

STATECRAFT AND CLASSICAL LEARNING:  
THE *RITUALS OF ZHOU* IN EAST ASIAN HISTORY

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### CENTERING THE REALM: WANG MANG, THE *ZHOULI*, AND EARLY CHINESE STATECRAFT

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In this chapter I address a basic problem: why would a text like the *Rituals of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮), which purports to describe the administrative structure of the Western Zhou 周 dynasty (ca. 1050–771 BCE), come to be employed by Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BCE–23 CE) and, later, Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021–1086) in projects of strong state centralization? Answering this question for the case of Wang Mang, however, is no easy task. In contrast to what we have later for Wang Anshi, there are almost no sources to help us understand precisely how Wang Mang used, appropriated, and presented the *Zhouli*. We are told in the *History of the [Western] Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書) that Wang Mang employed the *Zhouli*, but we possess no commentaries on the text by either Wang Mang or one of his associates. In fact, we have no full commentary until Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 CE), who was far removed from the events of Wang Mang’s time and was concerned with different issues.

Even the statements in the *Hanshu* about the uses of the *Zhouli*—referred to as the *Offices of Zhou* (*Zhouguan* 周官) by Wang Mang—are brief. We are told that Wang Mang changed the ritual system of the time to follow that of the *Zhouguan*,<sup>1</sup> that he used the *Zhouguan* for the taxation system,<sup>2</sup> and that he used the *Zhouguan*, along with the “The Regulations of the King” (“Wangzhi” 王制) chapter of the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記), to organize state offices.<sup>3</sup>

I propose to tackle this problem in a way that is admittedly highly speculative. I will discuss the argument of the *Zhouli* in relation to other claims being made about state organization in early China. This will still not, of course, explain how figures in the court of Wang

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<sup>1</sup> *Hanshu* (“Jiaosi zhi”) 25.1265. All references to the dynastic histories in this chapter are to the Zhonghua shuju editions.

<sup>2</sup> *Hanshu* (“Shihuo zhi”) 25.1180.

<sup>3</sup> *Hanshu* (“Wang Mang zhuan”) 99.4136.

Mang were reading and appropriating the *Zhouli*, but it will at least help us speculate on the cultural resonance that the *Zhouli* might have had in the Han, why groups might have attempted to appropriate the *Zhouli*, and what implications such appropriations might have had at the time.

### *The Organization of the Zhouli*

The *Zhouli* opens with the following claim:

It is the king who establishes the state, distinguishes the quarters and rectifies the positions, structures the state and aligns the fields, sets up the offices and designates the functions. He thereby serves as the pivot for the populace.

惟王建國，辨方正位，體國經野，設官分職，以為民極。<sup>4</sup>

This statement is then repeated at the start of each new section of the text, and each section of the text describes how the king set up the administrative structure for one of the six divisions of the state.

The first of these divisions concerns the officials in charge of administering the realm:

He thereupon institutes the official for Heaven, the minister of the state, to employ and take charge of his subordinates and to supervise the regulation of the territories, so as to assist the king in ruling the territories and states.

乃立天官冢宰，使帥其屬而掌邦治，以佐王均邦國。<sup>5</sup>

The text then lists the officials under the minister, along with a short description of their functions. These are the “heavenly officials” (*tianguan* 天官).

The next section concerns the “earthly officials,” charged with educating and training the populace. The structure is the same as for the heavenly officials:

It is the king who establishes the state, distinguishes the quarters and rectifies the positions, structures the state and aligns the fields, sets up the offices and designates the functions. He thereby serves as the pivot

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<sup>4</sup> *Zhouli* (“Tianguan”) (Chinese University of Hong Kong, Institute of Chinese Studies Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series [hereafter ICS]) 1.0/1/3. Here and throughout, my translations have greatly benefited from the excellent translation by E. Biot 1851.

<sup>5</sup> *Zhouli* (“Tianguan”) ICS 1.0/1/3–4.

for the populace. He thereupon institutes the official for Earth, the minister of the multitude, to employ and take charge of his subordinates and to supervise the teaching of the territories, so as to assist the king in pacifying and training the territories and states.

惟王建國，辨方正位，體國經野，設官分職，以為民極。乃立地官司徒，使帥其屬而掌邦教，以佐王安擾邦國。<sup>6</sup>

And then the officials in charge of rituals are mentioned:

It is the king who establishes the state, distinguishes the quarters and rectifies the positions, structures the state and aligns the fields, sets up the offices and designates the functions. He thereby serves as the pivot for the populace. He thereupon institutes the official for Spring, the minister of cult, to employ and take charge of his subordinates and to supervise the rituals of the territories, so as to assist the king in bringing harmony to the territories and states.

惟王建國，辨方正位，體國經野，設官分職，以為民極。乃立春官宗伯，使帥其屬而掌邦禮，以佐王和邦國。<sup>7</sup>

The text continues with the officials for Summer (in charge of war) and the officials for Autumn (charged with the administration of justice and punishments). (The section on the officials for Winter is missing and was later replaced by the “Artificer’s Record” [“Kaogong ji” 考工記].)

And that is the argument of the *Zhouli*.

What is immediately striking about the text is what is absent. Completely lacking here is any concern with what might be called legitimation—with, for example, training the emotions and dispositions of the populace, with rooting state practice or ideology in cosmological patterns, or with seeking support for the state from divine powers. Absent, in other words, are the very things that so many other texts from early China (and elsewhere) dealing with political organization emphasize.

The move of the text is instead simply to focus on the ruler, who serves as the pivot for the populace by establishing the center and organizing all activities under a clear hierarchy of officials. The goal is to take any practice of potential interest to the state, define an official to oversee it, and define the hierarchy within which that official will operate.

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<sup>6</sup> *Zhouli* (“Diguan”) ICS 2.0/15/23–24.

<sup>7</sup> *Zhouli* (“Chunguan”) ICS 3.0/32/17–18.

Why would a text argue in this way, and what resonance might such claims have had in the Western Han? And why would they become so influential in later East Asian history?

*The Liji*

To begin to answer these questions, let us turn to some contrasting visions. I will examine another set of texts that would also become important in very late Western Han politics, namely several of the chapters of the *Records of Ritual (Liji 禮記)*.<sup>8</sup> Elsewhere I have argued that several chapters of the *Liji*—“The Movements of the Rites” (“Li yun” 禮運), “The Meaning of Sacrifice” (“Ji yi” 祭義), “The Method of Sacrifice” (“Ji fa” 祭法)—try to build a vision of statecraft through a particular reading of ritual. More specifically, the chapters argue that sacrifice creates familial feelings toward those outside one’s immediate family: deceased persons come to be thought of as ancestors, and the ruler comes to be thought of as the father and mother of the people and also as the Son of Heaven. In other words, participants in the ritual system come to see themselves as linked to the ruler and to parts of the natural world in chains of constructed genealogical continuity. It is an argument that assumes a relatively decentralized form of governance in which power is based on particular dispositions inculcated in the populace through participation in rituals.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most powerful examples of this can be seen in the “Li yun” chapter. The chapter opens with a dialogue between Confucius and his disciple Yan Yan 言偃. Confucius is lamenting his inability to put into practice the way of the ancients or the great figures of the Three Dynasties of Antiquity:

The practice of the Great Way and the illustrious figures of the Three Dynasties—these I have not been able to reach. But my intent is to do so.

大道之行也，與三代之英，丘未之逮也，而有志焉。<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For a study of the uses of the ritual Classics, see Qian Xuan 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Puett 2005, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> *Liji* (“Li yun”) ICS 59/1.23–24. My translations from the *Liji* here and throughout have been aided greatly by those of Legge 1885.

In particular, Confucius is regretting the fact that people think only in terms of their immediate kin, resulting in endless competition between these kin groups.

According to Confucius, in early antiquity, everything was shared:

In the practice of the Great Way, all under Heaven was public. They selected the talented and capable. They spoke sincerely and cultivated peace. Therefore, people did not only treat their own kin as kin, and did not only treat their own sons as sons.

大道之行也，天下為公。選賢與能，講信脩睦，故人不獨親其親，不獨子其子。<sup>11</sup>

This Great Way has since been, in part, lost:

Now, the Great Way has become obscure. All under Heaven is [divided into] families. Each treats only its own kin as kin, only their own sons as sons.

今大道既隱，天下為家，各親其親，各子其子。<sup>12</sup>

Confucius's narrative places the point of discontinuity at the emergence of hereditary rule with the Xia dynasty. At this point, rulership comes to be defined as being within a family, and political power comes to be defined as competition between families—for dynastic rule at the highest level and for political influence and high ministerial positions at the next level of the hierarchy. To control the ensuing competition, ritual is used to try to control the populace:

Ritual and propriety are used as the binding. They are used to regulate the ruler and subject, used to build respect between the father and son, used to pacify elder and younger brother, used to harmonize husband and wife, used to set up regulations and standards, used to establish fields and villages, used to honor the courageous and knowledgeable, taking merit as personal. Therefore, schemes manipulating this arose, and because of this arms were taken up.

禮義以為紀：以正君臣，以篤父子，以睦兄弟，以和夫婦，以設制度，以立田里，以賢勇知，以功為己。故謀用是作，而兵由此起。<sup>13</sup>

According to Confucius, six figures have been able to use ritual properly to counteract the decline:

<sup>11</sup> *Liji* ("Li yun") ICS 59/1.24.

<sup>12</sup> *Liji* ("Li yun") ICS 59.9/1.27–28.

<sup>13</sup> *Liji* ("Li yun") ICS 59.9/1.28–30.

Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, Cheng, and the Duke of Zhou were selected because of this. These six rulers were always attentive to ritual, thereby making manifest their propriety, thereby examining their trustworthiness, making manifest when there were transgressions, making the punishments humane and the expositions yielding, showing constancy to the populace. If there were some who were not following this, they were removed from their position and the populace would consider them dangerous. This was the Lesser Peace.

禹、湯、文、武、成王、周公，由此其選也。此六君子者，未有不謹於禮者也。以著其義，以考其信，著有過，刑仁講讓，示民有常。如有不由此者，在執者去，眾以為殃，是謂小康。<sup>14</sup>

The key, therefore, is the correct use of ritual:

Yan Yan asked again, “Are the rites of such urgency?” Confucius said, “Rites are what the former kings used to uphold the way of Heaven and regulate the dispositions of humans.”

言偃復問曰：「如此乎禮之急也？」孔子曰：「夫禮，先王以承天之道，以治人之情。」<sup>15</sup>

When Yan Yan asks Confucius to explain, Confucius provides a narrative of the invention of ritual by the sages. I have summarized the full narrative elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> but the key I want to emphasize in the argument here is that the inventions of the sages allowed humans to move beyond the primitive world in which they originally lived, to survive the natural world, and to have a ruler to organize the world. But those same inventions also resulted in a destruction of the original unity of humanity. Thus, rituals were created to allow for a re-creation (but never a perfect one) of the ideal sets of relationships that existed in deep antiquity.

As the “*Li yun*” argues, the consequence of these rites of sacrifice—families developing proper filiality through sacrifices to ancestors, the ruler sacrificing to Heaven and thus defining himself as both the Son of Heaven and the father and mother of the people—is that the entire realm comes to function again as a single family:

Therefore, as for the sage undertaking to treat all under Heaven as one family and to treat the central states as one person, it is not something done overtly. He always knows their dispositions, stimulates their sense of propriety, clarifies what they feel to be advantageous, and appre-

<sup>14</sup> *Liji* (“*Li yun*”) ICS 59/9.1/28–32.

<sup>15</sup> *Liji* (“*Li yun*”) ICS 9.2/60.1

<sup>16</sup> Puett 2005.

hends what they feel to be calamitous. Only then is he capable of bringing about [the unity of the populace].

故聖人耐以天下為一家，以中國為一人者，非意之也，必知其情，辟於其義，明於其利，達於其患，然後能為之。<sup>17</sup>

In short, sacrifice allows the sage to consolidate his rule by molding the dispositions of the populace, leading the people to think of the realm as a single family. The sage is thus able to rule effectively, since he is seen, not as wielding arbitrary power, but rather as the father and mother of the people. In other words, ritual, when it is effective, is not seen as a tool to control the populace (in which case, as the beginning of the text makes clear, it just leads people to scheme against it) but rather comes to function covertly, through the dispositions of the populace. This, according to the text, was the key for the rule of figures like the Duke of Zhou.

### *The Argument of the Zhouli*

It is striking to note how radically distinctive the *Zhouli* approach is. Unlike the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*, the concern of the *Zhouli* is neither to build up genealogical connections through ritual nor to develop a notion of statecraft based upon the dispositions of the people. The text rather operates from dramatically different premises.

The opening concern of the text is that the world is inherently disordered, and the goal of the ruler is thus to designate a series of functionaries who will bring about order in the economic, administrative, and ritual realms. In the realm of ritual, the concern is to construct, not genealogical connection, but rather administrative order: to place the activities of the ritual specialists within a defined organizational structure.

Both the *Zhouli*'s opening claim and how it is to be put into effect thus differ from the principles expressed in the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*. In making this point, I am not necessarily claiming that, taken as a whole, the arguments of the *Zhouli* fully conflict with the arguments concerning rituals found in the *Liji* (although for many of the chapters of the *Liji* I think they do). Indeed, it is immediately clear how later commentators who wished to read these texts as related could do so: both the *Zhouli* and the chapters of the *Liji* mentioned

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<sup>17</sup> *Liji* ("Li yun") ICS 62/9/22.



above are based upon a claim of centering. In both cases, the ruler centers the realm and thereby creates order in an otherwise fractured and discontinuous world.

But, unlike most of the chapters of the *Liji*, the *Zhouli* is well suited to support a strong centralized state. As we saw, the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji* focus on ritual as a means of refining and encouraging certain attitudes among the populace. Although this does not preclude a centralized form of statecraft, it does imply that a successful form of governance would be based not upon strong centralized institutions but rather upon the populace coming to think of the ruler in familial terms. In contrast, the *Zhouli* proceeds from the claim that successful governance is based upon taking any given human activity and giving it a proper place within an institutionalized order. If the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji* construct chains of continuity from the refined familial tendencies of humans, starting with the family and ultimately encompassing the ruler and the larger cosmos, the argument of the *Zhouli* proceeds by beginning with the ruler and then working out from there, ultimately (ideally) encompassing everything. Familial dispositions and genealogical continuity are of no interest.

*Debates over Political Order in the Late Warring States Period*

Having laid out briefly some of the main claims of the *Zhouli* and of the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*—two sets of texts that became important at the end of the Western Han—it may now be helpful to situate these claims in a historical context. Many of the debates about statecraft that developed at the end of the Western Han can best be understood in relation to the forms of state centralization that developed in the late Warring States period (403–221 BCE), came to a head in the reign of the First Emperor of Qin 秦 (r. 221–210 BCE), and were consolidated during that of Emperor Wu 武 of the Han 漢 (156–87 BCE).

The forms of centralized statecraft that began developing in the late Warring States period were clearly recognized at the time to be unprecedented. This sparked a huge debate as to whether or not such institutions were legitimate and, if not, precisely how they could be legitimated.

It is quite possible that the *Zhouli* itself,<sup>18</sup> as well as several chapters of what would later be collected into the *Liji*, date to this same period.<sup>19</sup> Although, as we have seen, both texts came into prominence at the end of the Western Han dynasty, the contents of both were probably composed much earlier. As for the *Zhouli*, Mark Edward Lewis has argued: “Despite its reputation as a ritual text, a Confucian classic, and collection of implausible offices, the *Zhouguan* is closely linked to the major legal and administrative reforms of the Warring States period.”<sup>20</sup>

But if the *Zhouli* and many chapters of the *Liji* date to this period, there is little evidence to suggest that their arguments had a significant impact at the time. Despite their many differences, both of these texts were associated with a return to the Zhou—a position that was losing favor at the time and would only continue to do so over the ensuing two centuries. The texts that were becoming prominent were those that supported unprecedented forms of centralized statecraft. A few examples of such texts will be helpful.

### *Cosmological Order*

One such text was the *Annals of Lü Buwei* (*Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), a text composed at the court of the Qin. Completed around 240 BCE, when the Qin were clearly in a position to conquer the remaining states, the text was an argument for one way of building an imperial order. The essential move was one of pure inclusivity: taking any in-

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<sup>18</sup> Kang Youwei 康有為 famously argued that the *Zhouli* was probably a forgery by Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE), a figure closely associated with Wang Mang. Subsequent work has demonstrated that in fact at least much of the material of the *Zhouli*—and thus possibly the *Zhouli* itself—dates from the Warring States period. For an excellent overview of the proposed dates for the composition of the *Zhouli*, see Boltz 1993. For more specialized studies, see Karlgren 1931; Broman 1961; Qian Xuan 1996; Jin Chunfeng 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Even if the *Liji* itself was probably not compiled until the Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE), many of the chapters certainly are much earlier. For discussions of the dating of the text, see Riegel 1993. More recently, one of the chapters of the *Liji*, the “Black Robes” (“*Ziyi*” 緇衣) was discovered in the Guodian tomb, which was sealed around 300 BCE. This has sparked a general rethinking of the dates of many of the *Liji* chapters. For the Guodian find in general, see Hubeisheng Jingmenshi Bowuguan 1997, and for the implications of the find for our understanding of the *Liji* compilation, see Li Xueqin 1998. For a discussion of how the “*Ziyi*” was transformed into a chapter of what would ultimately come to be seen as one of the Classics, see Shaughnessy 2006, 63–130.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis 1999b, 42.

tellectual position that existed and giving it a place within a larger, unified order. And the basis for this unified order was a claim concerning the larger order of the cosmos: the cosmos was a unified totality, and if the earthly realm were modeled on this cosmic order, then it would be a unified totality as well.<sup>21</sup>

The first section of the work organizes the many intellectual visions for ordering the self and state that had developed during the Warring States period and places them on the grid of the seasons, with spring being used for self-cultivation, summer for education, and so on. The claim was that each method was correct but partial; the goal was thus to give each view a place and to call on each to be implemented at the moment when such activity would be proper within the larger cosmic cycle. The *Lüshi chungiu* itself, therefore, claimed to provide the system for unifying all other positions, and the basis for doing so was a claim concerning the order of the cosmos. The post-face (*xu yi* 序意) to the *Lüshi chungiu* makes the reasoning clear. To quote from the excellent translation by Knoblock and Riegel:

On the day of the new moon, a good man asked about the twelve Almanacs. The Marquis of Wenxin replied: "I have succeeded in studying what the Yellow Sovereign used to instruct the Zhuangxi sovereign: 'There is a great circle above and a great square below. If you are able to make them your model, you will be as father and mother to the people.' You have probably heard about the ancient age of purity. This was due to following the model of Heaven and Earth."

朔之日，良人請問《十二紀》。文信侯曰：「嘗得學黃帝之所以誨顓頊矣，爰有大圓在上，大矩在下，汝能法之，為民父母。蓋聞古之清世，是法天地。」<sup>22</sup>

The proper ordering of the state is one that is modeled on cosmic patterns.

Such an argument certainly invites comparison with the *Zhouli*. To begin with, as we have seen, the *Zhouli* may well be a late Warring States text as well, and there are at least hints that it could be associated with the state of Qin. As Mark Edward Lewis has argued: "The reference to the sacrifices to the five *di* 帝, which recur under many offices, are particularly significant, because this was the most important cult in Qin. Thus accounts of cults reinforce the impression that the text was greatly influenced by Qin."<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> On the *Lüshi chungiu*, see S. Cook 2002; Sellmann 2002.

<sup>22</sup> *Lüshi chungiu* ICS 12.6/62/6–8. Translation by Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 272.

<sup>23</sup> Lewis 1999b, 44.

Like the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the *Zhouli* is an attempt to take everything that exists and define a place for it within a comprehensive system. Indeed, in many ways the *Zhouli* shares much less with texts like the “Li yun” that call for rulers to build up support covertly through the training of the dispositions of the populace than with texts like the *Lüshi chunqiu* that attempt to provide a fully systematic explanation of the workings of the state. Moreover, the organization of the *Zhouli* is based upon a model that sounds much like the first section of the *Lüshi chunqiu*: the political administration is divided into six realms, called Heaven, Earth, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Indeed, Lewis has argued that the *Zhouli* should in fact be read as a text that, like the *Lüshi chunqiu*, is based upon a cosmological claim: “the rise of correlative cosmology in the late Warring States led to new models of governance based on imitation of natural patterns.... The *Zhouguan* reworked the old practice of listing Zhou officials in the light of this new theory of government, and thereby provided a model of the state that incorporated current cosmological theory, state cults, and administrative practice.”<sup>24</sup>

Lewis sees two bases for such a cosmological reading of the *Zhouli*. The first is that “the *Zhouguan*’s government operates on the principle that every office has a double function: administrative and religious. The authors of the text may not have recognized this distinction, but we must move through our own categories to reach an understanding of the alien world that produced such a work.”<sup>25</sup> The second is that “the officers are organized to function as a symbolic reproduction of the structure and working of the cosmos. In this way the text offers one of the earliest and most elaborate versions of the idea, central to Chinese civilization, that the world is fundamentally congruent with a bureaucratic order.”<sup>26</sup> Elaborating on this point, Lewis argues: “The text is arranged according to principles of numerology and ritual calendrics that emerged to prominence in the late Warring States period. The composition of the *Zhouli* was thus a ritual act that conjured into existence a graphic image of the state as cosmic mandala.”<sup>27</sup>

But there is a difference here between the arguments of the *Zhouli* and those of texts like the *Lüshi chunqiu*. Although it is certainly true that many of the administrative positions in the *Zhouli* involve activi-

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<sup>24</sup> Lewis 1999b, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Lewis 1999b, 43–44.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis 1999b, 44.

<sup>27</sup> Lewis 1999b, 45.

ties that we would define as both political and ritual in nature, the text makes no claim about the nature of the spirits being sacrificed to. On the contrary, the sense seems to be simply that there are ritual specialists out there—and the *Zhouli* will explain how to order them. Whether or not their rituals are efficacious (either because of their effect on the spirits or because of their effect on the dispositions of the participants) is something on which the text expresses no interest.

Similarly, although the administrative framework of the *Zhouli* does indeed involve a nomenclature of Heaven, Earth, and the seasons, here again the text makes no claim that there exists a cosmic pattern upon which the political realm should be modeled. Indeed, the *Zhouli* seems to use these as nothing more than useful organizing principles: it does not claim that Heaven and Earth function as a totality or that the political world should be modeled on such a larger cosmic pattern.

In saying this, I am not arguing that Lewis's argument is incorrect: on the contrary, in Chinese history the *Zhouli* would often be read precisely along these cosmological lines. My point is that the text makes no such claims itself: unlike the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the *Zhouli* does not lay out its argument in cosmological terms. It makes no attempt to claim that the cosmos is an ordered whole and that a properly structured political order should be based upon these cosmic principles. Instead, the entire argument is based upon the ruler establishing an order and then organizing the world accordingly. Instead of seeking an order in cosmology, the *Zhouli* simply does so administratively, by giving everything that exists a place in the administrative hierarchy.

Indeed, I would argue that part of the power—the counterintuitive power—of the *Zhouli* is that it makes no claims about legitimating state power, about the dispositions of humans, about the normative relationships of humans to the divine and cosmic order. In other words, it takes no position in the debates raging at the time concerning the nature of the cosmos, the relationship of the cosmos to the state, the nature of divine powers and the proper way for a ruler to relate to them, and so on. But, importantly, it also does not rule out any position on these questions: one can give the text a cosmological reading, a reading in terms of divine powers, and so forth.

*The Sagely Creation of Order*

Given the lack of interest in cosmology in the *Zhouli*, we might search for possible analogues for the *Zhouli* instead in texts that would later be classified as “Legalist” or “Huang-Lao”—texts like the *Book of Lord Shang* (*Shangjun shu* 商君書) and *Han Feizi* 韓非子. As with the *Zhouli*, the goal of these texts is to call on the ruler to create an institutional order in which the duties and functions of each office are clearly delineated. And, also like the *Zhouli*, these texts make few appeals to legitimation—apart from an implicit claim that the system invoked will work—and certainly no claims to a cosmological foundation for governance.

This attempt to create order through the development of a proper institutional structure is seen powerfully in the portions of the *Han Feizi* that build upon the text of the *Laozi* 老子. Appropriating the language of the *Laozi*, the *Han Feizi* argues that the ruler should set up an organizational system and then practice noninterference, allowing the system to operate on its own. In other words, by setting up a proper institutional order, the sage is able to create a world in which humans spontaneously act as the sage wants them to act, while the sage practices nonaction and noninterference: “[The sage] sets up a correct order and resides within it, causing everything to become settled by itself” (正與處之，使皆自定之。)<sup>28</sup> The ruler, therefore, is “empty, staying behind with stillness, never exerting himself” (虛以靜後，未嘗用己。)<sup>29</sup> The *Zhouli* certainly has no such Laozian language, but there are some significant similarities here. The *Zhouli* too is concerned with the ruler’s construction of a system in which the duties of each office are defined clearly, after which there would be no need for the ruler to interfere with the activities of the state.

Moreover, since there are no cosmological norms on which institutional order should rest, it is entirely up to the ruler to set up the order according to the requirements of the times. And, since times change, what is required for one time will differ from what is required for another. As the *Shangjun shu* argues: “if a sage can thereby strengthen the state, he does not model himself on antiquity, and if he can thereby benefit the people, he does not accord with rites” (是以聖人苟可以強

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<sup>28</sup> *Han Feizi* ICS 8/10/30–31.

<sup>29</sup> *Han Feizi* ICS 8/11/3.

國，不法其故；苟可以利民，不循於禮。 )<sup>30</sup> The sage must be completely free from following past precedent: “Therefore, the knowledgeable create laws, and the stupid are regulated by them. The worthy alter the rites, and the unworthy are restrained by them” (故知者作法，而愚者制焉。賢者更禮，而不肖者拘焉。 )<sup>31</sup>

The only criterion for judging a sage, therefore, is the degree to which his creation of a new order accurately reflects what is necessary at the time:

In the time of Shennong, the males plowed and the people were fed; the women weaved and the people were clothed. Punishments and administration were not used, but everything was put in order. Armored soldiers were not raised, but he reigned as king. After Shennong died, people used strength to overcome the weak and used the many to oppress the few. Therefore, Huangdi created (*zuowei*) the propriety of ruler and minister and of superior and inferior, the rites of father and son and of elder and younger brother, and the union between husband and wife and between wife and mate. In the interior he employed knives and saws, and in the exterior he used armored soldiers. This is because the times had changed. Looking at it from this perspective, it is not that Shennong is above Huangdi; the reason that his name is honored is that he fit the times.

神農之世，公耕而食，婦織而衣，刑政不用而治，甲兵不起而王。神農既沒，以強勝弱，以眾暴寡，故黃帝作為君臣上下之義，父子兄弟之禮，夫婦妃匹之合；內行刀鋸，外用甲兵。故時變也。由此觀之，神農非高於黃帝也，然其名尊者，以適於時也。<sup>32</sup>

The *Han Feizi* makes much the same argument:

In the earliest times, when the people were few and the birds and beasts numerous, the people could not overcome the birds, beasts, insects, and snakes. Then there appeared a sage who created the building up of wood to make nests so as to hide the masses from harm. The people were pleased with him and made him king of all under Heaven, calling him the “One Having Nests.” The people ate fruits, berries, mussels, and clams; they were so rank, rancid, bad, and foul-smelling that they hurt their stomachs, and many of the people became sick. Then there appeared a sage who created (*zuo*) the boring of wood to get fire so as to transform the rank and rancid food. The people were pleased with him and made him king of all under Heaven, calling him the “Fire Man.” In the time of middle antiquity, all under Heaven was greatly flooded, and Gun and Yu opened channels [for the water]. In the most recent pe-

<sup>30</sup> *Shangjun shu* (“Gengfa”) ICS 1/1/12–13.

<sup>31</sup> *Shangjun shu* (“Gengfa”) ICS 1/1/22–23.

<sup>32</sup> *Shangjun shu* (“Huace”) ICS 18/23/1–4.

riod of antiquity, Jie and Zhou were oppressive and chaotic, and Tang and Wu campaigned against them. Now, to have the building up of wood and the boring of wood in the time of the Xia would certainly have made Gun and Yu laugh, and to have the opening of channels in the time of the Yin and Zhou would certainly have made Tang and Wu laugh. As such, to exalt the way of Yao, Shun, Tang, Wu, and Yu in the present age would certainly make the new sages laugh. This is why sages do not try to cultivate the ancient ways and do not model themselves on constancy.

上古之世，人民少而禽獸眾，人民不勝禽獸蟲蛇。有聖人作，構木為巢以避群害，而民悅之，使王天下，號曰有巢氏。民食果蓏蚌蛤，腥臊惡臭而傷害腹胃，民多疾病。有聖人作，鑽燧取火以化腥臊，而民說之，使王天下，號之曰燧人氏。中古之世，天下大水，而鯀、禹決瀆。近古之世，桀、紂暴亂，而湯、武征伐。今有構木鑽燧於夏后氏之世者，必為鯀、禹笑矣；有決瀆於殷、周之世者，必為湯、武笑矣。然則今有美堯、舜、湯、武、禹之道於當今之世者，必為新聖笑矣。是以聖人不期脩古，不法常。<sup>33</sup>

In short, both the *Shangjun shu* and the *Han Feizi* celebrate their lack of concern with precedent and give free rein to the sage to create anew as necessary.

But here, of course, is a major tension. On the one hand, these texts are committed to the claim that circumstances change, and that the ruler must therefore be free to create a completely new order, unrestricted by past practice or precedent—hence the celebration in these texts of radical innovation on the part of the ruler. But the texts are also committed to the claim that, once this order has been created, the ruler must stop being active and instead practice noninterference. The problem, of course, is that, since times change, the ruler must always be prepared to become active once again and to create anew yet again.

Ironically enough, this unresolvable tension may in part explain the appeal of these texts—precisely because it allows the texts to be appropriated in different ways by different figures. Ministers would tend to support such texts' assertions of the need for clear procedures and regulations—and thus for a noninterfering ruler. But in periods of radical transformation rulers would tend to appeal to such texts because of their strong affirmation of the need for a highly active ruler to innovate. In others words, as problematic as this tension was in practice, the tension was also part of the appeal of the texts to political actors with very different concerns.

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<sup>33</sup> *Han Feizi* ("Wudu") ICS 49/145/13–18.



A crucial difference between the *Zhouli* and texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi* is that, while the *Zhouli* similarly sees the ruler's establishment of the state as the condition for the possibility of order, the ruler's activity is presented not as an act of creation but rather as one of organization. The ruler is an organizer, not a creator. He does not discard precedent and create a new system; he takes what exists and organizes it. Moreover, the way of organizing is always the same: the ruler is the pivot and organizes everything around himself. Thus, there is no hint in the *Zhouli* that the system described would need to be changed. One is simply organizing what exists, not creating anew.

To return to the example of the ritual specialist: according to texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi* a given ritual specialist would be preserved in a new order created by a sage only if that specialist fit into the new order as envisaged by the sage-creator. In other words, the sage would discard anything that needed to be discarded. In contrast, the move of the *Zhouli* is rather to say that the ruler establishes order by organizing what exists. To take the example of the ritual specialist, the ruler need solicit no opinion on whether that ritual specialist is or is not efficacious, nor is there a concern with whether the ritual specialist does or does not fit into a new order as envisaged by a creator-sage. The concern is rather simply that the ritual specialist is there and thus must be placed within a proper organization. The *Zhouli* is free from those passages in texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi* that celebrate the radical innovations of the creator-sage.

This is also why the *Zhouli*, unlike the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi*, works out the full institutional system in excruciating detail. Since the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi* and texts like them advocate the creation of systems that are specific to and respond to current situations, it would not make sense for them to present the details of any one system. The *Zhouli*, however, claims for itself a timeless vision of administration.<sup>34</sup> It makes no reference to history, to changing circumstances, to responding to new situations. The implication appears to be that the *Zhouli*'s prescriptions will work at any time and any place.

In short, the *Zhouli*, like the *Lüshi chunqiu*, *Shangjun shu*, and *Han Feizi*, may well have been written in the context of the emergence of centralized forms of statecraft in the late Warring States period. But, unlike the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*, the *Zhouli* clearly supports a form of overt centralized rule. Whereas the "Li yun," as we saw, calls

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<sup>34</sup> I am indebted to Willard Peterson for emphasizing this point to me.

upon the ruler to legitimate his rule covertly, by training the dispositions of the populace so that they come to think of the state as a family, the *Zhouli* shows no interest in such covert operations: the rule of the king in the *Zhouli* is overt, not hidden. Unlike the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the *Zhouli* makes no attempt to legitimate institutions through claims concerning cosmological norms. And unlike the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi*, the *Zhouli* makes no assertions about the duty of sages to create anew and discard precedent when necessary. On the contrary, it claims to provide a blueprint for a system that is applicable for all times.

What is striking about the *Zhouli* is that it is, in a sense, outside history and outside claims of legitimation altogether. The power of the text is to say that, whatever exists, here is a blueprint for how the ruler establishes the center and creates a hierarchy in which everything is given a place. One can defend the resulting order through cosmological or sacrificial claims, but the text itself makes no such argument, nor is the text at all concerned with celebrating a creator-sage. The power of the text lies in its absolute commitment to timeless modes of organization rather than legitimation through cosmology, the molding of the people's dispositions, or the calls for sages to create anew: things exist, and here is how one puts them in order.

But, if this was the argument, then it fell on deaf ears. During the imperial period of the ensuing two centuries, the *Zhouli* was almost completely ignored.

### *The Formation and Consolidation of the Empire*

The creation of the first empire by the Qin 秦 in 221 BCE inaugurated a distinctive period in Chinese history. Ideas like those in texts such as the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi* came fully to prominence. And, intriguingly, the period revealed many of the same tensions concerning active rulership that pervade those texts. One of the dominant goals of the Qin and early Han empires was to expand the bureaucratic system of the state of Qin to control an enormous amount of territory. The intent was to do so through an institutional order based upon a bureaucracy with clear procedures, rules for punishment and reward, and defined duties for all involved.

During this period, claims of not only breaking from but in fact superseding the past became increasingly commonplace. What is striking about these claims is that, far from simply asserting, like the

*Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi*, the legitimacy of not following past precedent, they celebrated superiority over the past. To give a few rhetorically charged examples, let me first quote some lines from one of the inimitable inscriptions of the First Emperor:

It is the twenty-eighth year. The First Emperor has created a new beginning. He has put in order the laws, standards, and principles for the myriad things....

維二十八年，皇帝作始。端平法度，萬物之紀 ...

All under Heaven is unified in heart and yielding in will. Implements have a single measure, and graphs are written in the same way....

普天之下，搏心揖志。器械一量，同書文字 ...

He has rectified and given order to the different customs... His accomplishments surpass those of the five thearchs....

匡飭異俗...功蓋五帝。<sup>35</sup>

Such bravado at surpassing the accomplishments of the past would continue over the first century of the ensuing Han 漢 dynasty. As I have argued elsewhere, in the early Han one finds many authors claiming that their works supersede all previous texts—the postface to the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 being an obvious example.<sup>36</sup> A related theme of the period is celebration of the importance of great sages being given the freedom to innovate when necessary, rejecting past precedent. The *Huainanzi*, again, provides an excellent example. Take the following passage from chapter 13:

Great men create and disciples transmit. If you understand from whence standards and order arise, then you can respond to the times and change. If you do not understand the origin of standards and order, you end up in disorder even if you accord with antiquity. The standards and edicts of the current age should change with the times; the rites and propriety should be altered according to changing customs. Scholars accord with those who came before, inherit their practices, rely on their records, and hold fast to their teachings, thinking that there can be no order if it is not thus. This is like placing a square peg into a round hole: they hope to obtain a proper fit and a fixed point, but it is very difficult.

大人作而弟子循。知法治所由生，則應時而變；不知法治之源，雖循古，終亂。今世之法（藉）〔籍〕與時變，禮義與俗易，為

<sup>35</sup> *Shiji* (“Qin Shihuang benji”) 6.245.

<sup>36</sup> Puett 2007. For excellent discussions of the *Huainanzi* postface, see Queen 2001; Murray 2004.

學者循先襲業，據籍守舊（教），以為非此不治，是猶持方柄而周員鑿也，欲得宜適致固焉，則難矣。<sup>37</sup>

The height of this drive toward centralized power, celebration of sagehood, and rejection of using past precedent to legitimize state power occurred during the reign of Han Wudi 漢武帝. As Wudi consolidated the imperial system, he also instituted a sacrificial system that came to symbolize his extreme centralization of power. Building on that of the First Emperor of Qin, the system involved the ruler taking direct control over all land, traveling throughout the realm, personally performing the sacrifices of each local area, and gradually being divinized through the process. The process would end with the ascension of the emperor to the heavens. There was, needless to say, no precedent before the Qin imperium for such a system.<sup>38</sup>

Critiques of this celebration of innovation and imperial centralization were, of course, frequent. Early in Wudi's reign, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104 BCE) explicitly criticized the Qin for breaking with the past:

When it came to the last generations of the Zhou, they definitively brought about the destruction of the Way, and thereby lost all under Heaven. Qin succeeded them. Not only were they unable to change, but they made it worse. They strongly banned the study of cultural patterns and prevented the possession of books. They discarded rituals and what is appropriate, and hated to hear of them. In their hearts they desired to completely extinguish the way of the former kings and to govern only according to their own recklessness and carelessness.

至周之末世，大為亡道，以失天下。秦繼其後，獨不能改，又益甚之，重禁文學，不得挾書，棄捐禮誼而惡聞之，其心欲盡滅先王之道，而顛為自恣苟簡之治。<sup>39</sup>

And for failing to follow the cultural patterns handed down from the earlier kings:

When it came to the Qin, things were not like this. They taught the laws of Shen [Buhai] and Shang [Yang]<sup>40</sup> and put in practice the theories of Han Fei. They detested the way of Di and the kings, taking greed and cruelty as customary, and did not have cultural patterns or potency to teach and instruct those below.

<sup>37</sup> *Huainanzi* ("Fanlun") ICS 13/122/20–13/120/23.

<sup>38</sup> Puett 2002.

<sup>39</sup> *Hanshu* 26.2504.

<sup>40</sup> Shang Yang is the putative author of the *Shangjun shu*.

至秦則不然。師申商之法，行韓非之說，憎帝王之道，以貪狼為俗，非有文德以教訓於下也。<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the attempt by the Han to continue the Qin institutions was comparable to, quoting the famous statement by Confucius, carving rotten wood:

Confucius said: “Rotten wood cannot be carved; walls of dung cannot be worked with a trowel.” Now, Han has succeeded Qin. It is like rotten wood or a wall of dung. Although you desire to improve it and put it in order, how is this possible? Laws are promulgated, but crime grows; orders are sent down, but deceit arises. This is like using hot water to stop boiling water or carrying kindling to put out a fire.

今漢繼秦之後，如朽木糞牆矣，雖欲善治之，亡可奈何。法出而姦生，令下而詐起，如以湯止沸，抱薪救火。<sup>42</sup>

Dong Zhongshu’s solution, of course, was to claim that the new mandate after the fall of the Zhou had been obtained by Confucius, not the Qin, so that the Han should now return to the teachings of Confucius.<sup>43</sup> But such arguments were completely out of favor at the court.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Return to the Zhou*

Over the subsequent decades, however, a significant financial crisis developed as a consequence of the extreme centralization of state power under the Han, and several voices emerged calling for a scaling back of the empire. What we see in this period—from about midway through the first century BCE onward—is a change in the court culture, where such calls to reject the legacy of the Qin and to return to something that came before shifted from being a clear minority voice to becoming a major presence in the court debates. Of particular interest to our concerns, however, is that, in the realms of ritual and gov-

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<sup>41</sup> *Hanshu* 26.2510.

<sup>42</sup> *Hanshu* 26.2504.

<sup>43</sup> *Hanshu* 26.2515.

<sup>44</sup> As Sarah Queen (1996) has argued, the view that Dong Zhongshu was a major figure at court is clearly the result of a later reading from the Eastern Han. It is telling in this regard that Sima Qian, writing during the reign of Han Wudi, clearly did not see Dong Zhongshu as a significant figure at court. Sima Qian’s biography of Dong Zhongshu (*Shiji* 121.3127–3129) is notable for its brevity, mentioning little more than that Dong Zhongshu was a scholar of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and that he practiced rain magic. See Puett 2001, 166–168, 262–263n93.

ernance, one of the key issues was not simply to turn to Confucius but rather to return to the practices of the Zhou. The rise of interest in the texts purporting to tell of the ritual and administrative structure of the Zhou occurred in this context.

In the thirties BCE, several figures, such as Kuang Heng 匡衡 (chancellor: 36–30 BCE) and Zhang Tan 張譚 (imperial counselor: 33–30 BCE), began critiquing the sacrificial system introduced by Wudi, claiming that it differed from the regulations of antiquity.<sup>45</sup> They called for a return to the ritual and administrative practices of the Zhou. Tellingly, several of the memorials written from this perspective referred not just to the *Book of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) but also to the *Liji*. Several, moreover, quoted from the *Liji*, and the quotations given all correspond with our extant text. As Timothy Baker has argued, it seems reasonable to conclude that something like the extant text of the *Liji* was in existence by the late Western Han.<sup>46</sup>

In 31 BCE, the court sided with Kuang Heng. The ritual system of Wudi was abolished, and a new system, based upon texts like the *Shangshu* and *Liji*, was instituted.<sup>47</sup> The new ritual system involved decentralization, an attempt to govern through ritual rather than through imperial institutions, and an explicit claim that it represented a return to the ritual system practiced during the Zhou. This alteration in the ritual system was part of a larger shift that occurred during these last few decades of the Western Han. If the dominant court tradition of the earlier Western Han had been characterized by dramatic claims of superseding the past, the court culture at the end of the Western Han shifted toward calling for restraint, for a return to earlier traditions, and particularly for a return to the Zhou.

It is only after this shift in the court culture that significant references to the *Zhouli* begin appearing in our extant writings. Prior to this period, the *Zhouli* was referred to only rarely.<sup>48</sup> There are, for example, at most two references to the *Zhouli* in the entirety of the *Historical Records* (*Shiji* 史記). (References to the “Zhouguan” in the *Shiji* refer to the “Zhouguan” chapter of the *Shangshu*.) Both references appear

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<sup>45</sup> *Hanshu* (“Jiaosi zhi”) 25B.1254.

<sup>46</sup> Baker 2006, 164–165.

<sup>47</sup> For the late Western Han ritual reform, see Loewe 1974; Kern 2001; Wang Baoxuan 1994; Bujard 2000; Baker 2006; Puett 2002, 307–315.

<sup>48</sup> Timothy Baker (2006, 276–293) has provided an invaluable tabulation of all references to the *Zhouli*, as well as the *Liji* and the *Ceremony and Rites* (*Yili* 儀禮), in the early histories. Here and below, my summaries are based upon Baker’s findings.

in the “Monograph on the Feng and Shan Sacrifices” (“Fengshan shu” 封禪書) chapter.<sup>49</sup> Although each of these references could refer to the *Shangshu* “Zhouguan,” Timothy Baker has argued that both probably refer instead to the *Zhouli*.<sup>50</sup> In the first of these, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BCE) quotes from the *Zhouguan* concerning sacrifices to Heaven and Earth. However, the quotation does not appear in our extant text of the *Zhouli*. Later in the chapter, we are told that classicists searched the *Zhouguan*, as well as the *Shangshu* and the “Wangzhi” (later made into a chapter of the *Liji*), to find information for Han Wudi on the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices.

Even if these are in fact references to the *Zhouli*, it is clear that the text was not of major significance at the time. The references show only that Sima Qian associated the text with “classicists” (*ru* 儒) who were trying to find ancient precedents for rituals, and who were clearly being ignored by the emperor. In short, if the *Zhouli* is the text being referred to here, these references seem to represent nothing more than how completely marginalized the users of the text were at the court of Han Wudi.

As Baker has shown, the *Zhouli* does not appear in the *Hanshu* until one reaches the very end of the Western Han. At this point, however, there are several references, including quotations that match our extant text.<sup>51</sup> Baker concludes:

The large number of references to this text under the term *Zhouguan*, together with the quotations corresponding to the transmitted version and lack of non-corresponding quotations, clearly confirm that a text similar to the current version was in active circulation by the end of the Western Han. That these references to the *Zhouli* almost all occur very late in the dynasty, in the Wang Mang period or the two decades preceding that, and [are] essentially all by or related to Liu Xin or Wang Mang clearly show that its popularity lay in that political camp.<sup>52</sup>

When he was a minister, Wang Mang, while appointing additional specialists of the Classics, also called to court those who had copies of other works, including the lost chapters of the *Liji*, the ancient text of the *Shangshu*, and the *Mao Odes* (*Mao shi* 毛詩). The *Zhouguan* was one of the works on the list.<sup>53</sup> The reference makes it clear that the

<sup>49</sup> *Shiji* (“Fengshan shu”) 1357, 1397.

<sup>50</sup> Baker 2006, 280nn1 and 2.

<sup>51</sup> Baker 2006, 280–284; Peng Lin 1991.

<sup>52</sup> Baker 2006, 163.

<sup>53</sup> *Hanshu* (“Wang Mang zhuan”) 99.4069.

*Zhouli* was not a widely accepted text at the time.<sup>54</sup> So, although the *Zhouli* may well date from the Warring States period, it certainly does not seem to have been considered a major work, and there is a clear sense that Wang Mang was rescuing an obscure text. Following his usurpation, Wang Mang used the *Zhouli* as a basis for the ritual system,<sup>55</sup> for taxation,<sup>56</sup> and for organizing state offices.<sup>57</sup> Although we do not have any explicit discussion of the text during this period to give us specifics about Wang Mang's appropriation of the text, a few clues can be found concerning the culture of the court.<sup>58</sup>

Wang Mang, very much in keeping with his times, positioned himself as a supporter of classicism rather than the imperial system of the Qin and the legacy of the latter in the early Han. For example, when restoring the "well-field" (*jing* 井) system of taxation, Wang Mang claimed that the system was practiced by Yao, Shun, and the Three Dynasties and that the Qin destroyed the institutions of the sages when they discarded the system.<sup>59</sup> But Wang also championed other texts—like the *Zhouli*—in addition to those that had been endorsed by figures like Kuang Heng in the generation before. His decision to turn to a text that was clearly not regarded as a significant work—even among classicist scholars—was therefore not an attempt to co-opt the court culture of the day by favoring a text already widely supported. So what was his purpose?

Among Wang Mang's goals were two that were very difficult to accomplish in the period in which he was active. Wang clearly wanted to assert the need for a strong ruler to create a system of government very different from the current one. But, in the context of the time, appeals to a sage-ruler creating a radically new state were very much out of favor. Moreover, it is clear that one of Wang's goals in creating a new system of government was to establish a powerful central state. But simply returning to the imperial system advocated by Wudi was clearly not an option because that was precisely the system that had been rejected so successfully at court in the previous generation.

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<sup>54</sup> Passages such as these, of course, were the ones utilized by Kang Youwei to argue that the *Zhouli* was fabricated by Liu Xin. For a discussion of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, see Xu Xingwu 2005.

<sup>55</sup> *Hanshu* ("Jiaosi zhi") 25.1265.

<sup>56</sup> *Hanshu* ("Shi huo zhi") 24.1180.

<sup>57</sup> *Hanshu* ("Wang Mang zhuan") 99.4136.

<sup>58</sup> See the excellent discussions by Loewe (1974) and Jin Chunfeng (1993, 238–244).

<sup>59</sup> *Hanshu* ("Wang Mang zhuan") 99.4110.



Both of these goals, of course, would have found strong sanction in texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi*. But by the end of the Western Han, texts such as these that asserted the need for a sage-ruler to break from the past and create anew, and specifically to create an order based upon defined roles and functions rather than moral governance, were, as we saw above in the memorials of Dong Zhongshu, very much associated with the Qin and early Han empires. These empires, of course, were being strongly criticized by the end of the Western Han for having broken with antiquity: by far the dominant tendency of the court at the end of the Western Han was to reject the Qin/early Han mode of statecraft and to call for a return to the Zhou. In short, appeals to texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi* would have been very unwise in such a context. Yet calls to follow the texts that figures like Kuang Heng in the previous generation had been emphasizing would hardly have supported Wang Mang's goals.

In this context, the *Zhouli* may have provided precisely the sort of argument Wang Mang needed. As we have seen, the *Zhouli* possessed the same tension seen in texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi*—calling on the one hand for a ruler to establish the state and on the other for a state that thereafter would function without interference from a ruler. But since the *Zhouli* emphasizes the organizing ruler rather than the creating sage, there is no celebration of having rejected precedent, and certainly no celebration of having created something better than existed in the past. Unlike the claims of radical sagely creation that characterized the reign of the First Emperor, Wang Mang could profess to be following the organizing principles that reigned in the Zhou.

In terms of the resulting order that would be created by the ruler, the text also had a potential appeal. In the debates of the Han, the Zhou was associated with a decentralized form of statecraft, in which land was enfeoffed to powerful aristocratic families in perpetuity. However, the *Zhouli* does not mention how to govern outlying areas. Thus, unlike most texts associated with the Zhou, there is no call for or even discussion of a decentralized feudal arrangement as existed in the Zhou.

There is also no discussion of procedures for promotions, rewards, and punishments, or forms of legal ordering of any kind. In other words, the bureaucratic vision that underlay texts like the *Shangjun shu* and *Han Feizi*, and that became associated with the Qin and Han empires, is absent from the *Zhouli*. Nevertheless, nothing in the text

argues against a bureaucracy either: the text is simply silent on how the rest of the realm outside the court is to be governed.

Thus, while supporting an initially active ruler to create the state, the *Zhouli* was associated not with the Qin-Han empires but rather with the Zhou. And yet, unlike the *Liji*, which was so emphasized in the court debates of the thirties BCE, the *Zhouli* was not based upon a call for legitimation through moral governance or by training the populace not to think of the state as a state—a position associated with at least a claim of decentralization. The ruler is overtly embraced as the figure who establishes order, and the order he establishes is defined in terms of functions and roles rather than a ritualized familial order. And, conveniently, the text leaves open the question of how to govern the outlying areas of the realm. In short, the *Zhouli* had the key elements Wang Mang was looking for.

### *Conclusion*

If the courts of the Qin and early Han empires were distinctive in celebrating innovation, the period beginning in the thirties was distinctive for the opposite reason: a shift occurred that emphasized returning to the past, favoring restraint, and opposing the grandiosity of the earlier imperial courts. But, even within these calls for a return to the Zhou, we have seen two very distinctive approaches, one associated with particular chapters of the *Liji* and the other associated with the *Zhouli*.

All three of these positions, I might add, continued to exert appeal in later Chinese history as well. The grand imperial claims associated with the Qin and early Han imperial courts would certainly recur. Whereas rulers concerned with building up support during periods of relatively decentralized rule—or in masking a drive toward more centralized rule—would seek support in the sacrifice chapters of the *Liji*. In contrast, the *Zhouli* was appealed to by those who sought a more activist form of governance and thus opposed an emphasis on the cultivation of individuals or on the use of rituals to influence the attitudes of the populace, but who for historical reasons found an appeal to antiquity more powerful than a claim to cosmological principles or the potentially divine powers of the ruler.<sup>60</sup> With both Wang Mang and Wang Anshi, this was precisely the concern.

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<sup>60</sup> For a study of the uses of the *Zhouli*, see Jin Chunfeng 1993.

In short, I would like to argue that part of the power of the *Zhouli* is precisely that it offers a means of organizing the world simply through the ordering acts of the ruler. Anything that exists can simply be ordered and given a place by the ruler, who thereby becomes a pivot of the realm. In other words, and somewhat ironically, one of the reasons for the *Zhouli*'s attractiveness was that it offered an approach to political organization based simply on organizing and administering from the center rather than on legitimation through appeals to human nature, creator-sages, or the cosmic order. One institutes and organizes; one does not legitimate or create. I will conclude by simply quoting the line that recurs throughout the *Zhouli*: "It is the king who establishes the state."