

WITCHCRAFT AND THE RISE OF THE  
FIRST CONFUCIAN EMPIRE



LIANG CAI

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A VOLUME IN THE  
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AND CULTURE

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Roger T. Ames, *editor*



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*Cover photo:* Bronze leaping feline, China,  
fourth–third century BC.

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To Qiang Zhang 張強, for his  
love and support and to  
Julie Yueqi Zhang 張悅祺,  
my endless source of joy and  
happiness

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# Introduction

In August 91 BCE an inauspicious air shrouded Chang'an 長安, the capital of the Western Han. At the emperor's demand, a group of foreign shamans, probably from central Asia, had excavated imperial parks, palaces, and the grounds of high officials' residences, looking for small dolls used to perform black magic. Soldiers stood sentry at the sites where malign influences had been sensed, arresting

those accused of summoning evil spirits or offering nocturnal prayers. The city gates had been barred to prevent the malefactors from escaping, and in the palace dungeons screaming and pleading mingled with the smell of flesh scorched by red-hot irons. Jiang Chong 江充, a rising star in the court who struck Emperor Wu 漢武帝 (141–87 BCE) as one who might live forever, had convinced the aged ruler that his long illness was the work of witches. Selected to head a broad investigation, Jiang had sown an atmosphere of panic and distrust. Accusations flew and, according to *The History of Western Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), tens of thousands were put to death.



The bloodbath reached its climax when Jiang named the crown prince, Liu Ju 劉據, as a conspirator: wooden carvings of his intended victims had been found in the prince's palace. Unable to mount a convincing defense, the crown prince murdered Jiang and his assistant, then placed himself at the head of the palace guard. The emperor, who had strayed from the capital during these events, immediately returned to Chang'an, ordering his most loyal troops to suppress what had become a full-blown rebellion. In the battle that ensued, the heir apparent, his subordinates, and their families were all massacred. Four years after this upheaval Emperor Wu died, and on

his deathbed he named his youngest son to succeed him. In 87 BCE the seven-year-old boy ascended to the throne, and the reign of Emperor Zhao 昭帝 began.

This horrific episode of bloodshed has long been presented as a battle for the throne. This book contends, however, that the witch-hunt scandal was not simply an intrigue involving the imperial family but a turning point that permitted China to become a Confucian empire.

Textbooks and many specialist works alike attribute the victory of Confucianism to Emperor Wu.<sup>1</sup> In a radical statement, one group of scholars moves that event even further

back in time, suggesting that the Five Classics had already become, before the Chinese empire was created, the standard preparation for most offices above the rank of clerk; this meant that all Han officials were designated as *ru* 儒 (Confucians) by their contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> But the truth is quite different. This book provides a new reading of this transformation. It demonstrates that Sima Qian, the founding father of Chinese historiography and an eyewitness to Emperor Wu's reign, provided evidence proving that Confucian officials amounted to a powerless minority until well after the death of Emperor Wu. Only in the aftermath of

the notorious witchcraft scandal (91–87 BCE) did Confucians evolve into a dominant force, one that set the tenor of political discourse for centuries to come. To appreciate this hidden narrative, one must turn to numbers.

## NUMBERS AS NARRATIVE AND AS METHOD

Students of early imperial China are fascinated by the dramatic tales about warriors, princes, and high officials that appear in *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji* 史記), written by Sima Qian 司馬遷 around 100 BCE, and *The History of Western Han*, which Ban Gu 班固 wrote around 90 CE. But just as the two historians painstakingly crafted

their stories about individuals, so too did they slavishly collect, organize, and present numerical data about early Chinese society. In both *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han* we find numerous charts preserving the names and the social origins of high officials and nobles.<sup>3</sup> By synthesizing these data with the narrative portions of the histories, we can extrapolate fundamental characteristics of Han officials.

Compared with an individual story, numerical data provide us a wider view of the political world. For instance, Gongsun Hong's 公孫弘 rise from humble circumstances to the chancellorship is often cited as proof

that Emperor Wu's recommendation system institutionalized Confucians' avenue toward officialdom. But the numerical data show that of the seventy-seven eminent officials recorded for this period, only six—or 7.8 percent—were regarded as Confucians, *ru* in Chinese, by their contemporaries, and only Gongsun Hong rose to power through the recommendation system.<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of the Five Classics—the defining expertise of Confucians—was, therefore, certainly not a requirement for holding office nor had it, as some modern scholars hold, been integrated into elite education.

The numerical data drawn from

charts and individual stories also help to identify the turning point in early imperial China. Without a statistical investigation, the witch-hunt scandal of 91 BCE looks like nothing but a succession struggle, and we cannot make out the sudden rise of Confucian officials during the transition from Emperor Wu to Emperor Zhao.

If the hidden numerical data permit us to reconstruct the emergence of a Confucian empire, we have to ask why the dominant narrative attributes the fundamental change to Emperor Wu, whose reign did not usher in a Confucian revolution.

## POLYPHONIC VOICES AND RETROSPECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

In a chapter entitled “The Collective Biographies of *Ru* (rulin liezhuan 儒林列傳),” Sima Qian recorded a memorial in which Gongsun Hong suggested selecting young men of exceptional talent to study at the Imperial Academy; those who excelled in the study of the Five Classics would be assigned to entry-level bureaucratic positions. After the proposal was approved, said Sima Qian, “among the Three Dukes, the Nine Ministers, the high officials, and the clerks, one found many refined people well-versed in literary matters” 則公卿大夫士 吏斌斌多文學之士矣.

This appears to mean that contemporary Confucians had a



glowing future, and the statement is frequently cited to show that a flood of Confucians with the imprimatur of the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy served in a variety of posts during Emperor Wu's reign.<sup>5</sup>

However, when we scrutinize the biographies of the hundreds of officials from this period who left their names to posterity, we find only two who studied at the Imperial Academy; the vast majority of eminent officials inherited their posts. It would appear that the author of "The Collective Biographies of *Ru*" crafted his account to fit a political agenda: he invented an ideal world where Confucians could become rich and famous simply

through intimate knowledge of the Five Classics.

This literary project in turn inspired those Confucians who clawed their way to power after the events of 91–87 BCE. To legitimate their success, they read it back into history, retrospectively constructing a flourishing Confucian community under Emperor Wu. This trend culminated in Ban Gu's work and left its imprint on modern scholarship.

Unwinding the individual strands from our polyphonic narratives and turning for assistance to archeologically excavated texts, the present study illustrates how disadvantaged Confucians tortuously

navigated their official careers and how a cohesive and competitive Confucian community was imagined, invented, and finally transformed into leaders of the bureaucracy.

## WHO WERE THE CONFUCIANS?

In the 1970s and 1980s scholars like Tu Weiming, Wm. Theodore De Bary, and Roger Ames declared Confucianism the essential ingredient of Chinese culture. Soon enough a backlash set in, and some even contended that there was no such group as “Confucians,” no school of thought that could be called “Confucianism.” The name “Confucius” was a painfully Latinate translation of *Kong fuzi* 孔夫子,

literally, “Master Kong,” and constructions such as “Confucian” and “Confucianism” are, semantically speaking, specifically Western and therefore totally alien to Chinese culture; surely it would be more appropriate to use the word adopted by Chinese writers to refer to the followers of the sage, *ru*.<sup>6</sup>

But this is a word full of ambiguity. While thinkers in the Warring States period often called the followers of Confucius *ru*, the word’s origins remain an enigma that has inspired a series of fanciful etymologies. Hu Shi 胡适 identified *ru* tradition with the culture of the Shang dynasty, and he cast Confucius as the link to this long-

gone dynasty, a heroic figure who transformed *ru* from a subservient and parochial tradition to an energetic and universal one.<sup>7</sup> Recently, Robert Eno has traced the lineage of Confucius to a small state whose culture was outside the mainstream of Xia–Shang–Zhou tradition. In this argument, the sage invented *ru* learning as a response to the hegemonic culture.<sup>8</sup> While these arguments are highly suggestive, they remain conjectures.

Scholars cannot agree upon a clear-cut definition of the relationship between the *ru* and Confucius in the pre-Qin period, and this ambiguity carried over to the Han. Those who called themselves *ru* in the latter

period were a motley group with varying intellectual orientations; some had no interest in Confucius at all.<sup>9</sup>

We must ask ourselves, given these recent insights, why Sima Qian devoted his energies to “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” designating some officials as *ru* and distinguishing them from their colleagues. Why did he make this demarcation within the upper class, and what was its significance?

Instead of the objective traits for which doctrinaire Marxists look when describing a class, Pierre Bourdieu contends that class formation is a subjective process. This does not mean that the criteria used to demarcate a group are imaginary, but that certain

connections between people are singled out and celebrated as the essential traits that distinguish one class at the expense of another. Making distinctions and applying taxonomies to members of a society is a way of exercising power and constructing reality, and it involves the workings of special interests and prejudices.<sup>10</sup> What was said about *ru* during the Han dynasty did not necessarily reflect the actual situation, but it did shape the perceptions of those who followed.<sup>11</sup> Sima Qian explicitly identified *ru* as experts in the Five Classics and traced their history back to Confucius; this, he said, suited them for high office.<sup>12</sup> And Ban Gu followed suit in *The History of*

*Western Han*. Their public naming constituted a performative discourse, declaring education in this archaic Zhou cultural heritage an essential prerequisite to serving the emperor. This vision of Han society not only transformed heterogeneous *ru* into Confucians, it invited the audience to perceive and evaluate society as they presented it.

As part of the ongoing study of who the Confucians were and how they came into being, this work examines why Sima Qian and Ban Gu presented the Han political and intellectual world as they did and how their presentations recast the social reality of the Han.

## SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS



I have organized the chapters that follow to trace the shifts in the status of Confucians over the course of the Western Han. [Chapter 1](#) describes the social origins, intellectual orientations, and career paths of high-level officials under the fifty-four-year rule of Emperor Wu. I point out that Sima Qian labeled only six men out of the seventy-seven officials who rose to prominence as Confucians. During that half century, familiarity with the Confucian Five Classics had little impact on one's career. Socially and politically weak, office-seeking Confucians were sidelined by hereditary nobles and military generals and overshadowed by specialists in law

and economics.

Why, I ask, have modern scholars habitually ignored the career paths of the Han officials who controlled the state apparatus while obsessively circling around a few exceptions to the rule? Answer: they have fastened on two chapters of *The Grand Scribe's Records*: “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” (*Xiaowu benji* 孝武本紀) and “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” The former is a forgery interpolated by later scholars; the latter is an imaginative refashioning of history. When modern scholars reproduce these narratives, they misrepresent the historical situation and obscure the subtle and profound

message Sima Qian conveyed in his writing.

Chapter 2 examines the political agenda underlying “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” If Confucians amounted to a powerless minority during the reign of Emperor Wu, why did Sima Qian compose this very chapter, an essay that established a distinctive genre, indispensable to later dynastic histories? As I demonstrate, the entirety of *The Grand Scribe’s Records* is in dialogue with “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” To appreciate this dialogue, we must begin by seeing that “*ru*,” whom modern scholars conventionally identify as “Confucians,” were not necessarily

followers of Confucius; though they had a shared educational background and a common fate, they did not form an interest group, nor did they have a consistent political stance. They never linked arms, choosing instead to battle one another for political advantage.

But in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” Sima Qian coined a new identity of “learned officials” for those *ru*, fashioning a teacher–disciple network that included them all, and tracing their history back to Confucius, whom Han scholars called a sage and “uncrowned king.” He identified the expertise of *ru* officials—namely, a close acquaintance with the Five Classics—as knowledge of Confucius’s teachings,

which conveyed the unmatched wisdom of administration: the ultimate Way of the King. Such ideas transformed *ru* into a homogeneous community—followers of Confucius—and cast them as the most legitimate candidates for official positions.

Furthermore, Sima Qian tailored reality by constructing a utopia where expertise in the Five Classics ensured employment and swift promotion. Such a place implied a sharp criticism of another world that appears in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, a place where men rose to power through wealth, nepotism, and factional struggles. Singling out expertise in the Five Classics as the only valid criterion for

selecting and promoting officials, Sima Qian also launched a war against practical knowledge, including the expertise in law and economics prized by the court. Long acknowledged as the founding father of Chinese historiography, Sima Qian employed historical narrative as a performative force to redefine the principle of hierarchy and thereby rectify contemporaneous politics.

Chapter 3 shows that not only were Confucians a powerless minority in the political realm, but that during the first 120 years of the Western Han dynasty the learning community of the Five Classics also suffered from fragmentation. Scholars have long

employed genealogies to trace the transmission of the Five Classics and map classical studies in the Han dynasty. But these seemingly well-documented lineages break down under close scrutiny: a mess of broken strands fails to connect obscure founders to communities that abruptly appear centuries after the death of Confucius. The rise of schools centered on individual classics—the Lu school of the *Book of Songs*, the Jing Fang school of the *Book of Changes*, the Ouyang school of the *Book of Documents*—generally regarded as the paradigmatic intellectual phenomenon of the Han era, took place between 87 and 48 BCE. These groups went on to

produce large numbers of high officials. One can only imagine that the lush growth of such interpretive schools inspired those who prized tradition to project a series of master-disciple lines back to the beginning of the Western Han, a retrospective construction that culminated in Ban Gu's work and has never been questioned.

Chapters 4 and 5 show that the revolutionary transformation of the intellectual world corresponded to the birth of a new elite class. In the last years of Emperor Wu's rule, rumors of black magic and treason upset the imperial succession and wiped out the established families who had



dominated the court since the beginning of the Western Han dynasty. The resulting power vacuum was filled by men from obscure backgrounds, including a group of officials identified with a commitment to the Confucian classics. Armed with a cosmological theory that could justify Huo Guang's dictatorship and Emperor Xuan's legitimacy, Confucians translated their expertise into cultural prestige and political capital. This allowed them not only to rival those who specialized in the practical knowledge of law and economy, but to compete with those with hereditary political power and social wealth.

As my conclusion underscores, the

rise of the Confucians resulted not just from the creation of a political discourse but from a remarkable—if belated—skill in networking. After a long period of infighting, Confucians eventually came together to help one another. They evolved into the new elite, dominating both political and intellectual worlds for centuries to come.

# Minority as the Protagonists

Revisiting *Ru* 儒 (Confucians)  
and Their Colleagues under  
Emperor Wu (141–87 BCE)  
of the Han<sup>1</sup>

Students of Chinese history probably are all familiar with a well-known narrative, easily summarized as “the

victory of *ru*” in the Han. In this narrative, the Warring States period, when the Hundred Schools flourished, has usually been depicted as the distant background, while the short-lived Qin 秦 dynasty (221–207 BCE), which is said to have cruelly oppressed scholars and their teachings, has played the overture. The early Han court, commonly described as dominated by Huang-Lao 黃老 thought, has become a proscenium. Through dramatizing the struggles between followers of Huang-Lao thought, represented by Empress Dowager Dou 竇太后, and supporters of *ru* learning, represented by Emperor Wu, this thesis portrayed the elevation of *ru* as a theater piece.

Over the past decades the occasional voice has openly challenged the idea that Han *ru* routed their court rivals.<sup>2</sup> For example, some scholars contend that Emperor Wu failed to promote pure *ru* learning—he too embraced Huang-Lao doctrines and Legalist teachings.<sup>3</sup> Some recognized that few of Emperor Wu's political policies—economic, military, even religious—bore the stamp of Confucianism.<sup>4</sup> Recently, Michael Nylan and Nicolas Zufferey have demonstrated that in the Han there was no distinctive group called Confucians with a distinguished ideology. Instead, those who called themselves *ru* in Han times were a heterogeneous group with

varying intellectual orientations; some were not even followers of Confucius.<sup>5</sup>

But if we cannot define *ru* according to a shared doctrine or moral code, why did Sima Qian classify some of his contemporaries into one group, call them *ru*, and define them as the followers of Confucius, and thereby set them apart from the rest of the officials of the day? What was the implication of such a category in social terms?

In order to answer these questions, I will look beyond the contentions between different intellectual discourses, beyond the materials strictly relevant to *ru*. This chapter will investigate the social origins and intellectual orientations of eminent

officials during Emperor Wu's reign to assess the positions those called *ru* occupied in the power hierarchy. It will demonstrate that *ru*, the protagonists in the dominant narrative, were in fact a small minority on the political stage during Emperor Wu's rule. Based on these observations, I will proceed to ask why the conventional wisdom has habitually devoted full attention to these few *ru*, who occupied a tiny fraction of the high-level posts, and therefore mistakenly claimed the triumph of *ru*. I will further demonstrate that traditional perception and representation of Emperor Wu's reign are profoundly shaped by two chapters of the *Grand Scribe's Records*

(*Shi ji* 史記): namely, the displaced chapter “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” (*Xiaowu benji* 孝武本紀) and “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” (*Ru lin lie zhuan* 儒林列傳).<sup>6</sup>

### RU, A MINORITY GROUP

Several famous stories are often cited by scholars dealing with the political and intellectual history of Western Han. For example, Dowager Empress Dou, a faithful follower of Huang-Lao thought, tried to punish Yuan Gu 轅固, a *ru*, because she disliked the *ru* learning. Emperor Wu employed Zhao Wan 趙綰 and Wang Zang 王臧, two *ru*, to implement certain ritual practice, and promoted Gongsun Hong 公孫弘,



an expert on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋) (hereafter, *Annals*) from humble circumstances to prominence. Rather than looking only at the activities of these *ru* officials, I would like to ask who were the colleagues of Gongsun Hong, Zhao Wan, and Wang Zang; what features characterized the high officials who directed the state apparatus; what factors contributed to their success in the officialdom.

In “A Chronological Table of Famous High Civil and Military Officials since the Founding of the Han” (*Han xing yilai jiangxiang mingchen nianbiao* 漢興以來將相名臣年表) of *The Grand Scribe's Records*,

appear the names, terms of appointment, and dates of death or dismissal of the Chancellors (*Chengxiang* 丞相), Commanders-in-chief (*Taiwei* 太尉; later the title was changed to *Dasima* 大司馬), and Grandee Secretaries (*Yushi dafu* 御史大夫), known collectively as the Three Dukes (*Sangong* 三公). The latter were employed between the establishment of the Han dynasty (206 BCE) and the middle of the reign of Emperor Yuan 元帝 (20 BCE).<sup>7</sup> This information is supplemented by the chapter “A Table of the Hundred Officials and Dukes” (*Baiguan gongqing biao* 百官公卿表) of *The History of Western Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), which provides, in addition

to information regarding the Three Dukes, the names and dates of the appointments and deaths or dismissals of the Nine Ministers of the State (*Jiuqing* 九卿), noted generals, and senior officials of the metropolitan area.<sup>8</sup>

With power second only to the emperor's, the Three Dukes occupied the apex of the Han bureaucracy. The Nine Ministers constituted the second highest stratum.<sup>9</sup> The senior officials of the metropolitan area, as the candidates for the positions of the Nine Ministers, enjoyed status equal to or slightly lower than the Nine Ministers.<sup>10</sup> In addition to their administrative titles, officials in the

Han court were also ranked in terms of bushels of grain, ranging from 10, 000 bushels to 100 bushels. It is said that the Three Dukes were ranked ten thousand bushels, while the Nine Ministers and senior officials of the metropolitan area fully two thousand bushels. These three groups comprised the most eminent officials of the imperial bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup>

During the fifty-four years of Emperor Wu's rule, 141 people reached these eminent positions. Collecting information scattered throughout *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han*, it is possible to identify seventy-seven people's social origins, career

patterns, intellectual orientations, and social networks; these are illustrated in [table 1.1](#) (see also [chart 1.1](#)).<sup>12</sup> An analysis of the above information provides us a clear picture of who was operating the state apparatus on a daily basis.<sup>13</sup>

## BACKGROUNDS OF EMINENT OFFICIALS

Under Emperor Wu there were twelve chancellors. Among them, three belonged to empresses' families or the imperial family proper; six were descendants of high officials.<sup>14</sup> Of the latter six, four were either the sons or grandsons of men who helped establish the Han and four were ennobled because of their military

accomplishments. The remaining three men were Li Cai 李蔡, Tian Qianqiu 田千秋, and a famous paragon of *ru*, Gongsun Hong. Li Cai came from a military family: one of his ancestors had served as a general in the Qin state, and one of his cousins was the famous general Li Guang 李廣. Tian Qianqiu had been a Gentleman-attendant serving at Emperor Gao's shrine (*Gaomiao qinlang* 高廟寢郎)—his social origin is not clear.

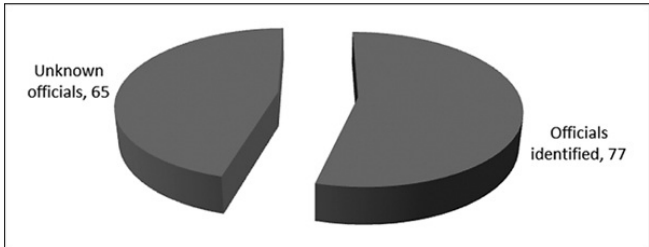


Chart 1.1 Unknown and Identifiable High Officials under Emperor Wu

Table 1.1. High Officials under Emperor Wu (141–87 BCE) 武帝 (公元前 141–87) 一朝三公九卿統計

Officials that can be identified: N. 77								
From powerful families: N. 45				From obscure /unknown backgrounds: N. 32				
Chancellors: 12	From imperial / consort family	From official families	From distinguished local families	From clerkship	From recommendation system / Imperial Academy	From Gentleman-attendants and other avenues	Through military achievements	Unknown Officials: N. 65
	賈渠 (140), 田始 (135), 劉屈氂 (91)	許昌 (139), 薛彞 (131), 莊青翟 (118), 趙周 (115), 石慶 (112), 公孫賀 (103)	李蔡 (121)		公孫弘 (124)	田千秋 (89)		
	N. 3	N. 6	N. 1		N. 1	N.1		
Grand Secretaries, Commanders-in-Chief, Nine Ministers, and the senior officials of the Metropolitan area: 65	劉受 (119), 衛青 (119), 霍去病 (119), 王信 (116), 李廣利 (104)	張臧 (131), 石建 (139), 灌夫 (140), 汲黯 (135), 孔臧 (127), 張敖居 (124), 周平 (123), 司馬安 (122), 李信成 (119), 李敢 (118), 樂賁 (117), 任越人 (115), 周仲居 (114), 張廣國 (113), 周建德 (112), 杜桓 (112), 蕭壽成 (107), 韓延年 (106), 張昌 (104), 公孫敬聲 (103), 石德 (102), 唯淦光 (94), 靳石 (93), 韓說 (91), 鄒終根 (89)	鄭當時 (137), 李廣 (134), 卜式 (111), 孔僅 (115), 桑弘羊 (87)	張陽 (120), [兒寬], 杜周 (98), 趙禹 (129), 顏異 (119), 王舒溫 (119), 楊僕 (119), 義縱 (119), 尹齊 (114), 滅[成]宣 (110), 王新 (89), 朱買臣 (122), 李壽 (90), 魏不害 (87)	兒寬 (110)	韓安國 (135), 暴勝之 (94), 商丘成 (91), 王臧 (140), 甯成 (140), 江充 (94), 金日磾 (87), 上官桀 (87), 田廣明 (89), 王恢 (136), 趙綰 (139), 霍光 (89), [張騫 (120)]	蘇健 (127), 徐自為 (117), 張騫 (120), 趙弟 (99), [李廣 (134)]	
	N.5	N.25	N.5	N.13	N.1	N.12	N.4	

Notes: 1. Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (122), refer to the year the man achieved a position among Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

2. Names in square brackets, e.g., [李廣 (134)], refer to officials counted in other categories.

Compared with the chancellors whose families had occupied a place near the top of the power pyramid for decades, Li Cai's and Tian Qianqiu's backgrounds were modest. But compared with Gongsun Hong, they stood high. According to Sima Qian, Gongsun Hong had been dismissed



from a clerkship he had held in a prison at Xue (*Xue yuli* 薛獄吏); so poor was he in his youth that he had herded pigs.

By and large, family background dictated one's future in Han China, and this was especially true of high officials. We know little about how Chancellor Liu Qumao 劉屈氂 climbed to the top of the imperial bureaucracy; the record tells us only that he was the son of Liu Sheng 劉勝, a half brother of Emperor Wu. Chancellor Tian Qianqiu's path to glory must have struck his colleagues as eccentric. Pleased by a one-sentence memorial from a Gentleman-attendant at Emperor Gao's shrine, the seventy-year-old emperor promoted Tian

Qianqiu from his lowly post to the office of Grand Herald (*Dahong lu* 大鴻臚)—thereby making him one of the Nine Ministers. A few months later Wu appointed Tian Chancellor. Ban Gu reported that on hearing this story, the leader of Xiongnu 匈奴, entitled Chanyu 單于, derided the Han court for not employing a worthy fellow.<sup>15</sup>

Seven of the men who served as Chancellor had held illustrious positions and exerted considerable influence in court long before Emperor Wu succeeded the throne. Xu Chang 許昌, Xue Ze 薛澤, and Zhuang Qingdi 莊青翟 had all inherited their grandfathers' noble status during the reign of Emperor Wen 文帝 in the

early 160s BCE. Dou Ying 竇嬰, Tian Fen 田蚡, Li Cai, and Shi Qing had ascended to official positions ranked two thousand bushels, the second-highest rank, during the reign of Emperor Jing 景帝. Because his father had served the throne with distinction, Zhao Zhou 趙周 had been ennobled in 148 BCE. Gongsun He 公孫賀, whose father was once ennobled as marquis of Pingqu 平曲 because of military achievement, served as a retainer of Emperor Wu when the emperor was still a crown prince and was appointed Grand Coachman, one of the Nine Ministers, in 135 BCE.

Not expected to have outstanding performance, innocent descendants of

meritorious officials of previous courts, especially of the founding father, naturally served as candidates for Chancellor. This practice had been followed by Emperor Wu, as Sima Qian said,

... in the reign of our present emperor [Emperor Wu], Xu Chang, marquis of Bozhi; Xue Zhe, marquis of Pingji; Zhuang Qingdi, marquis of Wuqiang, Zhao Zhou, marquis of Gaoling and others have been Chancellor. All were men who succeeded to their noble titles by birth, being of impeccable demeanor and sterling integrity,

serving as the reserve men for chancellor position. That was all. None of them proved capable of making any brilliant contributions to the government or doing anything to distinguish his name in the eyes of his contemporaries.

及今上時，柏至侯許昌、平棘侯薛澤、武彊侯莊青翟、高陵侯趙周等為丞相。皆以列侯繼嗣，姍姍廉謹，為丞相備員而已，無所能發明功名有著於當世者。<sup>16</sup>

Presenting a sharp contrast to his

fellow chancellors, who enjoyed privileged official positions for decades, Gongsun Hong, the only *ru* Chancellor, did not step onto the political stage until 140 BCE. At that time he was already sixty years old and had served only as an Erudite (*Boshi* 博士), a position that did not assume any administrative duties and from which he soon was dismissed. Thanks to his longevity, eleven years later, in 130 BCE, at the age of seventy, Gongsun Hong was appointed an Erudite again. Within two years, he had been promoted to the position of Metropolitan Superintendent of the Left, ranked two-thousand bushels. He served in 126 BCE as Grandee

Secretary and as Chancellor from 124 BCE until his death in 121 BCE. Rising from the office of Erudite, a low position in central court, to Chancellor, at the very crown of the bureaucracy, took him only seven years. Gongsun Hong's meteoric rise differed sharply from the career pattern of other chancellors.

Furthermore, among the twelve Chancellors appointed by Emperor Wu over fifty-four years, only Gongsun Hong was identified by his contemporaries as a *ru*. His membership in *ru* community was defined by his expertise in the *Annals*. Among the twelve Chancellors, only Gongsun Hong entered officialdom

through the recommendation system. <sup>17</sup>

Did Gongsun Hong's exceptional experience indicate that a new pattern of advancement to high levels of officialdom had been established, a revolutionary reform resulting from Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* and *ru* learning? The answer is complex. Gongsun Hong was Emperor Wu's fifth chancellor, appointed in the seventeenth year of his reign. Over the ensuing thirty-five years, seven chancellors followed him, none of whom were identified as *ru*, and none of whom entered officialdom through the recommendation system. With the exception of Tian Qianqiu, the social origins and patterns of advancement of



the chancellors who followed Gongsun Hong resembled those of the chancellors before him: all had occupied eminent positions for decades, and all came from powerful families that had enjoyed privileged social status for generations.

If Gongsun Hong was merely an atypical case, whose meteoric rise was more determined by the emperor's will than by the established career patterns in his day, how has his experience long been celebrated as the symbolic success of *ru* in political realm?<sup>18</sup> Who was responsible for this misrepresentation?

Before we try to answer the above questions, let us take a look at the

social origins, intellectual orientations, and career patterns of the Grandee Secretaries, the Commanders-in-Chief, the Nine Ministers, and the senior officials of the metropolitan area.

According to the *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han*, during the period in question 130 people achieved those positions. By combing available sources, one may identify sixty-five persons out of these 130 (see [table 1.1](#)). Though one would like to be able to account for every individual, the following examination faithfully reconstructs the picture of the upper level of officialdom of the time presented by *The Grand Scribe's*

## *Records and The History of Western Han.*

Social origins and career patterns clearly distinguish the officials into three groups: descendants of powerful official families, descendants of distinguished local families, and people from obscure and unknown background.

Among these sixty-five eminent officials, five came from the imperial family or from consorts' families and twenty-five were descendants of high officials who served under previous emperors.<sup>19</sup> Of these twenty-five, fifteen were the direct descendants of meritorious ministers who helped Liu Bang found the Han dynasty.<sup>20</sup> Ties of

kinship among Emperor Wu's eminent officials constituted a complicated network. For example, Shi De 石德 was appointed as one of the Nine Ministers immediately after his father, who was Chancellor, died in office; Gongsun Jingsheng 公孫敬聲 was appointed as one of the Nine Ministers during his father's tenure as Chancellor.<sup>21</sup> Sima An 司馬安 and Ji An 汲黯, who were cousins, both served at positions ranked two thousand bushels or above throughout their lives. Zhang Chang 張昌 was the son of Zhang Guangguo 張廣國; the father was appointed Grand Master of Ceremonies in 113 BCE and the son took the same post in 104 BCE. Li Gan

李敢 was the son of Li Guang 李廣; the son served as Gentleman-of-the-Palace from 118 BCE on and the father held a number of positions ranked 2000 bushels or above for forty years. Li Guang was also the cousin of Li Cai, who served as Chancellor from 121 to 118 BCE.

In short, aside from the chancellors, among sixty-five eminent officials during Emperor Wu's fifty-four-year rule, thirty came from powerful official families. This suggests that powerful official families reproduced themselves in high office.

Local celebrated families without traceable official history also successfully positioned their

descendants in the upper bureaucracy: five of the sixty-five eminent officials had such backgrounds. Zheng Dangshi 鄭當時 and Li Guang came from local military families, while Bu Shi 卜式, Kong Jin 孔僅, and Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 were from merchant families. Li Guang climbed to the top of the power hierarchy primarily through his military achievements. Bu Shi obtained his first official post through generous donations to the government. Sang Hongyang began his official career as a Gentleman-attendant at court and Zheng Dangshi began as a member of the crown prince's court.<sup>22</sup> They obtained these positions either by virtue of their family privilege or by

donating money to the government.

Sima Qian launched furious attacks against the rampant recruitment of merchants and the selling of offices during Emperor Wu's reign. He noted that Kong Jin and Dongguo Xianyang 東郭咸陽 “employed people as clerks who enriched themselves by [dealing in] salt or iron. The channels to official positions have become increasingly heterogeneous: there is no [real] process of selection, and many merchants [get in]” 除故鹽鐵家富者為吏。吏道益雜，不選，而多賈人矣。<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Sima Qian contended that “the people who donate money are able to become Gentleman-attendants. This has led to a decline in [the standards

of] selection” 入財者得補郎，郎選衰矣。<sup>24</sup> Rich families with no record of government service penetrated the elite sphere of officialdom by securing their younger members positions as the Gentleman-attendants or by buying them low-ranking official positions.

Of sixty-five eminent officials, thirteen started their careers as lowly clerks at the bottom of the bureaucracy and eventually climbed to the apex of the power pyramid. None of them came from powerful families.<sup>25</sup> Rather, as Sima Qian and Ban Gu emphasized, several rose from very humble circumstances.<sup>26</sup> For example, Zhang Tang's father, a clerk in the Chang'an government (*Chang'an cheng* 長安丞),



is said to have beaten the young Zhang Tang because a rat stole a piece of meat while the boy was minding the house.<sup>27</sup> When Du Zhou was first employed as a clerk of the Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei shi* 廷尉史), he owned only one horse and it was lame at that.<sup>28</sup>

Three of these thirteen men were actually upstarts, promoted directly from clerkships to official positions ranked two thousand bushels or above by Emperor Wu. At a time when Zhu Maichen 朱買臣 was starving at Chang'an, he was suddenly appointed as Grand Minister of the Palace (*Zhong dafu* 中大夫) thanks to his knowledge of the *Annals* and *The Songs of Chu*

(*Chuci* 楚辭), which pleased Emperor Wu. So began his illustrious career.<sup>29</sup> Both Li Shou 李壽, a magistrate's clerk of the magistrate of Xin'an (*Xin'an lingshi* 新安令史) and Wei Buhai 魏不害, Defender of the Yu county (*Yu shouwei* 圉守衛), were ennobled and soon after employed as two of the Nine Ministers because of their fortuitous contributions to suppressing a coup d'etat and a rebellion, respectively.<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to the sudden rise of these three men, the other ten climbed the ladder of success step by step from the lowest level of the bureaucracy. Promoted primarily because of their administrative ability, all were

competent in handling criminal cases, in controlling local magnates and bandits, and in collecting taxes. Another attribute they shared was special ties with current dignitaries, which permitted them to weave complicated social networks that boosted their careers. For example, as a clerk at Chang'an, Zhang Tang was introduced to many eminent persons by Tian Sheng 田勝, the half brother of Emperor Wu's dowager mother, surnamed Wang. When Ning Cheng 寧成 served as Governor of the capital, Zhang Tang was his clerk and was made Defender of Maoling (*Maoling wei* 茂陵尉) thanks to Ning's recommendation. Wang Shuwen 王舒

溫, Yin Qi 尹齊, Du Zhou 杜周, and Ni Kuan 兒寬 all served under Zhang Tang at one time or another, and his recommendations helped them ascend from lowly offices to the posts of Three Dukes or Nine Ministers.

Besides those who rose from clerkship, we have another sixteen identifiable officials, none of whom seems to have any blood or marital relatives among the high-level officials (see [table 1.1](#)). But they probably did not come from humble circumstances either. Not a single one of them ever worked at the bottom of the bureaucracy like those with obscure family background did. Instead, several of them entered officialdom by serving

as Gentleman-attendants or as Grand Minister of the Palace (*Zhongdafu*) in the kingdom.<sup>31</sup> In addition, their first-mentioned administrative appointments were either Magistrate or Commandant (*Xiaowei* 校尉) in the military or Defender (*Duwei* 都尉) in a Commandery. Therefore, their career pattern resembled that of those who came from local prestigious families, like Li Guang and Zheng Dangshi.

#### PRINCIPLES OF HIERARCHY

I have analyzed some fundamental characteristics of Emperor Wu's seventy-seven high officials: forty-five, or about 58 percent, were from imperial/consort families or from

families that had occupied prominent positions in the bureaucracy for generations, or came from local powerful families; and thirteen of them, or 17 percent, came from obscure backgrounds and started out as clerks (see [table 1.1](#) and [charts 1.2 & 1.3](#)). These groups of officials exhibited distinguished career patterns. Through assessing these patterns, I will investigate what kind of competence was evaluated in the political arena and will show how the quantitative analysis of the high-level officials revise our understanding of the Han recruitment system and its impact on elite learning.

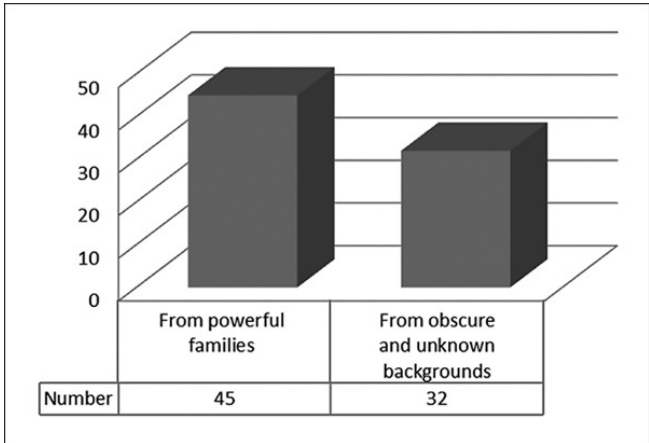


Chart 1.2. Backgrounds of High Officials under Emperor Wu

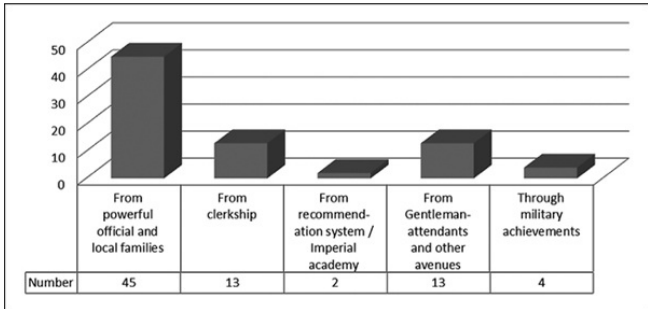


Chart 1.3. Career Patterns of High Officials under Emperor Wu

As the most dominant force of the bureaucracy, descendants of powerful official families were distinguished by their prestigious career paths. The luckiest ones directly inherited the noble status from their fathers, and thereby became the candidates for the high official positions. Less lucky ones usually served as Gentleman-attendants



in the court or in the crown prince's palace, an entry-level position without much power, but that provided them with great opportunities to establish a social network with the most influential officials and even to develop personal relations with the emperor or the crown princes.<sup>32</sup>

High officials had the right to appoint their sons and, sometimes, their brothers and nephews, as Gentleman-attendants, thereby transforming their family members into candidates for administrative positions. This institutionalized practice is well known as “hereditary privilege” (*yinren* 陰任). Contrary to the conventional view that Emperor

Wu regularized the recommendation system as the major recruitment means, it was during his reign that the number of people who entered the bureaucracy via the hereditary privilege noticeably increased. As Gao Min 高敏 has pointed out, at this moment, officials with noble titles and fiefs decreased, which means that their descendants could no longer enjoy the political and social prestige through inheriting the noble status. Therefore, they fully explored the policy of “hereditary privilege,” a practice that turned into the most important avenue for descendants of powerful families to penetrate the officialdom.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, as Gentleman-attendants

with prestigious backgrounds, those officials' descendants had a bright future. Our sources show that none of the descendants from high official families ever worked at the county level, let alone served as clerks at the bottom of the bureaucracy. Instead, their first formal positions were usually ranked in the middle level of the bureaucracy. Sima Qian recorded that Ji An, whose family members had been eminent officials for seven generations, was appointed magistrate of Yingyang (*Yingyang ling* 滎陽令); feeling ashamed, he resigned and returned to his family estate. Hearing this, Emperor Wu asked Ji An back to court and appointed him Grand Master

of the Palace (*Zhong dafu* 中大夫), ranked two thousand bushels.<sup>34</sup>

The phenomenon that the descendants of high official families were born to high position is not only illustrated by the numerical data but was commented on by Sima Qian:

When [Shi] Qing was Chancellor, his sons and grandsons served as officials and thirteen of them rose to positions ranked two thousand bushels.

慶方為丞相，諸子孫為吏更至二千石者十三人。<sup>35</sup>

When [Ji An] died, the emperor, in recognition of his service, promoted his brother Ji Ren to serve as one of the Nine Ministers. His son, Ji Yan, advanced to the position of Prime Minister of one of the marquises. Sima An, the son of Ji An's father's elder sister, had served in his youth as the prince's Forerunner along with Ji An. Sima An served as one of the nine ministers four times. When he died he was serving as the governor of Henan. Thanks to Sima An, ten of his brothers concurrently held posts

ranked two thousand bushels.

(汲黯) 卒後，上以黯故，官其弟汲仁至九卿，子汲偃至諸侯相。黯姑姊子司馬安亦少與黯為太子洗馬。安...官四至九卿，以河南太守卒。昆弟以安故，同時至二千石者十人。<sup>36</sup>

As distinct from the descendants of high officials who did not need to prove themselves before assuming important positions, the remaining officials climbed to the top of the bureaucracy by virtue of both the network they wove with the dignitaries

and by their achievements. But what kind of competence or what kind of knowledge was set as index of a bureaucrat's rank in the official hierarchy?

First, distinction in battle was closely correlated with promotion to prominent civil posts. Nineteen of the seventy-seven eminent civilian officials of Emperor Wu's time had participated in military campaigns, and at least seven of them were promoted to important positions primarily because of their success in the battlefield.<sup>37</sup> Their social origins varied: some came from powerful families and some from unknown backgrounds. Those who were the

relatives of favorite consorts were directly promoted as generals, despite not having much experience in the military. Sima Qian pointed out that a considerable number of civilian positions were filled by military veterans, saying, “[Huo Qubing’s] officers and soldiers were appointed as officials and presented with enormous rewards”軍吏卒為官，賞賜甚多.<sup>38</sup> *The History of Western Han* records that in 110 BCE,

among the military officers who served under General Li Guangli 李廣利, three were promoted to the positions of



Nine Ministers, more than one hundred became either the minister of a state, or a governor, or an official ranked at 2000 bushels, and more than 1,000 were promoted to lesser but still desirable positions ranked under 1000 bushels. Men who fought bravely were rewarded with official positions higher than they expected, while men who fought to atone for their crimes were all exempted from penal servitude

軍官吏為九卿者三人，諸侯相，郡守，二千石百餘人，千

石以下千餘人. 奮行者官過其望, 以適過行者皆黜其勞.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, as studies on both traditional sources and archeologically excavated manuscripts have demonstrated, accumulating services in the army was a significant avenue toward a career in bureaucracy.<sup>40</sup>

Second, a successful embassy to foreign countries helped one establish reputation and obtain important positions. Trips to the hostile Xiongnu and other countries were hard and dangerous. To fulfill the diplomatic duties and manage to safely return

required both fine negotiation skills and enormous courage. Zhang Qian 張騫 and Jiang Chong 江充, Gentleman-attendants without illustrious backgrounds, voluntarily chose to assume this responsibility and their exceptional experience won them important posts.<sup>41</sup>

Third, financial knowledge was valued by Emperor Wu. Dongguo Xianyang 東郭咸陽, Kong Jin 孔僅, and Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 all came from wealthy merchant families and were promoted to high positions especially for their expertise in economics. The famous policy of imperial monopoly of the production of salt and iron was designed by them,

which greatly increased government revenue. In order to solve the immense deficit caused by years of military campaigns and natural disasters, Emperor Wu issued new currency made of the skin of white deer and that of alloy of silver and tin. With an excessive growth of the money supply, the new currency caused inflation and thereby efficiently transferred the wealth of rich people to the government.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, commerce was identified as one of the stable sources of government revenue, and a heavy tax was imposed on merchants and craftsmen. Sang Hongyang also set up offices to control the prices in the market through transporting goods

nationwide, thereby preventing powerful merchants from making staggering profits.<sup>43</sup> Employing economists and incorporating commerce into government's fiscal strategies were of remarkable significance in the Han when the merchants were generally despised and pursuing profit was seen as not morally justified.<sup>44</sup> Sima Qian commented that "it is since this time [under Emperor Wu] that officials who promote profits emerge" 興利之臣自此始也。<sup>45</sup>

Fourth, administrative abilities, including handling criminal cases, controlling local magnates and bandits, and collecting taxes, were crucial credentials for one to ascend to top of

the bureaucracy. Among the thirty-two officials with obscure and unknown background, twelve ascended to highlevel posts primarily because of their administrative achievements.<sup>46</sup> Starting their careers as clerks or officials at the county level, these men were identified as *Daobi li* 刀筆吏 (brush-and-scraper clerk) by Sima Qian and were distinguished by their expertise in current laws and regulations.<sup>47</sup>

WHERE WERE THE *RU*, THE HUANG-LAO  
FOLLOWERS, AND THE LEGALISTS?

The career patterns of the seventy-seven identifiable prominent officials under Emperor Wu show that the main

principles that structured the hierarchy in the officialdom were high hereditary status, military achievement, fiscal knowledge, and administrative competence. But how about *ru* learning? How many of the seventy-seven high officials were identified by their contemporaries as *ru*, Huang-Lao followers, or Legalists? What kind of role did the expertise in Five Classics play in one's success in the officialdom?

Sima Qian placed most of his biographies of officials who started out as clerks in a chapter of *The Grand Scribe's Records* entitled "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials" (*Kuli liezhuan* 酷吏列傳).<sup>48</sup>

Because many of these men spent their time chasing bandits and other criminals, can we identify them as representatives of Legalism, a school of thought radically opposed to *ru* learning?<sup>49</sup> Some scholars have inferred the intellectual orientations of officials from their depositions and conduct, labeling them with one of the categories of thought—*ru* learning, Legalist, Huang-Lao—listed in *The Grand Scribe's Records* or *The History of Western Han*. For example, some scholars divide almost all of the officials active in early Western Han courts, even the generals, into either the Huang-Lao camp or the *ru* (Confucian) camp. They claim that one



should identify an official as a member of the Huang-Lao School if he performed certain actions such as opposing the military campaigns in the north.<sup>50</sup>

But this treatment of Han history is not justified. Scholars have questioned the validity of applying the rubrics of those schools of thought to early China. Terms such as Daoism and Legalism were created by Sima Tan (d. 110 BCE) and later reworked by Liu Xiang (79–8 BCE) retrospectively. Kidder Smith convincingly illustrates that Sima Tan coined “*Mingjia*” (schools of names), “*Fajia*” (legalism), etcetera, not because he attempted to objectively describe the intellectual history of the

pre-Han period but because he intended to present his political thought to the emperor.<sup>51</sup> Echoing this view, Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan contend that the concept *jia* 家 in Sima Tan's "Essential Tenets of Six Jia" (*liujia zhi yaozhi* 六家之要旨), does not refer to schools of thought but means expertise in certain fields.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, the political world is not simply an extension of the intellectual world, nor can struggles at court be uncritically interpreted as competition among different schools of thought. None of the officials in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials" were designated followers of Legalism by their contemporaries. The

biographies of officials known to have studied Legalism, such as Han Anguo 韓安國 and Zhang Ou 張歐, appear elsewhere. Sima Qian did not have in mind a chapter devoted to “The Collective Biographies of Legalist Officials” when he grouped together the biographies that appear in “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials.” Likewise, while Dou Ying and Tian Fen were famous for their advocacy of *ru* techniques (*rushu* 儒術), neither of them was said to be an expert in the *ru* classics, nor were they called *ru* by their contemporaries.

These examples imply that in both *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han* membership in

a certain school of thought was based not on a man's personality but on his intellectual investments. In fact, Sima Qian did not believe that a man's disposition and conduct necessarily reflected his intellectual orientation, let alone his familiarity with a specific school of thought. For example, Zhang Ou is said to have studied Legalism, yet Sima Qian praised him: "Since Ou became an official, he has never brought accusations because of words, always acting as a sincere senior official" 自歐為吏, 未嘗言案人, 專以誠長者處官. In Sima Qian's description, Zhang Ou behaved quite differently from the officials he described in "The Collective

Biographies of Harsh Officials,” who were adept at abusing the law.<sup>53</sup> By the same token, Gongsun Hong was depicted as an insidious and vengeful individual. His disreputable character did not affect his membership in the *ru* community, which was exclusively defined by his knowledge of the *Annals*.<sup>54</sup>

If the officials recorded in the “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials” cannot be labeled as alleged Legalists as the conventional wisdom believes, then let’s move our attention to *ru*. Our discovery will be an astonishing shock: *ru* officials, the most familiar protagonists in the political history of early Chinese

empire, were in fact a tiny minority in the bureaucracy.

Among the seventy-seven eminent officials discussed above, only four were identified by Sima Qian as *ru*—Gongsun Hong, Zhao Wan, Wang Zang, and Ni Kuan. All were experts in one or several of the Five Classics. We can add two more to the list: Zhu Maichen 朱買臣 is said to have studied the *Annals* and is described by Ban Gu as “a wide sash *ru*” (*jinshen zhiru* 縉紳之儒 literally means “a *ru* with a wide sash that holds a wooden-tablet notebook”).<sup>55</sup> And the literary productions of Kong Zang 孔臧 were assigned to the School of *ru* (*rujia* 儒家) in *The History of Western Han's*

“The Treatise on Literature and the Arts” (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志). Although Kong was not explicitly identified as a *ru* by Sima Qian, presumably their contemporaries thought of him as such.<sup>56</sup>

It turns out that only six of seventy-seven eminent officials, namely 7.8 percent, throughout the fifty-four-year rule of Emperor Wu were called *ru* by Sima Qian and Ban Gu (see [chart 1.4](#)). Clearly, *ru* were the odd men out in the upper stratum of the power pyramid. This discovery obliges us to ask whether Emperor Wu’s alleged promotion of *ru* learning has any basis in fact.

T h e *ru* were not the only

minorities. Two of the seventy-seven eminent officials—Ji An 汲黯 and Zheng Dangshi 鄭當時—were called followers of Huang-Lao thought, and two others—Han Anguo and Zhang Ou—followers of Legalism.<sup>57</sup> It turns out that when we consider what Sima Qian and Ban Gu wrote, few of the high officials of the day had strong commitments to any formal school of thought.

Projecting the contentions between different intellectual schools onto the political world, the conventional narrative labels the politics of the Qin dynasty Legalism, the politics of the early Western Han Huang-Lao thought, and the politics of Emperor Wu and all



who followed *ru* learning. According to the dominant narrative, Chancellor Wei Wan's appeal to Emperor Wu to ban Legalism, which he made in 141 BCE, signaled the beginning of the promotion of *ru* learning;<sup>58</sup> Dong Zhongshu's memorial that advocated abandoning the hundred schools to honor *ru* learning alone forecast the moment when *ru* learning became the state orthodoxy.<sup>59</sup>

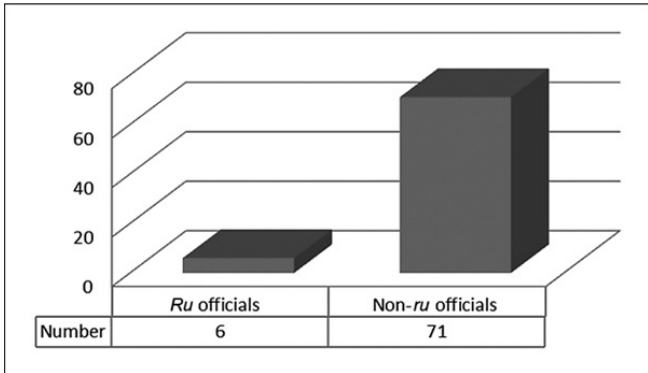


Chart 1.4. *Ru* and Non-*ru* Officials under Emperor Wu

However, it was only shortly after these events that, first, Han Anguo and, immediately thereafter, Zhang Ou, assumed the post of Grandee Secretary—both were known for their espousal of Legalism.<sup>60</sup> The memorials of Wei Wan and Dong Zhongshu did not affect

the advancement of Zheng Dangshi and Ji An, two adherents of Huang-Lao thought, to powerful posts either. Zheng served as one of the Nine Ministers from 137 to 120 BCE, though at one point he was briefly demoted to Supervisor of the Household (*Zhanshi* 詹事), ranked two thousand bushels. Ji was promoted to serve as one of the Nine Ministers in 135 BCE, and over the next twenty years he was appointed to various other positions, all ranked two thousand bushels or higher. The famous memorials do not appear to have dramatically changed the complexion of the empire's administration; they probably expressed personal statements rather

than public policies.

If the political world of Emperor Wu is seen solely in terms of the struggles among adherents of Huang-Lao thought, *ru*, and Legalists, we would distort the real picture. Empress Dowager Dou, an adherent of Huang-Lao thought, did engineer the impeachment of two *ru* officials appointed by Emperor Wu because she disliked *ru* teachings. But this is the only recorded conflict between Huang-Lao followers and *ru* that can be identified during the half century of Emperor Wu's reign.

In an attempt to detect more conflict, scholars have argued that the friction between Ji An, an adherent of

Huang-Lao thought, and Gongsun Hong, a *ru*, was caused by their different intellectual orientations.<sup>61</sup> But Ji An openly reprehended whomever he disliked, and even Emperor Wu feared his criticism. Gongsun Hong locked horns not only with Ji but also with a number of other high officials, including some *ru*. The six *ru* high officials never formed an interest group, and neither did the two followers of Huang-Lao thought.<sup>62</sup> At the root of Ji An's unhappiness with Gongsun Hong was an awareness of radically different social origins. Ji An, scion of a powerful family, had enjoyed his privileged position for decades, while Gongsun Hong started

his career as a lowly clerk. Ji An was mortified to watch the arriviste rise to a position above his own; as Sima Qian pointed out, Ji An mocked the emperor, saying, “Your majesty appoints officials the way people stack firewood—whatever comes to hand last is piled on top.”<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, even if followers of Huang-Lao thought, *ru*, and Legalists did have sharply different opinions on some important policies, these could never have led to great political struggles. Adding together the numbers of *ru*, Legalists, and followers of Huang-Lao thought, we get only ten men, a small portion of the high officials active in Emperor Wu’s reign.

The struggles among so few could not shake a political world composed of hundreds of eminent officials. Indeed, the dynamics that affected Han politics did not result from the tensions between followers of different schools of thought—they emerged from utterly different factors, an observation that leads us to Sima Qian's classification of his contemporary officials.

### SIMA QIAN'S CLASSIFICATION OF HIS CONTEMPORARY OFFICIALS

According to our sources, only a few high officials specialized in the Five Classics and were identified as *ru* by their contemporaries. One cannot help wondering whether Sima Qian and Ban

Gu's classification of the officialdom was valid. Were the descendants of powerful families and the clerks on the lower rungs of the bureaucracy not educated? Is it possible that they too were trained in the Five Classics? Might even the term *ru* be fairly applied to some of them? I will answer these questions from two different perspectives.

First, applying taxonomies to people is a meaningful performance. No matter how loosely the rubric *ru* was used, Sima Qian and Ban Gu only called certain officials *ru*. No matter whether or not it represents the common understanding, this public act of naming reflects the author's own



definition of the *ru* group. Thus, we should respect Sima Qian's explicit classification—a classification followed by Ban Gu—and observe his schemes to divide up officialdom. In this way, we can not only better understand the true situation but explore the messages Sima Qian inserted into his work through the ordering and grouping of biographies.<sup>64</sup>

Second, I shall examine the available sources to see what we can learn about the education of high officials and their descendants. Records show that *ru*, that is, scholars who specialized in the Five Classics, served as teachers to descendants of the

imperial family. For example, in *The Grand Scribe's Records* is the story of Liu Ying 劉郢, the nephew of Emperor Gao, who shared a teacher with Mr. Shen; later, when Liu Ying became king of Chu 楚王, he invited Mr. Shen, an expert on the *Book of Songs*, to serve as the teacher of his son Wu 戊.<sup>65</sup> Wang Zang 王臧, a disciple of Mr. Shen, served as Junior Tutor to Crown Prince (*Taizi shaofu* 太子少傅) during Emperor Jing's reign, meaning that he taught Liu Che 劉徹, later Emperor Wu.<sup>66</sup> Han Ying 韓嬰 was the Grand Tutor (*Taifu* 太傅) of the king of Changshan 常山王, and Yuan Gu was the Grand Tutor of the king of Qinghe 清河王 during the reign of Emperor

Jing.<sup>67</sup>

Although it is never mentioned in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, *The History of Western Han* records that Emperor Wu ordered the crown prince, Liu Ju 劉據, to study the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals* (*Gongyang chun qiu* 公羊春秋) and the Guliang tradition of the *Annals* (*Guliang chun qiu* 穀梁春秋) under Master Jiang of Xiaqiu 瑕丘江公.<sup>68</sup> *The History of Western Han* also preserves a decree of Emperor Zhao 昭帝, Emperor Wu's son, which said, "I, the emperor, ... am familiar with commentaries on the 'Nursing and Tutoring the Crown Prince,' the *Classic of Filiality*, *Analects*, and the *Book of Documents*,

but I never say that I am enlightened”  
朕 ... 通保傅傳, 孝經, 論語, 尚書, 未  
云有明.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, *The History of Western Han* records that Wen Weng 文翁, the governor of Shu 蜀郡守 during Emperor Jing's reign, sent more than ten of his clerks to the capital to study with the Erudites or to study the laws and edicts (*lüling* 律令). It is said that Wen Weng established the official academy in Chengdu and appointed its most distinguished graduates as clerks in the governments of commanderies and counties. Since Ban Gu noted that Wen had the students who combined personal dignity with a good understanding of the Five Classics

accompany him in inspection tours, it is likely that the Five Classics were taught at the academy. Ban Gu also said that Emperor Wu ordered the commanderies and vassal states to establish academies in accordance with the model established by Wen.<sup>70</sup>

I have presented all that the available sources have to say about the education of the ruling class at the end of Emperor Wu's reign. Some of these stories are often cited by scholars to argue for the victory of *ru* under Emperor Wu—I am less certain. Although the Five Classics were certainly part of the curriculum under some teachers and at some schools, it is not evident that the Han ruling class

was generally schooled in the Five Classics.

All four cases of *ru* employed as teachers by imperial families appeared in one chapter of *The Grand Scribe's Records*: "The Collective Biographies of *Ru*," the chapter in which *ru* were presented as the most legitimate candidates for government posts. The official careers of *ru* were traced and their important positions listed. When cases of *ru* acting as teachers to princes at the court or in vassal states were lumped together, it suggested to readers that this educational arrangement had become the rule rather than the exception. However, these four examples in fact are all

individual cases and lack any statistical significance. We know of three other persons besides Wang Zang who served as Junior Tutors to Crown Prince and at least eleven who served as Grand Tutors to Crown Prince early in the Han.<sup>71</sup> Among those, Wang Zang and Shusun Tong were experts on the Five Classics and called *ru*, while the others were not identified as *ru* by their contemporaries. Wei Wan started his career as a Gentleman-assistant because of his skill as a carriage driver, Bu Shi was a rich merchant, and Shi Fen had no knowledge of literature (*wu wenxue* 無文學).<sup>72</sup> Shi Qing was the son of Shi Fen, and Shi De was probably the son of Shi Qing.<sup>73</sup> Sima

Qian noted that Dowager Dou held that the members of the Shi family sincerely followed a moral code without preaching (不言而躬行; presumably “without preaching any elaborate teachings”) and countered the *ru* group, who had numerous teachings but little sincerity (文多質少).

Among these twelve tutors of crown princes in four different courts, eight came from powerful families that had helped Liu Bang establish the Han dynasty.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, *ru* did ascend to prestigious positions. This does not mean that all members of the upper class were educated in the Five Classics: much as in the examples of *ru* holding high positions that were



discussed above, these cases do not show that all officials of the Han were *ru*.

Those who argue that all Han officials studied the *ru* canon often cite Liu Ju and Liu Fuling 劉弗陵 (later Emperor Zhao), two of the sons of Emperor Wu, who had studied the Five Classics. It is plausible that Emperor Zhao did, as he himself claimed in the passage cited earlier, know something about these works. But Emperor Zhao was only thirteen years old or perhaps even younger when he issued that decree.<sup>75</sup> He mentioned his knowledge of these classics as a rhetorical device in a decree calling on high officials to recommend official candidates. After

mentioning that he was familiar with commentaries on “Nursing and Tutoring the Crown Prince,” and so forth, he immediately shifted his tone, claiming that he was not yet enlightened. This naturally introduces the order requiring high officials to recommend worthy men (*xianliang* 賢良) and outstanding literati (*wenxue gaodi* 文學高第).

The reference to Liu Ju studying both *Gongyang* and *Guliang* traditions of the *Annals* is suspicious. Sima Qian was a contemporary of Liu’s and mentioned Master Jiang of Xiaqiu as a teacher of the *Guliang* tradition in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” But he never mentioned that Liu Ju, the crown

prince at that time, studied the *Gongyang* commentary, let alone that Master Jiang of Xiaqiu was his *Guliang* teacher. Liu's studies of the *Annals* are mentioned in *The History of Western Han*, a book written one hundred years later.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, the *Gongyang* tradition of the *Annals* was a more influential tradition than *Guliang* when Liu Ju was active (i.e., Emperor Wu's reign). Both Sima Qian and Ban Gu preserved more names of *Gongyang* teachers than of *Guliang* teachers. Interestingly, the record in *The History of Western Han* does not specify who taught the *Gongyang* to Liu Ju, but identifies Master Jiang of Xiaqiu—the most important transmitter of the

*Guliang* tradition, defeated by the *Gongyang* expert Dong Zhongshu in a court debate—as his *Guliang* teacher.<sup>77</sup> It is possible that the followers of the *Guliang* tradition tried to embellish their history at the end of Western Han, once they had established supremacy over their rivals, inventing the story about the crown prince.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, regarding Wen Weng's story, Yu Qiding 俞啓定 convincingly demonstrated that it may have been an edict on paper only that Emperor Wu ordered to establish local or regional academies after Wen Weng. The central government lacked the resources to support one imperial academy, let alone the local ones. Even

in the early years of the Eastern Han dynasty, the local academies were unevenly developed. In addition, Wen Weng's story was not recorded until more than one hundred years later when Ban Gu wrote the Western Han history. Wen Weng's contemporary Sima Qian never mentioned him. Nor can such edicts regarding the establishment of local academies be found under Emperor Wu in our available sources.<sup>79</sup>

Therefore, not a single case in the sources indicates that Han officials were trained in the Five Classics. Instead, it is apparent that high officials during Emperor Wu's reign generally lack knowledge of the Five

Classics. For example, Sima Qian pointed out that because Grandee Secretary Zhang Tang was not familiar with the Five Classics, he was not able to reply to Xu Yan, who defended himself by citing the *Annals*. As mentioned before, an interest group formed around Zhang Tang, members of which promoted each other. However, when Zhang Tang tried to use ancient cases recorded in the Five Classics as legal precedents to justify his verdicts on important and complex lawsuits, he had to go outside his circle to find officials who had studied the *Documents* and the *Annals* as his clerks.<sup>80</sup> *The Grand Scribe's Records* also records that Gongsun Hong

distinguished himself among eminent officials precisely by employing *ru* techniques (*rushu*) to embellish the legal and bureaucratic affairs.<sup>81</sup>

Knowledge of Five Classics thus had not yet become a necessary credential to one's success in officialdom even by the end of Western Han dynasty. Nor had it been regarded as an essential part of elite education.

Not only Sima Qian but the contemporaries of the Western Han in general explicitly distinguished officials who specialized in the Five Classics from their colleagues. Ouyang Diyu 歐陽地餘, the Privy Treasurer under Emperor Yuan, called himself a *ru* official among Nine Ministers

(*Jiuqing* *ruzhe* 九卿 儒者), and instructed his descendants to distinguish their conduct from that of other officials.<sup>82</sup> Under Emperor Ai, when the Imperial Secretaries impeached Shen Xian 申咸 and Gui Qin 桂欽, two Erudites serving as Palace Steward, he designated them as *ru* officials (*ruguan* 儒官), saying that “[you are] lucky to be selected as confidants of the emperor in the name of *ru* officials” 幸得以儒官選擢備腹心.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, officials who knew little of Five Classics successfully ascended to eminent positions throughout the Western Han dynasty. Bing Ji 丙吉, Huang Ba 黃霸, and Yu Dingguo 于定



國 were all legal specialists. While Bing and Yu started their careers as jailers, Huang entered officialdom through buying the position of Gentleman-attendant. They achieved Chancellor position one after another under Emperor Xuan primarily by virtue of administrative achievements or networking. Ban Gu noted that they did not start to learn Five Classics until they were already established in officialdom.<sup>84</sup> Wang Mang, the usurper of the Western Han, was well known for his frenetic reforms according to *ru* classics. But like Emperor Wu, he employed merchants to implement his economic reforms simply because those men were experts on money

matters.<sup>85</sup>

In fact, the domination of officialdom by descendants of powerful families and the frustrating experiences scholars specializing in the Five Classics encountered were serious problems constantly pointed out by important *ru* officials under Emperor Wu. Dong Zhongshu raised this problem in his memorial presented in 134 BCE, pointing out that “In general, senior officials are drawn from among the Gentlemen of the Palace [*Langzhong* 郎中] and the Inner-Gentlemen [中郎]. Gentleman-attendants (*Lang* 郎) either buy their positions or are chosen from the descendants of officials ranked two

thousand bushels or above. These people are not necessarily worthy” 夫長吏多出於郎中,中郎,吏二千石子弟選郎吏,又以富訾,未必賢也. Dong Zhongshu therefore requested the emperor to routinize the recommendation system and establish an Imperial Academy.<sup>86</sup>

Ten years later, in 124 BCE, Gongsun Hong reminded the emperor of this issue. In his memorial, he criticized an ironic phenomenon: those in power were too ignorant to explain edicts and laws to the people; those who had literary knowledge and had mastered ritual matters did not have opportunities to advance.<sup>87</sup> Against this background, Gongsun Hong

requested the emperor to recruit students for Erudites at the Imperial Academy, and to appoint the graduates who excelled in one of the Five Classics as Literate Clerk in Charge of Precedents (*wenxue zhanggu* 文學掌故) or Gentleman-assistants. When Gongsun Hong, a *ru* official, addressed this problem, he had occupied a prominent position for about six years under Emperor Wu. Nevertheless, the *ru* generally did not penetrate the bureaucracy.

Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong had similar perceptions of officialdom under Emperor Wu, and the picture they presented corresponds well with the numerical data presented earlier.

We know that among the seventy-seven bureaucrats who rose to power under Emperor Wu, thirty-nine were descendants of high officials whose family members had occupied prominent positions in the bureaucracy for generations, six were from rich local families, and thirteen had climbed to the peak of the power pyramid from the bottom of the bureaucracy. Only six of seventy-seven high officials were experts on the Five Classics and were called *ru* by their contemporaries. Except for Kong Zang, none of these *ru* officials came from powerful families. This trend continues. During Emperor Xuan's reign, the number of *ru* officials

significantly increased in the upper level of officialdom. But the majority of them, about ninety-three percent, did not have any traceable history of official serving in the Han dynasty. This indicates that officials called *ru* by their contemporaries and officials from powerful families basically constituted two distinct groups, with very little overlap.<sup>88</sup>

Based on the foregoing examination, we can see that if we do not limit the examination to one or two individual cases, but observe how Sima Qian and his contemporaries presented the officials of their day, we will not conclude that Han officials above the rank of clerk were *ru*, that is, scholars

familiar with the Five Classics.<sup>89</sup>

## REASSESSING THE RECOMMENDATION SYSTEM AND THE IMPERIAL ACADEMY

Against the background that officials were not recruited by virtue of their knowledge but by virtue of their hereditary political power and wealth, Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong submitted their famous proposals: regularizing the recommendation system, recruiting disciples for the Erudites at the Imperial Academy (*Taixue* 太學), and appointing graduates of the Imperial Academy as clerks and Gentleman-attendants. Their memorials have been celebrated as the blueprint of the breakthrough reforms

under Emperor Wu and always occupy conspicuous space in the studies of both intellectual and institutional history of Han. The recommendation system, praised as the precursor of the later civil service examination system, has been regarded as the major recruitment method from the time of Emperor Wu.<sup>90</sup> Those who speak of the “victory of *ru* learning” hold that the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy institutionalized *ru*’s avenues toward officialdom.<sup>91</sup> Citing the cases of Gongsun Hong and Ni Kuan, they demonstrate that these innovations permitted *ru* to rise from obscure circumstances to splendid success. However, if we do not merely



focus on imperial edicts or individual cases, it is clear that the career patterns of high officials examined above present a different picture of the recruitment system in the Western Han.<sup>92</sup>

From the time Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong put forward their proposals until the end of Emperor Wu's rule more than thirty years passed. Of the seventy-seven eminent officials under Emperor Wu only one man—Gongsun Hong—was elevated through the recommendation system during the fifty-four years that Wu ruled China, and only one man—Ni Kuan—entered officialdom through the Imperial Academy during the same

period. These were not major routes to the upper ranks of the bureaucracy.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, the careers of both Gongsun Hong and Ni Kuan took circuitous courses. Their final success was determined primarily by contingent events: neither the recommendation system nor the Imperial Academy guaranteed a brilliant career. Rather, these two avenues merely enabled a few to enter the game. Twice Gongsun Hong was appointed to the position of Erudite through a recommendation from local government. The emperor dismissed him from his first appointment on a whim and later promoted him just as arbitrarily. Ni Kuan, who distinguished

himself during his studies at the Imperial Academy, won the post of clerk to the Commandant of Justice (*Tingweishi* 廷尉史) on graduation. Low as that post was, he was soon demoted and sent to the north for several years to supervise a livestock farm for several years.<sup>94</sup> When finally he was promoted, it was primarily due to Zhang Tang's recommendation. A certificate from the Imperial Academy amounted to nothing but a ticket to sit in the remotest balcony of officialdom; success came from professional networking, not from specialized learning or education background.

If people entering officialdom through the recommendation system or

through the Imperial Academy could only with difficulties penetrate high levels of bureaucracy, the role these two channels played in providing candidates for posts at middle and lower levels should also be investigated.

There are eight edicts from the period under study that called on high officials to recommend talented people to the court, and one edict ordered counties to send promising men to the capital, where they would serve as disciples to the Erudites at the Imperial Academy. Sima Qian also recorded that in both 140 and 134 BCE, more than one hundred men were recommended to the court by county governments.<sup>95</sup>

However, among hundreds of officials of Emperor Wu who left their names in the historical records, only seven entered officialdom through the recommendation system. One was Gongsun Hong; three were officials of earlier courts and were too old to serve in any position after they were nominated; the others were Dong Zhongshu, Yan Zhu 嚴助, and Yang He 楊何, whose highest posts were ranked two thousand bushels.<sup>96</sup>

As to those recommended to serve as disciples of the Erudites at the Imperial Academy, only two are known: Ni Kuan and Zhong Jun 終軍. Zhong died in his twenties while serving as Grandee Remonstrance (*Jian*

*dafu* 諫大夫), ranked at eight hundred bushels.<sup>97</sup> Unlike Ni, who merely obtained a clerkship after graduating from the Imperial Academy, Zhong Jun soon became one of the emperor's intimates. But his success derived no impetus from his status with the Erudites: that was all due to his memorial that won the emperor's approval (see [table 1.2](#)).

In short, only nine men are known to have entered officialdom through the recommendation system or the Imperial Academy during the reign of Emperor Wu. The information about those who rose to middle and lower level posts through these routes is scarce, but to judge from the

remarkably small number of *ru* among eminent officials and the circuitous courses of their careers, it is evident that under Emperor Wu, the recommendation system and Imperial Academy had not yet become the principal mechanism to recruit officials and *ru* avenues to high levels of the bureaucracy were far from being established.

In late imperial China, the civil service examination system was the principal means to join the group of official candidates; yet various avenues toward officials' success coexisted throughout the Han. Since the Song dynasty, ability to compose *belles lettres* or familiarity with the *ru*

Classics was the main filter of candidacy for official positions, outweighing the hereditary power and wealth at the first stage of one's career. It naturally became indispensable training for maintaining elite status.<sup>98</sup> The situation was more complicated in the Han, however. Scholars have pointed out that before Emperor Wu, kinship, money, and military achievement were the major means for one to penetrate the bureaucracy. For those who focus on traditional accounts also assert that the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy implemented by Emperor Wu replaced those old avenues, becoming the principal recruitment grounds.<sup>99</sup>



However, as the numerical data indicate, the story did not happen in that way. Hereditary power, wealth, and military achievements were still the operating forces in the recruitment system, while only a few climbed to the top of bureaucracy through the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy. This conclusion is corroborated by the reforms proposed by Dong Zhongshu and Gongsun Hong, which did not aim to abolish those established game rules but only to add another, allowing *ru* to enter the game by virtue of their knowledge of Five Classics.

As distinct from the later civil service examination that promised its

excellent graduates prominent positions, men who entered officialdom through the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy in the Western Han generally started with low-level positions. Cases like Gongsun Hong who achieved important positions directly through the recommendation system were extremely exceptional. Instead, the majority of recommended men or graduates from the Imperial Academy were appointed either as Gentlemanattendants or clerks of high officials, two major pools of potential administrative officials. In the Western Han, Gentleman-attendants were composed of around 1,000 men. While

we know little of how Gentleman-attendants were evaluated and what qualified them to be assigned to administrative positions, we know that it was by virtue of their hereditary power or family wealth that many of the contenders entered this pool. Men who specialized in the Five Classics had to compete with these individuals.<sup>100</sup>

Table 1.2. People Recruited via the “Recommendation System” and the Imperial Academy under Emperor Wu

N.	Name	Social origin	Intellectual orientations	Advancement to officialdom	Network
1	馮唐 SJ 102:2757 HS 50:2315	父故為代相		文帝: 唐以孝著, 為中郎署長; 車騎都尉; 主中尉; 郡國車士 景帝: 楚相 武帝: 求賢良, 舉馮唐	唐時年九十餘, 不能復為官, 乃以唐子馮遂為郎。
2	鄧公 SJ 101: 2747-2748			景帝: 謁者僕射校尉, 擊吳楚軍為將城陽中尉 武帝: 九卿	建元中, 上招賢良, 公卿言鄧公,
3	轅固 SJ 121: 3122-3124		治詩	景帝: 博士 清河王太傅	
4	董仲舒 SJ 121: 3127-3129		學春秋	孝景: 博士 武帝: 江都相, 中大夫, 相膠西王	家徙茂陵, 子及孫皆以學至大官
5	公孫弘 SJ 112:2949 121:3118	少時為薛獄吏, 有罪, 免家貧, 牧豕海上	學春秋雜說	140, 徵以賢良為博士, ... 免歸 130, 有詔徵文學, 拜為博士; 128, 左內史; 126, 御史大夫h 124, 為丞相	
6	兒寬 SJ 121:3125 HS 58:2628	貧無資用	既通尚書, 以文學應郡舉, 詣博士受業, 受業孔安國。	以射策為掌故補廷尉文學卒史湯奇其材以為掾 113中大夫兒寬為左內史, 三年遷	湯為御史大夫, 以兒寬為掾, 薦之天子。
7	嚴助 HS 64:2775	嚴夫子子(嚴忌)也, 或言族家子也	儒家	中大夫 會稽太守	漢書藝文志 儒家莊助四篇; 賦三十五篇
8	終軍 HS 64:2814	年十八, 選為博士弟子	漢書藝文志 儒家終軍八篇	至長安上書言事。武帝異其文, 拜軍為謁者給事中 諫大夫: 自請出使匈奴, 南越	
9	楊何 SJ 121:3127		以易, 元光元年徵	官至中大夫	

Note: SJ = *Shi ji* and HS = *Han shu*.

Those serving as the clerks to governors or high officials faced another kind of severe rivalry. Clerks were supposed to carry out routine government functions, such as tax collections or court litigation, and were evaluated and promoted accordingly. This meant that their performance had nothing to do with the acquaintance with knowledge of the remote past or abstract speculation on the cosmos or ideal government, but required mastering practical knowledge of current regulations, laws, and precedents. In other words, it was not expertise in Five Classics but in the legal and fiscal system that made one

competitive. For example, soon after graduating from the Imperial Academy and being appointed as clerk to the Commandant of Justice, Ni Kuan was demoted because he was not familiar with the daily administrative duties (*bu xishi* 不習事).<sup>101</sup> Wei Xiang 魏相, a *ru*, climbed from the bottom of bureaucracy under Emperor Xuan, not because of his training in the *Book of Changes* but because of administrative merit.<sup>102</sup> Cases in the transmitted sources corroborate archeologically excavated manuscripts, as in the administrative archives discovered in Juyan 居延 that the competent clerks or officials were characterized as “capable of compiling official

documents and able to make a calculation; when handling official affairs or administering the commoners, he knows regulations and laws well” 能書會計，治官民頗知律令。<sup>103</sup> In the Western Han, knowledge of the Five Classics was not yet a substitute for professional knowledge of law and economy nor could it be asserted that it was the legitimate and defining learning of ruling elite.

In fact, special attention should be paid to the phenomenon of officials climbing the ladder of success through the avenue of clerkship. In late imperial China, clerks, who had practical training in legal and fiscal affairs, were banned from participating

in civil service examinations. This not only meant that clerks were excluded from the middle and upper levels of officialdom, but directly caused the upper class to despise and ignore the technical subjects.<sup>104</sup>

In a stark contrast, clerks in the Han, parallel with Gentleman-attendants of the emperor, were regarded as important sources of official candidates. First, accomplished clerks were the direct beneficiaries of the recommendation system. Scholars have pointed out that a large number of clerks were among the men who were nominated as *xianliang* (intelligence and fine quality), *fangzheng* (upright character), or *maocai* (flourishing



talent).<sup>105</sup>

Besides this avenue, clerks also advanced to administrative posts, even high positions, through accumulating merits and length of services. Combining cases in transmitted texts with materials from Han-era bamboo-strip manuscripts from Juyan (*Juyan Han Jian* 居延漢簡), Ooba Samu 大庭脩 convincingly demonstrates that this significant recruitment means was institutionalized in the Han dynasty. His claim is further validated by recent archeological discoveries.<sup>106</sup> In 1993 an archive was excavated; it records the performance and promotions of about one hundred low-rank officials of the late Western Han (no earlier than

10 BCE) in Donghai 東海 commandery. Liao Boyuan 廖伯源 has scrutinized the promotion patterns revealed by these documents, convincingly pointing out that as a regular practice, clerks were promoted as the administrative officials through accumulating good evaluations of their daily performances. In fact, it was a much more significant avenue toward officialdom than the well-known recommendation system and the Imperial Academy (the ratio of the former cases to the latter was 66:5).<sup>107</sup>

Although these archeological data were limited to county and commandery level officials, it is confirmed by my studies of high-level

officials under Emperor Wu. As I argued above, a group of high officials without prestigious family backgrounds were promoted from clerkship because of their professional competence in legal and fiscal affairs. The important role that their daily performance played in their advancement meant that professional knowledge of technical subjects was highly valued by the Han upper class, contesting with the knowledge of Five Classics in the arena of elite learning.

Therefore, in terms of both entering officialdom and later career advancement, the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy were far from endowing men who

specialized in the Five Classics an advantage; nor could they generate any urgency for the upper class to adopt that archaic knowledge of Five Classics as the necessary training.

## SOURCES OF THE MYTH

If we focused our narratives only on the activities of Han *ru* and the policies promoting *ru* learning, it would appear as if the whole political stage was dominated by *ru* and their supporters. However, as soon as we investigate the social origins and intellectual orientations of eminent officials, placing the well-known *ru* in proper contexts, we find that they were in fact a minuscule proportion of the

bureaucracy and exerted limited influence in the political realm. This conclusion, which is primarily based on analysis of numerical data, well corroborates studies that challenge the view that Emperor Wu promoted *ru* learning.

Still, why have those who celebrated *ru*'s success ignored the majority of officials who operated the state apparatus and controlled daily political affairs? Why have they devoted their full attention to those few *ru* who actually occupied a tiny fraction of high-level posts, leading them to mistakenly proclaim the triumph of *ru* learning?<sup>108</sup> Fukui has demonstrated that Ban Gu's

presentation of Emperor Wu's reign, especially his comments on this period, contributed to the myth of *ru*'s triumph.<sup>109</sup> Wang Baoxuan illustrated that the famous phrase “abolish hundreds of schools and honor the *ru* technique alone” 罷黜百家，獨尊儒術 that has conventionally been used to describe Emperor Wu's achievements was not coined until Sima Guang 司馬光 wrote *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒 (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government) in the eleventh century.<sup>110</sup> Corroborating their arguments, I will explore how the narratives in *The Grand Scribe's Records* have led to the misconception of the elevation of *ru* under Emperor

Wu.

Most of what we know about Emperor Wu's reign comes from *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han*. The former consists of five sections: the "basic annals" (*benji* 本紀) of imperial reigns, the "chronological tables" (*biao* 表) of marquises and eminent officials, the "treatises" (*shu* 書) on special topics such as rituals and music, the "hereditary houses" (*shijia* 世家) of feudal lords, and the "collected biographies" (*liezhuan* 列傳) of eminent persons. The "treatises," "chronological tables," and "hereditary houses" provide us with valuable information about Emperor Wu's

reign. But they barely mention *ru* or policies that promoted *ru* learning. The *ru* encountered in these three sections of *The Grand Scribe's Records* usually served as Erudites, men who did not participate in the daily administration of the state but were often sent abroad on diplomatic missions, employed as experts in sacrifices and rituals, or consulted on special occasions.

In the “collected biographies,” Sima Qian wrote independent biographies of fifteen officials and one of a *fu* 賦 (prose-poem) writer active during Emperor Wu's reign. All of these officials either rose to serve as one of the Three Dukes or Nine Ministers, or were generals or



outstanding officials ranked two thousand bushels. Among them only two were referred to as *ru* by Sima Qian: Gongsun Hong and Zhufu Yan 主父偃 were given a separate chapter for their biographies (see [table 1.3](#)). Obviously, if scholars have comprehensively examined all of the materials related to Emperor Wu's reign in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, they cannot reach the conclusion that *ru* won a great success at that time.

In *The History of Western Han*, Ban Gu wrote independent biographies of forty-one officials and one commoner active during Emperor Wu's reign. In Sima Qian's book, the lives of some *ru* officials, such as Dong Zhongshu, Yan

Zhu, and Zhu Maicheng, were included in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” or were merely mentioned in the biography of someone else. By contrast, in *The History of Western Han*, a separate biography appears for each of these *ru* officials. Ban Gu also wrote more independent biographies of non-*ru* officials and generals than Sima Qian did. In other words, in terms of absolute number, six more *ru* officials had independent biographies in *The History of Western Han* than in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*; in terms of relative number, only eight of the forty-one officials Ban Gu profiled were *ru* (see [table 1.3](#)).

Table 1.3. Biographical Chapters Devoted to

# Officials under Emperor Wu in *Shi ji*

Chapter N.	Chapter Title	Main Personae	Official Position	Intellectual Orientations	N
103	萬石張叔列傳	石健	郎中令		1
		石慶	丞相		2
		張歐	御史大夫	治刑名	3
104	田叔列傳	田仁	司直		4
		任安	北軍使者護軍		5
107	魏其武安侯列傳	竇嬰	丞相		6
		田蚡	丞相		7
108	韓長孺列傳	韓安國	御史大夫	嘗受韓子、雜家說於臯田生所	8
109	李將軍列傳	李廣	將軍, 衛尉		9
111	衛將軍驃騎列傳	衛青	大將軍, 大司馬		10
		霍去病	驃騎將軍, 大司馬		11
112	平津侯主父列傳	公孫弘	丞相	學春秋雜說	12
		主父偃	齊相	學長短縱橫之術, 晚乃學易、春秋、百家言	13
117	司馬相如列傳	司馬相如	郎, 孝文園令	善詞賦	14
120	汲鄭列傳	汲黯	主爵都尉	黯學黃老之言, ... 然好學, 游俠	15
		鄭當時	大農令	以任俠自喜, ... 好黃老之言	16

Biographical Chapters Devoted to Officials under Emperor Wu in *Han shu*

46	萬石衛直周張傳	石健	郎中令		1
		石慶	丞相		2
		張歐	御史大夫	治刑名	3
50	張馮汲鄭傳	汲黯	主爵都尉	學黃老之言, ... 然好學, 游俠	4
		鄭當時	大農令	以任俠自喜, ... 好黃老之言	5
52	竇田灌韓傳	竇嬰	丞相		6
		田蚡	丞相		7
		灌夫	御史大夫		8
		韓安國	御史大夫	嘗受韓子, 雜家說於臯田生所	9



Chapter N.	Chapter Title	Main Personae	Official Position	Intellectual Orientations	N
54	李廣蘇建傳	李廣	將軍, 衛尉		10
		李陵	將軍		11
		蘇建	將軍		12
		蘇武			13
55	衛青霍去病	衛青	大將軍, 大司馬		14
		霍去病	驃騎將軍, 大司馬		15
56	董仲舒傳	董仲舒	相膠西王		16
57	司馬相如傳	司馬相如	郎, 孝文園令	善詞賦	17
58	公孫弘卜式兒寬傳	公孫弘	丞相	學春秋雜說	18
		卜式	御史大夫	治尚書, 事歐陽生, 以郡國選詣博士, 受業孔安國	19
		兒寬	御史大夫		20
59	張湯傳	張湯	御史大夫		21
60	杜周傳	杜周	御史大夫		22
61	張騫李廣利傳	張騫	大行		23
		李廣利	貳師將軍	學天官於唐都, 受易於楊何, 習道論於黃子	24
62	司馬遷傳	司馬遷	太史令		25
64	嚴朱吾丘主父徐嚴終王賈傳	嚴助	會稽太守	漢書藝文志儒家莊助四篇, 嚴助賦三十五篇	26
		朱買臣	主爵都尉	說春秋, 言楚詞, 縉紳之儒	27
		吾丘壽王	光祿大夫侍中	從中大夫董仲舒受春秋	28
		主父偃	齊相	學長短縱橫之術, 晚乃學易, 春秋, 百家言	29
		徐樂	郎中	漢書藝文志從橫家徐樂一篇	30
		嚴安	騎馬令		31
		終軍	諫大夫	漢書藝文志儒家終軍八篇	32

Chapter N.	Chapter Title	Main Personae	Official Position	Intellectual Orientations	N
65	東方朔傳	東方朔	中郎	漢書藝文志雜家 東方朔二十篇	33
66	卷六十六公孫劉 田王楊蔡陳鄭傳	公孫賀	丞相		34
		劉屈氂	丞相		35
		車千秋	丞相		36
67	楊胡朱梅云傳	楊王孫	家業千金	學黃老之術	37
		胡建	守軍正丞		38
68	霍光金日磾傳	霍光	大司馬, 大將軍		39
		金日磾	車騎將軍		40
75	睦兩夏侯京翼 李傳	夏侯始昌	太傅	通五經, 以齊詩, 尚書教授	41

If the general layout of Sima Qian's and Ban Gu's books fails to provide any indication of a *ru* victory, it is necessary to examine if any special chapters of these two texts have led scholars to argue for this myth.

## A DISPLACED CHAPTER: "THE BASIC ANNALS OF EMPEROR WU"

The general organization of the chapters that treat Emperor Wu's reign in *The Grand Scribe's Records* does not assign *ru* prominent position. The chapter "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" presents us a different picture, however. Here is an utterly straightforward presentation of Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* learning and of the life-and-death struggles between *ru* and followers of Huang-Lao thought. It is in this chapter that we find some models upon which the traditional paradigm bases its narrative of the triumph of *ru*.

Of the first six years of Emperor



Wu's rule, the "Basic Annals" records only one dramatic event: the promotion of *ru*. This drama opens with the newly enthroned emperor boldly promoting Zhao Wan and Wang Zang, two *ru*, to important posts. It reaches its climax when Empress Dowager Dou, an adherent of Huang-Lao thought, impeached Zhao and Wang: both were dismissed and subsequently committed suicide in prison. The curtain falls on a happy ending: the moment the empress dowager breathed her last, Emperor Wu started employing *ru* such as Gongsun Hong.<sup>111</sup> Not only did *ru* become the most active protagonists on the political stage in the early part of "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" of

*The Grand Scribe's Records*, but also they were portrayed as important actors toward the end of that chapter.

Scholars suggested long ago that “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” was quickly thrown together by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫.<sup>112</sup> It is said that the original chapter on the basic annals of Emperor Wu was lost soon after Sima Qian died; Chu Shaosun extracted the passage describing Emperor Wu’s performance of the Fengshan sacrifice from “The Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices” (*Fengshan shu* 封禪書) and slipped it into the gap left by the missing “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu.”

This traditional view sounds

plausible for several reasons. When comparing “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” with “The Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices,” there can be no doubt that the relevant passages are identical. Moreover, as Pei Yin 裴駟 (fl. 438), the most celebrated commenter on *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, contended, the section of the “basic annals” that deals with Emperor Wu in the transmitted text is entitled “Xiaowu benji” 孝武本紀, a literal translation of which is “Basic Annals of the Filial and Martial Emperor.” But in the “Epilogue of the Grand Scribe” (*Taishigong zixu* 太史公自序), Sima Qian referred to having written “Jinshang benji” 今上本紀, a

literal translation of which is “Basic Annals of the Current Emperor.”<sup>113</sup> Sima Qian was unlikely to call Emperor Wu “the filial and martial [emperor],” because that was a posthumous name and *The Grand Scribe’s Records* was completed before Emperor Wu died.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, when he spoke of Emperor Wu, Sima Qian often used terms like “the current emperor” (*jinshang* 今上), “the current son of Heaven” (*jintianzi* 今天子), and so forth. If a passage that contains the term “*xiaowu*” (the filial and martial emperor) appears in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, it must have been interpolated by a later editor.

Finally, in “Epilogue of the Grand

Scribe,” Sima Qian characterized Emperor Wu’s achievements as follows:

Outside the court, he resisted the barbarians’ aggressions; inside the court, he established laws and regulations. He performed the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, corrected the calendar, and changed the symbolic colors.

外攘夷狄，內脩法度，封禪，改正朔，易服色。<sup>115</sup>

In these comments on Emperor

Wu's accomplishments Sima Qian did not even mention the promotion of *ru* or *ru* learning. This does not square with the received "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu," which centers on the employment of *ru* and the struggles between *ru* and followers of Huang-Lao thought.

If the received "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" is merely an excerpt from "The Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices" inserted into *The Grand Scribe's Records* by Chu Shaosun, an interesting question emerges: why did Chu Shaosun not compile "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" by piecing together the historical materials scattered throughout Sima

Qian's book, as Ban Gu (32–92 CE) did one hundred years later; why did he cut and paste a section of one chapter and present it as an independent chapter, a clumsy fraud easily spotted by readers? This puzzling question has haunted numerous scholars throughout Chinese history.<sup>116</sup> But materials are scarce and we know too little to do much but speculate about Chu Shaosun's motivation.

Although “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” is admittedly a cursory interpolation, the conventional wisdom often ignores this. Deluded by the spurious title “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu,” it simply presents Emperor Wu's political world

according to its narrative.<sup>117</sup> In order to demonstrate how this displaced chapter distorts the real story and thereby imposes a misrepresented picture on perception of Emperor Wu's reign, I shall compare "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" (*Wudi ji* 武帝紀) by Ban Gu in *The History of Western Han*, "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu," and "The Treatise on the Feng and Shan Sacrifice" in *The Grand Scribe's Records*.

Ban Gu's "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" records numerous significant events during the first six years of Emperor Wu's rule, such as the displacement of local magnates to the suburbs of the capital, the



launching of military campaigns, and the issuing of new currency—in none of these did *ru* play more than a minor role. The chapter has one mention of Empress Dowager Dou's impeachment of Zhao Wan and Wang Zang. Ban Gu explained that she had been angered because Zhao Wan asked Emperor Wu not to report political affairs to her. Ban Gu did not identify the dowager as an adherent of Huang-Lao thought; nor did he identify Zhao Wan and Wang Zang as *ru*. Rather than present this episode as a struggle between the Huang-Lao camp and the *ru* camp, Ban Gu portrayed it as a struggle between the dowager's clique and the newly enthroned emperor's clique. Nowhere

in the chapter is there any mention of Emperor Wu promoting Zhao and Wang, let alone any talk about the emperor advocating *ru* learning.<sup>118</sup>

In sharp contrast to this, once the descriptions of Emperor Wu's performance of *Feng* and *shan* sacrifices was taken as the narrative of "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, *ru*, the protagonists active in performing rituals and formulating calendars, became the most conspicuous actors "dominating" the whole political stage. For example, in "The Treatise on the *Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices," the promotion of two *ru* scholars, Zhao and Wang, the struggle between Empress

Dowager Dou and the *ru*, and the final success of the *ru* are embedded in the overarching theme that Emperor Wu wanted to employ *ru* to perform sacrifices and correct the calendar. When this theme is erased in “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” through the process of shedding a host of other economic, military, and political events, the employment of *ru* comes to represent the most significant event in the first years of Emperor Wu’s rule. The promotion of *ru*—which was originally related only to performing sacrifices and reforming the calendar—becomes a far grander policy, potentially transforming the whole bureaucracy.

Mistakenly directing modern readers' attention toward the *ru*, this displaced chapter "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" in *The Grand Scribe's Records* provides them with a model for arguing Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* learning. But just as important is another model of the myth that Emperor Wu facilitated *ru*'s path to officialdom. The traditional view contends that through the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy *ru* came to constitute the main pool of official candidates. Where did they get this idea?

While *The Grand Scribe's Records'* version of "The Basic Annals of

Emperor Wu” placed *ru* in prominent positions on the political stage, it did not mention any institutional reforms that structured the avenues for *ru* to enter officialdom. “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” of *The History of Western Han* does chronologically record the policies scholars frequently cite in explaining the triumph of *ru*. Such policies include the establishment of the office of the Erudite on the Five Classics, the construction of the Imperial Academy, and the circulation of edicts ordering high officials to recommend talented people. However, these policies are juxtaposed with many other significant events that occurred over the course of Emperor

Wu's reign, such as numerous military campaigns, imperial inspection tours and ritual sacrifices, and economic reforms. Ultimately the policies related to *ru* hardly seem significant by comparison. Furthermore, the traditional view argues that the policies benefiting *ru* transformed the imperial bureaucracy into a scholar-official model. But *The History of Western Han* merely notes these policies without comment: there is no information that would allow scholars to assess their impact on contemporaneous society.

When neither *The Grand Scribe's Records* or *The History of Western Han* as a whole nor the two versions of "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" in

particular discusses the efficacy of the alleged institutional reforms, what leads conventional wisdom to endorse such a thesis?

MANIPULATED POLITICAL HISTORY: “THE  
COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHIES OF *RU*”

In addition to his full-blown biographies of eminent officials, Sima Qian devoted several chapters to collective biographies. In the present section I shall look closely at the well-known “Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” seeking there the evidence adduced by many who saw in this period the birth of power of the *ru* group.

As I showed earlier, among eminent officials, not only were *ru* a

minority, followers of schools of thought in total were a small number. There appears to have been a far sharper division between those who had no intellectual predilections and those who did than there was between the followers of different schools. But traditional paradigm has overlooked this, interpreting early Han political history in terms of the struggles between different schools. The model they employ and the examples they frequently cite are precisely based on the narrative of the “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.”

In that chapter, Sima Qian pointed out that from the rise of the Han to the reign of Emperor Hui 惠帝 (195–188



BCE) and Empress Dowager Dou most of the eminent officials directly contributed to the founding of the Han dynasty. With incomparable military accomplishments, they, arising from the bottom of the society, were all poorly educated. Not until the reign of Emperor Wen (180–157 BCE) did the court begin to recruit some literati. Although there must have been some tension between the entrenched official families and the newly appointed literati, Sima Qian said nothing about a struggle between these two different interest groups.<sup>119</sup> He spoke instead of struggles between different intellectual schools, arguing that the failure of *ru* to advance to important positions was

due entirely to Emperor Wen's fondness for Legalism and Emperor Jing court's fondness for Huang-Lao thought. Against this background, Sima Qian introduced Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru*.

Sima Qian constructed dramatic scenes to highlight the struggle between the *ru* camp and the Huang-Lao camp. He stated that Empress Dowager Dou was so fervent in her adherence to Huang-Lao thought that she sent Yuan Gu 轅固, a *ru* who criticized the *Laozi*, to animal pens to fight with a wild boar; displeased with *ru* teaching, Empress Dowager Dou also dismissed two *ru* officials, that is, Zhao Wan and Wang Zang, and forced

them to commit suicide in prison. Not until Empress Dowager Dou died did Chancellor Tian Fen 田蚡 abolish the teachings of Legalism and the Huang-Lao school and invite as many as a hundred *ru* to the court.

Precisely following this narrative, the politics of the early Han have been depicted as a series of conflicts among adherents of different philosophical schools.

But Yuan Gu, Zhao Wan, Wang Zang, and Gongsun Hong never sat at the same table, never toasted one another, and definitely never discussed how they could seize power. There were so few high *ru* officials over the course of the fifty-four years when

their ostensible patron ruled China, and they were, without question, a disadvantaged group. Without doing any actual quantitative analysis, the conventional view contends that regularizing the recommendation system and recruiting graduates from the Imperial Academy opened a gate for *ru* to officialdom, a claim that is found in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.”

In that chapter, Sima Qian said that because Emperor Wu advocated *ru* learning and issued edicts requiring high officials to recommend worthy and talented people to the court, the study of the *ru* classics flourished. Around one hundred *ru* were invited to

court by Chancellor Tian Fen 田蚡, among whom is the famous Gongsun Hong. Based largely on his knowledge of the *Annals*, he rose to the highest office. His example inspired every scholar in the country to try his luck. In this atmosphere, Sima Qian introduced Gongsun Hong's memorial, which suggested appointing talented people disciples of the Erudite at the Imperial Academy and selecting its excellent graduates to fill entry-level bureaucratic positions. Though among the hundreds of officials under Emperor Wu who left their names to posterity we can identify only two as former disciples of Erudites at the Imperial Academy, Sima Qian declared

that after Gongsun Hong's proposal was approved, "among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, the high officials, and the clerks, there are many refined people who were well schooled in literary matters" 則公卿大夫 士吏 斌斌多文學之士矣.

Sima Qian promised contemporary *ru* a glowing future, something quite different from the grim reality they had to face. His statement—"among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, high officials as well as clerks, there are many refined people who were well schooled in literary matters"—is frequently cited by scholars to show that the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy led *ru* to

constitute the main pool of official candidates during Emperor Wu's reign.<sup>120</sup>

I have tried to revive some unfortunately overlooked narratives that Sima Qian and Ban Gu devoted to the more powerful and dominant groups of their day, those with family traditions of high office, for example, and those whose military achievements won them imperial gratitude. Far too few historians of Han politics and thought linger over these passages. Instead, the traditional paradigm relies on two chapters of *The Grand Scribe's Records*. Leaning too heavily on a chapter that Sima Qian never intended to present in that broken and

incomplete form, historians map out the reign of Emperor Wu in accordance with “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu.” This in turn leads them to “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” so that the entire political history of Emperor Wu’s rule is played from a tattered and torn script missing countless pages.

But if few *ru* rose to occupy a small fraction of the top-level positions in the bureaucracy during Emperor Wu’s reign, why did Sima Qian create “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” in which he not only clearly distinguished *ru* from other officials but also constructed a political history centered on the vicissitudes of the official careers of *ru*? In [chapter 2](#), I will tease



out the agenda underlying this much-visited chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

# A Class Merely on Paper

A Study of “The Collective  
Biographies of Ru” in *The  
Grand Scribe’s Records (Shi  
ji 史記)*

Given that only six out of seventy-seven eminent officials under Emperor Wu were called *ru*, were these *ru*

officials aware of their shared identity? Did they form an interest group and promote more *ru* to expand their power? Did they close ranks to defend their intellectual and political positions? The picture that Sima Qian and Ban Gu provide in some parts of *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han* is of *ru* officials scrambling for political power, jostling for the recognition of the emperor. By contrast, in "The Collective Biographies of *Ru*," Sima Qian presented a homogeneous textual community of *ru* officials who celebrated their commitment to the teachings of uncrowned king Confucius in a community largely defined by

teacher–disciple relationships. These different pictures are carrying on a dialogue with each other, inviting both the *ru* of Sima Qian's own time and later readers to think of the possibility and urgency of a solidaristic *ru* group that could work for the benefit of all.

### RU IDENTITY SUPPRESSED BY CONFLICTS

Throughout *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Sima Qian recorded anecdotes about sixteen *ru* officials who served under Emperor Wu.<sup>1</sup> In spite of their shared intellectual background, these officials feuded constantly. Rather than bringing them together, their knowledge of the Five Classics soon

became a weapon in their disputes.

Zhu Maichen 朱買臣, a *ru* serving as Grand Master of the Palace (*Zhongdafu* 中大夫), wrote a series of ten complaints against Gongsun Hong 公孫弘, who, in his capacity as Grandee Secretary, had opposed the establishment of new commanderies in the border area.<sup>2</sup> According to *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Zhufu Yan 主父偃, a *ru* who was also serving as Grand Master of the Palace, was the new commanderies' principal advocate, and he manipulated the subsequent debates between Gongsun Hong and Zhu Maicheng. Gongsun Hong later advised Emperor Wu to execute Zhufu Yan, who was serving as

Administrator of Qi (*Qixiang* 齊相).<sup>3</sup> Soon after that, another quarrel between *ru* arose. Wuqiu Shouwang 吾丘壽王, holding the advisory role of Grand Master for Splendid Happiness (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫), officially attacked a proposal by Gongsun Hong that would have discouraged commoners from owning bows and arrows.<sup>4</sup>

Although Zhu Maichen, Zhufu Yan, Gongsun Hong, and Wuqiu Shouwang were all experts on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (hereafter, *Annals*), their political positions diverged sharply. Focusing on their individual interests, they could not cooperate but competed continually for the approval

of the emperor, a phenomenon that both Sima Qian and Ban Gu repeatedly depicted in their works.

Ban Gu recorded that during his tour as a customs inspector Xu Yan 徐偃, an Erudite, forged an imperial decree ordering Jiaodong 膠東 and the state of Lu (*Luguo* 魯國) to cast iron and make salt. When his crime was discovered, he was impeached by Grandee Secretary Zhang Tang. In his defense, Xu turned to the *Annals*, interpreting it to support his contention that officials might exercise autonomy to benefit country and people. When Zhang Tang failed to offer a convincing rebuttal, Emperor Wu sent Zhong Jun 終軍, a *ru*, to interrogate Xu

Yan. By quoting the same text that Xu Yan had relied on, Zhong forced him to plead guilty.<sup>5</sup>

The textual tradition the *ru* shared was open to different interpretations, which allowed them to assume various intellectual and political stances according to circumstances. And since this was a time of intense competition for favors and promotions, the similar education backgrounds of the *ru* made it all the more urgent that they distinguish themselves. Sima Qian related that when Emperor Wu prepared to perform the Fengshan sacrifice, he appealed to his *ru* advisers to adapt *ru* techniques (*rushu* 儒術) for the ritual. When the quarrelsome *ru*



disparaged each other, the emperor simply dismissed the lot of them.<sup>6</sup>

Sima Qian also said that although Gongsun Hong's knowledge of the *Annals* could not match Dong Zhongshu's, this did not stop him from climbing higher in the Han bureaucracy.<sup>7</sup> Gongsun Hong tried hard to sideline Dong Zhongshu, while Dong complained that his rival was submissive and adulatory (*congyu* 從諛). *The Grand Scribe's Records* also records that Zhufu Yan envied Dong's remarkable skill in applying his familiarity with the *Annals* to practical affairs. Taking advantage of a coincidence, Zhufu made a great fuss about an essay of Dong's entitled

*Records of Disasters and Portents* (zaiyi zhiji 災異之記). Managing to steal this essay, Zhufu presented it to Emperor Wu. At that time, a fire had just damaged the shrine to Emperor Gao in Liaodong 遼東. When Emperor Wu showed Dong's essay to several *ru* officials, they agreed that it contained an oblique but unmistakably satiric message. Even Lü Bushu 呂步舒, a disciple of Dong Zhongshu, criticized it as absurd and stupid—he had no idea who had written it. For a crime approaching *lèse-majesté*, Dong Zhongshu was thrown into prison, only narrowly escaping execution.<sup>8</sup>

TRANSFORMING “*RU*” INTO  
CONFUCIANS

Modern sociologists have long been puzzled by the fact that the disadvantaged do not necessarily coalesce and collectively manage to advance their positions.<sup>9</sup> The same question haunts readers of *The Grand Scribe's Records* and probably did its author as well. The avenue a *ru* might follow toward officialdom was far from routinized: he was an inexperienced upstart compared with officials who were born to office-holding. But we look in vain for evidence that *ru* officials felt insecure or powerless. This may be a result of their double identities: they were *ru* and they were officials. Expected to be

loyal to the government that could reward or punish them, they shared an ethical training with other members of that government. When *ru* pursued their own interests at the expense of their fellow *ru*, they were choosing their official identity over their *ru* identity. Selfish calculation was, of course, one of the reasons that *ru* failed to help each other. But the ambiguity in *ru* identity itself probably also hindered them from seeking alliances with their fellows. What *ru* had in common was their training in classics. But a shared education was not an essential trait: it could not guarantee any consistency in their political and intellectual stances, and it could not

subject *ru* to any obligations to their fellows.

In “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” Sima Qian invented a new category that would integrate the *ru* identity with the official identity: the learned official (*xueguan* 學官). He invoked a sacred history of *ru* officials to reinforce this newly created identity, constructed a coherent textual community for them, and urged them to pursue their collective interest.

*XUEGUAN* IN “THE COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHIES OF  
*RU*”

Sima Qian began “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” with the following passage: “Whenever I read a

recruitment regulations, I cannot help but sigh and lay it aside when I get to the part that encourages and expands the avenues for *xueguan*” 余讀功令，至於廣厲學官之路，未嘗不廢書而歎也。<sup>10</sup> What is the meaning of *xueguan* in this passage? What was the relationship between *xueguan* and *ru*? In this section, I shall analyze the history of the term *xueguan* and its specific meaning in *The Grand Scribe's Records*.

In the texts dated to before *The Grand Scribe's Records*, the term *xueguan* does not appear.<sup>11</sup> In the Han texts produced after *The Grand Scribe's Records*, *xueguan* appears once in the *Salt and Iron Debates* (Yan

tie lun 鹽鐵論) and about twenty-seven times in *The History of Western Han*. Since the original meaning of *guan* 官 is “government office,” *xueguan* in the *Salt and Iron Debates* and in most of its occurrences in *The History of Western Han* means either “government office for learning” or “buildings of an official academy,” a metonymic reference to the official academy.<sup>12</sup> For example, the passage where *xueguan* occurs in the *Salt and Iron Debates* reads, “Emperor Xuan constructed an academy and was close to the loyal and honest [officials]” 宣帝建學官，親近忠良。<sup>13</sup> From the original meaning of “official academy,” by *The History of Western*

*Han* the phrase had come to mean “official learning” and “official teachers.” One passage reads, “By the time of Emperor Xuan and Emperor Yuan, the teachings of Mr. Shi, Mr. Meng, Mr. Liangqiu, and Mr. Jing were listed as the official learning. Outside the official academies (*xueguan*), the thought of Fei and Gao were taught among the people” 訖于宣、元，有施、孟、梁丘、京氏列於學官，而民間有費、高二家之說。<sup>14</sup>

Another passage reads, “[The emperor] should distribute [the essays of Yu] to the commanderies and states and ask official teachers (*xueguan*) to teach them” 宜班郡國，令學官以教授。<sup>15</sup>

The three occurrences of the term



*xueguan* in *The Grand Scribe's Records* are all in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” In none of these cases can the phrase be translated as “official bureau for learning,” “official learning,” or “official teachers.”

Before we explore the phrase “encourage and expand the avenues for *xueguan*” that I noted earlier, let us examine the second and third occurrences of *xueguan* in the same chapter. Sima Qian tells us that when Emperor Wu promoted *ru* learning, Gongsun Hong's knowledge of the *Annals* permitted him to advance from being a commoner to the highest position in officialdom. Then, Sima Qian continued, “as a *xueguan*

Gongsun Hong grieved over the stagnation of the Way and therefore submitted the following memorial.” 公孫弘為學官，悼道之鬱滯，乃請曰。 Both *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典 and *Dai KanWa jiten* 大漢和辭典 cite this phrase in their entries on *xueguan* and explain the phrase as an “official-teacher who teaches at academies.”<sup>16</sup> But if we carefully examine the context, this reading will not do. *The History of Western Han* records that Gongsun Hong submitted his memorial in the fifth year of Yuanshuo 元朔, that is, 124 BCE.<sup>17</sup> In that year, Gongsun Hong served either as the Grandee Secretary or as Chancellor.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, when Sima Qian said,

“Gongsun Hong was a *xueguan*,” he obviously did not mean that Gongsun Hong was an official-teacher in charge of teaching, as *Hanyu da cidian* and *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* indicate. Instead, *guan* here should be interpreted in terms of its extended meaning —“official”—and *xueguan* in this passage must mean “learned official.”<sup>19</sup>

The third occurrence of *xueguan* in *The Grand Scribe's Records* appears in a passage that reads, “Though [the records] regarding the conduct of the *xueguan dizi* have not been preserved, hundreds of them advanced to the post of Grand Master, Gentleman of the Interior, or Clerk in Charge of

Precedents” 學官弟子行雖不備，而至於大夫，郎中，掌故以百數。<sup>20</sup>

A survey of roughly contemporaneous texts shows that *xueguan dizi* appeared as a compound three times in *The History of Western Han*. When we skip the occurrence in a passage that Ban Gu copied from “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, the other occurrences of *xueguan dizi* are in “The Collective Biographies of Gracious Officials” (*Xunli zhuan* 循吏傳) of *The History of Western Han*. Apparently Wen Weng 文翁 built an academy (*xueguan* 學官) in the marketplace of Chengdu 成都 and recruited children from neighboring counties as “*xueguan*

dizi.” Then, several years later, “clerks and commoners competed to be *xueguan dizi*.”<sup>21</sup> This context shows that *xueguan dizi* here refers to students at the official academy.

Probably influenced by the use of *xueguan dizi* in *The History of Western Han*, Yang Shuda 楊樹達 explained *xueguan dizi* in *The Grand Scribe's Records* as students of the official academy as well.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, Burton Watson rendered *xueguan dizi* in this passage as “disciples who became scholar officials.”<sup>23</sup> I prefer that reading, for the following reasons.

First, Yang Shuda's reading is not supported by the immediate textual context. Sima Qian had begun by

mentioning that more than ten disciples of Master Shen (Shengong 申公) had been appointed as Erudites and then enumerated the highest offices to which they rose. After a general comment on these officials' achievements, Sima Qian introduced the *xueguan dizi* with the passage I cited above—"hundreds of them advanced." At no point in this passage is there a mention of an official academy. Suddenly introducing the students of official academy would be strange. It may be that Yang Shuda also saw this problem and that was why he went on to suggest that here *xueguan dizi*—that is, "the students of official academy" in his understanding—

referred not to disciples of Master Shen but to disciples of Master Shen's disciples, who had served as Erudites at the official academy. This is a conjecture without support of strong textual evidence. In my opinion, Sima Qian did not have in mind the disciples of Master Shen's disciples at all. Master Shen's disciple Kong Anguo was the teacher of Ni Kuan at the Imperial Academy, and Ni Kuan assumed the position of Grandee Secretary, as Sima Qian knew. If he had the disciples of Master Shen's disciples in mind, certainly Sima would have mentioned Ni Kuan here.

Second, the passage from *The Grand Scribe's Records* is about the

disciples of Master Shen who won official positions. Sima Qian first enumerated those who successfully advanced to fairly important administrative posts, such as the governor of Linhuai (*Linhuai Taishou* 臨淮太守) or the administrator of Jiaoxi (*Jiaoxi Neishi* 膠西內史). Then he listed those of Master Shen's disciples who were awarded such sinecures as Grand Master, Gentleman of the Interior, and so on. The accomplishments of those who became important bureaucrats were disposed of in a single sentence. When Sima Qian wrote, "While the records of the conduct of the disciples who became learned-officials [*xueguan dizi*] are not



preserved, hundreds of them ...,” he made clear that, though he did not know Master Shen’s disciples very well, he knew that they flourished in officialdom.

Finally, by calling Gongsun Hong a *xueguan*, Sima Qian meant to call him a learned official. It follows that when, in the same chapter, he referred to officials who specialized in the *Book of Songs* (hereafter, *Songs*) as *xueguan*, he meant to call them learned officials as well.

Let us now return to the opening line of “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*”:

Whenever I read recruitment

regulations (*gongling*), I cannot help but sigh and lay it aside when I get to the part that encourages and expands the avenues for *xueguan*.

In order to better understand the phrase *xueguan* here, we must consider the meaning of *gongling*. Looking at this passage, Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (fl. eighth century) explained *gongling* as decrees regarding the assessment of scholars' performance.<sup>24</sup> Morohashi followed Sima Zhen's explanation, defining *gongling* here as prescriptions regarding academic affairs and *gong* as academic performance.<sup>25</sup> Watson followed suit, translating *gongling* as

“rules of educational institutions.”<sup>26</sup>

However, this explanation cannot do justice to the other occurrence of this term in the chapter. In a memorial, Gongsun Hong pointed out that the officials selected in accordance with their knowledge of literature and rituals lacked opportunities for advancement; he suggested appointing clerks who were schooled in one of the Five Classics to assist metropolitan officials, Messenger Officers (*Daxing* 大行), and commandery governors; he requested that his proposal appear on *gongling*.<sup>27</sup> From the context, it looks like *gongling* did not relate to the assessment of scholars' academic performance or to school rules, but to

decrees or edicts regarding assessing and recruiting officials. This reading well corresponds with Yan Shigu's understanding of this term; he explained *gongling* as *xuanju ling* 選舉令 (recruitment decree) of later times.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the term *gongling* appears twice in Han Bamboo Strips from Juyan (*Juyan Han jian* 居延漢簡), both cases in discussions of the performance of military officials. In his study of these materials, Chen Pan'an 陳槃庵 claimed that the term *gongling* did not necessarily relate to scholars and may have referred to all of the decrees assessing and promoting officials in general.<sup>29</sup> This

interpretation works well for the opening line of “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” because it would mean that Sima Qian singled out the part of the recruitment regulations (*gongling*) that related to *xueguan*. But what special group does *xueguan* here refer to?

To judge from context and syntax, *xueguan* here clearly has no relation with “buildings of official academies,” “academies,” or “official learning.” It must refer to either “official-teachers” or “learned officials.” Might it mean “official (teachers) scholars,” as Watson rendered it?<sup>30</sup> The answerer is negative. Sima Qian must have had “learned officials” in mind in this

passage for two reasons. Throughout “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” Sima paid little attention to official-scholars and their activities in the official academies, focusing instead on the official careers of men schooled in the Five Classics. And while an official-scholar could not rise to a position higher than Erudite at the Imperial Academy, Sima never suggested that this was the ideal position for a *xueguan*. On the contrary, he regretted that during the reign of Emperor Jing various Erudites merely had empty official titles, waiting to be consulted; not one of them advanced to administrative positions.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, when Sima

Qian sighed over the decrees regarding “expanding the avenues for *xueguan*,” it was not official-scholars or official academies that worried him—he was concerned about the avenues for learned officials to posts with real power.<sup>32</sup>

In *The Grand Scribe's Records*, or, more precisely, in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” *xueguan* refers to learned officials. But this was an unusual usage. Did Sima Qian create a new concept when he used *xueguan* to denote learned officials?

As I have shown earlier, the phrase *xueguan* does not occur in any of the extant texts written before Sima Qian used it, and after the appearance of *The*

*Grand Scribe's Records* it became widespread. During the Han it occurred in the *Salt and Iron Debates* and *The History of Western Han*. Appearing in the latter twenty-seven times, these passages are all discussions of official academies or related topics.

However, it is hard to say that *xueguan* as a concept did not exist before Sima Qian, because the pre-Han texts available to us are extremely limited. This conjecture can be further confirmed by one of the occurrences of *xueguan* in *The History of Western Han*. It is from a memorial by Wuqiu Shouwang, a contemporary of Sima Qian.<sup>33</sup> But Wuqiu employed the term in the sense of official academies.<sup>34</sup> It



seems likely that Sima Qian pioneered the use of the term to refer to learned officials, inventing both a new identity and a new category. But what special characteristics did Sima Qian attribute to the “learned officials”? Why did he open a chapter by expressing his concern for this group?

#### INVOKING A SACRED HISTORY OF *RU* OFFICIALS

After sighing over the decrees about learned officials, Sima Qian went a bit further, adding the remark, “Alas.” This strong interjection clearly announces what is coming. When the Zhou court declined, and the ritual and music system collapsed, the historian told us, Confucius appeared. He edited

the *Songs* (*Shi* 詩) and the *Book of Documents* (*Shu* 書) (hereafter, *Documents*), revived the traditions of music and ritual, and thereby rejuvenated the Way of the King (*wang dao* 王道). Still, when Confucius sought employment, no lord hired him. That was when he composed the *Annals* to set forth the Laws of the King (*wang fa* 王法).

The frustrations of Confucius were balanced by the success of his disciples. After Confucius died, his important disciples became imperial tutors and ministers and the lesser ones, friends and teachers of the lower officials. Because of their teachings, the likes of Mencius and Xunzi gained

great reputations during the time of King Wei and King Xuan of Qi (378–323 BCE). It seems that the successful official careers of Confucius's immediate disciples ignited the learned-scholars' passion and hope for the future.

But things took a radical turn when the Qin dynasty was established. Sima Qian proceeded to relate that the philistine Qin court burned books such as the *Songs* and the *Documents* and buried technicians (*shushi* 術士) alive. This was the nadir in the history of the relations between rulers and *ru* (*zhuru* 諸儒). After the founding of the Han, the situation improved. Shusun Tong 叔孫通, a *ru*, drew up the imperial

ceremonies, because of which he was appointed as Grand Master of Ceremonies. Various literati (*zhusheng* 諸生), including Shu's disciples, were given preferential treatment. But Sima Qian reminded us that most high official posts were occupied by military men at that time.

Sima Qian explained that although Emperor Wen began to employ *ru* he in fact favored the “teachings of laws and names” (*xingming zhi yan* 刑名之言). During Emperor Jing's reign, the preference of the empress dowager Dou for the teachings of the Huang-Lao tradition (*HuangLao zhishu* 黃老之數) barred the way of Erudites to promotion. Not until Emperor Wu was

enthroned did the court begin to recruit men of letters (*fang zheng xian liang wenxue zhi shi* 方正賢良文學之士, literally, men of letters who are sincere, upright, worthy, and good). Thereafter, the studies of the Five Classics began to flourish. When Gongsun Hong was appointed Chancellor, Sima Qian said, the literati in the whole country did what they could to follow his successful example.

Whereas Sima Qian traced the history of scholars schooled in the Five Classics from the fifth century BCE to the first century BCE., his principal interest lay in their official careers. Events unrelated to this theme were deliberately excluded from “The

Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” In this chapter, we cannot find a survey of the development of *ru* doctrines in the past four hundred years even though Sima Qian noted Mencius’s and Xunzi’s defense of *ru* doctrines and Lu Jia’s 陸賈 and Jia Yi’s 賈誼 advocacy of *ru* teachings in other parts of *The Grand Scribe’s Records*.<sup>35</sup>

For another example, in “The Hereditary House of the Five Families” (*Wuzong Shijia* 五宗世家), Sima Qian recorded that at a time when the imperial court was dominated by Huang-Lao thought, King Xian of Hejian 河間 獻王, the son of Emperor Jing, attracted many *ru* scholars to his court thanks to his intellectual

enthusiasm.<sup>36</sup> Important as that moment was in the revival of *ru* culture, it had little to do with the official careers of *ru* and is not mentioned in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.”

These observations not only confirm that *xueguan* in the opening line of this chapter should be interpreted as “learned officials,” but they demonstrate that the chapter is nothing but a history of the political careers of men schooled in the Five Classics. The vicissitudes of their official careers explain the opening sigh: Sima Qian was deeply touched by and concerned with the careers of *ru* officials.

When we scrutinize the contents of “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” we find that its subjects range from Confucius and his disciples, to *shushi* 術士 and various *ru* 諸儒 of the Qin and early Han periods, to various scholars 諸生, various Erudites 諸博士, and various literati 文學之士 of Sima Qian’s age. While the members of these categories were all more or less immersed in the study of the Five Classics, these terms in fact designated different groups. Among them a range of intellectual orientations are represented, some of which have little enough to do with Confucius. <sup>37</sup>



This corresponds with the historical reception of the Five Classics. Before Sima Qian, the Five Classics—the *Songs*, the *Documents*, the *Annals*, the *Book of Changes* (hereafter, *Changes*), and the Ritual and Musical traditions—were celebrated by various thinkers as the common cultural heritage transmitted from the remote past.<sup>38</sup> Educated men with varying political and philosophical stances all seem to have studied them. Mozi 墨子 and Han Feizi 韓非子, who openly criticized Confucius and his teaching, not only cited the *Songs* and the *Documents* to bolster their arguments, they also repeated stories that appear in the *Annals* and its commentaries to

illustrate their views. In *Huainanzi* 淮南子, both Confucius and Mozi are said to have penetrated the Six Classics.

Furthermore, if one looks at how the word *ru* was used, it soon becomes clear that it referred to men who were dedicated to rituals, musical traditions, and the classic texts. Because he championed all of these, Confucius was a super example of *ru* to thinkers active during the Warring States and early Han periods. But the variety of approaches to the Five Classics is such that few thinkers in the pre-Han and early Han periods ever associate all *ru* with Confucius.

Despite this, in “The Collective

Biographies of *Ru*” Sima Qian employed various strategies to unify *ru* 諸儒, scholars 諸生, *shushi* 術士, Erudites 諸博士 and literati 文學之士 into one group, for whom he provided a shared history.

First, by inventing the concept of “learned officials” and devoting a chapter of his ambitious work to the official careers of men schooled in the Five Classics, Sima Qian imposed a system of classification on officialdom, summoning a political group defined by a shared education. This principle of division makes a fact overshadowed by political conflicts explicit: namely, officials well versed in the Five Classics were differentiated

from the ones without such training. Sima Qian proceeded to cast this distinction as an essential one. If the perfect administrative wisdom—Way of the King—could only be appreciated through a study of the Five Classics, the men who studied those works had to be the most suitable candidates for official positions, and officials without such training were not qualified for their posts.<sup>39</sup>

The very professional skills mastered by men schooled in the Five Classics were contrasted with their frustrating official careers. Sima Qian started with the sage Confucius, who had confidently declared, “If someone employs me, I will accomplish

something within three years,” only to remain perennially unemployed. The historian then connected the Qin slaughter of *shushi* to the unemployment of *ru* during the early Han period. The ironic combination of high qualifications and scant employment aroused the consciousness of the common fate of men schooled in the Five Classics, thereby fostering the development of a group identity. Against this potential identity, the difference in *ru*’s political and philosophical positions faded into the background, becoming insignificant.

Second, Sima Qian tactfully revised the history, casting Confucius, who was widely regarded among Han literati as

a sage and an uncrowned king, as the forefather of *ru* officials, reinforcing the bond he had dreamt up for this group.

Playing with the widely accepted claim that Confucius was a perfect *ru* because of his expertise in the Five Classics, Sima Qian—for the first time in history—directly attributed the Five Classics to Confucius. When he argued that Confucius wrote the *Annals*, edited the *Songs* and the *Documents*, and revived the ritual and musical traditions, he made the Five Classics—which were formerly taken as the common cultural heritage of all educated men—the private intellectual property of the sage and uncrowned

king.<sup>40</sup> Men who were schooled in the Five Classics, no matter how they were called, *ru*, or Erudites, or *shushi*, and no matter how their views diverged, were transformed into the followers of Confucius. Sima Qian constantly emphasized the bond between Confucius and the *ru* group.

For example, he said, “When Chen She proclaimed himself king, the *ru* of Lu took the vessels transmitted from Confucius and went and submitted to King Chen” 陳涉之王也，而魯諸儒持孔氏之禮器往歸陳王。<sup>41</sup> Mencius and Xunzi lived about two hundred years after Confucius. Although they openly announced themselves his followers, neither appears to have had any direct

communication with his disciples. Mencius, born close to Confucius's hometown, famously stated, "The influence of both the gentlemen and the petty men ceases to exist after five generations. I am not able to become a disciple of Confucius—I have learned indirectly from him through others" 君子之澤，五世而斬。小人之澤，五世而斬。予未得為孔子徒也，予私淑諸人也。<sup>42</sup>

From the age of Mencius and Xunzi to Chen She's rebellion against the Qin dynasty, about eighty violent years had passed. However, Sima Qian claimed that the ritual vessels the *ru* of Lu brought to Chen She had belonged to Confucius. Is it difficult to convince



readers to take this passage literally? Nevertheless, in this exaggerated or figurative description, *ru*, originally not necessarily associated with Confucius, became the successors of the sage.

For another example, Sima Qian also said:

When Emperor Gao had defeated Xiang Yu, he marched north and surrounded the state of Lu with his troops. [At that time,] the *ru* of Lu continued to recite and discuss their teachings, and to practice rites and music. The sound of their strings and their voices never

died out. Is it not because of the teachings and influence left behind by the sage that the Lu state loves rites and music so? This is why, when Confucius was in the state of Chen he said, “Let us return! Let us return to Lu! My disciples are ambitious and possess unbridled enthusiasm, as brilliant as colorful silk. I don’t even know how to guide them.” 及高皇帝誅項籍，舉兵圍魯，魯中諸儒尚講誦習禮樂，弦歌之音不絕，豈非聖人之遺化，好禮樂之國哉？故孔子在陳，曰：“歸與歸與！吾黨之小子狂簡，斐然成章，不知所以裁之。”

Sima Qian attributed the vitality of the later *ru* tradition in Lu to the influence of Confucius. To strengthen his point, Sima Qian cited a quotation that appears in both the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. But if we read carefully, we will find that what Confucius commented on were his own disciples, not the *ru* of Lu in general. But thanks to the editorial emendation Sima Qian allowed himself—a causal conjunction “therefore” (*gu* 故) that connects the flourishing of *ru* tradition in Lu and in Confucius’s comments—readers were encouraged to imagine that the message of the uncrowned king had enjoyed tremendous success, and *ru* in the Lu era were all immersed in his

teaching.

Third, not only did Sima Qian prompt the identification of men schooled in the Five Classics with Confucius, he also employed various rhetorical strategies to lead men schooled in the Five Classics—whether *ru*, *shushi*, or Erudites—to identify with each other.

When events with very little actual relation to one another were placed together in a linear structure within a limited textual space, readers are invited to find similarities and construct logical connections. For example, from Confucius to Mencius and Xunzi is a temporal jump of about two hundred years; from Mencius and

Xunzi to the *shushi* of the Qin court, about one hundred years; from the *shushi* of the Qin to the Erudites of the Han, another fifty years. No extant document shows a direct social connection among these different groups. Furthermore, considering the diverse and complicated social and historical circumstances, comparing the experience of Confucius to the destiny of the *shushi* and the Erudites seems a nearly hopeless—or perverse—enterprise.

The author of *The Grand Scribe's Records* faced this challenge undaunted. He simply related these stories one after another, highlighting the theme of professional frustration

and erasing the specific social and political contexts. This treatment not only aligns these stories in a seemingly sequential time without historical disturbances, it suggests that *ru*, *shushi*, and Erudites faced similar conditions. In this narrative structure, the originally obscure relationship among Confucius, *shushi*, and *ru* becomes tangible and fathomable.

Furthermore, Sima Qian frequently used the causal clause to connect different events, identifying the protagonists in different stories with each other. Here is a passage describing the early Han courts: “When Emperor Jing succeeded to the throne, he did not employ *ru*. His mother,

Empress Dowager Dou, adhered to the teachings of Huang-Lao. Therefore, the Erudites, holding their empty official titles, waited to be consulted, and no one advanced to administrative posts” 及至孝景, 不任儒者, 而竇太后又好黃老之術, 故諸博士 具官待問, 未有進者. We know that in the Qin and Han *ru* and Erudites were not identical. One could become an Erudite by demonstrating expertise in the Five Classics—or expertise in *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*.<sup>43</sup> But in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Sima Qian conflated these two categories, and said that the imperial decision not to employ *ru* meant that Erudites had no opportunity for advancement: the slippage is

evident once you appreciate the distinction between the categories.

And when describing Emperor Wu's court, Sima Qian wrote: "When the present emperor came to the throne, officials such as Zhao Wan and Wang Zang advocated *ru* learning. The Emperor was attracted by their ideas. Therefore the court began to recruit literati of moral worth" 及今上即位，趙綰，王 臧之屬明儒學，而上亦鄉之，於是招方正賢良文學之士. Employing a rhetorical strategy much like the one we just considered, Sima Qian connected advocating *ru* learning with recruiting literati, transforming the *ru* and the literati into a single group.



After Sima Qian historicized the *ru* officials, invoking a past for them, he devoted the remainder of “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” to *ru* officials of Emperor Wu’s reign, assembling them into a homogeneous textual community. Sima Qian recorded the names and positions of twenty-two *ru* officials who served under Emperor Wu; he devoted biographical sketches to six of them, organizing the information according to a carefully contrived scheme.

Dwelling on the textual tradition, Sima Qian laid out five communities: those of the *Songs*, the *Documents*, the *Book of Rites* (hereafter, *Rites*), the

*Changes*, and the *Annals*. Each he gave its own interpretive schools, centering on the founding master and extending to his disciples. This teacher–disciple network determined the order in which the names of *ru* officials under Emperor Wu were listed (see [table 2.1](#)).

When discussing the community of the *Songs*, Sima Qian mentioned three interpretive traditions, one established by Master Shen of Lu, another established by Yuan Gu of Qi, and the third established by Mr. Han 韓生 of Yan 燕. Nine officials under Emperor Wu were identified as the disciples of Master Shen and one, Ni Kuan, was identified as the disciple of Master

Shen's disciple Kong Anguo. As we have seen, Sima also said that hundreds of Master Shen's disciples were flourishing as officials of the current regime. In discussing the interpretive school established by Yuan Gu, he claimed that those from Qi who had distinguished themselves by their knowledge of the *Songs* were all disciples of Yuan Gu. As for Mr. Han, he contended that those who talked about the *Songs* in Yan and Zhao 趙 all could trace their learning back to Mr. Han; two of Han's disciples were Mr. Ben 賁生 and Han Shang 韓商, the latter said to be the grandson of Mr. Han.

Sima Qian realized that these three

schools had different interpretive models, and that even people he placed in the same school offered different takes on the *Songs*. But he waved away these dissonant notes, claiming that while the founders of these three schools used different words to elaborate their teachings, in fact they shared the same guidelines. This meant that every official serving under Emperor Wu who claimed to be an expert in the *Songs* was connected, forming a homogenous textual community.

Sima Qian applied the same formula to the scholars who specialized in the four other classics. Specialists of the *Documents* traced their learning

back to Mr. Fu 伏生; Specialists of the *Rites* derived their learning from Mr. Xu 徐生; Specialists of the *Changes* based their learning on Yang He 楊何, whose teachings could be traced back to Confucius; Specialists of the *Annals* belonged to three interpretive schools, one represented by Dong Zhongshu, one represented by Mr. Huwu 胡毋生, and the third represented by Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu 瑕丘江生. Because some men had knowledge of more than one classic, these five textual communities overlapped to some extent. For example, Zhou Ba 周霸 studied the *Songs* with Mr. Shen and the *Changes* with Yang He. Kong Anguo was listed as a member of both the community

surrounding the *Songs* and that of the *Documents*.

While membership of these communities was defined by what book one studied with which master, achievements of those *ru* were defined by one's rank in the officialdom. For each of the biographies in this chapter, Sima Qian began by tracing the origin of his learning and ended with the post he had obtained. In fact, the members of textual communities whom Sima Qian specifically mentioned and profiled tended to be the ones who had obtained official positions. This was underlined in the text. He started his introduction of Master Shen's disciples by saying, "Among the disciples of

Master Shen, more than ten became Erudites” 弟子為博士者十餘人.<sup>44</sup> He listed three disciples of Dong Zhongshu who, he reckoned, had fulfilled their ambitions—two rose to official positions ranked above one thousand bushels. As to the disciples of Dong Zhongshu who got a nod, they became Special Envoy to the emperor (*ming dafu* 命大夫).<sup>45</sup> Hence, the textual communities depicted by Sima Qian, though organized by teacher–disciple relationships, were oriented toward officialdom. This made sense: after all, the Five Classics conveyed the Way of the King, so men schooled in these works could only realize their potential through applying their

knowledge of the Way of King to their society.

Table 2.1. Learning Communities of Five Classics in *Shi ji*

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*Book of Songs*

Mr. Shen 申公 (Emperor Wu 武帝: Superior Grand Master of the Palace 太中大夫)	Zhao Wan 趙綰 ( Grandee Secretary 御史大夫)	
	Wang Zang 王臧 (Prefect of the Gentlemen-of-the-palace 郎中令)	
	Mr. Miao 繆生 (Administrator of Changsha 長沙內史)	
	Xia Kuan 夏寬 (Administrator of Chengyang 城陽內史)	
	Kong Anguo 孔安國 (Governor of Linhuai 臨淮太守)	Ni Kuan 兒寬 (Grandee Secretary)
	Xu Yan 徐偃 (Commandant-in-ordinary of Jiaoxi 膠西中尉)	
	Zhou Ba 周霸 (Administrator of Jiaoxi 膠西內史)	
	Dang Luci 碭魯賜 (Governor of Donghai 東海太守)	
	Quemen Qingji 闕門慶忌 (Administrator of Jiaodong 膠東內史)	
Yuan Gu 轅固 (Emperor Jing 景帝: Erudite 博士; Grand Tutor of King of Qinghe 清河王太傅)		
Mr. Han 韓生 (Emperor Wen 文帝: Erudite; Emperor Jing: the Grand Tutor of King of Changshan 常山王)	[Grandson of Mr. Han] Han Shang 韓商 (Emperor Wu: Erudite)	
	Mr. Ben 賁生	

*Spring and Autumn Annals*

Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (Emperor Jing: Erudite; Emperor Wu: Administrator of Jiangdu 江都相)	Lü Bushu 呂步舒 (Chief Clerk 長史)
	Chu Da 褚大 (Administrator of Liang 梁相)
	Yin Zhong 殷忠
Mr. Huwu 胡毋生 (Emperor Jing: Erudite)	Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (Chancellor 丞相)
Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu 瑕丘江生	



*Book of Documents*

Mr. Fu 伏生 (Qin dynasty: Erudite)	Mr. Zhang 張生(Erudite)	
	Chao Cuo 朝錯 (Emperor Jing: Grandee Secretary)	
	Mr. Ouyang 歐陽生	Ni Kuan
	The grandson of Mr. Fu 伏生孫	
?	Kong Anguo 孔安國	Ni Kuan
	Zhou Ba 周霸	
	Jia Jia 賈嘉	

*Book of Rites*

Mr. Gaotang 高堂生	
Mr. Xu 徐生 (Emperor Wen: Grand Master of Rites 禮官大夫)	[Grandson of Mr. Xu] Xu Xiang 徐襄 (Administrator of Guangling 廣陵內史)
	[Grandson of Mr. Xu] Xu Yan 徐延 (Grand Master of Rites)
	Gonghu Manyi 公戶滿意 (Grand Master of Rites)
	Mr. Huan 桓生 (Grand Master of Rites)
	Shan Ci 單次 (Grand Master of Rites)
	Xiao Fen 蕭奮 (Governor of Huaiyang 淮陽太守)

*Book of Changes*

Confucius 孔子	Shang Qu 商瞿	Four generations ...	Tian He 田何	Wang Tong 王同	Yang He 楊何 (Ordinary Grand Master 中大夫)
				?	Ji Mocheng 即墨成 (Administrator of Chengyang 城陽相)
				?	Meng Dan 孟佗 (Grand Master of Palace of Heir Apparent 太子門大夫)
				?	Zhou Ba 周霸
				?	Heng Hu 衡胡 (official of 2,000 bushels 二千石)
				?	Zhufu Yan 主父偃 (Administrator of Qi 齊相)

It follows that a successful member of these textual communities had two different but related identities: he was a disciple of a certain master, subject to the obligation he owed to both his teacher and his fellows; at the same time and he was a court official, enjoying the power and prestige brought by his rank. For example, Gongsun Hong achieved the Chancellor position, possessing political power few people could match. But in the textual community, he was a disciple of Mr. Huwu. Similarly, Ni Kuan was appointed to Grandee Secretary, occupying a position in the crest of the power pyramid for years. But in the

textual community, he was a disciple of both Mr. Ouyang and Kong Anguo. Sima Qian tactfully suggested that a man's official identity should be subordinated to his scholarly identity because the knowledge of the Five Classics one obtained from his teacher determined a man's success in government. A formula used many times in the chapter is "X achieved Position Y because of his knowledge of Classic Z." For example, Sima Qian wrote, "Xiao Fen of Xiaqiu became the Governor of Huaiyang because of [his expertise in] rites," 瑕丘蕭奮以禮為淮陽太守, and, "Ji Mocheng advanced to the position of prime minister of Chengyang because of [his knowledge

of] the *Changes*” 即墨成以易至城陽相.

When both Yuan Gu and Gongsun Hong were recommended to the court because of their knowledge of the Five Classics, Sima Qian informs us, Gongsun Hong was very nervous and shy in Yuan Gu's presence and “only ventured now and then to cast a glance at him out of the corner of his eyes” 側目而視固. On that occasion, “Yuan Gu said to Gongsun Hong, ‘Mr. Gongsun, always strive to base your words on correct learning. Never twist your learning around in order to flatter the age’” 固曰: “公孫子, 務正學以言, 無曲學以阿世!” One might have some doubts about the accuracy of this scene,

since there was no way for Sima Qian to know the facial expression of Gongsun Hong or the exact words Yuan Gu said to him. Sima Qian must have based his description either on some anecdotes or on his imagination. But in the context of “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” this scenario seems true to life: Yuan Gu was one of the founding masters in the textual communities and, compared with him, Gongsun Hong was of very low rank indeed. This is why Gongsun Hong felt nervous and uneasy in the presence of Yuan Gu. Thanks to his senior status, Yuan Gu did not hesitate to admonish Gongsun Hong.

In these scenes in Sima Qian’s

chapter on *ru*, the political world run according to the mechanics of power was balanced by the textual communities in which the learned were revered by the neophytes.

### REPRESENTING OR PRODUCING?

The textual community constructed by Sima Qian was founded on a shared knowledge of the Five Classics, reinforced by teacher–disciple relationships. But if we carefully examine the genealogy presented by Sima Qian, some doubts arise.

For example, what exactly did Sima Qian know about the textual community devoted to the *Documents*? He contended that Mr. Fu 伏生, the



founder of the Han tradition of the *Documents*, taught Mr. Zhang 張生 and Mr. Ouyang 歐陽生; the latter taught Ni Kuan. He also mentioned the grandson of Mr. Fu, who is said to have been recommended to the court because of his knowledge of the *Documents*. But Sima Qian told us that he actually knew nothing about him. Of the members of this seemingly well-constructed community, Sima Qian could give only one person's full name, that is, Ni Kuan, who had risen to high office during Sima Qian's lifetime.

Is it possible that Sima Qian did know the full names of Fu, Zhang, and Ouyang, skipping their given names because they were well known? We can

exclude this possibility, because Sima Qian tended to present as much information about names as possible, especially in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” If he did not provide the full names of the founding fathers of the community of the *Documents*, or of his immediate disciples or grandson, he must have had no such records.

Although I have no evidence that Sima Qian presented any false information, I cannot refrain from noting that Zhang and Ouyang were extremely popular surnames in the Han, the Smith and Cohen of their day, and there must have been thousands of Mr. Zhangs and Mr. Ouyangs

throughout the country, possibly hundreds within the *ru* group. Saying that Mr. Fu taught Mr. Zhang and Mr. Ouyang is like saying that Mr. Fu taught Mr. X and Mr. Y. We can reasonably conjecture a scenario: the founder of the tradition was well known; a popular saying named Mr. Fu as the first teacher of the *Documents* in the Han. At the same time, Ni Kuan, a high official, was widely known to have specialized in the same book. It is just possible that Sima Qian invented Ni Kuan's teacher and identified him as Mr. Fu's direct disciple, creating a homogenous group organized around the *Documents*.

Similar flaws can be found in Sima

Qian's descriptions of other textual communities. He said that the Han *ru* who spoke about rites all based their learning on Mr. Xu 徐生, whose disciples included Xu Yan 徐延, Xu Xiang 徐襄, Gonghu Manyi 公戶滿意, Mr. Huan 桓生, Shan Ci 單次, and Xiao Fen 蕭奮. Why is Xu's full name not given? In fact, of the fifty people affiliated with the textual communities Sima Qian described, ten were identified only by their surnames or by no name at all.

I will mention a few other doubts. Sima Qian contended that the men from Qi who mastered the *Songs* all were disciples of Yuan Gu—without mentioning a single other name. And

he depicted Yang He as the founding father of the Han tradition of the *Changes*, tracing his learning back to Confucius. The line of descent was: Confucius to Shang Qu 商瞿, Shang Qu to his disciples, from unnamed disciple to unnamed disciple through six generations, to Tian He 田何 (active during the Qin-Han transition), Tian He to Wang Tong 王同, and Wang Tong to Yang He. What are we to make of a four-generation gap? Sima Qian could not name the book's most prominent experts from Confucius's direct disciples to the late Qin.

Still, these problems do not indicate that Sima Qian created the textual communities out of the air. The

Five Classics is a complex corpus, written in archaic languages and full of textual disjunctions. Sections from the *Documents* and the *Changes* can be dated to the eleventh century BCE, which means that there was a millennial gap between the language of the text and the language used in the Han. The *Annals* consists of very concise records of historical events, which do not make any sense if one does not know the historical background. It was difficult for anyone to study the Five Classics by himself: virtually every *ru* must have had a teacher.

The doubtful points in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” only

suggest that Han-era *ru* probably did not value the teacher–disciple relationship as highly as Sima Qian suggested, did not keep records of the transmission line of the Five Classics, and did not perceive themselves as members of a single community. When Sima Qian constructed the textual communities, he tailored and embellished reality, creating a coherent group visible to its members and others.

The textual community constructed by Sima Qian was not an actual group and never mobilized for political struggle. Thanks to *The Grand Scribe's Records* it acquired potential. As I pointed out at the beginning of this

chapter, *ru* officials warred constantly. Gongsun Hong and Ni Kuan achieved the highest positions an official could ever dream of, from which they might have promoted many *ru*. But neither of them identified with the textual community conjured up by Sima Qian, nor did they assume responsibilities toward their teachers and fellow disciples. The Ni Kuan of *The Grand Scribe's Records* is a warmhearted and kind man, but he never promoted any *ru* officials. The Gongsun Hong of *The Grand Scribe's Records* is a narrow-minded man who did not hesitate to drive fellow *ru* officials from office. These stories constitute a sharp contrast with the one Sima Qian



devoted to Zhang Tang, a clerk official who rose from the bottom of the officialdom and always tried to promote his subordinates.

Precisely against the background that *ru* did not form an interest group, Sima Qian constructed these textual communities and invoked a history of them. Although these homogeneous communities of *ru* seem to exist merely on paper, it highlighted their propensity to function as a group.

## REDEFINING THE PRINCIPLES OF HIERARCHY

Two distinct impressions arise as one reads *The Grand Scribe's Records*: some officials seem to inhabit a

utopian realm where learning guarantees employment and swift promotions; other officials have to form alliances and throw themselves into factional struggles to survive. In this part, I will begin by exploring Sima Qian's presentation of the officials who served under Emperor Wu, showing why he classified eminent officials in different groups, singling out the *ru* group for praise. Then I will turn to the bifurcation within the text of *The Grand Scribe's Records*, comparing the different versions of stories presented by Sima Qian and Ban Gu to show how Sima Qian tailored his material to create a utopia for *ru* officials and how Sima

Qian used this utopia to present a specific political agenda.

## SIMA QIAN'S REPRESENTATION OF OFFICIALDOM UNDER EMPEROR WU

In 134 BCE Emperor Wu issued a decree ordering all of China's commanderies to recommend talented people to offer much-needed advice to the throne. Dong Zhongshu, who had served Wu's predecessor, Emperor Jing, as an Erudite, was recommended as "a scholar worthy and good" (*xianliang* 賢良) and wrote three essays in reply to the emperor's inquiries.<sup>46</sup> A passage in one of his essays reads:

Of the many people in a commandery or a state, not a single person responded to your recent inquiry, which indicates that the Way of the King is likely to become extinct. Your humble servant suggests that Your Majesty establish an Imperial Academy, appoint illuminating teachers, and thereby nurture the literati of the world.... The commandery governors and the magistrates are the teachers and leaders of the common people.... Nowadays, officials not only

have forgotten to instruct the common people, they do not follow Your Majesty's laws, ... therefore *yin* and *yang* are displaced and ferocious *qi* is diffused. The living things barely flourish and the common people are not taken care of. All these things are caused by the unworthiness of the senior officials.

今以一郡一國之眾，對亡應書者，是王道往往而絕也。臣願陛下興太學，置明師，以養天下之士 ... 今之郡守、縣令，民之師帥 ... 今吏既亡教

訓於下，或不承用 主上之法 ... 是以陰陽錯繆，氛氣充塞，群生寡遂，黎民未濟，皆長吏不明，使 至於此也。

In general, senior officials are drawn from among the Gentlemen of the Palace (*langzhong* 郎中) and the Inner-Gentlemen (*zhonglang* 中郎). Descendants of officials ranked two thousand bushels or above were chosen as Gentleman-attendants and rich people can also buy their positions. These people are not necessarily worthy.

Furthermore, when the ancient spoke of their achievements, their concern was whether or not the officials fulfilled their duties, not how long they had served. Therefore, although the less talented people served day after day and month after month, they should remain in less important positions. Although the worthy people entered officialdom recently, this should not hinder them from serving as eminent officials and assisting the emperor. This will permit these officials to apply their

energy and wisdom to the fullest, devoting themselves to administration so as to produce real results. Today the situation is different. [Officials] perform their daily tasks and thereby achieve high rank; as their period of service grows, they are promoted. As a result, the sense of honor and the sense of shame are mixed and the worthy are indistinguishable from the unworthy. This phenomenon does not accord with true values. In his ignorance your servant suggests that Your Majesty



order                                 marquises,  
commandery governors, and  
officials ranked two thousand  
bushels or above to select the  
worthy from among their  
clerks and the common  
people, providing two men  
yearly who will serve as  
Guard of the Lodgings  
[namely,                                 as  
Gentlemanattendants]. This  
will permit Your Majesty to  
evaluate the abilities of the  
eminent officials. Those who  
supply worthy men will be  
rewarded, while those who  
supply unworthy men will be  
punished. If you proceed in

this way, the various  
marquises and officials  
ranked above two thousand  
bushels will all do their best  
to seek out worthies, and you  
will be able to identify and  
employ the literati  
throughout the empire.

夫長吏多出於郎中，中郎。吏  
二千石子弟選郎吏，又以富  
訾，未必賢也。且古所謂功  
者，以任官稱職為差，非  
（所）謂積日綦久也。故小  
材雖綦日，不離於小官；賢  
材雖未久，不害為輔佐。是以  
有司竭力盡知，務治其業而  
以赴功。今則不然。（累）日

以取貴,積久以致官,是以廉  
恥貿亂,賢不肖渾殽,未得其  
真.臣愚以為使諸列 侯、郡  
守、二千石各擇其吏民之賢  
者,歲貢各二人以給宿衛,且  
以觀大臣之能; 所貢賢者  
有賞,所貢不肖者有罰.夫如  
是,諸侯、吏二千石皆盡心  
於求賢,天下之 士可得而官  
使.<sup>47</sup>

The portions of this passage that suggest establishing an Imperial Academy and routinizing the recommendation system are very well known. According to the conventional view, it shows that Dong Zhongshu was

the chief architect behind Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* learning.<sup>48</sup> But when we set Dong's proposal back into its context, it becomes clear that what he suggested was not the promotion of *ru* or *ru* learning per se, but a series of reforms to the system of official recruitment and promotion.

First, Dong severely criticized the current government for only accepting the rich and the descendants of powerful officials into its ranks. He pointed out that senior officials (*zhangli* 長吏)—that is, commandery governors (*junshou* 郡守) and magistrates (*xianling* 縣令)—were mainly selected from Gentleman-attendants (*langli* 郎吏), including

Gentlemen-of-the-palace and Inner-gentlemen. Most of these Gentleman-attendants achieved their positions through money or their prestigious family background.<sup>49</sup> By criticizing the administrative performance of these officials, Dong implied that the rich and the descendants of powerful official families lacked proper qualifications for high office.

Dong proposed two ways for the court to find suitable officials: the recommendation system and establishing an Imperial Academy. We can see that he classified current officials according to the route they had taken into officialdom: those who benefited from their family background

and those who entered through the Imperial Academy and the recommendation system.

Second, Dong Zhongshu criticized the current system for allowing people to rise by accumulating achievements and length of service. He argued, “Although the less talented people served day after day and month after month, they should remain in less important positions. Although the worthy people entered officialdom recently, this should not hinder them from serving as eminent officials and assisting the emperor.” Judging from the context, the “worthy people” (*xiancai* 賢材) were those who entered officialdom through the Imperial

Academy and the recommendation system. By contrast, the “less talented people” (*xiaocai* 小材) must be those who started their careers as clerks or something similar, since Dong said that the less talented should stay at the bottom of the bureaucracy. In the memorial, it is not clear whether the people who rose from the bottom of the bureaucracy overlapped with those who entered officialdom through their powerful family backgrounds. But Sima Qian clearly divided officials from powerful families and officials from the bottom of the bureaucracy into two groups and criticized both, as the above observation shows.

In light of Dong Zhongshu’s

perception of contemporaneous officials and his ideal candidates, I will explore Sima Qian's representation of Emperor Wu's political world.

A [table 1.3](#) shows, Sima Qian wrote discrete biographies of sixteen eminent officials from Emperor Wu's reign—together these make up nine chapters. Juxtaposed with these independent biographies are “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” and “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials,” two chapters that are primarily devoted to officials active under Emperor Wu. Furthermore, in “The Treatise on the Balanced Standard” (*Ping zhun shu* 平准書)—a chapter seemingly devoted to



economics and related policies—Sima Qian included detailed biographies of three eminent officials who served Emperor Wu. Weaving the information and statements provided in these chapters into one picture, we can observe that Sima Qian's perception of the officialdom of his age was remarkably similar to Dong Zhongshu's, even though Dong Zhongshu was one or two generations older than Sima Qian and wrote his memorial about fifty years before Sima Qian's *The Grand Scribe's Records*.<sup>50</sup> Although he did not speak out directly in a single essay, as Dong did, nonetheless, by carefully arranging his chapters, Sima skillfully divided his

eminent officials into three groups: descendants of powerful families, people who rose from the bottom of the bureaucracy, and *ru* officials who entered officialdom through the Imperial Academy and the recommendation system. Sharing Dong's ideal, Sima Qian contended that the *ru* officials trained in the Five Classics were the most qualified official candidates.

Among the nine chapters in *The Grand Scribe's Records* devoted to discrete biographies of officials active during Emperor Wu's reign, chapter 107 is devoted to two chancellors—Dou Ying 竇嬰 and Tian Fen 田蚡—and chapter 111, to two Commanders-

in-Chief—Wei Qing 衛青 and Huo Qubing 霍去病. All were closely related to consorts of Emperor Jing and Emperor Wu. In these two chapters, Sima Qian deliberately emphasized these officials' special ties to the imperial families and vividly demonstrated how these ties determined the rise and fall of their official careers.

Chapters 103 and 120 are devoted to five eminent officials who came from four powerful families, namely, Shi Jian 石建, Shi Qing 石慶, Zhang Ou 張歐, Ji An 汲黯, and Zheng Dangshi 鄭當時. Sima Qian depicted the large and influential families of his age, whose members not only had held

prominent posts since or even before the founding of Han—members of a single family simultaneously occupied more than ten prominent positions during Emperor Wu's reign. With great care, statements like the following are placed in each biography:

De is the second son of [Shi] Qing [an official who died while serving as Chancellor]. ... The emperor recognized him as the heir [of Shi Qing] and allowed him to succeed to the marquissate ... De later became Grand Master of Ceremonies.

慶中子德 ... 上以德為嗣, 代  
侯.後為太常.<sup>51</sup>

Grand Secretary Zhang Shu,  
whose familiar name was Ou,  
was the son of a concubine of  
[Zhang Yue,] the Marquis of  
Anqiu ... His sons and  
grandsons all advanced to  
important posts in  
government.

御史大夫張叔者,名歐,安丘  
侯說之庶子也 ... [張叔]子  
孫咸至大官矣.<sup>52</sup>

Thanks to Zhuang [i.e.,

Zheng Dangshi, who served as one of the Nine Ministers for decades], six or seven of his bothers and descendants advanced to positions ranked two thousand bushels.

莊兄弟子孫以莊故，至二千石六七人焉。<sup>53</sup>

Sima Qian pointed out that the descendants of powerful officials achieved their positions because of family prestige. By returning to this repeatedly, he showed that the current system made it easy for powerful officials to secure important posts for their family members, thereby

reproducing their status.

Juxtaposed with this picture, in “The Treatise on the Balanced Standard” Sima Qian related the stories of three eminent officials who came from rich merchant families, namely, Bu Shi 卜式 and Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊—both of whom once served as Grandee Secretary—and Kong Jin 孔僅, who once served as Grand Prefect of Agriculture (*Da nongling* 大農令). These three officials entered officialdom either by donating money to the government or by buying positions such as Gentleman-attendant outright, and thereby serving in the palace (*shizhong* 侍中).<sup>54</sup> While demonstrating how money could help

merchants and their descendants to penetrate high levels of the bureaucracy, Sima Qian at the same time provided a historical survey of Emperor Wu's policy on the sale of official positions. This indicates that selling official positions was a routine practice of the Han court at that time, and these three officials represented many others who had entered the bureaucracy through this avenue.

Sima Qian openly criticized this system: he saw it as corrupting, as he stated,

People who donate goods are  
appointed to official posts;



people who contribute commodities are pardoned for their crimes. [As a result], the recommendation system has declined; the sense of integrity and the sense of shame are mixed together.

入物者補官，出貨者除罪，選舉陵遲，廉恥相冒。<sup>55</sup>

“[The officials] requested the creation of honorary official positions, called ‘ranks of military merit.’ ... The purchasers of *guanshou*, the fifth grade of the ‘ranks of military merit,’ fill clerical

vacancies and have priority in the assignment of official positions.” ... There are many avenues, mixed together, that one may take toward officialdom, which means that the duties of officials are poorly performed.

“請置賞官,命曰武功爵 ... 諸買武功爵官首者試補吏,先除” ... 吏道雜而多端,則官職耗廢.<sup>56</sup>

Employing a strategy similar to that used by Dong Zhongshu, Sima Qian attacked the morality and the

performance of officials who bought their positions. Furthermore, he explicitly contrasted *ru* officials who entered the bureaucracy through the recommendation system with those who bought their positions, praising the former and scorning the latter. Gongsun Hong had entered the bureaucracy through the recommendation system. Whereas Sima Qian disparaged him elsewhere in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, in this chapter Gongsun Hong appears as an exemplary official who lived a frugal life in order to correct the morals of other administrators who, corrupted by the sale of offices, merely pursued profit.<sup>57</sup>

While depicting a group of eminent officials from powerful families, Sima Qian composed “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials.” In writing it, he apparently had in mind a mirror image of “The Collective Biographies of Gracious Officials” (*Xunli liezhuan* 循吏列傳).<sup>58</sup> Officials described in the former chapter believed that laws and punishments were the most efficient and desirable means to administer the country; officials in the latter chapter seldom applied severe laws, relying on their exemplary personalities to influence people.

Interestingly, officials placed in “The Collective Biographies of

Gracious Officials” by Sima Qian were all active during the Eastern Zhou period (770–221 BCE), while officials placed in the “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials” were all Han officials. As some modern scholars have observed, through this deliberate arrangement Sima Qian expressed his own philosophy of rulership and indirectly criticized the administrative style of the Han court.<sup>59</sup>

Behind his criticism of immorality and disciplinarianism in “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials” lay an attack on an interest group. Of the eleven officials profiled in the chapter on “harsh officials,” ten had risen to lofty posts under Emperor

Wu. It cannot be a coincidence that, except for Ning Cheng 寧成 and Zhou Yangyou 周陽由, these men all came from obscure backgrounds, started their careers as clerks at the bottom of bureaucracy, and advanced to hold a position either as one of the Nine Ministers or one of the Three Dukes. All were promoted because of two factors: their administrative achievements and the networks they wove themselves into.

Not only did social origins and administrative styles distinguish these officials from other eminent officials, these hard-bitten infighters promoted and helped each other in a world full of intense struggles for power. Sima Qian

noted that Ning Cheng promoted Zhang Tang, who served as his clerk, to District Defender of Maoling (*Maoling wei* 茂陵尉). And Zhang Tang and Zhao Yu 趙禹 got to know each other in 135 BCE, when both worked for Chancellor Tian Fen. Ten years later, both of them served among the Nine Ministers.<sup>60</sup> Sima Qian said that at that moment Zhang Tang treated Zhao Yu as a younger brother serves the older. Du Zhou 杜周 first served as a clerk to Yi Zong 義縱, who held the post of governor of Nanyang (*Nanyang shou* 南陽守) at that moment, and Yi recommended Du for the position of a clerk to the Commandant of Justice. Wang Shuwen 王舒溫, Yin Qi 尹齊,

and Du Zhou all served as subordinates under Zhang Tang at one time or another. Sima Qian specifically pointed out that Zhang Tang often openly praised the abilities of his subordinates and worked to advance them in the bureaucracy.<sup>61</sup>

Among the seventy-seven eminent officials identified in *The Grand Scribe's Records* as having served during Emperor Wu's reign, thirteen started their careers as clerks and climbed step by step from the bottom of the bureaucracy.<sup>62</sup> Sima Qian placed all of them in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials" except for Yan Yi 顏異 and Ni Kuan. This treatment reveals the historian's



carefully contrived scheme.

Sima Qian thought Yan Yi was honest and upright (*lianzhi* 廉直), but this is not the reason that he excluded him from “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials.” After all, he praised Zhi Du 郅都 for his courage in offering criticism (*gan zhijian* 敢直諫) of the emperor and identified him as a scrupulously honest and public-minded person (*gonglian* 公廉)—and still included him in that chapter of shame. So too with Zhao Yu 趙禹, who enjoyed a reputation for honesty and fairness (*lianping* 廉平). The likely reason Sima Qian did not place Yan Yi in “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials” is that Yan was not a

member of Zhang Tang's clique. In other chapters of *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Sima Qian related that there were some rifts between them, and Zhang finally had Yan put to death because of their different political positions.<sup>63</sup>

Although Ni Kuan was associated with Zhang Tang's clique, Sima Qian avoided mentioning his name in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials," probably because he tried to cast him as a model *ru* official. That is what I have tried to show in the following examination.

The pattern of advancement shared by officials in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials" is so

noticeable that one is reminded that these officials were precisely the sort Dong Zhongshu had criticized fifty years earlier. Let us review Dong's arguments: less-talented people should stay in lower positions no matter how extended their service, while the worthy should be entrusted with important tasks in spite of limited experience. In Dong's day officials achieved high status because of seniority, and Dong thought this led to confusion between the sense of honor and the sense of shame and the mixture between the worthy and the unworthy. Dong identified those who started their careers as lesser officials with the unworthy. By attacking the morality of

these officials, he shored up his criticism of the current pattern of advancement.

Likewise, Sima Qian disguised his criticism of Zhang Tang's clique behind a discourse of morality. As the term “harsh officials” (*kuli*) indicates, his tendentious attitude was explicit. The chapter is full of pungent words attacking the personalities and administrative styles of officials profiled. Ning Cheng 寧成 is said to be “cunning and trickery” (*hua zei* 滑賊); Zhouyang You 周陽由 was “cruel and harsh, arrogant and willful” (*baoku jiaozi* 暴酷驕恣); Zhang Tang often “behaved in a deceitful way” (*weiren duozha* 為人多詐); and Wang Wenshu

王溫舒 “tended to fawn on people, good at serving those with power” (*weiren chan, shan shi youzhi zhe* 為人調，善事有執者).<sup>64</sup> Although these strong criticisms center on morality, dissatisfaction with Zhang Tang’s clique also stemmed from career paths. I will return to this point in a comparison of “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials” with “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.”

Flanked by chapters devoted to eminent officials from powerful families and those who started their careers at the bottom of bureaucracy is “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” There scholars trained in the Five Classics were cast as the most

legitimate official candidates.

The Five Classics, canons studied by Han *ru*, were considered the formal enshrinement of the Way of the King and the Laws of the King. Sima Qian portrayed Confucius, who enjoyed a reputation as a sage and uncrowned king, as the forefather of Han *ru* officials. In this narrative, *ru* not only had a divine tradition initiated by the wisest of wise men, they possessed a sacred and practical knowledge of how to administer the state. Furthermore, Sima Qian emphasized that *ru* achieved their positions through their expertise in the Five Classics. The following passages are typical of what one finds throughout “The Collective

## Biographies of *Ru*”:

Gongsun Hong, because of his knowledge of the *Annals*, went from being a commoner to serving as one of the three dukes.

公孫弘以春秋白衣為天子三公.<sup>65</sup>

Xiao Fen of Xiaqiu, because of his knowledge of rites, served as the governor of Huaiyang.

瑕丘蕭奮以禮為淮陽太守.<sup>66</sup>

[Yang] He, because of his knowledge of the *Changes*, was recommended to the court in the first year of Yuanguang [134 B.C.E.] and advanced to the post of Grand Master of the Palace. Jimo Cheng of Qi, because of his knowledge of the *Changes*, advanced to the post of minister of Chengyang. Meng Dan of Guangchuan, because of his knowledge of the *Changes*, served as the Grand Master of Palace of Crown Prince. Zhou Ba of Lu, Heng Hu of Lü, and Zhufu Yan of Linzi all advanced to posts



ranked two thousand bushels because of their knowledge of the *Changes*.

何以易，元光元年徵，官至中大夫。齊人即墨成以易至城陽相。廣川人孟但以易為太子門大夫。魯人周霸，莒人衡胡，臨菑人主父偃，皆以易至二千石。<sup>67</sup>

Sima Qian portrayed *ru*'s success as the embodiment of a meritocracy. When we compare his description of officials who obtained their positions by family prestige, money, or networking with his descriptions of these utterly different *ru* officials, we

can see that the former appeared to lack both ability and morality. The latter became paragons: their competence arose from their knowledge of the Five Classics, and their dignities from self-earned success.

### TAILORING THE HISTORY

In Sima Qian's descriptions, three different principles of hierarchy are at work in the Han court: descendants of powerful families achieved their statuses hereditarily, officials who began with clerkships earned their success by accumulating practical achievements and networking, and *ru* officials relied on their knowledge of

the Five Classics.

However, considering the complicated political situation, we would expect that a man who relied exclusively on textual knowledge could hardly make his way up to the upper level of officialdom. Furthermore, although Sima Qian thought highly of the Five Classics, the archaic knowledge preserved in them was far from practical in a realm whose leader pursued military and economic strength. But in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” Sima Qian presented his persona selectively in order to cast his ideal officials.

In a passage quoted above, Sima Qian stated that Zhufu Yan achieved a

high position thanks to his knowledge of the *Changes*. However, in the standalone biography devoted to Zhufu Yan, he told a different version of this story. After years of poverty, Zhufu Yan finally attracted the attention of the emperor with a memorial that discussed nine topics, eight of them related to laws and regulations (*lüling* 律令) and one to campaigns against the Xiongnu 匈奴. If we examine the full text of this memorial, which is quoted in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, we find that it did not even mention the *Changes*.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, Sima Qian identified the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy as two major

avenues for *ru* to enter officialdom.<sup>69</sup> Dong Zhongshu, whom some modern scholars see as the architect of the recommendation system, suggested that those recommended to the court first serve as Gentleman-assistants. Gongsun Hong, who proposed to recruit graduates from the Imperial Academy, appealed to the emperor to appoint them as Literate Clerk in Charge of Precedents (*wenxue zhanggu* 文學掌故) or Gentleman-assistants. In the Han dynasty, Gentleman-assistants merely constituted the original pool of official candidates, most of whom were assigned to a chief clerk position in local government.<sup>70</sup> Cases in our available sources also show that people

recruited through the recommendation system or the Imperial Academy usually achieved the positions of Gentleman-attendants, clerks to various officials (*cheng* 丞) or low-rank officials (*ling* 令).<sup>71</sup> This means that even if *ru* officials entered officialdom through the recommendation system or the Imperial Academy, most must have begun their careers at the lower levels of officialdom, just like the members of Zhang Tang's clique described in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials."

In that chapter Sima Qian described how members of Zhang Tang's clique started their careers at the bottom of

the bureaucracy, how they accumulated political achievements by oppressing and slaughtering the people, and how they obtained promotions by flattering and catering to prominent officials and nobles.

But in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” the *ru* officials seem to obtain decent positions as soon as they completed their studies. Sima Qian barely mentioned any menial positions they held or early frustrating experiences they had, let alone the exploitation of networks for advancement. Instead, their knowledge of the Five Classics became the only means used to win political success. While this picture accords well with

Dong Zhongshu's ideal that the worthy should be entrusted with important tasks on entering officialdom, it is not entirely convincing.

For example, *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han* offer different accounts of the official career of Ni Kuan.<sup>72</sup> In *The History of Western Han* Ban Gu related that after graduating from the Imperial Academy, Ni served as a Literate Clerk to the Commandant of Justice. However, he was soon demoted because it was felt that he was not familiar with daily administrative affairs. Ni was sent to Beidi 北地 to take care of livestock for several years. Not until he wrote a memorial for a



clerk working for Zhang Tang were his talents and knowledge finally recognized. Once Zhang had come to appreciate him, Ni set out on a brilliant career.<sup>73</sup>

By contrast, Sima Qian did not mention the miserable experience at the beginning of Ni's official career, nor did he record the chance opportunity that opened the way for his promotion. Instead, he depicted a rather pleasant and smooth path. Sima Qian related that because of Ni's knowledge of the *Documents*, he was recommended by his home commandery for study with Erudites at the Imperial Academy. After graduating, he was appointed as a clerk

to Commandant of Justice (*tingweishi*). At that moment, Sima Qian noted, Zhang Tang had begun to employ historical precedent to justify his own verdict on complicated cases; this made the knowledgeable Ni Kuan a great asset.

What *The History of Western Han* reveals to us is that a diploma from the Imperial Academy merely enabled Ni Kuan to enter officialdom, serving as a clerk to an official. The crucial step in his career was due to a random event and his final success to Zhang Tang's strong recommendation. However, in *The Grand Scribe's Records*' account, the diploma from the Imperial Academy turns out to be the most

crucial factor—though Sima Qian also mentioned Zhang Tang's interventions.

Like the officials in “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials,” Ni Kuan started at the lower level of the bureaucracy and eventually rose to serve as one of the three dukes. Also like them, he was a member of Zhang Tang's clique and benefited from Zhang's patronage. But Sima Qian deliberately placed all of the other eminent officials associated with Zhang in “The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials” while Ni received the distinction of appearing in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” When Sima Qian praised Zhang Tang for advancing his talented subordinates, he

never mentioned Ni as one of the beneficiaries.

Sima Qian deliberately tailored his presentation of Ni probably because of two considerations. In all likelihood, Ni's personality and administrative style differed from those of the other members of the clique: in *The Grand Scribe's Records* he is “gentle and kindhearted, honest and intelligent” (*wenliang, you lianzhi* 溫良, 有廉智), while the other members of Zhang Tang's clique are “fierce and brutal” (*baoku* 暴酷). And he is presented as the model of the *ru* official. Coming from extremely humble circumstances and deeply versed in the Five Classics, Ni Kuan was one of the few *ru* who

achieved the highest position in the bureaucracy. When Sima Qian downplayed the close relationship between Ni Kuan and Zhang Tang, obscuring the crucial role Zhang played in the rise of his protégé, he gave his readers the impression that Ni's success was due to his knowledge of the Five Classics.

Not only did Sima Qian neglect to say how *ru* officials made use of their administrative achievements and networking skills, he made no mention of *ru* officials who came from prestigious families in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.”

*The Grand Scribe's Records* shows that most *ru* officials came from

obscure backgrounds, whereas we do know that some *ru* were employed as teachers by imperial families and it seems reasonable to assume that some descendants of powerful families knew something of the Five Classics. For example, Kong Zang, who once served as the Grand Master of Ceremonies, was a descendant of a meritorious official who had helped Liu Bang establish the Han dynasty. Heir to his father's title of nobility, Kong was also a prolific writer. Ban Gu listed ten *juan* 卷 of his writings under the category of the *ru* school. Since Sima Qian quoted from a memorial that Kong helped draft, he must have known something about him. However, Sima Qian never

identified Kong as a *ru*, nor did he list him in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” Rather, *ru* officials in *The Grand Scribe’s Records* all seem to have emerged from humble families, propelled upward by their textual expertise.

Well educated, Sima Qian himself came from the lower level of the elite class and experienced professional frustration throughout his life.<sup>74</sup> As a chronicler of the various power struggles under Emperor Wu, he must have had a deep understanding of the complicated mechanisms underlying the political world, and he must have clearly recognized as a myth the idea that one can achieve political success

by studying the Five Classics. If he reproduced this myth in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” he must have had very particular motives.

Han officials immersed in the Five Classics had long criticized the system of recruitment and advancement that prioritized family backgrounds and personal ties. At least two memorials voiced this unhappiness, Dong Zhongshu’s memorial of 140 BCE and Gongsun Hong’s of 124 BCE as we mentioned above. Their arguments are clear and simple: the court should not favor the descendants of powerful families, but employ men well educated in the Five Classics. But because this message was at odds with



the interests of the powerful, a bold criticism could have been suicidal. So the arguments are presented in a tactful way.

Neither Dong nor Gongsun attacked the problems head-on. Instead, both of them seized the opportunity presented by specific edicts to comment on recruitment. Emperor Wu had asked why the state was not yet in harmony despite the emperor's diligence; Dong located the problems in the current officials, chosen via a recruitment system that could not provide worthy people to the court. And when Emperor Wu lamented that the rituals and music associated with the marriage ceremony were in decline and called for the study

of rituals, Gongsun claimed that in order to revive the ritual tradition the court had to recruit young and talented men from the students at the Imperial Academy.

Furthermore, both Dong and Gongsun showered praise on the emperor, lauding his wisdom and his serious concern for the common people. They attacked the incompetence of current officials who failed to implement the emperor's orders, contending that the court should employ instead men schooled in the Five Classics and those who entered officialdom through the recommendation system. When they combined their criticism of current

officials with glorification of the emperor, they hoped that one would be sweetened by the other.

These comments about recruitment help us understand why Sima Qian created an ideal picture of *ru* officials in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*.”

Sima Qian clearly knew that he could never enjoy an easy official career path as those from powerful families did, as he stated “my pedigree had no great deeds that entitled him to receive territories and noble titles from the emperor” 僕之先, 非有剖符丹書之功.<sup>75</sup> He also distinguished himself from those who rose to power via military accomplishment, as he said, “[I] am not able to prepare myself for

the army, seize the city and win the field battle, having the accomplishment of killing the enemy's general and capturing enemy's flag” 不能備行伍，攻城[野戰]，有斬將奪旗之功. The historian did not count himself as one of those who rose from clerkship either, as he confessed “[I] cannot accumulate length of services, and achieve prestigious position and high salary, thereby bringing honor and network to my lineage “不能積日累勞，取尊官厚祿，以為宗族交遊光寵.”<sup>76</sup>

In “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” Sima Qian imagined a utopia for men like him. This is an idealized world where one's knowledge could

determine one's future, while the assets of the powerful, the military accomplishment, and the networking all lost their significance. In reality, the success of a *ru* official involved various factors. It seems that *ru* officials, just like the other types of officials mentioned in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, made use of all of the resources available to them over the course of their careers, advancing by accumulating accomplishments and establishing networks. When tailoring the historical materials to contend that they obtained their positions strictly by virtue of their knowledge, Sima Qian ignored reality to construct a utopia based on his own dream.

Furthermore, this utopia implies a strong criticism of officialdom under Emperor Wu. Sima Qian did not compose this utopia as an independent piece. Instead, he included it as an organic part of a text describing the political realm. The descriptions and statements regarding this utopia are essentially dialogues with other parts of the text. Because Sima Qian constructed his utopia in the form of a description of the real world, it played a counterpoint to the stories of officials who achieved their status through family assets and networking. In juxtaposition with this ideal picture of a realm where officials achieved their success by virtue of knowledge alone,

less noble realms were delegitimized.

Had Sima Qian directly assailed hereditary power and accused Zhang Tang's clique of nepotism, he would surely have incurred the anger of many officials, those who obtained their positions through these means. But read on their own, his chapters dedicated to officials from powerful families do not sound critical. Similarly, if "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Official" is read on its own, one might think that Sima Qian was attacking only the morality and administrative styles of these officials. Only when we read all these chapters together as an entity and compare different descriptions and

statements, can we see that under the carefully contrived structure lay Sima Qian's elaborated official ideal, the hierarchical principle he endorsed, and his strong criticism of the systems used for recruitment and advancement.



## CHAPTER THREE

# An Archeology of Interpretive Schools of the Five Classics in the Western Han Dynasty

Not only were *ru* a powerless minority in the political realm, but during the first 120 years of the Western Han dynasty the learning community of the

Five Classics also suffered from fragmentation. Before the founding of the Han dynasty, thinkers of every stripe cited the Five Classics to legitimate their ideas. But the transmission of the Zhou's cultural heritage was not clearly documented until Sima Qian (second century BCE) traced the study of the Five Classics back to Confucius.<sup>1</sup> Although Confucius's disciples—and later Mencius and Xunzi—all distinguished themselves by textual expertise, Sima Qian claimed that the study of the Five Classics generally declined during the Warring States and Qin periods. During this chaotic time, scholars in the states of Qi 齊 and Lu 魯 were said to have

saved the classics from destruction, but none of their names were recorded and little is known about their social backgrounds.

The ambiguity of these beginnings seems to dissipate with the dawn of the Western Han dynasty. From that point on Sima Qian's efforts provide us with a line of transmission for each classic. Following suit, later scholars relied on genealogies as the basic framework to map the history of classical studies and *ru* communities. They documented an unbroken line of transmission that survived wars and plagues, extended through social and economic change, and shaped four hundred years of intellectual and political history from

the establishment of the Western Han till the end of the Eastern Han.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter I question the alleged continuities in those seemingly welldocumented genealogies, contending that the accepted account of textual transmission often conflated multiple historical narratives. Unfolding these different layers, I present a more complex and challenging history. Instead of a seamless narrative, a story of fragmented learning communities buffeted by political and social change under Emperors Zhao 昭, Xuan 宣, and Yuan 元 emerges. The era essentially transformed classical studies as various interpretive schools were established,

enormous scholarly works produced, and new hermeneutics formulated, all of which set an intellectual tone for centuries to come. During the subsequent flourishing of classical studies, *ru* sought to refashion their obscure past, a project which culminated with Ban Gu in the first century of the Common Era and which continues to shape perceptions of Han Confucianism to the present.

## FRAGMENTED SCHOLARLY LINEAGES

In around 90 BCE Sima Qian finished writing “The Collective Bibliographies of *Ru*” (“*Rulin liezhuan*” 儒林列傳), an essay that summarizes classical learning from the beginning of the

Western Han to the end of the reign of Emperor Wu.<sup>3</sup> When we look closely at this narrative, it becomes evident that the Five Classics were not passed from master to disciple in a smooth and unbroken chain. According to the essay, the first scholars who applied themselves to the study of these works were all obscure figures, their family backgrounds unclear and their scholarly credentials dubious. Six of those ten figures are known only by their nicknames or surnames (see [table 2.1](#)).

Mr. Fu (*Fusheng* 伏生), a man whose full name is unknown, is said to have lived for more than ninety years and to be solely responsible for the

transmission of the *Book of Documents* (hereafter, *Documents*) during the chaotic transition from the Qin to the Han dynasty. As to the study of the *Records of Rites* (hereafter, *Rites*), it originated with Mr. Gaotang 高堂 and Mr. Xu 徐 of Lu, whose full name, like that of Mr. Fu, was not recorded. Mr. Huwu 胡毋 was said to have taught the reading of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (hereafter, *Annals*) approved by the Gongyang tradition in the Qi area, while Mr. Jiang 江 of Xiaqiu 瑕丘 was the first person in the Han to specialize in the Guliang tradition. Virtually nothing is known about any of these scholars.

Before the Han, the work most

studied among elites was the *Book of Songs* (hereafter, *Songs*). But Sima Qian's description of the transmission of this work lacks detail. Three founding masters are listed—Shen Pei 申培, Mr. Han 韓生, and Yuan Gu 轅固—and while Sima Qian recounted some famous anecdotes about these masters and traced their official careers, he kept silent about their education and their family backgrounds.

Of the learning of Five Classics in the Western Han, the only one that appears to have a glorious origin is the *Book of Changes* (hereafter, *Changes*); its transmission can be traced directly back to Confucius and his disciple



Shang Qu 商瞿. A composite text, the *Changes* is made up of several strata, the earliest of which can be dated to the Western Zhou dynasty, or approximately 900 BCE.<sup>4</sup> Legends attributed its creation to the primeval ruler Fu Xi 伏羲, and later emendations were ascribed to forebears of the Zhou dynasty, King Wen 文王 and the Duke of Zhou 周公. Sima Qian seems to have been the first to attribute the *Changes*' appendices, known as the Ten Wings, to Confucius, saying that the sage loved this work in his old age and was devoted to elucidating *tuan* 彖 (the hexagram statement), *xiang* 象 (the image), *xici* 繫辭 (the great commentary), and other characters.

Repeatedly reading it, he wore out three copies of the book.<sup>5</sup> The depiction is vivid, but no one knows whether it is accurate: whether Confucius knew the *Changes* or taught it to his students has long been shrouded in doubt.<sup>6</sup> In the standard edition of the *Analects*, the only relevant passage quotes Confucius as saying: “Give me a few more years so that I may study *Yi* [the *Changes*] when I am fifty, and I should be able to avoid gross errors” 加我數年．五十以學易．可以無大過矣.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Sima Qian indicated that Confucius had been familiar with the classic for some time, only to fully appreciate it in old age, the *Analects* indicates that even while

in his forties Confucius had not made much headway. Sima Qian portrayed Confucius as an expert on the *Changes* and ascribed some of the most important comments on this difficult text to the sage, but the *Analects* assumes a hypothetical tone and does not say whether Confucius ever studied the text.

Some scholars contend that the passage from the *Analects* has nothing to do with the *Changes*, suggesting that the character “yi 易”—translated as “*Changes*”—should be read as “yi 亦,” meaning “also.” Then the sentence would mean, “Give me a few more years, and I may [start to] learn when I am fifty, so that I, too, will avoid gross

errors” 加我數年. 五十以學. 亦可以無大過 矣. This reading is supported by a number of ancient editions, including the Lu version of the *Analects* and the one excavated in Dingzhou 定州, Hebei province.<sup>8</sup>

Not only is Confucius's relationship with the *Changes* controversial, so is that of one of his lesser disciples, Shang Qu, ostensibly charged with teaching the work to the next generation. Why did Confucius choose an obscure disciple to transmit one of the Five Classics? Scholars have been puzzled by this question for centuries.<sup>9</sup>

The scholarly lineages associated with the Five Classics not only started

with men who amount, by and large, to ciphers—they also exhibit significant gaps. Regarding the *Changes*, Sima Qian said that Confucius transmitted it to Shang Qu and after five generations it was handed down to Tian He 田何—but he could not name any of the individuals from the intervening period and could only identify three persons who took part in this textual tradition during the first 120 years of the Western Han dynasty: Tian He, who flourished at the beginning of the era, transmitted the text to Wang Tong 王同, who in turn transmitted it to Yang He 楊何, who achieved a middle-level bureaucratic position under Emperor Wu.<sup>10</sup> Sima Qian also listed five other

experts on the classic who achieved positions ranked as “two thousand bushels,” concluding that all of the discussions about the *Changes* that took place later in the dynasty were indebted to Yang He. Still, he did not connect any of those five officials to Yang He directly, nor did he identify their masters or disciples ([table 2.1](#)).

From the time of Confucius to Emperor Wu’s rule, according to Sima Qian, more than four hundred years had passed, and the transmission of the *Changes* stretched over nine generations. This means that the average age difference between a master and a disciple would have been more than forty-five years. Given what

we know about life expectancy in the premodern era, this is hardly possible.<sup>11</sup>

Similar patterns are found in the transmission of the other Five Classics. Sima Qian claimed that Mr. Fu, who was active even in his nineties, taught the *Documents* in the areas of Qi 齊 and Lu 魯, and scholars there were all familiar with the work. Yet only three generations of experts, altogether six men, are listed in *The Grand Scribe's Records* for the 120 years of the Western Han dynasty. Again attribution is a problem, as among those six, only two were provided with full names. Three other experts on the *Documents* from the reign of Emperor

Wu were also mentioned, but no connection between them and Mr. Fu was specified.

For the *Rites*, another of the Five Classics, Sima Qian identified two generations of experts during the first 120 years of Western Han, and of them he provided little detail—just their names and their official positions.<sup>12</sup> For *Annals*, seven experts are listed in addition to the scholars who initiated the tradition, constituting two generations. Among them one was identified as a Gongyang expert, namely the famous Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, and one as a Guliang scholar, Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu.<sup>13</sup>

It seems that only the three masters



of the *Songs* attracted a large number of students, outnumbering all of the experts on the other classics combined. Sima Qian claimed that hundreds of Mr. Shen's students went on to serve as low-level bureaucrats in positions such as Grand Master, Gentlemen of the Interior, or Clerk in Charge of Precedents, and he identified seven students who achieved middle-level positions under Emperor Wu. But he failed to provide the names of Yuan Gu's disciples and named only two of Mr. Han's. He said that in Qi those who distinguished themselves by their knowledge of the *Songs* were all disciples of Yuan, while those in Yan 燕 and Zhao 趙 had all studied under

Mr. Han.<sup>14</sup>

But was the book really so popular? Why, for the period from the first to the fifth emperor, was Sima Qian able to list only two generations of experts? Was the astonishing longevity ascribed to some teachers, like *Documents* specialist Mr. Fu, merely an oddity, or was a myth created to make the transmission of the texts a seamless narrative?<sup>15</sup> This question must be posed, as from Emperor Gaozu to Emperor Wu, 120 years altogether, none of the lineages connected with the Five Classics produced more than three generations of experts, which means the average difference in age between master and disciple was between forty

and sixty years (see [table 2.1](#)).

In addition to the problems revealed by a close look at the genealogies compiled by Sima Qian, the professional habits of scholars who specialized in the Five Classics raise doubts. Few of the disciples produced by these scholarly lineages rose to the higher levels of the bureaucracy—over the period in question only three held a position as one of the Nine Ministers and only two were among the Three Dukes.<sup>16</sup> At the time, the connection between master and disciple, and between fellow disciples, lacked the importance it would later acquire. There are stories of the disciples of Shusun Tong 叔孫通 receiving

favorable treatment because of their master's accomplishments, and it was said that Wang Zang and Zhao Wan recommended their master, Mr. Shen, to Emperor Wu, but there is little evidence that *ru* cooperated in officialdom. Instead, the relationships among *ru* officials were generally characterized by fierce struggles. For example, Gongsun Hong, Zhufu Yan 主父偃, and Zhu Maicheng were all experts on *Annals*. Instead of helping his fellows, Gongsun Hong advised Emperor Wu to execute Yan, who once manipulated Zhu into opposing a proposal made by Gongsun Hong. It was said that although Gongsun Hong's knowledge of *Annals* could not match

Dong Zhongshu's, this did not stop him from climbing higher in the Han bureaucracy. Gongsun Hong tried hard to sideline Dong Zhongshu, while Dong complained that his rival was submissive and adulatory (*congyu* 從諛).<sup>17</sup>

## REVISING SIMA QIAN

The scholarly lineages of the Five Classics that Sima Qian outlined have been modified by subsequent scholars, a project that started with Ban Gu and continued for centuries.

Over time, the names of many previously unknown figures, especially those of the founding masters, were filled in. When Ban Gu compiled *The*

*History of Western Han* one and half centuries after Sima Qian's work, Mr. Han, the expert on the *Songs*, was given a first name, Ying 嬰; Mr. Huwu, the *Gongyang* master from Qi, was given the courtesy name (zi 字) Zidu 子都; Mr. Ouyang 歐陽, the only disciple who transmitted Mr. Fu's interpretation of the *Documents* to later generations, obtained the courtesy name Hebo 和伯 and was said to be a native of the Qiansheng 千乘 region.<sup>18</sup>

Ban Gu's was not the only work that provided backgrounds for obscure scholarly figures. In modern texts, Mr. Fu of the *Documents* is identified as a man whose personal name is Sheng 勝 and courtesy name Zijian 子賤, though

none of the earliest sources (*The Grand Scribe's Records* or *The History of Western Han*) provides such information.<sup>19</sup> The early Qing scholar Yu Xiaoke 余蕭客 (fl. eighteenth century) cited *The Elucidation of the Classics* (*Jingdian shiwen* 經典釋文) by Lu Deming 陸德明 (556–627 CE) to show that Mr. Fu had been conflated with Fu Sheng 伏勝. But Yu's theory was criticized by the editors of *The Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature* (*Si ku quan shu* 四庫全書) for failing to trace the connection to its source. They pointed out that Mr. Fu's personal name had been recorded long before the Tang dynasty, since Fu Tao 伏滔 (317–396 CE), a scholar in

the Eastern Jin dynasty 東晉, had claimed as his remote ancestor Mr. Fu of the *Documents*, whose first name was Sheng 勝.<sup>20</sup>

Yu's critics, who belonged to the dominant school of evidential scholarship (*kaoju* 考據), were guilty of the same sin as Yu, since the earliest conflation can be traced back to *The History of the Eastern Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書). Fu Zhan 伏湛, a *ru* who started his official career under Wang Mang 王莽 and climbed to the top of the Eastern Han court's bureaucracy, claimed that his ninth-generation ancestor was named Sheng with the courtesy name Zijian, and identified this Fu Sheng as the Mr. Fu who was



said to have taught the *Documents* at the beginning of the Western Han.<sup>21</sup> Although there is no evidence that would permit a conclusive refutation of Fu Zhan, his claim was most likely a fabrication. His hometown was Langye Dongwu 琅邪東武, while Mr. Fu of the *Documents* was said to be a native of Ji'nan 濟南; no genealogies are available to validate the blood ties between these two. Also, Ban Gu knew Fu Zhan's father, Fu Li 伏理, who was an expert on the *Songs*, but Ban never traced Fu Li's origins back to the founding teacher of the *Documents*. It was common in the Han era to trace one's family history back to some famous figure of the past. Identifying

the famous Mr. Fu as one's ancestor and inventing a personal name for him would not only add glory to Fu Zhan's family but add some texture to the fragmented history of *ru* learning. Fu Zhan's assertion was treated in subsequent histories as a fact. Zhang Yan 張晏, an unknown commentator on *The History of Western Han*, noted that Mr. Fu's personal name must have been Sheng because the stone tablet devoted to him said so.<sup>22</sup>

Not only were names and native places assigned to these unknown figures, vivid anecdotes were added. For Mr. Han and Mr. Huwu, *The Grand Scribe's Records* merely lists hometowns, official titles, disciples,

and works. But 150 years later, Ban Gu recorded a debate that took place in front of Emperor Wu between Mr. Han and Dong Zhongshu, noting that Mr. Han was capable and vigorous, having a clear judgment when handling state affairs, and Dong Zhongshu could not rebut him.<sup>23</sup> In a similar fashion, *The History of Western Han* adds that Huwu studied the same classics Dong did, and Dong wrote essays to praise Huwu's virtue.<sup>24</sup>

Vibrant stories were also told about Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu. *The Grand Scribe's Records* has one sentence devoted to him, saying that he studied the Guliang tradition of *Annals*, and when Gongsun Hong was in power he

compared Jiang's teachings with Dong Zhongshu's, preferring the latter.<sup>25</sup> This scanty information was expanded into a lively story in *The History of Western Han*. Mr. Jiang's expertise was contrasted to that of Dong: while the latter was capable of substantiating his argument and good at composing essays, the former was reticent and could not compete with Dong in open debate. Gongsun, the chancellor, had also studied the Gongyang tradition. Faced with the two practitioners and their different styles, the emperor compared the two and decided in favor of Dong.

While Han, Huwu, and Jiang were experts in different classics, the stories

i n *The History of Western Han* all associated them with one man: Dong Zhongshu, the famous *ru* whose biography was carefully documented in *The Grand Scribe's Records*. Mentioning a well-known figure may have tended to make the stories about these scholars a bit more credible and interesting.

In addition to the newly included background information and anecdotes, the intellectual lineages of the founding masters were clarified, often by being traced back to the disciples of famous thinkers. In *The Grand Scribe's Records*, the lineage of the *Changes* was traced back to Confucius, but the educational credentials of other

founding masters were all unclear. This unsatisfactory situation—much like the murkiness surrounding the origins of founding practitioners—was remedied in later narratives.

Mr. Shen was the first Han-dynasty master to teach the Lu version of the *Songs*. While it reported that Shen had studied with someone in the Lu area and later in Chang'an, *The Grand Scribe's Records* offered no other information about his teacher. The missing information was added in *The History of Western Han*: Ban Gu identified his teacher as Fuqiu Bo 浮丘伯, a disciple of Xunzi. Compared with the other distinguished students of this famous scholar, Li Si 李斯 and Han Fei

韓非, Fuqiu was a rather obscure figure. The form of his name varied in Han texts, sometimes recorded as Fuqiu, sometimes Baoqiu 鮑丘. But because Fu 浮 and Bao 鮑 are phonologically associated and paleographically interchangeable in pre-Han and Han texts, scholars generally hold that the two were the same person. *A New Discourse* (*Xin yu* 新語), a text produced by Lu Jia 陸賈 around the second century BCE, is the earliest source to mention Baoqiu, comparing him with Li Si 李斯. *The Debate on Salt and Iron* (*Yan tie lun* 鹽鐵論), written around the middle of the first century BCE, is the earliest source that directly identified Baoqiu zi 包丘

子 (another alternative form of Fuqiu) as the disciple of Xunzi. Liu Xiang 劉向, at the end of the Western Han, reiterated this message.<sup>26</sup> Up to Ban Gu's time, therefore, it was probably true that Fouqiu Bo passed along Xunzi's teachings. Associating Mr. Shen's learning with a disciple of a prominent *ru* during the Warring States period, Ban Gu's account assigned the Lu reading of the *Songs* a more prestigious origin than did Sima Qian's. Although this connection had been made almost two hundred years after Shen's death, and a century and a half after our earliest record of Shen in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, it has become the accepted narrative.<sup>27</sup>



In similar fashion, the origin of the Guliang tradition was embellished in *The History of Western Han*. In *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu was presented as the only representative of this tradition, but Ban Gu stated that the same individual had a master: Mr. Shen, the earliest partisan of the Lu version of the *Songs*. Ban said that Shen taught both the *Songs*—the only specialty Sima Qian had indicated—and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (hereafter, *Annals*). Since Ban also noted that Shen was the disciple of Fuqiu, who was in turn the disciple of Xunzi, the Guliang tradition, whose origins had not been described by Sima Qian, now had a

glorious history that could be traced back to a well-known thinker.

What source did Ban rely on when he added this new master–disciple relation to the version compiled by Sima Qian? There is no way of knowing. He may have confabulated that detail from Shen’s supposed origins in the Lu area. As the Guliang tradition was believed to have originated in Lu, and Mr. Shen was identified as a native of Lu by Sima Qian, the pieces fall nicely into place. This same geographical connection may have been the stimulus that led Ban Gu to associate Jiang with Shen in his exploration of the origins of the Guliang tradition. Little evidence can

be found to substantiate this later construction, but tracing the Guliang version of the *Annals* back to Xunzi through obscure Mr. Shen and Fuqiu Bo has become a staple of later accounts.<sup>28</sup>

The emendations did not stop with Ban Gu. Later Eastern Han scholars traced the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals* back to Confucius's famous disciple Zixia 子夏. In *The Grand Scribe's Records*, the only person Sima Qian associated with the Gongyang commentary was Dong Zhongshu, while in *The History of Western Han* the list was expanded: Gongsun Hong and his teacher Mr. Huwu—both of whom Sima Qian identified as experts

on the *Annals*—were presented as experts on the *Gongyang* tradition. But this added information was not enough to satisfy later scholars, who built up a more splendid version of their intellectual roots. The Tang scholar Xu Yan 徐彥 (fl. ninth century) cited a preface to *Gongyang* by Dai Hong 戴宏, saying that Gongyang Gao 公羊高 received the teaching from Zixia and transmitted it to his son. The Gongyang family perpetuated this teaching for six generations, and in the Han Gongyang Shou 公羊壽 taught it to Mr. Huwu. The preface also comments that the *Gongyang* commentary was not written down until the rule of Emperor Jing 景 (157–141 BCE), suggesting that oral

transmission was deliberately chosen by scholars as a way to survive political oppression under the Qin dynasty. The author argued that Confucius foresaw that the first Emperor of Qin, a cruel tyrant, would burn all the classics two hundred and fifty years later; Confucius therefore transmitted his teachings orally to Zixia.<sup>29</sup>

It is difficult to believe that a work of history that covers three hundred years in some detail could be preserved for centuries merely by oral transmission. In fact, evidence shows that the *Gongyang* already existed as a text by the end of the Warring States period. This clumsy story about

Confucius's alleged foresight should be enough to render his account dubious, but he was not the last to present Confucius as a prophet.<sup>30</sup> But why did scholars attempt to associate the *Gongyang* with Zixia? Some clues can be found in *Han Feizi*, in which Zixia is described as an expert on the *Annals*.

<sup>31</sup> Identifying the *Gongyang* tradition with an accomplished disciple of Confucius allowed its followers to feel superior to their rival *Guliang* school, which did not count among its early adherents anyone more famous than a disciple of Xunzi.

While reworking the credentials of various founders, Ban Gu added more intellectual lineages and more disciples

to the *ru* recorded in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, most of whom were actually the contemporaries of Sima Qian. The most revealing case is the history of the Mao version of the *Songs*. In modern scholarship, King Xian of Hejian 河間獻王 is famous for being a patron of a scholar of the *Songs* called Mr. Mao. But in *The Grand Scribe's Records*—the earliest source—while Sima Qian devoted a whole chapter to this king, there is neither mention of this Mr. Mao nor the Mao interpretation of the *Songs*, let alone any discussion of experts from this school. The first work we know of that mentioned this group was *The History of Western Han*, which sketched the

intellectual lineage from Mao to scholars who took up Mao version of the *Songs* at the end of the Western Han. Centering on the basic information provided by Ban Gu, more stories have been added over time to the general history of the Mao tradition. The founder Mr. Mao, as Ban Gu called him, acquired his personal name a century after his first appearance in history. Lu Ji 陸璣 (261–303 CE) identified him as Mao Heng 毛亨, and *The History of Eastern Han* gave his name as Mao Chang 毛長 (or 萇).<sup>32</sup> In later narratives, this Mao achieved higher and higher official positions. In *The History of Western Han*, Mao was an erudite employed by



the court of King Xian. Five hundred years later, in *The History of the Sui Dynasty* (*Sui shu* 隋書), Mao became a governor of Hejian 河間. Not only were his name and bureaucratic authority enhanced with time, his scholarly credentials became far more detailed. Ban Gu had remained mum about the origin of Mao's learning, whereas one century later Zheng Xuan attributed it to Zixia, who was praised by Confucius for his accomplishments in literature (*wenxue* 文學).<sup>33</sup> One hundred more years later, a detailed genealogy from Zixia to Mao appeared. Lu Ji provided a consecutive list of those who had passed the teachings from one to the next up to Mao; it

began with Confucius and included Zixia, Zeng Shen 曾申 (the son of Confucius's famous disciple Zengzi 曾子), the Warring States thinker and politician Li Ke 李克, Mencius's disciple Meng Zhongzi 孟仲子, and Xunzi.<sup>34</sup> This was cherry picking the brightest lights of their generations. How could Sima Qian have possibly remained silent in the face of a lineage marked by such celebrated learning? I shall explore this question later in this chapter.

Sima Qian never said who had transmitted Confucius's teachings about the *Changes* from Shang Qu to the Han scholar Tian He, a gap of four generations. Ban Gu discovered the

missing links, apparently. He provided the names of the experts connecting Shang to Tian, and although the newly added men were of no other significance in history, the very existence of an explicit unbroken lineage lent the tradition a certain respectability. Furthermore, in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Tian He, the only forebear of Western Han scholarship on the *Changes*, had one disciple, Wang Tong 王同. By the time Ban Gu wrote *The History of Western Han*, Tian He's disciples had expanded to number five—Wang Tong, Zhou Wangsun 周王孫, Mr. Fu 服生, Mr. Xiang 項生, and Ding Kuan 丁寬. Although Ban Gu could not provide the

full names of Mr. Fu and Mr. Xiang, a crucial figure has appeared: Ding Kuan. Ding was identified as the teacher of Tian Wangsun 田王孫, who was the teacher of the founding fathers of the three influential schools that emerged in the last ninety years of Western Han: Shi 施, Meng 孟, and Liangqiu 梁丘.

Analogously, the other scholarly lineages of the first 120 years of the Western Han also acquired more disciples in Ban Gu's account. For the *Documents*, Defender Xiahou 夏侯都尉 was added to the genealogy. Although little is known about this individual, he was a crucial figure because he connected Fu to the later

Xiahou school. Ban Gu also noted that Ni Kuan taught the son of his master Mr. Ouyang, a point never mentioned in Sima Qian's detailed biography of Ni. The bridge between Ni and his students is crucial to tracing the later Ouyang school's teachings back to the beginning of the Western Han.

A certain Meng Qing 孟卿 makes his first appearance in the history of the transmission of the *Rites* as the disciple of Xiao Fen; a Mr. Ying of Dongping 東平嬴公 appears as the disciple of Dong Zhongshu in the study of the *Annals*; and four men were listed as the disciples of Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu, though in *The Grand Scribe's Records* he had not a one. In the study of the

*Songs*, Mr. Jiang of Xiaoqiu, the founder of the Guliang school of the *Annals*, was added as one of the disciples of Mr. Shen, while Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 was named as a disciple of Yuan Gu and Zhao zi 趙子 as a disciple of Han Ying.

Those newly added disciples shared some common characteristics: while little is known about them, they all linked prominent interpretative schools that arose later with the scholarly lineages recorded by Sima Qian. At face value, the additions Ban Gu made to the intellectual genealogies suggest that although he lived almost one hundred and fifty years after Sima Qian he was more knowledgeable about

Sima's contemporaries. More interestingly, while the men mentioned in *The Grand Scribe's Records* produced not a single important disciple during the second half of the Western Han, those added to the learning lineages in *The History of Western Han* produced brilliant students who shaped the intellectual world of the coming century. To understand this, we need to appreciate the emergence of interpretive schools late in the Western Han.

## THE EMERGENCE AND PROLIFERATION OF INTERPRETIVE SCHOOLS<sup>35</sup>

Ban Gu not only mended fragmented transmission of the Five Classics, he

recorded the appearance of new schools of interpretation during the reigns of Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan. These thriving schools substantially transformed the landscape of the textual community of the Five Classics.

Let's focus first on the *Changes*. In this era, six schools emerged and flourished, and four of them were sanctioned by the court as official scholarship.<sup>36</sup> Especially remarkable were the traditions founded by Shi Chou 施 讎, Meng Xi 孟 喜, and Liangqiu He 梁丘賀. Over the ninety years (from Emperor Zhao till the end of Western Han) we are considering, the Shi school produced seven



prominent disciples over three generations, one of whom, Zhang Yu 張禹, served as Chancellor, and two, Peng Xuan 彭宣 and Chong Ziping 崇子平, served among the Nine Ministers. The Meng School produced eight disciples over four generations, and the Liangqiu school gathered six disciples over three generations, three of whom—Liangqiu He, Wang Jun 王駿, and Wulu Chongzong 五鹿充宗—served among the Nine Ministers. The vitality of these schools gave rise to sub-lineages. The Shi school yielded two interpretive traditions, the Meng, three, and the Liang, three. The growth in the number of disciples, and the frequency with which they achieved

political distinction, suggest that the latter Western Han may be viewed as the first golden age of the Five Classics (see [table 3.1](#)).

The same sort of diversification seen among scholars of the *Changes* occurred in those who specialized in the other classics. In contrast to the obscure *ru* scholars recorded by Sima Qian, in this era prominent figures established influential schools. Among those who studied the *Documents*, the Erudite Ouyang Gao 歐陽高 established the Ouyang school, Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝, the Marquis of Guannei (*guannei hou* 關內侯), founded the school of Xiahou the senior, and Xiahou Jian 夏侯建, the crown prince's

grand tutor (*taizitaifu* 太子太傅) founded the school of Xiahou the younger. Chancellor Wei Xian 韋賢 established the Wei school, specializing in the Lu version the *Songs*, and Chancellor Kuang Heng 匡衡 founded the Kuang school, devoted to the readings of the Qi version of the *Songs*. As to the *Annals*, a member of the Nine Ministers named Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖 founded the Yan 嚴 school to promote the Gongyang tradition.

Alongside the schools mentioned above a number of others sprung up, founded by the disciples or classmates of prominent *ru* figures. Meng Xi 孟喜, the classmate of Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 who served as one of the Nine

Ministers, founded the Meng school of the *Changes*; Dai De 戴德 and Dai Sheng 戴勝, two disciples of the Hou Cang 后倉 (fl. 70 BCE), another one of the Nine Ministers, established the two most important schools devoted to the study of the *Rites*—the school of Dai the elder and that of Dai the younger. Shi Zigong 食子公 and Wang Ji 王吉, disciples of Chancellor Cai Yi 蔡儀, founded the Shi and Wang schools devoted to the *Songs*.

The new schools thrived throughout the latter half of the dynasty, as evidenced by the scholars they produced and the sub-lineages their disciples founded. While in the first 120 years of the Western Han, only

eight men representing three generations of experts can be identified who specialized in the *Documents*, during the balance of the dynasty the Ouyang school produced three generations of disciples and two sub-lineages, the school of Xiahou the younger engendered three generations and five sub-lineages, and the school of Xiahou the elder spanned four generations. Adding the masters and disciples of the three schools together, we find thirty-one men, almost four times the number of identifiable experts in the first half of the Western Han (see [table 3.2](#)).

Table 3.1. Learning Communities of the  
*Changes in Han shu*

1. Confucius 孔子	Tian He 田何	Ding Kuan 丁寬 (General of King Xiao of Liang 梁孝王將軍)	Tian Wangsun 田王孫 (Erudite)	Wang Tong 王同	Yang He 楊何 (Superior Grand Master of the Palace)	Jing Fang 京房 (Governor of Qi County 齊郡)	Liangqiu He 梁丘賀
2. Shang Qu Zimu 商瞿子木				Zhou Wangsun 周王孫		Ding Kuan 丁寬	
3. Qiao Bi Ziyong 橋庇子庸				Mr. Xiang 項生		Ding Kuang	
4. Han Bi Zigong 軒臂子弓				Mr. Fu 服生			
5. Zhou Chou Zijia 周饒子家				Shi Chou 施讎 (Erudite)	Liangqiu Lin 梁丘臨 (Privy Treasurer)	Liangqiu Lin 梁丘臨	
6. Sun Yu Zicheng 孫虞子乘						Zhang Yu 張禹 (Chancellor)	Peng Xuan 彭宣 (Grantee Secretary 大司空)*
						Cong Ziping 崇子平 (one of the Nine Ministers)	
						Lu Bo 魯伯 (Governor of Kuaiji 會稽)	Mao Moru 毛萸如 (Governor of Changshan 常山)
						Bing Dan 郎丹	
						Wang Jun 王駿 (Grantee Secretary)	
						Shusun Zhang 士孫張 (Erudite; Regional Governor of Yangzhou 揚州牧)*	
						Deng Pengzu 鄧彭祖 (Grand Tutor of Zhending 真定)	
						Heng Xian 衡咸 (Wang Mang: Grand Master of Lecturing)	
				Meng Xi 孟喜 (Clerk to Chancellor 丞相掾)	Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 (Privy Treasurer)*	Bai Guang 白光 (Erudite)	
						Zhai Mu 翟牧 (Erudite)*	
						Jiao Yanshou 焦延壽	Jing Fang 京房*
							Yin Jia 殷嘉 (Erudite)
							Yao Ping 姚平 (Erudite)
							Cheng Hong 乘弘 (Erudite)

?	Fei Zhi 費直 (Magistrate of Shanfu 單父)	Wang Huang 王璜
Ding Kuan 丁寬?	??	Gao Xiang 高相
		[Son of Gao Xiang] Gao Kang 高康 (Wang Mang: Gentleman-Attendant)
		Wujiang Yong 毋將永 (Defender of Yuzhang 豫章都尉)

\*In *Han shu*, it says "In the school of Shi, there are learning of Zhang and Peng" 施家有張、彭之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3598.

\*In *Han shu*, it says "thereafter there are schools of Shi, Meng, and Liangqiu" 施是易有施、孟、梁丘之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3598.

\*In *Han shu*, it says "thereafter, for school of Liangqiu, there are learning of Shusun, Deng, and Heng" 施是梁丘有士孫、鄧、衡之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3601.

\*In *Han shu*, it says "thereafter, there are learning of Zhai, Meng and Bai" 施是有翟、孟、白之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3599.

\*In *Han shu*, it says "thereafter, for Changshu there is learning of Jing" 施是易有京氏學。 *Han shu*, 88:3602.

A similar comparison can be applied to students of the *Annals*. In the early period, nine experts were named across two generations. By contrast, in

the later period eighteen experts were identified across four generations. Experts in the Gongyang learning went from no schools to two, with subbranches. Guliang specialists went from one to eleven men who created four sub-lineages (see [table 3.3](#)).

Schools grew up around the *Songs* and the *Rites* too. Before Emperor Zhao, neither of these two textual communities produced more than two generations of experts, nor did they found a single interpretive school. In the later period, the interpretation of the Lu version of the *Songs* produced three generations of experts and established four schools, the followers of the Qi weathered four generations

and set up four schools, the specialists in the Han version survived four generations and founded three schools, and specialists in the *Rites* spanned four generations and engendered three interpretative schools, which in turn created sub-branches (see [tables 3.4](#) and [3.5](#)).

Corresponding to the flourishing of schools and the expansion of scholarly genealogies, *ru* scholars of this era achieved distinction in government service. Within ninety years, acknowledged members of the classical schools included nine chancellors, two commanders-in-chief, and twenty-three members of the Nine Ministers.<sup>37</sup> The abundance of prominent officials



during these years differs markedly from the earlier period.

Another measure of change is the number of works produced by the members of these new schools. In the “Bibliography of Arts and Literature” (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) section of *The History of Western Han*, Ban Gu relied on the research of Liu Xiang 劉向 and Liu Xin 劉歆 in drawing up a list of all the important books available by the end of the Western Han. Studies of the *Changes* were divided into thirteen separate categories, which altogether accounted for 290 chapters (*pian* 篇). The books written before Emperor Zhao was enthroned accounted for just seven categories, altogether twenty

chapters, 7 percent of the works in total. While the Shi, Meng, and Liang schools constituted only three categories, they accounted for 114 chapters, constituting nearly 40 percent of the works in total.<sup>38</sup>

In the same section of *The History of Western Han*, works devoted to the *Documents* were divided into nine categories, and altogether counted for 421 chapters. While not a single work was attributed to a *ru* scholar active before the reign of Emperor Zhao, seven works were produced by the schools of Ouyang and the two Xiahou, and one was the record of a *ru* conference convened under Emperor Xuan. In terms of volumes, while

works whose authorship was unidentifiable account for 30 percent, works produced during the latter part of the Western Han accounted for 70 percent of volumes on the *Documents*.

The majority of the works listed in the “Bibliography of Arts and Literature” under the *Annals* category either were produced before the Han dynasty or were not related to the *Annals* but to historical works in general. Among the works on the *Annals* that were by Han scholars, most were produced in the last ninety years of the Western Han. It is same situation with works related to the *Rites*. Works devoted to the *Songs* are unique in that those produced by *ru* in the first 120

years of Han outnumbered the ones produced in the later period. Almost no works on the *Documents* and only a few on the *Changes*, the *Rites*, and the *Annals* were attributed to *ru* in the earlier period, suggesting that either *ru* in that era did not produce any or those written by them were not influential and were quickly forgotten during the Han era.

The various schools that emerged under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan lasted into the next dynasty, almost the only traditions that survived several tumultuous transitions. A student of the Liangqiu school served as Grand Master for Lecturing (*jiangxue dafu* 講學大夫) under Wang Mang, the

usurper of the Han throne. When Emperor Guangwu 光武 founded the Eastern Han dynasty, he revived and endorsed the Shi, Meng, Liangqiu, and Jing Fang schools, creating a Erudite position for a notable scholar from each in order to preserve their traditions. Guangwu also recruited experts from those schools into his government; several achieved prominent positions.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the Eastern Han, the schools that had emerged in the later half of the Western Han dynasty remained the leaders, a point demonstrated by the records in *The History of Eastern Han* and reinforced by the bibliography of Eastern Han

books compiled by the Qing scholar Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗. Combing the available sources, Yao listed all books related to the *Changes* produced in this era. Except two, they were all related to the schools of the Western Han.<sup>40</sup>

At the end of the Eastern Han, that is, about 250 years after the various schools first emerged, Emperor Ling 漢靈帝 (175–183 CE) enthusiastically ordered the annotated Five Classics inscribed on stone stele—these came to be known as the stone classics of Xiping (*Xiping shijing* 熹平石經). The *Changes* preserved by the Liangqiu school was used as the authoritative version for this project.<sup>41</sup> Both Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, whose teachings of the

classics are often celebrated as the culmination of Han intellectual development, and his rival, Wang Su 王肅, were devoted to the Fei 費 school's reading of the *Changes*, which had emerged under Emperor Yuan, and Zheng's commentaries have been transmitted by scholars ever since.<sup>42</sup>

Table 3.2. Learning Communities of the *Documents in Han shu*

Mr. Fu 伏生	The grandson of Mr. Fu 伏生孫				
	Chao Cuo 朝 (夙) 錯				
	Mr. Ouyang 歐陽生	Ni Kuang (Grandee Secretary)	Son of Mr. Ouyang 歐陽生子	[Mr. Ouyang's great grandson] Ouyang Gao 歐陽高 (Erudite)	[Ouyang Gao's grandson] Ouyang Diyu 歐陽地餘 (Emperor Yuan: Privy Treasurer)
					Lin Zun 林尊 (Privy Treasurer)
					Ping Dang 平當 (Chancellor)
					Zhu Pu 朱普 (Erudite)
					Bao Xuan 鮑宣 (Metropolitan Commandant 司隸校尉)
					Chen Wengsheng 陳翁生 (Grand Tutor of Xindu 信都) <sup>a</sup>
					Yin Chong 殷崇 (Erudite)
					Gong Sheng 龔勝 (The Western Sustainer)
	Jian Qing 閻卿		Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝		Xiahou Jian 夏侯建
					Xiahou Jian 夏侯建

Mr. Fu 伏生	Mr. Zhang 張生	夏侯都尉 Defender of Xiahou	[the descendant of Xiahou Clan] Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌	Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (Steward of the Empress Dowager 長信少府)	Xiahou Jian 夏侯建 (Grand Tutor of Heir Apparent) <sup>b</sup>	Zhang Shanfu 張山拊 (Erudite, Privy Treasurer)	Li Xun 李尋 (Commandant of Cavalry 騎都尉)
						Zheng Kuanzhong 鄭寬中 (Erudite; Emperor Cheng: Marquis of Guannei 關內侯)	Zhao Xuan 趙玄 (Emperor Ai: Grandee Secretary)
						Zhang Wugu 張無故 (Grand Tutor of Guangling 廣陵)	Tang Zun 唐尊 (Wang Mang: Grand Tutor)
						Qin Gong 秦恭 (Administrator of Cheng Yang 城陽)	Feng Bin 馮賓 (Erudite)
						Jia Cang 假倉 (Administrator of Jiaodong 膠東) <sup>d</sup>	
					Mou Qin 牟卿 (Erudite)	Kong Guang 孔光	
				Zhou Kan 周堪 (Superintendent of the Imperial Household)	Xu Shang 許商 (One of the Nine Ministers 九卿)	Tang Lin 唐林 (Wang Mang: One of the Nine Ministers)	
						Wu Zhang 吳章 (Wang Mang: Erudite)	
						Wang Ji 王吉 (Wang Mang: One of the Nine Ministers)	
						Que Qin 缺飲 (Wang Mang: Erudite)	
				Kong Ba 孔霸 (Erudite) <sup>c</sup>		[Kong Ba's son] Kong Guang 孔光 (Chancellor)	

<sup>a</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "therefore, for the Documents, there is a school of Ouyang for generations" 由是尚書世有歐陽氏學。 *Han shu*, 88:3604.

<sup>b</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "therefore, for the school of Ouyang, there is learning of Ping and Chen" 由是歐陽有平、陳之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3604.

<sup>c</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "therefore, for the Documents, there are schools of Xiahou the Senior and Xiahou the Junior" 是尚書有大小夏侯之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3604.

<sup>d</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "therefore, for the school of Xiahou the Junior, there is learning of Zheng, Zhang, Qin, Jia, and Li" 由是小夏侯有鄭、張、秦、假、李氏之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3605.

<sup>e</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "therefore, for the school of Xiahou the Senior, there is learning of Kong and Xu" 由是大夏侯有孔、許之學。 *Han shu*, 88:3604.

## Table 3.3. Learning Communities of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in *Han shu*: Gongyang Tradition



Mr. Hu 胡毋生 (Erudite)	Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (Chancellor)			
Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (Administrator of Jiangdu)	Chu Da 褚大 (Administrator of Liang)			
	Lǔ Bushu 呂步舒 (Chief Clerk of Chancellor 丞相長史)			
	Duan Zhong 段仲			
	Ying gong 酈公 (Grand Master of Remonstrance)	Gong Yu 貢禹 (Grantee Secretary)		Tangxi Hui 堂鄉惠
		Meng Qing 孟卿	Shu Guang 疏廣 (Grand Tutor of Heir Apparent)	Guan Lu 筦路 (Palace Aide to the Grantee Secretary 御史中丞)
		Sui Meng 莊孟 (Manager of Credentials 符節令)	Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖 (Emperor Xuan: Erudite; Eastern Supporter 左翼端)	Wang Zhong 王中 (Emperor Yuan 元帝: Steward 少府)
				Gongsun Wen 公孫文 (Grand Tutor of Dongping 東平)
				Dongmen Yun 東門雲 (Regional Inspector of Jingzhou 荊州)
			[Nephew of Sui Meng] Yan Anle 顏安樂 (Clerk to the Governor of Qi 齊郡太守丞)	Ling Feng 冷豐 (Governor of Zichuan 淄川)
				Ma Gong 馬宮 (5 CE, Chancellor)
				Zuo Xian 左咸 (6 BCE, Grand Herald 太鴻臚)
				Ren Gong 任公 (Steward)
				Ming Du 冥都 (Clerk to the Chancellor 丞相史)
				Guan Lu 筦路

Mr. Shen of Lu 魯申公	Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu 瑕丘江公	Son of Mr. Jiang	Grandson of Mr. Jiang 江公孫 (Emperor Xuan: Erudite)	Hu Chang 胡常	Xiao Bing 蕭秉 (Wang Mang 王莽: Grand Master for Lecturing 講學大夫)
		Rong Guang 榮廣	Cai Qianqiu 蔡千秋 (Emperor Xuan: Gentleman of the Interior Serving as Gate Commander 郎中戶將)	Liu Xiang 劉向 (Director of the Imperial Clan 宗正)	
				Yin Gengshi 尹更始 (Grand Master of Remonstrance)	[Son of Yin Gengshi] Yin Xian 尹咸 (Grand Minister of Agriculture)
					Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 (Chancellor)
					Fang Feng 房鳳 (Governor of Jiujiang 九江)
			Zhou Qing 周慶 (Erudite)		
		Hao Xing gong 皓星公	Ding Xing 丁姓 (Erudite, Grand Tutor of Zhongshan 中山)	Shenzhang Chang 申章昌 (Erudite, Grand Tutor of Shangcha 長沙)	
			Cai Qianqiu 蔡千秋		
Zhang Cang 張蒼 (Marquis of Beiping 北平侯)					

Jia Yi 賈誼 (Grand Tutor of Liang 梁)	Mr. Guan 賈公 (King Xian of Hejian 河間獻王: Erudite)				
	[Son of Jia Yi] Jia Changqing 賈長卿 (Magistrate of Dangyin 滎陰令)	Zhang Yu 張禹 (Censor 御史)	Yin Gengshi 尹更始 (Grand Master of Remonstrance)	[Son of Ying Gengshi] Yin Xian 尹咸 (Grand Minister of Agriculture)	Liu Xin 劉歆 (Wang Mang: Preceptor of State 國師)
				Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 (Chancellor)	
				Hu Chang 胡常	Jia Hu 賈護 (Emperor Ai: 哀帝: Gentleman-attendant 郎) 1
					Chen Qin 陳欽 (Wang Mang: General 將軍)
Zhang Chang 張敞 (Governor of the Capital 京兆尹)					
Liu Gongzi 劉公子 (Superior Grand Master of the Palace 太中大夫)					

"Rulin liezhuan" of *Han shu* says that Wang Zhong served as *Shaofu* 少府. But we cannot find this record in "Baiguan gongqing biao" 百官公卿表 (A table of the hundred officials and dukes), a chart that records the important officials such as the Nine Ministers. Therefore, *Shaofu* here probably does not refer to the Privy Treasurer of the central government, but is the abbreviation of some official titles such as *Changxin Shaofu* 長信少府 (Steward of Empress Dowager). See *Han shu*, 88:3616.

<sup>1</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "for the Gongyang tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, there are schools of Yan and Yann" 由是公羊春秋有顏, 嚴之學. *Han shu*, 88:3616.

<sup>2</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "therefore, for school of Yan, there are learning of Ling and Ren" 由是顏家有冷, 任之學. See *Han shu*, 88, 3617. Also, Ren Gong here is said to serve as *Shaofu*, while this record does not appear in "Baiguan gongqing biao" or other places in our sources. Therefore, *Shaofu* here is more likely an abbreviation of some official title. *Han shu*, 88:3617.

<sup>3</sup>In *Han shu*, it says "for the school of Yan, there is also learning of Guan and Ming" 顏氏復有寬, 冥之學. *Han shu*, 88:3617.

<sup>4</sup>In *Han shu*, it says, "For the Guliang tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, there is learning of Yin, Hu, Shenzhang, and Fang" 穀梁春秋有尹, 胡, 申, 章, 房氏之學. *Han shu*, 88:3620.

<sup>5</sup>In *Han shu*, it says, "therefore, those who talked about the Zuo tradition based their learning on Jia Hu and Liu Xin" 由是官左氏者本之賈護, 劉歆. *Han shu*, 88:3620.

The earliest works attributed to experts on the *Changes* have long been lost to scholars, but the commentaries attributed to Meng Xi, the founding father of the Meng school, and to Jing Fang the younger, a second-generation disciple of Meng Xi, seem to have survived for seven hundred years, appearing in the "Bibliography of

Classics and [other] Books” (*Jingji zhi* 經籍志) section of *The History of the Sui Dynasty* (*Sui shu* 隋書).<sup>43</sup> Because of the great reputation of the Jing Fang school, those who produced spurious works often attached Jing Fang’s name to them, as recorded by the compilers of this treaty.<sup>44</sup> Actually, Jing Fang’s teachings on the *Changes* have become one of the most influential and enduring traditions from the Han period to the modern day. While Ban Gu compiled *The History of Western Han* in the late first century CE, Fan Ye 范曄 drew up *The History of Eastern Han* in the middle of the fifth century, and Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 completed *The History of the Jin Dynasty* (*Jin shu*

晉書) in the middle of the seventh century, they all cited Jing Fang's comments to explain various omens or portents that occurred in different dynasties. Every subsequent dynastic history recorded works attributed to Jing Fang, and countless scholars cited his teachings in their own works.<sup>45</sup> The *Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature* compiled in the late eighteenth century, preserved a book entitled *The Teaching of Jing Fang [the Younger] on the Changes* (*Jing Fang Yi zhuan* 京房易傳), and several Qing scholars devoted their lives to collecting every fragment of writing by Jing Fang.<sup>46</sup>

When Emperor Guangwu revived

the study of the Five Classics, eleven out of the fourteen schools he endorsed as official learning had emerged under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan.<sup>47</sup> During the two-hundred-year history of the Eastern Han, a productive time during which some scholars labored over the old script versions of the *Documents*, *Zuozhuan*, and the Mao version of the *Songs*, no new interpretive schools emerged to compete with the established ones.<sup>48</sup> The schools of Ouyang and Xiahou the elder and younger flourished as the major traditions in studies of the *Documents* for nearly four hundred years, disappearing finally during the Yongjia 永嘉 Revolt at the end of

Western Jin (ca. 310 CE).<sup>49</sup> The schools of Yan 顏 and Yan 嚴 dominated studies of the Gongyang tradition in the Eastern Han.<sup>50</sup> The latter won imperial favor: it was inscribed on stone steles and displayed at the Imperial Academy under Emperor Ling. The Qing 慶 school, established by a disciple of Hou Cang to study the *Rites*, attracted several prominent followers, among them Cao Chong 曹充.<sup>51</sup> While serving as an erudite, Cao formulated the major rites for the Eastern Han court, including the sacrifice known as *fengshan* 封禪.<sup>52</sup> Zheng Xuan, the shining star in Eastern Han intellectual history, studied in the traditions of Dai the junior, and his

commentaries on the *Rites* not only survived several centuries of chaos and wars, but were elevated as official scholarship during the Sui dynasty.<sup>53</sup> The extant edition of the *Rites* is traditionally identified with the work of Dai.

Table 3.4. Learning Communities of the  
*Songs* in *Han shu*: Lu Tradition

Fuqu Bo of Qi 齊人浮丘伯

Mr. Shen 申公 (Superior Grand Master of the Palace)

King Yuan of Chu 楚元王: Jiao 交

[Son of King Yuan of Chu]元王子: Ying 郢

[Son of Ying] 郢子: Wu 戊

Wang Zang 王臧 (Prefect of the Gentlemen-of-the-palace)

Zhao Wan 趙筮 (Grantee Secretary)

Kong Anguo 孔安國 (Governor of Linhuai)

Zhou Ba 周霸 (Administrator of Jiaoxi)

Xia Kuan 夏寬 (Administrator of Chengyang)

Dang Luci 瑒魯賜 (Governor of Donghai)

Mr. Miao 繆生 (Administrator of Changsha)

Xu Yan 徐偃 (Commandant-in-ordinary of Jiaoxi)

Quemen Qingji 闕門慶忌 (Administrator of Jiaodong)

Mr. Xu 徐公

Wang Shi 王式 (Teacher of King Changyi)

Wei Xian 韋賢 (Chancellor)

Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 (Chancellor)

Wei Shang 韋賞(Commander-in-chief 大司馬)\*

Zhang Chang'an 張長安 (Erudite, Commandant-in-ordinary of Huaiyang 淮陽)

You Qing 游卿 (Grand Master of Remonstrance)

Wang Fu 王扶 (Commandant-in-ordinary of Sishui 泗水)

Xu Yan 許晏 (Erudite)\*

Tang Changbin 唐長賓 (Erudite, Grand Tutor of Chu 楚)

Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 (Erudite)\*

Xue Guangde 薛廣德 (Grantee Secretary)

Gong She 龔舍 (Governor of Taishan 泰山)



Learning Communities of the *Songs* in *Han shu*: Qi Tradition

Yuan Gu 袁固 (Emperor Jing: Erudite)	Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 (Grand Tutor of Changyi 昌邑)	Hou Cang 后蒼 (Emperor Xuan: Privy Treasurer)	Yi Feng 翼奉 (Grand Master of Remonstrance)		
			Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (Grandee Secretary)		
			Kuang Heng 匡衡 (Chancellor)	Shi Dan 師丹 (Grandee Secretary)	
				Fu Li 伏理 (Grand Tutor of Gaomi 高密) <sup>4</sup>	
				Man Chang 滿昌 (Supervisor of the Household 詹事)	Zhang Han 張邵 Pi Rong 皮容

Learning Communities of the *Songs* in *Han shu*: Han Tradition

Han Ying 韓嬰 (Emperor Jing: Grand Tutor of Changshan)	Mr. Ben 賈生				
	[Grandson of Han Ying] Han Shang 韓商 (Erudite)	Descendant of Han Ying at Zhuo County 涿郡韓生	Gai Kuanrao 蓋寬饒 (Metropolitan Commandant 司隸校尉)		
	Zhao Zi 趙子	Cai Yi 蔡詒 (Chancellor)	Shi Zigong 食子公 (Erudite)	Li Feng 栗豐 (Regional Inspector 部刺史)	Zhang Jiu 張就
			Wang Ji 王吉 (Commandant-in-ordinary of King of Changyi 昌邑 [王]中尉)	Zhangsun Shun 張孫順 (Erudite) <sup>4</sup>	Fa Fu 樊福

Learning Communities of the *Songs* in *Han shu*: Mao Tradition

Mr. Mao 毛公 (King Xian of Hejian 河間獻王: Erudite)	Guan Changqing 賈長卿	Xie Yannian 解延年 (Magistrate of A'Wu 阿武令)	Xu Ao 徐敖	Chen Xia 陳俠 (Wang Mang: Grand Master of Lecturing)	
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<sup>3</sup> In *Han shu*, it says, "therefore, for the Lu tradition of the *Songs*, there is the school of Wei" 由是魯詩有韋氏學. *Han shu*, 88:3609.<sup>4</sup> In *Han shu*, it says, "for the school of Zhang, there is learning of Xu" 張家有許氏學. *Han shu*, 88:3611.<sup>5</sup> In *Han shu*, it says, "for the Lu tradition of the *Songs*, there is learning of Zhang, Tang, and Zhu" 魯詩有張、唐、褚氏之學. *Han shu*, 88:3610.<sup>6</sup> In *Han shu*, it says, "for the Qi tradition of the *Songs*, there is learning of Yi, Kuang, Shi, and Fu" 齊詩有賈、匡、師、伏之學. *Han shu*, 88:3613.<sup>7</sup> In *Han shu*, it says, "for the Han tradition of the *Songs*, there is learning of Wang, Shi, Changsun" 韓詩有王、食、長孫之學. *Han shu*, 88:3614.Table 3.5. Learning Communities of the *Rites* in *Han shu*

Mr. Gaotang of Lu 魯高堂生					
Mr. Xu 徐生 (Emperor Wen: Grand Master of Rites)	[Grandson of Mr. Xu] Xu Xiang 徐襄 (Administrator of Guangling)				
	[Grandson of Mr. Xu] Xu Yan 徐延 (Grand Master of Rites)				
	Gonghu Manyi 公戶滿意 (Grand Master of Rites)				
	Mr. Huan 桓生 (Grand Master of Rites)				
	Shan Ci 單次 (Grand Master of Rites)				
	Xiao Fen 馮奮 (Governor of Huaiyang)	Meng Qing 孟卿	Hou Cang 后倉	Wenren Tonghan 聞人通漢 (Commandant-in-ordinary of Zhongshan 中山)	
				Dai De 戴德 (Grand Tutor of Xindu 信都)	Xu Liang 徐良 (Erudite, Governor)
				Dai Sheng 戴聖 (Erudite, Governor of Jiujiang 九江)	Qiao Ren 橋仁 (Grand Herald)
					Yang Rong 楊榮 (Governor of Langya 琅邪) <sup>a</sup>
				Qing Pu 慶普 (Grand Tutor of Dongping 東平) <sup>b</sup>	Xiahou Jing 夏侯敬
					Qing Xian 慶咸 (Governor of Yuzhang 豫章)
			Lüqiu Qing 闕丘卿		

<sup>a</sup>In *Han shu*, it says, "For the school of Dai the Senior, there is learning of Xu; for the school of Dai the Junior, there is learning of Qiao and Yang" 大戴有徐氏, 小戴有橋, 楊氏之學. *Han shu*, 88:3615.

<sup>b</sup>In *Han shu*, it says, "for the Rites, there are schools of Dai the Senior, Dai the Junior, and Qing" 由是禮有大戴, 小戴, 慶氏之學. *Han shu*, 88:3615.

## CONTINUITY OR DISRUPTION

Exploring the social and political backgrounds of *ru* scholars, their disciples and the works they produced, the picture we have put together suggests a fragmented assortment of *ru* during the former part of the Western Han, sharply contrasted with an

exorbitant growth thereafter. Scrutiny of the sources shows that the interpretive schools of the Five Classics, which have long been taken as the representative intellectual trends of the Han dynasty, emerged fairly late.

Sima Qian carefully documented the master–disciple relationships between *ru*. He never differentiated, however, between different traditions of scholarship.<sup>54</sup> Let us consider for a moment how study of the *Changes* was treated. The first to teach about the *Changes* in the Han, according to Sima Qian, was Yang He, while Ban Gu singled out Tian He, but neither Yang nor Tian established his own tradition and nothing like a Yang or Tian school

ever existed. For such phenomena, we must look to the time of the Shi, Meng, and Liangqiu schools established under Emperor Xuan. Only from that date do we see phrases like *Meng zhi xue* 孟 (喜) 之學 (the Meng school), *Shi shi yi* 施氏易 (the Shi family's *Yi jing*), and *Liangqiu zhi xue* 梁丘之學 (the Liangqiu school).

Similar cases can be found in the development of the traditions surrounding the *Rites* and the *Documents*. Whereas Sima Qian identified Mr. Gaotang and Mr. Xu as Western Han pioneers in the study of the *Rites*, true schools were established only under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan, almost ninety years after the

deaths of Gaotang and Xu. And the schools of Ouyang Gao and of Xiahou the elder and younger, all devoted to the *Documents*, were also founded after the first 120 years of the Western Han.<sup>55</sup>

Scholars have long divided studies of the *Songs* in the Han period into the Qi, Lu, Han, and Mao traditions, crediting Yuan Gu, Mr. Shen, Han Ying, and Mr. Mao as their respective founders. The different traditions are often traced to the beginning of the Western Han, an error that has arisen by confusing Sima Qian's presentation with Ban Gu's.

Sima Qian never mentioned Mao and his teachings. More importantly,

rubrics like “Lu shi” 魯詩 (the Lu edition of the *Songs*), “Qi shi” 齊詩 (the Qi edition of the *Songs*), and “Han shi” 韓詩 (the Han edition of the *Songs*) made no appearance at all in Sima Qian’s writings; they arrived with Ban Gu.<sup>56</sup>

*The Grand Scribe’s Records* named Shen, Yuan Gu, and Han as the first generation of Han-dynasty experts on the *Songs*, noting that these scholars taught in Lu, Qi, and Yanzhao areas respectively. What Sima Qian did not say was that these individuals established their distinguished traditions. Rather, he pointed out that even though all based their work on one master’s teaching, Shen’s disciples

each had different interpretations of the *Songs*.<sup>57</sup>

Evidence further shows that, at the least, identifying Shen as the founding master of the Lu edition of the *Songs* did not accord with Sima Qian's argument, an idea presumably fabricated by later scholars. Ban Gu said that Shen served as an Erudite under Emperor Wen—a fact that cannot be found in *The Grand Scribe's Records*—and claimed that at that time he started to write commentaries to the works collected in the *Songs*, which eventually became the Lu edition.<sup>58</sup> When we look at what Sima Qian actually wrote, we find him saying that Shen merely explained the special

terms in the classic but did not write any commentaries.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, *The Grand Scribe's Records* always used the term “specialized in the Songs (*zhi shi* 治詩)” to define one’s expertise. In *The History of Western Han*, however, while men of the first half of the dynasty were identified as experts on the Songs in general, men since Emperor Zhao were described as experts on a particular tradition of the Songs (*zhi qishi* 治齊詩, specialized in the Qi version of the Songs, for example). This indicates that differentiating experts on the Songs into various schools happened in the last ninety years of Western Han.



When various prominent *ru* established their own interpretive schools—Wei Xian's school specializing in the Lu edition of the *Songs*, for instance—they traced their origins back to the beginning of the dynasty and retrospectively imposed the newly coined rubrics on their forebears.

A similar thing happened with the scholarly communities connected to the *Annals*. It has long been held that Confucius composed the terse *Annals* to convey the way of the king, while his followers contributed the *Gongyang* 公羊, *Guliang* 穀梁, and *Zuozhuan* 左傳, which provided the historical background while explaining the profound meaning Confucius hid in his

cryptically brief remarks.<sup>60</sup> Later scholars conventionally divided Han-era *ru* who specialized in this text into different camps according to which commentary they studied. However, a scrutiny of available sources shows that neither Sima Qian nor his predecessors strictly distinguished the Confucius's kernel from the commentaries, nor did they ever differentiate between schools; instead, taking the detailed historical narratives conveyed by *Zuozhuan* and the didactic messages by *Gongyang* and *Guliang* as an organic whole, they used one rubric, referring simply to *Chun qiu*. The boundaries between *Gongyang*, *Guliang*, and *Zuo* appear to have been

first demarcated by *ru* under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan, retrospectively mapping the *ru* world of the early Han.

The term “chun qiu” first appears in *Mozi* 墨子, where several vivid ghost stories are ascribed to the “chun qiu” of Zhou, Yan, Song, and Qi states. Corresponding not to a period of disunity when Confucius flourished, here “chun qiu” acted as a generic term denoting historical records.<sup>61</sup> In fact, both pre-Han and Han scholars continued to use “chun qiu” to refer to history in general.<sup>62</sup>

Mencius was the first person we know of to associate the phrase “chun qiu” with a specific corpus of historical records attributed to Confucius.<sup>63</sup>

However, in pre-Han scholars' works, without exception, *Chun qiu* designated both the *Annals* and its commentaries.

Xunzi cited *Chun qiu* twice. Extremely brief, the first citation reads, “*Chun qiu* treats Duke Mu as worthy because it considers him capable of changing (himself)” 春秋賢穆公，以為能變也。<sup>64</sup> Examining the received *Chun qiu Annals*, we find that it states, “The Earl of Qin (i.e., Duke Mu) sent Sui to visit (Lu)” 秦伯使遂來聘 in the twelfth year of Duke Wen 文公 of Lu.<sup>65</sup> *Gongyang* explains this record as follows:

Who is Sui? The grandee of

Qin. There are no grandees in Qin state; why was it recorded in this way? It is to treat Duke Mu as worthy. Why does it treat Duke Mu as worthy? Because it considers him capable of changing (himself).

遂者何? 秦大夫也. 秦無大夫. 此何以書. 賢繆公也. 何賢乎繆公? 以為能變也.<sup>66</sup>

It is difficult to understand why labeling Qin's messenger as the grandee was a way to praise Duke Mu, but obviously Xunzi was referring not

to the six characters in the *Annals* but to the passage in *Gongyang*.

The second citation from *Chun qiu* reads,

Hence *Chun qiu* praised “pledging each other” and the *Songs* condemned “frequent covenanting.” The meanings they conveyed are the same.

故《春秋》善胥命，而  
《詩》非屢盟，其心一也。<sup>67</sup>

While the *Annals* briefly mentions that in the third year of the rule of Duke Huan of Lu, the Marquis of Qi

and the Marquis of Wei pledged each other at Pu (齊侯衛侯胥命于蒲), *Gongyang* and *Guliang* interpreted the term *xuming* 胥命 (pledge each other) as a laudatory term.<sup>68</sup> When Xunzi said, “*Chun qiu* praised ‘pledging each other,’” he must have had in mind both the laconic chronicles and the explanations provided in the commentaries.<sup>69</sup>

Han Fei used “*Chun qiu*” to refer to the same collection of documents as Xunzi. In the chapter entitled “Ministers Apt to Betray, Molest, and Murder their Lords” (*Jian jie shi chen* 姦劫弑臣), Han Fei cited two stories that he ascribed to *Chun qiu*. One involved Prince Wei 圍 of Chu, who

killed his father and usurped the throne, an event that is recorded only in *Zuozhuan*. The second story, in which Cui Shu 崔杼 kills Duke Zhuang of Qi 齊莊公, is sketched in the brief *Annals*. But Han Fei's narrative corresponds well with that in the *Zuozhuan*.<sup>70</sup> Both *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 and *Han shi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳 cited the same stories and attributed them to *Chun qiu*.<sup>71</sup>

Han scholars did the same. *Huainanzi* 淮南子 celebrates Confucius for compiling *Chun qiu* and thereby completing the Way of the King; three stories are mentioned, and to find them we must look to *Gongyang. Luxuriant Dew of the Annals* (*Chun qiu fan lu* 春秋繁露) is



traditionally attributed to Dong Zhongshu, who has been credited as a master of Gongyang tradition since Ban Gu. Interestingly, Dong never distinguished either between the *Annals* and the commentaries or between his learning and that of his rivals. Among the twelve quotations he ascribed to *Chun qiu*, ten are preserved in the extant *Annals*, one is preserved in *Gongyang*, and the last can be located in no surviving text.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, in *Luxuriant Dew of the Annals* events ascribed to *Chun qiu* tend to be found in either *Gongyang* or *Zuozhuan*. In the chapter entitled “Bamboo Grove” (*Zhulin* 竹林), for instance, the reader is told that

*Chun qiu* praises Sima zi 司馬子, who did not obey the lord's order but acted according to his own judgment on a diplomatic mission. Sima zi's story was not mentioned in the *Annals*, but it does appear in *Gongyang*.<sup>73</sup> In same chapter the author notes that *Chun qiu* criticizes Pang Choufu 逢丑父 for not knowing how to weigh the relative importance of various events, while the story of Feng Choufu was recorded only in *Zuozhuan*.<sup>74</sup>

We are now prepared to examine Sima Qian's treatment of *Chun qiu* learning and its experts. His take was quite different from Ban Gu's, but it was entirely in keeping with the conventions of his day. In several

different places, *The Grand Scribe's Records* extolled Confucius's achievement in *Chun qiu*, citing that work as the final word on historical events. One passage reads:

The grand historian says:  
[ ...] *Chun qiu* criticizes the chaos of the Song: after Duke Xuan deposed the crown prince and appointed his brother as the legitimate heir, shockwaves rocked the state for ten generations.

太史公曰：[ ...] 春秋譏宋之亂自宣公廢太子而立弟，國以不寧者十世。<sup>75</sup>

This story is preserved in the extant version of *Gongyang*, yet Sima Qian cited *Chun qiu*. Besides paraphrased passages from *Chun qiu*, direct quotations were also preserved in *The Grand Scribe's Records*. It records that Dowager Dou 竇太后 wanted to establish her younger son, the brother of Emperor Jing 景帝 (fl. 154–140 BCE), as the crown prince. The emperor consulted his advisers regarding this ticklish question, and they replied:

Nowadays, the loyal Han family imitates the Zhou. According to the way of the

Zhou, the emperor is not allowed to establish his brother as the legitimate successor but should give the throne to his son. For such a cause, *Chun qiu* criticized Duke Xuan of Song. When Duke Xuan of Song died, he did not give the throne to his son but to his younger brother. The younger brother received the state. After he died, he returned the state to the son of his older brother. The sons of the younger brother fought for the throne, thinking that they should have succeeded their father.

This led them to murder the son of the older brother. Therefore, the state was in chaos and disasters went on interminably. Hence, *Chunqiu* says, “Gentlemen generally reside in the center; the disaster of Song is caused by Duke Xuan.”

方今漢家法周，周道不得立弟，當立子。故春秋所以非宋宣公。宋宣公死，不立子而與弟。弟受國，死，復反之與兄之子。弟之子爭之，以為我當代父後，即刺殺兄子。以故國亂，禍不絕。故春秋曰：“君子大居正，宋之禍宣公

This passage occurs in the extant edition of *Gongyang*, whereas Sima Qian simply cited *Chun qiu*. He treated material from *Zuozhuan* the same way.

Therefore, Confucius illuminated the Way of the King. He sought to serve more than seventy rulers, but none were able to use him. Consequently, he went west to observe the household of Zhou and to discuss the historical records and old traditions. Starting with Lu

state, he arranged *Chun qiu*. [...] As for Xunzi, Mencius, Gongsun Gu, and Han Fei, they often excerpted the writing of *Chun qiu* to compose their works. Cases like those cannot be numbered.

是以孔子明王道，幹七十餘君，莫能用，故西觀周室，論史記舊聞，興於魯而次春秋 ... 及如荀卿、孟子、公孫固、韓非之徒，各往往摭摭春秋之文以著書，不同勝紀。<sup>77</sup>

What Xunzi, Mencius, Gongsun



Gu, and Han Fei drew from is what we now call *Zuo zhuan*; for Sima Qian the distinction was meaningless.<sup>78</sup>

Much of the material that went into *Gongyang* and *Zuozhuan* had been well known since the Warring States period. But the use of the term “Chun qiu” by scholars from Xunzi to Sima Qian shows that the divisions that eventually arose among the various traditions had no practical existence: rubrics like “Gongyang,” “Guliang,” and “Zuozhuan” did not appear in any pre-Han texts at all, and their occasional occurrence in Western Han texts such as *A New Discourse* (*Xin yu*) and *The Grand Scribe's Records* invites a range of interpretations.

The first reference to *Guliang* appears in Lu Jia's *A New Discourse*, dated to the second century BCE. A passage cited in the end of a chapter is attributed to *Guliangzhuan* 穀梁傳. This is a single case in the Western Han dynasty where *Guliang* is identified as a *zhuan*—commentary. Not until the Eastern Han was the work commonly distinguished by that title.

Sima Qian is the first person to mention Zuo Qiuming 左丘明, naming him as the author of *Zuo shi Chun qiu* 左氏春秋, and Ban Gu identified this work with *Zuoshi zhuan*, which we now call *Zuozhuan*. However, Sima Qian did not list Zuo's work as an independent tradition, nor did he

identify any scholar as a *Zuozhuan* expert. This treatment accords with that received by the *Gongyang* and *Guliang* traditions in *The Grand Scribe's Records*. Mr. Huwu is commonly understood to be the first Han scholar of the *Gongyang* tradition, and Gongsun Hong was his most prominent disciple. However, Sima Qian never associated the rubric “Gongyang” with them, simply listing these two *ru* as experts on *Chun qiu*. In fact, although Sima Qian frequently mentioned and cited *Chun qiu*, composing detailed biographies of those who studied it, the terms “Gongyang” and “Guliang” occurred merely once in *The Grand Scribe's*

*Records*, and instances are ambiguous. At the end of the biography of Dong Zhongshu, a passage reads:

From the establishment of the Han dynasty there were five generations, and only Dong Zhongshu was known for understanding *Chun qiu*, and he transmitted [the work of] Mr. Gongyang.

故漢興至于五世之間，唯董仲舒名為明於春秋，其傳公羊氏也。<sup>79</sup>

Dong was identified by Ban Gu as

the most important representative of the Gongyang tradition, but Sima Qian depicted him—with a single exception, just cited—as an expert on *Chun qiu* in general. In the cited passage, “he transmitted [the work of] Mr. Gongyang” was a supplement to an independent sentence that could have stood alone, which suggests two possibilities: either Sima Qian thought the special tradition Dong focused on was insignificant and merely mentioned it in passing or the sentence was interpolated into *The Grand Scribe's Records* later. After copying Dong's biography almost verbatim into *The History of Western Han*, Ban Gu omitted this entire sentence: did his

copy of *The Grand Scribe's Records* have this sentence at all?<sup>80</sup>

If the only occurrence of “Gongyang” in *The Grand Scribe's Records* invites doubts, that of “Guliang” also stimulates speculation. This term appears in the introduction to the brief comments about Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu included in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” but the whole paragraph must have been lifted from another place. Throughout the chapter, Sima Qian organized his biographies according to a distinct structure, starting with name, hometown, expertise, career, extending into anecdotes, and ending with a discussion of the figure's disciples.

This regular pattern is broken in the case of Dong Zhongshu. Between the anecdotes about Dong and the discussion of his disciples appear the paragraphs devoted to Mr. Huwu and Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu. Ban Gu obviously recognized this disorder and, when copying the information into his own work, he placed the biographical sketch of Huwu before the major entry for Dong, slipping Jiang's sketch in after it.

The disorder in *The Grand Scribe's Records* may have come about long after Sima Qian's day, when the bamboo slips of an early edition were shuffled. Consider the following passage:

Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu studied Guliang *Chun qiu*. Since Gongsun Hong was employed [in the court], [he?] once collected and compared [Mr. Jiang's] interpretation, and ended up using Dong Zhongshu.

瑕丘江生為穀梁春秋。自公孫弘得用，嘗集比其義，卒用董仲舒。<sup>81</sup>

This passage seems to indicate that Gongsun compared Jiang's interpretation with Dong's and eventually chose the latter. However, this contradicted the overall narrative.



After all, Gongsun Hong had already studied *Chun qiu* and had no need for Dong's learning, which in any case he would have spurned, since Dong was a great foe of his.

This inconsistency was purged from *The History of Western Han*, where Ban Gu wrote,

Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu studied the Guliang *Chun qiu*. [ ... ]  
The Emperor made him debate with Dong Zhongshu, and he could not compete. Chancellor Gongsun Hong originally specialized in Gongyang learning, so [the

Emperor] compared their teachings, and ended up employing Dong.

瑕丘江公受穀梁春秋 ... 上使與仲舒議，不如仲舒。而丞相公孫弘本為公羊學，比輯其議，卒用董生。<sup>82</sup>

In this version, it is Emperor Wu who compared Jiang and Dong's learning and employed the latter. Gongsun Hong, who studied the same tradition Dong did, becomes just one factor that helped the emperor make the decision. It is likely that Ban Gu modified Sima Qian's story in order to clear the original contradiction, but identified

Gongsun Hong as a Gongyang scholar—information totally absent from *The Grand Scribe's Records*—in order to intensify the plot.

But it is also likely that Sima Qian never mentioned Jiang of Xiaqiu, that the broken paragraph devoted to him in the extant version of *The Grand Scribe's Records* was originally a casual bit of marginalia by a later reader, at some point down the line mistaken for a passage from the original.

The absence of “Zuozhuan” experts and the suspicious occurrences of the terms “Gongyang” and “Guliang” take on new meaning when viewed against the intellectual context I have

reconstructed. Seeing *Chun qiu* learning as an undifferentiated whole is also a characteristic of the *Debate on Salt and Iron*, compiled by Huan Kuan 桓寬 (fl. 74–49 BCE).<sup>83</sup>

However, it was totally transformed in Ban Gu's *History of Western Han*. In this work, Gongyang, Guliang, and Zuozhuan were taken as three rival groups, which not only assumed different hermeneutic devices to expound the *Annals* but had their well-documented transmission lines dated back to the beginning of the Western Han or even to Confucius. Furthermore, Ban Gu clearly distinguished between citations from the chronicles and from the

commentary traditions. Examining the textual evidence, we can see that this change seems to have occurred in the latter part of the dynasty. In Ban Gu's work, only a few experts from early in the dynasty were retrospectively associated with different interpretive schools, whereas later scholars were all defined according to their schools of thought. In addition, Ban Gu carefully recorded the emergence of the Guliang tradition. Although this tradition is said to be traceable back to the early Han, only two scholars before Emperor Zhao were identified, and, as Ban Gu noted, under Emperor Xuan it had already stood on the brink of extinction. The sympathetic emperor then appointed a

series of Guliang experts to serve as erudite at the Imperial Academy, and he chose ten Gentleman-attendants as their disciples. After a decade of this, Guliang learning started to flourish.<sup>84</sup>

An examination of the concept of *shifa* (師法), or “master-rule,” provides further evidence that competitive traditions were a new construction by *ru* under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan. *Shi*, meaning “teacher,” and *fa*, “law,” first appear as a combination in *Xunzi*. For example, one passage reads,

Therefore, opposing ritual is the same as lawlessness, and opposing your master is the

same as having no master at all. Those who do not follow master and law but prefer acting on one's own opinion are comparable to those who use a blind man to differentiate colors and a deaf person to distinguish sounds.

故非禮，是無法也；非師，是無師也。不是師法，而好自用，譬之是猶以盲辨色，以聾辨聲也。<sup>85</sup>

Han Fei also used *shifa* as a compound, meaning “following the law,” or literally, “taking the law as the

master.” It reads:

While implementing law in order to guide the people, [the ruler] also values literary accomplishment. Then, even if the people follow the law, they have doubts.

錯法以道民也而又貴文學，  
則民之所師法也疑。<sup>86</sup>

Employing *shifa* to mean “master-rule” was a new phenomenon in the Han dynasty. Generally, it signifies the special hermeneutical perspective and exegetical method a master developed



to explain the classics. Han *ru*'s attitude toward master-rule has been regarded as one of the defining features of Han classical studies. A famous story, often cited in modern scholarship, is about an expert on the *Changes* named Meng Xi 孟喜. It is said that Meng was recommended to fill a vacant post as Erudite at the Imperial Academy. But upon hearing that Meng had altered his "master-rule," Emperor Xuan refused to employ him.<sup>87</sup> If changing one's take on the classics could lead to unemployment, then destroying the master-rule became a serious wrongdoing that justified the punishment of execution in Han rhetoric.<sup>88</sup> By contrast, following the

master-rule was always thought of as a valuable quality, making a man a suitable candidate for office while enhancing the authority of his explanations.<sup>89</sup>

The connection between “master-rule” and merit demonstrates a strong consciousness of school identity: one’s expertise was linked to the identity of one’s teacher, and one was expected to defend that teacher’s views. This phenomenon not only reflects the existence of different explanations of the classics, it suggests that the different groups had become rivals.

It is commonly held that the concept of “master-rule” originated from the time when Emperor Wu

created the official position of Erudite on Five Classics.<sup>90</sup> However, neither this term nor similar ideas ever appeared in the writings of Sima Qian, a contemporary historian who carefully documented the *ru* world throughout Wu's rule.<sup>91</sup> And while Ban Gu did use this term, he only applied it to circumstances that occurred after Wu's death. A consequence of the same intellectual specialization that occurred after *The Grand Scribe's Records* was written, there was no chance that "master-rule" would be part of Sima Qian's mental universe.<sup>92</sup>

## LOCATING THE TURNING POINT

The essential difference between these

two *ru* communities clearly indicates that the reigns of Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan represented a significant watershed. But if, as is often claimed, Emperor Wu promoted *ru* learning, was the emergence of the various *ru* schools actually fueled by the policies implemented by Emperor Wu? In other words, was the vigorous growth of the *ru* community in the last half of the Western Han a natural development of the *ru* group that was revived by Emperor Wu?

The answer would be no. First and foremost, Emperor Wu did not create a healthy, thriving *ru* community—this I have shown by examining the intellectual lineages of the time. The

allegedly pro-*ru* policies—a system of regularization of recommendation and professional positions within the bureaucracy for specialists in the Five Classics—if they ever existed, appear to have done nothing over his half-century reign to help *ru* schools to proliferate or give *ru* advantages in gaining power.

Moreover, *ru* scholars under Emperor Wu did not have strong connections with the schools that emerged later. What connections have been alleged to exist between these two *ru* communities amount to a small number of rather obscure figures. The famous Ouyang school, which offered a distinctive reading of the *Documents*,

was named after Ouyang Gao, who served as an Erudite under Emperor Xuan. Ban Gu could not specify the name of Ouyang Gao's teacher, but noted that Mr. Fu, a pioneer in the study of the *Documents*, taught someone surnamed Ouyang who was connected to Ni Kuan, and Ni Kuan to Ouyang's son. Then, said Ban Gu, the Ouyang family transmitted this learning down—generation by generation—to Ouyang Gao. This narrative, relying on unnamed figures in Ouyang's family, connected the famous Ouyang school to Ni Kuan, one of the few prominent *ru* officials under Emperor Wu. But it also invites various doubts. Why, for instance, did

Sima Qian, a contemporary of Ni Kuan, never mention any disciple of Ni Kuan? If the Ouyang school inherited a weight of Ouyang family tradition, what made Ouyang Gao the founding master? Why did Ni Kuan, a *ru* who achieved a lofty official position under Emperor Wu, not establish a school of his own (see [table 3.2](#))?

Similar problems plague the origins of the Xiahou schools named for Xiahou Sheng and Xiahou Jian. It is said that Xiahou Sheng studied the *Documents* with Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 and Jian Qing 簡卿, a disciple of Ni Kuan. Again, both teachers were unknown to their contemporary, Sima Qian, but were mentioned by Ban Gu

one hundred and fifty years later. He said little about Jian Qin but was able to trace Xiahou Shichang's learning back to his remote ancestor Defender Xiahou 夏侯都尉, who was said to have studied with Mr. Zhang, a student of Mr. Fu of the *Documents*. As with the Ouyang school, an unknown disciple of Ni Kuan and unknown members of a lineage serve as the links between two celebrated figures (see [table 3.2](#)).

For the *Changes*, three different schools—the Shi, the Meng, and the Liangqiu schools—were ostensibly connected through Ding Kuan and Tian Wangsun to an intellectual forebear in the Han, Tian He. But is it likely that



Sima Qian would not have mentioned Ding Kuan? If Ban Gu's description was accurate, and Ding was indeed the student of Tian He, might Sima Qian not have been interested, since his father once studied the *Changes* under Ding's classmate Yang He (see [table 3.1](#))?

Weak connections also characterize the relations between the *ru* community surrounding the *Songs* that flourished before and after the crucial mid-Western Han divide. The Wei school, named after the Chancellor Wei Xian was linked to Mr. Shen, the forebear of the Lu edition in the Western Han, through Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu, Mr. Xu 徐公 of Mianzhong 免

中, and Mr. Xu 許生 of Lu. Not only those three persons' full names are unknown but it is doubtful if Mr. Jiang of Xiaqiu ever studied with Mr. Shen. Sima Qian named more than ten of Shen's disciples in *The Grand Scribe's Records*; some of them he knew in person. But the historian never associated Jiang of Xiaqiu with Shen (see [table 3.4](#)).

All of the scholars who devoted themselves to the Qi edition of the *Songs* were followers of Hou Cang, a prominent *ru* who won high office under Emperor Xuan. Hou was connected to Yuan Gu, the forebear of the school to which he belonged, by Xiahou Shichang, a man whom Sima

Qina never mentioned. Those who studied instead the Han edition of the *Songs* centered on Cai Yi, a chancellor under Emperor Xuan, and Cai's learning was linked back to the founding father of the Han tradition by an otherwise unknown man—Zhaozi 趙子 (see [table 3.4](#)).

Sima Qian finished writing *The Grand Scribe's Records* at the end of or even a little after Emperor Wu's reign, whereas the founders of all the prominent interpretive schools generally flourished under Emperor Xuan's reign, thirteen to twenty years after the death of Wu. This means that the *ru* who lived during Wu's reign were, at most, two generations older

than the scholars active during Xuan's reign. However, none of the prominent *ru* under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, or Yuan were the direct disciples of those recorded by Sima Qian. Instead, the masters of those influential *ru* were all unknown to the great historian. Why was every single *ru* school founded during the latter part of the dynasty linked back to the scholarly lineages highlighted by Sima Qian through interim figures with no names?

There are two possibilities. First, the obscure ones who connected these two communities were indeed the disciples or fellow classmates of the *ru* who left their names in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, but Sima Qian knew

nothing about them. Under Emperor Wu, the connections among masters and disciples could do little for anyone's professional career, and there was no consciousness of school identity among *ru*. So no one bothered to pay much attention to intellectual lineages. For example, Mr. Ying 嬴公 was the man who linked the Yan 顏 and Yan 嚴 schools devoted to *Gongyang* back to the famous Dong Zhongshu (see [table 3.3](#)). While Sima Qian named three of the accomplished disciples of Dong, Ban Gu added one more, Mr. Ying. It is likely that Sima Qian did not know of Ying because no one bothered to keep track of Dong's disciples, and Ying himself did not

have much influence in either the intellectual or the political world.

This could explain things pretty well if we were only concerned with one case. But similar patterns prevailed in the development of the *ru* communities around all of the Five Classics, obliging us to ask why it was always *ru* scholars whom Sima Qian failed to record as having established their own schools. So we turn to the second possibility: the connections between the relatively late interpretive schools and the scholarly lineages compiled by Sima Qian were created out of thin air. Rather than declare that great schools had been erected by less influential men, some people—

members of the schools? Ban Gu himself?—forged a series of master-disciple relationships between obscure figures and the more famous *ru* recorded in *The Grand Scribe's Records*.<sup>93</sup>

This hypothesis seems more plausible when we recall that intellectual lineages Sima Qian slaved over were modified for *The History of Western Han*. After the emergence of the popular schools of interpretation under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan, men endeavored to connect those schools with the *ru* community recorded by Sima Qian, and to repair the gaps in the transmission of the Five Classics. Their reconstruction shaped

Ban Gu's presentation, which in turn affected modern scholarship. But what caused the birth and lush growth of these schools in the last half of the Western Han dynasty? This epochal change in the intellectual world was closely associated with a fundamental reshuffling of power in the court during the transition between Emperor Wu and Emperor Zhao, a topic that shall be explored in next chapter.



# A Reshuffle of Power

## Witchcraft Scandal and the Birth of a New Class

Emperor Wu's reign has long been taken to be the climax of the Western Han dynasty. Many view the preceding reigns as a preparation for this great era, and the time after it as an epilogue. As Ban Gu concluded in his eulogy for Wu, "The succeeding emperors were able to follow Wu's grand

achievements; his reign possessed the fame of the three golden dynasties” 後嗣得遵洪業，而有 三代之風。<sup>1</sup>

Overshadowed by this brilliant emperor, the succeeding era has not yet been carefully studied. In the present chapter, I will demonstrate that while Emperor Wu's reign witnessed continuity in the membership of the upper class from the beginning of the Han, under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan an essential change occurred. This revolution fundamentally restructured the elite class and the intellectual world, a turning point that transformed the disadvantaged *ru* in the officialdom into admirable contenders.

## A FUNDAMENTAL DISJUNCTION

In the spring of 87 BCE, the septuagenarian Emperor Wu died. His youngest son, Liu Fuling 劉弗陵, who was eight years old, succeeded to the throne as Emperor Zhao. Huo Guang 霍光, a Counselor of the Palace (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫), served as regent, in keeping with the late emperor's valedictory decree. Emperor Zhao occupied the throne for about thirteen years and died in his early twenties. Historians have praised him for his confidence and trust in Huo Guang, while extolling his reign as a correction to the extravagance of Emperor Wu: during this period large-scale military

expeditions were halted, taxes were reduced, and labor service was lightened.<sup>2</sup>

Emperor Xuan, succeeding Emperor Zhao, ruled China for about twentyfive years. He was famous for criticizing the *ru* orientation of his heir apparent. When Liu Shi 劉奭 suggested that Xuan relied too much on severe laws and suggested employing *ru*, the emperor replied:

The Han court has its own system and laws, which fundamentally combine rule by force and rule by benevolence. How could I

rely merely on moral instruction and follow the policies of the Zhou dynasty? The vulgar *ru* do not understand what is appropriate to the times: they are fond of advancing the ancient and rejecting the present, confusing people about the relationship between names and realities so that they do not know what they should abide by. How could [the *ru*] be trusted with responsibilities?

漢家自有制度，本以霸王道  
雜之，奈何純任德教，用周

政乎！且俗儒不達時 漢家  
自有制度，本以霸王道雜  
之，奈何純任德教，用周政  
乎！且俗儒不達時 宜，好  
是古非今，使人眩於名實，  
不知所守，何足委任！<sup>3</sup>

This statement has frequently been quoted to demonstrate that Emperor Xuan strongly rejected the partiality to *ru* displayed by his predecessor, embracing instead the teachings of Legalism.<sup>4</sup>

Emperor Yuan ruled China for sixteen years. He was a man of versatility, fond of playing and composing music for the zither. While

Ban Gu pointed out that Emperor Yuan employed several *ru* as important ministers, far more credit is generally given to Emperor Wu in this area. Scholars commonly hold that Emperor Yuan's fondness for *ru* learning was a swing back toward Wu's policy.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than reproduce these conventional narratives, I shall use the same method I applied to Emperor Wu's reign, quantitatively examining the social origins, intellectual orientations, patterns of advancement, and social networks of high officials. The reigns of the three emperors who followed Emperor Wu lasted about fifty-four years all told—the same duration as Wu's reign. Throughout

these years, about 140 people advanced to the upper strata of the bureaucracy, becoming notable generals, senior metropolitan officials, members of the Three Dukes and of the Nine Ministers. By searching through *The History of Western Han*, the principal source for this period, I have documented seventy-four of them (see [chart 4.1](#)). This number is comparable to that under Wu, during whose reign seventy-seven were identified out of 142 eminent officials. Collating the eminent officials of these two eras, I have found that essential changes occurred while the government structure remained quite stable.

Let us first compare the social



origins of the Chancellors during these two eras. Almost all the Chancellors under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan had no traceable family history of official service, and most had advanced from lower levels of the bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup> Of the eleven Chancellors, only Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 had a prestigious background, and even his family could not point to a long history of glory. Before his father, Wei Xian 韋賢, became Chancellor under Emperor Xuan, no family member, either in the paternal or maternal lines, had held any position in the central government, though it was said that an ancestor of his who had lived about a century earlier had served as the tutor of King

## Yuan of Chu 楚元王.<sup>7</sup>

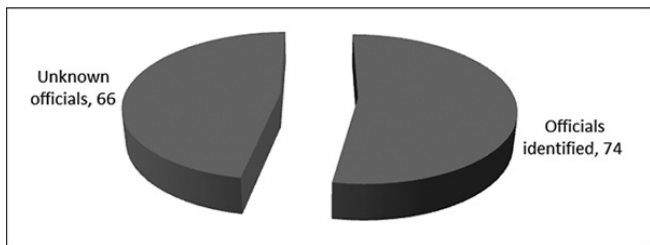


Chart 4.1. Unknown and Identifiable High Officials under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan

Among the remaining ten Chancellors, Cai Yi 蔡義 and Kuang Heng 匡衡 were said to have risen from humble circumstances. Cai had reputedly once been too poor to afford a cheap carriage, and served, early in

his career, as Captain in Command of the Fuang Gate (*Fuang chengmen hou* 覆盎城門候).<sup>8</sup> Kuang's father and ancestors had all been farmers, and Kuang himself turned to heavy labor to subsidize his studies.<sup>9</sup> Yu Dingguo 于定國, Wei Xiang 魏相, and Bing Ji 丙吉 all started their careers as clerks working in prisons or in local governments.<sup>10</sup> Compared with their colleagues, Yang Chang 楊敞 and Huang Ba 黃霸 opened their careers at relatively high levels. Yang owed his success to the special tie he had with the regent, Huo Guang, and Huang bought his first position. But even they had no family history of government service.<sup>11</sup>

If we compare those Chancellors with their counterparts under Emperor Wu, we cannot help but notice a sharp difference. As I showed in [chapter 1](#), three out of Wu's twelve Chancellors were close relatives of an empress or the emperor himself, and seven came from prestigious families. Among the latter seven, four—Xu Chang, Xue Zhe, Zhuang Qizuo, and Shi Qing—were sons or grandsons of the meritorious officials who helped to establish the Han dynasty. Furthermore, while none of the eleven Chancellors who served under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan held noble status before taking office, nine out of Emperor Wu's twelve Chancellors had been ennobled as

marquises due to their hereditary prestige or military accomplishments long before their promotions (see [tables 1.1](#) and [4.1](#)).

This trend becomes more evident when we take into account all the eminent officials that we can identify from these two eras. Forty-five, namely 58 percent, of seventy-seven eminent officials under Emperor Wu came from prestigious families, and the rest, about 42 percent, of high officials, climbed the social ladder from obscure or unknown backgrounds (see [chart 1.2](#)). Under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan, the ratio is reversed. Only twenty-seven, 36 percent, of the seventy-four high officials came from

powerful families, and forty-seven, about 64 percent, ascended the power pyramid from humble circumstances (see [chart 4.2](#)).

Table 4.1. High Officials under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan (87–33 BCE) 昭宣元三朝 (公元前 87–33) 三公九卿統計

Officials identified (Including Chancellors): N. 74		From powerful families: N. 27	From obscure/unknown backgrounds: N. 47			
			Military achievements N. 4	From clerkship N. 15	Gentleman-attendants N. 6	Advisor/Erudites/Imperial Academy/recommendation system N. 13
Huo Guang's Regency (87–68 BCE) N. 29	Emperor Zhao 87–74 BCE	劉辟彊(85), 徐仁(84), 上官安(83), 杜延年(80), 劉德(80), 韓增(74), 朱山增(70), 張安世(86)	趙充國(80), 范明友(78)	王祈(87), 雋不疑(86), 田延年(75), [魏不害(87)]	上官桀(87), 桑弘羊(87), 金日磾(87), [田千秋(89)], 田廣明(83)	田千秋(89), 魏不害(87), 楊敞(81), 江德(81), 蘇昌(77), 便樂成(75)
	N. 23	N. 8	N. 2	N. 3	N. 4	N. 6
	Emperor Xuan 74–68 BCE	田順(71)		趙廣漢(71)	宋畸(72)	后倉(72), 蔡義(74), 韋賢(71)
	N. 6	N. 1		N. 1	N. 1	N. 3
Emperor Xuan (68–48 BCE) N. 25		張延壽(65), 楊樞(61), 杜延(51), 丙卿(51), 霍禹(67), 許延壽(56), 史高(49), 章玄成(58)	馮奉世(62), 常惠(50)	魏相(67), 黃霸(55), 朱邑(66), 尹翁歸(65), 陳萬年(61), 張敞(61), 韓延壽(59), 解延年(49), 于定國(51), 丙吉(59)	梁丘賀(59)	蕭望之(65), 龔遂(66)
		N. 8	N. 2	N. 10	N. 1	N. 2

Emperor Yuan (48–33 BCE) N. 20		王綏(43), 許嘉(41), 劉更生(48), 任千秋(45), 金賁(43), 馮野王(42), 于永(48), 丙寅(35), [韋玄成(42)], 劉慶忌(33), 王章(33)		鄭弘(46)	[召信臣(33)], [匡衡(36)], [耿種(地)餘(43)]	周堪(46), 貢禹(44), 薛廣德(44), 嚴彭祖(44), 耿種(地)餘(43), 五鹿充宗(38), 匡衡(36) [蕭望之(65)], 召信臣(33)	陳遂(48)
		N. 10		N. 1		N. 8	N. 1
Chancellors		From powerful families	From obscure background				
			Military achievements	Gentleman-attendants	From clerkship	Advisor/ Erudites/ Imperial Academy	Directly promoted
Huo Guang's regency (87–68 BCE)	Emperor Zhao (87–74 BCE)			[田千秋(89)]	王祈(87)		田千秋(89), 楊敞(81)
	Emperor Xuan (74–68 BCE)					蔡義(74), 韋賢(71)	
Emperor Xuan (68–48 BCE)					魏相(67), [丙吉(59)], 黃霸(55), 于定國(51)		丙吉(59)
Emperor Yuan (48–33 BCE)		韋玄成(42)				匡衡(36)	

Notes: Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (36), refer to the year the man achieved the position among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

Names in square brackets, e.g., [匡衡(36)], refer to officials counted in other categories.

Furthermore, the powerful families of those two eras were two totally different groups. Whereas under Emperor Wu's fifty-four-year rule 40 percent of the eminent officials (31 men) had fathers or grandfathers who enjoyed high official positions or noble status long before Wu was enthroned, the figure was only 14 percent (10

men) before Emperor Zhao was enthroned. While 25 percent of eminent officials (19 men) under Wu were the descendants of meritorious officials who helped establish the Western Han, this group totally disappeared since the time of Emperor Zhao. In fact, none of the eminent officials from Zhao's reign on could trace a family history of official service back to the beginning of the Western Han. Indeed, only two of the most prestigious families of that era seem to have had a long history of glory.<sup>12</sup> Of Wu's eminent officials, 21 percent (16 men) had achieved high positions or enjoyed noble status for years before the emperor ascended to



the throne. By contrast, only 9.5 percent of those (7 men) who served under Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan enjoyed high positions or noble status before Zhao was enthroned. Even those seven were all upstarts, not only having no traceable family history of official service but four of them entering the center of politics at the very end of Emperor Wu's reign (see [table 4.2](#)).<sup>13</sup>

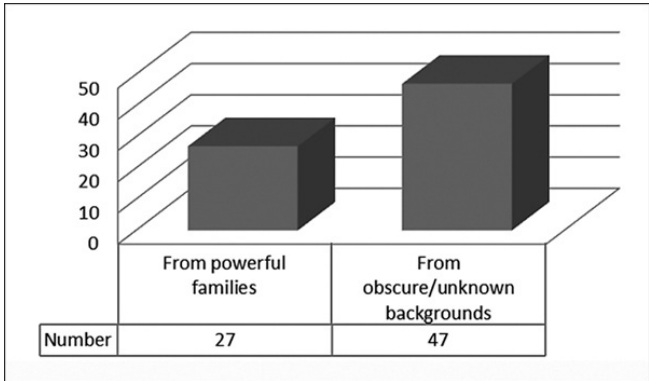


Chart 4.2. Backgrounds of High Officials under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan

Table 4.2 A Break in the Membership of the Upper Class

	Emperor Wu	Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan
Eminent officials who had already held high positions in a previous court	實嬰(155), 李蔡(景帝: 二千石), 石慶(景帝: 二千石)(石建(景帝: 二千石), 張敖(當為九卿) N. 5	田千秋(89 宰相), 王訢(89右扶風) 桑弘羊(100 大司農), 田廣明(89大鴻臚) N. 4
Eminent officials who had already enjoyed noble status in a previous court	許昌(165), 薛澤(161), 莊青翟(162), 趙周(148), 孔臧(171), 張當居(148山陽侯), 周平(颍侯), 樂賁(144 俞侯), 王信(蓋侯), 周仲居(148 郭侯), 杜桓(145陽平侯) ) N. 11	魏不害(91當塗侯), 江德(91轅陽侯) 蘇昌(91蒲侯) N. 3
Eminent officials who were the descendants of those who helped to establish the Han dynasty	許昌(139), 薛澤(131), 莊青翟(118), 石慶(112), 張敖(131), 石建(139), 孔臧(127), 周平(123), 李信成(119), 任越人(115), 周仲居(114), 張廣國(113), 周健德(112), 杜桓(112), 蕭壽成(107), 張昌(104), 石德(102), 靳石(93), 鄧終根(89) N. 19	N. 0
Eminent officials whose father / grandfathers held high positions or noble status in a previous court	許昌(139), 薛澤(131), 莊青翟(118), 趙周(115), 石慶(112), 公孫賀(103), 張敖(131), 石建(139), 灌夫(140), 汲黯(135), 孔臧(127), 張當居(124), 周平(123), 司馬安(122), 李信成(119), 李敖(118), 樂賁(117), 任越人(115), 周仲居(114), 張廣國(113), 周健德(112), 杜桓(112), 蕭壽成(107), 韓延年(106), 張昌(104), 公孫敬聲(103), 石德(102), 唯涂光(94), 靳石(93), 韓說(91), 鄧終根(89) N. 31	劉辟疆(85), 徐仁(84), 杜延年(80), 劉德(80), 韓增(74), 朱山附(70), 張安世(86), 張延壽(65), 杜璲(51), 劉慶忌(33) N. 10
Eminent officials who served at middle or low level officialdom in a previous court	灌夫(景帝: 中郎將, 代相), 李廣(景帝: 太守), 趙禹(150-147 丞相), 甯成(144 中尉), 韓安國(梁國內史) 李息(事景帝), 李祖(事景帝) N. 7	霍光(侍中奉車都尉), 上官桀(侍中) 張安世(尚書令), 金日磾(侍中驸馬都尉), 烏不疑(青州刺史), 趙充國(遷車騎將軍長史), 馮奉世(良家子選為郎) 黃霸(二百石卒史), 于定國(獄史) N. 9

Clearly, from the establishment of the Western Han till the end of the long reign of Emperor Wu, we see a clear continuity among the upper-level officials. Under his successors, a fundamental disjunction happened.

In fact, powerful officials always tried to provide their descendants with remunerative jobs, and those who

served Emperor Wu were no different. Sima Qian repeatedly pointed out that these office-holders had many relatives who had risen to middle-level or high positions in the bureaucracy: there were four father-son pairs who held lofty posts (Shi Qing-Shi De, Gongsun He-Gongsun Jingsheng, Li Guang-Li Gan, and Zhang Guangguo-Zhang Chang) and three pairs of cousins (Li Cai-Li Guang, Shi Jian-Shi Qing, and Sima An-Ji An).

Few of those men survived to serve under Zhao, let alone Xuan or Yuan, and the vast majority vanished from the political arena. It would be a mistake to imagine that the era of nepotism was succeeded by an era of

social mobility. Instead, the power vacuum left by prestigious families was quickly filled by new elites who rose from obscure backgrounds. These upstarts evolved into the new powerful official families, who successfully reinforced their positions and secured their descendants careers in officialdom till the end of the reign of the usurper Wang Mang.

From the reign of Emperor Cheng till the end of Wang Mang's reign in 23 CE, four more emperors ruled over a period of fifty-four years.<sup>14</sup> Putting aside the eminent officials from imperial or consort families, we know that twenty-nine of the high officials from that half century had a glorious

family history of official service.<sup>15</sup> And 86 percent (25 men) were the descendants of those who came from humble backgrounds but distinguished themselves under Emperors Zhao and Xuan (see [table 4.3](#)).<sup>16</sup> Yu Yong 于永, who served as a high official under both Emperor Yuan and Emperor Cheng, was the son of Yu Dingguo, a Chancellor under Xuan who advanced to the apex of the bureaucracy after serving as a lowly prison clerk (*yushi* 獄史).<sup>17</sup> Chen Xian 陳咸, Ren Qianqiu 任千秋, Feng Yewang 馮野王, Yin Cen 尹岑, Huang Fu 黃輔, and Kuang Xian 匡咸 served as members of the Nine Ministers under Emperors Cheng and Ai; all were the sons of officials

promoted by Emperor Xuan step-by-step from the bottom of the bureaucracy.<sup>18</sup> In fact, among the high officials from Emperor Zhao till Wang Mang, we can identify twenty-two pairs of fathers and sons. Except for Du Yannian, whose father had achieved a high position under Emperor Wu, the first generation of those powerful families all came from obscure backgrounds and distinguished themselves after Emperor Zhao was enthroned (see [table 4.4](#)).

In addition to these cases of direct transmission of political power from father to son, several families continuously produced eminent officials under every emperor till the

end of the Western Han. The Wei 韋 family had no history of government service in the first half of the Western Han, except a remote ancestor was said to have served as the Tutor of King Yuan of Chu (*Chu yuan wang fu* 楚元王傅). But after Wei Xian became Chancellor under Emperor Xuan, his son Wei Xuancheng ascended to the position of Chancellor under Emperor Yuan, his grandson Wei Anshi 韋安世 to the position of one of the Nine Ministers under Emperor Cheng, and another grandson, Wei Shang 韋賞, to Commander-in-Chief under Emperor Ai. Jin Midi began life as a Xiongnu tribesman, but he was captured by the Han army and forced to serve as an



official slave in charge of feeding the emperor's horses. But since he distinguished himself as General of Chariots and Cavalry (*Cheji jiangjun* 車騎將軍) during the transition between Emperors Wu and Zhao, five of his descendants served consecutively at the top of the bureaucracy from Emperor Yuan's reign till the reign of Wang Mang.<sup>19</sup> Like the Wei and Jin families, the families of Xiao Wangzhi, Bing Ji, Wang Ji, and Kong Ba 孔霸 did not achieve prominence until the time of Emperors Zhao and Xuan. In the last fifty years of the Western Han dynasty, the Xiao family produced four eminent officials; the Bing family, the Wang

family, and the Kong family produced three each (see [table 4.4](#)).

What all of these examples show is a significant break at the end of Emperor Wu's reign, as the ranks of high-level officials were decimated, followed by a distinct continuity from the time of Emperor Zhao till the end of the Western Han dynasty.

## THE RISE OF *RU* OFFICIALS

Accompanying the extinction of old official families and the birth of a new class was the rise of *ru* officials to the government's highest levels.

Of the eleven men appointed to serve as Chancellor under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan, five were

identified by their contemporaries as experts in one or more of the Five Classics. And three of the others, as Ban Gu pointed out, started to study the Five Classics during their official careers. This is in sharp contrast with the educational backgrounds of Emperor Wu's twelve Chancellors, among whom only one could claim expertise in one of these works (see [table 4.5](#)).

This trend is also apparent in the intellectual orientations of other high officials. Including Chancellors, twenty-four of those seventy-four officials, namely, around one third, were identified as *ru* by their contemporaries, and four studied *ru*

classics after rising to a position of authority. The numbers alone made *ru* a competitive group in the political world, which was not the case under Emperor Wu, when only six out of seventy-seven eminent officials were identified as *ru* (see [table 4.5](#) and [chart 4.3](#)).

It is surprising to find that under Emperor Xuan—an alleged partisan of Legalism—*ru* started to play important roles on the political stage. To take two examples from other reigns, both Wang Xin 王新 and Yang Chang were appointed Chancellor under Emperor Zhao. The former owed his success to administrative achievements and networking, while the latter was

closely associated with the regent, Huo Guang. Neither is said to have had any training in the Five Classics or any intention to study them. In sharp contrast, among the six Chancellors who served under Emperor Xuan, the first three were deeply versed in the Five Classics—two had served as Erudites at the Imperial Academy.<sup>20</sup> The remaining three were characterized as experts in modern law and advanced primarily by virtue of administrative achievements or networking, just like Wang Xin and Yang Chang under Emperor Zhao. But all these three were said to have studied *ru* classics at different stages of their careers.

Table 4.3. High Officials under Emperors

# Cheng, Ai, and Ping (33 BCE–6 CE) and under Wang Mang's Reign (9–23 CE) 成哀平三朝(公元前33–公元6年)及王莽新朝(公元9–23)的三公九卿统计

Officials identified	From powerful families: N. 51		From obscure backgrounds : N. 24					
	From consort / imperial families	From official families	Advisor / Erudite	Administrative achievements / clerkship	Recommendation	Directly promoted	Imperial Academy	Military achievement
N. 75	N. 26	N. 25	N. 5	N. 11	N. 1	N. 1	N. 5	N. 1
Emperor Cheng (33–7 BCE) N.45	王商(29), 王鳳(33), 王音(22), 王商2(15), 王根(12), 王莽(8) 劉慶忌(31), 王章1(31), 史丹(29), 王臨(26), 王音(26), 荷參(22), 王襄(20), 淳于長(16), 王安(11), 王成2(9), 趙新(8), 劉常(7), 王龔(7), N. 19	胸普(32), 任千秋(31), 王敏(28), 辛慶忌(26), 王咸1(26), 韋安世(25), 金敞(25), 逢信(24), 于永(22), 杜業君(20), 陳咸(16), 蕭尊(13), 蕭育(11), 尹岑(13) N. 14	張禹(25), [翟方進(15)], 許商(14), 彭宣(14), 趙玄(10) N. 4	薛宣(20), 王遵(29), 孫寶(11), 谷永(9) N. 4	[薛宣(20)], [翟方進(15)], [王敏(28)], [何武(13)], [谷永(9)], [王遵(29)], 辛慶忌(26)		翟方進(15), 何武(13), 王章2(25) N. 3	[辛慶忌(26)], 趙護(12) N. 1
Emperor Ai (7–1 BCE) N. 20	傅喜(6), 丁明(5), 傅晏(2), [王莽(1 BCE)], 丁璽(7), 丁憲(5), 董恭(3) N. 6	孔光(7), 韋賢(2), 王崇(4), 丙昌(1 BCE), 黃輔(1 BCE), N. 5	[平當(5)], [師丹(7)], 左咸(6) N. 1	朱博(5), 平當(5), [王嘉(4)], 邴漢(7), 毋將隆(4), 龔勝(3) N. 5	師丹(7), [龔勝(3)] N. 1	董賢(2) N. 1	王嘉(4) N. 1	

Emperor Ping (1 BCE–6 CE) N. 10	劉 岑(3 CE) N. 1	平晏(5 CE), 甄 邯(1 CE), 蕭 咸(1 CE), 金 欽(1 CE), 張 宏(2 CE), 辛 咸(2 CE) N. 6		[馬宮(5 CE), 尹 賞(2 CE), 尹 咸 (5 CE) N. 2	[尹 賞(2 CE)]		馬宮(5 CE) N. 1	
Officials identified N. 19	From powerful families		From obscure backgrounds					
	From consort / imperial families	From official families	Advisor / Erudite	Administrative achievements / clerkship	Recommendation	Directly promoted	Imperial Academy	Military achievement
Ruzi Ying (6–8 CE) Wang Mang (9–23 CE) 17-year reign	劉歆(國師), 王舜 (太保), 王邑(大司 空), 王奇(揚武將 軍), 王況(將軍), 王涉(將軍), 王匡 (將軍), 王向(安定 大), 王丹(中山太 守) N. 9	[平晏(5 CE)大 司徒], [甄 邯 (大司徒)], 孔 永(大司徒), 甄 邯(京兆尹), 崔 篆(新建大尹), 金遵, [金 欽(1 CE)] N. 4	[左 咸(5 CE)] [蘇 竟(代郡中 尉)]			王興(衛將軍), 王盛(前將軍), 崔發(大司空), 唐尊(水衡都 尉), 唐林(建 德侯), [滿昌 (六經祭酒)], 陳欽(將軍, 以 左氏授王莽) N. 6		

Notes: Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (28), refer to the year the man achieved a position among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

Names in square brackets, e.g., [馬宮(5 CE)], refer to officials counted in other categories.

## Table 4.4. Powerful Official Families in the Last Ninety Years of the Western Han Dynasty (87 BCE–9 CE) and under Wang Mang's Reign (9–23 CE) 西漢後期（公元前87年－公元9年）至王莽新朝（公元9年－23年）的世宦大家

**Group 1: Father and Son Pairs among High Officials from Emperor Zhao till Wang Mang**

<i>Social Origin of the First Generation</i>	<i>First Generation</i>	<i>Second Generation</i>	<i>Third Generation</i>	<i>N.</i>
Obscure	田千秋 (89)	田順 (71)		1
Obscure	上官桀 (87)	上官安 (83)		2
Obscure	張禹 (25 BCE)	張宏 (2 CE)		3
Obscure	平當 (5 BCE)	平晏 (5 CE)		4
Obscure	尹貴 (2 CE)	尹立 (京兆尹?)		5
Obscure	楊敞 (81)	楊惲 (61)		6
Obscure	于定國 (51)	于永 (22)		7
Obscure	馮奉世 (62)	馮野王 (42)		8
Obscure	任宮 (66)	任千秋 (31)		9
Obscure	尹翁歸 (65)	尹岑 (13)		10
Obscure	陳萬年 (61)	陳咸 (16)		11
Obscure	黃霸 (55)	黃輔 (1 BCE)		12
Obscure	王吉 (under Emperor Xuan)	王駿 (28)	王崇 (4)	13–14
Obscure	金日磾 (87)	金賞 (50)		15
Obscure	韋賢 (76)	韋玄成 (42)		16
Obscure	丙吉 (59)	丙順 (51)	丙昌 (1 BCE)	17–18
Obscure	蕭望之 (64)	蕭育 (11)		19
	蕭望之 (64)	蕭咸 (1 CE)		20
High official under Emperor Wu	杜延年 (80)	杜延年 (51)	杜業君 (20)	21–22

**Group 2: Prestigious Families from Emperor Zhao to Wang Mang**

<i>Social Origins</i>	<i>First Generation</i>	<i>Second Generation</i>	<i>Third Generation</i>	<i>Fourth Generation</i>	<i>Fifth Generation</i>
碑以父不降見殺，... 沒入官，輸黃門養馬 <i>HS, 68:2959</i>	金日磾 (87)	金賞 (50)			
		金建 (昭陽都尉)		金當 (鉅侯)	
	金倫	金安上 (關內侯、都成侯)	金敞 (25 衛尉) 五鳳三年 夷侯常嗣，一年薨，亡後。	金敞 (1 CE 京兆尹)	金敞 (1 CE 都成侯)
魯國權人也。其先韋孟，家本彭城，為楚元王傅，傅子夷王及孫王戊... 自孟至賢五世 <i>HS, 18:696</i>	韋賢 (76 大鴻臚)	韋玄成 (42 丞相)	建昭三年，子頃侯 [韋] 寬嗣。薨	元延元年，子偁侯育嗣。薨	子節侯況(湛)嗣，王莽敗，絕
		韋弘 (太山都尉遷東海太守)	韋安世 (25 大鴻臚)		
			韋賞 (2 大司馬車騎將軍)		
魯國人也。治律令，為魯獄史 <i>HS, 3142–3151</i>	丙吉 (59)	丙順 (51 太僕)	丙昌 (1 BCE 太常，博陽侯)	元始二年，釐侯並嗣	侯勝客嗣，王莽敗，絕
		丙禹 (35 水衡都尉)			
家世以田為業 <i>HS, 3289–3271</i>	蕭望之 (64)	蕭育 (11)			
		蕭咸 (1 CE 大司農)			
少(時) [好] 學明經以郡史舉孝廉為郎 <i>HS, 72:3058–3068</i>	王吉 (宣帝:益州刺史)	王駿 (28)	王崇 (4)		



Social Origins	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation	Fourth Generation	Fifth Generation		
孔光，孔子十四世之孫也 HS, 81:3352–3365	孔霸(昭帝:博士; 元帝: 關內侯)	孔光(7丞相)	甄邯:孔光女婿 (王莽: 大司馬)				
		孔光兄	孔永 (王莽: 大司馬)				
Social Origins	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation	Fourth Generation	Sixth Generation	Seventh Generation	Eighth Generation
杜周初徵為廷史， 有一馬，且不全 SJ, 122:3153–3154	杜周 (98 御史 大夫)	杜延年 (80太 僕，健平侯)	杜緩 (51 太常， 健平侯)	杜業君 (20太 僕，健平侯)	元始二年，侯 輔嗣	侯惠嗣，建武 中以先降梁王， 薨，不得代。	
父為長安臣 SJ, 122:3137–3144	張陽 (120 御史 大夫)	張安世 (86富 平侯)	張延壽 (65,富 平侯)	張衡 (富平侯)	張臨 富平侯	張放 富平侯	張純 (王莽, 富 平侯) (建武, 大 司空)
			張彭祖 (陽都侯)				

Note: Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (28), refer to the year the man achieved a position among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

Table 4.5. High *Ru* Officials under Emperors Wu, Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan 儒生官員在武昭宣元四朝的分布圖表

		<i>Ru</i> Chancellor	Eminent <i>ru</i> officials except Chancellor	Chancellor who started to learn <i>ru</i> classics after entering officialdom	Eminent officials who started to learn <i>ru</i> classics after entering officialdom
Emperor Wu N. 6		公孫弘 (124 )	趙綰 (139), 王臧 (140), 倪寬 (110), 朱買臣 (122), 孔臧 (127)		
		<i>Ru</i> Chancellor N. 4	Eminent <i>ru</i> officials except Chancellor N. 20	Chancellor who started to learn <i>ru</i> classics after entering officialdom N. 3	Eminent officials who started to learn <i>ru</i> classics after entering officialdom N. 1
Huo Guang's regency	Emperor Zhao: N. 1		雋不疑 (86)		
	Emperor Xuan	蔡義 (74), 韋賢 (71)	宋壽 (72), 后 倉 (72)		
Emperor Xuan's twenty-five- year rule N. 8+4 = 12		魏相 (67)	梁丘賀 (59), 蕭望之 (65), 龔遂 (66), 張敞 (61), 韓延壽 (59), 解延年 (49), 韋玄成 (58)	丙吉(59), 黃 霸(55), 于定 國 (51)	馮奉世 (62)
Emperor Yuan's sixteen-year rule N. 11		[韋玄成 (42)], 匡衡 (36)	[蕭望之 (65)], 周堪 (46), 薛廣德 (44), 嚴彭祖 (44), 歐陽餘 (43), 五鹿充宗 (38), 鄭弘 (46), 貢禹 (44), 馮野王 (42), 召信臣 (33), 劉更生 (48)		

Note: Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (122), refer to the year the man achieved a position among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

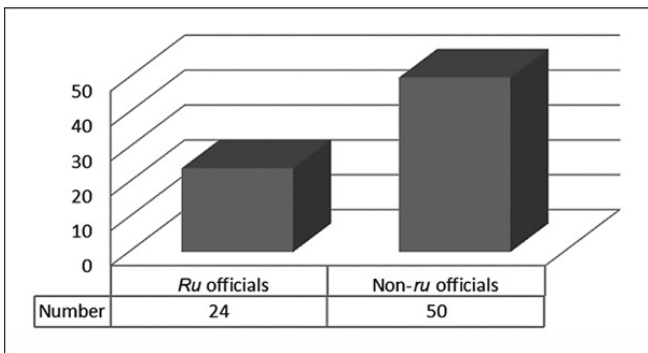


Chart 4.3. *Ru* and Non-*ru* Officials under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan

Bing Ji was one of Huo Guang's favorite subordinates, and he did much to help Emperor Xuan succeed to the throne. But he was not promoted to the head of the state bureaucracy until after three *ru* had held that position. While

Bing started his career as a petty clerk, he was said to have familiarized himself later with the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of Rites*.<sup>21</sup> Huang Ba 黃霸 began to study the *Book of Documents* with Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 when he was at the nadir of his official career. Xiahou Sheng criticized an imperial decree and Huang, serving as the chief clerk of the Chancellor (*Chengxiang zhangshi* 丞相長史), failed to denounce him. Both of them ended up in prison. With some time on his hands, Huang proposed that he study the classics with Xiahou. At first Xiahou declined the request: what point was there in such a project when they were about to be executed? But

Huang replied with an apt quotation from Confucius: “If in the morning you hear the Way, in the evening you can die content” 朝聞道，夕死可矣. This story made the rounds and became a classic anecdote.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Huang Ba, Yu Dingguo started studying the *Spring and Autumn Annals* after rising to serve as Commandant of Justice, one of the Nine Ministers. It is said that while enjoying a lofty place in officialdom, Yu was quite willing to play the part of a disciple, and he held a formal ceremony to welcome his teacher.<sup>23</sup>

The stories of these three chancellors distinguished them from their immediate predecessors under Emperor Zhao and Emperor Wu,

suggesting that significant changes occurred in the bureaucracy from Emperor Wu's reign to Emperor Xuan's. Let us refresh our memory: under Emperor Wu, thirteen eminent officials climbed from the very bottom to high office, and one might say their patterns of advancement were comparable to those of Bing Ji, Huang Ba, and Yu Dingguo. But nowhere in *The History of Western Han* or *The Grand Scribe's Records* is there any evidence that they had an interest in the Five Classics. What led ambitious officials to bone up on *ru* doctrines? While this question will be explored separately in [chapter 5](#), the comparison clearly indicates that Emperor Xuan's

reign was a watershed for *ru* officials, a point that will be confirmed when we analyze the distribution of the *ru* officials.

Only six *ru* rose to power under Emperor Wu's half-century reign, and one rose to prominence under Emperor Zhao's thirteen-year rule. By contrast, twelve achieved leading positions under Xuan's twenty-five-year rule and eleven under Yuan's sixteen-year rule. Both in terms of absolute numbers and in terms of the ratio of *ru* officials to the length of the reign, Emperor Xuan's regime saw a breakthrough (see [table 4.5](#)).

This directly contradicts the traditional image of this emperor as a

harsh critic of *ru* who preferred legal experts. But the contradiction need not imply a revolution in our thinking. An adjustment may be sufficient, even preferable, since were we simply to discard the dominant convention, and argue that Emperor Xuan embraced *ru* learning, it would obscure the intriguing and complicated historical events that helped *ru* achieve prominence in the political realm. Emperor Xuan did promote a considerable number of legal experts—as the traditional narrative indicates. The rise of *ru* officials during his reign was not simply a result of imperial preferences: it could not have occurred without making a clean sweep of the



higher levels of the bureaucracy.

Further evidence for the rise of the *ru* group is provided by the success of their disciples in the second half of the Western Han dynasty and even under Wang Mang's reign. Three emperors served after Emperor Yuan, and during that period seven out of the eleven Chancellors were *ru*.<sup>24</sup> When we add the reign of Wang Mang, we find thirty-three *ru* among the ninety-four high officials who can be identified. While seven came from distinguished official families, the others (26 men) were from obscure backgrounds. Most of the latter were connected to *ru* officials distinguished under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan by teacher—

student ties (see [tables 4.6](#) and [4.7](#)). In fact, eleven pairs of teachers and disciples served as high officials from Emperor Zhao's reign till the end of Wang Mang's rule. Hou Cang 后倉 became one of the Nine Ministers in 72 BCE, while his disciple Xiao Wangzhi, who studied with him for ten years, ascended to the same rank seven years later and exerted enormous influence under both Emperors Xuan and Yuan. Another disciple of Hou Cang, Kuang Heng, achieved the position of Chancellor under Emperor Yuan. Kuang's disciple Shi Dan 師丹 served as one of the Nine Ministers in 14 BCE and climbed to the position of Commander-in-Chief (*Da sima* 大司

馬), the apex of the bureaucracy, in 7 BCE (see [table 4.6](#)).

Table 4.6. Teacher–Disciple Relations among the High Officials in the Last Ninety Years of the Western Han and under Wang Mang’s Reign 西漢後期至王莽新朝三公九卿中的師徒關係列表

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### Genealogy 1

Teacher	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5
夏侯始昌	后倉 (72)	蕭望之 (65)			
		匡衡(丞相 36)	師丹 (7)		
			潁川滿昌君都(哀帝詹事, 王莽六經祭酒)	九江張邯、琅邪皮容, 皆至大官	
	梁丘賀 (59)	張禹(丞相25)	淮陽彭宣 (14大司空)		
			沛戴崇子平 (九卿)?		
		梁丘臨(少府?)	王駿 (28)		
	夏侯勝	[蕭望之]			
		周堪 (46)	許商 (14)	沛唐林子高為德行 (王莽時,九卿)	
				平陵吳章偉君為言語(王莽時,博士;為王莽所誅)	
				重泉王吉少音為政事(王莽時,九卿)	
				齊炔欽幼卿為文學 (王莽時,博士)	
		黃霸(丞相 55)			
		孔霸(高密相,太子師, 關內侯)	孔光 (丞相 7)		
		夏侯建	張山拊(博士)	鄭寬中(博士授太子, 關內爵)	趙玄 (10, 御史大夫)
				山陽張無故子儒(廣陵太傅)	沛唐尊(王莽太傅)

### Genealogy 2

Teacher	G1	G2	G3	G4
歐陽高(博士)	歐陽地餘 (43)	歐陽政(王莽講學大夫)		
	林尊(為博士, 論石渠, 後至少府·太子太傅)	平陵平當 (5 丞相)	子 [平] 晏以明經歷位大司徒, 封防鄉侯	
		梁陳翁生(信都太傅, 家世傳業)	琅邪殷崇(博士)	楚國龔勝(右扶風)
	夏侯建	張山拊(博士)	鄭寬中(博士授太子, 關內爵)	趙玄 (10 御史大夫)



### Genealogy 3

Teacher	G1	G2	G3
睦孟	顏安樂(齊郡太守丞)	冷豐次君 (淄川太守)	馬宮 (5 CE大司徒)
			琅邪左咸(6 BCE九卿)
		淄川任公(少府)	
		琅邪筦路(御史中丞)	孫寶 (11 BCE大司農)
		冥都(丞相史)	
	嚴彭祖(44)	王中(元帝: 少府?)	
	貢禹(44)		

### Genealogy 4

Teacher	G1	G2	
尹更始	尹咸 (5CE)	[劉]歆	
	翟方進 (15)	[劉]歆	
	胡常	蒼梧陳欽子佚(王莽將軍)	王莽

### Genealogy 5

Teacher	G1	G2	
王吉	張禹 (25丞相)	淮陽彭宣 (14大司空)	
		沛戴崇子平(九卿)?	
	王駿 (28)		

### Genealogy 6

Teacher	G1	G2	
施讎(博士)	張禹 (25丞相)	淮陽彭宣 (14大司空)	
		沛戴崇子平(九卿)?	
	梁丘臨	王駿 (28)	
	韋賢 (71)	韋玄成 (42)	

### Genealogy 7

Teacher	G1		
薛廣德 (44)	龔勝 (3)		

Note: Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (36), refer to the year the man achieved a position among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

**Table 4.7. *Ru* Officials under Emperors Cheng, Ai, and Ping and under Wang Mang's Reign** 成哀平三朝及王莽新朝三公九卿中的儒生官員

	<i>From powerful official families</i>	<i>Powerful local families</i>	<i>From obscure backgrounds</i>			
			<i>Advisor /Erudite</i>	<i>Recommendation system</i>	<i>Imperial Academy</i>	<i>Administration / clerkship</i>
N. 33	N. 7	N. 1	N. 6	N. 1	N. 4	N. 7
Emperor Cheng (33-7 BCE) N. 13	王莽(8) 王駿(28)		張禹(25) [翟方進 (15)] 王章2(25), 許商(14) 彭宣(14) 趙玄(10)	[翟方進 (15)] [何武(13)] [王遵 (29)] [谷永(9)]	翟方進 (15) 何武(13)	王駿(28) 谷永(9) 孫寶(11) 王遵 (29)
Emperor Ai (7-1 BCE) N. 8	孔光 (7) 韋 貴 (2)	平當 (5)	[平當 (5)] [師丹 (7)] 左 咸(6)	師丹 (7) [龔 勝(3)]	王嘉 (4)	平當 (5) 龔 勝(3)
Emperor Ping (1 BCE-6 CE) N. 4	平晏(5 CE) 金 敞(1 CE)				馬宮5 CE	[馬宮5 CE] 尹咸 (5 CE)
Wang Mang (8 CE-23 CE) N. 8	劉歆 (國師)		蘇竟 (代郡中尉) 滿昌 (六經祭酒) [左 咸 (5 CE)] Direct promotion 唐尊 (水衡都尉) 唐林 (建德侯) 陳欽 (將軍) 崔發 (大司空) 重泉王吉(九卿)			

Note: Numbers in parentheses, e.g., (36), refer to the year the man achieved a position among the Three Dukes, Nine Ministers, or senior officials of the metropolitan area.

Not only did Hou Cang's disciples rise to prominence under every reign from Emperor Zhao on, those of Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 and Zhou Kan 周

堪 did the same. Liangqui distinguished himself in 59 BCE because of his expertise in the *Book of Changes*. His disciple Zhang Yu 張禹 was named Chancellor in 25 BCE. One of Zhang's disciples, Peng Xuan 彭宣, became Grandee Secretary (*Da sikong* 大司空) eleven years later, and another, Dai Chong 戴崇, rose to serve as one of the Nine Ministers. Zhou Kan was the Junior Tutor for the crown prince under Emperor Xuan and became Superintendent of the Imperial Household in 46 BCE after the enthronement of Emperor Yuan. His disciple Xu Shang 許商 became the Privy Treasurer in 14 BCE under Emperor Cheng, and two of Shang's



disciples became members of the Nine Ministers once Wang Mang established the Xin dynasty (see [table 4.6](#)).

While so many of the *ru* who became high officials were bound by teacher–student ties, when we look at the high officials from Emperor Zhao’s reign we find an impressive number of classmates. Both Hou Cang and Liangqiu He studied with Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌. Xiao Wangzhi, Zhou Kan, and Huang Ba, three who served as members of the Nine Ministers under Emperors Xuan and Cheng, were all disciples of Xiahou Sheng, a *ru* who had studied with Xiahou Shichang. Counting these disciples and disciples’ disciples of

this master, we find that four ascended to the apex of the bureaucracy, assuming the post of Chancellor, and twelve served either as one of the Nine Ministers or of the Three Dukes—all between the reign of Emperor Zhao and the end of Wang Mang's rule. Compared with the brilliant careers of Xiahou Shichang's disciples were those of Ouyang Gao 歐陽高 and Sui Meng 眭孟: during that same period, six disciples or disciples' disciples of Ouyang and five of Gui achieved positions among or above the Nine Ministers (see [table 4.6](#)).

*Ru* officials did not hesitate to fraternize, recruit their fellows as subordinates, and recommend them to

the court, acts that both reinforced their teacher–disciple relations and fostered a strong group identity. For instance, when Wei Xiang achieved the position of Grand Secretary, he hired Xiao Wangzhi, then only a county clerk, to serve as his assistant.<sup>25</sup> When Xiao went on to serve as Grand Secretary, he employed Xue Guangde 薛廣德 as his subordinate and recommended the latter for the post of Erudite.<sup>26</sup> Xiao also recommended Kuang Heng, a classmate, to Emperor Xuan, and when Emperor Yuan succeeded Xuan, he selected Kuang as Chancellor.<sup>27</sup> Kuang Heng in turn recommended Kong Guang 孔光 for the post of “square and upright” (*Fangzheng* 方正); when

Kong became Grand Secretary under Emperor Cheng, he recommended Kuang's disciple Shi Dan 師丹 to the court, catalyzing a distinguished career.

Indeed, personal recommendation and the formal recommendation system were the major means *ru* used to help their fellows move to the center of the political stage. Huang Ba's master, Xiahou Sheng, requested that another *ru* official, Song Chou 宋疇, who served as the Eastern Supporter (*Zuo pingyi* 左馮翊), recommended Huang for the post of "virtuous and good" (*Xianliang* 賢良), and he himself also praised his disciple in the court. Thus, Huang Ba, who had just been released

from prison thanks to a general amnesty, became Regional Inspector of Yangzhou (*Yangzhou cishi* 揚州刺史).<sup>28</sup> Zhang Yu 張禹, who held a prestigious post as Emperor Cheng's teacher, directly recommended his disciple Peng Xuan 彭宣, who therefore was made the Western Sustainer (*You fufeng* 右扶風).<sup>29</sup> Zhang himself had been selected to teach the emperor because of the recommendation of Zheng Kuanzhong 鄭寬中.<sup>30</sup>

The large number of *ru* among the high officials, their continuous penetration into upper-level officialdom, and the close bond among them announced the birth of a new

political force and distinguished the fate of the *ru* from their counterparts in the first half of the Western Han. As discussed in [chapter 1](#), although Emperor Wu enjoyed a reputation for promoting *ru* learning, in his day the group accounted for a small number of high officials. Much as Sima Qian endeavored to craft a lineage of *ru* scholars, few of the prominent *ru* officials were connected with each other. In the first 120 years of the Western Han dynasty, we know of a single case of two high officials studying under the same master, and we cannot identify a single teacher–disciple pair among the hundreds of prominent officials whose names are

left to us. Sima Qian mentioned that in the early Han dynasty, when Shusun Tong 叔孫通 formulated the court ceremonies and was rewarded with the title of Grand Master of Ceremonies, his disciples gained an edge over all rivals in the competition for office. However, none of Shu's disciples leaves his name in the historical record.<sup>31</sup> The six *ru* scholars who served as high officials during Emperor Wu's half-century rule produced no known disciples. It is recorded that Dong Zhongshu, a *ru* who rose to a middle-level position under Emperor Wu, had several disciples. But even his most accomplished students never won a position higher than Minister of the

Liang state (*Liangxiang* 梁相), far from the center of politics.

We can understand the political fortunes of *ru* in the first half of the Western Han by considering their infighting as illustrated in [chapter 2](#). Unlike the *ru* officials of the latter half of the dynasty who happily endorsed each other, these early *ru* did not develop a shared identity, regarding their fellows as rivals instead of allies.

It was not Emperor Wu's reign but the period over which presided Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan that witnessed a historic transformation, a moment when the identity of high-level officialdom was fundamentally and permanently changed. As the old



eminent families that had dominated the central court since the establishment of Western Han disappeared, a new group with no family history of official service seized the plum roles on the political stage. Among them was a group of *ru* that entrenched their positions till Wang Mang seized the throne.

We cannot attribute it to coincidence that the rise of the *ru*, the extinction of old and powerful families, and the birth of a new elite happened at the same time. By analyzing a series of complicated and bloody court intrigues, I will explore the sequence of these profound changes.

## WITCHCRAFT SCANDAL AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW CLASS

Toward the close of his reign, Emperor Wu, an old man, was seriously ailing. In 91 BCE, the crown prince, Liu Ju 劉據, was involved in a witchcraft scandal and met his violent death. Three years later, on March 25, 87 BCE, Emperor Wu named his youngest son, Liu Fuling, then only a child, as the new heir apparent. Two days later, after promoting Huo Guang to the posts of Commander-in-Chief (*Da sima* 大司馬) and General-in-Chief (*Da jiangjun* 大將軍), the emperor died. On the following day, Liu Fuling was enthroned as the new emperor, known as Emperor Zhao, with Huo acting as

primary regent, aided by two newly promoted generals: Jin Midi 金日磾, the General of Chariots and Cavalry (*Cheji jiangjun* 車騎將軍), and Shangguan Jie 上官桀, General of the Left (*Zuo jiangjun* 左將軍).<sup>32</sup>

At a glance this event looks just like a typical succession. But considering the complex situation of the time and some unusual details, few observers could fail to suspect that it was a well-planned conspiracy.

Emperor Wu had six sons. Liu Hong 劉閎 died in 110 BCE and Liu Ju was killed in 91 BCE. After Liu Bo 劉髆 passed away in 88 BCE, the emperor was left with Liu Dan 劉旦 and Liu Xu 劉胥, two mature adults, and Liu

Fuling, a small child.<sup>33</sup> Liu Xu, fond of entertainment and terrifically strong, was said to fight wild beasts with his bare fists. Since his behavior did not meet current moral standards, Ban Gu told us, he was not considered for the throne.<sup>34</sup> Liu Dan was described as a talented and competent man. Enfeoffed as the King of Yan 燕 in 117 BCE, he had governed his kingdom in the north for decades. When the former crown prince died, Liu Dan reckoned that he would be the next choice and therefore presented a memorial requesting permission to return to the capital and wait on the emperor. But according to *The History of Western Han* this request enraged the old emperor, who

appointed his youngest son heir apparent.<sup>35</sup>

To our eyes, the emperor's reaction to Liu Dan's seemingly innocuous request seems a bit wild. Did he never consider so seemingly competent an administrator as his successor? Why did Wu prefer to pass the reins of power to a boy, who was ignorant of administrative affairs and subject to the manipulation of powerful officials? *The History of Western Han* explains that it was because Liu Fuling's was a miraculous birth. But if Wu really wanted to establish Fuling as his successor in the first place, why wait so long?

While it is difficult to find a

convincing reason to justify Emperor Wu's choice, even more puzzling is his promotion of Huo Guang and Jin Midi, who had never held important positions in court but now became the primary regents for the boy emperor.

Huo Guang, an intimate servant of the emperor, did not have a glorious family background, nor could he claim any military or administrative achievements. His father, Huo Zhongru 霍中孺, a clerk who worked for a magistrate, had once served in the retinue of Marquis Pingyang (*Pingyang hou* 平陽侯), where he and a servant called Wei Shao'er 衛少兒 produced an illegitimate son, Huo Qubing 霍去病. When Huo Qubing's aunt Wei Zifu

衛子夫 became empress, he became the most influential general in the court. But Huo Qubing did not have any contact with his biological father for decades. Although later Huo Qubing recommended Huo Guang for a post as Gentleman-attendant in the court, no records show that Huo Qubing gave any special favors to his half-brother. Indeed, when Huo Qubing reached the zenith of his career, Huo Guang was merely a Palace Attendant (*Zhucao shizhong* 諸曹侍中). The former crown prince, Liu Ju, was the son of Wei Zifu. When he was engulfed by scandal, Liu Ju and the whole Wei family suffered extinction. Huo Guang managed to hang on to his post at the

emperor's side, barely affected, which suggests that Huo Qubing and the Wei family had no relations with him.

Huo Guang spent his entire career in the inner court, managing the daily life of the emperor. Although it is said that he was a meticulous man and guilelessly won the emperor's trust, it seems that Emperor Wu never intended to promote him to a powerful office. Like Huo Guang, Wei Qing 衛青 and Huo Qubing first served as Palace Attendants, but soon the former was promoted to a generalship and the latter became a Commandant Piaoyao (*Piaoyao jiaowei* 票姚校尉). Because of their success on the battlefield, they quickly occupied the most prominent



positions in the court.<sup>36</sup> Zhu Maichen, Yan Zhu, and Zhufu Yan all served as Palace Attendants or as Ordinary Grand Master (*Zhongdafu* 中大夫), positions comparable to that held by Huo Guang. All were later appointed either as Governor of a commandery or Prime Minister of a vassal state. By contrast, Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 was famous for feeling stuck in the position of Superior Grand Master of the Palace (*Taizhong dafu jishizhong* 太中大夫給事中) and was never granted an administrative post.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, although Huo Guang served Empower Wu for about twenty years, until his final days the emperor never gave him any opportunity to accomplish

something or to earn the respect and loyalty of other officials. Huo's sudden rise to the position of regent therefore provoked all kinds of suspicions.

Jin Midi, who became the second powerful man to assist the boy emperor, had an experience similar to Huo Guang's. Jin Midi was a Xiongnu 匈奴, forcibly brought to the Han court to tend the horses of the imperial stables at the age of fourteen. Ban Gu told us that Jin Midi was promoted to Inspector of Horses (*Ma jian* 馬監) because the emperor admired his manly look and the strong horses he had raised. Soon he was granted the honorary title of Palace Attendant (*Shizhong* 侍中), then Cavalry

Attendant (*Fuma duwei* 駙馬都尉) and Counselor of the Palace, all fairly high positions but supernumerary.<sup>38</sup> Jin is said to have been shown special favor by the emperor: he escorted him whenever the emperor went out. His oldest son, a playmate (*Nong'er* 弄兒) of the emperor, was also a favorite. This led to a quite unexpected tragedy. Jin Midi monitored his son's carryings on, and was sorely displeased when his frolics with the emperor turned frivolous. Later, when he observed the young man flirting with women in the palace, his rage boiled over and he killed his son.<sup>39</sup> Upon hearing the news, Emperor Wu was torn between anger at the father and pity for the son,

and he could not refrain from weeping.

The image of Jin Midi and his family members revealed by such anecdotes suggests that he was truly a plaything of the emperor, kept like a singing girl or a jester, and despised by his contemporaries. This is far from the reputation we would expect of the official assigned the important task of guiding a young emperor.

The other officials named in the valedictory decree were Shangguan Jie and Sang Hongyang, who appear to have made their names on the political stage before the decree was issued. But even they were little better than upstarts and had not accumulated much political capital.

Shangguan Jie rose to prominence at the end of Wu's reign. In his youth he had served as a Gentleman of the Palace Guard and a Gate Guard (*Yulin qimen lang* 羽林期門郎). Because of his unmatched strength, he was promoted to Director of Stables at Weiyang Palace (*Weiyang jiu ling* 未央殿令) and later, as a Palace Attendant, became the emperor's intimate companion.<sup>40</sup> Not until the end of Emperor Wu's reign, that is, in 88 BCE, was Shangguan Jie promoted to serve as Chief Commandant of Cavalry (*Ji duwei* 騎都尉), ranked two thousand bushels. Working with a General of the Gentlemen-of-the-Household of the Feathered Forest

(*Yulin zhonglang jiang* 羽林中郎將), a Chief Commandant of Cavalry seems to have led the palace guards known as the Cavalry of the Feathered Forest (*Yulin ji* 羽林騎).<sup>41</sup> It is said that before receiving the valedictory decree at the emperor's deathbed, Shangguan had advanced to the position of Grand Coachman (*Taipu*), giving him a foothold in the upper ranks of the bureaucracy. But in the tables that record the appointments of the Nine Ministers of the Han dynasty there is no evidence of this appointment, nor can we find any supporting materials of Shangguan Jie's appointment in the other available sources.<sup>42</sup>

Sang Hongyang was constantly

involved in daily administrative matters throughout Emperor Wu's reign and sat for a time on the peak of the power hierarchy. The son of a merchant, he became a Palace Attendant at the age of thirteen. Because of his understanding of financial matters, he was promoted to be Assistant to the Grand Minister of Agriculture (*Danong cheng* 大農丞) in 115 BCE, Commandant-in-Chief of the Granaries (*Zhisu duwei* 治粟都尉) in 110, and Grand Minister of Agriculture (*Dasinong*) in 100 BCE<sup>43</sup> But he was demoted to Commandant-in-Chief of the Granaries in 96 BCE and held that office until being named Grandee Secretary by the dying emperor.<sup>44</sup>

The foregoing review shows that even toward the end of Emperor Wu's reign Huo Guang, Jin Midi, Shangguan Jie, and Sang Hongyang had not yet risen to positions of any real authority. Furthermore, while the emperor had occasionally promoted the relatives of his favorite consorts, none of these men was related to the newly established heir or other members of the imperial clan.

One has to wonder why Emperor Wu chose these men and why he happened to name the regents on the day of his death.<sup>45</sup> It is said that when Emperor Wu was dying in the Wuzuo Palace (*Wuzuo gong* 五柞宮), none of his descendants stood at his bedside



and most of his high officials waited outside. Then suddenly the inner court resounded with the news that the emperor had died, and the newly appointed generals, namely, Huo Guang, Jin Midi, and Shangguan Jie, collectively crowned the prince, who was eight or nine years old, as emperor. Such a cloudy series of events, with all of the related puzzles that I noted earlier, might have been engineered by Huo Guang and his comrades, the biggest winners. Liu Dan, the King of Yan, even denied Liu Fuling's legitimacy, saying that the new emperor was the son of the regent, Huo Guang.<sup>46</sup> After all, the name of the newly enthroned emperor's mother was

not immediately disclosed, and the new ruler never put in an appearance at Wu's funeral.<sup>47</sup> Besides, there are contradictory records regarding the young emperor's age at the time of his enthronement. While *The History of Western Han*, which was compiled about one hundred years after these events, says he was eight or nine years old, Chu Shaoshu, a scholar who flourished at the end of Emperor Zhao's reign, recorded that Emperor Zhao was born when Emperor Wu was seventy and succeeded to the throne at the age of five.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, a controversy surrounds the authenticity of the valedictory decree. In that document

Emperor Wu ennobled Huo Guang, Jin Midi, and Shangguan Jie, making them marquises, ostensibly for their contributions to the suppression of an uprising incited by Mang Heluo 莽何羅 and Ma Tong, Marquis of Chonghe 重合侯馬通 in 88 BCE. A Palace Attendant named Wang Hu 王忽, the son of Wang Mang 王莽, who was General of the Right, openly criticized Huo Guang for fabricating the decree, claiming that he himself had never left the emperor's side in his last hours and that during that time no such decree was drawn up.<sup>49</sup>

Was Huo Huang a calculating schemer who masterminded the succession, seeing to it that a young

boy became emperor so that he himself might take control of the Han court? Or was Huo Guang really entrusted by the old emperor with the regency? No matter what the truth is, Huo and his colleagues faced the same challenge. In the face of all kinds of suspicions, they had to consolidate their newly obtained positions. This they did. Huo Guang fully controlled the Han court from 87 BCE till his death in 68 BCE. During these twenty years, he suppressed coup attempts, enthroned the King of Changyi 昌邑王 as emperor when Emperor Zhao died in his early twenties without an heir, and deposed the new emperor just twenty-seven days later. Finally, Huo enthroned Liu

Bingyi 劉病已, said to have been the grandson of Liu Ju, the rebellious heir of Emperor Wu who was killed during the witchcraft scandal. Acting as the regent for more than a decade, Huo Guang handpicked emperors and high officials, all of whom pledged their loyalty to him.

Yang Chang, formerly Division Commander (*Jun sima* 軍司馬) of Huo, was named Grand Minister of Agriculture in 81 BCE. Four years later he became Grandee Secretary, and two years after that, Chancellor, a post he held until he died.<sup>50</sup> Pian Lecheng 便樂成 was notorious for having become Privy Treasurer (*Shaofu*) by virtue of his close relationship with Huo.<sup>51</sup> Du

Yannian 杜延年 and Tian Yannian 田延年 both first served in the office (*mufu* 幕府) of Huo. Because Du Yannian helped reveal the conspiracy dreamed up by Shangguan Jie in 80, he was appointed Grand Coachman that same year. Tian Yannian first served as Chief Clerk (*Zhangshi* 長史) in Huo Guang's headquarters and then was appointed Governor of Hedong (*Hedong taishou* 河東太守). In 75 he was promoted to the office of Grand Minister of Agriculture and played a leading role in dethroning the King of Changyi in 74.<sup>52</sup> Having proven themselves able soldiers, Zhao Chongguo 趙充國 and Fan Mingyou 范明友 were made generals and later

appointed to high civil office by Huo Guang.<sup>53</sup>

While promoting his intimates, Huo Guang also cultivated middle-level officials under Emperor Wu, who soon became his trusted subordinates, even as he quietly purged his potential enemies. Besides the three officials who received Emperor Wu's valedictory decree along with Huo Guang, six other high- or middle-level officials of Emperor Wu were active in the court dominated by Huo Guang. Zhang Anshi 張安世, serving as Counselor of the Palace under Emperor Wu, was promoted by Huo to serve as Superintendent of the Imperial Household (*Guanglu xun*) in 86 BCE.

Zhang, who later served as General of Chariots and Cavalry, participated in enthroning and dethroning the King of Changyi, and helped Huo Guang finally enthrone Emperor Xuan. Jun Buyi 雋不疑, serving as Regional Inspector of Qingzhou (*Qingzhou cishi* 青州刺史) under Emperor Wu, suppressed the rebellion led by Liu Ze 劉澤 in 87 BCE. Because of this achievement, Huo made him Governor of the Capital.<sup>54</sup>

By contrast, Tian Qianqiu 田千秋, Wang Xin 王訢, and Tian Guangming 田廣明 all rose to prominence before Huo Guang became regent. Although they retained their positions, the regent either drained their positions of real



power or transformed them into loyal underlings. Although Tian Qianqiu held the position of Chancellor from 89 till 77 BCE, this did not keep Huo Guang from executing his son-in-law, the Privy Treasurer Xu Ren 徐仁, in 84 BCE. Tian Guangming had risen to the position of the Grand Herald (*Dahonglu*) during Wu's reign. At the beginning of Huo's regency, Tian led the army that suppressed a rebellion in Yizhou 益州. Having proved his loyalty to Huo, he was promoted to Commandant of the Guards (*Weiwei*) in 83 BCE and Eastern Supporter of Capital (*Zuo pingyi*) in 78 BCE.

Interestingly, most of those who came into or held onto high positions

during the regency came from obscure circumstances. In fact, among the twenty-eight high officials we can identify under the regency of Huo Guang, only nine came from rather powerful families (see [table 4.1](#))

Among them, Liu Piqiang 劉辟彊 and his son Liu De 劉德 were related to the imperial family. Liu Biqiang was the grandson of Liu Jiao 劉交, a younger brother of Emperor Gaozu.<sup>55</sup> When Huo took power, someone advised him to make a gesture of sharing some administrative duties with the members of the imperial house so as to allay the concerns of the court. He therefore promoted these distant relatives of Emperor Zhao to

high positions.<sup>56</sup>

For the eminent officials Xu Ren, Shangguan An 上官安, Zhang Anshi, Zhu Shanfu 朱山拊, Du Yannian, and Han Zeng 韓增, their fathers or fathers-in-law all served as either one of the Nine Ministers or of the Three Dukes under Emperor Wu. But all except the father of Han Zeng were upstarts: they ascended to the apex of the power pyramid from the bottom of the bureaucracy. In fact, Han Zeng was the only official under Huo Guang whose glorious family history could be traced back to a time before the reign of Emperor Wu. But like Zhang Anshi and Du Yannian, Han's father died before he could establish himself in

officialdom: his brilliant career was largely the making of Huo Guang.<sup>57</sup>

Based on the above analysis, we can see that the most prestigious and influential families, those whose members held high office for several reigns, almost totally disappeared from the political stage under Huo Guang. But who were these prestigious families? What means were at their disposal for securing high offices in the first half of the Western Han? How could Huo Guang successfully remove them from the center of politics?

These prestigious families can be divided into three groups: first, meritorious officials who helped Liu Bang, known as Emperor Gaozu,

establish the Han dynasty; second, those who had distinguished themselves in recent military campaigns; third, relatives of the imperial consorts. The most outstanding of these enjoyed hereditary noble status. A disproportionate number of men from these families held high office from the founding of the Han to the end of the reign of Emperor Wu. Among the advantages they enjoyed was early exposure to the imperial court or the retinue of a crown prince—many served as Gentleman-attendants. While this was a low-ranking position without much real power, it provided them great opportunities to establish ties to

influential officials and with the emperor or the heir apparent.<sup>58</sup> After that, they were usually appointed to middle-level positions.<sup>59</sup>

Those who inherited their families' noble titles automatically became candidates for high official positions. During Emperor Wu's reign, Xu Chang 許昌, Xue Ze 薛澤, and Zhuang Qingdi 莊青翟, descendants of officials who helped found the Han, were regarded by their contemporaries as natural candidates for the position of Chancellor thanks to their hereditary status.<sup>60</sup> Most of Emperor Wu's high officials who had enjoyed the noble status were directly granted positions among the Nine Ministers.

Obviously, Huo Guang broke the established rules. Among his high officials, only three had noble status before taking office: Wei Buhai 魏不害, Jiang De 江德 and Su Chang 蘇昌. But these three had nothing to do with prestigious families. Wei was Defender of the Yu county (Yu shouwei 圉守尉), Jiang was an Overseer of the Stables (*Jiu sefu* 廄嗇夫), and Su Clerk of the Defender of Yu county (*Yu weishi* 圉尉史). Because they helped capture Gongsun Yong 公孫勇, the leader of a rebellion, they were ennobled by Emperor Wu in 89 BCE.<sup>61</sup>

Huo Guang's own rather humble background and his sudden rise to power are probably the keys to his

efforts in excluding members of prestigious families from the center of the political world. Because of the strong bond those families forged with Liu Bang over the course of bloody battles, their offspring enjoyed immediate access to the imperial house and were supposed to share the empire with Liu family. This kind of power was precisely what Huo lacked. Since the hereditary elites associated power with their ancestors' accomplishments, Huo could not make this group develop any sense of special loyalty to him, even if he appointed them to office. And if he did do that, he would endanger himself by providing a group with a certain solidarity an opportunity



to seize power.

But what enabled this upstart regent to clip the wings of his potential rivals? How could he secure the power to enthrone emperors at will? A number of factors contributed to his success, but the two most important were 1) the inherent weaknesses of the system that had once secured the interest of the prestigious official families and 2) the political turmoil at the end of Emperor Wu's reign that eradicated more than twenty powerful families within a short time, leaving a power vacuum that Huo readily exploited.

Let us survey a brief history of the prestigious families of the first half of the Western Han dynasty, and review

the political calamity that occurred shortly before Huo assumed the regency.

At the beginning of the Han dynasty, two independent but closely related systems were constructed simultaneously: the centralized bureaucracy and the hereditary aristocracies. When Liu Bang was enthroned, his generals and advisors were assigned the most important government posts even as they received titles of nobility. Although the official position could not be inherited by one's descendants, the title was hereditary. When Emperor Gaozu ennobled his men, the oath of investiture was: "Even if the Yellow River becomes no

broader than a girdle, even if Mount Tai becomes no larger than a whetstone, the state—eternally peaceful and harmonious—will be transmitted to our descendants” 封爵之誓曰：“使河如帶，泰山若厲。國以永寧，爰及苗裔。”<sup>62</sup> That marquises were favored candidates for high office was an unwritten law, honored by all the emperors from Gaozu to Wu.

Furthermore, nobility was only limited to a privileged few. A bloody oath had been made between Gaozu and his meritorious officials: “No one who is not of the Liu family shall be made a king, and no one lacking outstanding merit shall be made a marquis. If anyone violates this

agreement, the empire is to unite in attacking him” 非劉氏不得王，非有功不得侯。不如約，天下共擊之。 This oath was cited on several occasions by Liu Bang’s meritorious officials to prevent relatives of the emperor’s consorts from joining their group and infringing on their prerogatives.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the advantages it enjoyed, the nobility had an intrinsic vulnerability that finally led to its demise under Huo Guang. First, marquises did not really share any political power with the emperor. Instead, only high officials with real administrative duties could exert influence in court.<sup>64</sup> Though these nobles enjoyed great advantages over

commoners in the competition for high office, the emperor maintained strict control over the assignment of offices.

Second, marquises and their fiefs were under the jurisdiction of local governments. Various regulations issued by the court kept Han aristocrats in debt, as did the local officials empowered to implement them. Zhou Bo 周勃 helped Emperor Gaozu establish the Han dynasty, played a crucial role in dispossessing Empress Lü's family, and saw to it that Emperor Wen was properly enthroned. Zhou long occupied prominent positions, wielding unmatched power for decades. But after he resigned from court and returned to his fief, he lived in fear of

the local officials.<sup>65</sup> And the historical record includes numerous cases of men deprived of their noble status because of misconduct: though some cases involved authentic crimes, many were punished for minor mistakes. For instance, in the year of 112 BCE the titles of 106 marquises were rescinded because their annual donations of gold for the court's sacrificial offerings failed to match the stipulated figure.<sup>66</sup> Such events suggest that the hereditary aristocrats of the Han possessed very little independent power.

A statistical study has reinforced the impression of a relatively impotent nobility. Li Kaiyuan 李開元 has shown that under Emperor Gaozu 100 percent

of eminent officials were meritorious officials who contributed to the founding of the dynasty, and during the time of Emperor Hui and Empress Dowager Lü the figure was only slightly lower—90 percent. The proportion declined under Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing: to 62 percent and then 46 percent.<sup>67</sup>

During Emperor Wu's fifty-four-year rule, the offspring of Gaozu's meritorious officials occupied around 20 percent of the high-level positions.<sup>68</sup> Obviously, although this group always had powerful representatives at the apex of power before Huo Guang shook things up, its power had been continuously declining.

The offices that originally belonged to them were gradually occupied by new groups, including close relatives of the emperor's consorts, men who had lately distinguished themselves in battle, as well as the men who distinguished themselves through administrative achievements. When Huo Guang became regent, he disentangled the imperial family from Gaozu's meritorious officials and saw to it that their descendants enjoyed no advantages in seeking office.

The Han political system allowed Huo to sideline the prestigious families even as the internal strife that broke out at the end of Emperor Wu's reign wiped out the most prominent families.



Fate was on Huo's side.

In February 91 BCE, Gongsun Jingsheng, who had been serving as Grand Coachman for a decade, was thrown into jail for embezzling a large sum of money that belonged to the northern army of Chang'an. His father, Chancellor Gongsun He, managed to capture one of the state's most wanted men, a wandering knight named Zhu Anshi 朱安世, whom he hoped to exchange for his son. But from his prison Zhu submitted a memorial in which he brought two charges: he accused Jingsheng of illicit sexual relation with his cousin, Princess Yangshi 陽石公主, and he accused the Gongsun family of employing a

shaman to place a curse on the aged emperor and of having malefic mannequins buried underneath the horse path that led toward Ganquan Park 甘泉, where Emperor Wu had a summer retreat. A trial was convened, the charges substantiated, and the emperor promptly had the entire Gongsun family executed.<sup>69</sup> Princess Yangshi and her sister Princess Zhuyi 諸邑 were accused of practicing witchcraft and put to death.<sup>70</sup> This minor massacre served as an overture to the far bloodier turmoil that would sweep through the court.

In the summer of 91 BCE, Emperor Wu traveled to Ganquan Park as usual. But the resort's beautiful landscape did

not alleviate the aged man's illness. Jiang Chong 江充, a rising star in the court, convinced the emperor that his suffering was caused by witchcraft. The anxious ruler named Jiang to head a broad investigation that would dig deeper into the plot uncovered by the recent case. Jiang hired shamans, probably from central Asia, who searched for buried puppets and lingering ghosts. Authorities arrested and threw into dungeons those accused of praying to evil spirits. The screaming and groveling of the suspects mixed with the smell of burning skin. An atmosphere of fear and distrust permeated the capital. Accusations flew every which way and,

according to *The History of Western Han*, around ten thousand people were put to death.<sup>71</sup>

This bloodbath reached its climax when Jiang Chong charged that the poisonous vapor had infected the palace. Once he had breached the royal gate, his first victims were the concubines whom the emperor no longer desired. By stages he reached all the way to Empress Wei, and he boldly fingered the crown prince, Liu Ju, as a practitioner of sorcery: wooden carvings of his intended victims were found in his palace. With the emperor in Ganquan Park and the fates of his two sisters and the Gongsun family still terrifyingly vivid, Liu Ju took the

advice of his Junior Tutor, Shi De 石德, and had Jiang Chong and his associates arrested. When Jiang Chong's assistant, Han Yue 韓說, who served as the Superintendent of the Imperial Household, questioned the prince's authority in this matter, the prince simply had him killed. Zhang Gan 章龔, another official loyal to Jiang, managed to escape to Ganquan Park. As the situation grew tenser, the prince informed his mother, Empress Wei, of the situation, and had weapons from the imperial armory issued to the archers and guards assigned to her. Speaking to the court's highest officials, he explained that when the emperor had succumbed to a grave

illness at his summer retreat—possibly he had already perished—Jiang Chong and his allies had tried to seize power. Jiang was executed, and the foreign shamans were burnt to death in Shanglin Park.<sup>72</sup> After these events, the prince led his followers to the office of the Chancellor, Liu Quli 劉屈釐, who had managed to escape. Chaos broke out in the capital. Unconvinced that the emperor backed the prince's actions, commanders of the armies in the area watched and waited.<sup>73</sup>

As soon as he got wind of the revolt, the emperor returned to Chang'an, ordered the Chancellor to suppress the rebellion, and barricaded the city walls and gates to prevent the

escape of the rebel heir, Liu Ju. In the battle that ensued, several tens of thousands were killed, among them the Empress Wei, Liu Ju, his subordinates, and their families.

Sorcery panics would recur. In May 90 BCE the target was Liu Quli, the Chancellor who had replaced Gongsun He and suppressed Liu Ju's revolt. His wife, according to the complaint, had employed witchcraft to curse the emperor. She was also said to have joined General Li Guangli in imploring heaven to make Liu Bo, the king of Changyi, the new heir apparent. Naturally Liu Quli and his wife were executed. Li Guangli, leading imperial troops in the far west at that time,

promptly surrendered to his Xiongnu foes; his entire family was exterminated.<sup>74</sup>

The next witch hunt targeted the newly appointed Grandee Secretary, Shangqiu Cheng 商丘成; the Grand Master of Ceremonies, Li Zhonggen 酈終根; the Grand Herald, Dai Ren 戴仁; the Governor of the Capital, Jian 建; and the former generals Gongsun Ao 公孫敖 and Zhao Ponu 趙破奴: all were charged with practicing black magic, and they were executed one after another between 89 and 87.<sup>75</sup> During the same period, around eleven marquises without positions in court were accused of the same crime, convicted, and put to death.<sup>76</sup> Over the



last five years of Emperor Wu's rule, the most prestigious and powerful families, long the dominant force at court, were virtually wiped out. Was this a well-designed intrigue? Why and how did all the bloodshed lead back to one accusation: witchcraft?

The Chinese expression *wugu* 巫蠱 is commonly translated as *witchcraft*. *Wu*, conventionally understood as shamans, existed as early as the Shang dynasty—the word appears frequently in the oracle bone inscriptions. Although later scholars, like Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), used *wu* to refer specifically to female shamans (*xi* 覡 was used for males), in the early texts the character does not have a

strong indication of a specific gender. *Wu* were thought to have mastered special skills that permitted them to communicate with gods and other powerful spirits. It was they who presided over sacrifices and divinatory rituals. Because they had access to forces beyond the human realm, *wu* were also thought to possess healing powers, which were often expressed through incantations (*zhuyou* 祝由). Ritual sacrifices and war were once regarded as the major activities of the state, so *wu* came to play important roles in the bureaucracy of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Some scholars have speculated that the ruler of the Shang dynasty acted as a shaman. We

do know that those *wu* who entered the bureaucracy performed the following functions: the interpretation of dreams, prayers for rain, divinations, and exorcisms that accompanied funerals.

Commoner shamans probably emerged in the Warring States period or earlier, since records of their activities appear in several texts produced at this time. They made a living by praying for blessings and curing illnesses, and as the officiants at religious services, including the sacrifices offered to river spirits. A passage from the *Debate on Salt and Iron* (*Yan tie lun*), set down in the first century BCE, states: “There are shamans on every street and invokers

in every ward” 是以街巷有巫，閭里有祝。<sup>77</sup>

In *The Discourses of the State* (*Guo yu*), the shamans of antiquity were said to be men of high intelligence, knowledgeable about gods and spirits and at ease with the laws of Heaven. However, since the Spring and Autumn period skeptics had expressed doubts about the efficacy of shamanistic techniques in staving off catastrophe and inviting blessings. Among the thinkers of the pre-Qin and Qin eras, virtually none failed to assault such practices. Some, like Mozi, advocated using shaman's skills to serve other secular goals, while others, like Xunzi and Han Feizi, advocated imposing

strict controls on these potentially dangerous figures.

During the Qin and Han dynasties, the imperial house employed *wu* to offer sacrifices to various spirits. Their status was lowly: Sima Qian once compared his petty position with that of the court's diviners and invokers, all of them something like musicians and jesters, laboring to amuse the emperor, despised by the mainstream (文史星曆近乎卜祝之間，固主上所戲弄，倡優畜之，流俗之所輕也).<sup>78</sup> Shamans and their descendants also seem to have been banned from holding administrative positions, for Gao Feng 高鳳, a scholar in the Eastern Han, avoided office by indicating that he

was related to a shamanic household 巫家.<sup>79</sup>

While *wu* seem more often to have been associated with white magic, *gu* 蠱 used poison and invoked evil spirits in pursuit of power, wealth, or revenge. The word *gu* has a history as long as Chinese writing: it appears in the oracle bone inscriptions as two insects in a receptacle. This symbol may reflect the specific procedures used for making *gu* poison, which involved putting various poisonous snakes and insects together in a vessel and encouraging them to battle it out until there was but one survivor. The poison, or *gu*, is secured from the only survivor. Han law, which was based on

earlier codes, stated, “Those who dare to poison people with *gu*, or teach others to do it, will be publicly executed.”<sup>80</sup> *Gu* also refers to a poisonous vapor, or an evil spirit, that can invade the body and cause illness and death.<sup>81</sup> It was thought that the poisonous vapors that existed naturally could be manipulated through incantations, kept at bay by sacrificing dogs and offering herbs.<sup>82</sup>

*Wugu* was the art of directing malevolent spirits to harm people. The witchcraft scare that took place during the reign of Emperor Wu included such practices as shamanic curses 祝詛, the utterance of evil prayers at night 夜祠, the burial of mannequins representing

the intended victims 埋偶人, and, probably, shamanic sacrifices on roads 祠道中.

These practices were probably not uncommon in Han society, and they are mentioned in Han law codes. However, the emperor's attitude appears to have had a strong bearing on enforcement. While the death penalty was traditionally prescribed for anyone who placed a curse on the emperor, Emperor Wen ended this custom, stating:

There are cases among the people in which men have banded together under oath to



put a curse on the emperor; later some of the members withdraw from the oath and report the matter, only to be accused of high treason by officials of the law.... These acts are nothing more than the foolishness of insignificant people who are unaware that they are inviting death. I cannot under any circumstances sanction action against such men. In the future no one accused of such violations shall be brought to trial.

民或祝詛上以相約結而後相謾，吏以為大逆，... 此細民

之愚無知抵死，朕甚不  
取。自今以來，有犯此者勿  
聽治。<sup>83</sup>

The emperor seems to have recognized that it was impossible to prove one had not cursed the emperor and that the law might tempt people to launch dishonest attacks on their enemies. This open-minded and rational attitude was also reflected by his dismissing of the office of Secret Invoker 秘祝之官. Both in the Qin and the Han courts, there was an officer who specialized in “transferring curses” 移過—when an evil omen appeared or a disaster seemed

imminent, the Secret Invoker offered sacrifices and prayed that the blame for the mishap might be transferred from the ruler to the officials or the people.<sup>84</sup> But Emperor Wen issued an edict, saying:

The way of Heaven, I have heard, is that disasters follow the appearance of complaints and blessings come after the flourishing of virtue. As far as the faults of officials, I myself shall be responsible. Nowadays, the Secret Invoker is delegated to pray that the blame for any of my faults be

transferred to the officials or the people, showing that I am not virtuous. I find this practice wholly unacceptable. From now on, let the post of Secret Invoker be abolished.

蓋聞天道禍自怨起而福繇德興。百官之非，宜由朕躬，今祕祝之官移過于下，以彰吾之不德，朕甚不取。其除之。<sup>85</sup>

Emperor Wu, the grandson of this rational ruler, did not believe that virtue was rewarded by a shower of blessings. On the contrary, he was well known for spending vast sums on the

search for an elixir that would allow him to achieve immortality. This brilliant emperor, whose material accomplishments were impressive, believed that gods and spirits could be bribed by sacrifices and manipulated by spells. This might be why the first recorded case of witchcraft in the Han dynasty happened during his reign.

In 130 BCE Empress Chen 陳皇后, out of favor with Emperor Wu, was accused of misdeeds, including seduction (*meidao* 媚道). The emperor ordered a thorough investigation, which revealed that the empress had arranged for a woman named Chufu 楚服 and others to offer sacrifices to spirits and practice incantations (*wugu*

*ciji zhuzu* 巫蠱祠祭祝詛). Over three hundred people were executed, and Chufu's head was displayed in the marketplace. Though her accomplice met a violent death, Empress Chen did not suffer any physical punishment: she did lose her title and was forced to live in Changmen 長門 Palace.<sup>86</sup>

Emperor Wu's rather lenient treatment of his wife contrasted sharply with the cruelty he would exhibit forty years later, when the witchcraft scare drove him to murder his own heir, his daughters, empress, and many high officials. It is possible that unmistakable signs of mortality convinced the old and prickly emperor that his physical suffering was caused

by *gu*, a poisonous vapor, produced and manipulated by his most trusted family members. As early as 99 BCE he came to suspect that evil sacrifices were taking place along the road he routinely traveled and called for an intensive search.<sup>87</sup> Seven years later he ordered city policemen to search Shanglin Park, a large recreation area laced with waterways, peppered with shrines devoted to various spirits, and featuring a hunting area. Ban Gu identified this search as the beginning of the witchcraft scare: to prevent the escape of an alleged sorcerer, the gates of Chang'an were closed for eleven days.<sup>88</sup>

Emperor Wu's suspicions and

actions blew an air of fear and inauspiciousness into the capital even before he turned his sights on his family and the officials closest to him. And after he exterminated almost all around him, the emperor continued to search for *gu*, partly through a subordinate who held a newly created position, the Metropolitan Commandant (*sili jiaowei* 司隸校尉). This official hired twelve hundred soldiers to arrest those who practiced witchcraft.<sup>89</sup>

That same year, 89 BCE, the new Chancellor, Tian Qianqiu, wanted to offer reassurances to citizens agitated by the massive witch hunt and the ensuing bloodbath; he presented a



memorial to the emperor. Praising the ruler's longevity and extolling his virtue, he pleaded with the emperor to show the people mercy and munificence by loosening restrictions and lifting penalties. But, according to Ban Gu, the emperor replied:

I am without virtue. Since the Chancellor on the Left and Ershi (Li Guangli) led a rebellion, the plague of witchcraft has spread to officials; for months I have managed to swallow only one meal a day ... I constantly feel sorrow for those

officials, and I want to forgive their past misdeeds. Nevertheless, when the use of witchcraft was first uncovered, I ordered the Chancellor and the Grand Secretary to supervise the officials, to sniff out and arrest witches, and I ordered the Commandant of Justice to prosecute. But I never hear back from those officials. In the past, Jiang Chong first investigated the ladies in the inner palace and later discovered witchcraft in the empress's palace. And when it came to Jingsheng and to

Li Yu—who conspired to betray me and join forces with the Xiongnu—the officials never found out beforehand. In recent days, you, my current Chancellor, excavated Lantai and proved the existence of *gu*. You know this clearly. Even today, there are still shamans who have escaped and have not yet been arrested. The *yin* disaster invaded my body, and those close and far all produced *gu*. I am so ashamed of this, how could I possibly achieve long life?

朕之不德，自左丞相與貳師

陰謀逆亂，巫蠱之禍流及士大夫。朕日一食者累月 ... 痛士大夫常在心，既事不咎。雖然，巫蠱始發，詔丞相、御史督二千石求捕，廷尉治，未聞九卿廷尉有所鞫也。曩者，江充先治甘泉宮人，轉至未央椒房，以及敬聲之疇、李禹之屬謀入匈奴，有司無所發，今丞相親掘蘭臺蠱驗，所明知也。至今餘巫頗脫不止，陰賊侵身，遠近為蠱，朕媿之甚，何壽之有？<sup>90</sup>

But hidden under Emperor Wu's fear of witchcraft must have been a series

of political intrigues. Indeed, a careful examination of the list of victims shows that they clearly constituted two interest groups.

Gongsun He and Shi De directed the group that formed around Empress Wei—supporters of the heir apparent, Liu Ju, they are known as the Wei clique. Gongsun He had married the empress's elder sister, the aunt of Liu Ju, and he had held a high position at court since 135 BCE; his son Gongsun Jingsheng began to play a prominent political role in 102 BCE. Shi De, acting as Grand Master of Ceremonies from 102 to 99 BCE, was the son of a former Chancellor, Shi Qing, and his relatives had held important positions

at court since the founding of the dynasty. The clique also included General Wei Qing, who was Empress Wei's brother, and General Huo Qubing, Empress Wei's nephew, both of whom once occupied the most important positions in the court. But both Wei Qing and Huo Qubing died in their prime, and the declining Wei clique was virtually wiped out during the witchcraft scare. The retaliatory slaughter started with Gongsun He and his son, a heavy blow for the Wei clique. Although at first sight the collapse of the Gongsun family looks like an independent event, the enmity between Zhu Anshi and the Gongsun family, the later developments suggest

that the witchcraft charges were a well-designed trap.

Several months later Empress Wei's daughters, Princesses Yangshi and Zhuyi, and her niece, Wei Kang 衛伉, were put to death for practicing sorcery. Jiang Chong, of course, brought about the direct downfall of the heir apparent, Empress Wei, and their subordinates. Ban Gu spoke of Jiang's motivation: having once offended the heir apparent, he often fretted that if Liu Ju were enthroned his future would be bleak indeed. But why did the emperor trust such a man, allowing him to enter the palace precincts, search the places of the heir apparent and the empress, and even go

so far as to destroy the imperial throne in his search for untoward objects (入宮至省中，壞御座掘地)? Why did Wu refuse the heir apparent and the empress any chance to talk with him directly, let alone a chance to apologize? Such questions have led scholars to argue that Emperor Wu was aiming to wipe out the heir apparent and his group, that witchcraft was merely a convenient excuse.<sup>91</sup>

It is difficult to understand why Emperor Wu wanted to kill the heir he had selected three decades earlier. No surviving records suggest any friction between the two men. The only clue is that Empress Wei had fallen out of favor with Emperor Wu. Some scholars



have suggested that the conservative policies favored by the son alienated a father who employed brutal officials to implement the law in the strictest possible terms, and launched expensive military campaigns throughout his life. Suggestive as they may be, these are only speculations: neither Sima Qian, a contemporary historian, nor Ban Gu, who carefully documented the downfall of Liu Ju, ever mentioned such things.<sup>92</sup>

It is possible that Emperor Wu felt threatened by his heir and wanted to squash his growing power. This would explain why Emperor Wu had all those who had any relations to the Wei clique executed during the turmoil at court.

Gongsun Ao, for instance, was a former subordinate of Wei Qing, and Zhao Ponu, of Huo Qubing. Even though both had lost their noble titles long before the witchcraft scare occurred, both were killed—along with their families—for practicing black magic. Among the other victims of the massacre were Lu He 盧賀, the former king of Donghu 東胡, Ju Gu 居股, King Yao of Dongyue 東粵 繇王, and Lu 祿, a descendant of Jiancheng Hou 建城侯 of Dongyue—all ennobled as marquises because they surrendered to the Han court. Lu He and Ju Gu were both executed because Liu Ju contacted them while trying to round up an army in Chang'an. Lu was accused of

housing a woman whom Liu Ju once favored, and of placing a curse on the emperor. Ren'an 任安 and Tian Ren 田仁, former guests of Wei Qing, rose to significant positions in the capital because of Wei's recommendations. Tian Ren met his death because he allowed Liu Ju to flee from Chang'an. Ren'an was not spared, even though he turned a deaf ear to the heir apparent's order to mobilize the army he controlled. The Grandee Secretary Bao Shengzhi 暴勝之, whom the emperor had excoriated for obstructing Tian Ren's execution, was forced to take his own life.<sup>93</sup>

Emperor Wu's motivations and goals become difficult to explain when

we consider that even the rivals of the Wei clique were exterminated. Among the victims of the witchcraft scare, Li Guangli, Liu Quli, and Shangqiu Cheng led the group supporting Liu Bo, the son of Emperor Wu's favorite consort, Lady Li. Li Guangli, as the brother of Lady Li, had held the rank of general from 104 BCE on. He was connected with Liu Quli, the son of Emperor Wu's half brother, by marriage.<sup>94</sup> Shangqiu Cheng was the subordinate of Li Guangli. Known as the Li clique, these men benefited from the collapse of Liu Ju's party, whose positions in the national government they quickly filled. Li Guangli became the most powerful military commander after the

death of Wei Qing and Huo Qubing; Liu Quli was promoted to Chancellor when Gongsun He died in prison; and Shangqiu Cheng became the Grand Secretary when Bao Shengzhi took his own life. Not surprisingly, both Liu Quli and Shangqiu Cheng were the major players in suppressing Liu Ju's revolt. However, Emperor Wu never intended to support the Li clique. After the Wei clique had been wiped out, Li Guangli and Liu Quli suggested to Emperor Wu that he establish Liu Bo, Lady Li's son, as heir. This rather reasonable proposal outraged Emperor Wu. He accused them of casting spells on him and had them killed. As to Liu Bo, he mysteriously died right before

Emperor Wu named his new heir.

After the Wei and Li cliques were decimated, the next to face the executioner were those who opposed the former heir apparent Liu Ju. Among them were Su Wen 蘇文, Han Xing 韓興, Li Shou 李壽, Zhang Fuchang 張富昌, Quan Jiuli 泉鳩里, Mang Tong 莽通, and Jing Jian 景健. Su Wen and Han Yue had assisted Jiang Chong in his investigations of the suspected witchcraft, and all three had accused the heir apparent of practicing black magic. While Jiang Chong and Han Yue had already met violent deaths during Liu Ju's revolt, in 89 BCE Emperor Wu ordered the execution of Jiang Chong's family and

Su Wen.<sup>95</sup> Han Yue's son Han Xing was executed in 89 BCE for practicing black magic.<sup>96</sup> Li Shou, a clerk a magistrate in Xin'an 新安令, and Zhang Fuchang, a soldier from Shanyang 山陽卒, helped to capture Liu Ju and both were ennobled accordingly. Quan Jiuli, who killed the heir apparent, was promoted to governor of Beidi 北地. But Li Shou was executed for leaving Chang'an without permission; the emperor ordered Quan Jiuli's whole family exterminated, and Zhang was also mysteriously killed by an unknown assailant. Mang Tong, a subordinate of Li Guangli, and Jing Jian, the Grand Minister of Chang'an 長安大夫,

helped to attack the Wei clique during Liu Ju's revolt and were both ennobled thereafter. But when they saw all of their former comrades being struck down one by one, Mang Tong, his brother Mang Heluo 莽何羅, and Jing Jian tried to assassinate the emperor. When they failed, they too were executed.

Ban Gu indicated that Emperor Wu killed those who had opposed Liu Ju because of his guilty conscience: if his heir had been blameless after all, it was imperative that he avenge his death.

It is hard to place the remaining victims of this calamity in any particular interest group. But one may say, in general, that they had either



played an important role in the imperial court or had enjoyed prestigious status for decades. For instance, among them was Li Zhonggen 酈終根, a descendant of Emperor Gaozu's meritorious minister Li Shang 酈商, who had inherited noble status in 115 BCE. These men had won sinecures in court under Emperor Wu and were expected to play major roles under his successor. Due to the witchcraft scandal, this never happened.

If there was a kingpin who manipulated the whole affair, it could only have been Emperor Wu. It is possible that after changing his mind about his intended successor he used

witchcraft as an excuse to wipe out the established Wei and Li cliques.<sup>97</sup>

Although some of the evidence seems to lead to this conclusion, questions linger. If Emperor Wu really wanted his youngest son as his heir, why did he bother to promote members of the Li clique after Liu Ju's death instead of immediately establishing the future Emperor Zhao as crown prince? Why did Emperor Wu kill Emperor Zhao's mother and entrust power to several upstarts, who were neither related to the five-year-old boy nor had any accomplishments?

All of these doubts suggest another possibility: no mastermind engineered this five-year-long slaughter. Rather, a

number of factions saw a witch hunt as the perfect drama for squeezing posts and rewards from the emperor. The violent storm they unleashed finally spun out of control, sweeping clean the entire political stage. From a power vacuum emerged an unexpected victor: Huo Guang seized power and filled the court with men utterly beholden to him.<sup>98</sup>

# Begin in the Middle

## Who Entrusted *Ru* with Political Power?

The elevation of *ru* learning as state ideology is often associated with the creation of a giant empire, as the conventional view holds that to unify diversified regions into one political entity needs a homogeneous discourse. Few people would ever expect that the embrace of *ru* doctrines by political

authorities in fact was directly linked with the succession crisis of the empire after the witchcraft scandal.

## HUO GUANG'S DICTATORSHIP AND *RU* DISCOURSE

While Huo Guang occupies a certain position in the political history of the Han dynasty, he is seldom mentioned in modern narratives of *ru* history. However, it is during his regency that a number of historical anecdotes preserved and transmitted by *ru* were fully exploited for the first time to legitimate the political changes he oversaw.

It is said that in 89 BCE, when Liu Ju, the former heir apparent, died,

Emperor Wu gave Huo Guang a painting. Depicted were a number of vassals waiting on the Duke of Zhou (Zhougong 周公), who was carrying King Cheng (Cheng Wang 成王) on his back. Two years later, when Wu was seriously ill, Huo Guang wept as he raised the question of who should be his heir. Emperor Wu replied, “Have you never grasped the meaning of the painting? Enthroned my youngest son and act as the Duke of Zhou.”<sup>1</sup>

The Duke of Zhou was the benevolent and wise brother of King Wu, the founding father of the Zhou dynasty. After King Wu died, the duke acted as the regent for the young king, ruling the country until he came of age.

This story circulated widely in the pre-Han and Han periods. Its original version is preserved in the *Book of Documents* (hereafter, *Documents*), which Sima Qian attributed to Confucius. When *The Zuo zhuan* 左傳 states that a man's misconduct should not implicate his innocent and reliable relatives, it cites the story of Duke of Zhou, explaining that whereas his brothers Guan Shu 管叔 and Cai Shu 蔡叔 rebelled against the Zhou court, the duke steadfastly assisted the young king.<sup>2</sup> *Mencius* repeats anecdotes about the duke when discussing whether kingship should be transmitted according to merit or descent. In the early Han, Liu Zhang 劉長, the son of

Emperor Gaozu and the brother of Emperor Wen, behaved unscrupulously. Acting for Emperor Wen, General Bo Zhao 薄昭 sent a letter to admonish Liu, saying, “In the past, the Duke of Zhou executed Guan Shu and exiled Cai Shu in order to pacify the Zhou” 昔者，周公誅管叔，放蔡叔，以安周。<sup>3</sup> Under Emperor Wu, Sima Qian collected a range of scattered materials and composed a systematic narrative of the duke’s story in “Hereditary Houses of Duke of Zhou in Lu” (*Lu Zhougong shijia* 魯周公世家) in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*.

Was Emperor Wu really inspired to entrust his youngest son to Huo Guang by the story of the Duke of Zhou, as



Ban Gu said? Or did Huo Guang create this whole scenario to legitimate his own position as regent? Huo Guang's sudden rise tempted many to entertain doubts. Because of the scarcity of historical materials, we will never be absolutely certain of the historical truth. But what is clear is that this seems to be the first time in history that the relationship between The Duke of Zhou and King Cheng was looked at purely in terms of politics, as a historical precedent for persuading the public to accept a political discontinuity.<sup>4</sup>

This propaganda was widely accepted by Huo's contemporaries. Even in criticizing the powerful

minister, officials accepted the analogy. When Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之, a *ru* scholar, was humiliatingly frisked by Huo's bodyguards before a meeting, he angrily complained that such treatment of literati was a violation of the standards established by the duke.<sup>5</sup> When Emperor Zhao died without an heir, Huo Guang planned to enthrone Liu He, king of Changyi. Wang Ji 王吉, who was serving as Commandant-in-ordinary (*Zhongwei* 中尉) in Changyi, submitted a memorial to advise the king. He juxtaposed Huo Guang with the Duke of Zhou and suggested that Liu He subordinate himself completely to Huo.<sup>6</sup> When writing the eulogy he devoted to

Emperor Zhao one hundred years later, Ban Gu placed Huo and the Duke of Zhou on a par.<sup>7</sup>

During the Western Han dynasty there were four occasions when the regent monopolized power, manipulating the emperor like a puppet. Before Huo Guang, Empress Dowager Lü 呂, the wife of Emperor Gaozu and the mother of Emperor Hui 惠帝, dominated the court and enthroned two infant emperors to secure her position after Hui died. Empress Dowager Lü ruled for about sixteen years, managing to place her maternal relatives in high civil and military office to consolidate her interests. However, neither she nor her

brothers ever appealed to the story of the Duke of Zhou to legitimate their positions, and Emperor Dowager Lü became a notorious woman in history, whose abuse of power always served as a warning for the imperial house.<sup>8</sup>

Huo Guang was cleverer than his predecessor. Comparing himself with the Duke of Zhou was such a successful propaganda that not only prevented audiences from associating Huo's manipulation of power with the disreputable regent Empress Dowager Lü in Han history but transformed Huo's era into a historical continuum of the Zhou dynasty, a splendid age in the nostalgic memory of the educated men.

After Huo Guang, Wang Feng 王鳳 and Wang Mang 王莽 acted as regents during the reigns respectively of Emperor Cheng 成帝 and Emperor Ai 哀帝.<sup>9</sup> It probably is not a coincidence that both regents identified themselves with the Duke of Zhou, as Huo Guang had. Indeed, Huo Guang created a historical precedent for later ambitious usurpers—such as Cao Cao 曹操 and Sima Zhao 司馬昭 in the Six Dynasties, and Emperor Yongle 永樂 of the Ming dynasty—to use the duke's regency as a legitimate excuse for coup d'état or usurpation of power.<sup>10</sup>

Huo did not hesitate to cite historical anecdotes drawn from *ru* classics to validate his rather heavy-

handed rule.<sup>11</sup> Before Liu He was enthroned in 74 BCE, there had been a long debate. Most court officials favored the only surviving son of Emperor Wu: Liu Xu, the king of Guangling. Huo Guang justified his choice of Liu He by showing officials a memorial submitted by a Gentleman-attendant, which reads,

King Tai of Zhou abandoned Taibo and enthroned Wang Ji; King Wen put aside Bo Yikao and enthroned King Wu. It depends on who is appropriate, and therefore it is permissible to abandon the

elder in favor of the younger. The king of Guangling cannot offer sacrifices in the ancestral shrine of the imperial family.

周太王廢太伯立王季，文王舍伯邑考立武王，唯在所宜，雖廢長立少可也。廣陵王不可以承宗廟。<sup>12</sup>

Stories of Taibo and Bo Yikao were well known in *ru* circles. Confucius had once mentioned Taibo, praising him for yielding the throne to his younger brother. In *Book of Rites (Liji 禮記)*, Bozi 伯子, a noble active in the state of Lu during the Spring and

Autumn period, justified a succession dispute by citing the story of King Wen choosing Wu instead of his oldest son as heir.<sup>13</sup> If primogeniture had not been rigorously followed by ancient kings, then Huo Guang was entitled to choose whoever he liked.

After Liu He had occupied the throne for twenty-seven days, Huo decided to depose him. Immediately he set about determining whether there was a historical precedent. His intimate subordinate Tian Yannian told him, "When Yi Yin assisted the Shang dynasty, he deposed King Taijia in order to appease the spirits in ancestral shrines. Posterity praised Yi Yin as a loyal minister. If you can follow suit,



you will be the Yi Yin of the Han dynasty” 伊尹相殷, 廢太甲 以安宗廟, 後世稱其忠. 將軍若能行此, 亦漢之伊尹也.<sup>14</sup> This comparison enabled Huo to set aside his vacillations: promptly he and General Zhang Anshi began to plot the impeachment.

Then something happened. The newly enthroned emperor Liu He was said to enjoy sojourns away from the palace. One day, Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝, a *ru* who served as a Counselor of the Palace, stood in the way of the emperor's carriage and, once it had come to a halt, admonished the ruler, saying, “It has been cloudy for a long time but it does not rain, [which indicates that] there are subordinates

engaging in intrigues against the superior. Your Majesty, where do you want to go?” 天久陰而不雨，臣下有謀上者，陛下出欲何之。 Enraged, the emperor had Xiaohou Sheng arrested.<sup>15</sup>

When he heard this news, Huo Guang concluded that someone had gotten wind of his plot. He blamed Zhang, but no evidence of the leak was ever found. He then summoned Xiahou Sheng. Upon being asked why he had spoken of intrigues, Xiahou replied, “In the commentary on the “Great Plan” chapter of the *Documents*, it says that when a lord fails to establish himself, his punishment is perennial cloudy weather. At the moment, subordinates are attacking the superior. As I was

averse to saying it straightforwardly, I said that subordinates had intrigues” 在洪範傳曰, “皇之不極, 厥罰常陰, 時則下人有伐上者”, 惡 察察言, 故云臣下有謀. Both Huo and Zhang are said to have been shocked by Xiahou's foresight, and thereafter they held *ru* scholars in high esteem.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting to observe that Xiahou Sheng was not punished for detecting and exposing Huo Guang's scheme. Instead he was promoted. Did his shrewdness really impress Huo and win his admiration? Although the story itself seems to convey that message to readers, a less obvious conclusion may be drawn.

While the excuse publicly given for

deposing Liu He was his licentious behavior, the more likely explanation was that the emperor trusted no one but former subordinates and so filled the upper ranks of the bureaucracy with officials from the kingdom he had previously ruled. The conflict between Huo's group and these new arrivals is well illustrated in our sources. For example, Zhang Chang 張敞, an Assistant to the Grand Coachman (*Taipu cheng* 太僕丞) who served under Du Yannian, one of Huo Guang's trusted friends, submitted a memorial to admonish the emperor, claiming that it was a serious mistake to overlook the officials who had promoted his case when the emperor was being chosen.<sup>17</sup>

Gong Sui 龔遂, Superintendent of the Imperial Household (*Langzhongling* 郎中令) of the Changyi kingdom, also warned Liu He not to employ the officials from Emperor Zhao's court, cautioning him that continuing to use his own cronies could only bring disaster.<sup>18</sup> After the impeachment of Liu He was announced by the Empress Dowager Shangguan 上官, who was the granddaughter of Huo Guang, the first thing Huo did was to execute virtually every official Liu He had brought with him from Changyi, more than two hundred people in total. When the latter were being killed in the marketplace, Ban Gu said, they shouted aloud, voicing their regrets at not

ridding themselves of Huo Guang much earlier.<sup>19</sup> Among Liu's subordinates, only Wang Ji 王吉, Gong Sui 龔遂, and Wang Shi 王式 were exempted from the death penalty, for they had once remonstrated with the emperor. But even they became convict laborers.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, Xiahou Sheng was not a member of Liu He's group but obtained his post under the regent. He was one of the men who signed the memorial calling for impeachment of the newly enthroned emperor. Because of this, he was ennobled as the Marquis of Guannei (*Guannei hou* 關內侯).

Piecing together these scraps of information, modern readers are

tempted to suspect that the story of Xiahou Sheng's remonstrance to the emperor might have been contrived by Huo Guang's group. This conjecture is supported by the fact that the emperor disregarded Xiahou Sheng's admonition and had Xiahou arrested was listed as one of the new emperor's misdemeanors in the memorial that requested his dethronement.

In this crucial memorial, the *ru* ethics was fully exploited. For the major crime that the emperor stood accused of was being unfilial to his ancestors, namely the previous emperors.

But did the emperor not have direct biological relationship to his

predecessor, Emperor Zhao? No, but the Gongyang tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (hereafter, *Annals*) says that “those who serve as successors should act as the sons of their predecessors” 為人後者為之子也, therefore Liu He was regarded as a descendant of Emperor Zhao.<sup>21</sup> Rather than exhibit any sadness about the death of his ritual father, he had eaten meat during the mourning period, which violated the strict *ru* code. The memorial proceeded to accuse him of leading an extravagant life and engaging in incest. Before offering sacrifices to the shrines of the previous emperors, continued the indictment, Liu He sent missionaries to offer his



actual father a great sacrifice of ox, sheep, and pigs (*san tailao* 三太牢) at the shrine of King Ai of Changyi 昌邑哀王. His behavior, the memorial said, “violates proper imperial rituals and etiquette, upsetting the established system and customs of the Han dynasty” 失帝王禮誼, 亂漢制度.<sup>22</sup>

How were the officials to treat this immoral emperor? The memorial proceeded to present the historical precedents and ritual basis for removing him from power. This was, it explained, the result of conferences among the officials, represented by Yang Chang, and various Erudites. All had agreed that the emperor was old enough to answer for his own conduct

and obligations. Confirming that “among the five crimes nothing is more serious than being unfilial” 五辟之屬，莫大不孝， they cited the story of King Xiang of Zhou 周 襄王. The *Annals* records that he was exiled (*chu* 出) to Zheng 鄭, and *The Gongyang Commentary* explained that the word “exile” expressed the sage’s criticism of King Xiang, for he did not serve his mother with filial piety. The memorial accepted the commentary at face value, saying that unfilial behavior precipitated the exile of King Xiang. The Western Han officials suggested that Liu He ought to suffer the same fate. They invoked ritual regulations, pointing out that since the putative

emperor had not yet received the mandate in the shrine of Emperor Gaozu, he might be deposed.

Huo Guang's success in this enterprise was, of course, due primarily to the military and political power he monopolized. But by wielding such naked power, willfully enthroning and dethroning an emperor, he had already aroused discontent in the court. When he had first broached the subject of deposing the emperor, the prominent officials had been too shocked and fearful to respond. Not until Tian Yannian threatened them, offering to behead anyone who hesitated to agree with Huo Guang's proposal, did the officials assent. Under such

circumstances, invoking the discourse of filial piety may have helped build support.

The regent had clearly realized that *ru* ideas could be employed as powerful weapons in politics. In 82 BCE a man dressed in yellow arrived at the East Palace in a carriage drawn by a yellow calf; he claimed to be the former crown prince, Liu Ju. The Gate Traffic Control Office (*Gongche* 公車) summoned marquises, prominent officials, and generals to identify this stranger. The General of the Right saw fit to muster troops under the palace watchtowers. The Chancellor, the Grandee Secretary, and all of the other high officials who had arrived on the

scene dared say nothing. When Jun Buyi, the Governor of the Capital, arrived he barked out an order: his clerks were to arrest this impostor. Some objected that it was not yet clear whether this man was the real prince or not, and they counseled prudence. Jun Buyi replied, "Why do you gentlemen fear the former prince? In ancient times, Kuaikui 蒯瞶, the crown prince of Wei, offended Duke Ling of Wei (Wei Linggong 衛靈公) and fled to Jin 晉; when Kuaikui tried to return to Jin after the death of Duke Ling, Zhe 輒, who had succeeded to the throne, refused to welcome him back. The *Annals* approves Zhe's actions. The former crown prince offended Emperor

Wu; he fled and in all likelihood he did not die. Today, though he has visited the palace in person, he is still a criminal.”<sup>23</sup>

When Huo Guang and Emperor Zhao heard how Jun had resolved this tough problem, they praised him: “The dukes and officials should employ the techniques of classics (*jingshu* 經術) and understand the fundamental rules.” Thereafter, Ban Gu told us, Jun Buyi enjoyed a great reputation in the court: men in the loftiest positions all viewed him as beyond compare.<sup>24</sup>

Huo Guang is also said to have asked Xiahou Sheng to teach the *Documents* to Empress Dowager Shangguan, since he held that she

ought to know the techniques of classics (*jingshu*) if she was to preside over the court.<sup>25</sup>

Drawing on historical anecdotes preserved in *ru* classics to render judicial verdicts or support arguments presented in memorials both had precedents. Dong Zhongshu and Zhong Jun, living under Emperor Wu, were said to be famous for the former. However, Huo Guang used *ru* discourse as the primary rationale in solving succession disputes. The frequent visits of the precedents of Zhou history make Huo's monopoly of power transcend both the temporal political struggles and the history of Han dynasty, but become a political continuum of an

idealized past. Huo, therefore, was transformed from an upstart to an heir to Zhou culture and an implementer of Confucius' teachings. The marriage between *ru* learning and these momentous political events are merely the beginning of a new era. Huo Guang would soon use the *ru* and *ru* doctrines to legitimate the enthronement of a man with ambiguous imperial origin.

## TECHNIQUES OF THE CLASSICS (*JINGSU* 經術 經術) AND LEGITIMACY OF THE THRONE

Before they had officially announced the end of Liu He's reign, Huo Guang and his clique had already completed their plans to enthrone Liu Bingyi, later



known as Emperor Xuan.<sup>26</sup> But who was Liu Bingyi? How could the regent convince the public that this nominee could appease the spirits in the ancestral shrine and rule the country properly?

Liu Bingyi was the grandson of Liu Ju, Emperor Wu's former heir apparent. As an orphan who was raised up and protected by Huo Guang's subordinates, he always showed himself beholden to his benefactors. Only several months old when his grandfather became embroiled in the witchcraft scandal, this infant was actually jailed, a fate only slightly preferable to that of every adult in his family. It is said that Bing Ji 郢吉,

serving as the Inspector of Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei jian* 廷尉監) and therefore responsible for the prison where Bingyi was held, took pity on the child and chose two female prisoners to take care of him.

Then a dramatic event occurred. Ban Gu told us that in 87 BCE the officials charged with observing the *qi* 氣 (vital powers) of the cosmos announced that they had detected the *qi* of the Son of Heaven in one of the capital's prisons. Emperor Wu sent messengers to various jails with orders to execute every prisoner, no matter their crime. One of the messengers, a man named Guo Rang 郭穰, arrived at the prison supervised by Bing Ji, only

to find the gate shut against him. Bing refused to let him in, saying, "The great-grandson of Emperor Wu is here. It is not permissible to execute common people who are innocent, let alone one's own great-grandson." Failed in his attempt to enter the prison, Guo returned to the palace, where he gave his report to the emperor and formally impeached Bing Ji. Quite surprisingly, at that moment Emperor Wu suddenly came to his senses, realized that the events must have been orchestrated by Heaven, and granted a general amnesty.<sup>27</sup> The central tropes of the story are the miraculous survival of a child with a special destiny and the appearance of an official whose loyalty

to the dynastic house (and to a certain morality) superseded his loyalty to his ruler.

Released from prison, this baby was entrusted to the family of an imperial concubine surnamed Shi (*Shi Liangdi* 史良娣): she was the baby's grandmother.<sup>28</sup> Later the child was transferred to the Palace Discipline Service (*Yeting* 掖庭), and his name was formally registered in the imperial clan's genealogy.<sup>29</sup>

Five passages in *The History of Western Han* mention the future emperor's tribulations. While the outlines of these narratives are quite similar, some crucial details varied. Bing Ji's proper biography notes that

Emperor Wu requested in a valedictory decree that the child be placed in the care of the Palace Discipline Service.<sup>30</sup>

By contrast, the biography of Huo Guang preserves the memorial in which Huo and the prominent officials proposed to enthrone Liu Bingyi. It indicates that the decree determining who would raise the boy was issued during Emperor Wu's rule.<sup>31</sup> This same memorial was also quoted in the "Basic Annals of Emperor Xuan." Interestingly, although that version is almost identical to the one in the biography of Huo Guang, the phrase "during Emperor Wu's rule" (*Wudi shi* 武帝時) was omitted; it simply says, a bit ambiguously, that there was a

decree ordering the Palace Discipline Service to raise Liu Bingyi. When did Emperor Wu notice this baby and decide to acknowledge his royal status, while he was alert and lucid or on his deathbed? Obviously, these records do not agree with each other. Liu Bingyi was in prison for five years. *The History of Western Han* says after the young boy was released from prison, he had no place to turn. Bing Ji first tried to send Liu Bingyi to the Governor of the Capital, but officials there refused to accept him. Eventually Bing sent him to his grandmother's brother's home, where he was cared for by his aged great-grandmother.<sup>32</sup> This indicates that for a long time Emperor

Wu ignored his great-grandson's fate. Did he suddenly recall this orphan in the last minutes of his life? Or did Huo Guang and his clique call all the shots? It was probably not a coincidence that Bing Ji, the man who saved the life of this future emperor, was an ally of Huo Guang. Whether the royal status of Liu Bingyi was recognized by Emperor Wu or by Huo Guang would have impinged on his legitimacy as a potential heir to the throne. On this important question there are contradictory records, inviting readers to suspect that the record had been deliberately altered.

Zhang He 張賀, who took care of Liu Bingyi in the Palace Discipline Service, was the brother of Zhang

Anshi, another rock-solid ally of Huo Guang. Zhang He had long been an intimate friend of the former crown prince, Liu Ju. When the latter was involved in the witchcraft affair, almost all of his subordinates were executed. Zhang Anshi submitted a memorial imploring Emperor Wu to be lenient in his brother's case. Zhang He escaped death but was castrated. Later he was appointed Director of the Palace Discipline Service (*Yeting ling* 掖庭令). It is said that when Liu Bingyi was a youth, Zhang He looked out for him, and when he grew up Zhang educated him. Zhang once even wanted to marry his own daughter to his protégé but was prevented by Zhang Anshi.



Nevertheless, he did find the boy a wife, who later became Empress Xu 許皇后.

Allowing the child to live in the Palace Discipline Service effectively acknowledged his royal blood. But few other privileges were extended to him. Instead Liu Bingyi was raised up as a commoner—after all, his grandfather was a criminal who had rebelled against the emperor.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the Bailiff of the Privy Treasurer (*Shaonei sefu* 少內嗇夫) complained to Bing Ji that there was no decree ordering him to feed Liu Bingyi. It fell to Bing to provide the necessary food.<sup>34</sup> And it was Zhang He who provided the money to school Liu Bingyi in the *ru* classics

and to secure him a wife.

After Emperor Zhao died without an heir, four branches of Emperor Wu's house were still flourishing. The first was represented by Liu He, the son of Liu Bo and the grandson of Emperor Wu and Lady Li. As noted earlier, he was enthroned and dethroned within a month by Huo Guang. The second was led by Liu Xu, the only surviving son of Emperor Wu. Liu Xu's line appeared to be the most promising. He had acted as the king of Guangling from 117 BCE and had several adult sons. The third consisted of descendants of Liu Dan, who was the son of Emperor Wu and Li Ji 李姬. Liu Dan had organized a revolt against Huo Guang and had been forced

to commit suicide; all of his sons were demoted to commoner status. The fourth line was wholly represented by Liu Bingyi. In terms of blood ties, Liu Bingyi had the most distant relationship with Emperor Wu. In terms of social status, Liu Bingyi had never established the sort of connection to the throne that his granduncle and uncles had. Huo Guang needed compelling reasons to justify placing this young man on the throne.

While he could not change the conventional order of succession, the regent's monopoly on political power granted him the authority to rate the worthiness of the various contenders. But what was the standard Huo pointed

to? Knowledge of the *ru* classics. Bing Ji was the first to speak openly of enthroning Liu Bingyi. He praised Liu Bingyi before Huo Guang, saying “[Liu] penetrates the techniques of the classics, possesses brilliant talent; he behaves peacefully and his morality is harmonious” 通經術，有美材，行安而節和. The memorial formally proposing this momentous step reads,

The *Record of Rites* says, “The way of human beings is to love one’s relatives. Hence people honor the founder of the house.” When the chief lineage has no heirs, its

members select a worthy person as heir from the collateral branches. By imperial decree, Bingyi, the great-grandson of Emperor Xiaowu, was to be reared in the Palace Discipline Service. At present he is eighteen years old. He has received the teachings of the *Book of Songs*, the *Analects*, and *The Classic of Filial Piety* from a master. He has been moderate and thrifty in his conduct; he is kind and benevolent, and he loves others. Therefore he is capable of succeeding

Emperor Xiaozhao, of  
worshiping and serving the  
ancestors of the imperial  
house, and of treating the ten  
thousand families as his  
offspring.

禮曰：“人道親親故尊祖，尊  
祖故敬宗。” 太宗毋嗣，擇支  
子孫賢者為嗣。孝武皇帝 曾  
孫病已，有詔掖庭養視，至  
今年十八，師受詩、論語、  
孝經，操行節儉，慈仁 愛人，可  
以嗣孝昭皇帝後，奉承祖  
宗，子萬姓。<sup>35</sup>

Selecting “the worthy” (*xian* 賢) was a  
phrase frequently used in Han imperial

decrees that dealt with the recruitment of officials; here it was applied to something quite different, imperial succession. More significant for our purposes, this was the first imperial decree to equate legitimacy of an emperor with knowledge of *ru* classics. This rhetoric reminds us the sage-king model advocated by *ru*: as the worthiest shall be the king, the ambiguous imperial origin of Liu Bingyi became insignificant.<sup>36</sup> The principle of meritocracy helps to suppress the dissonant voices against Huo Guang's manipulation of the throne. Furthermore, it makes Emperor Xuan's inauguration triumph over the hereditary succession in both Qin and

Han courts, becoming a beginning of new era.<sup>37</sup> Behind the skillful exercise of the *ru* discourse were the *ru* officials, who, as a new and competitive political force, emerged on the center of political stage precisely during the time when the commoner, Liu Bingyi, became Emperor Xuan.

### RU OFFICIALS UNDER HUO GUANG AND EMPEROR XUAN

The *ru* who helped bang the drum for Huo Guang during the imperial transition were rewarded. Counselor of the Palace (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫) Song Ji and Erudite (*Boshi* 博士) Hou Cang 后倉, who signed the memorial requesting the deposal of Liu He, were



directly granted positions among the Nine Ministers, while Xiahou Sheng was ennobled. After Emperor Xuan was enthroned, two *ru* were appointed Chancellors. The new prominence of *ru* officials was due not only to their contributions to a new political discourse of especial value to Huo Guang, but to their ability to placate Huo's critics.

The regent had long been criticized for promoting only his supporters. In the 80s BCE his enemies submitted a memorial pointing out that while Su Wu 蘇武, in spite of heroic stoicism during twenty years as a hostage of the Xiongnu, was awarded the middling post of Supervisor of Dependent

Countries (*Dianshu guo* 典屬國), Huo's subordinate Yang Chang, a man without any accomplishments to point to, was named Commandant of Collection of Grains (*Sousu duwei* 搜粟都尉).<sup>38</sup> Ren Xuan 任宣, who had been the regent's son's Chief Clerk (*Zhangshi* 長史), declared that Huo had absolute sway over the life and death of Han officials. Several eminent officials were thrown into prison or condemned to death because they irritated Huo, while Pian Lecheng served as one of the Nine Ministers and was ennobled merely because he was Huo's favorite.<sup>39</sup>

To repair his reputation, Huo selected Cai Yi and Wei Xian, two *ru*

scholars, for prominent positions. Cai had acted as Captain in command of the Fuyang Gate for quite a long time. Not until Emperor Zhao announced a search for men familiar with the Han tradition of interpretation of the *Book of Songs* (*Hanshi* 韓詩) was Cai promoted to serve as Counselor of the Palace, tutoring the emperor. He was placed at the center of the Han political stage when he was in his seventies, and he was appointed Privy Treasurer in 78 BCE. Three years later he advanced to the position of Grandee Secretary and became Chancellor in 74 BCE when Yang Chang, a close associate of Huo Guang, died in that position. At the time, Cai was already in his eighties

and so feeble that he needed two men to support him when walking.

The meteoric rise of one old man could not quench the antipathy to the regent's methods. Some declared that he only promoted men he could manipulate. Huo defended his position, saying, "I think that he who served as the emperor's teacher should be Chancellor. Why is there such grumbling?" 以為人主師當為宰相，何謂云云？<sup>40</sup> The scholarship of *ru* focused on the way of the former sage kings, which they viewed as the ultimate principles for ruling a country. This knowledge could become a veil, concealing the weakness of an effete old man unfit to make important

decisions.

Wei Xian, who became Chancellor after Cai Yi died, had a similar career pattern. As a prominent *ru* in the Zou-Lu 鄒魯 area, Wei was selected to serve as an Erudite, educating Emperor Zhao about the *Book of Songs* (hereafter, *Songs*). In 76 BCE, he ascended to the position of Grand Herald in his late sixties. In 71 BCE he became Chancellor. Some said that despite five years as the leading bureaucrat of the land, Xian knew nothing of administrative affairs.<sup>41</sup>

Although Wei Xian probably never exercised real power in the court, the high position he achieved helped his descendants enter the bureaucracy.

Around thirty years after his term as Chancellor, his son Wei Xuancheng assumed the same office under Emperor Yuan. Whereas both men's success depended on complicated, sometimes even contingent, political factors, Ban Gu told us that their accomplishments gave rise to a legend in their hometown: people there attributed their brilliant careers solely to their knowledge of *ru* classics, saying, "Leaving your son a whole basket of gold is not as good as leaving your son a single classic" 遺子黃金滿簏, 不如一經.

Since Confucius in the 5th century B C E , *ru* industriously promoted themselves as the ideal candidates for

official position. Mencius contended that Confucius knew the affairs of the Son of Heaven, and announced himself as a potential creator of a new empire. Xunzi argued that if a small state employed petty *ru*, it can survive in a dangerous situation; if a medium size state employed the great *ru*, it can unify the whole world. *Ru*'s confident self-image and ceaseless self-promotion made them the best candidates Huo Guang would use to mend his reputation.

*Ru* officials not only served as window-dressing for Huo Guang's dictatorship, they also rose to the upper reaches of bureaucracy as competent administrators under Emperor Xuan.

After Liu Bingyi became Emperor Xuan in 74 BCE, Huo Guang made a pretense of surrendering to him all of his own accumulated power. Drawing on the lesson of Liu He, Emperor Xuan not only entrusted all political affairs to Huo, he increased the size of Huo's fiefs and ennobled his cronies.<sup>42</sup> Not until Huo Guang died in 68 BCE did Emperor Xuan take up the reins of power. Counting from this moment to the death of Xuan, we know that around forty-one people advanced to prominent positions—twenty-five of them can be identified. While eight of the twenty-five were imperial kin or the descendants of high officials, seventeen, 68 percent, came from



rather obscure circumstances. Members of the latter group generally shared three distinctive characteristics: first, they had played a part in Emperor Xuan's rise to power; second, they belonged to complicated social networks that included other eminent officials; third, they were distinguished by their administrative accomplishments.

Liu Bingyi's protector and patron, Bing Ji, was destined to become one of the core members of Emperor Xuan's cabinet. Zhang Chang and Yu Dingguo 于定國 submitted memorials to admonish Liu He, guaranteeing themselves exceptional promotions.<sup>43</sup> After Huo Guang died, Wei Xiang 魏

相, Zhang Chang, and Xiao Wangzhi all submitted memorials attacking his monopolization of power and urging the emperor to govern the country without leaning on Huo family.<sup>44</sup>

These men had long cultivated rewarding relationships with high officials themselves. Wei Xiang was a good friend of Bing Ji. When the former served as Regional Inspector of Yangzhou (*Yangzhou cishi* 揚州刺史), Bing wrote him a letter in which he declared, "The court is already aware of your administrative abilities and will promote you to an important position soon. Please be a little prudent when managing affairs and conduct yourself with dignity, [so as to]

preserve your talent” 朝廷已深知弱翁治行，方且大用矣。願少慎事自重，臧器于身。<sup>45</sup>

Xiahou Sheng and Song Yi, who were rewarded with high positions after helping depose Liu He, recommended Huang Ba 黃霸, who later became the fourth Chancellor under Emperor Xuan. Bing Ji recommended Xiao Wangzhi to the regent Huo Guang. Xiao Wangzhi once was the subordinate of Wei Xiang who served as Grandee Secretary, and the latter recommended Xiao for the post of Assistant for Ceremonies in the Messenger Office (*Daxing zhili cheng* 大行治禮丞).<sup>46</sup> Both Zhang Chang and Yin Wengui 尹翁歸 obtained

endorsements from Huo's clique early in their careers.<sup>47</sup>

When serving as Minister of Miudong (*Miudong Xiang* 繆東相), Zhang Chang wrote to Zhu Yi 朱邑, then Grand Minister of Agriculture, contending that those who went on to achieve great things usually got their start from other's recommendations. He hoped that Zhu, who occupied an important position, would recommend talented people to the throne. Zhu Yi is said to have found his friend's argument convincing: many of the men who joined the central court had risen through his recommendation.<sup>48</sup>

Although networking definitely helped these men ascend to high posts,

their excellent administrative accomplishments were also crucial. Ban Gu tells us that Emperor Xuan was highly motivated by his recollections of the hardships he had faced early in life and kept himself busy with administrative affairs. During his reign officials generally earned promotions to the extent that they fulfilled their duties. When middle-level officials distinguished themselves, the emperor sent them letters to encourage them, increased their salaries, granted them gold, and even ennobled them. Whenever a vacancy opened up among the Nine Ministers or the Three Dukes, the emperor made a point of promoting a worthy, honorable, hard-working

official to fill it.<sup>49</sup>

This characterization is borne out by the evidence. About ten of the officials who achieved prominence under Emperor Xuan had considerable experience governing local regions: they had risen gradually through the bureaucracy thanks to their administrative accomplishments.<sup>50</sup> Zhu Yi 朱邑, Wei Xiang, Yin Wengui, Chen Wannian 陳萬年, and Zhang Chang all ascended from the bottom. Zhu started his career as the Bailiff of Tong Village (*Tongxiang sefu* 桐鄉嗇夫); Yin had been a clerk in charge of a marketplace (*Shili* 市吏); the remaining three all started out as clerks in commandery governments.

Beneficiaries of the recommendation system, they were promoted to serve as magistrates or assistants to the Nine Ministers. Later, after serving as Governors of various commanderies, they assumed prominent positions in the court.<sup>51</sup> For instance, Zhu was Governor of Beihai when he was promoted to Grand Minister of Agriculture; Huang Ba was Governor of Yingchuan 潁川 when he was appointed Governor of the Capital—both were highly valued for their achievements.<sup>52</sup> Also admired for their managerial skill, Yi Wenggui and Chen Wannian took office as Western Sustainer of the Capital one after the other in 65 and 61 BCE.<sup>53</sup>

The commandery of Bohai 渤海 suffered famine for years, provoking an outbreak of banditry the governor could not suppress. Looking for a capable official, Emperor Xuan chose Gong Sui, who had narrowly escaped execution when Liu He was deposed. After Gong put Bohai in order, Emperor Xuan made him Superintendent of Waterways and Parks (*Shuiheng duwei* 水衡都尉).

Emphasis on officials' administrative ability was a defining characteristic, distinguishing Emperor Xuan's reign from others of the Western Han. When appointing Regional Inspectors, Governors of commanderies, and Ministers of vassal



kingdoms, Emperor Xuan always interviewed the candidates in person, intent on finding out what these men hoped to achieve. After they assumed office, the emperor monitored their performance, checking it against their previous statements.<sup>54</sup> Emperor Xuan was famous for a policy he clearly articulated:

What ensures that the commoners can peacefully work their fields without anxieties and resentment is fair administration and reasonable legal procedures. Men who share these

responsibilities with me are fine officials ranked at two thousand bushels.

庶民所以安其田里而亡歎息  
愁恨之心者，政平訟理也。  
與我共此者，其唯良二千  
石乎！ <sup>55</sup>

It is said that Emperor Xuan viewed Xiao Wangzhi's knowledge of the *ru* classics and his talent in argumentation as qualifications for becoming Chancellor; yet he still wanted to test Xiao's ability in administration. So Xiao, who was serving as the Privy Treasurer, became the Western Sustainer of the Capital. Xiao regarded

this as a demotion and offered to resign. To reassure him, the emperor sent Jin Anshang 金安上, Marquis of Chengdu 成都, to him with a message, explaining that “those the emperor employed [as eminent officials] all had experience administering local regions—that was how they proved their ability. Since you acted as Governor of Pingyuan 平原 for only a short time, the emperor wanted to test your administrative ability once again—that is why he put you in charge of the capital area. The emperor has not heard anything bad about you.”<sup>56</sup>

As part of his campaign to cultivate practical administrative skills, Emperor Xuan insisted on generously

rewarding his subordinates. In 59 BCE he issued a decree increasing the salary of lower-level clerks:

If the officials are not upright and just, then government falters. At present, clerks are all industrious in their work yet their salaries are low. [Given the situation], although I don't want them to place demands on the people, it is difficult [for them to resist]. Let the salaries of the officials ranked one hundred bushels or below be increased by one hundred and fifty

percent.

吏不廉平則治道衰．今小吏  
皆勤事，而奉祿薄，欲其毋  
侵漁百姓，難矣．其益 吏  
百石以下奉十五.<sup>57</sup>

This appears to be the only decree issued during the Western Han dynasty that addresses the living conditions of lower-level officials. Another unique event in the Western Han was the conferral of noble status on Wang Cheng 王成 and Huang Ba as a reward for their administrative accomplishments in local regions. The emperor cared about industrious

officials, and this impression was reinforced when we observe how Emperor Xuan treated the families of Yin Wenggui and Zhu Yi. Yin had served as Western Sustainer of the Capital, and Zhu as Grand Minister of Agriculture. After their deaths, the sons of these worthy officials received one hundred *jīn* (around 25 kg) of gold so that they might offer sacrifices to their ancestors.

Because he prized administrative ability, Emperor Xuan has been presented as one quick to hire clerk-officials (*wenfali* 文法吏, literal translation is “clerks adept in administrative paperwork and legal affairs”) and loath to hire experts in the

*ru* Classics. Of the twenty-five eminent officials promoted by Emperor Xuan, ten of them (including four chancellors) started their careers as clerks. They advanced to the top of the bureaucracy via seniority and administrative merit measured by technical knowledge of fiscal and legal matters. Whereas those officials can be easily identified as clerk-officials, among them were three *ru* scholars who were famous for using techniques of *ru* to embellish their execution of public affairs. The double identities of those officials indicate that there was no clear-cut boundary between clerk-officials and *ru*, a point that can be further validated from another

perspective. Among the eight *ru* officials advanced by Emperor Xuan, five followed the career patterns of clerk-officials and were promoted mainly because of their administrative abilities. The remaining seventeen officials had no training in *ru* classics before entering the official sphere, yet four of them started to study *ru* teachings at different stages of their careers. Three of those four, according to our traditional view, were typical clerk-officials ([tables 4.1](#) and [4.5](#)).

In short, under Huo Guang and Emperor Xuan *ru* first emerged as either political opportunists or competent administrators. While *ru*'s self-image helped to preserve the



façade of meritocracy under Huo Guang's dictatorship, *ru* also proved themselves by their administrative abilities. But as soon as they occupied important positions, they began to spread their philosophy and managed to give fellow *ru* scholars advantages.

## MORAL COSMOLOGY AND EMPEROR XUAN

*Ru's* views on correlative cosmology presented Emperor Xuan with opportunities to both justify his legitimacy and reinforce his sovereignty. In the first month of the third year of Yuanfeng 元鳳 (i.e., in 78 BCE), on the south side of Laiwushan 萊蕪山, a series of supernatural events

were observed. A noise rose up, something like the mingled voices of thousands of people, and a giant stone whose circumference could barely be enclosed by forty-eight linking hands shot from the mountainside. Then thousands of white birds converged besides the fallen rock. At that moment, in the Kingdom of Changyi, a dead tree that had long stood near a shrine put out leaves, and in Shanglin Park a big willow let fall a dead branch, which sent out roots as soon as it hit the ground. Some of its leaves were eaten by worms, tracing the words "Gongsun Bingyi will be established" 公孫病已立. A *ru* called Sui Hong 眭弘 held that, based on the *Annals*, all

these extraordinary phenomena indicated that some commoner would become the Son of Heaven. He therefore submitted a memorial, requesting Emperor Zhao to take his lead from the signs and yield the throne to one more worthy. An enraged Huo Guang responded to Sui Hong's memorial by having him executed.

The omens were variously interpreted. Sui believed that someone from the Gongsun family would become emperor. Interestingly, Emperor Xuan seems to have thought that the omens described his career, since his personal name was Bingyi and, as the grandson of the former heir apparent ("Gongsun" in the omen can

also be read as the grandson of a duke), he had arisen from humble circumstances.

Known as Apocryphal (*Chen wei* 讖緯), this practice—relying on unusual natural events to tell the future—became all the rage fifty years later, when Wang Mang usurped the Western Han throne and Emperor Guangwu 光武 established the Eastern Han dynasty. And Emperor Xuan was among the first to embrace the new device.<sup>58</sup>

Emperor Xuan not only needed to carefully defend his legitimacy as emperor but also had to reclaim power from Huo Guang, the powerful man who enthroned him. *Ru*'s correlative cosmology helped to justify this

political struggle by turning to a cosmic plan. In a memorial criticizing the Huo family, Zhang Chang, who was Governor of Shanyang 山陽, applied his expert knowledge of the *Annals*. After citing a number of anecdotes from the age of Confucius, he suggested that there could be no doubt that if a family held too much power for a long time, it would become a threat to the ruler. Zhang said that when Confucius composed the *Annals* he subjected to mockery those families that had occupied important positions for generations (*shiqing* 世卿). Then Zhang introduced the main point of his memorial, arguing that although Huo Guang helped to stabilize the Han court

and contributed to enthroning Emperor Xuan, he had monopolized power for twenty years. When Huo Guang's power reached its zenith, Zhang contended, heaven and the earth were affected, and *yin* and *yang* forces were upset. This precipitated various disasters and the appearance of bizarre and inauspicious phenomena. There was no choice but to deprive Huo's relatives of their noble status.

Huo had died some time before Zhang drew up his memorial, and the emperor was already beginning to weaken the power of the former regent's family. By appealing to the discourse of correlative cosmology, Zhang buttressed the emperor's plans

to cripple the family of his former benefactor while avoiding the pitfall of seeming self-interested.

It was hardly a coincidence that Xiao Wangzhi, an expert on the *Songs*, employed the same discourse when adding his voice to the assault on the Huo family. Members of the Huo family still occupied important positions in court after Huo Guang died. When a hailstorm swept through the capital in 66 BCE, Xiao saw an opportunity to offer a cosmological explanation. According to the *Annals*, in the third year of Duke Zhao 昭公 of Lu, the state suffered from snowstorms and hailstorms. This was during the time the Ji family monopolized

political power; soon after that they exiled Duke Zhao. Had the duke recognized the significance of the natural disaster, Xiao claimed, he would have been able to avoid his political demise. If Emperor Xuan ceaselessly labored to better the country without witnessing an auspicious portent, surely the meddling of the Huos in government had precipitated an imbalance between *yin* and *yang* forces. Henceforth the emperor would do best to rely exclusively on worthy officials. After Xiao Wangzhi submitted this memorial, the emperor immediately promoted him to Imperial Messenger.

Indeed, eminent officials under



Emperor Xuan actively promoted correlative cosmology in various occasions. Wei Xiang, an expert on the *Book of Changes* (hereafter, *Changes*), began his career as a clerk in a commandery. Rising quickly thanks to his managerial skills and his close ties to Bing Ji, Wei had a brilliant career under Emperor Xuan, acting as Grandee Secretary for four years and Chancellor for eight—he died in office. At the time Wei assumed the position of Chancellor, Emperor Xuan was just beginning to reclaim power from the Huo family and take on the empire's administrative affairs. Wei, cooperating with Bing Ji, supervised the government's various offices, and

his performance satisfied the emperor.<sup>59</sup>

During his time as a local official, Wei was famous for maintaining law and order; as Chancellor, he assisted an emperor famous for “drilling the officials, and checking the agreement between performance and [professional] title” 練群臣，核名實， practices identified as Legalist.<sup>60</sup> Still, Wei was a great advocate of *ru* learning.

Rummaging through the archive of the previous court, Wei dug out memorials presented by luminaries such as Jia Yi 賈誼, Chao Cuo 晁錯, and Dong Zhongshu. Jia Yi and Dong Zhongshu were prolific *ru* scholars and

Chao Cuo had studied the *ru* classics. Whereas Jia Yi had been a trusted aide of Emperor Wen and Chao Cuo assumed the position of Grand Secretary under Emperor Jing, neither lasted long. Sidelined by his fellow *ru* Gongsun Hong, Dong Zhongshu never held an eminent position. Evidently these three *ru* officials left no mark on the politics of the day but Wei nonetheless revived their proposals that had never been approved in previous courts, praising them as worthy officials and extolling their insights.<sup>61</sup>

Wei was one of the pioneers who advocated implementing *ru*'s correlative cosmological system into the state policies: he believed that

changes in the universe were closely associated with politics. The cosmos had its own fundamental patterns, which were based on *yin* and *yang* forces and embodied by the four seasons; an enlightened emperor would seek to understand the patterns of the cosmos and formulate his policies accordingly. When policies suited the patterns of the universe, there would be good weather, the people would enjoy bountiful harvests, and the state would be in harmony. If the policies violated the cosmic order, all would suffer. The basic duty of the emperor was to study the patterns of *yin* and *yang*. Wei proceeded to say that although nowadays the emperor endowed the

people with blessings, natural disasters regularly occurred; therefore some policies and decrees must have been at odds with the cosmic order. The solution was to select four men with a firm grasp of the *ru* classics who understood the movement of *yin* and *yang* forces—each would be in charge of affairs of state for one season.<sup>62</sup>

Regardless of their philosophical affiliations, all scholars could become competent bureaucrats if they served in the government for a certain amount of time. But *ru* were trained to use the theory of *yin* and *yang* to explain the connection between natural disasters, current politics, and historical precedents. When Wei Xiang managed

to convince the emperor that heavenly changes and mundane policy were connected, he did much to usher in an age when those who had received *ru* training could play a meaningful role in government.

When Wei Xiang acted as Chancellor, his subordinates often informed him of extraordinary phenomena that occurred in local regions they visited on matters of state. If any Governor failed to report bizarre weather or disasters, Wei promptly notified the emperor.<sup>63</sup>

Bing Ji succeeded Wei Xiang, acting as Chancellor from 59 to 55 BCE. An event that took place during his term in office became a famous

anecdote. When passing through a region where men battled in the streets and the slain lay heaped in gutters, Bing never had his driver stop. A bit later, when he came upon a farmer whose puffing and panting ox was so weary that his tongue hung out, Bing stopped and asked the man how long the beast had been on the road. This provoked merriment among the Chancellor's subordinates, who felt that their chief had failed to distinguish weighty matters from trivial. Bing replied:

When the people wound and murder one another, it is the

duty of the Magistrate of Chang'an and the Governor of the capital to demand them to stop or to make arrests. What the Chancellor does is to rank the officials' administrative achievements at the end of the year, report their performance to the emperor, and reward or punish them accordingly. The Chancellor does not manage small affairs in person and it is not appropriate for me to stop in the road and interrogate men who are fighting. [By contrast], spring has just arrived, which



Shaoyang is supposed to manage. It should not be hot yet. I suspect that the ox did not walk far, that it was breathing heavily because of the hot weather. This would indicate that the climate has deviated from its regular pattern and, I fear, will do harm [to the state]. The Three Dukes are supposed to mediate the *yin* and *yang* forces. It is my duty to be concerned with [those phenomena]. That is why I questioned him.

民相殺傷，長安令、京兆尹  
職所當禁備逐捕，歲竟丞相

課其殿最，奏行賞罰 民相  
殺傷，長安令、京兆尹職所  
當禁備逐捕，歲竟丞相課其  
殿最，奏行賞罰 而已．宰  
相不親小事，非所當於道路  
問也．方春少陽用事，未可  
大熱，恐牛近 行，用暑故  
喘，此時氣失節，恐有所傷  
害也．三公典調和陰陽，職  
當憂，是以問之．<sup>64</sup>

Bing Ji started his career as a  
Prison Clerk, only later taking up  
*Songs* and the *Record of Rituals*.  
Surprisingly, by the time he arrived at  
the top of the bureaucracy he was

described not as a shrewd prosecutor but as a sincere adherent of *ru* doctrines, which implies that these texts must have enjoyed a certain popularity among high-level officials under Emperor Xuan.

Emperor Xuan embraced *ru*'s discourse, as he issued five decrees in response to large-scale earthquakes, ferocious weather, and solar eclipses.<sup>65</sup> In accordance with the line taken by Wei Xiang, Zhang Chang, and Xiao Wangzhi, the assumption in those decrees was that these natural disasters had been triggered by governmental lapses, and the emperor called on eminent officials and commanderies to recommend worthy men who could

interpret the omens and provide solutions.<sup>66</sup> For instance, a decree dating 70 BCE stated:

In general, the calamities and prodigies were warnings sent by Heaven and Earth. I have inherited the grand enterprise, have perpetuated the sacrifices in the imperial ancestral shrines, and have been entrusted with a position above that of the gentlemen and commoners. But I have not yet been able to harmonize the various living things. Recently,

earthquakes occurred in Beihai and Langye commanderies, ruining the ancestral shrines. I am very worried. I command the Chancellor and the Grandee Secretary, together with the marquises and officials ranked at two thousand bushels, to question the experts on the [*ru*] classics so that we can respond to the emergency and correct my errors. You must not conceal anything from me. I order the capital region, the Grand Master of Ceremonies, and the inner commanderies and

kingdoms each to  
recommend one capable and  
upright person. If there are  
codes and ordinances that  
should be abolished in order  
to bring peace to the common  
people, please inform me.

蓋災異者,天地之戒也.朕承  
洪業,奉宗廟,託于士民之  
上,未能和群生.乃者地 震  
北海、琅邪,壞祖宗廟,朕  
甚懼焉.丞相、御史其與列  
侯、中二千石博問經學 之  
士,有以應變,輔朕之不  
逮,毋有所諱.令三輔、太  
常、內郡國舉賢良方正各

一人.律令有可蠲除以安百姓,條奏.<sup>67</sup>

In this decree, Emperor Xuan treated *ru* scholars as the authoritative consultants in times of catastrophe. Five years later, Emperor Xuan blamed himself for his ignorance of the *ru* classics: surely his failure to grasp the truth of the universe had left *yin* and *yang* out of joint. The decree reads:

I did not comprehend the six classics, and I am ignorant of the ultimate way [of the universe]. Therefore, the *yin*

a n d *yang* forces, and the winds and the rain have deviated from their regular pattern. I order [all officials ranked above full two thousand bushels] each to recommend two persons from among current officials and commoners who have cultivated and improved themselves, who have thoroughly absorbed the literature, and who comprehend the techniques of the former kings and understand their intentions. Officials whose rank is full two thousand bushels



(namely the Nine Ministers)  
are each to recommend one  
such person.

朕不明六藝，鬱于大道，是以陰陽風雨未時。其博舉吏民，厥身修正，通文學，明於先王之術，宣究其意者，各二人，中二千石各一人。<sup>68</sup>

The correlative thinking that took the natural world and the social world as an organic entity and saw natural phenomena as the universe's response to human affairs had a long tradition, dating back to the Warring States

period. The rare and scattered passages about Zou Yan 鄒衍, who was active in the late fourth century BCE, indicate that he combined the concepts of *yin* and *yang* with five phases theory to interpret dynastic change, an innovation that won him generous patronage from several states over the course of his lifetime.<sup>69</sup> Thanks to recently discovered manuscripts—for example, the *yin-yang* texts from Yinqueshan 銀雀山 and the astro-calendrical texts from Mawangdui 馬王堆—we now see clearly that it was common in the third and second century BCE to use *yin-yang* theory, sometimes together with five phases theory, to interpret omens, construct

medical theories, and compile almanacs.<sup>70</sup>

At the inception of the Han dynasty, Lu Jia 陸賈, a *ru* scholar, advanced a theory of moral cosmology, claiming that the natural changes, especially abnormal phenomena, were omens sent by Heaven and that the emperor, whose conduct directly influenced nature, should be responsible for the cosmic order.<sup>71</sup> In the first half of the second century BCE, Liu An 劉安, the grandson of Liu Bang and the uncle of Emperor Wu, sponsored the compilation of *Huainanzi* 淮南子. This book presents an elaborated theory regarding the relationship between cosmos and

human society, the basic vocabulary and framework of which are comparable to the message that Wei Xiang presented to Emperor Xuan. Neither Lu nor Liu saw his theories adopted by the imperial court.<sup>72</sup>

Dong Zhongshu, who once served as the Minister of Jiangdu (*Jiangdu xiang* 江都相) under Emperor Wu, was famous for “using the catastrophes and abnormal phenomena recorded in the *Annals* as precedents for understanding the cause of the irregular movement of the *yin* and *yang* forces” 以春秋災異之變推陰陽所以錯行.<sup>73</sup> Dong was presented as the founding father of *yin-yang* hermeneutics by Ban Gu, who cited his writings to explain various

disasters and unusual phenomena in “A Treatise on Five Phases” (*Wuxing zhi* 五行志) in *The History of Western Han*.<sup>74</sup>

However, this scholarly tradition did not win the open acknowledgment of the government until the time of Emperor Xuan. Turning to the available sources, Emperor Wen was the first ruler in the Western Han to address the connection between natural disasters and their implications for politics. In 178 BCE solar eclipses took place in two consecutive months. Emperor Wen issued a decree declaring this unusual phenomenon a warning sent by Heaven and requesting recommendations of worthy men who

had the courage to admonish the emperor.<sup>75</sup> Fifteen years later Emperor Wen issued another decree, this one about bad harvests, famine, drought, and plague. The emperor declared his puzzlement over these calamities, wondered whether his policies or his behavior might have triggered them, and requested advice from his officials.<sup>76</sup>

While in both decrees the emperor saw disasters as a barometer of political morality, this idea disappeared almost completely from imperial decrees after Wen. During the reigns of Jing, Wu, and Zhao, although earthquakes, famines, and solar eclipses were well documented, I have

found no decrees that specifically addressed those disasters, let alone connected them with current policies.

Emperor Wu once associated his own imperfect virtue (*de* 德) with disasters.<sup>77</sup> In another decree, Wu said that after he ascended to the throne, his virtue had not proved adequate to protect the people, who suffered from cold and hunger; he therefore declared that he would offer sacrifices to Houtu 后土 and pray for a bumper harvest.<sup>78</sup>

At first glance, Emperor Wu's statements seem comparable to the messages of Emperors Wen and Xuan. But while Emperor Wu emphasized the direct interaction between his personal virtue and the cosmic order—a familiar

concept known as “the mandate of Heaven,” Wen and Xuan emphasized the direct resonance between politics and the cosmos. Although they blamed themselves for a lack of virtue, Emperor Wen and Xuan emphasized inappropriate policies or transgressive actions as the primary causes of natural disasters. Therefore, when facing catastrophes, they did not offer sacrifices as Emperor Wu did: they begged humans for advice. This gesture provided their subordinates an opportunity to voice their opinions.

By contrast, Emperor Wu thought his personal virtue responsible for the cosmic order, and he grew angry when *ru* directly associated specific disasters



with current politics. Dong Zhongshu wrote the *Records of Disasters and Portents* (*Zai yi zhi ji* 災異之記) soon after a fire damaged the shrine to Emperor Gaozu in Liaodong 遼東. Instead of agreeing with Dong's explanation of disasters, Emperor Wu imagined he saw carping remarks in the essay and threw Dong into prison. Though he escaped execution by a hair's breadth, Dong elected not to talk about disasters and portents any more.<sup>79</sup>

It is since Emperor Xuan that the imperial acknowledgment of disasters became a powerful tradition, stretching for more than two hundred years to the end of the Eastern Han. Typically, after

a catastrophe, the emperor would deliver a decree, calling on eminent officials to discuss the flaws of the administrations and to recommend a few good men.<sup>80</sup> Emperor Xuan's reign witnesses a turning point for correlative cosmology to be fully established in the political world, a fact that can be further demonstrated by another two sets of data.

First is the use of the concept *yin-yang* in imperial decrees. Whereas *yinyang* had been widely employed in philosophical essays, medical treatises, and even in some officials' memorials in the first half of the Western Han dynasty, it is under Emperor Xuan that this term for the first time appeared in

the imperial decree.<sup>81</sup> Thereafter, *yin-yang* became jargon frequently employed in official documents to address the cosmic-social changes in the Western Han.<sup>82</sup>

The second set of data is the application of cosmology in daily politics. As mentioned above, although Dong Zhongshu had fully developed the theory regarding the politics and the moralized cosmology, he himself did not dare to comment on the disasters and portents of his own age. In fact, the earliest cases in which correlative cosmology helped to change the power configuration in the court were 1) that Xiaohou Sheng read the cloudy weather as an omen to

admonish Liu He, the twenty-seven-day emperor,<sup>83</sup> and 2) that under Emperor Xuan, *ru* officials used disasters to attack Huo Guang's family. Since then, using disasters or anomalies to criticize political rivals and even the emperor became a distinguished feature of Western Han politics. The famous ones include the execution of Yang Yun 楊惲, whom Emperor Xuan thought caused the solar eclipse; the suicide of a prominent *ru* official Xiao Wangzhi under Emperor Yuan; the accusation of Emperor Cheng's favorite concubines for causing the natural calamities;<sup>84</sup> the dismissal of three chancellors under Emperor Cheng for the occurrence of

disasters.<sup>85</sup>

It is not difficult to understand why the correlative cosmology successfully penetrated the political realm under Emperor Xuan. While the *ru* who had advanced to high position zealously advocated this political philosophy, Emperor Xuan found it useful in justifying his questionable legitimacy and sovereignty. Emperor Xuan was raised as a commoner and lived a life outside the palace before he succeeded to the throne. His enthronement fully relied on the support of the powerful regent Huo Guang. But in order to reclaim the power, Emperor Xuan wiped out the Huo family and its clique right after Huo Guang's death.

Distracting contemporaries' attention from those facts, *ru's* reading of omens provided a cosmic justification for both the enthronement of this commoner and the eradication of the family of his primary benefactor. As omens indicated that Emperor Xuan was the choice of the august Heaven, Huo Guang's role in helping Xuan occupy the throne was of little importance, and the gratitude Xuan should owe to Huo's family became unnecessary. This distant echo of the Mandate of Heaven makes Emperor Xuan's inauguration transcend the hereditary succession in Qin and Han history, and become a historical continuum of the utopian past when the worthy was chosen as an

emperor.<sup>86</sup>

Few scholars have commented on Emperor Xuan's promotion of correlative cosmology. I can think of two reasons for this. First, those who continue to subscribe to the master narrative of the victory of *ru* learning in the Western Han believe that Dong Zhongshu's theory was established as the imperial orthodoxy under Emperor Wu, despite recent challenges to that idea.<sup>87</sup> Second, misled by Ban Gu's comments about Emperor Xuan, modern scholars have stated that this emperor did not employ *ru*. By contrast, Emperor Yuan, the son of Emperor Xuan, enjoys a reputation for his generous patronage of *ru* scholars

—Ban Gu wrote of him, “As a youth, he loved *ru* learning; after succeeding to the throne, he recruited *ru* scholars for service at court, entrusting the government to them” 少而好儒,及即位,徵用儒生,委之以政.<sup>88</sup>

But when we look carefully at the historical materials, we find that Emperor Xuan supported both the *ru* philosophy and its partisans, who became a powerful clique of high officials. The flourishing of *ru* officials under Emperor Yuan was the upshot of fierce competition between this full-fledged *ru* group and the group led by eunuchs and those affiliated with the imperial consorts. In the next section I shall dwell on this complex and



intriguing historical process at some length.

## WHO ENTRUSTED *RU* WITH POLITICAL POWER?

Besides the *ru* who distinguished themselves by justifying Huo Guang's dictatorship and by administrative accomplishment, several *ru* officials received special treatment from Emperor Xuan. Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 was a disciple of Jing Fang 京房, a scholar known for his expertise in the *Changes*. Because of Jing's reputation, his student was recruited by Emperor Xuan to serve as a Gentleman-attendant and soon won imperial favor thanks to his skill in prognostication.

Normally Emperor Xuan placed great weight on administrative abilities, but Liangqiu won a post among the Nine Ministers without any administrative experience at all.<sup>89</sup>

Emperor Xuan also promoted the career of Xiao Wangzhi, whom I have mentioned previously. When the emperor began to receive large numbers of memorials offering the advice he had solicited, Xiao was entrusted with the task of classifying these recommendations into three levels. So pleased was the emperor with Xiao's performance that he promoted him three times within a year.

Later, when Xiao was appointed to

the governorship of Pingyuan 平原 instead of the position in the central court he had expected, Xiao submitted a memorial, which reads:

Your majesty has sympathy for the people, and out of a concern that moral transformation cannot be accomplished you have sent remonstrating officials to fill the vacancies in the commanderies. This action is what people call “worrying about minor details and forgetting about fundamental concerns.” If no minister can

provide forthright admonishment in court, then [the emperor] will not know what is wrong. If the state lacks for insightful literati, then [the emperor] will not hear what is good. Your majesty, please choose as your most trusted officials in the court those who understand the techniques of the classics, those who [are able to] draw new insights when reviewing old materials, and those who fully grasp subtlety, and are resourceful and astute—have them participate in

government affairs. When the various vassal states hear what you are doing, they will conclude that the state accepts remonstrance and cares about the administration, having nothing left incomplete or abandoned. If you pursue this relentlessly, then you will not be far from the way of Emperors Cheng and Kang of the Zhou dynasty. [When that comes to pass,] even if the outer commanderies are not ordered, how can that be a worry?

陛下哀愍百姓，恐德化之不

究，悉出諫官以補郡吏，所謂憂其末而忘其本者也。朝無爭臣則不知過，國無達士則不聞善。願陛下選明經術，溫故知新，通於幾微謀慮之士以為內臣，與參政事。諸侯聞之，則知國家納諫憂政，亡有闕遺。若此不怠，成康之道其庶幾乎！外郡不治，豈足憂哉？<sup>90</sup>

Xiao Wangzhi's bold claim—captured in the rhetorical question “even if the outer commanderies are not ordered, how can that be a worry?”—directly contradicted the

emperor's most basic idea about government, but he got away with it. Upon receiving the memorial, the emperor immediately summoned Xiao back to the court and appointed him Privy Treasurer.<sup>91</sup>

The emperor's faith in Xiao never slackened. After serving as one of the Nine Ministers for six years, in 59 BCE Xiao was promoted to the post of Grand Secretary, the second highest position in the bureaucracy. Then, three years later, he was impeached for his arrogant treatment of the current Chancellor, Bing Ji, and for abuse of power. Though he had previously ordered the executions of some eminent officials, Emperor Xuan

declared that he could not bear to imprison Xiao: he merely demoted him to the position of Grand Tutor to the crown prince.

This demotion did not marginalize Xiao. He still exerted a profound influence in court and participated actively in court discussions. In 51 BCE, the leader of the Xiongnu paid his first visit to the Han court. The emperor invited court painters to Qilin Pavilion (*Qilin ge* 麒麟閣) to draw a series of portraits. Eleven officials were selected, including Xiao, whose position as Grand Tutor was well below those of any of the Three Dukes and Nine Ministers. But the emperor insisted that he be painted instead of



the current Chancellor or Grandee Secretary.<sup>92</sup>

Examining the eleven officials in the “Drawing of Famous Officials” (*mingchen zhi tu* 名臣之圖), we find that eight of them had risen to prominence under Huo Guang and helped enthrone Emperor Xuan, while the remaining three were officials promoted by Xuan himself. Interestingly, all three of them—Wei Xiang, Liangqiu He, and Xiao Wangzhi—were *ru* officials. The great importance Emperor Xuan attached to his *ru* subordinates is further confirmed by another piece of evidence. Among the seven Tutors Emperor Xuan chose for his heir, five

were *ru*.<sup>93</sup> In the previous courts employing *ru* as Tutors happened only in exceptional cases. Once again, Emperor Xuan was breaking ground in Western Han history.

The evidence I have presented shows clearly that the conventional image of Xuan is incorrect: he did hire *ru* officials and placed great stock in them. Furthermore, toward the close of his rule, he sponsored the Conference of Shiqu Pavilion (*Shiqu ge* 石渠閣) and promoted two *ru*, asking them to receive his valedictory decrees and assist the new emperor, two events that profoundly affected the subsequent political configuration.

Early in his reign, Emperor Xuan

heard that his great-grandfather Liu Ju liked the Guliang tradition of the *Annals* and tried to champion it. So the emperor sent ten Gentleman-attendants to study with Cai Qianqiu 蔡千秋, the leading expert on the Guliang tradition. Among the students was Liu Xiang 劉向 (original name, Liu Gengsheng 劉更生), a descendant of the imperial house who, as a prominent *ru* scholar, was active in the court from Emperor Yuan's reign up to the end of the Western Han dynasty. After studying for about ten years, Ban Gu told us, these men were all well versed in the *Annals*. Therefore, in 53 BCE the emperor ordered some famous scholars of the Five Classics, headed by Xiao

Wangzhi, to hold extensive discussions at court, exploring the differences between the Gongliang and Guliang traditions of the *Annals*, and passing judgment in accordance with the Five Classics. Over thirty distinct issues were discussed, with each scholar quoting the classics to elaborate his views.<sup>94</sup> I will call this event a court discussion in 53 BCE.

Two years later, in 51 BCE, the emperor summoned *ru* scholars to Shiqu Pavilion for a discussion of the differences and similarities among the Five Classics: this came to be known as the Shiqu Conference. According to “A Bibliographical Treatise on Art and Literature” in *The History of Western*

*Han*, the works produced at this conference were preserved in the imperial library: forty-two essays on the *Documents*, thirty-eight essays on the *Record of Rituals*, thirty-nine essays on the *Annals*, eighteen on the *Analects*, and eighteen miscellaneous discussions of the set of the Five Classics preserved in the imperial library.<sup>95</sup> Xiao Wangzhi seems to have been the event's motivating force, and he was responsible for evaluating and memorializing their discussions. Emperor Xuan simply translated all of the memorials into decrees.<sup>96</sup>

The Shiqu Conference was the first meeting of *ru* scholars ever sponsored by an emperor. The emperor's personal

participation made it a national event, one Homer Dubs compared with the first General Council of the Christian Church at Nicaea (AD 325).<sup>97</sup> Modern scholars, assuming that under Emperor Wu the Gongyang tradition had become a philosophical orthodoxy, usually argue that the conference symbolized the victory of the Guliang tradition over the Gongyang. Limiting their studies to the intellectual world, these scholars basically ignore the political significance of the meeting.<sup>98</sup>

*The History of Western Han* preserves the names of fourteen of the participants. Their biographies show that six of them ascended to positions among the Nine Ministers or the Three

Dukes under Emperor Yuan. The succeeding generation of *ru* officials, disciples of the Shiqu group, flourished in the last forty years of the Western Han dynasty: two of them served as Chancellor and eight were among the Nine Ministers.<sup>99</sup>

Approaching the event from another perspective, I find that among the twelve identifiable *ru* officials who rose to prominence under Emperor Yuan, seven participated in the Shiqu Conference in 51 BCE or the Court Discussion in 53 BCE (see [table 5.1](#)). The patterns of advancement of these *ru* officials indicate that they had become a force to be reckoned with under Emperor Xuan. As I will

demonstrate later, it was their struggles with a rival group led by a eunuch named Shi Xian 石顯 and a relative of an imperial consort named Shi Gao 史高 that moved the *ru* to the center of Emperor Yuan's political stage. Retrospectively reflecting on the Shiqu Conference, we can see that it was an announcement of the arrival of *ru* as political players of the first rank. In the section that follows, I will analyze the upper reaches of the bureaucracy under Emperor Yuan to prove this point.

When Emperor Xuan drew close to the end of his life, he appointed Shi Gao, the son of his grandmother's brother, as Commander in Chief and General of Chariots and Cavalry; the



crown prince's former Grand Tutor, Xiao Wangzhi, as Superintendent of the Imperial Household; and the crown prince's former Junior Tutor, Zhou Kan, as a Counselor of the Palace. The emperor asked these three men to receive the valedictory decree and assist his heir, Liu Shi.<sup>100</sup>

Zhou Kan was a disciple of Xiahou Sheng, a *ru* who rose to prominence during the transition between Liu He and Emperor Xuan. As Director of the Interpreters' Office (*Yiguan ling* 譯官令), Zhou participated in the Shiqu Conference, where his peerless knowledge of the classics was generally acknowledged.<sup>101</sup> When Emperor Yuan ascended to the throne,

Zhou and Xiao Wangzhi were both determined to persuade the new emperor to employ the ancient way preserved in the classics.<sup>102</sup>

They recommended Liu Xiang, a descendant of the imperial house whose study of the Guliang tradition of the *Annals* had been commanded by Emperor Xuan. A Cavalier Attendant and Advisory Counselor (*Sanji jian dafu jishizhong* 散騎諫大夫給事中), Liu had also attended the Shiqu Conference. Soon afterward he became Director of the Imperial Clan, one of the Nine Ministers.<sup>103</sup>

Xiao and Zhao “recommended, on more than one occasion, famous *ru* scholars and men of talent to serve as

Remonstrance Officials” 數薦名儒茂材 以備諫官.<sup>104</sup> We know that at that time both Xue Guangde 薛廣德 and Gong Yu 貢禹 rose to the post of Advisory Counselor. Xue was an expert on the Lu tradition of the *Songs*. When Xiao was serving as Grandee Secretary under Emperor Xuan, he employed Xue as his subordinate and recommended him to the emperor, saying that “[his knowledge of the] classics and conduct makes him an appropriate candidate for the court” 經行宜充本朝. Xue attended the Shiqu Conference as an Erudite.<sup>105</sup> Under Emperor Yuan, he eventually advanced to the position of Grandee Secretary. Gong was recruited as an Erudite because of his knowledge of *ru*

classics, as well as his noble and unsullied conduct. After holding some middle-level administrative positions under Emperor Xuan he resigned.<sup>106</sup>

As I will describe in greater detail later, Gong finally was absorbed as a member of Shi Xian's clique, which helped him obtain a prominent position under Emperor Yuan.

While Xiao Wangzhi worked hard to place his comrades in important positions, his rivals also promoted *ru* in order to compete with him. Although Shi Gao was related to Emperor Yuan by blood and was one of the three chosen to receive the valedictory decree, he did not covet responsibilities early in Emperor Yuan's reign: it was

said that he had been included with the other two officials only to round up the number. Shi was not on good terms with Xiao, who enjoyed a national reputation as a learned *ru* scholar and whom Emperor Yuan trusted because he had taught him. Lagging a bit in the competition for respect—both from the emperor and from the bureaucracy as a whole—Shi accepted the advice offered by the magistrate of Chang'an, a certain Yang Xing 楊興, and began to promote talented people instead of his own chums. Shi recruited a *ru*, Kuang Heng 匡衡, who was serving as Scholar of Pingyuan (*Pingyuan wenxue* 平原文學) at that moment, as his subordinate—soon he recommended him to the

emperor.<sup>107</sup>

Kuang Heng received his training in the *Songs* from Erudites in the capital. The sources are not in agreement about his education. While *The Grand Scribe's Records* recorded that Kuang failed the examination at the Imperial Academy eight times and placed no higher than the third rank (*bingke* 丙科) on his ninth attempt, *The History of Western Han* says that Kuang placed in the first rank (*jiake* 甲科). More interestingly, Chu Shaosun (who is responsible for this interpolation in *The Grand Scribe's Records*) said that because Kuang repeatedly took the examination, he familiarized himself with the classics;

Chu also noted that after Kuang became Scholar of Pingyuan, the residents did not respect him.<sup>108</sup> By contrast, *The History of Western Han* records that when Kuang served in Pingyuan, many scholars submitted memorials praising Kuang's knowledge of the classics and urging the emperor to appoint Kuang to a position in the capital.<sup>109</sup>

Table 5.1. Participants of Court Discussion in 53 BCE and Participants of the *Shiqu* Conference in 51 BCE

N.	Participants	Expertise	Network	Patterns of advancement	Position held when participating in the conference
1	蕭望之 HS, 78:3271-3291	治齊詩	事同縣后倉且十年。以令詣太常受業，復事同學博士白奇，又從夏侯勝問論語、禮服	*以射策甲科為郎，署小苑東門候。御史大夫魏相除望之為屬，察廉大行治禮志。*對奏，天子拜望之為謁者。累遷諫大夫，丞相司直。歲中三遷，官至二千石。*平原太守64少府蕭望之為左馮翊，三年遷。61為大鴻臚，二年遷。59為御史大夫，三年貶為太子太傅。49為前將軍，一年為光祿勳，二年免。	太子太傅蕭望之及五經諸儒難論同異於石渠閣，條奏其對
2	周堪 HS, 88: 3604	夏侯勝從始昌受尚書及洪範五行傳，說災異...善說禮服	與孔霸俱事大夏侯勝	諱官令，太子少傅元帝：光祿大夫光祿勳	堪諱官令，論於石渠，經為最高
3	韋玄成 HS, 78:3108-3115	治詩，又治禮	故丞相韋賢之子	*以父任為郎，常侍騎。*以明經擢為諫大夫，遷大河都尉。58河內太守韋玄成為衛尉56為太常，二年免。48淮陽中尉韋玄成為少府46，為太子太傅43，為御史大夫36，丞相玄成薨	以淮陽中尉論石渠
4	劉向[更生] HS, 36: 1929	穀梁春秋	會初立穀梁春秋，徵更生受穀梁，講論五經於石渠	復拜為郎中給事黃門，遷散騎諫大夫給事中。48，為宗正，二年免	

5	薛廣德 HS, 71: 3046	魯詩	*薛廣德亦事王式。*蕭望之為御史大夫，除廣德為屬，數與論議，器之。*蕭廣德經行宜克本朝。*與勝，舍師事焉	遷諫大夫，代貢禹為長信少府。御史大夫。	為博士，論石渠
6	施讎 HS, 88: 3598	易	*從田王孫受易...與孟喜、梁丘賀並為門人...及梁丘賀為少府，事多，及遣子臨分將門人張禹等從臨問。*讎授張禹、琅邪魯伯。伯為會稽太守，禹至丞相，禹授淮陽彭宣，神戴崇子平。崇為九卿，宣大司空	於是賀薦讎：「結髮事師數十年，賀不能及。」詔拜讎為博士	甘露中與五經諸儒難論同異於石渠閣
7	梁丘臨 HS, 88:3600	專行京房法	*梁丘賀之子。琅邪王吉通五經，聞臨說，善之。時宜帝選高材郎十人從臨講，吉乃使其子郎中駁上疏從臨受易	臨代五鹿充宗君孟為少府，駁御史大夫	為黃門郎。甘露中，奉使問諸儒於石渠
8	歐陽地餘 HS, 88:3603	尚書	歐陽高之孫	以太子中庶子授太子侍中，至少府	後為博士，論石渠
9	林尊 HS, 88:3604	尚書	*事歐陽高。*授平陵平當。梁陳翁生。當至丞相，自有傳。翁生信都太傅，家世傳業。	博士，少府，太子太傅	為博士，論石渠
10	張山拊 HS, 88:3605	尚書	*事小夏侯建。*授同縣李尋，鄭寬中少君，山陽張無故子儒、信都秦恭廷君，陳留假倉子驥...寬中有材，以博士授太子，成帝即位，賜爵關內侯，食邑八百戶，遷光祿大夫，領尚書事，甚尊重。	至少府	為博士，論石渠



N.	Participants	Expertise	Network	Patterns of advancement	Position held when participating in the conference
11	假倉子 驥 HS, 88:3600	尚書	張山附授假倉子驥	至膠東相	倉以謁者論石渠
12	張長安幼君 HS, 88:3610	魯詩	事王式	至淮陽中尉	張生論石渠
13	戴聖次君 HS, 88:3615	禮	后倉門人	至九江太守	以博士論石渠
14	通漢子方 HS, 88:3615	禮	后倉門人	至中山中尉	通漢以太子舍人論石渠
N.	Participants	Expertise	Networking	Pattern of advancement	Position held when participating in the conference
1	蕭望之	見上			
2	嚴彭祖 HS, 88: 3616	公羊春秋	*與顏安樂俱事眭孟 *授琅邪王中, 為元帝少府, 家世傳業. 中授同郡公孫文, 東門雲 ...	公羊博士至河南、東郡太守...以高第入為左馮翊, 遷太子太傅	公羊博士
3	申輓 HS, 88:3618	公羊	不詳		侍郎
4	伊推 HS, 88:3618	公羊	不詳		侍郎

5	宋顯 HS, 88:3618	公羊	不詳		侍郎
7	尹更始 HS, 88:3618	穀梁春秋	授汝河張禹長子.禹與蕭望之同時為御史,...後望之為太子太傅, 禹為太子太傅, 徵禹待詔, 未及問, 會疾死. 授尹更始, 更始傳子咸及翟方進, 咸至大司農, 方進丞相	諫大夫 長樂戶將	穀梁議郎
8	劉向	See above			
9	周慶 HS, 88:3618	穀梁	不詳	博士	
10	丁姓 HS, 88:3618	穀梁	不詳	博士 中山太傅	
11	許廣 HS, 88:3618	公羊	不詳		內侍郎
12	王亥 HS, 88:3618	穀梁	不詳		中郎

Notes: Men who participated in the Shiqu Conference and later ascended to positions among the Nine Ministers and Three Dukes under Emperor Yuan include Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之, Zhou Kan 周堪, Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成, Liu Xiang 劉向[更生], Xue Guangde 薛廣德, Ouyang Diyu 歐陽地餘, and Yan Pengzhu 嚴彭祖.

Disciples of the men above who penetrated the high-level bureaucracy in the last fifty years of the Western Han include Kong Guang 孔光 (Chancellor), Zhang Yu 張禹 (Chancellor), Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 (Chancellor), Yin Xian 尹咸 (Grand Minister of Agriculture), Xu Shang 許商 (Privy Treasurer), Lin Zigao 林子高 (among the Nine Ministers under Wang Mang), Wang Ji 王吉[少翁] (among the Nine Ministers under Wang Mang), 韓仁 (Grand Herald), Wang Jun 王駿 (Grand Secretary), Peng Xuan 彭宣 (Grand Secretary), Chong Ziping 崇子平 (among the Nine Ministers).

# Although these two sources present

different or even contradictory testimony about Kuang's educational experience and his career, they agree that after Shi Gao's recommendation he enjoyed a charmed existence and eventually became Emperor Yuan's Chancellor.

Shi Gao was not Xiao Wangzhi's principal rival. Throughout Emperor Yuan's rule, the most powerful man at court was Shi Xian. Shi Xian served as Vice Director of the Imperial Secretariat (*Puye* 僕射) under Emperor Xuan. After Emperor Yuan ascended to the throne, Shi was promoted to Director of the Secretariat (*Zhongshu guan* 中書官). So he ran an important court department for a long time and

presumably became deeply familiar with the dynastic laws and decrees.<sup>110</sup> He often sided with Shi Gao in disputes with Xiao Wangzhi.<sup>111</sup>

Xiao's reaction was brutal: he went after Shi through his eunuch status:

The office of Imperial Secretary is the root of all offices and the axle of the state. [The emperor] should employ enlightened and fair-minded men to this office. Emperor Wu [often] amused himself and held banquets in the consorts' palace; this is why he employed eunuchs [as

Imperial Secretaries]. But this is not how the traditional institution worked. The position of Eunuch of the Secretariat should be abolished, so as to accord with the ancient convention and to avoid associating with men who had been subjected to corporal punishment.

尚書百官之本，國家樞機，宜以通明公正處之．武帝游宴後庭，故用宦者，非古制也．宜罷中書宦官，應古不近刑人。<sup>112</sup>

But Emperor Yuan paid no attention to Xiao, and Shi carried on as he had. When Xiao started a feud with Shi Xian and his camp, they quickly impeached him.

The main accusations Shi Xian brought against Xiao Wangzhi were excessive attention to the members of his clique, wanton calumnies against eminent officials, and reckless slander of members of the imperial clan. But it is interesting to observe that Shi was also adept at employing the *ru* discourse in this feud. As a result of the impeachment, Xiao lost his official position, and his colleagues Zhou Kan and Liu Xiang were thrown into prison. In the spring of that year there was an

earthquake, accompanied with some unusual astronomical phenomena. The emperor took these to be a sign warning him against how he had treated his former tutor, so he ennobled Xiao and granted him a supplementary honorific designation: Palace Steward. Zhou Kan and Liu Xiang were soon welcomed back into the court. But that winter another earthquake happened. Ban Gu related that when the news was reported at court, Shi Xian and the members of his camp all cast sidelong glances at Xiao Wangzhi and his group. Liu Xiang was so frightened that he engineered the submission of a memorial explaining that the earthquake was the result not of Xiao's

reappearance at court but of the machinations of the eunuch Hong Gong 弘恭, a leader in Shi's camp.<sup>113</sup> At the climax of the struggle between the rival cliques, Xiao committed suicide.<sup>114</sup>

It ought to be no surprise that Shi's clique included *ru* officials. Xiao Wangzhi was a celebrated *ru* scholar. Ban Gu told us that in the wake of Xiao's death Shi feared that all of the empire's learned men would turn against him. Therefore, Shi began to associate with Gong Yu, a *ru* who served as Advisory Counselor as noted earlier. He showered him with praise and Gong became Grandee Secretary in his eighties. *The History of Western*

*Han* notes that his relationship with Gong made the emperor even more trusting of Shi Xian.<sup>115</sup>

Another *ru* in Shi Xian's clique was Wulu Chongzong 五鹿充宗, an expert on the *Changes*. He moved quickly through the ranks because of his expertise in the Liangqiu 梁丘 tradition of the *Changes*, and he became Privy Treasurer in 38 BCE. The emperor proposed that Wulu, an adherent of the Liangqiu interpretation of the *Changes*, debate for his pleasure a group of experts aligned with other hermeneutic traditions. When the debate was staged the result was unanimous: the eloquent Wulu by a mile.<sup>116</sup>

During the struggle between the



camp led by Xiao Wangzhi and that led by Shi Xian, what kind of role did Emperor Yuan play? Contrary to his reputation of favoring *ru* scholars, Emperor Yuan preferred Shi Xian: both times Shi impeached Xiao Wangzhi the emperor indicated his approval. In fact, Ban Gu mentioned several times that the emperor's feeble health led him to entrust all administrative affairs to Shi Xian. The most trivial and the weightiest matters were all decided by Shi.<sup>117</sup>

A number of interesting and amusing anecdotes can convey some sense of the enormous power Shi Xian wielded under Emperor Yuan. When the former first impeached Xiao

Wangzhi and his cronies, he made the following request: “Ask the Imperial Messenger to summon them to the office of the Commandant of Justice” 請謁者召致廷尉. When the emperor approved the memorial he had no idea that this phrase was a technical term referring to imprisonment. Not until he wanted to summon Liu Xiang and Zhou Kan did he learn that they were in jail. Later, Feng Qun 馮遂, the son of an eminent official and the brother of an imperial consort, was recommended by Shi Xian for the post of Imperial Messenger. When Feng was awarded the post, only to badmouth his benefactor in the emperor’s presence, the infuriated ruler had him sacked.

Feng Qun's brother Feng Yewang 馮野王 was a fine scholar of the *ru* classics and renowned for his administrative ability. When the position of Grandee Secretary opened up, many officials recommended him. The emperor asked Shi Xian for his opinion. Shi said that although not one of the Nine Ministers could surpass Feng Yewang, he was the brother of the emperor's consort: appointing him to a lofty post was bound to look like nepotism. The emperor elected not to promote Feng Yewang, simply praising his morality and his achievements instead.<sup>118</sup> Ban Gu noted that the interest group formed by Shi Xian, Wulu Chongzong, and Lao Liang 牢梁 (the Vice Director of the

Imperial Secretariat) dominated the court of Emperor Yuan: men who supported them all achieved fine positions. A folk song described the situation of the government being staffed by their cronies: “O Lao! O Shi! O hanger-on of Wulu! Piled high are the official seals, long are their ribbons” 牢邪石邪，五鹿客邪！印何纍纍，綬若若邪。<sup>119</sup>

In short, if we scrutinize the twelve *ru* who occupied prominent positions under Emperor Yuan, we find that six of them were associated with either Xiao Wangzhi or Shi Xian and were hoping the alliance would benefit their careers. Among the remaining six, Ouyang Yu 歐陽餘, Yan Pengzu 嚴彭

祖, and Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 all participated in the Shiqu Conference or the court discussion of 53 BCE under Emperor Xuan; Zheng Hong 鄭弘 and Zhao Xincheng 召信成 had previously won fame as competent governors, and Wei Xuancheng had once been among the Nine Ministers under Emperor Xuan.<sup>120</sup> In other words, with the exception of Feng Yewang, every member of the latter group had already distinguished himself under Emperor Xuan, either through expertise in the *ru* classics or by administrative achievements.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, although the ratio of eminent *ru* officials to non-*ru* officials was higher under Emperor Yuan than at any other time in

Western Han history, this cannot be attributed simply to Yuan's love of *ru* learning. Instead, we must recognize that Emperor Xuan's reign was a turning point that witnessed both the official adoption of *ru* philosophy and the emergence of a powerful *ru* group in the highest levels of the national bureaucracy.

# Conclusion

## *RU BEFORE THE RISE OF THE RU EMPIRE*

The witchcraft scandal under Emperor Wu, a notorious event in early Chinese imperial history, once was regarded as symbolic of the decline of the *ru* sovereignty and of the bankruptcy of *ru* ethics.<sup>1</sup> This book, however, shows that the five-year-long witch hunt created the very opportunity for the rise of the first *ru* empire. It was after the witch hunt swept through the upper reaches

of the bureaucracy that *ru* officials emerged from a powerless minority to become weighty contenders in the political realm. From that point, *ru* discourse started to transform administrative rhetoric and imperial policies for hundreds of years to come.

Unfolding the story of *ru*'s ascent to power, we find that they were no longer righteous moralists providing a cosmic blueprint for an empire or issuing moral admonition to the emperor as their writings intended us to believe. More often, *ru* acted as political opportunists furnishing propaganda to justify power manipulation by ambitious regents and serving as window-dressing for



political cliques. Some other *ru*, as competent administrators, climbed to the zenith of the bureaucracy step-by-step, precisely as those clerk-officials whom *ru* openly despised.

The new story of *ru*'s conquest in the political realm is a surprising discovery; but it also leads to intriguing questions: where did these *ru* come from in the first place? This book shows that *ru*'s learning functioned as a useful tool with the support of brutal force, but why were *ru* ideas chosen by political upstarts and accepted by various parties as legitimate reasons for emperorship and political intrigues?<sup>2</sup> What were the social, institutional, and intellectual

contexts of the time that allowed classical learning to gain authority? In this conclusion, I will first entertain some hypotheses to highlight the historical circumstances that allowed the triumph of *ru* discourse in official spheres. Then I will synthesize the new studies of the recruitment system to assess the institutional foundations that enabled *ru* to penetrate the center of power.

This book starts with a quantitative analysis of the high-level officials under Emperor Wu. This shows that *ru* amounted to an insignificant minority in the imperial bureaucracy. This argument corroborates recent studies on institutional and ideological history

of the Western Han dynasty. Indeed, all research points in one direction: the conventional wisdom regarding Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* and *ru* learning was a product of historiography rather than of historical facts.<sup>3</sup>

The grand narrative of the victory of *ru* under Emperor Wu, however, involves shattering another important thesis: the suppression of *ru* and *ru* discourse in the Qin and early Western Han courts. If Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* was merely an illusion, how should we decipher the political history of the Qin and early Han eras? What social status and political power did *ru* have before they

became political stars? What ideology did the Qin and early Han courts appeal to when justifying their legitimacy and representing themselves to the public?

In his monograph on the stele inscriptions of Emperor Shi Huang of Qin 秦始皇, Martin Kern points out that the moral values conveyed by these inscriptions find their counterparts in the Five Classics, texts that preserved the Zhou culture. Based on this finding, Kern argues that contrary to the traditional accusation of Qin for its abandoning and suppressing traditional Zhou values, the Qin dynasty showed continuity with the traditional thought and ritual practice of the Eastern Zhou era.<sup>4</sup> Exploring the

Qin-related epigraphic and archeological sources, Yuri Pines demonstrates the pro-Zhou sentiments of the ruling elites of Qin and the amicable interactions between the court of Qin state and the Zhou house. Pines further contends that, rather than taking Qin as an arch-villain that eliminated the cultured Zhou house, as the traditional view holds, the Qin state, as the potential heir of a deceased line of Zhou kings, faithfully perpetuated Zhou values.<sup>5</sup> As promising as their statements are to alter the landscape of early Chinese imperial history, new questions still emerge.

If the Qin dynasty witnessed the

continuity of Zhou tradition as Kern and Pines argue, why do we see a break from the Zhou tradition in Emperor Wu's reign? What had changed since the establishment of the Western Han? Aihe Wang and Li Kaiyuan both analyze the political group that helped Liu Bang found the Han dynasty. Differing from the ruling class of the Qin dynasty who stemmed from old aristocracies of Qin state, this founding emperor as well as his eminent officials rose to the top of the power pyramid from the bottom of society. They entrenched their descendants' positions in the bureaucracy by way of hereditary prestige. Raised from humble circumstances, this group

generally was not well educated, nor did they have any sympathy toward the elite culture of the old Zhou dynasty. Because of the social status of the Liu Bang group, the Western Han rather than the Qin dynasty saw a sharp rupture from Zhou practice.

But if Qin's upper class, as one branch of Zhou elites, carried on the traditional culture and moral values, can we further infer that *ru* were active politicians in its imperial court, or that officials of the Qin court were all immersed in the Five Classics? The answer is negative. We therefore must reexamine the nature of both the political world and the *ru* group in the pre-Han period.

Above all, *ru*, whether associated with Confucius or not, first emerged as an intellectual force, not a political one. Misled by *ru*'s own ambition to occupy the political world and by their later success as scholar-officials, it is easy to conflate the intellectual realm with the political one and ignore some basic well-known facts.

The Spring Autumn and Warring States periods during which *ru* emerged are characterized by fundamental changes. The first is the decline of Zhou culture, famously expressed by Confucius as the collapse of the rituals and the ruin of the music (*li beng yue huai* 禮崩樂坏). Second, trying to replace both the traditional



values and the old political system, various thinkers proposed new philosophical ideas and political agendas. Against this background, the ruling members of various states became increasingly negligent of Zhou culture: usurpation of the hierarchy titles and transgression of ritual codes prevailed among elites. Various states began implementing reforms to gain a competitive edge, including introducing new military organizations and new tax forms as well as recruiting professional generals and administrators adept in fiscal and legal affairs. Those reforms prepared the rise of the unified Qin empire and at the same time made the political values

and practice depart further from those of the old Zhou's.

In this phase, the reforms were implemented by elites themselves, instead of a revolution from the bottom up. Continuity in the membership of the elite class explains why on the one hand we see Zhou culture preserved and embodied by sacrificial rituals and administrative documents; and on the other hand, we also observe new features of elite life, including new burial practices, new ritual vessels, and new ideas that directly challenged traditional conventions.<sup>6</sup> A simple analogy can be made: just as American politicians generally know American history but cannot be called American

historians, the official class in the Eastern Zhou and Qin periods might have learned the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of Documents* in their youth and might have some nostalgia toward traditional Zhou values and practices, but they were far from being experts of the tradition.

It is the *ru* group who established themselves by their specialty in the traditional Zhou culture and distinguished their political agenda from those of other thinkers by adopting a defensive position toward the tradition.

*Ru* were not those who merely took a class or two on Zhou culture or those who could recite a couple of sentences

from the Five Classics as some of their contemporary officials might have been able to do. Instead, they were *ru* precisely because they made a living via their specialty in the old tradition, serving either as teachers or as professional ritualists in various occasions. Confucius, the exemplary *ru*, was thought of by his fellow countrymen as an expert in different sacrificial rituals. According to a famous anecdote, one of the nobilities of Lu state asked his son to learn rituals from Confucius. Famous *ru*, from Confucius to Mencius to Xunzi and to Confucius's followers, all attracted disciples, as both Chinese folklore and dominant textbooks

labeled Confucius as the first and greatest teacher in history. *Ru* were also hired for their professional knowledge of rituals. Mozi laughed at them, for “when rich people have funerals, [*ru*] are thrilled, happily saying ‘these are the sources of my food and clothing.’” 富人有喪，乃大說，喜曰：“此衣食之端也。”

Expertise rather than general education defines *ru*’s identity, a persistent motif illuminated by abundant examples in Han sources. Among the few *ru* officials in the early Han, Shusun Tong 叔孫通 established his reputation by compiling the imperial rites for the newly founded Han dynasty.<sup>7</sup> Sima Qian in the

“Collective Biographies of *Ru*” classified his contemporary *ru* according to their specialties in certain classics.<sup>8</sup> In the second half of the Western Han, Xiao Wangzhi was said to study the Qi tradition of the *Songs* with Hou Cang for ten years, after which he went to the Imperial Academy to further pursue classical studies.<sup>9</sup> Ten years of study is probably a standard length of time for one to become specialized in one classic. Emperor Xuan once appointed ten Gentleman-attendants—among them was Liu Xiang, who later became a reputed *ru*—to study the declining Guliang tradition of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. It was more than ten

years before they familiarized themselves with this classic and were able to open a debate with *ru* who specialized in the rival tradition of the same classic.<sup>10</sup> With the proliferation of the teachings of the Five Classics, to specialize in one classic required decades of investment. As the famous complaint of Ban Gu states, “[therefore] while young children concentrate on one classic, they cannot talk about it till they wear gray hair” 故幼童而守一藝，白首而後能言。<sup>11</sup> To become an expert on even a single classic demands both academic talent and perseverance. This explains why even after *ru* successfully penetrated officialdom, there were only a few

cases of father-son relationships among eminent *ru* officials. Instead, most *ru* were connected via teacher-disciple and classmate relations.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, *ru* defended their specialty by emphasizing “Master Rule” (*shifa*).<sup>13</sup> Self-study of the Five Classics was not welcomed. Yu Dingguo had to hold a ceremony acknowledging his teacher when he decided to study the *Annals*, though at that moment he was already one of the Nine Ministers.<sup>14</sup> Xue Xuan 薛宣 ascended to the position of Chancellor and often proposed memorials embellished with *ru* ideas, but he later was attacked by his rivals as one who did not receive the teaching of classics



from a master.<sup>15</sup>

*Ru* established themselves by their specialties in the old Zhou tradition, but the famous *ru* all had strong ambition for political power. Confucius claimed to revive the Zhou culture if some lord employed him; Mencius identified himself as the potential creator of an empire; and Xunzi industriously promoted *ru* as ideal candidates for ministers. Before the witchcraft scandal, however, no *ru* was born to a high official and few of them distinguished themselves in official circles.

This is not difficult to understand. Traditional scholarship celebrates social mobility during the Eastern

Zhou period, and we indeed see the decline of some aristocratic families and the success stories of men from humble circumstances. But without a revolution from the bottom up, most important official positions were still controlled by old or new powerful lineages.<sup>16</sup> While there were positions open to talented men, what the upper class really needed were generals to win battles and administrators to maintain the social order.<sup>17</sup> *Ru's* political agenda could not help realize those goals. Those moralists stressed the idealized ritual system and old moral values, being ridiculed as those who failed to understand administrative affairs. When it came to

the Han dynasty, *ru*'s path toward officialdom did not become smoother. Members of the new upper class emerged from the bottom of society and were not familiar with Zhou culture. They did not have nostalgic sympathy toward the old values as elites of the Warring States period and Qin dynasty had. *Ru* probably became even more marginal, as Liu Bang, the founder of Han, allegedly even urinated in the hat of a *ru*.<sup>18</sup> Except for a couple of *ru* hired by the emperor or local lords to consult on sacrificial, ceremonial, and calendric issues, most *ru* languished in obscure circumstances, serving as teachers, professional ritualists, or petty clerks

in local government, just as their counterparts in the Warring States period did.

This speculation is supported by our numerical data, as it shows that the overwhelming majority—that is, 89 percent—of eminent *ru* officials from Emperor Wu to Emperor Xuan had no traceable family history of official service.<sup>19</sup> But what enabled *ru* to penetrate the upper reaches of the bureaucracy when opportunity came? To answer this question, we must consider the recruitment system.

## RECRUITMENT SYSTEM OF THE HAN EMPIRE REVISITED

Attributing the rise of *ru* officials to

the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy, as dominant as this thesis is, is a misreading of both the official careers of *ru* and the recruitment system of the Han empire. In fact, the institutional history of early imperial China, though important, received little attention in the West.<sup>20</sup> In the past twenty years, Chinese and Japanese scholars, by using newly discovered archeological manuscripts, have significantly revised our understanding of the recruitment and promotion system of the empire.

To understand the pivotal mechanism of recruiting officials in the Han, we must first recognize a fundamental but easily neglected fact:

Han officials generally came from three systems, namely marquises, Gentleman-attendants, and clerks. Since the majority of the *ru* officials in Western Han came from humble circumstances, they started their official careers either as clerks or as Gentleman-attendants.<sup>21</sup>

The noble title of marquise was granted to those who helped establish the Han dynasty, family members of favorite imperial concubines, those with extraordinary military accomplishments, chancellors without nobility titles, and people who killed rebellious leaders.<sup>22</sup>

Gentleman-attendants constituted an independent group in the

bureaucracy. Primarily serving the emperor and the imperial family, they sometimes were regarded as personal employees of the throne.<sup>23</sup> According to Yan Gengwang's 嚴耕望 statistical investigation, around one fourth of the recorded Gentleman-attendants came from powerful official families by way of hereditary privileges (*yinren* 陰任; namely, sponsoring one's sons or brothers to be Gentleman-attendants).<sup>24</sup> The second major source was the recommendation system and the Imperial Academy, but becoming Gentleman-attendants via this avenue generally emerged after Emperor Wu. Other ways to become a Gentleman-attendant included buying the position,

accumulating military merits,<sup>25</sup> being directly appointed by the emperor, and being recommended by powerful officials.

Differing from the system of Gentleman-attendants that has drawn scholars' attention for decades, the clerk group is treated in a fragmented manner in traditional sources. Scholars did not have a breakthrough in this field until turning to archeologically excavated administrative archives. As a complicated part of the bureaucracy, the clerk group served as the major pool of official candidates throughout the Han dynasty.<sup>26</sup>

Clerks were differentiated from officials in two major characteristics:



first, they were directly employed by an official as assistants, which appointment did not require approval of the official's superior or the throne; second, their ranks thereby were below two hundred bushels, carried no official seals, and had no guard of honor when traveling. Various levels of officials, ranging from the magistrate of a small county to the most powerful bureaucrat, all had their self-appointed clerks. According to *Han guan jiu yi* 漢官舊儀, the office of the Chancellor hired 162 clerks ranked one hundred bushels.<sup>27</sup> As officials who directly dealt with daily administration, clerks were the de facto operators of the intricate machinery of imperial

bureaucracy.

Candidate pools for clerks can be generally divided into four categories. The first were military veterans, especially those awarded low-rank noble titles and those with more than ten years of services. They usually served as prison clerk (*yuli* 獄吏), local police officer (*qiudao* 求盜), or postman (*youren* 郵人). The second were those familiar with administrative regulations, legal systems and precedents, and institutional procedures. Most of them acquired technical training through apprenticeship or attending the special training school called *xueshi* 學室. The third were those who distinguished

themselves in martial arts. In order to maintain the security of the local community, this type of clerk was as needed as the civil clerks. The fourth were those who established their reputations as experts of classics or by their moral conduct.

The Imperial Academy was designed by Gongsun Hong and Dong Zhongshu to train official candidates. But its graduates were first absorbed by the systems of Gentleman-attendants and the clerk group, as those with excellent examination scores were appointed as Gentleman-attendants or clerks of important officials, while those with average scores, as clerks in local government. The

recommendation system also operated within the systems of clerks and Gentleman-attendants. In a considerable number of cases, the beneficiaries of the recommendation system were either clerks or officials ascending from clerks or Gentleman-attendants.<sup>28</sup> If the recommended ones held no positions in the officialdom before, they were first recruited as Gentlemanattendants and from there they waited for further appointments.<sup>29</sup>

Military veterans were also important sources for official candidates, but they were generally absorbed by the three systems as well. Those with extraordinary military accomplishments were ennobled as

marquises and directly became candidates for high officials. Those with remarkable achievements were appointed as Gentleman-attendants, while those with minimum accomplishments, but sufficient years of service, became clerks.<sup>30</sup> Cases are also common in which civil officials assumed military duties, and military officers were transferred to civil positions, such as magistrate of a county. But in the latter scenario, the military officers usually already had experience in the bureaucracy before serving in the army.<sup>31</sup>

The three systems—marquises, Gentleman-attendants, and clerks—provided official candidates at

different levels. Enjoying hereditary prestige, marquises were direct candidates for middle- and high-level officials. We know that descendants of those who helped to establish the Western Han inherited their forbears' noble titles and were chosen as Chancellors, and that petty clerks serving in the county government were ennobled as marquises and directly promoted as Nine Ministers after they captured leaders of rebellions.

After years of service, Gentleman-attendants were candidates for low- to middle-level officials, including administrative officials such as magistrates, chief clerks serving in local regions, and retinue of the

emperor such as Erudite, Messenger, and Gentleman-attendant at the Palace gate (*huangmen shilang* 黃門侍郎) in the central court.<sup>32</sup>

Clerks had two directions in which to advance themselves: transfer from clerks of low-rank officials to those of high-rank officials and transfer from clerks to government-employed officials.

Clerks, Gentleman-attendants, and officials were subject to the same promotion regulations that had been institutionalized in the bureaucracy. The most typical means of career advancement was to accumulate both seniority and administrative merit, as officials and clerks' performances were

documented and evaluated monthly and annually.<sup>33</sup> Generally known as “*Ji gonglao* 積功勞,” this avenue for promotion has long been ignored. But archeologically excavated administrative archives show that accumulating seniority and achievements was much more significant than the recommendation system for promotion.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, in light of the new knowledge, numerous similar cases have been found in traditional sources. For example, *The History of Western Han* records that Bing Ji 丙吉, a prison clerk in Lu region, gained achievement and seniority (*ji gonglao*) and was promoted to Left Inspector of the



Commandant of Justice (*tingwei youjian* 廷尉右監).<sup>35</sup> Sima Qian related that Zhao Yu 趙禹, a clerk-official, accumulated years of service (*jilao* 積勞) and rose to Censor (*yushi* 御史).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, years of service without serious error itself was counted as a sort of merit and guaranteed promotion.<sup>37</sup>

Second, both officials and clerks advanced themselves through the recommendation system, and they won higher position through categories like “filial and integrity” (*xiaolian* 孝廉), “flourishing talent” (*maocai* 茂才), “able and virtuous” (*xianliang* 賢良), and “assessment of integrity” (*chalian*

察廉).<sup>38</sup>

The third avenue that enabled officials and clerks to climb the ladder of bureaucracy was personal nomination or recommendation (*jian* 薦, *jin* 進, and *ju* 舉), an institutionalized practice often known as “sponsorship” (*baoju* 保舉).<sup>39</sup> Although scholars have not yet paid enough attention to this means of promotion, sources preserve more than sixty cases of sponsorship in the Western Han, a figure that clearly exceeds the identifiable cases of those enjoying the recommendation system. The positions men achieved through personal nominations or recommendations covered every level

of the bureaucracy from clerkship to the positions of the Three Dukes. Officials usually nominated their subordinates or colleagues to their superior or directly to the emperor. Some extraordinary candidates enjoyed nomination from several powerful officials, and sometimes a nomination was made collectively: for example, “various *ru* recommend” (*zhuru jian* 諸儒薦) and “people recommend” (*zhongren jian* 衆人薦).<sup>40</sup> Personal nomination could be conducted in an informal manner, as one orally recommended someone to a superior, or in a formal way, as several cases involved with confidential memorials submitted to the emperor.<sup>41</sup>

For example, Yi Zong 義縱, Governor of Nanyang 南陽, recommended his subordinate Du Zhou 杜周 to Zhang Tang, and Zhang employed Du as Clerk of the Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei shi* 廷尉史).<sup>42</sup> It is said that Chancellor Tian Fen 田蚡 was so powerful that some of the men he recommended to Emperor Wu started their positions as high as ranked two thousand bushels.<sup>43</sup> When Chancellor Bing Ji was seriously sick, Emperor Xuan visited him, asking him to evaluate current officials' behavior and capability. Bing Ji recommended three men, all of whom ended up achieving top positions in the bureaucracy.<sup>44</sup> Because the

nominations by powerful officials carried so much weight, we have stories that people conspired to nominate each other in order to seize the top bureaucratic posts.<sup>45</sup>

In most cases, officials nominated their confidants. We know, however, that Zhang Anshi rejected associating with his nominees who came to express gratitude to him, claiming that presenting the worthy and advancing the capable had nothing to do with personal kindness.<sup>46</sup> Kong Guang avoided letting his nominees know that he was the recommender.<sup>47</sup> No matter in what case, nominees and recommenders were regarded as constituting an interest group. Sources

record several cases in which nominees were dismissed from positions when their recommenders lost power, and likewise, recommenders had to assume legal responsibility when their nominees made mistakes or acted criminally.<sup>48</sup> Despite the risk one had to face when nominating people, high officials were obliged to recommend men to the emperor. Those who helped to advance others enjoyed good reputations and those who did not do so were criticized by the public.<sup>49</sup>

The fourth avenue for officials to penetrate the middle to upper reaches of the bureaucracy was by direct promotion by the emperor. Obviously this avenue only applied to those in the

central court who had both the access and ability to impress the man on the throne.

We can see that the recommendation system only served as one of the mechanisms in helping officials advance their careers. The system itself could never grant *ru* any special competitive edge, let alone guarantee a high position in officialdom. First, the recommendation system primarily targeted current officials and clerks, whose performance was evaluated on their administrative merit, not on their knowledge on classics. Second, the recommendation system can only help one climb a single step in an intricate

hierarchical system, for example, ascending from a commoner to Gentleman-attendant or from senior clerk to magistrate.<sup>50</sup>

The success of an official usually involved decades of experience in officialdom and owed much to the combination of two or more of these factors: a powerful family background, extraordinary military accomplishments, administrative merits, recognition by the emperor, and networking. Indeed, both the recommendation system and sponsorship engaged in networking, which means that a powerful family background or a membership in an interest group would largely help one



climb the ladder of success.

Before rising as a remarkable political force, some *ru* who were also adept in legal and fiscal affairs served as clerks in local government or under powerful officials; some *ru* managed to join the membership of Gentleman-attendants. Through their administrative performance and networking, they had opportunities to advance to low- to middle-rank officials in local government. A few reputed *ru* obtained sinecure positions, such as Erudite, Grand Master of Remonstrance (*Jian dafu* 諫大夫), and provided consultation to the emperor in some ritual, sacrificial, and calendar issues in the central court. But without

a prestigious family background or membership in an interest group, *ru* did not have much chance to reach the upper reaches of the bureaucracy.

It is when the old prestigious families were wiped out during the witchcraft scandal that those *ru*, who were always animated by political ambition, rose to fill the power vacuum. They first distinguished themselves as competent administrators, being advanced from clerkships at the very bottom of the bureaucracy. As a shared identity and a strong network gradually developed among *ru* officials, they fully explored the existing promotion system to lend their fellow *ru* a helping hand. Eminent

*ru* officials recruited their fellows as their clerks, nominated them for important positions, and recommended them to the emperor. As we show in [chapters 4 and 5](#), most high *ru* officials who emerged after the witchcraft scandal were connected with one another, being teacher–disciples or classmates.

Besides benefiting from their administrative ability and group identity, *ru* also rose to power during the imperial succession crisis because they were deemed useful in providing the right historical precedents and political philosophy to justify various political machinations. Huo Guang, a regent without a powerful family

background or any administrative or military accomplishments, enthroned three emperors within thirteen years. Although the manipulation of the imperial succession was always endorsed by brutal political power, Huo desperately needed some discourse to ensure public support.

*Ru* turned out to be the best choice: as experts on the old tradition, *ru* had the expertise to provide the appropriate precedents from the Zhou dynasty to justify Huo Guang's intrigues. Perceived stories of the remote and idealized dynasty transformed the temporal power struggles of an upstart into the historical continuum of a splendid age in the nostalgic memory

of elites. As an advocate of a correlative cosmology, *ru*'s reading of omens provided cosmic legitimacy for both disposing of Liu He and enthroning of Emperor Xuan. The latter, a commoner with ambiguous imperial origin, became the choice of august Heaven for the sovereign. This distant echo of the Mandate of Heaven made Emperor Xuan's inauguration transcend the history of both the Qin and the Han empires.<sup>51</sup> *Ru*'s exercises of moral suasion, attacking the licentious life of Liu He and portraying Emperor Xuan as a refined, benevolent ruler, helped suppress the dissonant voices against Huo Guang's manipulation of the throne. Few knew

the behavior of those who lived in the forbidden places, and only those with political power dared to stand at the commanding elevation and make such moral judgment. *Ru*'s self-identity—masters of the way of the sage-kings—and *ru*'s ceaseless self-promotion since Confucius—the best candidates for official positions—eventually convinced both Huo Guang and Emperor Xuan to promote them to power and to rely on them. They became the winners, seizing the right opportunity during the imperial crisis to realize their political dream, a dream that had been envisioned and pursued by the exemplary sage Confucius hundreds of years earlier.

# Appendix

## Major Official Titles of the Western Han Dynasty

Administrator of Liang (*Liang xiang* 梁相)

Assistant for Ceremonies in the Messenger  
Office (*Daxing zhili cheng* 大行治禮丞)

Assistant to the Grand Coachman (*Taipu  
cheng* 太僕丞)

Assistant to the Grand Minister of  
Agriculture (*Dasinong cheng* 大司農丞)

Bailiff of the Privy Treasurer (*Shaonei sefu*  
少內嗇夫)

Cavalier Attendant and Advisory Counselor  
(*Sanji jian dafu* 散騎諫大夫)

Cavalry Attendant (*Fuma duwei* 駙馬都尉)

Censor (*Yushi* 御史)

Chancellor (*Chengxiang* 丞相)

Chief Clerk (*Zhangshi* 長史)

Chief Clerk of the Chancellor (*Chengxiang zhangshi* 丞相長史)

Chief Commandant of Cavalry (*Ji duwei* 騎都尉)

Chief Commandant over the Nobility (*Zhujue duwei* 主爵都尉)

Clerk to Chancellor (*Chengxiang yuan* 丞相掾)

Clerk of the Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei shi* 廷尉史)

Clerk of the Defender of Yu County (*Yu weili* 圉尉史)

Clerk of the Magistrate of Xin'an (*Xin'an lingshi* 新安令史)

Commandant in the Military (*Xiaowei* 校尉)

Commandant of Collection of Grains (*Sousu duwei* 搜粟都尉)



Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei* 廷尉)

Commandant of the Guards (*Weiwei* 衛尉)

Commander-in-Chief (*Taiwei* 太尉 and later the title was changed to *Dasima* 大司馬)

Commandant-in-Chief of the Granaries (*Zhisu duwei* 治粟都尉)

Commandant-in-Ordinary (*Zhongwei* 中尉)

Commandery Governor (*Junshou* 郡守)

Counselor of the Palace (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫)

Defender in a Commandery (*Duwei* 都尉)

Defender of Maoling (*Maoling wei* 茂陵尉)

Defender of Recovering Territory (*futu duwei* 復土都尉)

Defender of the Yu County (*Yu shouwei* 圉守尉)

Director of Stables at Weiyang Palace (*Weiyang jiu ling* 未央殿令)

Director of the Imperial Clan (*Zongzheng* 宗正)

Director of the Secretariat (*Zhongshu guan*

中書官)

Division Commander (*Jun sima* 軍司馬)

The Gate Traffic Control Office (*Gongche* 公車)

General of Chariots and Cavalry (*Cheqi jiangjun* 車騎將軍)

General-in-Chief (*Da jiangjun* 大將軍)

Gentleman of the Palace Guard and a Gate Guard (*Yulin qimen lang* 羽林期門郎)

Gentleman-attendant (*Lang* 郎 or *langli* 郎吏)

Gentleman-attendant at the Palace Gate (*huangmen shilang* 黃門侍郎)

Grand Coachman (*Taipu* 太僕)

Grand Herald (*Dahonglu* 大鴻臚)

Grand Master for Lecturing (*jiangxue dafu* 講學大夫)

Grand Master of Ceremonies (*Taichang* 太常)

Grand Master of Remonstrance (*Jian dafu* 諫大夫)

Grand Master of Rites (*Liguan dafu* 禮官大夫)

Grand Master of the Palace (*Zhong dafu* 中大夫)

Grand Minister of Agriculture (*Dasinong* 大司農)

Grand Tutor (*Taifu* 太傅)

Grandee Secretaries (*Yushi dafu* 御史大夫  
and later the title was changed to *Da sikong* 大司空)

Imperial Secretary (*Shangshu* 尚書)

Inspector of Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei jian* 廷尉監)

Inspector of Horses (*Ma jian* 馬監)

Junior Tutor (*shaofu* 少傅)

Leader of the Officials (*Zhuli* 諸吏)

Left Inspector of the Commandant of Justice  
(*tingwei youjian* 廷尉右監)

Magistrates (*Xianling* 縣令)

Manager of Credentials (*Fujie ling* 符節令)

Manager of the Granary of Ganquan

(*Ganquan cangzhang* 甘泉倉長)  
Messenger (*Yezhe* 謁者)  
Metropolitan Commandant (*Sili jiaowei* 司隸校尉)  
Metropolitan Superintendent of the Left (*Zuo neishi* 左內史)  
Metropolitan Superintendent of the Right (*You neishi* 右內史)  
Nine Ministers of the State (*Jiuqing* 九卿)  
Overseer of the Stables (*Jiu sefu* 廄騫夫)  
Palace Attendant (*Shizhong* 侍中)  
Palace Secretaries (*Zhong shu* 中書)  
Palace Steward (*Jishizhong* 給事中)  
Privy Treasurer (*Shaofu* 少府)  
Superintendent of the Imperial Household (*Langzhongling* 郎中令 and later the title was changed to *Guanglu xun* 光祿勳)  
Superintendent of Waterways and Parks (*Shuiheng duwei* 水衡都尉)  
Superior Grand Master of the Palace (*Taizhong dafu* 太中大夫)

Supervisor of Dependent Countries (*Dianshu guo* 典屬國)

Supervisor of the Household (*Zhanshi* 詹事)

Three Dukes (*Sangong* 三公)

Vice Director of the Imperial Secretariat  
(*Puye* 僕射)

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. More than a half century after Homer Dubs elaborated the thesis of victory of Confucianism under Emperor Wu in the 1930s, some scholars still follow this grand paradigm in mapping the intellectual, political, social, and even military changes in early imperial China. Some scholars, such as Mark Lewis (1998), Martin Kern (2001), Fukui Shigemasa (2005), and Michael Loewe (2012), have called this established view into question. My work is part of this revisionist enterprise. See Homer H. Dubs, "The Victory

of Confucianism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 58, no. 3 (1938): 435–449; Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and during the Early Han Dynasty* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 337–348; Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to “A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods”* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 606–607. Chun-sun Chang, *The Rise of the Chinese Empire*, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), Chapter 1. Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Introduction” in *Readings in Han Chinese Thought*, edited and translated by Mark Csikszentmihalyi (Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 2006), esp. xxiii–xxvi. Martin Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the

Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *Wen* in Early Modern China,” *T’oung Pao* 87, no. 1–3 (2001), 43–91, esp. 67. Mark Edward Lewis, “The Feng and Shan Sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han,” in *State and Court Ritual in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 50–80. Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, *Kandai jukyō no shi teki kenkyū: jukyō no kangakuka o meguru teisetsu no saikentō* 漢代儒教の史的研究：儒教の官学化をめぐる定説の再検討 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2005). Michael Loewe, “‘Confucian’ Values and Practices in Han China,” *T’oung Pao* 98, no. 1–3 (2012): 1–30.

2. Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 18–19. Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian*



*Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17–56. For the relationship between *ru* and Confucians, see the discussion below.

3. As scholars like Li Kaiyuan 李開元 point out, while *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han* have been regarded as the most important sources for the study of the Han dynasty, the tables in those sources have not yet been fully explored. See Li, *Han diguo de jianli yu Liu Bang jituan: Jungong shouyi jieceng yanjiu* 漢帝國的建立與劉邦集團：軍功受益階層研究 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000).

4. Although the importance of numerical data for the study of Han officialdom has not yet been fully recognized, Hirai Masaji 平井正士 explored this method as early as in the 1980s, and Li

Kaiyuan followed suit in 2000. Both noted the tiny number of Confucians among Emperor Wu's high officials. Since Li wanted to understand the social and political status of the group that helped Liu Bang establish the Han dynasty, his focus was elsewhere. Hirai did not use the data he compiled to question Empower Wu's alleged commitment to Confucianism. Instead he explained away the contradiction by arguing that the promotion of Confucians occurred only during the first seventeen years of his reign, after which the gate to officialdom was locked to them. Probably because Hirai discussed his findings in the framework of the victory of Confucianism, his article did not attract much attention among Japanese scholars. See Hirai, "Kandai ni okeru juka kanryū no kugyū sō e no shinjun" 漢代における儒家官僚の公卿層への浸潤, in *Rekishini okeru minshū to bunka: Sakai Tadao*

*sensei koki shukuga kinen ronshū* 歴史における民衆と文化: 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集, ed. Sakai Tadao *sensei koki shukuga kinen no kai hen* 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念の会編 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1982), 51–65.

5. See, for example, Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 182; Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 330–335.

6. Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 6–7; Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 3–28.

7. Probably because of his novel claims and his prominent intellectual status, Hu

Shi's article ignited an intense debate among his contemporaries. See Hu Shi, "Shuo ru" 說儒, in *Hu Shi zuopin ji* 胡适作品集 (The collected works of Hu Shi), vol. 15 (Taipei: Yuanliu chuban, 1986), 99–159; Qian Mu 錢穆, "Bo Hu Shi zhi 'shuo ru'" 駁胡适之 '說儒', in *Hu Shi zuoping ji*, 15:191–201; Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, "Yuan rumo" 原儒墨, *San song tang xueshu wenji* 三松堂學術文集 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1984), 304–310; Guo Moruo 郭沫若, "Bo 'shuo ru'" 駁說儒, *Qing tong shi dai* 青銅時代 (Shanghai: Qun yi chubanshe, 1947), 434–462. See also, Xu Zhongshu 徐中舒, "Jia gu wen zhong suo jian de ru" 甲骨文中所見的儒, *Xian Qin shi lun gao* 先秦史論稿 (Chengdu: Ba shu chubanshe, 1992), 302–305. Zhang Taiyan 章太炎, "Yuan ru 原儒", in *Zhang Taiyan zhenglun xuanji* 章太炎政論選集, 2 vols. (Beijing: Tang Zhijun, 1977), 1: 489–494.

8. Robert Eno, “The Background of the Kong Family of Lu and the Origins of Ruism,” *Early China* 28 (2004): 1–28.

9. Nylan, “A Problematic Model,” 17–56; Nylan, *Five “Confucian” Classics*, 32–33; Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 165–375; Anne Cheng, “What Did It Mean to Be a ‘Ru’ in Han Times?” *Asia Major* 14 (2001): 101–118.

10. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 163–251.

11. From Xunzi 荀子 in the Warring States period to Xu Gan 徐幹 at the end of the Eastern Han, scholars continuously redefined the essential characteristics of *ru*. They not only endeavored to distinguish *ru* from other social groups but drew a line between true *ru* and vulgar *ru* within their own communities. See Cheng, “What Did It

Mean?” 101–118. Also Lai Chen, “Ru”: Xunzi’s Thoughts on Ru and its Significance, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 4, no. 2 (2009): 157–179.

12. *Shi ji*, 122:3115–3219. See also Michael Nylan, “Toward an Archaeology of Writing: Text, Ritual, and the Culture of Public Display in the Classical Period (475 B.C.E.–220 C.E.),” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005), 3–49.

## CHAPTER ONE. MINORITY AS THE PROTAGONISTS

1. I have noticed the debate regarding the relationship between *ru* and Confucians in Western academia and accept the view that the *ru* constituted a heterogeneous group with different intellectual orientations in the Han dynasty. Thus, I will use the Chinese

“*ru*” instead of translating it as “Confucians” in this book. But on the other hand, although *ru* were not necessarily the followers of Confucius, the rubric *ru* was used in a rather consistent way in the pre-Han and Han texts, designating men who immersed themselves in the Five Classics. For Sima Qian’s creation of *ru* identity, see Chapter 2. For modern scholars’ discussion of *ru* and Confucianism, see Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 6–7. Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), esp. 3–28. Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow,

On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17–56; Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 32–33. Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and during the Early Han Dynasty* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 165–375. Anne Cheng, “What Did It Mean to Be a *Ru* in Han Times?” *Asia Major* 14 (2001): 101–118.

2. Some critical Japanese scholars have challenged some aspects of the master narrative of the victory of *ru* learning under Emperor Wu. For example, they have called into question the significant role the conventional view usually assigns to Dong Zhongshu during Emperor Wu’s promotion of *ru* learning. They have also cast doubts on the claim that Emperor Wu established the “the erudite of the Five Classics” (*Wujing*



*boshi* 五經博士). But their views have not been widely accepted. See Hirai Masashi 平井正士, “Tō Chujo no kenriyou taisaku nenji ni tsuite” 董仲舒の賢良対策の年次に就いて, *Shichō* 史潮 11 no. 2 (1941): 79–116. Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, *Kandai jukyō no shi teki kenkyū: jukyō no kangakuka o meguru teisetsu no saikentō* 漢代儒教の史的研究: 儒教の官学化をめぐる定説の再検討 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2005). Fukui Shigemasa, “Rokukei rokugei to gokei: Kandai ni okeru gokei no seiritsu” 六經六藝と五經: 漢代における五經の成立, *Chūgoku shigaku* 中国史学 4 (1994): 139–164. Watanabe Yoshihirō 渡邊義浩, *Gokan kokka no shihai to jukyō* 後漢国家の支配と儒教 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1995), esp. introduction and Chapter 1. See also, Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 246–314. Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a Confucian Heritage and the “Chunqiu fanlu”* (Leiden

and Boston: Brill, 2011), Chapter 2; Michael Loewe, “‘Confucian’ Values and Practices in Han China,” *T’oung Pao* 98, no. 1–3 (2012): 1–30.

3. Zhu Ziyan 朱子彥, “Han Wudi ‘Bachu baijia, duzun rushu’ 漢武帝 “罷黜百家, 獨尊儒術” 質疑, *Shanghai daxue xuebao* 上海大學學報 11, no. 6 (2004), 92–94; Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Lü Simian dushi zhaji* 呂思勉讀史劄記 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982), 648.

4. Michael Loewe is famous for labeling Emperor Wu’s economic and military policies as “Modernist.” Lao Gan 勞幹 shows that throughout the Western Han dynasty, less than half of the men who advanced themselves through the recommendation system were experts in *ru* learning. Mark Lewis and Martin Kern, in their respective studies, contend that the intellectual orientations revealed by ritual practices in

Emperor Wu's court deviated greatly from *ru* learning. See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974). Lao Gan, "Handai chaju zhidu kao" 漢代察舉制度考, *Lishi yuyan yanjiu suo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊17 (1948): 79–129. Mark Edward Lewis, "The Feng and Shan Sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han," in *State and Court Ritual in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 50–80. Martin Kern, "Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of Wen in Early Modern China," *T'oung Pao* 87, no. 1–3 (2001), 43–91, esp. 67.

5. Michael Nylan, "A Problematic Model," 17–56; Nylan, *Five "Confucian" Classics*, 32–33; Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 165–375.

6. Besides these two chapters of *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Ban Gu's

presentation of the Western Han also contributed to shaping the view that Emperor Wu promoted *ru*, a topic that needs separate study. See also Fukui, *Kandai jukyō*, 415–526.

7. This table contains some minor errors as well as some records contradicting those in *The History of Western Han*. For example, there is a contradiction in the date of one appointment. These minor errors or contradictions will not affect my arguments. Loewe has meticulously documented the differences between this table and other records in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, or between this table and records in *Han shu* 漢書. Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 22:1119–1156. Ban G u 班固, *The History of Western Han* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 19:721–860. See Michael Loewe, *Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to a Biographical*

*Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 242–248.

8. “A Chronological Table of Famous High Civil and Military Officials since the Founding of the Han” of *The Grand Scribe’s Records* seems to record all the people who once bore the title of general (*Jiangjun* 將軍), whereas “A Table of the Hundred Officials and Dukes” of *The History of Western Han* is more selective, only recording names of important military commanders. While I generally follow the *The History of Western Han*, I add Li Guangli 李廣利 to [Table 1.1](#), who, as the brother of the emperor’s favorite concubine Li Furen 李夫人, was the prominent general toward the end of Emperor Wu’s reign. It is an enigma why Ban Gu, who wrote an independent biography for Li Guangli, left him out of the “Table of the Hundred Officials and Dukes” of *The History*

of Western Han.

9. They were the Grand Master of Ceremonies (*Taichang* 太常), the Superintendent of the Imperial Household (*Guanglu xun* 光祿勳), the Commandant of the Guards (*Weiwei* 衛尉), the Grand Coachman (*Taipu* 太僕), the Commandant of Justice (*Tingwei* 廷尉), the Grand Herald (*Dahonglu* 大鴻臚), the Director of the Imperial Clan (*Zongzheng* 宗正), the Grand Minister of Agriculture (*Dasinong* 大司農), and the Privy Treasurer (*Shaofu* 少府).

10. The Commandant of the Capital (*Zhongwei* 中尉) enjoyed the rank of fully two thousand bushels, a status equal to that of the Nine Ministers. The Superintendent of Waterways and Parks (*Shuiheng duwei* 水衡都尉), the Governor of the Capital (*Jingzhao yin* 京兆尹), the Eastern Supporter (*Zuo pingyi* 左馮翊), and the Western Sustainer (*You fufeng* 右扶風), who administered the

capital area, were ranked “fully two thousand bushels” or “two thousand bushels,” a status that was slightly lower than that of the Nine Ministers.

11. Before 104 BCE, the capital area was governed by the Metropolitan Superintendent of the Left (*Zuo neishi* 左内史), Metropolitan Superintendent of the Right (*You neishi* 右内史), and the Chief Commandant over the Nobility (*Zhujue duwei* 主爵都尉). See Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 86–87.

12. Officials who held several different posts are classified under the highest positions they achieved.

13. In the study of the Western Han history, the Han central bureaucracy is also divided into Outer Court (*waichao* 外朝) and Inner Court (*neichao* 内朝). Outer Court was

composed of Chancellor, Grand Secretary, Nine Ministers, and their subordinates. Those officials had well-defined administrative, censorial duties and their number was fixed. Inner Court generally consisted of Commander-in-Chief, the emperor's confidants such as Palace Attendant (*Shizhong* 侍中), Leader of the Officials (*Zhuli* 諸吏), Palace Steward (*Jishizhong* 給事中), and Imperial Secretaries (*Shangshu* 尚書). To what degree the officials of the Inner Court could control the Outer Court was primarily determined by how much power the emperor entrusted to them. Therefore, it was the Three Dukes and Nine Ministers who shared administrative duties with the emperor and thereby represented the significant power holders in the bureaucracy. Regarding the studies of Inner and Outer Courts, see Lao Gan 勞幹 “Lun Liang Han de neichao yu waicha” 論兩漢的內朝與外朝,



*Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊13 (1948): 227–267. Yu-ch'uan Wang, “An Outline of the Central Government of the Former Han Dynasty,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 12, no. 1/2 (1949): 134–187. Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 143–157. Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 193, 410–411. Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed*, 194–195.

14. The former group are Dou Ying 竇嬰, Tian Fen 田蚡, and Liu Qumao 劉屈氂; the latter group are Xu Chang 許昌, Xue Ze 薛澤, Zhuang Qingdi 莊青翟, Zhao Zhou 趙周, Shi Qing 石慶, and Gongsun He 公孫賀. See [Table 1.1](#).

15. *Han shu*, 66:2885. This is the only case in the Western Han that a Gentleman attendant directly ascended to the position of Nine Minister. In fact, the

meteoric rise of Tian Qianqiu was due to the witchcraft scandal that happened at the end of Emperor Wu's reign, a crisis which wiped out the established families in the court and created a power vacuum in the upper level of the bureaucracy. For discussion of the reshuffling of power after the witchcraft scandal, see Chapter 4.

16. This translation is Watson's with my modification. See Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty*, translated by Burton Watson, vol. 1 (New York: Renditions-Columbia University Press, 1993), 216.

17. Emperor Wu issued several edicts throughout his rule, asking governors, high officials, and marquises to recommend official candidates to the court. It is commonly held that it is from Emperor Wu's reign on that the recommendation system was regularized and became the major

recruitment method. See the section “Reassessing the Recommendation System and the Imperial Academy” below.

18. Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 297–341, esp. 319–341; Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 342–351; Ch'en Ch'i-Yun, “Confucian, Legalist, and Taoist Thought in Later Han,” in *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, *The Ch'in and Han Empires (221 B.C.–A.D. 220)*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 767–769; Homer H. Dubs, “The Victory of Han Confucianism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 58, no. 3 (1938): 440–441; Yu Yingchun 于迎春, *Qin Han shishi* 秦漢士史 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 93–99.

19. See [Table 1.1](#).

20. They are Shi Jian 石建, Kong Zang

孔臧, Zhou Ping 周平, Li Xincheng 李信成, Ren Yueren 任越人, Zhou Zhongju 周仲居, Zhou Jiande 周建德, Du Xiang 杜相, Xiao Shoucheng 蕭壽成, Zhang Chang 張昌, Zhang Guangguo 張廣國, Shi De 石德, Han Yue 韓說, Jin Shi 靳石, and Li Zhonggen 酈終根. See [Table 1.1](#).

21. Shi De 石德 was appointed as the Grand Master of Ceremonies in 102 BCE; his father, Shi Qing 石慶, was Chancellor from 112 to 103 BCE. Gongsun Jingsheng 公孫敬聲 was appointed Grand Coachman in 103 BCE; his father, Gongsun He 公孫賀, was Chancellor from 103 to 91 BCE. See *Han shu*, 19b:783–784.

22. *Shi ji*, 30:1428–1434, 120:3111–3112.

23. *Ibid.*, 30:1429.

24. *Ibid.*, 30:1437.

25. They are Zhang Tang 張湯, [Ni Kuan 兒寬], Du Zhou 杜周, Zhao Yu 趙禹, Yan Yi

顏異, Wang Shuwen 王舒溫, Yang Pu 楊僕, Yi Zong 義縱, Yin Qi 尹齊, Jian Xuan 減[咸]宣, Wang Xin 王訢, Zhu Maichen 朱買臣, Li Shou 李壽, Wei Buhai 魏不害. See [Table 1.1](#).

26. They are Zhang Tang 張湯, Ni Kuan 兒寬, Zhu Maichen 朱買臣, and Du Zhou 杜周.

27. *Shi ji*, 122:3137.

28. *Ibid.*, 122:3154.

29. *Han shu*, 64:2971.

30. *Ibid.*, 63:2746, 90:3664.

31. Jin Midi 金日磾 might be regarded as an exception in this group. He was a descendant of the Xiongnu king and was enslaved by the Han army. While put to tending the horses of the imperial stables, he impressed Emperor Wu by his appearance and thereby was appointed as a confidant serving the Emperor Wu. See *Han shu*, 68:2961.

32. Cf. Yan Buke 閻步克, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao* 察舉制度變遷史稿 (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1997), 22–28. Li Konghuai 李孔懷, “Handai langguan shulun,” 漢代郎官述論, in *Qin Han shi luncong* 秦漢史論叢, vol. 2 (Xi’an: Shanxi ren min chu ban she, 1982), 158–172. Yan Gengwang, 嚴耕望 “Qin Han langli zhidu kao” 秦漢郎吏制度考, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 23.a (1951): 89–143.

33. Most of the cases of “hereditary privilege” occurred during the reigns from Emperor Wu to Emperor Cheng 成帝. Gao Min, “Guanyu Han dai ‘ren zi zhi’ de jige wenti” 關於漢代任子制的幾個問題, in *Qin Han shi lunji* 秦漢史論集 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shuhua she, 1985), 272–292; Zhang Zhaokai 張兆凱, “Ren zi zhi xintan” 任子制新探, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研

究, 69, no. 1 (1996): 62–72.

34. *Shi ji*, 120:3105.

35. *Shi ji*, 103:2078.

36. *Shi ji*, 120:3111.

37. They are Guan Fu 灌夫, Li Guang 李廣, Su Jian 蘇健, Xu Ziwei 徐自為, Li Gan 李敢, Han Yue 韓說, Zhao Di 趙弟. See [Table 1.1](#).

38. *Shi ji*, 111:2936.

39. *Han shu*, 61:2703.

40. See Li Kaiyuan 李開元, *Han diguo de jianli yu Liu Bang jituan: Jungong shouyi jieceng yanjiu* 漢帝國的建立與劉邦集團：軍功受益階層研究 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2000), 44–69. Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, *Qin Han guanliao zhidu* 秦漢官僚制度 (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 2002), 159; “Yinwan Hanmu jian du junli yi ‘shisui bu’ buzheng” 尹灣漢墓簡牘軍吏以“十歲補”補證, *Jianbo yanjiu* 2004, 簡帛研究 2004 (Guilin: Guangxi shifa daxue

chuban she, 2006), 234–242.

41. Jiang Chong was employed as Messenger (*yezhe* 謁者), a category of the Gentleman-attendants, before he was entrusted with the mission to Xiongnu. *Shi ji*, 59:2099; 111:2944.

42. When Wang Mang usurped the throne and established the Xin 新dynasty, he frequently issued new currency in order to reduce the deficit of the government. Emperor Wu can be regarded as his direct precedent. See Homer H. Dubs, “Wang Mang and His Economic Reforms,” *T’oung pao* 35 (1940): 219–265.

43. *Shi ji*, 30:1417–1437.

44. For merchant’s social status in pre-Han and Han China, see Derk Bodde, “The Idea of Social Classes in Han and Pre-Han China,” in *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China: Studies Dedicated to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of His Eightieth*



*Birthday*, ed. W[ilt] L. Idema and E. Zürcher (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 26–41; Nishijima Sadao, “The Economic and Social History of Former Han,” in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1: *The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 545–607.

45. *Shi ji*, 30:1421.

46. They are Zhang Tang 張湯, Ni Kuan 兒寬, Du Zhou 杜周, Zhao Yu 趙禹, Yan Yi 顏異, Wang Shuwen 王舒溫, Yang Pu 楊僕, Yi Zong 義縱, Yin Qi 尹齊, Xian Xuan 減[咸]宣, Ning Cheng 甯成, Tian Guangming 田廣明.

47. Archeologically excavated manuscripts, from Juyan bamboo strips 居延 to Yinwan archives 尹灣, all indicate that accumulating merit and length of service was a crucial means for Han officials to receive promotions. See more detailed discussion in

the Conclusion.

48. Although Ni Kuan was associated with Zhang Tang's clique, his biography does not appear in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials"; on the contrary, Sima Qian cast him as a model *ru* official. Yan Yi was not included in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials," probably because he was not a member of Zhang Tang's clique; indeed, the two men appear to have had their differences. See also *Shi ji*, 30:1433.

49. It is a common practice in both China and Japan to identify men placed in "The Collective Biographies of Harsh Officials" as representatives of Legalism. For examples, see Fu Lecheng 傅樂成, "Xi Han de jige zhengzhi jituan" 西漢的幾個政治集團, in *Guoli Taiwan daxue Fu guxiaozhang Sinian xiansheng jinian wenji* 國立臺灣大學傅故校長斯年先生紀念論文集 (Taipei:

Guoli Taiwan daxue, 1952), 81–82; Xiao Gongquan 蕭公權, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiang shi* 中國政治思想史 (Taibei: Zhonghua wenhua chubanshiye weiyuanhui, 1954), 268–270. Fukui, *Kandai jukyō*, 70–72.

50. For example, Hans van Ess, “The Meaning of Huang-Lao in ‘Shi ji’ and ‘Han shu,’” *Etudes chinoises* 12, no. 2 (1993): 161–177. See also Lewis, *Writing*, 338–352.

51. Kidder Smith Jr., “Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, ‘Legalism,’ et cetera,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (2003): 129–156. Also, Scott Cook illustrates the similarity between teachings of Confucius, Mencius, and that of Zhuangzi; see also Scott Cook, “Zhuang Zi and His Carving of the Confucian Ox,” *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 4 (1997): 521–553. Paul Goldin, “Persistent Misconceptions about Chinese ‘Legalism,’” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38, no. 1 (2011): 88–

104.

52. Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 89, no. 1–3 (2003): 59–99.

53. *Shi ji*, 103:2773.

54. The original passage reads, “諸嘗與弘有卻者，雖詳與善，陰其禍。” *Shi ji*, 112:2951.

55. Ibid., 122:3143; *Han shu*, 94:3830.

56. It is an interesting phenomenon that Sima Qian, who obviously knew Kong Zang, did not include him, a descendant from powerful official families, in the “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*” nor did Sima Qian specify Kong’s expertise as he usually did for other political figures in his time. I have analyzed why Sima Qian tailored historical materials as he did in Chapter 2.

57. *Shi ji* notes that Han Anguo 韓安國

was a follower of Han Feizi 韓非子 and of the “miscellaneous thinkers” (*zajia* 雜家), while Zhang Ou 張歐 was a follower of “teachings regarding laws and names” (*xingming yan* 刑名言). *Shi ji*, 108:2857, 103:2773.

58. The original passage reads, “As for those who were recommended as worthies, if they have studied the teachings of Shen Buhai, Han Feizi, Su Qin, or Zhang Yi which will confuse the state policies, I request to reject all their memorials” 所舉賢良, 或治申、韓、蘇、張之言, 亂國政, 請皆罷奏. *Han shu*, 6:156. However, as Susan Schor Ko pointed out, Wei Wan’s memorial did not appear in *The Grand Scribe’s Records*. See Susan Schor Ko, *Literary Politics in the Han* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1991), 118. See also Lao Gan 勞榦, “Handai chaju zhidu kao” 漢代察舉制度考, 83; Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 138; Feng Liangfang 馮良方,

*Hanfu yu jingxue* 漢賦與經學 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 12–55; Lewis, *Writing*, 347.

59. For example, Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 138; Kung-chuan Hsiao, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans. Frederic Mote, vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1979), 554; Markus Keller, “From ‘Non-action’ to ‘Over-action’: An Analysis of the Shift of Political Paradigms in the Second Century B.C.” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1993), 1–33; Chen Ming 陳明, *Zhonggu shizu xianxiang yanjiu: ruxue de lishi wenhua gongneng chutan* 中古士族現象研究: 儒學的歷史文化功能初探 (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1994), 37–57; Feng Liangfang, *Han fu*, 12–55. Yan Buke 閻步克, *Shidafu zhengzhi yansheng shigao* 士大夫政治演生史稿. (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996), 224–333. Lewis, *Writing*, 339–351.

60. Han Anguo became Grandee Secretary in 135 BCE, and Zhang Ou achieved that position in 131 BCE.

61. Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC–AD 24)* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 180.

62. Sima Qian carefully documented the struggles between these *ru* officials. See *Shi ji*, 28:1397; 112:2950; 2961–2962; 121:3128. See also Chapter 2.

63. *Shi ji*, 120:3109.

64. For the significance of Sima Qian's public act of naming his contemporary officials, see Chapter 2.

65. *Shi ji*, 121:3121. Loewe, *Biographical Dictionary*, 399, 319.

66. *Shi ji*, 121:3121.

67. *Ibid.*, 121:3122, 3124.

68. *Han shu*, 63:2741.

69. “Bao fu” (Protecting and tutoring) is

attributed to Jia Yi 賈誼. It has been preserved in the received *Dadai liji* 大戴禮記 (Records of the rituals of Senior Dai), *Xin Shu* 新書 (New Writings) and *Han shu*. The quoted sentence can be punctuated in another way, to read, “I, the emperor, am familiar with ‘Bao fu,’ and I have written commentaries on *Xiao jing* 孝經 (The filiality classic), *Lun yu* 論語 (The Analects), and *Shang shu* 尚書 (The book of documents). But I never say that I am enlightened” 朕 ... 通保傳，傳孝經、論語、尚書，未云有明 (see *Han shu*, 7:223). Mark Csikszentmihalyi translated it with an introduction. See *Readings in Han Chinese Thought*, edited and translated by Mark Csikszentmihalyi (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006), 9–22.

70. *Han shu*, 89:3626. For a comprehensive survey about narratives regarding Wen Weng, see J. Michael Farmer, “Art, Education, & Power: Illustrations in the



Stone Chamber of Wen Weng.” *T’oung Pao* 86, no.1–3 (2000): 100–135.

71. During the reign of Emperor Gao 高帝, Shusun Tong 叔孫通 was once appointed as Grand Tutor to Crown Prince and Zhang Liang 張良 Junior Tutor to Crown Prince; other grand tutors include Wang Ling 王陵, Shen Yiji 審食其(reign of Dowager Empress Lü呂太后), Zhang Xiangru 張相如 (reign of Emperor Wen 文帝), Zhou Jiande 周建德 (reign of Emperor Jing 景帝), Shi Qing 石慶, Zhuang Qingdi 莊青翟, Zhao Zhou 趙周, Bu Shi 卜式, Shi De 石德 (all reign of Emperor Wu 武帝); junior tutors include Shi Fen 石奮 (reign of Emperor Wen 文帝), Wei Wan 衛綰 (reign of Emperor Jing 景帝), Shi Qing 石慶, Zhuang Qingdi 莊青翟, Zhao Zhou 趙周, Bu Shi 卜式, Shi De 石德 (all reign of Emperor Wu 武帝).

72. *Shi ji*, 103:2768; 103:2763.

73. Shi Qing had a son named Shi De

and the junior tutor of Emperor Wu's anointed heir was also called Shi De. Yan Shigu 顏師古 held that they were one person, though there is no record that directly supports this conjecture. See also *The History of Western Han*, 63:2743.

74. They are Zhang Liang 張良, Zhang Xiangru 張相如, Shi Fen 石奮, Zhou Jiande 周建德, Shi Qing 石慶, Zhuang Qingdi 莊青翟, Zhao Zhou 趙周, and Shi De 石德.

75. This decree was issued in the fifth year of Yuanshi reign 始元, namely 82 BCE. While Ban Gu recorded that Emperor Zhao was age of eight or nine when he succeeded the throne in 86 BCE, Chu Shaosun noted that he was merely five years old at that time. See *Han shu*, 63:2751–2753; *Shi ji*, 49:1985.

76. It is possible that Sima Qian avoided recording all events related to Liu Ju in *The Grand Scribe's Records* since he launched a military coup against Emperor Wu.

77. *Han shu*, 88:3617.

78. Regarding the development of *Guliang* tradition in the Western Han, see Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Chunqiu xue shi* 春秋學史 (Jinan: Shangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), 169–170. For how Han scholars fabricated the genealogy of transmitting the Five Classics, see Chapter 3.

79. Yu Qiding 俞啓定, *Xian Qin Liang Han rujia jiaoyu* 先秦兩漢儒家教育 (Ji'nan: Qilu shushe, 1987), 148–155.

80. *Shi ji*, 122:3139; 121:3125.

81. *Ibid.*, 112:2950.

82. *Han shu*, 88:3603.

83. *Ibid.*, 86:3507.

84. Under Emperor Wu, fifteen eminent officials climbed from the very bottom to high office as we discussed above, and one might say their patterns of advancement were comparable to those of Bing Ji, Huang Ba, and Yu Dingguo. But nowhere in *Han shu* or

*The Grand Scribe's Records* is there any evidence that they had an interest in the *ru* classics. What led ambitious officials under Emperor Xuan to beef up on *ru* doctrines? This question will be explored in Chapter 4. See *Han shu*, 74:3142–3150, 89:3627–3634; 71:3041–3045.

85. Dubs, “Wang Mang and His Economic Reforms,” 261. *Han shu*, 24:1183.

86. *Han shu*, 56:2513.

87. *Shi ji*, 121:3119.

88. *Ru* always had ambition to occupy the political realm. But they were first and foremost scholars specializing in Zhou tradition, not born politicians. For more discussion, see Chapter 4 and the Conclusion.

89. Nylan claims that the term *ru* was used to designate all officials serving in the Han court by their contemporaries. Furthermore, she contends that the Five

Classics were the standard preparation for most offices above the rank of clerk. Those statements misrepresent the Han empire. See Nylan, *Five “Confucian” Classics*, 18–19.

90. For example, Yan Buke 閻步克, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao* 察舉制度變遷史稿, 8–22; Lewis, *Writing*, 351, 359; Robert Kramers, “The Development of the Confucian School,” in *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1: *The Ch’in and Han Empires (221 B.C.–A.D. 220)*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 753–756. Fukui Shigemasa argues that the recommendation system dominated the various recruitment methods from Emperor Wu’s reign on. See Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, *Kandai kanri tōyō seido no kenkyū* 漢代官吏登用制度の研究 (Tokyo: Sobunsha, 1988), 3–114. Loewe, *Men Who Governed*, 109–154.

91. See Nathan Sivin’s discussion on the

Imperial Academy. Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early China and Greece* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 47, 50–51.

92. Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 133–139; Lao Gan, “Handai chaju zhidu,” 79–129; Yu Yingchun 于迎春., *Qin Han shishi* 秦漢士史 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 93–99; Huang Liuzhu 黃留珠, *Qin Han shijin Zhidu* 秦漢仕進制度 (Shanxi: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 1985), 86–87. Yan Buke, *Shi dafu*, 337–341.

93. Deng Gong 鄧公, a former Commandant of Chengyang (*Chengyang zhongwei* 城陽中尉) under Emperor Jing 景帝, is said to achieve a position among Nine Ministers through the recommendation system but was soon dismissed because of health problems. No record, however, can be found in “A Table of the Hundred Officials

and Dukes” of *The History of Western Han* nor is it clear which position he had achieved. See *Shi ji*, 101:2747–2748.

94. The original passage reads “除為從史，之北地視畜數年.” *Han shu*, 58:2628.

95. *Han shu*, 64:2775; *Shi ji*, 52:2949.

96. The old nominees were Feng Tang 馮唐, Deng Gong 鄧公, and Yuan Gu 轅固.

97. Bielenstein, *Bureaucracy*, 26.

98. This does not mean that the civil service examination system effectively facilitated social mobility, since only the well-to-do families were able to equip their descendants with the archaic knowledge of the Five Classics. See Robert M. Hartwell, “Demographic, Political, and Social Transformation of China, 750–1550” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 2 (1982): 365–442. Ann Waltner, “Building on the Ladder of Success: The Ladder of Success in Imperial China and Recent Work

on Social Mobility” (review article), *Ming Studies* 17 (Fall 1983): 30–36. John W. Chaffee, *The Thorny Gates of Learning in Sung China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Benjamin A. Elman, “Political, Social and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Later Imperial China,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 50, no. 1 (1991): 7–28.

99. See Yan Buke, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao*; Fukui Shigemasa, *Kandai kanri tōyō seido no kenkyū*, 3–114. Loewe, *Men Who Governed*, 109–154.

100. See also Yan Gengwang “Qin Han langli zhidu kao.” Li Konghuai, “Handai langguan shulun.”

101. *Han shu*, 58:2628–2629.

102. *Ibid.*, 74:3133.

103. Ooba Osamu 大庭脩, *Qin Han fazhi shi* 秦漢法制史, translated by Lin Jianming 林劍鳴 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin



chubanshe, 1991), 448–449.

104. Benjamin A. Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 199–200; 249; 379–380. Bradly Reed, “Scoundrels and Civil Servants: Clerks, Runners, and County Administration in Late Imperial China” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1994).

105. Michael Loewe, *Men Who Governed*, 114–115. Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, “Li yu Qin Han guanliao xingzheng guanli” 吏與秦漢官僚行政管理, *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 70, no. 2 (1996), 41–50.

106. Ooba Osamu 大庭脩, “Lun Han dai de lungong shengjin” 論漢代的論功升進, in *Jiandu yanjiu yicong* 簡牘研究譯叢, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1987), 323–338. Also, *Qin Han fazhi shi* 秦漢法制史, 442–458.

107. Liao Boyuan 廖伯源, “Handai shijin zhidu xinkao,” 漢代仕進制度新考. *Jiandu yu zhidu: Yinwan Hanmu jiandu guanwenshu kaozheng*, 簡牘與制度: 尹灣漢墓簡牘官文書考證 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 3–55. See also Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, “Jianbo yu Qin Han difang xingzheng zhidushi yanjiu” 簡帛與秦漢地方行政制度史研究, *Guoxue xuekan* 國學學刊 4 (2010), 56–76. See also Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, *Qin Han guanliao zhidu* 秦漢官僚制度 (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 2002), Chapters 7 and 8.

108. In 1982, Hirai Masashi 平井正士 published a short article in which he pointed out that *ru* were a tiny minority among high-level officials during Emperor Wu’s reign. However, deeply influenced by the dominant assertion that Emperor Wu advocated *ru* learning, Hirai did not venture to question the legendary victory of *ru*. Instead he

argued that Emperor Wu's promotion of *ru* occurred only during the first seventeen years of his reign, after which the gate to officialdom was locked to them. Probably because Hirai discussed his findings in the framework of the victory of *ru*, his article did not attract much attention among Japanese scholars. See Hirai Masashi 平井正士, "Kandai ni okeru juka kanryū no kugyū sō e no shinjun" 漢代に於ける儒家官僚の公卿層への浸潤, in *Rekishi ni okeru minshū to bunka: Sakai Tadao sensei koki shukuga kinen ronshū* 歴史における民衆と文化: 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念論集, ed. Sakai Tadao Sensei Koki Shukuga Kinen no Kai 酒井忠夫先生古稀祝賀記念の会編 (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1982), 51–65.

109. Fukui, *Kandai jukyō*, 485–526.

110. Wang Baoxuan 王葆玟, *Xi Han jingxue yuanliu* 西漢經學源流 (Taipei: Dong da tu shu gong si, 1994), 191–195.

111. *Shi ji*, 12:451–454.

112. Most scholars believe that “The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu” was reworked by Chu Shaosun (fl. 53–47 BCE). Yu Jiaxi, on the other hand, argued that it is not Chu Shaosun but later editors active in the third and fourth centuries AD who added this chapter. See Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫, “Taishi gong shu wang pian kao” 太史公書亡篇考, in *Zhongguo xiandai xueshu jingdian: Yu Jiaxi, Yang Shuda juan* 中國現代學術經典: 余嘉錫, 楊樹達卷, ed. Liu Mengxi 劉夢溪, Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚, et al. (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 257–361, esp. 283–288.

113. *Shi ji*, 12:451. See also Yu Jiaxi, “Taishi gong,” 283–288.

114. On the dates of Sima Qian’s death and the completion of *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, see Zhang Dake 張大可, “*Shi ji*” *wenxian yanjiu* 《史記》文獻研究 (Beijing:

Beijing minzu chubanshe, 1999), 88–89.

115. *Shi ji*, 130:3303. Wang Baoxuan documented the comments on Emperor Wu during the Han dynasty, showing that except Ban Gu, none of them explicitly associated Emperor Wu with the promotion of *ru* learning. See Wang Baoxuan, *Jingwen jingxue*, 191–194.

116. Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (eighth century) had a forced explanation of the issue in question. See *Shi ji*, 12:451. See also the introduction of the *Shi ji* published by Zhonghua shuju, in *Shi ji*, p. 3. See also Yu Jiaxi, “Taishi gong,” 284–288.

117. For example, Zufferey cites it to illustrate Emperor Wu’s promotion of *ru*. See Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 314–315.

118. *Han shu*, 5:155–160.

119. See the discussion of the tension between Ji An and Gongsun Hong in the section “Where Were the *Ru*, the Huang-Lao

Followers, and the Legalists?”

120. For example, Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 182; Zufferey, *To the Origins*, 330–335; Feng Liangfang, *Han fu*, 51.

## CHAPTER TWO. A CLASS MERELY ON PAPER

1. Six of them achieved high positions, and ten middle- to low-level positions. The former group includes Wang Zang 王臧, Zhao Wan 趙綰, Gongsun Hong 公孫弘, Ni Kuan 兒寬, Zhu Maichen 朱買臣, and Kong Zang 孔臧: and the latter, Yuan Gu 轅固, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, Yan Zhu 嚴助, Zhong Jun 終軍, Wuqiu Shouwang 吾丘壽王, Chu Da 褚大, Lü Bushu 呂步舒, Zhou Ba 周霸, Xu Yan 徐偃 and Di Shan 狄山.

2. *Shi ji*, 112:2950; *Han shu*, 58:2619.

3. *Ibid.*, 112:2961–2962; *Han shu*, 64:2803.

4. *Han shu*, 64:2796–2797.

5. *Han shu*, 64:2817.

6. *Shi ji*, 28:1397.

7. *Ibid.*, 121:3128.

8. *Han shu*, 56:2524.

9. Michael Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 177.

10. Here I translate *gongling* as “recruitment regulations.” Chen Pan’an 陳槃庵 has discussed the meaning of *gongling* at some length. My translation combines his explanation and the definition of this term provided in *Hanyu da cidan*. See also Wang Shumin 王叔岷, *Shi ji jiaozheng* 史記斟證, 10 vols. (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1983), 10:3249. *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典 (Shanghai: Hanyu da

cidian chu ban she, 1994), 2:767. See also Morohashi Tetsuji, ed., *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典, 13 vols. (Tokyoo: Taishūkan Shoten, 1984–1986), 2:368.

11. In the “Xueji” 學記 chapter of *Liji* 禮記, a passage reads as follows: 凡學, 官先事, 士先志. Although both the words *xue* and *guan* appear, they do not combine to form a single term: the passage should be translated to read, “In the case of learning, officials make their duties their first priority while literati (*shi*) make their ideals their first priority.”

12. On the original meaning of *guan* 官, see Wang Li 王力, Tang Zuofan 唐作藩, and Guo Xiliang 郭錫良, et al., *Wang Li gu hanyu zidian* 王力古漢語字典 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 220.

13. *Yan tie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校註, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器, 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 1:356.



14. *Han shu*, 30:1704.

15. *Ibid.*, 99:4066.

16. *Hanyu dacidian*, s.v. “學官.” *Dai Kan-Wa jiten*, 3:368 “學官.”

17. *Han shu*, 1:171–172. The accuracy of this date is confirmed by the following evidence. In this memorial, which appears in its entirety in *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Gongsun Hong mentioned that he had discussed his proposal with Grand Master of Ceremonies Zang (*Taichang Zang* 太常臧). We know that in 124 BCE the position was indeed held by a man called Zang, that is, Kong Zang 孔臧. This confirms that Gongsun Hong did submit this memorial in 124 BCE. See *Han shu*, 19:771.

18. In 124 BCE, Gongsun Hong was promoted from Grandee Secretary to Chancellor. See *Han shu*, 19:772–773.

19. *Guan* originally meant government office and was eventually extended to mean

officials. See Wang Li, *guhanyu cidian*, 220 s.v. “官.” Burton Watson also points out that when Sima Qian called Gongsun Hong *xueguan*, Gongsun Hong was in fact Grandee Secretary. That is why Watson used the phrase “scholar official.” See Burton Watson, trans. *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 355. I render *xueguan* as “learned official” instead to avoid the connotations strongly associated with “scholar officials” in histories of late imperial China.

20. “Grand master” (*dafu*) referred not to a specific post but to a category of officials without special administrative duties, like Gentlemen of the Interior or Officers in charge of Precedents (see *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, s.v. “tafu”). Liao Boyuan 廖伯源, “Handai dafu zhidu kaoshi” 漢代大夫制度考

釋, in *Qin Han shi luncong* 秦漢史論叢 (Taipei: Wuna tushu chuban gongsi, 2003), 201–230.

21. The original passage reads “又修起學官於成都市中，招下縣子弟以為學官弟子，... 縣邑吏民見而榮之，數年，爭欲為學官弟子。” *Han shu*, 89:3626.

22. Yang Shuda's view regarding this passage is cited in *Shi ji jiaozheng* 史記斟證, 9:3260.

23. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian*, 362.

24. The original passage reads, “索隱案：謂學者課功，著之於令，即今學令是也。” *Shi ji*, 121:3115.

25. *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* 大漢和辭典, 2:368.

26. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian*, 355.

27. *Shi ji*, 121:3119.

28. *Han shu*, 88:3596.

29. Chen's discussion is quoted by Wang Shumin in *Shi ji jiaozheng*, 10:3249.

30. Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian*, 355.

31. The original passage reads, “諸博士具官待問，未有進者。” See *Shi ji*, 121:3117. Yan Shigu 顏師古 interpreted *juguan* 具官 as *beiyuan* 備員, that is, reserve candidates. See *Han shu*, 88:3593.

32. It is interesting to observe that while in his translation of the “Collective Biographies of *Ru*.” Watson translated two instances of *xueguan* as “scholar officials,” he uncritically translated the instance at the beginning of the chapter as “official scholars.” He may have rendered the same term differently because of context. In the former cases, the contexts clearly suggest that *xueguan* meant learned officials, while in the latter case the immediate context fails to indicate what group of people was meant.

So Watson simply chose to follow the common meaning of *xueguan*, translating it as official-teachers or official-scholars.

33. *Han shu*, 64.a:2796.

34. The original sentence reads: “今陛下昭明德, 建太平, 舉俊材, 興學官, 三公有司或由窮巷, 起白屋, 裂地而封 ...” See *Han shu*, 64.a:2796.

35. Interestingly, although Sima Qian did not mention the transmission and development of *ru* doctrines in history, he documented the transmission of *ru* learning from the establishment of Han on so as to unite Han *ru* into a coherent group. See the following discussions.

36. *Shi ji*, 59:2093.

37. In his study of *ru*, Nicolas Zufferey examines the Erudites, the *shushi*, and the prominent *ru* of the Qin and Han. He concludes that both Erudites and *shushi* were heterogeneous groups and shows that people

called *ru* did not necessarily follow Confucius's teachings. He argues that *ru*, as a generic term, meant not "Confucians" but "men of letters." Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The "Ru" in Pre-Qin Times and in the Han Dynasty* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 167–285.

38. The Six Classics is simply the Five Classics plus a book about music. See also Liang Cai, "Between the Si-Meng Lineage and Xunzi: A Study of the Newly Discovered Text 'The Xing Zi Ming Chu,'" (Master's thesis, Cornell University, 2003), 13–25.

39. See Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no.1 (Spring 1989): 14–25. E. P. (Edward Palmer) Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1966).

40. Nylan makes this insightful observation. See Nylan, *The Five*

“Confucian” Classics, 6–7.

41. *Shi ji*, 121:3116

42. *Mengzi Zhengyi* 孟子正義, compiled by Jiao Xun 焦循; annotated and punctuated by Shen Wenzhuo 沈文倬 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 8:22.

43. Zufferey, *Origins*, 181–191.

44. *Shi ji*, 121:3122.

45. *Ibid.*, 121:3129.

46. Sarah Queen has discussed the date of these three memorials, which are preserved in *Han shu*. She concluded that Dong Zhongshu might have written them in response to the imperial inquiries of 140 and 134 BCE. See Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the “Spring and Autumn,” According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 249–254.

47. *Han shu*, 56:2513.

48. Queen, *Chronicle*, 23–25.

49. Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, s.v. “lang.”

50. Queen has discussed the birth date of Dong Zhongshu and contends that Dong was born in 195 BCE, but she also mentions that Dong might have been born around 179 BCE. See Queen, *Chronicle*, 241–246. Zhang Dake has summarized various discussions of Sima Qian’s birth date and claims that 145 BCE is most plausible; Zhang also claims that the *Shi ji* was completed around 90 BCE. See Zhang Dake 張大可, *Shiji wenxian yanjiu* 《史記》文獻研究(Beijing: Beijing minzu chunbanshe, 1999), 15–17, 88.

51. *Shi ji*, 103:2768.

52. Ibid., 103:2773.

53. Ibid., 120:3113.

54. Ibid., 30:1428, 1431.

55. Ibid., 30:1421.

56. Ibid., 30:1423.

57. The original passage reads, “當是之



時,招尊方正賢良文學之士,或至公卿大夫.公孫弘以漢相,布被,食不重味,為天下先.然無益於俗,稍驚於功利矣.” See *Shi ji*, 30:1424.

58. See William H. Nienhauser Jr., “A Reexamination of ‘The Biographies of the Reasonable Officials’ in the Records of the Grand Historian,” *Early China* 16 (1991): 209–233.

59. Zhou Yanmin 周彥民, “Lun Han dai de kuli” 論漢代的酷吏, *Shizhe* 史轍, vol. 2 (1978), 62–72; Tian Jiuchuan 田久川, “Ye lun Xi Han de kuli 也論西汉的酷吏,” *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 5 (1983): 65–70. Nienhauser, “A Reexamination,” 209–223.

60. Zhao Yu served as Privy Treasurer (*shaofu* 少府), and Zhang Tang served as Commandant of Justice (*tingwei* 廷尉).

61. *Shi ji*, 122:3139.

62. See [Table 1.1](#).

63. *Shi ji*, 30:1433–1434.

64. *Shi ji*, 122:3134–3149.

65. *Shi ji*, 121:3118.

66. *Ibid.*, 121:3126.

67. *Ibid.*, 121:3127.

68. *Shi ji*, 112:2954.

69. *Ibid.*, 121:3118–3121.

70. Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, “Qin Han langli zhidu kao “秦漢郎吏制度考. *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 23.a (1951): 89–143.

71. Lao Gan 勞榦, “Handai chaju zhidu kao” 漢代察舉制度考, *Lishi yuyan yanjiu suo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊17 (1948): 79–129.

72. Michael Loewe has noticed that *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han* offer different accounts of Ni Kuan's career and his service to Emperor Wu. Loewe thinks that, compared with Ban Gu, Sima Qian downplayed Ni Kuan's

contributions. Loewe insightfully figures out that Sima Qian and Ni Kuan once worked together to compile a new calendar for the Han court. He speculates that Sima Qian might have developed an antipathy toward Ni Kuan due to their different intellectual positions on the shared project. While Loewe's speculation is plausible, additional information may help explain the differences between the account of Ni Kuan in *The Grand Scribe's Records* and *The History of Western Han*.

73. *Han shu*, 58.2628–2629.

74. See Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1–29.

75. *Han shu*, 62:2732.

76. *Han shu*, 62:2727. See also, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed.,

vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 370–372; Bernhard Fuehrer, “The Court Scribe’s Eikon Psyches: A Note on Sima Qian and His Letter to Ren An,” *Asian and African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 170–183

### CHAPTER THREE. AN ARCHEOLOGY OF INTERPRETIVE SCHOOLS OF THE FIVE CLASSICS

1. See Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), introduction. There are many works studying how various thinkers in the pre-Han era cited and treated the Five Classics, especially the *Songs* and the *Documents*. For example, Zhang Haiyan 張海晏, “Xianqin zhuzi dui shi de jiedu yu linian hua 先秦諸子對《詩》的解讀與理念化,” *Journal of Yanshan University* 燕山大學

學報 3, no. 4 (2002), 15–21. Ma Shiyuan 馬士遠, “Boshu Yao yu Mozi chengshuo ‘shangshu’ yizhi xintan” 帛書《要》與《墨子》稱說‘尚書’意旨新探, *Academic Monthly* 學術月刊 39, no. 1 (2007): 137–141.

2. For example, Qian Mu 錢穆, “Liang Han boshi jiafa kao” 兩漢博士家法考, in *Liang Han jingxue gujin wen pingyi* 兩漢經學古今文平議 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2001), 181–262, esp. 221–223. Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, “Zhongguo jingxue shi de jichu” 中國經學史的基礎, in *Xu Fuguan lun jingxue shi er zhong* 徐復觀論經學史二種 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2002), 65–153.

3. For recent studies on Sima Qian’s “Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” see Michael Nylan, “Toward an Archaeology of Writing: Text, Ritual, and the Culture of Public Display in the Classical Period (475 B.C.E.–220 C.E.),” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*,

ed. Martin Kern (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2005), 3–49.

4. Long dated to the early Western Zhou, the *Changes* has recently been shown to have attained its final form in the late Western Zhou. See Edward L. Shaughnessy, “I ching 易經 (Chou I 周易),” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 219.

5. The original passage reads “孔子晚而喜易,序彖,繫,象,說卦,文言.讀易,韋編三絕.” *Shi ji*, 47:1937.

6. Zhu Xi 朱熹, the most important *ru* of the Song dynasty, stated that Confucius had not taught the *Changes* to his disciples. See Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Zhuzi Yu lie* 朱子語類 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 66:1620.

7. *Lunyu zhu shu* 論語註疏, ed. Xing

Bing 邢邴, Ruan Yuan 阮元, and He Yan 何晏 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shu ju, 1936), 62.

8. *Lunyu*, ed. Hebei sheng wen wu yanjiusuo Dingzhou Han mu zhu jian zhengli xiao zu 河北省文物研究所定州漢墓竹簡整理小組 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), 33. See also *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley (New York: Random House, 1989), 126; Wang Baoxuan 王葆玄, *Jin gu wen jingxue xin lun* 今古文經學新論 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 6–7.

9. A number of modern scholars have expressed similar doubts. See Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, “Zhongguo jingxueshi de jichu,” 73; Wang Baoxuan, *Jin gu wen*, 10–11.

10. *Shi ji*, 121:3127. Interestingly, while Sima Qian did not name the men who transmitted *Changes* from Shang Qu to Tian He in the “Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” they were identified in another part of his

book, “The Biographies of Confucius’s Disciples” (*Zhongni dizi liezhuan* 仲尼弟子列傳). But that passage is suspect. It is the only place in that chapter where the transmission of the Classics is discussed, and in terms of both style and presentation the passage in question differs from the rest of the chapter. Wang Baoxuan suspects that the passage, which is quite close to a passage from *The History of Western Han*, is a later interpolation. See *Shi ji*, 67:2211; Wang Baoxuan, *Jin gu wen*, 10–11.

11. The Qing scholar Cui Shi 崔適 pointed out the problem with age differences long ago. See Cui Shi, *Shiji tanyuan* 史記探源 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 217. See also Wang Baoxuan, *Jin gu wen*, 461.

12. Scholars have pointed out that *ru* before the Eastern Han era were not necessarily the experts of ancient texts but were distinguished by their transmission of



ancient rites. But here Sima Qian must have had ancient texts in mind, for he talks about Canons of Rites (*lijing* 禮經). See Martin Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of Wen in Early Modern China,” *T’oung Pao* 87, no. 1–3 (2001): 43–91. Michael Nylan, *Five “Confucian” Classics*, 32; “Toward an Archaeology of Writing,” 3. esp. 7–29. *Shi ji*, 121:3126.

13. Nylan thinks that the “Collective Biographies of *Ru*” in both Sima Qian and Ban Gu’s work are devoted to *ru* who were not important enough to merit an independent biography on their own. However, those two chapters serve more than that purpose. As we have seen, those two “Collective Biographies” map the complicated master–disciple relationships in the Han era, a network that included the eminent *ru* who had their own separate

biographies elsewhere. See Nylan, “Toward an Archaeology of Writing,” 16.

14. Besides the three masters recorded by Sima Qian, there were, of course, other scholars who taught and systematically explained the *Songs* in the early Han time. The Mawangdui 馬王堆 manuscript discovered in 1970s provides a glimpse into those lost traditions. See Jeffrey Riegel, “Eros, Introversion, and the Beginning of Shijing Commentary,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 57, no. 1 (1997): 143–147.

15. Shen Pei was said to have lived into his mid-eighties, while Yuan Gu and Mr. Fu lived about a decade longer. See *Shi ji*, 121:3121–3124.

16. The former are Shusun Tong 叔孫通, Wang Zang 王臧, Zhao Wan 趙綰, and the latter Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 and Ni Kuan 兒寬.

17. *Shi ji*, 112:2950, 121:3128,

112:2961–2962, 28:1397. For more stories regarding feuds among the *ru* officials, see Chapter 2.

18. It is common practice to identify the editor of the Han version of *Songs* as Han Ying. See James Robert Hightower, “The ‘Han-shih wai-chuan’ and the ‘San chia shih,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 11, no. 3/4 (December 1948): 241–310; Xinzhong Yao, ed., *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1:247.

19. For examples of identifying Mr. Fu as Fu Sheng, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Shang shu 尚書 (Shu ching 書經),” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 381; Michael Nylan, “The ‘Chin Wen/Ku Wen’ Controversy in Han

Times,” *T’oung pao* 80, no. 1–3 (1994): 83.

20. Yu Xiaoke 余蕭客, *Wenxuan yinyi ba juan* 文選音義八卷, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 (Ji’nan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 4:288–327.

21. Fan Ye 范曄, *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuhu, 1965), 26:893. Xu Fuguan noted Xu Zhan’s claim when relating the Han-era transmission of the *Documents*. See Xu Fuguan, “Zhongguo jingxueshi de jichu” 中國經學史的基礎, in *Xu Fuguan lun jingxueshi liang zhong* 徐復觀論經學史兩種 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2002), 85.

22. Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 88:3603.

23. Ibid., 88:3613. Hirai Masashi 平井正士 in the 1950s and Zufferey in the 2000s both argue that Dong Zhongshu exercised a limited role in advocating *ru* learning in the political realm. Following Hirai’s studies, Fukui contends that Dong’s contribution to

the success of *ru* doctrines was exaggerated by Ban Gu, a scholar who was deeply influenced by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin 劉歆, two zealous adherents of Dong at the end of the Western Han dynasty. See Hirai Masashi 平井正士, “Tō Chujo no kenriyou taisaku nenji ni tsuite” 董仲舒の賢良対策の年次に就くて, *Shichō* 史潮 11, no. 2 (1941): 79–116. Fukui Shigemasa, “Tō Chujo no taisaku no kisoteki kenkyū” 董仲舒の対策の基礎的研究, *Shigaku zasshi* 史学雑誌 106 (1997): 157–204. Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and During the Early Han Dynasty* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 246–314.

24. *Shi ji*, 121:3128; *Han shu*, 88:3615.

25. The story of Mr. Jiang is not entirely coherent in *The Grand Scribe's Records*; I will devote more attention to this later. See *Shi ji*, 121:3129.

26. The *Shou yuan* mentions a man

named Baobailingzhi 鮑白令之 who was said to have discussed Shanrang 禪讓 in front of Emperor Shihuang of the Qin. Meng Wentong identifies this individual as Fouqiu Bai, but does not provide any evidence. See Lu Jia 陸賈, “Zizhi” 資質, in *Xinyu jiaozhu* 新語校注, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 113; Huan Kuan 桓寬, “Huixue” 毀學, in *Yan tie lun* 鹽鐵論, ed. Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 229; Liu Xiang 劉向, “Zhigong” 至公, in *Shuo yuan jiao zheng* 說苑校證, ed. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 347; John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 3:272; Meng Wentong 蒙文通, “Fuqiu Bo” 浮丘伯, in *Zhongguo zhexue sixiang tanyuan* 中國哲學思想探源 (Taipei: Taiwan guji chubanyouxian gongsi, 1997), 166–167, 195.

27. For example, see Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:38; Hightower, “‘Han-shih wai-chuan,’” 268.

28. For example, see Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:38.

29. The story that the Gongyang scholars chose to transmit their teaching in the pre-Han era can be traced back to the writings of He Xiu 何休 (129–182 CE). See “Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu” 春秋公羊傳注疏, ed. He Xiu and Xu Yan 徐彥, in *Shi san jing zhu shu: fu jiaokan ji* 十三經註疏：附校勘記, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 2:2189, 2:2203b. Han scholars accused the first emperor of Qin of burning books and burying literati alive; He Xiu and Dai Hong were obviously referring to this event. Modern scholars have cast doubts on this famous story. See Petersen Jens Ostergard, “Which Books Did the First Emperor of Ch’in Burn? On the

Meaning of ‘Pai Chia’ in Early Chinese Sources,” *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995): 1–52.

30. Modern scholars often cite his account. See, for example, Anne Cheng, “Ch’un ch’iu 春秋, Kung yang 公羊, Ku liang 穀梁, and Tso chuan 左傳,” in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 68.

31. Wang Xianshen 王先慎, ed., *Han Feizi ji jie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 309.

32. Qing scholars pointed out that in early versions of *The History of Eastern Han* the master’s personal name appeared as 長, without the radical; later versions took to writing the name 萇, as it appeared in *Sui Shu* 隋書 (*The History of the Sui*). See Hou Han



shu, 79b:2569.

33. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄, “Mao shi pu” 毛詩譜, in *Huang Shi* 黃奭, *Huang shi yi shu kao* 黃氏逸書考 (Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1934), 38:238.

34. Lu Ji 陸璣, “Mao shi cao mu niao shou chong yu shu jiao zheng” 毛詩草木鳥獸蟲魚疏校正, ed. Ding Yan 丁晏, in *Xu xiu Si ku quan shu* 續修四庫全書, ed. Xu xiu Si ku quan shu bian zuan wei yuan hui 續修四庫全書編纂委員會 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 71:457–458.

35. “Interpretive schools” here is the translation of “xue 學” in phrases like “weishi xue” 韋氏學 (school of Mr. Wei), “Yan zhi xue” 顏之學 (school of Mr. Yan). As we shall observe in this section, those “xue” were full-fledged scholarly organizations, which not only had founding masters who often crystallized their teachings in works, but endured over more

than three generations. Obviously, in this sense, those interpretative schools are different from “daoia” 道家, “fajia” 法家, terms that were constructed retrospectively by Han historians like Sima Tan 司馬談 and Ban Gu. Scholars have argued “jia” in rubrics like “daoia,” “fajia” shall not be translated as “schools” but as “experts” or “lines of filiations.” See Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 1–3, no. 89 (2003): 59–99. Kidder Smith, “Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, ‘Legalism,’ ‘Et Cetera,’” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (2003): 129–156. Sarah Queen, “Inventories of the Past: Rethinking the ‘School’ Affiliation of the Huainanzi,” *Asia Major* 14 (2001): 51–72.

36. The four official schools devoted to the *Changes* were those of Shi, Meng,

Liangqiu, and Jing Fang the younger; the two traditions that were not officially acknowledged were those of Fei and Gao. See *Han shu*, 88:3597–3603, 3621.

37. The number of prominent *ru* officials who served in the last ninety years of Western Han surpassed the figures provided here, because some *ru* officials did not belong to any of the interpretive schools.

38. Ibid., 30:1703.

39. *Hou Han shu*, 79a:2548–2554. To name a few, Liu Kun 劉昆, a leading member of the Shi school, served as the Superintendent of the Imperial Household (*Guanglu xun*); Wa Dan 洼丹, of the Meng school, served as a Grand Herald (*dahonglu*); Hua Yanghong 鮒陽鴻, also a Meng specialist, served as the Privy Treasurer (*shaofu*); Zhang Xing 張興, a specialist in the Liangqiu school, served as Junior Tutor for the Crown Prince (*taizi shaofu*). In addition,

several scholars served as provincial governors.

40. Yao Zhenzong 姚振宗, *Hou Han shu yi wen zhi* 後漢書藝文志, in *Xu xiu Si ku quan shu* 續修四庫全書, ed. Xu xiu Si ku quan shu bian zuan wei yuan hui 續修四庫全書編纂委員會 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2002), 190–197.

41. *Hou Han shu*, 79:2547. Michael Loewe, citing the work of Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, claims that the Xiping version of the *Changes* was based on a text prepared by Jing Fang the Younger, while Wang Baoxuan thinks that Liangqiu's version was used as the standard text. Both schools emerged under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan. See *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Xinzhong Yao (London: Routledge, 2003), 2:555; Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1962), 73–79; Wang Baoxuan, *Jin gu wen*, 473.

42. *Hou Han shu*, 79:2554. Wei Zheng 魏徵, *Sui shu* 隋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 32:912.

43. *Sui shu*, 32:909.

44. There were two experts on the *Changes* named Jing Fang in the Western Han. Jing Fang the Elder was active before Emperor Xuan's reign, while Jing Fang the Younger worked during the reign of Emperor Yuan. The Jing Fang school devoted to the *Changes* was named after Jing Fang the Younger. See *Han shu*, 88:3620.

45. For bibliographical works in traditional China, see Shuyong Jiang, "Into the Source and History of Chinese Culture: Knowledge of Classification in Ancient China," *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 42, no. 1 (2007): 1–20.

46. Guo Yu 郭彧, *Jing shi Yi yuanliu* 京

氏易源流 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2007), 127–189.

47. *Hou Han shu*, 79:2545. Of the schools Guangwu endorsed, only those devoted to the *Songs* can be traced back to the *ru* of the first 120 years of the Western Han.

48. The history of the scholarly traditions surrounding both the old-script *Documents* and the old-script *Zuozhuan* can be traced back to prominent *ru* under Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan.

49. Wei Zheng, *Sui shu*, 32:915. For the old script and new script debate, see Michael Nylan, “The Chin Wen / Ku Wen Controversy in Han Times,” *T’oung Pao* 80, no. 1–3 (1994): 83–145.

50. Among the eleven prominent experts on the Gongyang tradition listed in “The Bibliographies of *Ru*” in *The History of Eastern Han*, only Li Yu 李育 and He Xiu 何

休 did not have affiliations with the two Yan schools of the Western Han. See *Hou Han shu*, 79:2582–2583.

51. The Qing school devoted to the *Rites* also appears to have been recognized as official in the Eastern Han, since Cao Chong, an expert from that school, won the post of Erudite at the Imperial Academy. Still, it is not among the fourteen official schools listed in the opening of “The Bibliographies of *Ru*” in *The History of Eastern Han*. See *ibid.*, 79:2545.

52. *Ibid.*, 35:1201.

53. Wei Zhang, *Sui shu*, 32:926.

54. Scholars have also approached Sima Qian’s writing on *ru* from other perspectives. See Nylan, “Toward an Archaeology of Writing”; Li Wai-Yee, “The Idea of Authority in the Shih Chi (Records of the Historian),” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 54, no. 2 (1994): 345–405.

55. The Ouyang school is named after Ouyang Gao, not after his ancestor. Ban Gu pointed out that the Ouyang school derived from the teachings of Ni Kuan; Ouyang Gao was the only member of his family to receive Ni's teachings. See *Han shu*, 88:3603.

56. In extant versions of *The Grand Scribe's Records*, the term *Han shi* occurs only once, in an entry that was added by Chu Shaosun, a scholar who lived under Emperor Xuan, around twenty-five years after the death of Sima Qian. See *Shi ji*, 20:1062.

57. *Ibid.*, 121:3122.

58. *Han shu*, 36:1922. Through carelessness, Ban Gu failed to purge the contradiction regarding Mr. Shen from his work. In “The Biography of King Yuan of Chu” 楚元王傳, he claimed that Shen wrote commentaries to the *Songs*, whereas in “The Collective Biographies of *Ru*,” he copied the information devoted to Shen directly from



*The Grand Scribe's Records*, including the assertion that Shen did not write any commentaries.

59. The original passage reads, “申公獨以詩經為訓故以教，亡傳。” *Shi ji*, 121:3121.

60. This conventional view is often cited but at the same time questioned by modern scholars. See Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics*, 253–262; Michael Nylan and Thomas Wilson, *Lives of Confucius: Civilization's Greatest Sage Through the Ages* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 76–87. Anne Cheng, “Ch'un ch'iu,” 70–71; Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 68; Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the ‘Spring and Autumn,’ According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 115–126; Zhou

Yutong 周 予同, *Zhou Yutong jingxueshi lun zhu xuanji* 周予同經學史論著選集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1983), 253–261.

61. Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Mozi xian gu* 墨子閑詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 1:225–230. The term *chun qiu* occurs in the expositions of the ten Mohist doctrines in the core chapters, which can be dated to the late fifth century BC. See A. C. Graham, “Mo tzu,” in *Early Chinese Texts*, 336–338.

62. For examples, see *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, ed. Liu Xiang 劉向 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1978), 30:1088; *Shi ji*, 128:3232; *Han shu*, 100:4208, 4211.

63. *Mengzi zheng yi* 孟子正義, ed. Jiao Xun 焦循 and Shen Wenzhuo 沈文倬 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 452.

64. Wang Xianqian 王先謙, ed., *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 2:498.

65. The version of *Annals* preserved in the *Zuo* and the *Guliang* commentaries has this passage as “秦伯使術來聘.” See *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhu shu* 春秋公羊傳註疏, in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 4.14.3a.

66. *Ibid.*, 4.14.3a.

67. The translation is Knoblock’s with my modifications. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:218, 226.

68. *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan*, 2.4.6a; *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan zhu shu* 春秋穀梁傳註疏, in *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 1.3.4b.

69. Interestingly, although Knoblock realizes that in these two cases the message *Xunzi* cites actually is conveyed in *Gongyang* and *Guliang* instead of in *Annals*, he nevertheless chooses to translate *chunqiu* as “the Spring and Autumn Annals.” See Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 3:366.

70. Wang Xianshen, *Han Fei zi ji jie*, 107.

71. *Zhanguo ce*, 567. *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳逐字索引, ed. Liu Dianjue (Lao, D. C.) (Hong Kong: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1992), 4.25/32/4.

72. The book *Chun qiu fan lu* finally came into being in Six Dynasties, but most chapters can be taken as a rich source of early Han thought. See Steve Davison and Michael Loewe, "Ch'un ch'iu fan lu," in *Early Chinese Texts*, 77–79. Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon*, 69–115. For those preserved in the *Chunqiu Annals*, see *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin* 春秋繁露逐字索引, ed. Liu Dianjue (Lao, D. C.) (Hongkong: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1994), 1.1/1/15; 2.1/8/29; 4.1/17/6–30; 8.2/36/3–12; 7.3/30/21; 7.3/29/13; 6/70/25; for the one preserved in Gongyang, see *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin*, 7.3/31/8; for the one that does

not occur in our received texts, see *Chunqiu fanlu zhuzi suoyin*, 6/70/25.

73. Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露, ed. Su Yu 蘇輿 and Zhong Zhe 鐘哲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), 51–52.

74. Ibid., 57–60.

75. *Shi ji*, 38:1634.

76. Ibid., 58:2091.

77. Ibid., 14:509–510. The translation is from Durrant, *Cloudy Mirror*, 66.

78. Liu Zhenghao 劉正浩, *Zhou Qin zhu zi shu Zuo zhuan kao* 周秦諸子述左傳考 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1966), esp. 128–208.

79. *Shi ji*, 121:3128.

80. *Han shu*, 56:2525.

81. *Shi ji*, 121:3129.

82. *Han shu*, 88:3617.

83. There are eight quotations in the *Iron and Salt Debates* that are ascribed to

Chun qiu. One is preserved in all three commentaries; one is preserved in both the Zuo commentary and the Gongyang; two are preserved in the Gongyang; the remaining four quotations cannot be found in our received texts. For those preserved in Gongyang or Zuozhuan, see *Yantie lun zhuzi suoyin* 鹽鉄論逐字索引, ed. Liu Dianjue (Lao, D. C.) (Hongkong: Shang wu yin shu guan, 1994), 2.1/10/8; 9.2/63/17; 9.4/65/16; 9.6/67/22; for those without correspondences in the received texts, see *Yantie lun zhuzi suoyin*; 1.4/7/13; 2.4/13/29; 5.6/35/19; 7.1/50/29.

84. *Han shu*, 88:3618.

85. Knoblock, *Xunzi*, 1:157.

86. *Han Feizi*, 425.

87. Wang Xianqian claimed that the concept of “master-rule” in the Han dynasty originated from Xunzi, without noticing that in that text the compound had a different

meaning. Xu Fuguan refuted Wang's view. See Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (ed.), *Han shu bu zhu* 漢書補注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 88:1517; Xu Fuguan, *Zhongguo jingxueshi*, 75–77.

88. The original passage reads: “國師嘉信公顛倒五經，毀師法，令學士疑惑. ... 宜誅此數子以慰天下!” See *Han shu*, 99:4170.

89. For examples, see *ibid.*, 27:1429, 74:3137, 75:3170. While loyalty to one's teachers was praised, David Elstein argues that one could shift one's scholarly affiliation without shame. See David Elstein, “Friend or Father? Competing Visions of Master-Student Relations in Early China,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2006, 183–186.

90. Several famous Chinese scholars discussed the Han dynasty's interest in *shifa*, but none noticed that this idea did not appear until the second half of the Western Han. See,

for example, Wang Mingsheng 王明盛, *Shiqi shi shangque* 十七史商榷 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1937), 27; Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue lishi* 經學歷史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 136; Qian Mu 錢穆, “Liang Han boshi jiafa kao” 兩漢博士家法考, in *Liang Han jingxue jinguwen ping yi* 兩漢經學今古文平議 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2001), 181–261, esp. 223–230; Yen-zen Tsai, “‘Ching’ and ‘Chuan’: Towards Defining the Confucian Scripture in Han China (206 BCE–220 CE),” PhD diss., Harvard University, 1993, 126.

91. Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅 argues that Emperor Wu did not establish the Erudites of Five Classics as we commonly believe. Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, “Rokukei rokugei to gokei: Kandai ni okeru gokei no seiritu” 六經六藝と五經：漢代における五經の成立, *Chūgoku shigaku* 中国史学 4 (1994): 139–164.



92. This observation echoes the views of scholars who challenge the victory of *ru* under Emperor Wu. To name a few, Fukui Shigemasa, *Kandai jukyō no shi teki kenkyū: jukyō no kangakuka wo meguru teisetsu no saikentō* 漢代儒教の史的研究：儒教の官学化をめぐる定説の再検討 (Tokyo: kyūko shoin, 2005); Martin Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of Wen in Early Modern China,” *T’oung Pao* 87, no. 1–3 (2001): 43–91, esp. 67; Mark Edward Lewis, “The Feng and Shan Sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han,” in *State and Court Ritual in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 50–80; Michael Nylan, “Classics without Canonization, Reflections on Classical Learning and Authority in Qin (221–210 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220),” *Early Chinese Religion, Part One, Shang through Han (1250 BC–AD 220)*, ed. John Lagerwey and

Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 721–777.

93. This scenario indicates that before the *ru* community established influential school traditions and started to produce a considerable number of high officials, there was a group that preserved and taught the Five Classics, even though this could not bring them immediate rewards. For more discussion, see conclusion.

## CHAPTER FOUR. A RESHUFFLE OF POWER

1. *Han shu*, 6:212.

2. *Ibid.*, 7:233.

3. *Han shu*, 9:277. The translation is Dubs's, with some modifications. See Ban Gu, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, translated by Homer H. Dubs (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938), 301.

4. Loewe has summarized these arguments; see Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to a Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 617–619. See also, Yang Shengmin 楊生民, “Han Xuandi shi ‘ba wang dao za zhi’ yu ‘chun ren de jiao’ zhi zheng kaolun” 漢宣帝時“霸王道雜之”與“純任德教”之爭攷論, in *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 285, no. 6 (2004), 62–66; Yu Yingchun, *Qin Han shi shi*, 171–179.

5. Yu Yingchun, *Qin Han shi shi*, 171–179.

6. I could find no relatives on either the paternal or the maternal side who had served in officialdom.

7. *Han shu*, 73:3101.

8. Ibid., 66:2898.

9. Ibid., 81:3331.

10. Ibid., 89:3627; 74:3142.

11. Ibid., 66:2888; 89:3627.

12. Only two such families can trace their history back before Emperor Wu's reign. Liu Piqiang 劉辟彊 was a relative of the imperial clan. An ancestor of Han Zeng 韓增, Han Tuidang 韓頹當, surrendered the Xiongnu troops under his command to the Han and so was ennobled under Emperor Wen. See *Han shu*, 33:1856; 30:1749.

13. The four upstarts are: Tian Qianqiu 田千秋, Wei Buhai 魏不害, Jiang De 江德, and Su Chang 蘇昌 For detailed discussion of those four upstarts, see below.

14. They are Emperor Cheng 成帝 (33–7 BCE), Emperor Ai 哀帝 (7–1 BCE), Emperor Ping 平帝 (1 BCE–6 CE), and Wang Mang 王莽 (6 CE–23 CE).

15. Under Emperors Cheng, Ai, and Ping, twenty-five eminent officials came from powerful official families and, under Wang Mang's rule, four from official

families. See [Table 4.3](#).

16. Only Ju jin 駒普 (32), Wang Xian 王咸<sup>1</sup> (26), Jin Chang 金敞 (25), and Du Yejun 杜業君 (20) had family histories of official service before Emperor Zhao.

17. *Han shu*, 71:3046; 83:3391.

18. Chen Xian was the son of Chen Wannian 陳萬年, who ascended to the position of Grand Secretary from the bottom of the bureaucracy under Emperor Xuan. Ren Qianqiu was the son of Ren Gong 任宮, Huang Pu was the son of Huang Ba 黃霸, Feng Yewang was the son of Feng Fengshi 馮奉世, and Yin Cen was the son of Yin Wenggui 尹翁歸. See *Han shu*, 83:3398; 79:3300; 79:3302; 89:3634; 76:3209.

19. Jin Shang 金賞, the son of Jin Midi, served as the Superintendent of the Imperial Household under Emperor Yuan; Jin Chang 金敞, the son of Jin Midi's brother, became Commandant of the Guards under Emperor

Cheng; Jin Qin 金欽, grandson of Jin Midi, became Governor of the Capital (*Jingzhao yin*) under Emperor Ping; Jin Zun 金遵 became a member of the Nine Ministers under Wang Mang (see [Table 4.4](#)).

20. Cai Yi 蔡誼[義] and Wei Xian 韋賢 served as Erudites at the Imperial Academy, and Wei Xian is said to have studied the *Book of Changes* in his youth. See *Han shu*, 66:2898, 73:3101, 74:3133.

21. Ibid., 73:3143.

22. Ibid., 75:3157.

23. Ibid., 71:3042–3046.

24. The seven men in question were Zhang Yu 張禹, Zhai Fangjin 翟方進, Kong Guang 孔光, Ping Dang 平當, Wang Jia 王嘉, Ma Gong 馬宮, and Ping Yan 平晏. *Han shu*, 71:3048; 81:3347–3350; 81:3352; 86:3481; 71:3051.

25. *Han shu*, 78:3272.

26. Ibid., 71:3046.

27. Both Xiao Wangzhi and Kuang Heng were disciples of Hou Cang. See *Han shu*, 81:3331.

28. Ibid., 89:3629.

29. Ibid., 71:3051.

30. Ibid., 81:3347.

31. *Shi ji*, 121:3117.

32. *Han shu*, 6:211.

33. Historical records disagree about the year of Liu Bo's death. In "The Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" (*Wudi ji* 武帝紀), a section of *The History of Western Han*, Liu Bo is said to have died in 88 BCE (*Han shu*, 6:211). This date seems to be confirmed by Ban Gu's comment in "The Biographies of Emperors' Consorts" (*Waiqi zhuan* 外戚傳) that Liu Bo died earlier than Emperor Wu (*Han shu*, 97:3965). However, in another section of *The History of Western Han*, "The Five Sons of Emperor Wu," one reads that Liu Bo died eleven years after being named king of

Changyi, that is, 86 BCE (*Han shu*, 63:2764), a date that matches the one in “The Table of Dukes and Kings, Part Two” (*Zhuhou wang biao di'er* 諸侯王表第二) (*Han shu*, 14:420). Did Emperor Wu ever consider Liu Bo, the son of one of his favorite consorts, as his successor after the crown prince was killed? Why did Wu die so soon after Liu Bo? Did someone deliberately change the date of Liu Bo’s death in order to justify Wu’s choice of his youngest son as heir? Such questions arise naturally when we consider the complicated and confusing situation of the time. However, our limited sources cannot provide any final answers.

34. *Han shu*, 63:2760.

35. *Han shu*, 63:2751.

36. *Han shu*, 55:2471–2472, 2478.

37. *Jishizhong* is a supplementary honorific designation, translated as Palace Steward. See *A Dictionary of Official Titles in*



*Imperial China*, s.v. “chi-shih-chung.”

38. *Fuma duwei* and *Fengju duwei* were two positions created by Emperor Wu. They were largely sinecures and in times of peace they were assigned no subordinates. Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 29.

39. *Han shu*, 68:2959–2961.

40. *Han shu*, 6:211. There were two men named Shangguan Jie. Another one served as Privy Treasurer (*Shaofu*) in 102 BCE or 101 BCE and was soon dismissed because of his old age (see *Han shu*, 19B:784; 61:2702).

41. Bielenstein said that from the time of Emperor Xuan the Cavalry of the Feathered Forest was led by Gentlemen-of-the-Household of the Feathered Forest and a Chief Commandant of Cavalry. See Bielenstein, *Han Bureaucracy*, 25.

42. It is not clear if Shangguan Jie

achieved the position of Grand Coachman before the valedictory decree was issued; possibly he was simultaneously granted the posts of Grand Coachman and of General of the Left. The latter scenario seems more likely, since in the summer of 88 BCE Shangguan Jie was still a Chief Commandant of Cavalry. See *Han shu*, 6:211.

43. *Shi ji*, 30:1432, 1441; *Han shu*, 19B:785.

44. *Han shu*, 68:2932.

45. Huo Guang was appointed Commander-in-Chief and General-in-Chief on the same day that Emperor Wu died, that is, the *dingmao* 丁卯 day of the second month in 87 BCE. An entry in *Han shu* says that Sang Hongyang was appointed Grandee Secretary on the *yimao* 乙卯 day of the second month in 87, but no such day existed. See *Han shu*, 19:791.

46. *Shi ji*, 60:2118.

47. *Han shu*, 63:2751–2753.

48. *Shi ji*, 49:1985.

49. *Han shu*, 68:2933.

50. *Ibid.*, 66:2888.

51. *Ibid.*, 68:2953.

52. *Han shu*, 90:3665

53. *Ibid.*, 69:2972; 7:230.

54. *Ibid.*, 71:3035.

55. Liu Biqiang's father was Liu Fu 劉

富. See *Han shu*, 36:1922–1926.

56. *Ibid.*, 36:1926–1927.

57. *Ibid.*, 33:1857.

58. Yan Buke 閻步克, *Chaju zhidu*

*bianqian shigao* 察舉制度變遷史稿

(Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe,

1997), 22–28; Li Konghuai 李孔懷, “Handai

langguan shulun,” 漢代郎官述論 in *Qin Han*

*shi luncong* 秦漢史論叢, vol. 2 (Xi'an:

Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1982), 158–172;

Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, “Qin Han langli

zhidu kao” 秦漢郎吏制度考, *Zhongyang*

yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan 中央  
研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 23 (1951), 89–  
143.

59. For more discussion, see Chapter 1.

60. Ibid., 96:2685.

61. *Han shu*, 90:3664.

62. *Han shu*, 18:877.

63. *Shi ji*, 27:2077, 9:400. Loewe has some discussion of the nobilities of the Western Han, Loewe, *Men Who Governed*, 251–324. Yang Guanghui 楊光輝 has a monograph that studies the nobilities of Han through Tang dynasty. However, it merely provides a coarse outline without detailed evidence. See Yang Guanghui, *Han Tang feng jue zhidu* 漢唐封爵制度 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1999).

64. At the beginning of the dynasty, all marquises lived in the capital and nearby areas; the network between them and high officials in court could let them exert some

influence in the political reign. From Emperor Wen on, all marquises were requested to go back to their own fiefs, which were far from the political center. Thereafter, unless a marquise assumed any official position, he could hardly play any role in contemporary politics. *Han shu*, 4:115. See Li Kaiyuan, *Han diguo de jianli yu Liu Bang jituan: Jungong shouyi jieceng yanjiu* 漢帝國的建立與劉邦集團：軍功受益階層研究 (Beijing: sanlian shudian, 2000), 212–215.

65. *Han shu*, 40:2056.

66. *Han shu*, 6:187.

67. Li Kaiyuan, *Han diguo*, 63–73

68. Ibid., 63–73. My statistical number, as indicated in [Table 4.2](#), is a little higher than Li's: 19 out of 77 high officials, namely 25 percent, were the descendants of Emperor Gaozu's meritorious officials.

69. *Han shu*, 66:2878.

70. Ibid., 6:208.

71. Ibid., 45:2175–2179.

72. Ibid., 63:2742.

73. Ibid., 63:2743, 66:2880–2881.

74. Ibid., 66:2883.

75. Ibid., 19B:788–789, 55:2491–2493.

76. Ibid., 16:579, 606, 629, 17:639, 640,

644, 652, 655–657.

77. *Yan tie lun*, “San bu zu” 散不足, 2:352.

78. *Han shu*, 62:2732.

79. *Hou Han shu*, 83:2768–2769. See also Wang Zijin 王子今, “Xi Han Chang’an de ‘hu wu’” 西漢長安的“胡巫,” *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 5 (1997): 64–69; idem, “Liang Han de ‘Yue wu’” 兩漢的“越巫,” *Nandu xue tan* 南都學壇 25, no. 1 (2005): 1–5; Ma Xin 馬新, “Lun Liang Han minjian de wu yu wushu” 論兩漢民間的巫與巫術, *Wen shi zhe* 文史哲 264, no. 3 (2001): 119–128; Fu-shih Lin, “The Image and Status of Shamans in Ancient China,” in *Early Chinese*

*Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Mark Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 397–458.

80. “敢蠱人及教令者，死。” This belongs to the legal code cited by Zheng Xuan in his annotations to *Zhou li*. See *Zhou li zhu shu* 周禮註疏, in *Shi san jing zhu shu fu jiao kan ji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 1.37.888.

81. By analogy, *gu* was used to designate diseases brought on by excessive sexual indulgence, as indicated by the records of the first year of Duke Zhao 昭公 in *Zuo zhuan*. See *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, ed. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 4:1222–1223. See also H. Y. Feng, J. K. Shryock, “The Black Magic in China Known as *Ku*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55, no. 1 (March 1935), 1–30.

82. *The Grand Scribe's Records* relates that Duke De of Qin 秦德公 sacrificed dogs at the city's four gates to dispel the *gu* (plague); in *Zhou li*, a special department is described that is responsible for driving off *gu* by spells and herbs. See *Shi ji*, 28:1359; *Shi san jing zhushu*, 1.37.888.

83. *Shi ji*, 10:424. The translation is Watson's, with my modifications. See Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty I*, translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 297.

84. *Shi ji*, 28:1377.

85. *Ibid.*, 10:427.

86. *Ibid.*, 97:3948.

87. *Ibid.*, 6:203.

88. *Ibid.*, 6:208.

89. *Ibid.*, 19:737.

90. *Ibid.*, 66:2885.

91. For example, see Pu Muzhou (Muzhou Poo) 蒲慕州, "Wugu zhi huo de



zhengzhi yiyi” 巫蠱之禍的政治意義, *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊 57, no. 3 (1986): 511–537; Lao Gan 勞幹, “Duiyu ‘Wugu zhi huo de zhengzhi yiyi’ de kanfa” 對於 “巫蠱之禍的政治意義” 的看法, *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 57, no. 3 (1986): 539–551; Meng Xiangcai 孟祥才, “Xi Litaizi zhi yu” 析戾太子之獄, *Qi Lu xuekan* 齊魯學刊 164, no. 5 (2001): 11–17; Zhang Xiaofeng 張小鋒, “Weitaizi de yuanyu zhaoxue yu xihan Wu, Zhao, Xuan shiqi de zhengzhi” 衛太子冤獄昭雪與西漢武, 昭, 宣時期的政治, *Nandu xuetan* 南都學壇 no. 3 (2006): 12–17.

92. This view is first put forward by Sima Guang in *Zi zhi tong jian* 資治通鑑. Modern scholars like Tian Yuqing and Michael Loewe have elaborated this thesis. See Tian Yuqing 田余慶, “Lun Luntai zhao” 論輪台詔, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 2 (1984): 9; Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (London: George

Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1974), 77.

93. *Han shu*, 66:2881.

94. *Ibid.*, 61:2699.

95. *Ibid.*, 63:2747.

96. *Ibid.*, 16:629.

97. See Pu Muzhou, “Wugu zhi huo,” 531–537.

98. The witchcraft scare at the end of Emperor Wu’s reign was probably the most striking tragedy of the Western Han; it caused a sensation and immediately attracted the attention of historians. Although Ban Gu did not devote a special chapter to it, he presented detailed information in biographies of the victims. In *The History of Western Han* the term *wugu* 巫蠱 became virtually synonymous with the events surrounding this massacre. In the 1970s Michael Loewe documented the events in a chronological account. Influenced by the thesis of the victory of the Confucians under

Emperor Wu, Loewe saw the witch hunts as proof of the bankruptcy of Confucian ideology. Pu Muzhou revisited this event in the 1980s and argued that all the talk of witches was a smokescreen for executing the rivals of the future Emperor Zhao. While scholars, including Ban Gu, clearly saw that this tragedy had paved the way for Huo Guang to seize power, no one thought to investigate the outcome of this event, namely, the nearly complete eradication of the old ruling class and the construction of a *ru* bureaucracy thereafter. See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict*, 37–90, esp. 37–38; Pu Muzhou, “Wugu zhi huo”; Lao Gan, “Duiyu ‘Wugu zhi huo’.”

## CHAPTER FIVE. BEGIN IN THE MIDDLE

1. *Han shu*, 68:2932. See also *Shi ji*, 49:1985.

2. See Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 4:1061.

3. *Han shu*, 44:2139.

4. Loewe documents the references to the Duke of Zhou in Qin and Han times. See Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed China: Companion to "A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods"* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2004), 340–356.

5. *Han shu*, 78:3272.

6. *Han shu*, 72:3061.

7. *Ibid.*, 7:233.

8. Hans van Ess, "Praise and Slander: The Evocation of Empress Lü in the Shiji and the Hanshu," *Nan Nu: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 8, no. 2 (2006): 221–254.

9. *Ibid.*, 12:349; 36:1960; 84:3428.

10. For example, both Cao Cao 曹操

(155–220 CE), at the end of Eastern Han, and Sima Zhao 司馬昭, at the end of Western Jin, compared themselves with the Duke of Zhou. See Cao's poem "Duan ge xing" 短歌行, in *Cao Cao ji zhu zi suo yin* 曹操集逐字索引 (A concordance to the works of Cao Cao), ed. D. C. Lao, Chen Fangzheng, 陳方正 and He Zhihua 何志華 (Hong Kong: Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, 2000), 1. See also Chen Shou 陳壽, *San guo zhi* 三國志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 1:38; *Jin shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 2:40. On the use of the story of the Duke of Zhou and King Cheng in later history, see Benjamin Elman, "'Where is King Ch'eng?' Civil Examinations of Confucian Ideology during the Early Ming, 1368–1415," *T'oung Pao* 79, no. 1–3 (1993): 23–68.

11. In this chapter "*ru* classics" is interchangeable with "Five Classics." In the Western Han dynasty, especially, since

Emperors Zhao, Xuan, and Yuan, people generally associated the “Five Classics” with the expertise of *ru*. For example, *The History of Western Han* says, “Zhang Chang originally studied the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; using the techniques of classics as his auxiliary tools, his administration is blended with the elegance of *ru* (teaching)” 然敞本治春秋，以經術自輔，其政頗雜儒雅. Another case reads “Those three officials were all *ru*, who use the techniques of classics to embellish the administrative affairs” 三人皆儒者。以經術潤飾吏事, *Han shu*, 76:3222; 83:3393.

12. *Han shu*, 68:2937.

13. Bozi cited this story to justify his brother’s decision to promote his younger son instead of his eldest grandson as heir after his oldest son died. See *Liji zhu zi suo yin* 禮記逐字索引, ed. D. C. Lao, Chen Fengzheng, and He Zhihua (Hong Kong:

Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, 1992), 10.

14. *Han shu*, 68:2937.

15. *Han shu*, 75:3155.

16. This story was recorded twice in *The History of Western Han*, appearing in the biography of Xiahou Sheng and in “A Treatise on Five Phases” (*Wuxing zhi* 五行志). See *Han shu*, 75:3155; 27:1459.

17. Zhang Chang was promoted to Regional Inspector of Yuzhou (*Yuzhou cishi* 豫州刺史) after Liu He was deposed by Huo Guang. See *Han shu*, 76:3216.

18. *Han shu*, 63:2766.

19. *Ibid.*, 68:2946.

20. *Ibid.*, 72:3062; 88:3610.

21. Although this memorial says that it cites from *Liji*, the passage in question is preserved not in *Liji* as we know it, but in *Chunqiu gongyang zhuan* 春秋公羊傳. See *Gongyang zhuan zhu zi suo yin* 公羊傳逐字索引, ed. D. C. Lao, Chen Fengzheng, and He

Zhihua (Hong Kong: Zhong wen da xue chu ban she, 1995), 94.

22. *Han shu*, 68:2944. See also, Chaihark Hahm, “Ritual and Constitutionalism: Disputing the Ruler’s Legitimacy in a Confucian Polity,” *American Journal of Comparative Law* 57, no. 1 (2009): 135–203.

23. The original passage reads: 不疑曰: “諸君何患於衛太子! 昔蒯瞶違命出奔, 輒距而不納, 春秋是之. 衛太子得罪先帝, 亡不即死, 今來自詣, 此罪人也.” See *Han shu*, 71:3027

24. *Ibid.*, 71:3037–3038.

25. *Ibid.*, 75:3155.

26. The original given name of Emperor Xuan was Bingyi, which led to problems with the customary taboo against using any of the characters in the imperial name. Since the characters bing 病 and yi 已 were normally quite common, many people forgot to avoid



them when submitting memorials, a punishable offense. Emperor Xuan felt pity for them and decided to change his personal name to Xun 詢, a relatively unusual character which could be tabooed without endangering the unwary. See *Han shu*, 8:256.

27. *Han shu*, 74:3142.

28. The consorts of the crown prince were divided into three ranks, fei 妃, liangdi 良娣, and ruzi 孺子. See *Han shu*, 97:3961.

29. The phrase *yeting* refers to the palace's side apartments, where women associated with the household who committed crimes were detained and those who fell ill were cared for. See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), entry 3010.

30. *Han shu*, 74:3142–3143.

31. *Ibid.*, 68:2947.

32. *Han shu*, 97:3961; 74:3149.

33. Zhang Anshi once said to Zhang He that as the descendant of Liu Ju, Liu Bingyi was lucky to be treated by the court as a commoner. As noted earlier, Jun Buyi also openly denounced Liu Ju as a criminal. See *Han shu*, 97:3964.

34. Ibid., 74:3149.

35. Ibid., 8:238.

36. Sarah Allan, *The Heir and the Sage: Dynastic Legend in Early China* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1981). “Abdication and Utopian Vision in the Bamboo Slip Manuscript, Rongchengshi,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37.s1 (2010): 67–84.

37. See Yuri Pines, “Subversion Unearthed: Criticism of Hereditary Succession in the Newly Discovered Manuscripts,” *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005–2006): 159–178.

38. Ibid., 68:2935.

39. Ibid., 68:2953.

40. *Han shu*, 66:2898–2899.

41. *Shi ji*, 20:1062.

42. *Han shu*, 8:241.

43. Ibid., 76:3223.

44. Ibid., 74:3135; 76:3217; 78:3273.

45. Ruoweng 弱翁 is the style name of

Wei Xiang. Ibid., 74:3134.

46. Ibid., 78:3273.

47. Ibid., 76:3216; 76:3206.

48. Ibid., 89:3635–3636.

49. Ibid., 89:3624.

50. They were Wei Xiang 魏相 (67), Huang Ba 黃霸 (55), Zhu Yi 朱邑 (66), Gong Sui 龔遂 (66), Yin Wenggui 尹翁歸 (65), Chen Wannian 陳萬年 (61), Zhang Chang 張敞 (61), Han Yanshou 韓延壽 (59), Xie Yannian 解延年 (49), Yu Dingguo 于定國 (51); see [Table 4.1](#).

51. Zhu Yi became Assistant to the Grand Minister of Agriculture, Wei Xiang

magistrate of Maoling 茂陵, Chen Wannian a magistrate of a county, Zhang Chang Manager of the Granary of Ganquan (*Ganquan cangzhang* 甘泉倉長), and later Assistant to the Grand Coachman.

52. *Han shu*, 89:3635; 76:3221.

53. *Ibid.*, 67:3208; 66:2899.

54. *Ibid.*, 89:3624.

55. *Ibid.* 89:4299.

56. *Ibid.*, 78:3274.

57. *Ibid.*, 8:263.

58. See Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, *Chunqiu xue shi* 春秋學史 (Jinan: Shandong jiaoyu, 2004), 202–210; Jack L. Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch’an-Wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty,” PhD diss., University of Washington, 1966.

59. *Han shu*, 74:3135.

60. Han Fei 韓非 proposed a method of bureaucratic management that involved “making a judgment of right and wrong by

examining the agreement between one's performance and [one's official] title, assessing one's speech by examining its effectiveness" 循名實而定是非，因參驗而審言辭. See *Han Feizi ji jie* 韓非子集解, compiled by Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), 100. See also A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), 282–285.

61. *Han shu*, 74:3136.

62. *Ibid.*, 74:3140.

63. *Ibid.*, 74:3141.

64. *Ibid.*, 74:3147.

65. *Ibid.*, 8:241; 245, 249, 255, 268, 269.

66. *Ibid.*, 8:268.

67. *Ibid.*, 8:245.

68. *Ibid.*, 8:255.

69. *Shi ji*, 26:1259; Loewe, *Men Who Governed*, 455–468; Donald Harper, "Warring States: Natural Philosophy and

Occult Thought,” in *The Cambridge History of China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 B.C.*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 813–884.

70. Robin Yates, “The Yin-Yang Texts from Yinqueshan: An Introduction and Partial Reconstruction, with Notes on Their Significance in Relation to Huang-Lao Daoism,” *Early China* 19 (1994); Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy,” 860–866. See also A. C. Graham, *Yin-Yang and the Nature of Correlative Thinking* (Singapore: Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1986), 76.

71. Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177–180.

72. Ibid., 183–195.

73. *Shi ji*, 121:3128.

74. *Han shu*, 27:1317.

75. *Shi ji*, 10:422.

76. *Han shu*, 4:128.

77. *Ibid.*, 34:2786.

78. *Ibid.*, 6:185.

79. *Ibid.*, 56:2524.

80. Chen Yexin 陳業新 has compiled detailed charts of the decrees related to disasters that were delivered in both the Western and the Eastern Han dynasties. It is a pity that he did not point out that Emperor Xuan initiated the policy of addressing the catastrophe—it became an established tradition—a point that his charts clearly indicate. See Chen Yexin, *Zaihai yu liang Han shehui yanjiu* 災害與兩漢社會研究 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2003), 224–228. Aihe Wang, “Wuxing guan lanshang de lishi guocheng” 五行觀濫觴的历史过程, *Zhongguo zhexue yu wenhua* 中国哲学与文化, v. 9 (2011): 181–218.

81. References to *yin* and *yang* appeared

in Chao Cuo and Dong Zhongshu's memorials. See *Han shu*, 49:2293; 56:2500. For the first decree to employ the concept, see *Han shu*, 8:255.

82. Loewe argues that references to the five phases (wuxing) were not made by high-ranking officials until Emperor Yuan's reign. This suggests that official acceptance of correlative cosmology took place after Emperor Wu. See Loewe, *Men Who Governed*, 515.

83. See discussion in the first part of this chapter.

84. *Han shu*, 66:2890–2892

85. They are Wang Shang 王商, Xue Xuan 薛宣, and Zhai Fangjin 翟方進; see *Han shu*, 83:3393, 84:3423.

86. See also Michael Loewe, “‘Confucian’ Values and Practices in Han China,” *T'oung Pao* 98, no.1–3 (2012): 1–30.

87. For the claim that Dong's theory did



not exercise profound influence under Emperor Wu, see Fukui Shigemasa, *Kandai Jukyō no shiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kyuko shoin, 2005), 261–404; Nicolas Zufferey, *To the Origins of Confucianism: The Ru in Pre-Qin Times and during the Early Han Dynasty* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 304–319; Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, A Confucian Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), Chapter 2. On Dong's thought, see Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, according to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

88. *Han shu*, 9:298

89. *Ibid.*, 88:3600.

90. *Ibid.*, 78:3274

91. *Ibid.*, 78:3274.

92. *Ibid.*, 54:2468.

93. They are Bing Ji 丙吉, Huang Ba 黃

霸, Shu Guang 疏廣, Shu Shou 疏受, Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝, Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之, Zhou Kan 周堪, and the latter five were *ru* officials. See *Han shu*, 71:3039; 19B:803, 807, 809; 36:1931; 88:3604.

94. *Han shu*, 88:3618.

95. Ibid., 30:1705, 1710, 1714, 1716, 1718.

96. Ibid., 8:272.

97. Pan Ku, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, trans. Homer Dubs (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938), 2:273.

98. See also Gary Arbuckle, "Inevitable Treason: Dong Zhongshu's Theory of Historical Cycles and Early Attempts to Invalidate the Han Mandate," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 115, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1995): 585–597. Martin Kern, "Shiqu ge huiyi (The Conference in the Stone Canal Pavilion)," in *RoutledgeCurzon Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, ed. Yao

Xinzhong (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 559. Xia Changpu 夏長樸, “Lun Han dai xueshu huiyi yu Han dai xue shu fazhan de guanxi: yi shiqu ge huiyi de zhaokai weili” 論漢代學術會議與漢代學術發展的關係：以石渠閣會議的召開為例, in *Di san dai Han dai wenxue yu sixiang xueshu yantao hui lunwen ji* 第三屆漢代文學與思想學術研討會論文集 (Taibei: Wen shi zhe chu ban she, 2000), 87–108.

99. See [Table 5.1](#): Participants of Shiqu Conferences in 51 BCE and Participants of Court Discussion in 53 BCE.

100. *Han shu*, 78:3283.

101. Ibid., 88:3604.

102. Ibid., 78:3284.

103. In the biography of Liu Xiang that appears in *The History of Western Han*, his position is erroneously given as Sanji zongzheng jishizhong 散騎宗正給事中. See *Han shu*, 36:1929; 78:3283.

104. *Han shu*, 78:3284.

105. *Ibid.*, 71:3047.

106. *Ibid.*, 72:3069.

107. *Ibid.*, 81:3332.

108. *Shi ji*, 96:2688.

109. *Han shu*, 81:3332.

110. Regarding the significant role Imperial Secretaries (*Shang shu* 尚書) and Palace Secretaries (*Zhong shu* 中書) played in Han bureaucracy, see Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史, vol. 1 (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 137–149. Lao Gan 勞榘, “Lun Liang Han de neichao yu waichao.” 論兩漢的內朝與外朝, *Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊13 (1948): 227–267.

111. *Han shu*, 78:3284.

112. *Ibid.*, 78:3284.

113. *Ibid.*, 36:1930–1931.

114. *Ibid.*, 78:3284–3286; 93:3726.

115. Ibid., 93:3729.

116. Ibid., 67:2913.

117. Ibid., 93:3726.

118. Ibid., 93:3728.

119. *Han shu*, 93:3727.

120. *Han shu*, 28:1654.

121. They were Ouyang Yu 歐陽餘, Zheng Hong 鄭弘, Yan Pengzu 嚴彭祖, Zhao Xincheng 召信成, Feng Yewang 馮野王, Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成.

## CONCLUSION

1. Michael Loewe comments about the witchcraft scandal that “whatever lipservice was paid in edict or official pronouncement to the superior virtues of ‘Confucian’ values, decisions of state were frequently dictated by ambition, jealousy or fear.” See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 B.C. to A.D. 9* (London: George Allen &

Unwin, 1974), 38.

2. Those questions do not indicate that the *ru* ideas, as a potential ideology, assumed autonomous power. See Pierre Bourdieu, “The Social Conditions for the Effectiveness of Ritual Discourse,” in *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 107.

3. Examples of works that challenge the traditional wisdom of the victory of *ru* include Hirai Masashi 平井正士, “Tō Chujo no kenriyou taisaku nenji ni tsuite” 董仲舒の賢良対策の年次に就くて, *Shichō* 史潮 11, no. 2 (1941): 79–116; Fukui Shigemasa 福井重 雅, “Rokukei rokugei to gokei: Kandai ni okeru gokei no seiritu” 六經六藝と五經: 漢代における五經の成立, *Chūgoku shigaku* 中国史学 4 (1994): 139–164; *Kandai jukyō no shi teki kenkyū: jukyō*

*no kangakuka wo meguru teisetsu no saikentō* 漢代儒教の史的研究： 儒教の官学化をめぐる定説の再検討 (Tokyō: kyūko shoin, 2005); Watanabe Yoshihiro 渡 邊義浩, *Gokan kokka no shihai to Jukyō* 後漢 国家の支配と儒教 (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1995), introduction; Mark Edward Lewis, “The Feng and Shan Sacrifices of Emperor Wu of the Han,” in *State and Court Ritual in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 50–80; Martin Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of Wen in Early Modern China,” *T’oung Pao* 87, no. 1–3 (2001), 43–91, esp. 67.

4. Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-Huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 2000), esp. 163–182.

5. Yuri Pines, “The Question of

Interpretation: Qin History in Light of New Epigraphic Sources,” *Early China* 29 (2004): 1–44; “Biases and Their Sources: Qin History in the *Shiji*, ” *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005–2006): 10–34.

6. Lothar von Falkenhausen, “Mortuary Behavior in Pre-Imperial Qin: A Religious Interpretation,” in *Religion and Chinese Society*, vol. 1: *Ancient and Medieval China*, ed. John Lagerwey (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004), 109–172. Yuri Pines and Gideon Shelach, “Power, Identity and Ideology: Reflections on the Formation of the State of Qin (770–221 BC),” in *An Archaeology of Asia*, ed., Miriam Stark (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005): 202–230.

7. *Han shu*, 22:1030; 22:1043.

8. For more discussion on Sima Qian’s treatment of his contemporary *ru*, see Chapter 2.

9. *Han shu*, 78:3271.



10. Ibid., 36:1967; 88:3618.

11. Ibid., 30:1724.

12. For more discussion about the network woven by the eminent *ru* officials after they rose to power, see Chapters 3 and 4.

13. For more discussion on Master Rule, see Chapter 3.

14. *Han shu*, 71:3043.

15. Ibid., 84:3413.

16. Influenced by the social mobility theory, traditional scholarship ideally portrays the emergence of scholar (*shi* 士) class—the lowest segment of the hereditary aristocracy who were educated but without powerful family background, regarding them as the major candidates for official positions. This might lead Nylan to claim that all the officials of the Han dynasty were trained in the Five Classics and can be called *ru*. See Yu Yingshi 余英時, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua*

士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 1–11; 84–113. See also Cho-yun Hsu 許倬雲, “Qin Han zhishi fenzi” 秦漢知識份子, in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan guoji hanxue huiyi lunwenji: Lishi kaogu zu* 中央研究院國際漢學會會議論文集歷史考古組 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1981), 495–496; *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722–222 B.C.* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965); Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17–56; Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 18–19.

17. It is too idealized to portray the

various states of Warring State period as centralized bureaucracy run by officials whose positions reflected their abilities more than their pedigree. See Yuri Pines and Gideon Shelach, “Using the Past to Serve the Present: Comparative Perspectives on Chinese and Western Theories of the Origins of the State,” in *Genesis and Regeneration: Essays on Conceptions of Origins*, ed., Shaul Shaked (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, 2005), 127–163, esp. 128–129.

18. *Han shu*, 43:2105.

19. Nineteen eminent *ru* officials emerged during this time, among whom only Kong Zang and Wei Xuancheng came from prestigious family backgrounds. See [Table 4.5](#).

20. Michael Loewe is one of the few who in recent years publish in English on the institutional history of the Han empire. See

Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to a Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), esp. Chapters 2 and 4.

21. Among the sixty-three eminent *ru* officials from Emperor Wu to Wang Mang's reign, fifty-two, or more than 80 percent, came from obscure backgrounds. See [Tables 4.5](#) and [4.7](#).

22. Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, *Qin Han guan liao zhi du* 秦漢官僚制度 (Beijing: She hui ke xue wen xian chu ban she, 2002), Chapters 4 and 5.

23. Yan Gengwang's work on Gentleman-attendants can be counted as the classical study in the field. Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, "Qin Han langli zhidu kao" 秦漢郎吏制度考, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 23.a (1951): 89–143.

24. See also Zhang Zhaokai 張兆凱, “Renzi zhi xintan” 任子制新探, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 69, no. 1 (1996): 62–72.

25. Jiang Feifei 蔣非非, “Han dai gongci zhidu yanjiu” 漢代功次制度研究, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中國史研究 1 (1997): 62–72.

26. Gao Min 高敏, “Shilun Han dai ‘li’ de jieji diwei he lishi yanbian” 試論漢代 “吏” 的階級地位和歷史演變, in *Qin Han shi lunji* 秦漢史論集 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou shushe, 1982); Zhao Shiyu 趙世瑜, *Li yu Zhongguo chuantong shehui* 吏與中國傳統社會 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1994), Chapter 2. Bu Xianqun, *Qin Han guan liao zhi du*, Chapters 7 and 8. Liao Boyuan 廖伯源, “Han chu xianli zhi zhijie jiqi renming” 漢初縣吏之秩階及其任命, *Shehui kexue zhanxian* 社會科學戰線 no. 3 (2003): 100–107.

27. Bu Xianqun, “Li yu Qin Han

guanliao xingzheng guanli”吏與秦漢官僚行政管理, in *Zhongguoshi yanjiu* 中國史研究 70, no. 2 (1996): 41–50; “Cong jiandu kan Qindai xianli de liyuan shezhi yu xingzheng gongneng”從簡牘看秦代鄉里的吏員設置與行政功能, in *Liye gucheng, Qinjian yu Qin wenhua yanjiu* 里耶古城秦簡與秦文化研究 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2009), 103–113.

28. Lao Gan, “Handai chaju zhidu kao”漢代察舉制度考, *Lishi yuyan yanjiu suo jikan* 歷史語言研究所集刊 17 (1948): 79–129.

29. Yan Gengwang contends that the recommendation system cannot directly promote a commoner to an administrative position. Instead, the recommended commoner must first accumulate some experience as Gentleman-attendant before assuming other positions. See Yan Gengwang, “Qin Han langli zhidu kao.”

30. Bu Xianqu 卜憲群, “Yinwan Hanmu

*jiandu junli yi 'shisui bu' buzheng*” 尹灣漢墓簡牘軍吏以”十歲補”補證, *Jianbo yanjiu* 2004, 簡帛研究2004 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chuban she, 2006), 234–242. Liao Boyuan 廖伯源, *Jiandu yu Zhidu: Yinwan Hanmu jiandu guanwenshu kaozheng* 簡牘與制度: 尹灣漢墓簡牘官文書考證 (Guilin: Guangxi shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2005), 14, 39.

31. For example, Feng Fengshi 馮奉世, as a Gentleman-attendant, filled the vacancy of the position of the Messenger. Later he was selected into the army. After serving as the Defender of Recovering Territory (*futu duwei* 復土都尉), he was appointed as the magistrate of Meiyang 美陽 via the recommendation system. See *Han shu*, 79:3305.

32. Exceptional cases existed where Gentleman-attendants were directly appointed to high positions, such as the story

of Tian Qianqiu. For more discussion on Tian, see Chapter 1.

33. The promotion regulation was also applied to officers and soldiers in the army. See Jiang Feifei, “Han dai gongci zhidu yanjiu;” Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, Yinwan Hanmu jianadu junli yi ‘shisui bu’ buzheng” 尹灣漢墓簡牘軍吏以“十歲補”補證, *Jianbo yanjiu* 2004, 簡帛研究2004 (Guilin: Guangxi shifadaxue chubanshe, 2006), 234–242.

34. Ooba Osamu 大庭脩, “Lun Han dai de lungong shenjin” 論漢代的論功升進, in *Jiandu yanjiu yicong* 簡牘研究譯叢, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1987), 323–338; *Qin Han fazhi shi* 秦漢法制史, translated by Lin Jianming 林劍鳴 et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), 442–457. Jiang Feifei, “Han dai gongci zhidu yanjiu”. Liao Boyuan 廖伯源, “Handai shijin zhidu xinkao” 漢代仕進制度新考, *Jiandu yu zhidu: Yinwan Hanmu jianadu*



*guanwenshu kaozheng*, 簡牘與制度: 尹灣 漢墓簡牘官文書考證 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 3–55.

35. *Han shu*, 74:3142.

36. *Shi ji*, 122:3136.

37. Dong Zhongshu criticized this evaluation system and suggested that the emperor “not ... count the length of services as a merit” 毋以日月為功. See *Han shu*, 56:2513.

38. Traditional research on the recruitment system of Han usually takes the recommendation system as its focus, for example, Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, *Kandai kanri tōyō seido no kenkyū* 漢代 官吏 登用 制度 の 研究 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1988); Yan Buke 閻步克, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao* 察舉制度變遷史稿. (Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1997); Loewe, *The Men Who Governed*, Chapter 4.

39. Personal nomination or

recommendation (*jian*, *jin*, and *ju*) was different from hereditary privilege (*yinren* 陰任). *Yinren* could only be applied to one's relatives, and the position for the beneficiary was limited to Gentleman-attendants. By contrast, *jian*, *jin*, and *ju* always meant to nominate those the recommenders thought worthy, and positions for the nominees varied from clerkship to chancellorship. Therefore, I render *yinren* as hereditary privilege, but *jin*, *jian*, and *ju* as sponsorship. This treatment is different from that of Michael Loewe, who does not deal with personal nomination but translates *yinren* as sponsorship. See Loewe, *The Men Who Governed*, 133.

40. For the former case, see *Han shu*, 72:3066; for the latter, see *Han shu*, 75:3167; 75:3347; 71:3048.

41. For the former case, see *Han shu*, 89:3629; for the latter, see *Han shu*, 79:3033;

86:3499; 98:4021.

42. *Han shu*, 60:2659.

43. *Ibid.*, 52:2380.

44. *Ibid.*, 66:2900.

45. *Ibid.*, 64:2836–2837.

46. The original passage reads, “舉賢達能，豈有私謝。” *Han shu*, 59:2650.

47. *Ibid.*, 81:3354.

48. For the former cases, see *Han shu*, 50:2324; 66:2901; 86:3485; 86:3501, for the latter case, see *Han shu* 98:4018.

49. *Ibid.*, 93:3723.

50. Some might think that the success of the famous Gongsun Hong was due to the recommendation system. This is a misreading, as Gongsun Hong's distinctive career was largely due to the direct promotion of the emperor. For more discussion, see Chapter 1.

51. In the Qin dynasty and the Early Han era, the Mandate of Heaven, once the

guardian of political order of the Zhou dynasty, lost its appeal among the ruling members. It returned as a frequently visited concept legitimating an imperial house after Emperor Xuan. See Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed*, 421–448.

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When did Confucianism become the reigning political ideology of imperial China? A pervasive narrative holds it was during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty (141–87 BCE). In this book, Liang Cai maintains that such a date would have been too early and provides a new account of this transformation. A hidden narrative in Sima Qian's *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji*) shows that Confucians were a powerless minority in the political realm of this period. Cai argues that the notorious witchcraft scandal of 91–87 BCE reshuffled the power structure of the Western Han bureaucracy and provided Confucians an opportune moment to seize power, evolve into a new elite class, and set the tenor of political discourse for centuries to come.

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