The Ambivalence of Creation

Debates Concerning
Innovation and Artifice
in Early China

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In 221 B.C. the state of Qin overtook Qi, the last of the remaining states, and created the first unified empire in Chinese history. This was the culmination of a lengthy process that had started with the reforms of Shang Yang in the mid-fourth century B.C. and continued through the gradual growth of Qin economic and military power over the course of the third century B.C. Nonetheless, upon declaring the formation of a new dynasty, the Qin chose to emphasize the moment as a point of rupture—of radical discontinuity from the past. And although the Qin empire would in the end last for only fourteen years, the institutions forged by the first emperor would ultimately have tremendous longevity. Indeed, by the time empire became successfully consolidated under the reign of Wudi (r. 141–87) of the following Han dynasty, the state to a large degree resembled that which had been initially created by the Qin.

During this period, from the first emperor’s establishment of empire to the consolidation by Han Wudi, the debates traced in the previous two chapters intensified. Did imperial institutions mark a radical break from the past? If so, in what ways, if any, could be they be considered legitimate? In this debate, the arguments that had developed over the previous two centuries were invoked and reworked with a greater sense of immediacy and urgency—by figures at the imperial court and by those outside it. Ultimately, the voices favoring imperial centralization won and formed an imperial ideology.
The Creation of Empire: The Qin Dynasty

After 221 B.C., the Qin expanded the state system that had developed over the previous century and a half to rule over all of China. The Qin divided all of its lands into a system of commanderies under the direct control of the central court, formalized a universal legal code, and greatly expanded both the power of the state and the area of its domination. In direct contrast to the decentralized kingdom of the previous Zhou dynasty, the Qin created an empire.¹

Few acts more clearly demonstrate how the Qin court decided to present itself than its choice of a title for the ruler. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the Shang and Zhou title wang (king) had been widely usurped by rulers during the latter part of the Warring States period. When Zheng, the king of Qin, defeated the other states and started a new dynasty, he could have kept the title of king, thereby both proclaiming the illegitimacy of his earlier rivals’ use of the title and emphasizing his own links to the rulers of the Zhou. But he did not. Instead of maintaining the traditional title, the Qin sovereign decided to invent a new one that emphasized the degree to which his regime marked a point of discontinuity from the past.

The new title chosen was “huangdi,” which means literally “the august di.”² Di, it may be remembered, were the thearchs who stood above spirits in the celestial pantheon. The term was then picked up by various thinkers in the Warring States period to designate the early sages of antiquity. The most famous of these was Huangdi (the yellow di), the main figure in many narratives about the original establishment of the state. By using this epithet in his title, the Qin ruler was proclaiming himself to be a di—in other words, a great sage like those of antiquity. Moreover, it seems likely, for reasons that will soon become clear, that the Qin ruler was advocating an interpretation of these sages comparable to that in earlier works like the Shangjunshu: the di were not organizers but great creators, and the greatest of them, Huangdi, had created the state institutions utilized from then until the rise of the Qin. This interpretation of the di as great creators became a crucial part of Qin ideology, as the Qin ruler also attempted to present himself as a creator-sage, forging a new state that would surpass that created by the ancient di.

Indeed, the historian Sima Qian, whose work Shiji is our main source for
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this period, reconstructs a statement by the Qin ministers on the occasion of choosing this new title. The main theme of the speech was that what the first emperor had accomplished superseded anything accomplished before, even by the di of antiquity. Although the speech may well be of the historian's own making, Sima Qian's interpretation of the meaning of the title seems plausible: the title was meant to signify a figure greater than the ancient sages.

The king further called himself the "first august di." Sima Qian here narrates the emperor as stating that his successor would be called the "second august di," followed by the third, and so on for the next ten thousand generations. Once again, although we cannot verify the historical accuracy of the speech, the interpretation of the historian nonetheless seems plausible: the numerical prefix to the title appears to signify that the ruler was the first of a projected long series of emperors. The empire that he had introduced was thus to continue from then on, and the Qin ruler was the first of this new imperial line.

The Qin empire, in other words, was not simply a new dynasty that would itself be supplanted by another dynasty after a few centuries; it was to rule in a new imperial era that would continue for even longer than the cycle of dynasties introduced by Huangdi.

Nonetheless, the first emperor also had an interest in presenting the Qin as a legitimate dynasty that deserved to follow the Zhou. Accordingly, he made use of the five-power theory of governance. The early history of five-power theory is somewhat difficult to trace, although it is presumed to have originated in early technical practices, such as medicine. According to late Warring States authors, Zou Yan was the first to apply the system to the spheres of politics and ethics. At its basis, the theory posited that the universe operated according to cycles of phases, and that human action ought to define itself in relation to these cycles. The political implication was that each dynasty should be correlated with the natural movement of the phases. As a result, the dynastic cycle would replicate the larger cycles of nature.

Several models competed to explain how precisely the previous dynasties matched up with the five powers, which were earth, wood, metal, fire, and water. The one followed by the first emperor was given to him by some of the disciples of Zou Yan. According to this model, it was believed that Huangdi, who ruled over the first state, had attained the power of earth, the Xia had
attained the power of wood, the Shang had attained the power of metal, and the Zhou had attained the power of fire. Since the next dynasty would be succeeding the Zhou, the first emperor decided it was time for the power of water to be attained, because water conquers fire. As such, the next dynasty would have to follow the power of water, as well as the other phenomena associated with water, such as yin, winter, blackness, punishments, and the number six. Accordingly, the first emperor proclaimed water as the power of the dynasty, set the tenth month (which fell in the winter) as the beginning of the year, honored the color black, and set measures according to the number six. He also, of course, used laws and punishments to organize affairs.\(^{12}\)

The proclamation is interesting, for it implies not only that the Qin empire was a legitimate successor to the Zhou kingdom but also that centralized administrative institutions were purely natural. According to such a theory, then, Qin, by ruling with laws, was simply correlating itself with the movement of the universe: just as, in the progression of the year, there must be a season of winter and death, so in the cycle of dynasties there must be one devoted to laws, punishments, and warfare.

At first glance, however, such a proclamation would appear to contradict the other claims made by the first emperor. Why would the first emperor, who in other respects so strongly emphasized himself as the creator of a new era, try to use a theory that defined the Qin as simply another in an unending cycle of dynasties, especially since the theory implied that the Qin empire, instead of ruling for ten thousand generations, would simply be supplanted by another dynasty? The answer to this question perhaps lies in the first emperor’s interpretation of the five-power cosmological system. Although late Warring States authors posited the movement of the powers as an unending cycle, the first emperor may not have been employing it in this way at all. In the model that he was using, the first state, that of Huangdi, attained the power of earth, and each following dynasty attained the next power. The Qin then took the fifth and final power, namely water. Later dynasties after the Qin would want to claim that this was a cycle, and that the dynasty following the Qin would then return to the power of earth originally held by Huangdi, but it is possible that the first emperor believed that, having attained the fifth and final power, the Qin marked the end of the era begun by Huangdi. There would, then, never be a return to the power of earth.
The most important and ultimately most controversial administrative reform was the creation of the Qin commandery system. This administrative structure was a continuation of the state system that had been developing in the state of Qin since the fourth century B.C. As was discussed in the previous chapter, the introduction of centralizing reforms by Shang Yang had initiated a major debate on the legitimacy of a break from the practices of the Zhou. However, the introduction of a centralized administrative structure over the entirety of China marked an even more radical departure from earlier practices: as had been narrated in the Shangshu, King Wu, upon founding the Zhou dynasty, enfeoffed land to his supporters and relatives. A number of figures at court believed that the Qin, having started a new dynasty, should do the same. Wang Wan, the chief minister at the time, and other advisers argued that, in order to control distant regions (such as the land of the former states of Yan, Qi, and Jing), the ruler should enfeoff the land to his relatives. 13

However, Li Si argued that enfeoffment had been a significant factor in the destruction of the Zhou: by enfeoffing their land to relatives, the Zhou rulers gave virtual autonomy to the lords in managing the affairs of the various domains. With the passing of generations, the kinship relations of the lords to the kings grew less strong, as, therefore, did their loyalty to the central court. As a result, Li Si argued, the realm gradually fell into the disorder that characterized the Warring States. The minister therefore recommended that the Qin ruler reject the traditional practice of enfeoffment. 14

The first emperor did so, and the realm was divided into 36 commanderies, each ruled by officials appointed by the central court and hence under its direct control. 15 The intent was to halt any growth of local autonomy by placing all areas under the charge of figures directly answerable to the Qin central court.

In order to further curb the growth of local centers of control, the first emperor forcibly moved powerful families from throughout the realm to the capital city of Xianyang. 16 The goal was to prevent resurgence of the powerful families that had controlled local areas before the unification. As a result, the imperial magistrates for each commandery would remain the most powerful figures in the area.

A similar attempt was made symbolically as well: the first emperor had replicas of the palaces of the former states built near his own capital. The palaces were then filled with women, bells, and drums taken from each feudal ruler. 17
Since each of the states traced itself back to its original enfeoffment from the Zhou rulers, the evident goal of such an act was to claim that the former enfeoffed rulers were now under the direct command of the first emperor.

Beyond these moves to undercut local centers of power, the first emperor also tried to break down regional cultures and institutions and forge a unified realm. Accordingly, he standardized weights and measures, the gauge of wheeled vehicles, and the script. All weapons not used by imperial forces were confiscated and melted down to make bells and statues. Finally, roads were built connecting the empire. The goal of these acts was to unify the states and pacify the realm, bringing an end to the interstate violence that characterized the Warring States period.

In 219 B.C., the first emperor decided to claim legitimacy for these policies by performing the feng and shan sacrifices. The feng and shan were offered to mark the beginning of a new era, and the first emperor's decision to perform them would constitute a proclamation that a new order had been established. According to the records, the first emperor performed the feng at the summit of Mt. Tai and the shan at Liangfu. Unfortunately, the ritual used in the performance was kept secret, so no descriptions of the event exist. We are told, however, that while ascending Mt. Tai to perform the feng sacrifice he encountered violent winds and rain halfway up the slope, a fact that led the Ruists to ridicule him for failing to receive the blessings he sought. This claim that the first emperor's offerings had not been accepted was to become an important issue in later discussions of the Qin creation of empire.

The first emperor's desire to proclaim a new order is apparent as well in a set of commemorative inscriptions that the ruler had carved during his reign. The first of these inscriptions was set up immediately after the emperor performed the feng and shan sacrifices, and the others were done as the first emperor continued to tour the empire. The overriding concern in all of the inscriptions was to present the emperor as the creator of an entirely new order, something that fully surpassed the states ruled over by the ancient sages.

The second of these inscriptions was set up near Mt. Langya:

It is the twenty-eighth year. The first emperor has created a new beginning [zuo shi].
He has put in order the laws, standards, and principles for the myriad things. . . .
All under Heaven is unified in heart and yielding in will. Implements have a single measure, and graphs are written in the same way. . . . He has rectified and given order to the different customs. . . . His accomplishments surpass those of the five thearchs \([di]\).\(^{24}\)

The tone of the inscription is clear. In the first two lines, the first emperor presents himself as a great creator, fashioning order for the entire world through laws and standards. The next lines emphasize the unity that the first emperor has initiated, not only politically but also by forming for all under Heaven a unified heart, as well as unified implements, measures, and characters. The final line makes a claim that was also implied in the title invented by the ruler, namely that the first emperor’s accomplishments are superior to those of the five \(di\). Not only does the first emperor make no attempt to claim that his actions are a continuation of the work of the earlier sages, but he also boasts that he has superseded their accomplishments and created an order unlike anything that existed before.

In another inscription carved in stone and set up on Mt. Zhifu, the first emperor presents himself as a sage who has created a new order:

- The great sage created \([zuo]\) order, established and settled the laws and standards, and made manifest the relations and principles. . . .
- He universally bestowed and clarified the laws to bind all under Heaven and to stand eternally as a righteous pattern.
- Great indeed! Everyone within the divisions will receive and accord with the intent of the sage.
- The numerous ministers praise his accomplishments, requesting to carve them on stone and display them and hand them down as a constant model.\(^{25}\)

Here again, the words do not suggest that the first emperor was continuing the work of the earlier sages. They emphasize the idea that the first emperor is himself a great sage who has created a new order, and the issue of transmission is raised only to suggest that the creation will be handed down to posterity. This is the same point, of course, made by the numerical portion of the first emperor’s title: the Qin ruler was the first in the series and would be followed by the second, third, etc., for the next ten thousand generations.
These claims by the first emperor to be a great creator sage clearly had their origins in the texts, such as the *Shangjunshu*, that presented the original state as the creation of the early sages, most notably Huangdi. Following this model, the Qin, upon unifying all of the states under a new system of governance, seemed uninterested in linking their empire to the earlier dynasties. On the contrary, the proclamations of the founder of the Qin empire emphasize that the ruler personally created a completely new, unprecedented era in Chinese history.

The degree to which the first emperor was committed to this mode of legitimation can be seen in an incident that occurred in 213 B.C. A scholar, Chunyu Yue, called on the first emperor to model himself on antiquity and return to the practices of enfeoffment. Li Si, now the chief minister, argued that it was wrong to follow the past and that no one should advocate such a thing. On Li Si’s advice, the first emperor then ordered that all books, with the exception of those related to medicine, divination, agriculture, and the history of the state of Qin, be proscribed. From then on only scholars would be allowed to possess the proscribed books. All other copies, with the exception of those owned by the state of Qin itself, were to be burned. Anyone caught “using the past to criticize the present” was to be executed.

The Fall of the Imperial System

The first emperor died in 210 B.C. and was succeeded by one of his sons. Very quickly, the failure of the Qin to consolidate imperial rule became clear: despite the unification efforts of the first emperor, the Qin had failed to break local centers of power. In 209 B.C., Chen She initiated a revolt in what had been the state of Chu. Attempting to link himself with those who supported a reemergence of the pre-Qin states, Chen She called himself a king and took the title “enlarger of Chu.”

Although Chen She’s rebellion was quickly crushed, another rebellion, led by Xiang Yu and his uncle, Xiang Liang, emerged in the former state of Chu. Like Chen She, Xiang Yu and Xiang Liang appealed to those who wanted to reconstitute the pre-imperial states. Early in the revolt, for example, Xiang Liang found the grandson of the late ruler of Chu and entitled him King Huai of
Xiang Liang and Xiang Yu then claimed themselves to be working under the command of King Huai. The revolt was thus presented as the reemergence of the legitimate Chu rulers against the imperial system.

Similar revolts quickly spread throughout the empire. By 207 B.C., the former states of Yan, Zhao, Qi, Chu, Han, and Wei had been reconstituted, and each had established kings as rulers. The Qin armies, by then completely overstretched, were unable to impose control. In the same year, the second emperor committed suicide. The Qin empire, forged to last for ten thousand generations, had fallen in just fourteen years. Another ruler, Ziying, was set up to rule Qin, but in an open admission that the empire had failed, he took the title of “king” rather than “emperor”: Qin was once again only one state among many.

Even this rule was short-lived, however, and soon thereafter the state of Qin fell completely. At the end of 207 B.C., the rebel Liu Bang reached the capital and forced the surrender of the king of Qin. In early 206 B.C., Xiang Yu, who had become by far the most powerful general in the wars against the Qin armies, led his forces into the capital, killed Ziying, looted the city, and burned the Qin palaces.

At this point, a reconstitution of the pre-Qin system of states became a real possibility. However, even if the Qin failed to create an enduring imperial system, it seems to have been successful in undercutting local power centers. I infer this from the ensuing civil wars: after 206 B.C. de facto power was held by the generals of the rebel armies, rather than the newly installed kings of the six reconstituted states. Indeed, the most powerful rebel leader, Xiang Yu, actually overthrew the heirs of the former kings and made a new claim to unity: he granted King Huai of Chu the title of “righteous di,” carved up the old state territories, enfeoffed pieces of each to his own ministers and generals, and gave himself the title “hegemon-king of the Western Chu.” Xiang Yu supported a return to the system of enfeoffment from before the centralized rule of the Qin empire. However, he also wanted to continue the Qin policy of undercutting the power of the families that had controlled the pre-Qin states: but instead of doing so through imperial centralization, Xiang Yu divided the states into smaller, and thus less powerful, units, and enfeoffed his own supporters.

Soon thereafter, Xiang Yu took action against yet another of the remaining relatives of one of the pre-Qin ruling families: he had the “righteous di” (the
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king of Chu) killed. It was on this pretext that Liu Bang, who had been enfeoffed as the king of Han, rose up in rebellion, claiming that Xiang Yu had become a tyrant. The armies of Liu Bang and Xiang Yu fought for the next four years, until finally, in 202 B.C., Xiang Yu was defeated.

The Reintroduction and Consolidation of Empire
Under the Han Dynasty

The Founding of the Han

Liu Bang, now the dominant figure in China, declared the beginning of a new dynasty: the Han. The difficulties facing him were clear. The Qin imperial system had failed, the states that reconstituted themselves in 207 B.C. had proven weak, and the hegemonic system of Xiang Yu had failed as well. In 202 B.C., it would not have been at all clear what form of statecraft the Han system should embrace, nor would it have seemed likely that the dynasty would be able to hold power for any length of time.

The first major symbolic act that Liu Bang undertook to demonstrate his claims to legitimacy was to choose his title: instead of keeping the title “king of Han,” and instead of calling himself “hegemon-king” as Xiang Yu had done, Liu Bang took the Qin title “emperor.” He thus clearly proclaimed his intent to reestablish the imperial unification introduced by the Qin.

Gaozu then went on to divide about one-third of the realm into commanderies along the lines of the Qin empire, an act that again revealed his desire to continue centralized rule in China. Nonetheless, he was hesitant to employ all of the institutions introduced by the Qin. The reasons for his hesitancy are not difficult to find. Although the Qin had united a group of states that had become independent during the Warring States period, the Qin empire had failed. Moreover, Gaozu had been forced to contend in the rebellion with many of those who wished to return to the institutions of the pre-imperial period, so he knew well the kind of opposition that the Qin system had faced.

Indeed, a concern with presenting himself in opposition to Qin centralization had defined his career for some time. For example, when he had first entered the capital city during the revolt and accepted the surrender of Ziying, one of his first acts was to reduce the strictness of the Qin legal code.
wanted to win support by demonstrating that he opposed the more extreme sides of Qin imperial rule.

His opposition to centralization became even more pronounced after he declared the formation of the Han. Although it is true that he used the Qin commandery system to administer about one-third of his domain, for the remaining two-thirds he returned to the traditional practice of enfeoffment. In order to maintain the allegiance of those who supported him during the revolt, he parcelled out large fiefs of land and granted the rulers tremendous autonomy. For most of his realm, then, Gaozu dismantled one of the bulwarks of the Qin imperial system and returned to Western Zhou practices.

Gaozu also revealed his concern with showing his connection to the Zhou dynasty by establishing a set of sacrifices. For example, when told that the Zhou, upon taking power, instituted sacrifices to their ancestor Hou Ji, Gaozu responded by ordering every commandery, kingdom, and county to institute sacrifices to Hou Ji as well.

In addition, upon starting the Han dynasty, Gaozu did not change the ruling power of his dynasty: like the Qin, the Han ruled with the power of water, the same element that had been held by the Qin. By doing so, Gaozu denied the Qin a place in the dynastic and cosmic cycle: it was the Han, not the Qin, whose power of water followed the Zhou power of fire. The Han dynasty was thus the true successor to the Zhou, and the first emperor was simply a usurper who had falsely claimed a place in the succession of dynasties.

Overall, then, Gaozu took a mixed stance on the issue of imperial rule. On the one hand, he presented himself as a ruler attempting to return to the ways of the past, and particularly as a ruler turning against the vicious sides of the Qin imperium. Accordingly, he weakened the legal code, gave out most of his land through enfeoffment, and ruled under the same element in the five-power cycle as the Qin had—presenting himself as the legitimate successor to the Zhou and, at the same time, implying that the Qin were just usurpers, without a place in the dynastic cycle. On the other hand, Gaozu took the title of emperor and divided about one-third of the land into the commandery system created by the Qin.

That mixture, however, did not last long. The most pressing problem came to be that of enfeoffment. The dangers of granting so much autonomy to his former supporters became immediately clear as a number of the rulers rose up
in revolt against the central court. Recognizing that his empire was in peril, Gaozu began replacing them with members of his own family. His relatives, he felt, would be far less likely to turn against the central court. But even this solution was only temporary, for the descendants of his relatives would be less likely to offer their full support to the ruler. As was seen in the history of the Western Zhou, even a relatively small kingdom can, over time, disintegrate through practices of enfeoffment. For a large imperial state, such practices were all the more dangerous.

As it turned out, the revolts staged against Gaozu by the enfeoffed rulers did indeed foreshadow trouble. Gaozu’s successors thus faced the choice of allowing the empire to degenerate into warring regions or attempting to reinstate the Qin system of rule. If they attempted to reinstate the Qin system, however, they would have to find a more successful means of implementation, for the failure of the Qin was an undeniable fact. Such were the problems facing the early rulers of the Han.

Lu Jia

It was in this context that Lu Jia wrote the *Xinyu*. The work is an argument for the importance of following the textual traditions of the earlier sages, and therefore of following precedent in statecraft. However, this did not entail, for Lu Jia, completely rejecting the Qin legacy. Accordingly, the work attempts to balance many of the competing arguments in Gaozu's court. It is of particular interest to the current study because the way that Lu Jia presents his arguments owes much to the synthesis and approach forged in the late Warring States by the authors of the *Xici*. Moreover, I suggest that this marks an important moment in the development of classical scholarship in the Han.

In the first chapter, “Daoji,” Lu Jia takes up the issues of innovation and historical change. The chapter opens as follows: “The commentary says: ‘Heaven gives birth to the myriad things and uses earth to nourish them. Sages bring them to completion.’”

In a passage clearly reminiscent of the *Xici*, the text claims that the sages observed the patterns of the natural world and used Qian and Kun to determine the proper hierarchy for humans:

Thereupon the early sages looked up to observe the patterns of Heaven and looked down to examine the principles of Earth. They dia-
grammed Qian and Kun so as to determine the way of man. The people for the first time were enlightened and understood the affections of fathers and sons, the propriety of rulers and ministers, the way of husbands and wives, and the order of older and younger. Thereupon the hundred officials were established and the way of the kings was thereby generated.\(^5^2\)

As in the *Xici*, the sages are those who observed the patterns of Heaven and Earth and then brought those patterns to humanity. This allowed humans to realize the hierarchy proper to them. And, also as in the *Xici*, Qian and Kun are the mediating elements in the movement from nature to humanity.

The text next provides a version of sagely innovations:

The people ate flesh and drank blood and took skins and furs as clothing. When it came to Shennong, he felt it difficult for flying insects and running beasts to nourish man, and he thereupon sought things that could be eaten. He tried the fruits of a hundred plants, examined the tastes of sourness and bitterness, and taught people to eat the five grains. In all under Heaven, the people took the wilds as their residence and caves as their dwellings. Since they did not yet have houses, they shared the land with the birds and beasts. Thereupon Huangdi cut down trees, made beams out of the wood, and built palaces and houses.\(^5^3\)

The text goes on to describe how Hou Ji taught proper agricultural practice, Yu directed the rivers, Xi Zhong made chariots and boats, and Gao Yao established punishments.\(^5^4\)

At this point, however, the people still had no morality. Accordingly, the sages of the middle period taught them ritual and propriety.\(^5^5\) For Lu Jia, this middle period—presumably a reference to the three dynasties—represented a new height for humanity: it enjoyed both the material culture invented by the early sages and the ritual and propriety taught by the middle sages.

However, things declined thereafter: “The later ages declined and fell to waste. Thereupon, the later sages established the five classics and clarified the six arts to correspond to Heaven, govern Earth, and probe affairs.”\(^5^6\) The five classics, then, were composed in a state of decline in order to once again connect humanity to Heaven. The later sages thereby “reformed the decline and
The five classics, therefore, are what will allow later generations to return to the golden age of the three dynasties.

Such a presentation of history allows Lu Jia to distinguish two of the poles that had dominated so many of the intellectual debates on creation over the previous two centuries: Lu Jia accepts the idea that there had been a period of great technological innovations by creator sages, but his historical sequencing allows him to distinguish this fully from the moral governance of the three dynasties.

In itself, however, such a historical sequence would not necessarily entail a position radically different from that presented in texts like the *Shangjunshu*. Indeed, as Chapter 3 described, the authors of the *Shangjunshu* even accepted the idea that the three dynasties introduced moral governance. Their argument was simply that following the precedents of the three dynasties was wrong: the times had changed, and it was now proper to institute amoral, centralized forms of statecraft.

And this is precisely why the author’s cosmological framing device is so important for Lu Jia’s argument: Lu Jia will attempt to claim that sages were not so much responding to changing times as they were successively working to bring things to their proper, and fully natural, completion. For example, he makes the following claim about natural objects: “One can work to make them useful and exhaust their essence to make them into utensils. Therefore I say: Sages complete them. This is the means by which one governs things, penetrates change, controls essence and nature, and makes manifest humaneness and propriety.” The practice of humaneness and propriety, therefore, involves humans appropriating natural things and making them into objects of human consumption. Such acts of appropriation, moreover, are defined as sages bringing things to their proper completion. Or, to put it in the terms of Lu Jia’s opening sentence, the sages’ appropriation of the natural world is the proper and moral completion of the process begun by Heaven: appropriating natural materials for human consumption is a necessary moment in the unfolding of the process begun by Heaven. The sages’ creation of material culture is thus nothing more than the process of successive sages correctly appropriating more and more of nature for the proper use of humans, and the guiding criteria are humaneness and propriety.

The goal of the narrative of sagely creations in this chapter, then, is not to celebrate innovation per se but to emphasize the necessity of sages correctly
providing humanity with what it requires. Accordingly, the narrative emphasizes not the changing of the times but the progressive growth of human culture through each successive innovation of the sages. The "middle period" of the three dynasties, therefore, represents not a particular moment when sages responded in a particular way, but the moment when the technological innovations of the previous period were properly joined with humaneness and propriety.

There is, then, a hidden teleology in the argument, and one that, somewhat counterintuitively, parallels the one found in Xunzi. Sages correctly use the natural world to create the proper culture for man, and in doing so they complete the process begun by Heaven. Thus, creating culture is the cosmologically proper way for the sages to utilize nature. As in Xunzi, then, the tacit support of sagely innovation is fully linked to following the ethical principles expounded in the classics. Lu Jia, of course, roots these ethical principles in the cosmos itself, rather than presenting them as constructs that a sage will naturally invent if he correctly uses his faculties. Nonetheless, both adhere to a similar teleology, a position that allows for an argument that the classical texts provide principles that are eternally valid. Far from being an argument that creating anew is legitimate with the changing of the times, the argument limits any possible innovation by grounding it within a larger cosmology.

Accordingly, Lu Jia asserts, there are indeed unchangeable standards, namely humaneness and propriety. Moreover, these unchangeable standards are expounded in the five classics, which the later sages established. Accordingly, Lu Jia argues, the classics are essential for proper statecraft:

Now, those who plan affairs without humaneness and propriety will surely fail to prosper. If, in erecting things, you build a tall lodging without making the base solid, it will surely collapse. Therefore, sages prevent disorder using the classics and arts, and artisans set straight the crooked using a level and plumb-line. . . . Duke Huan of Qi esteemed virtue and thereby became a hegemon; the second emperor of Qin esteemed punishments and perished.59

In other words, those rulers who follow the principles of humaneness and propriety as given in the classics will prosper; those who do not—like the second emperor of Qin—will be destroyed.

But if this argument bears some similarity to that of Xunzi, the far more
important precedent for Lu Jia's argument is in fact the *Xici*. Lu Jia refers implicitly to the *Xici*'s discussion of the hexagrams as the means through which the sages brought patterns to humanity, and, like the *Xici*, Lu Jia uses this same framework to account for the ensuing inventions of technologies by the sages. Lu Jia then presents the classics as having been written during an era of decline, when sages thought it necessary to teach humaneness and propriety in a degenerate age. The *Xici*, in other words, provides Lu Jia with a means of pulling together numerous different claims: that the sages of antiquity brought patterns from nature to the world of humanity, that these patterns guided subsequent acts of innovation, including both the invention of technologies and the teaching of humaneness and propriety, and that these enduring principles of humaneness and propriety are enshrined in the classics. In short, the *Xici* provides Lu Jia with the ability to call for following the classics while still allowing for innovation.

In the context of the early Han, such arguments had crucial implications. Texts such as the *Shangjunshu* and *Han Feizi*, which provided strong support for sagely innovation, were written to proclaim the legitimacy of introducing centralized institutions of statecraft: since sages create anew with the changing of the times, the argument went, the creation of centralized institutions of statecraft was a necessity for the current age. The state of Qin took over many of these notions in developing its own claims for the legitimacy of creating unprecedented imperial institutions. Accordingly, Lu Jia's attempt to refer to such narratives of sagely creation, while redirecting the argument to emphasize the importance of following the cosmological principles found in the classics, was also an implicit critique of the ideology of the Qin empire. In short, Lu Jia was calling on the emperor to avoid embracing all Qin imperial institutions and ideology, and instead to follow the guidelines of the five classics. But the way that he phrased his argument allowed him to accept the legitimacy of new innovations while still advocating a turn to the classics.

Similar arguments appear throughout the work. In chapter 2, for example, he criticizes those who "take that which is transmitted from the past as important, and that which is created in the present as unimportant." Although this may at first sound like a critique of those who would call for following textual precedents, it is in fact fully consistent with the position outlined in chapter 1: Lu Jia argues that there are eternal principles that should be followed, and,
moreover, that these principles are to be found in works like the *Spring and Autumn Annals*:

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* does not reach up to the five _di_ or down to the three monarchies. It transmits the small good points of Huan of Qi and Wen of Jin, and of the twelve dukes of Lu. [But], down to the present time, it is sufficient to allow one, in practicing governance, to understand what succeeds and what fails.\(^61\)

Far from being a critique of following textual precedents, therefore, the argument instead calls on the ruler to follow the principles of governance found in works like the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

The argument is reminiscent of the Mohist position that innovation is acceptable as long as it is guided by proper principles. But unlike the Mohists, Lu Jia argues that such principles are to be found not in a utilitarian calculus but in texts like the *Spring and Autumn Annals*—and ultimately, therefore, in the patterns brought to humanity by the sages.

Throughout the *Xinyu*, therefore, Lu Jia develops a position that allows him to accept innovation, as long as it is done under proper moral guidelines. Accordingly, he never criticizes the entire Qin imperial system; rather, he criticizes, for example, the Qin's reliance on punishments rather than moral principles. Qin innovations per se are not singled out, but instead he criticizes an over-reliance on punishments, a failure to follow the classics, and other aspects of the imperial system that contradict the cosmological and ethical principles found in the early classics. In short, Lu Jia develops the argument in the *Xici* in such a way that he can claim there to be enduring principles that the sages have brought to humanity, and that these principles can also guide proper sagely innovation. Although Lu Jia does not appear to have been immediately influential on the Han court, his general approach may have ultimately had a crucial impact on the development of classical scholarship in the Han.

*Early Dynastic Problems*

In the short term, however, Lu Jia's arguments seem to have had little if any impact on court politics. The primary issue facing the early empire was controlling the enfeoffed areas, and there is no evidence that classical scholarship on that issue became a significant force in the debates during the first few de-
decades of the Han. Gaozu himself died from a wound received fighting against Qing Bu, the king of Huainan who had revolted against the emperor. Following his death, the empire endured a series of crises involving problems of dynastic succession and an attempted coup by the empress dowager. The immediate consequence of waning central power was growth in the strength of the enfeoffed kingdoms.

By the reign of Wendi (r. 180–157 B.C.), the enfeoffed kingdoms had become so powerful that a number of ministers, such as Jia Yi and Chao Cuo, began calling for increasing centralization to prevent a disintegration of the empire. The emperor thereafter gradually began implementing a policy of reducing the size of the larger kingdoms. His most notable achievement in this regard occurred in 164 B.C., when Wendi successfully divided the enormous kingdom of Huainan into three parts. Reducing the size of the kingdoms, however, sparked tremendous opposition from the enfeoffed rulers themselves. Finally, during the reign of Jingdi (r. 157–141 B.C.), the situation reached a crisis point. In 154 B.C., seven of the enfeoffed kings, led by the king of Wu, launched a revolt against the central court. The Han armies ultimately put them down, and Jingdi used the occasion to expand the commandery system and cut even more significantly into the power of the enfeoffed kingdoms.

The Organization of Empire by Han Wudi

EARLY COURT DEBATES

Issues related to imperial centralization and enfeoffment came to a head during the reign of Han Wudi (r. 141–87 B.C.). Although Jingdi had begun centralizing, the process was still far from complete, and much of the empire was still under the control of enfeoffed kings. Many of the court debates therefore came to rest on whether Wudi should reverse his father’s policies and return to a decentralized feudal system or continue those policies and thereby move toward a recreation of the Qin imperial system of centralized rule.

When Wudi took the throne, several practitioners of “techniques of the Ru” called on him to build a Mingtang, a hall where the feudal lords would come to court. The implicit goal of such a recommendation was to get the emperor to reverse the trend toward imperial centralization and to return to the practices of enfeoffment—a shift that would be marked symbolically by the emperor’s building a temple where he would meet the enfeoffed rulers. They
also called on him to perform the feng and shan sacrifices, acts that would signify the consolidation of the dynasty. As discussed above, the Ruists believed that the first emperor's offering of the feng and shan sacrifices had been rejected because he refused to follow precedent. A successful performance, by their reckoning, would be one offered by a ruler fully linked to the traditional practices associated with the Zhou. Finally, they called on him to alter the calendar and official color of the dynasty. Presumably, the goal here was for the emperor to define himself as attaining a power different from one associated with punishments, warfare, and the Qin system.

The Huainanzi

One of the most dramatic points of this debate centered on the relationship between the court of Wudi and that of Huainan, which remained, even after the division under Wendi, one of the largest and most powerful enfeoffed areas in the Han empire. At Wudi's accession, Huainan was ruled by Liu An, the grandson of Gaozu and the uncle of Wudi himself. Liu An was a patron of scholarly ideas, and, in 139 B.C., Liu An traveled to the central court and presented Wudi with the text. Consisting of 21 chapters, the Huainanzi stands as one of the longest and richest sources for understanding the political and intellectual climate of the early years of Wudi's reign.

In the concluding chapter of the work, the authors proclaim the intent of the text as a whole. They provide a lengthy survey of earlier figures who wrote works as advice to rulers, including the Ruists, Mohists, and Shang Yang. However, the authors claim, each of these figures only provided specific advice for rulers at a particular time; in contrast, they said, the work of Liu An would provide timeless advice:

The book of Mister Liu observes the images of Heaven and Earth, penetrates the affairs of ancient times and the present, weighs affairs and establishes regulations, measures forms and puts forth what is fitting. . . . It does not follow a path from one trace or hold fast to instructions from one corner. . . . Therefore, one can establish it regularly and constantly and never be blocked; one can promulgate it throughout all under Heaven and never make a mistake.

The Huainanzi is intended to be a work that will survive the ages. Unlike all other previous works written at crucial historical junctures, the Huainanzi does
not merely make helpful suggestions for its own time but teaches one how to
become a sage who can always accord with changing circumstances. And the
basis for this claim is similar to that made in the \textit{Xici}: the \textit{Huainanzi} will endure
because it alone is based upon a proper understanding of the natural world.\textsuperscript{72}

One of the most powerful statements in the \textit{Huainanzi} concerning precisely
what such claims would mean appears in chapter 13, the “Fanlun xun.” The
chapter is a lengthy attempt to argue against both the claims of figures like Lu
Jia as to the importance of following textual authority and the strong support
for the creation of centralized institutions being advocated by several figures
at the Han court. Intriguingly, the chapter also builds on the arguments in
texts like the \textit{Xici}, although it does so as a way to deny the very claims that the
authors of the \textit{Xici}, as well as Lu Jia, wished to maintain—namely that sages
brought enduring patterns to humanity and that humans should continue to
follow these patterns.

The chapter opens with a narrative of how successive sages created houses,
clothing, ploughs, boats, wheels, carts, and weapons.\textsuperscript{73} This narrative is clearly
indebted to texts like the “Ciguo” chapter of the \textit{Mozi} and the “Wudu” chapter
of the \textit{Han Feizi}: the sages are defined as active creators of the material cul­
ture of humanity. The text then draws from this narrative the same conclusion
found in the “Wudu” chapter of the \textit{Han Feizi}, namely that it is necessary for
sages to create anew with the changing times: true sages make innovations at
the proper time, without regard for precedent.\textsuperscript{74} Thus, the text argues, the five
di and the three monarchies “changed in accord with the times.”\textsuperscript{75}

In the context of the early Han, such claims had great resonance. By the
late Warring States period, the narratives of the creation of material culture by
successive sages, when combined with the argument that sages change in ac­
cord with the times, had become associated with the arguments of texts like the
\textit{Shangjunshu} and \textit{Han Feizi} advocating the creation of unprecedented forms of
centralized rule. By the early Han, this sort of argument would imply a strong
support for the imperial system that had been created by the first emperor and
that Jingdi had begun to reinstitute.

The text goes on to argue that following textual precedent— the very thing
advocated by figures such as Lu Jia— was foolish:

When the way of the kings splintered, the \textit{Shi} was created. When the
house of Zhou was neglected and rituals and propriety fell to waste,
The Creation of Empire

the Chunqiu was created. As for the Shi and Chunqiu, those who study them view them as beautiful. But they are the products of ages of decline [shuai shi]. The Ruists follow them in order to teach and guide the generations. But how can they compare to the flourishing of the three dynasties? They take the Shi and the Chunqiu as the way of the ancients, and they honor them. But there is also the time before the Shi and Chunqiu were created. Now, the splintering of the way is not as good as the entirety of the way. To recite the poems and texts of the former kings is not as good as hearing and attaining their words. And hearing and attaining their words is not as good as attaining that about which they spoke. As to attaining that about which they spoke, words are not able to express it. Therefore: “The way that can be spoken is not the enduring way.”

Textual traditions cannot recover the actual way of the earlier sages: quoting from the Laozi, the authors make the point that words cannot even provide an understanding of the way. And, regardless, the way of the period from which these texts date is simply one of degeneracy. The text thus denies the crucial claims made by Lu Jia, namely that enduring patterns exist, and that such patterns are articulated in the texts of the sages.

The text continues with its critique: “How can all under Heaven have constant models?” There are no enduring models, and therefore trying to imitate the past is foolish: times change, and what worked in the past will no longer work now. Accordingly, sages must create with the changing times, and others must simply follow them: “Great men create and disciples comply.”

Having thus rejected the following of textual precedents, and having strongly asserted the claims found in texts like the Shangjunshu and Han Feizi that true sages create with the changing of the times, the authors at first glance appear to be arguing for centralized rule. In other words, the text appears to be advocating the imperial system created by the first emperor, and to be calling on Wudi to rebuild such a system instead of following precedent, as the Ruists would have them do.

In fact, however, the text at this point takes these arguments in a completely different direction. The authors turn to a lengthy discussion of self-cultivation and then argue that, thereafter, the sage will be able to accord spontaneously with the generative processes of the universe:
As for the qi of Heaven and Earth, there is nothing greater than harmony. Harmony is the joining of yin and yang. Day and night are distinguished, and things are born. Spring is distinguished and there is birth; autumn is distinguished and there is completion. Birth and completion must have the essence of harmony. Therefore, the way of the sage is lenient yet firm, stern yet kind, soft yet straight, forceful yet humane. . . . The sage resides between hardness and softness, and he thereupon obtains the root of the way.80

The processes of the universe are defined as spontaneous, generative movements, wherein each process occurs at the proper moment. Similarly, the sage, insofar as he accords with these processes, must always rest between extremes.

It is this claim that sets up the crucial part of the argument. Although thus far the authors have appeared to provide a narrative of innovation comparable to texts like the Shangjunshu, this claim, that the sage must correspond to particularly defined processes in the natural world, allows for a very different conclusion. Instead of celebrating discontinuity in the narrative of sagely innovation, the authors claim that such acts of innovation were simply examples of sages properly responding to the processes of nature. In other words, not unlike the Xici, the authors here claim that acts of zuo do not involve inherent discontinuity; on the contrary, such acts are simply an example of sages correlating themselves with the natural world. But, unlike the Xici, the authors do not employ the mediating role of the hexagrams, and, unlike Lu Jia, do not allow for the possibility of eternal patterns embodied in the classics. Thus, although the authors deny the kind of celebration of discontinuity found in the Shangjunshu, they also deny textual authority.

The implications of this position become clear in the following section, where the authors turn to a narrative of the rise of imperial rule in China. Contrary to what the first section might have led one to expect, the text describes the rise of the Qin imperium in highly critical terms. Far from being a proper reaction to the times, and far from demonstrating sagacious moderation, the Qin is singled out as having been excessive in every way:

In the time of Qin, they built to great height towers and pavillons, made extensive gardens and enclosures, built far-reaching imperial roads, and cast bronze figures. They sent out troops and brought in
grasses and grains. . . . Young and strong men were sent west to Lin-chao and Didao, east to Huiji and Fushi, south to Yuzhang and Guilin, and north to Feihu and Yangyuan. On the roads, the dead filled the ditches.81

This extreme militarization of society under Qin rule led to a denigration of all ethical principles: “At this time, those who loyally remonstrated were called inauspicious, and those who took humaneness and propriety as their way were called mad.”82

The rise of Gaozu, however, is presented as a time when the radical destructiveness of the Qin was overcome and links to the past were forged once again: “When we come down to the time of Emperor Gao, he preserved what had been extinguished and continued what had been cut off.”83 Unlike the Qin, Gaozu linked himself with the past—presumably by supporting the enfeoffed states against Qin imperial centralization.84

During the civil war, the Ruists and Mohists continued to be opposed: “At this time, those who wore sumptuous clothing and wide sashes and who took Ruism and Mohism as their way were taken as unworthy.”85 But, following the end of the civil war and the founding of the dynasty, Gaozu once again balanced wen and wu, civil and military:

This continued until the tyranny and disorder was ended and overcome. When, throughout the land, things were greatly settled, he continued the undertakings of wen and established the merits of wu. . . . He unified the Ruists and Mohists of the Zou and Lu and penetrated the transmitted teachings of the former sages. . . . In this period, wen and wu alternated as female and male; at the right time each was used.86

Wen, in this chapter, is thus used to refer to the cultural patterns handed down from the ancient sages, and support for wen is thus defined as support for the Ruists and Mohists—that is, those figures who advocate following the textual precedents of the early sages.87 And wu, of course, refers to the military. Gaozu was a success, the text claims, because he balanced his support for the two, understanding the proper time to follow precedent and the proper time to utilize the military.
It claims that in the current age, however, the balance that characterized the reign of Gaozu has been lost:

In the present time, those who practice *wu* reject the *wen*. Those who practice *wen* reject *wu*. The *wen* and *wu* oppose each other, but they do not understand timely utilization. Each sees only one instruction from a corner or a bend and does not understand the length and greatness of all the eight points.\(^{88}\)

The history of the rise of empire, therefore, is read as a dichotomy between *wen* and *wu*. It would not be lost on contemporary readers that the supporters of *wen* as defined here, namely those who support the following of textual precedent, also favored the policy of enfeoffment outlined in the early Zhou texts like the *Shi* and *Shu*, while the rise of the military was associated with the forcible creation of imperial centralized rule. The lack of conciliation between *wen* and *wu* in the “present time,” therefore, was a clear reference to the ongoing debates between those who supported a decentralization of the empire and a continuation of the early practice of enfeoffment, and those who favored a return to the policies of imperial militarization and centralization forged by the Qin and reintroduced by Jingdi.

At this point, the text returns to a discussion of the importance of the self-cultivation of the sage. The emphasis continues to be on weighing or deciding the proper balance to be maintained: “Only the sage, in acting, is able to understand weighing.”\(^{89}\) The text continues:

Thus, the sage appreciates the alterations of movement and stillness, understands the appropriateness of the measures of receiving and giving, sees the pattern of the fundamentals of likes and dislikes, harmonizes the rhythm of joy and anger. Now, when movement and stillness have been obtained, then distress will not be excessive; when receiving and giving are appropriate, then faults will not be accumulated; when likes and dislikes are patterned, then anxieties will not approach; when joys and anger are modulated, then enmity will not be committed.\(^{90}\)

The sage, then, is one who undergoes the correct form of self-cultivation so as to be able to understand what action to take at a given time.\(^{91}\)
With this as a general summary, let us reflect on the overall argument of the chapter. First, the chapter claims that, since times change, there can be no enduring standards to guide action. Accordingly, attempting to follow textual precedent is foolish: sages must act according to the times, and what worked in the past is not necessarily relevant to the current situation. Even though, at times, the patterns of the past can be important for statecraft, only a sage can understand when to use them and when to ignore them. Instead, the text argues, a sage is one who has cultivated himself to a point where he simply understands the correct way to act at any moment and the correct balance to maintain.

The text also makes it clear, although implicitly, that such claims have direct implications for the issue of empire. The authors have defined their terms so as to claim that Gaozu is the one who maintained a proper balance between wen and wu, and between imperial rule and enfeoffment. The chapter thus places itself between two of the arguments dominant at the central court: that textual precedents should be followed, including a return to the policies of enfeoffment described in such texts from the Zhou period, and that Jingdi's policies of centralization should be continued.

Thus, in an ironic twist on what readers of the time would expect from a text that provides a narrative of the creation of material culture by earlier sages, the authors argue that creating anew with the changing of times is perfectly acceptable, but that this does not mean that the creation of imperial centralization should be fully supported. And intriguingly, the argument for this is based on claims similar to those in the Xici. As in the Xici, the authors of the "Fanlun xun" wish to account for acts of creation, but they also want to pose such acts as not leading to any discontinuity from the generative relations of the natural world. But instead of positing the mediating role of the hexagrams, they argue that the true sage creates only when he is moving spontaneously with the changes of the natural world, and they then define those changes in a way that argues for particular forms of imperial centralization to be legitimately maintained. In both cases, however, the act of zuo is posed as not leading to the forms of discontinuity that were emphasized (either positively or negatively) in so many of the earlier Warring States texts.92

And it is for this reason, I believe, that the argument of the Xici became so
influential among scholars during the early Han dynasty. Both Lu Jia and the authors of the “Fanlun xun” turned to the sort of argument given in the *Xici* because it granted them a powerful form of critique against imperial rule. Instead of taking a simple rejectionist stance toward empire, the type of argument given in the *Xici* enabled them to allow for innovation—and thus to accept aspects of imperial rule—while still using cosmological notions to criticize specific aspects of centralized statecraft. This is why, despite their enormous political and intellectual differences, both Lu Jia and the authors of the “Fanlun xun” commit to a notion of *zuo* that involves according with the natural world, rather than marking a point of discontinuity.

Dong Zhongshu

But if such arguments in the *Huainanzi* represent an attempt to oppose imperial centralization while still denying a return to textual authority and earlier precedents, Dong Zhongshu represents an attempt to oppose imperial centralization precisely on the grounds of the importance of textual precedent. Although Dong Zhongshu was later to be reinterpreted as the forger of imperial Confucianism, his memorials to Han Wudi reveal a very different sort of figure.93 The memorials are extremely blunt in their rejection of the Qin dynasty and in their open opposition to the Han attempt to maintain aspects of Qin rule.94 As for the Qin itself, Dong makes the following claims:

When it came to the last generations of the Zhou, they greatly brought about the destruction of the way and thereby lost all under Heaven. Qin succeeded them. But not only were they unable to change, they also 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 only to make a governance of their own recklessness and carelessness.95

And, if Qin was so detestable, then it is equally wrong for Han to continue Qin practices. Even the attempt to improve upon Qin statecraft is unacceptable:

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.96

In other words, the policies of Qin should not be used, and neither can they be improved upon: they are like rotten wood that simply cannot be carved.

In another memorial, Dong makes a similar claim. After praising the morality of the Zhou, he argues:

When it came to the Qin, things were not like this. They taught the laws of Shen [Buhai] and Shang [Yang] and put in practice the theories of Han Fei. They detested the way of the di and the kings, taking greed and cruelty as customary, and did not have cultural patterns or potency to teach and instruct those below.97

Unlike the “Fanlun xun” of the Huainanzi, which criticized the Qin system (as well as its resurgence in the Han) for being extreme, Dong Zhongshu is proclaiming the complete illegitimacy of the Qin institutional system.

In its place, Dong advocates following the Spring and Autumn Annals, a text created by Confucius: “Confucius created [zuo] the Spring and Autumn Annals, above calculating it to the Heavenly way, below making it substantive with the fundamentals of man; comparing it with antiquity, examining it with the present.”98 We see here again the view that sages zuo by articulating patterns. In this case, Dong argues that Confucius zuo-ed the Spring and Autumn Annals such that he connected Heaven and man, past and present.

As such, the Spring and Autumn Annals are in fact the patterns of a sage: “Confucius created [zuo] the Spring and Autumn Annals, first correcting the king and then connecting the myriad things, manifesting therein the patterns of the uncrowned king.”99 This reading of Confucius as the uncrowned king is a variant of Mencius’s reading, quoted above:

As the generations declined and the way became obscure, heterodox teachings and violent practices arose. There were instances of ministers killing their rulers and sons killing their fathers. Confucius was worried and created [zuo] the Spring and Autumn Annals. The Spring and Autumn Annals is an undertaking for a Son of Heaven. This is why Confucius said: “Those who understand me will do so through the
Like Mencius, then, Dong Zhongshu argues that Confucius was indeed a sage. And, building upon the cosmological ideas that had developed over the subsequent two centuries, Dong further claims that the patterns manifested by Confucius’s act of zuo-ing link Heaven and man, past and present. In the context of the early Han, however, an argument that Confucius was an uncrowned king has additional implications. Dong wishes to assert that Confucius’s *Spring and Autumn Annals*, insofar as it is the product of a king (albeit uncrowned), and insofar as it was written as a criticism of his own king (the reigning Zhou monarch), should have marked the beginning of a new dynasty. By calling on Han Wudi to model himself on the work, Dong in essence claims that the Qin was illegitimate and that the Han should become the dynasty that ought to have begun with Confucius.

In many ways, this is a stronger (and more explicit) criticism of Han policies than that made in the “Fanlun xun” chapter of the *Huainanzi*, and a far more complete rejection of the Qin imperial system of statecraft than the earlier figure Lu Jia had made. Far from being the forger of imperial Confucianism, the Dong Zhongshu that appears in these memorials does not seem to accept the legitimacy of empire at all.

**THE LEGITIMATING ACTS OF HAN WUDI**

Both the *Huainanzi* and Dong Zhongshu, in very different ways, called on Wudi to turn away from the centralization policies inherited from the Qin and reintroduced by Jingdi. In the end, neither recommendation was followed. On the contrary, over the next few decades, Han Wudi, far from preserving the enfeoffed kingdoms, greatly increased the central power of the state and radically reduced, through a variety of means, the power of the local rulers. Indeed, his policy of centralization involved a far more radical curtailment of the enfeoffed lands than his father had undertaken.

The single most important act of this policy was Wudi’s destruction of the kingdom of Huainan itself. Liu An was accused of treason and in 122 B.C. took his own life. The kingdom of Huainan was occupied by imperial troops and thereafter incorporated into an imperial commandery.

Through policies such as these, much of the empire was again made into a
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commandery system reminiscent of that in the time of the Qin,\textsuperscript{104} and a strong legal system was once again introduced.\textsuperscript{105} The emperor also greatly expanded the size of the empire through a number of invasions of northern regions, Central Asia, and the south.\textsuperscript{106} Finally, he implemented a series of centralizing economic policies, including the creation of several state monopolies.\textsuperscript{107} In short, the empire returned in large part to the centralized state created by the first emperor. As such, Wudi finally ended the danger that the local rulers posed to the empire, a danger that on several occasions had almost destroyed the Han.

However, while these centralizing policies continued, Wudi also attempted to legitimize his imperial state. Perhaps the most surprising decision he made, in 136 B.C., was to establish positions for \textit{boshi} to teach the five classics,\textsuperscript{108} and his later decision in 124 B.C. to institute an academy for the training of \textit{boshi}.\textsuperscript{109}

This act has often been read as an example of Wudi embracing the imperial Confucian ideas of Dong Zhongshu. One leading scholar, for example, has described Wudi's support for the classics and his attack on Huainan as part of a general Han shift from "Huang-Lao" thought to Confucianism:

"During the first few decades of the rule of Emperor Wu, the ideology of statecraft had swung away from the Huang-Lao Taoism of earlier periods to the Confucianism of such scholar-bureaucrats as Tung Chung-shu... To a Confucian central government preoccupied with consolidating power, armed intervention may have seemed to be the only choice.\textsuperscript{110}"

However, as I have argued, both the \textit{Huainanzi} and Dong Zhongshu were, albeit in different ways, highly critical of Han Wudi's centralizing policies. Moreover, labeling these voices "Huang-Lao" and "imperial Confucian" respectively, and reading the reign of Wudi as one of shifting from the former to the latter, may be misleading: both Liu An and Dong Zhongshu were critics of Wudi's policies, and both ultimately failed to sway the emperor. Although Dong Zhongshu did not, like Liu An, lose his life, it is unclear how much significant influence he held at Wudi's court.

Instead of positing the emergence of an imperial Confucianism designed by Dong Zhongshu, I suggest a somewhat different explanation. Although we have, unfortunately, no direct evidence to suggest what Wudi's intentions were in this regard, I think the debates we have been tracing might lead to another
hypothesis. Figures like Lu Jia, building on the *Xici*, had begun developing a vocabulary that reconciled the notion of innovation with support for the patterns brought by the ancient sages from the natural world to the world of man. Although Dong Zhongshu himself called for a full repudiation of the Qin imperial system, the approaches developed by figures like Lu Jia did not. I would suggest that it is more likely in line with arguments such as these that Wudi made his decision: Wudi’s goal was to prove that he was in fact in accord with the patterns of the ancient sages as found in the five classics, and that his rebuilding of the institutional system created by the first emperor in no way entailed the kind of rejection of the past that was such a dominant part of the Qin imperial ideology.

It must be emphasized, however, that there is no evidence to suggest that support for the five classics led to the rise of something that might legitimately be called “imperial Confucianism.” As the later text *Yantie lun* shows, Ruist officials several decades later were still in the same position that Dong Zhongshu had been in during the reign of Han Wudi—namely, arguing against the imperial policies dominant at the central court.111

Instead, what we see here is an attempt by Wudi to use this rhetoric to very different ends. Not only, therefore, did Wudi establish posts for the study of the five classics, he also built a Mingtang temple, performed the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, and changed the official color of the dynasty. However, far from symbolizing a return to the practices of the Zhou, such acts seemed designed with the opposite purpose in mind—to claim that the imperial system was now consolidated and that empire had become the new norm.112

If Sima Qian’s presentation can be believed on this point, Wudi’s interest in performing the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices arose in part out of stories concerning Huangdi. One story is particularly telling. It was told to him by a man from Qi named Gongsun Qing, who claimed that he had received, via a figure called Shen Gong, a cauldron with the following inscription:

> When the Han arises, it will again accord with the calendar of Huangdi. The sage of the Han will be the grandson or great-grandson of Gaozu. A precious cauldron will appear and he will communicate with the spirits. He will also perform the *feng* and *shan*. Of the 72 kings who attempted the *feng* and *shan*, only Huangdi was able to ascend Mt. Tai and perform the *feng*.113
Shen Gong also stated: “The ruler of the Han will also be able to ascend and perform the feng. If he ascends and performs the feng, then he will be able to become immortal and rise to Heaven.”

The story thus emphasizes that a descendant of Gaozu (an obvious reference by the author of the inscription to Wudi) would return the Han to the calendar of Huangdi and perform the feng and shan sacrifices. Such a ruler would also be a sage and would, like Huangdi, achieve immortality and ascend to Heaven.

Whether or not this particular story was in fact a major stimulus to Wudi’s actions is impossible to say, but there is further evidence to suggest that Wudi did indeed undertake the sacrifices in emulation of Huangdi: Wudi began the preparations for the feng and shan by sacrificing at the grave of Huangdi. He also ordered that the Mingtang be constructed according to the same specifications purportedly used by Huangdi.

The rest of his preparations are worth following in detail, because they are among the few clues that we possess for explicating the meaning of the sacrifices. One of his acts of preparation involved an inspection, followed by a ritual disbanding of his troops:

In the winter of the next year, the ruler [Wudi] stated: “In ancient times, one would perform the feng and shan only after first bringing out the troops and then disbanding them.” He thereupon made an inspection of the north, and brought back over 100,000 of his troops. Upon returning, he sacrificed at the tomb of Huangdi at Mt. Qiao. He disbanded the troops at Xuru.

Following this, the emperor had rocks carried up to the summit of Mt. Tai:

[Wudi] traveled eastward and ascended Mt. Tai. The grasses and leaves of the trees had not yet sprouted. He thereupon ordered his men to carry rocks up the mountain and set them up on the summit of Mt. Tai.

Wudi then performed the sacrifices. The entire description is as follows:

On yimao [May 17, 110 B.C.], [Wudi] ordered the attending Ruists to wear skin caps and official sashes and to shoot an ox and proceed with the ritual. He then performed the feng sacrifice on the eastern foot of Mt. Tai. It was like the ritual of the jiao sacrifice to Taiyi. The feng
was one *zhang* and two *chi* wide, and nine *chi* high. Underneath was an inscribed jade tablet, but the inscription was kept secret. When the ritual was completed, the Son of Heaven, alone with his attending carriage driver Zihou, ascended Mt. Tai and again performed the *feng*.123 This was done in secret. The next day, he descended by the northern road. On *bingchen* [May 18, 110 B.C.], he performed the *shan* north-east of Mt. Tai, on Mt. Suran. It was like the ritual of the sacrifices to Houtu.124

The description continues:

In these rituals, the Son of Heaven did the obeisance and presented himself in person. His clothes honored yellow, and he used music throughout. A grass with three ridges that grows between the Yangzi and Huai Rivers was used to make the divine mats. Earth of five colors was put on top and mixed into the *feng*. He set free strange beasts, flying creatures, white pheasants, and other animals from distant regions in order to augment the ritual. Animals like rhinoceroses and elephants were not used, but were brought to Mt. Tai and then taken away.125 During the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, there appeared to be a light at night, and during the day a white cloud arose from the *feng*.126

Following the performance of the *feng* and *shan*, Wudi sat in the Mingtang and issued an edict, one portion of which read: “Let there be a great amnesty for all under Heaven. . . . The places that I passed through in my travels should not return to constructing.”127 Punishments and construction were thus stopped after the performance.

When a comet then appeared, the emperor’s officials are quoted by Sima Qian as stating: “Since you have instituted the *feng* and *shan* for the house of Han, Heaven has responded with this star of power.”128 The star revealed that Heaven had accepted the sacrifices and had thus accepted the Han dynasty itself.

Although Sima Qian has not provided any detailed discussions of the offerings themselves, he has given enough information to allow us to make hypotheses about the meaning of the sacrifices as a whole. One clue can be seen in the preparations, which included raising his army and then disbanding it. Another
of the few descriptions included the detail that animals from all over the empire were released during the performance—animals from the lands that he had conquered and unified. In both of these cases, phenomena associated with imperium were first exercised and then relinquished.

A similar sense would appear to be implied in the name “feng” itself, and the fact that the term refers both to the sacrifice and to the mound built for the sacrifice. “Feng,” when used as a verb, means “to enfeoff”; when used as a noun it refers to mounds that were built to demarcate owned tracts of land. The latter usage seems particularly important, for, in the description, mounds of rocks were constructed, and these mounds were themselves referred to as feng. The sense appears to be that, by building such mounds, the emperor was staking his claim to control the land. Further evidence for such a reading can be seen in the fact that five colors of earth were mixed into the mounds. As we have seen in the theory of the five phases, five was commonly taken in the late Warring States and early Han to symbolize the totality of a natural phenomenon. The five colors of earth thus presumably referred to the totality of the land, and the building of the mound therefore marked a claim to such a totality. The sacrifice then represented a yielding of the emperor’s control of the land to the divine powers, presumably to Heaven. A successful sacrifice would signify that Heaven accepted the ruler’s imperium and thus allowed him to maintain his position.

Finally, after the sacrifice, an amnesty was called, and construction was put to a halt. The emperor thus temporarily relinquished his powers of coercive and constructive action, implying that, following the sacrifice, his rule had been divinized and, in a sense, naturalized. Methods of control and work could thus temporarily cease.

The timing of the ritual is also of interest. The feng mound was built in the spring, before grass and leaves had begun to grow. The sacrifice itself was then given in May, and the flowering of spring would presumably be taken to symbolize a correlation between the beginning of a new political order and the rebirth of nature. Following the sacrifice, the ruler could then claim a symbolic link between his new order and the natural world.

Overall, then, it is worth speculating that the sacrifices were expiatory rites, in which the imperial order taken by the ruler was offered to higher powers.
The successful completion of the sacrifices thus would signify that the higher powers had accepted the new order. The implicit claim here would appear to be that the formation of the new order involved a transgression that required expiation. As a result of the sacrifices, the new order became accepted by the divine as the norm. Wudi’s goal in performing the sacrifices was thus to proclaim that the imperial order had been given divine approval and should thereafter be seen as the proper organization for the Chinese realm.

Such an organization, clearly, was far removed from that hoped for by the Ruists at the beginning of the emperor’s reign. Although Wudi had built a Mingtang and had undertaken the feng and shan sacrifices, the acts were not intended to signify a return to the traditional practices of pre-imperial China. On the contrary, they were performed to signify the beginning of a new era, in which it was hoped that the imperial order would be recognized thereafter as the norm. Wudi was thus proclaiming himself a sage who, like Huangdi, had consolidated a new order and would thereafter ascend to Heaven as an immortal.

And, as a further claim along these lines, Wudi went on to change the calendar and official color of the dynasty. Whereas the earlier Han rulers had continued ruling under water, the same power held by the Qin, Wudi switched to the power of earth:

In the summer [of 104 B.C.], the Han changed the calendar, so that the first month was at the beginning of the year. As for the color, they honored yellow. The titles of officials were recarved on seals so as to consist of five graphs. This was the first year of the period “Great Beginning.”

Since earth was thought to conquer water, the Han was thus officially succeeding the Qin. Here again, Wudi was fulfilling one of the requests that the some of Ruists had made of him upon his accession, but the symbolism of the claim was radically different from that hoped for by the Ruists in question. Instead of differentiating himself from the policies of the Qin, Wudi was stressing a continuity: the Han was truly following the Qin. Unlike the earlier Han rulers, then, Wudi was no longer posing the Qin as simply usurpers outside of the dynastic cycle: if the Han dynasty was the successor to the Qin, then the Qin was officially recognized as a dynasty. The implicit claims here
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are that the institutions of the Qin ought to be accepted as a part of the natural cycle, and therefore that the Han could legitimately appropriate and organize such institutions. As has been seen, this symbolism betokened a larger reality: many of the creations of the first emperor were indeed being employed and consolidated by Wudi.

An additional symbolic claim was made in this change as well. As noted above, Wudi wished to compare himself with Huangdi, and indeed undertook the feng and shan sacrifices and constructed a Mingtang in order, at least in part, to emulate the actions of Huangdi. Interestingly, Huangdi, it may be recalled, also ruled under the power of earth. By changing the power of the dynasty, Wudi was arguing that the movement of the virtues was indeed a cycle, and moreover that the cycle had repeated itself: Wudi was thus a figure comparable to Huangdi. In contrast to the first emperor, Wudi was not claiming to have created a new era surpassing that of the ancient sages. On the contrary, he was claiming that his consolidation of a new imperial era was no different from what the great sage Huangdi had done in consolidating feudal institutions in the distant past.

This point reveals the different orientations taken toward the early sages by the first emperor and Wudi. As discussed above, the first emperor followed the interpretation of the early sages as found in works such as the Shangjunshu, namely that the sages of antiquity were great creators. The first emperor then presented himself as a creator-sage as well, although one even greater than those in the ancient past. In contrast, Wudi followed the interpretation that posed Huangdi as an organizer of institutions created by an earlier, transgressive figure. Wudi then presented himself as another Huangdi, in this case establishing a new order by consolidating the empire created by the Qin. For Wudi, then, Huangdi was a figure to be emulated, not surpassed: just as Huangdi had successfully organized the state, so was Wudi successfully organizing the empire.

Wudi thus hoped to be for the empire what Huangdi had been for the feudal state. From here on, Wudi was claiming, the norm for succeeding dynasties to follow would not be enfeoffment but imperial centralization, and the organizing sage that such successors would try to emulate would be, Wudi hoped, himself. Empire was thus presented as the new norm, completely in accord with the divine and natural worlds.
Conclusion

Michael Loewe has stated it a "paradox" that the first emperor, a ruler "denigrated consistently in the Chinese tradition," was one of the most influential figures in the formation of imperial institutions.131 This chapter has in part attempted to explicate the issues behind this paradox. The argument has been that the first emperor's historical reputation as a failure was not, in the end, an impediment to claiming that the empire that he had created should come to be seen as the norm. On the contrary, Wudi was able to use the first emperor in the same way that so many narratives of the creation of the state had used evil creators like Chi You, namely as a transgressor responsible for the negative aspects of the introduction of new instruments of governance. Wudi could then present himself as a consolidator like Huangdi, appropriating those new elements and organizing them into a proper order. He could, in other words, claim that empire, even if created by one such as the first emperor, was fully in accord with the divine, fully in accord with the patterns of the ancient sages, and fully deserving of acceptance as the norm.

The claim that empire had been fully dissociated from the transgressive implications of its creation, however, was not universally accepted in early China. Indeed, in the next chapter, I argue that the historian Sima Qian strongly opposed that claim by Wudi. However, even Sima Qian makes it clear that empire, if not as moral or as unproblematic as Wudi made it out to be, was nonetheless the new norm for China.
the sun (discussed above) would also be dated to the same stage of development; see Granet, *La civilisation chinoise*, pp. 223–27.


129. Joseph Needham has attempted to build on Granet’s theories by arguing that the Miao, Chi You, and Gun, along with other rebels such as Gonggong, represent leaders associated with metallurgical guilds in the early Bronze Age. The narratives of various sages defeating them in battle then represent the later rise of the feudal state, which usurped the power of the earlier leaders; see Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, pp. 115–20. In making this argument, Needham builds on Granet’s analysis that the myths reflect the rise of the state in the Bronze Age. Unfortunately, this interpretation ignores the more intriguing elements of Granet’s theories (his explanation of the interplay of sage, rebel, and minister in the narratives) and focuses on the least intriguing sides of them (his attempt to root the narratives in an earlier period of historical development).

130. As Granet states about the Chinese historians: “They neither understood nor invented the scheme which guided them in their arrangement of the facts: it was imposed on them by tradition” (*Danses et légendes*, p. 47). This denial of authorial invention is, of course, necessary insofar as he wants to argue that these schemes and principles predate the given authors by a rather large stretch of time, and the denial of authorial comprehension is necessary insofar as he wishes to grant himself the liberty to read statements and accounts of events outside of their context in the texts. (His reconstruction of a ritual involving kings shooting arrows at the sun would be a good example of the latter liberty. The early Chinese historians record such an activity only in the context of showing the evil hubris of a given king. Granet’s reconstruction works only if one argues that the historians, trying to present a moralized vision of history, simply did not understand the true meaning of the activity.)

Chapter 4

1. The best overall discussion of the Qin empire remains Yang Kuan, *Qin Shihuang*. See also Bodde, *China’s First Unifier*. Bodde provides a careful overview in “The State and Empire of Ch’in.” The main source that we have for discussing the political history of the Qin empire remains the relevant chapters of the *Shiji*.
Our understanding of other aspects of this period of history, however, has been greatly enriched by archaeological materials. Most notable are the materials excavated from the Shuihudi site, materials that include portions of the Qin legal code. On the code, see in particular Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law*. Nonetheless, for the issues under discussion here, the chapters of the *Shiji* are still the most important source.

3. Ibid.

4. I examine this speech in the next chapter, where I discuss Sima Qian’s presentation of the rise of empire. Here, as elsewhere in this chapter, I do not assume that the speeches given represent the actual words spoken. It is, of course, likely that the Qin kept records of the statements made at court, and it is possible that Sima Qian had access to these. But it would be dangerous to assume this.

6. From here on, I follow the convention of referring to the “First august di” as the “first emperor.” Although not a literal translation, it captures, as does the translation of “king” for the earlier title wang, the nature of the position.

8. See the discussion by Gu Jiegang in Gu et al., *Gushibian*, vol. 6, pp. 404–617.

9. Since there are no extant writings by Zou Yan, our understanding of the figure comes entirely through other authors’ descriptions. Perhaps the most important of these is Sima Qian’s discussion (*Shiji* 74.2344). For a useful summary of what little we know about Zou Yan, see Gu et al., *Gushibian*, vol. 5, pp. 411–22.

10. In the extant literature, the most powerful statement of the theory appears in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, “Yingtong,” 13.4a.

12. Ibid., 28.1366.
13. Ibid., 6.239.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 28.1367. Sima Qian does, however, provide a brief description of the performance of the rituals by Emperor Wu. This is discussed below.

22. Shiji, 28.1367. In his description of the event in the chapter on the first emperor himself, Sima Qian states that the storm hit while the first emperor was descending the mountain (6.242), which would imply less of a rejection by the divine powers.

The word ru, which I leave untranslated here, is usually translated as “Confucian.” “Ruists” refers to those who advocated following the teachings of the classical tradition. Exactly what this meant varied greatly from figure to figure. Particular readings of the Book of Poetry, the Book of Documents, and the Spring and Autumn Annals were strongly supported by most Ruists; the Book of Rites and the Book of Changes were used increasingly over the course of the Western Han dynasty. Since Confucius was frequently posited as the sage who edited—or, in the case of the Spring and Autumn Annals, wrote—these works, he was seen as a crucial figure by the Ruists. But his precise role was interpreted quite differently from figure to figure.

23. Since none of these inscriptions are now extant, the only source that we possess for them is the Shiji. Nonetheless, the length and number of the inscriptions quoted make it unlikely that the historian simply made them up.

24. Shiji, 6.245.

25. Ibid., 6.249.


27. Ibid., 6.255. For an in-depth exploration of the proscription on books, see Peterson, “Which Books?”

28. Shiji, 6.255.

29. Ibid., 6.264.

30. Ibid., 8.349.

31. Ibid., 7.300.

32. Ibid., 6.273.

33. Ibid., 6.274.

34. Ibid., 6.275.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 7.316-17.

37. Ibid., 7.315.

38. Ibid., 7.316-17.

39. Ibid., 7.317.

40. Ibid., 7.320.

41. Ibid., 8.379.
42. “Gaozu” is the posthumous name given to Liu Bang. In his narrative about the figure, Sima Qian switches the appellation from Liu Bang to Gaozu when the ruler accepts the emperorship. For ease of reference, I do the same here.

43. *Shiji*, 8.362. There is no independent evidence to confirm such a move: all of our sources date from the early Han, when there would have been clear ideological reasons to differentiate the founder of the dynasty from what were seen to be the excesses of the Qin empire. At the same time, however, reducing the severity of a legal code in order to gain the support of the inhabitants living near the capital would not be a surprising action for a rebel to take. Regardless of Liu Bang’s actual views toward law, then, there seems to be little reason to doubt that he did modify the legal code.


45. Ibid., 28.1380.

46. Ibid., 8.394.

47. Ibid., 8.382–391.

48. See, for example, ibid., 8.384.

49. Numerous doubts about the authenticity of the *Xinyu* have been raised, although not with convincing evidence. I suspect that such concerns arose out of a belief that Dong Zhongshu was the first Confucian in the Han to embrace cosmological principles. There is, however, no strong reason to claim this, and I argue later that the view of Dong as the father of imperial Confucianism is misplaced anyway. See the discussions by Luo, “Lu Jia *Xinyu* kaozheng”; and Xu Fuguan, “Han chu de qimeng sixiangjia Lu Jia,” in *Liang Han sixiang shi*, vol. 2, pp. 85–108. Ku Mei-kao provides a very convincing argument as to the authenticity of the *Xinyu* as well; see Ku, *A Chinese Mirror*, pp. 12–23. Michael Loewe provides a helpful summary of the textual issues surrounding the *Xinyu* in his essay, “Hsin yü.”

50. Cf. He, “Lu Jia de zhengzhi sixiang.”

51. Lu Jia, *Xinyu*, “Daoji,” SBBY ed., A.1a. The identity of the “commentary” here is unclear. As we will see, however, the chapter is closely linked to the *Xici*, so it is possible that this is the intended reference. If so, it is not a true quotation, since the statement appears in neither the received nor the Mawangdui version of the *Xici*. Nonetheless, it is possible that the author attributes one of his major claims to the *Xici* in order to bolster his position.


53. Ibid., A.1b.

54. Ibid., A.1b–2a.

55. Ibid., A.2a–2b.
56. Ibid., A.2b. Lu Jia does not specify what the five classics are. He does, however, refer in various places to the Shi, Shangshu, Liji, Yijing, and Chunqiu, so it is likely that the five classics to which he refers are the same as the canon that would later be established under Han Wudi.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.


60. Ibid., A.4a–4b.

61. A.4b.

62. Shiji, 8.391.

63. The precise recommendations of Chao Cuo are discussed at length in Chapter 5.

64. Shiji, 118.3081.

65. Ibid., 8.440.

66. Ibid., 28.1384. The Mingtang was a building used for ritual functions. The interpretation of what functions ought to be performed in it varied, but those Ruists in question here clearly believed that it should be used for rituals related to traditional feudal relationships.

67. Shiji, 28.1384.

68. Ibid.

69. For an excellent attempt to collate available evidence concerning the life of Liu An, see Kanaya, Rosō teki sekai, esp. pp. 24–56. Harold Roth, in The Textual History of the Huai-nan Tzu, provides a superb study of both the history and nature of the text.


71. Ibid., 21.7b–8a.

72. The Huainanzi is often read in contemporary scholarship as an example of “Huang-Lao” ideology. For example, Harold Roth calls the Huainanzi “the principal representative of Huang-Lao thought during the Han”; see The Textual History of the Huai-nan Tzu, p. 13. Similar arguments are made by Le Blanc, in Huai-Nan Tzu, p. 6; and by Major in Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought, p. 12.

Since, however, the authors of the Huainanzi never associate themselves with the term “Huang-Lao,” it strikes me as unnecessary to label it as such. Indeed, as a general methodological principle, the attempt to categorize texts in terms of schools is not always helpful: the concern should rather be to explicate the claims of each text within the debates of the time. For the Han (as for the Warring States), these claims are not necessarily discussed most fruitfully as a
“school.” Even when dealing with a text that posits itself within a defined textual tradition, the analyst should seek to understand that textual tradition and what claims are being made through such a positing. In the case of the *Huainanzi*, however, where no claim of a school affiliation is ever made, the label strikes me as unnecessary.

74. See ibid.
75. Ibid., 13.3a.
76. Ibid., 13.3b.
77. Ibid., 13.4b.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 13.6a.
80. Ibid., 13.6b.
81. Ibid., 13.8b.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.

84. As we saw above, this is only true in part. Liu Bang did claim that he was going to war with Xiang Yu because the latter had killed the ruler of Chu, and thus, in a sense, Liu Bang could be said to have been supporting the descendants of pre-Qin states. Moreover, Liu Bang did go on to enlist the help of the generals who had been enfeoffed with land by Xiang Yu. But, of course, this was only after Xiang Yu had deposed most of the kings of the reconstituted states and broken up the states themselves into smaller divisions.

86. Ibid.
87. The authors’ decision to combine the Mohists and Ruists like this might at first glance seem surprising, considering the debates between the two that were discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. But it is important to remember that both the Mohists and Ruists emphasized the importance of following the ancient sages, albeit in different ways—something that the Qin court opposed.

89. Ibid., 13.11b.
91. In understanding these notions of self-cultivation, I have been particularly aided by Harold Roth’s excellent analysis in “Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought.”

92. It was mentioned in Chapter 2 that Gu Jiegang believed the *Xici* to postdate the *Huainanzi* (*Gushibian*, vol. 3, pp. 36–43, 45–69). One of Gu Jiegang’s
main reasons for this claim was based on the “Fanlun xun” under discussion here. Since the chapter includes a discussion of the creation of utensils by the sages that is similar to that in the *Xici*, Gu argues, one must be based upon the other. However, the “Fanlun xun” does not mention the notion, so central to the argument of the *Xici*, that the creations of the sages were based on the hexagrams. Gu finds this particularly surprising, since, he argues, Liu An, the figure who commissioned the composition of the *Huainanzi*, was a follower of the *Yi*: if the *Xici* had been in existence at the time, the model found therein would assuredly have been used (see in particular Gu et al., *Gushibian*, vol. 3, pp. 41, 61). As a consequence, Gu claims, it must be that the *Xici* was modeled on the “Fanlunxun,” rather than the other way around.

This specific statement concerning the date of the *Xici* is not entirely convincing, as Hu Shi, in a critique of Gu’s argument, pointed out soon after it first appeared (Gu et al., *Gushibian*, vol. 3, pp. 84–88). And, of course, the Mawangdui find later proved beyond a doubt that the *Xici* predated the *Huainanzi* by at least 50 years, and quite possibly by as much as a century. Even if Gu was wrong about the date of the *Xici*, however, his general point concerning the content of the two works is, as I have suggested here, quite accurate.

Hu Shi, for his part, also argues that it was the “Fanlun xun” that was modeled on the *Xici*, and that the reason the author of the former did not use the hexagrams was simply because he had different interests (pp. 84–85, 86). In this section, I have elaborated on what these different interests might have been. I would also like to point out, in response to Gu, that, regardless of whether he is correct that Liu An himself was a devotee of the *Yi*, the fact of the matter is that divination is posed in a number of the *Huainanzi* chapters as a problematic activity. Although it is seen as a possible method for connecting one’s actions to the natural world, and hence laudable, such a calculated means of connection is posed as lower than a purely spontaneous harmonization with nature (see, for example, *Huainanzi*, “Benjing,” 8.1a). Such a formulation seems applicable to the “Fanlun xun” as well. It is true that the chapter, like the *Xici*, argues that sages do in fact create, and the authors, again like those of the *Xici*, want to root such actions in the generative processes of nature. However, instead of following the *Xici* in using the mediating device of the hexagrams, he roots the sages’ actions in nature by arguing that the true sage creates only when he is moving spontaneously with the changes of the natural world.

93. Two important studies published in the 1990s rethink the received tradition concerning Dong Zhongshu: Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon*; and Arbuckle, *Restoring Dong Zhongshu* (B.C.E. 195–115). Both Queen and Arbuckle
question the view of Dong as an imperial Confucian, and both question the impact that Dong's ideas had on the imperial court. As Queen rightly points out: "we may reconsider whether it is useful to employ the old and familiar phrase 'the victory of Han Confucianism' when speaking of the ritual practices of Emperor Wu" (p. 205). I would only add to this that it is not simply about ritual practice that Dong seems to have been ineffectual. For example, Sima Qian, a contemporary, clearly did not see Dong as a significant player at Wudi's court. See the brief biographical mention in *Shiji* 121.3127–3129.

The reason, of course, that Dong ultimately became known as the initiator of a form of imperial Confucianism is that later Han Ruists chose to present him as such. In order to avoid allowing this later view to prejudice our understanding of the figure, it is important to ignore much of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, a work that has been recognized since the Song period as including a great deal of later Han material. See the useful summary by Loewe, "Ch'un ch'iu fan lu," in *Early Chinese Texts*, pp. 77–87. Both Arbuckle and Queen provide useful hypotheses concerning the dating of portions of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, and both conclude that several of the chapters are probably authentic. Nonetheless, here I restrict my own comments on Dong Zhongshu to his memorials, since these are among the few writings that can, with full confidence, be attributed to Dong.

94. The precise dates for the memorials have long been debated. Since the evidence given in the *Hanshu* appears contradictory, it is unlikely that a solution to the problem will ever be found. Sarah Queen provides a good summary of the evidence and argues that the evidence points to a date of either 140 or 134 B.C.; see *From Chronicle to Canon*, pp. 249–54. Arbuckle, in contrast, argues for a date of 130 B.C.; see *Restoring Dong Zhongshu*, pp. 34–46. My own view is that we simply do not have enough evidence to give a firm date.

96. Ibid.
98. Ibid., 26.2515.
99. Ibid., 26.2509.
102. There is no way to determine if the charges are accurate. It is possible that, seeing the growing centralization of the Han imperium, Liu An felt he had no choice but to plot revolt. It is also possible that the charges were simply a made-up pretext to legitimize an annexation by the Han state.
104. The process of transforming kingdoms into commanderies and of establishing new commanderies in recently conquered territories appears throughout many of the chapters on Wudi. The most important example of the former is Wudi’s abolition of the kingdom of Huainan and the establishment of the territory as a commandery; Shiji 118.3094. For an example of the latter, see the description of his creation of new commanderies in the south; Shiji 30.1440.

105. Here, too, the return to a strong legal system appears repeatedly throughout the chapters on the reign of Wudi. For examples, see Shiji 30.1421, 1424, and 1428.

106. See, for example, ibid., 30.1424, 1428, 1438–1439, and 1440.

107. See in particular ibid., 30.1429 and 1432. For a good summary of Wudi’s policies, see Loewe, “The Former Han Dynasty,” pp. 152–79.

108. Hanshu, 6.159.


110. Roth, The Textual History of the Huai-nan Tzu, p. 17. See also the argument by Si in Huang-Lao xueshuo.

111. The Yantie lun is supposedly a record of the debates staged in 81 B.C. as to the legitimacy of the state monopolies on salt and iron. The text, however, is clearly written by an author sympathetic to the Ruist calls to reject the centralization policies of the court, and it is doubtful that it can be used as an actual record of the debate itself. Nonetheless, it is of interest to my argument precisely because of its defense of the Ruist position: it is obvious that the text is written from the perspective of a group whose ideas are not influential at court. The best overall discussion of both the debates and the text that purports to describe them is Wu Hui, Sang Hongyang yanjiu.

112. The best overall discussion of this period of Han Wudi’s reign is Loewe, Crisis and Conflict in Han China, pp. 17–36.

113. Shiji, 28.1393.

114. Ibid.

115. A comparable story concerning immortality was provided by a Li Shaojun, who claimed that immortality could be gained through a performance of the feng and shan sacrifices. This, Li argued, is precisely what Huangdi did (Shiji, 28.1385).

116. Ibid., 28.1396. Emperor Wu had already given offerings to Huangdi in another context. The emperor had ordered a set of sacrifices instituted in the springtime in order to dispel evil forces. One of the recipients of these sacrifices was Huangdi, to whom was offered an owl and a broken mirror, both of which
were considered inauspicious (Shiji, 28.1386). The sacrifice then presumably represented an expiation of such inauspiciousness.

117. Shiji, 28.1401.

118. Unfortunately, Sima Qian was not interested in describing the details of rituals (see his statements on the issue in Shiji, 28.1404). There is a sizable body of material concerning performances of the *feng* and *shan* sacrifices in much later time periods, but since the rituals may well have changed a great deal over the centuries, I do not believe that such accounts can be used to discuss the early imperial performances. For a discussion of these later materials, see Chavannes, *Le T'ai chan*, pp. 20–26, 158–261.

119. Shiji, 28.1396.

120. Ibid., 28.1397.

121. Sima Qian states that the ritual for the *feng* was like that used for the *jiao* sacrifice to Taiyi. But in his discussion of the *jiao* sacrifice to Taiyi, Sima Qian simply mentions that it was like the *jiao* sacrifice at Yong (Shiji, 28.1395). Unfortunately, he never describes this sacrifice either. As a result, we simply do not possess a full description of the ritual performance.

122. The *feng* (written with the same graph as the name of the sacrifice) is also the name for a mound raised to mark out a territory. In the description of the offering, the mound on which the *feng* sacrifice is given is consistently referred to as the *feng*. The significance of this is discussed below.

123. It will be recalled that one of the preparatory acts for the sacrifice involved carrying rocks up Mt. Tai. It was presumably at or on the *feng* mound made from these rocks that the sacrifice at the summit of the mountain was given.

124. Shiji, 28.1398. Here again, the analogy proves useless for reconstructing the ritual: Sima Qian provides no description of the sacrifices to Houtu.

125. This translation follows the reading given in the “Annals of the Filial Emperor Wu” (Shiji, 12.475), a chapter of the Shiji that simply duplicates this portion of the “Fengshan shu.”

126. Shiji, 28.1398.

127. Ibid.

128. Shiji, 28.1399.

129. Unfortunately, Sima Qian does not explicitly state which divinities were to receive the offerings. In all later works that discuss the sacrifices, however, the *feng* and *shan* are described as being offered to Heaven and Earth respectively. This was probably true when Emperor Wu performed the sacrifices as well. Par-
tial evidence for this interpretation can be seen in one of the statements quoted above. When a comet appeared after the completion of the rituals, Emperor Wu's officials are said to have stated: “Since you have instituted the feng and shan for the house of Han, Heaven has responded with this star of virtue” (Shiji, 28.1399). The offerings were described as successful, in other words, when Heaven responded to reveal its acceptance. It may then be that the intended recipients of the earlier sacrifices were the same as those of the later forms.

130. Shiji, 28.1402.

Chapter 5

1. The exact dates of Sima Qian's life have long been debated. One of the more influential discussions was provided by Wang Guowei, who placed Sima Qian’s date of birth at 145 B.C.; see “Taishigong xingnian kao.” Other scholars dispute this date, including Guo Moruo, who argued 135 B.C. was more plausible; see “‘Taishigong xingnian kao’ you wenti.” This latter date is supported by Zhang Dake as well in Shiji yanjiu, pp. 108–20; see pp. 74–107 for a cogent discussion of the issues involved in determining the chronology of Sima Qian’s life.

2. Shiji, 130.3297.
3. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 130.3299.
6. Ibid.
7. Shiji, 130.3299–3300.
8. Ibid., 130.3300.
9. Ibid., 130.3301–3320. See Watson, Ssu-ma Ch'ien, pp. 90–91; Watson also correctly points out that in similar contexts Ban Gu, a far more orthodox historian than Sima Qian, always used the term shu (transmit) instead of zuo; see Watson, Ssu-ma Ch'ien, p. 223 n. 31. I would also read Ban Gu’s statement that Sima Qian created (zuo) the “Benji” section (Hanshu 100B.4235) as an implied criticism of Sima Qian.

10. Stephen W. Durrant has argued that Sima Qian tries, in the Shiji, to write a text like the Spring and Autumn Annals but that he fails because of psychological conflicts and ends up writing a very different work; see Durrant, The Cloudy Mirror, esp. pp. 1–71. See also my review of Durrant’s book in Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 57, no. 1 (1997): 290–301.