Han technicians turned to these texts. Very often, the apocrypha were simply used as a tool for promoting the Yin li. In the case involving Jia Kui, one of the most important supporters of the idea of spherical heavens, the political pressure becomes particularly evident. This is in fact the only explanation why a supporter of the huntian refers to the huntian-incompatible model of the cosmos mentioned in the Kaolingyao.

The third turning point in the history of the apocrypha occurred during the first half of the second century AD, when Zhang Heng submitted his famous memorial against the apocrypha and called on the emperor Shun to gather and burn all chen texts. Evidently, such a proposal was conceivable at that time: the much milder stance taken by Huan Tan had provoked a vehement and enraged reaction on the part of Guangwudi. Zhang Heng certainly opened a new phase in the way of dealing with chen scripts. His suggestions, however, were not respected during the medieval age and under the Tang, when the chain of proscriptions ordered and implemented by rulers was often dictated by the ambiguity of the chen wordings and by their manipulability in political struggles. Indeed, the attitude of later scholars and technicians was more or less the carbon copy
of the stance of their Han ancestors. As Zu Chongzhi once lamented, groups of technicians continued to rely on the apocrypha. Finally, under the Tang, a number of scholars widely drew from the *chen* in their exegetical work, even though several *ru* condemned these texts.

This gradual disappearance of the texts and the ambiguous attitude of scholars resulted in the fourth turning point in the history of the apocrypha, namely Wei Zheng’s classification of the *chenwei* as exegetical works. This is perhaps the crucial moment in the late history of the *chenwei*, since Wei Zheng has compelled generations of scholars to regard the apocrypha exclusively as exegetical works connected to the Han exegetical circles and bound to Han exegetical discourse. In this phase, the inherent hybridism of the texts, the relevance of the astrological layer, and the manipulation of *lipu* elements begins to disappear.

The fragmentariness of the corpus as well as its thematic complexity have ultimately made out of the apocrypha one of the mysteries of Han culture. As late as 2000, Huang Fushan began his book by asking what in the end “*chenwei*” means. Such a question can be seen as a sort of litmus test which brings to light the uncertainties of the interpreters of the fragments. In many cases, the discomfort of the scholarly world derives from an unwillingness to explore the contents of the fragments. This approach, however, should be regarded as obligatory since the historical elements are definitively too few to make sense of the development of this cultural phenomenon. It is astonishing that most interpreters are prepared to accept the definition formulated within the pages of the *Siku quanshu* without counterchecking it in the fragments or, in some cases, even in the histories. Thus, the undeniable fact that the apocrypha played a role during the calendrical reform of 85 AD is completely neglected in order to highlight the exegetical connections.

In defence of the students of the *chenwei*, one should say that the interpretation of these texts often compels one to deal with very complex themes. The approach proposed in this work can work effectively on condition that those issues or sources which form the counterchecking instrument for understanding the apocrypha are adequately explained. Thus, for instance, comprehension of apocryphal astrology derives from a knowledge of Han astrology; understanding of *chenwei* calendrical layer presupposes familiarity with Han *lipu* techniques. Yet, the strategies of Early Han astrologers or Early Han calendrical experts are, *per se*, rather slippery fields of research. The *Monograph on Calendar* in the *Hanshu*, for instance, is a virtually unknown document so that the interpreter of the apocrypha is on his own when dealing with the relationship between *Yijing* time-scheduling strategies and calendrical techniques. This point should not be judged (only) negatively because, while certainly being an obstacle for the reader of the *chenwei*, it is also one of the most interesting facets of these texts. Several aspects of
Han culture, in fact, only come to light when we look at early imperial China from the perspective of the apocrypha. The calendrical and perhaps mantic implications of the *wu de* framework as well as the role of time-scheduling strategies under the Han can be detected thanks to the apocrypha. Moreover, the reader of these texts can realize the importance of the theme “time” under the Early Han. We have here addressed the calendrical debates of 104 and those of 78 BC; we have mentioned the *Santong li* and Wang Mang’s calendar of 36,000 years. Finally, one should also consider that the interpreter of the *chenwei* comes upon important cultural issues. The merging between *Yijing* and calendrical practice, for instance, cannot be dismissed as a “superstitious” contamination of the technical world or even as a marginal aspect in the history of Chinese *lipu* practice. The Tang monk Yi Xing, one of the most important astronomers in pre-modern China so to speak, also worked with *Yijing* cycles.

The most significant reward of the interpreter of the apocrypha is that one learns to distinguish. Han China is a very dangerous field of research since the intercultural debate, between *ru* and astrologers, between *wu xing* mantic practitioners and calendrical experts gradually generated a rather homogenous culture. This tendency probably peaked in the Later Han centuries when the expansion of the education in the classics finally brought even the “masters of recipes” to come close to the exegetical world. Thus, if the interpreter underestimates the need to draw demarcation lines, he could easily reduce Han culture to correlative thinking and cosmology. A reader of the apocrypha certainly learns to understand that there was a correlative thinking of astrologers, a correlative thinking of the *ru*, and a correlative thinking of physicians. Under the Han, these communities competed for cultural relevance and social visibility. They might have used similar strategies. They however belonged to different cultural groups, they were trained in different disciplines, they had different targets, and, certainly, they must have opposed each other. In this work, we have come upon *ru/petty* officials, astrologers, a perhaps proto-Taoist and, unfortunately, only the shadow of *wu xing* mantic practitioners. We have even met subgroups of the *ru* like the mediocre *ru* of the *tuchen* of the first decades AD. This is perhaps the advantage of the reader of the *chenwei*: to glimpse into Han intellectual ferment and variety. In this mindset, the *chenwei* can work as a tool for intuiting those marginal cultural tendencies which must have played a role during the Han centuries. They certainly help to draw demarcation lines among the disciplines, to dissect cultural communities like the *ru* in subgroups, to finally look behind the homogeneous, centralized, and crystallised culture portrayed in the *Hanshu*. 
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Bochum, 15.10.2007

Licia Di Giacinto