
Liu Xin, Creator and Critic *

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Living in the uneasy time of the reigns of Han Chengdi 成帝 and his two successors, and Wang Mang's establishment of his own dynasty, Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 B.C. to A.D.23) contributed basically to what would become China's intellectual tradition and heritage. Best known for the part that he played in the collection and classification of literature, he wrote with a greater degree of initiative and with a more radical frame of mind than his father Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 B.C.). A supporter of Wang Mang 王莽 (45 B.C.–A.D.23) in intellectual terms, he may well have composed the latter's formal pronouncements, but he died by his own hand after involvement in a plot to overthrow him.

Author of several *fu* 賦, Liu Xin wrote the treatise on Pitch-pipes and calendar (*Lü li zhi* 律曆志) that is now incorporated in the *Han shu* 漢書, where he treated astronomy, harmonics, mathematics and history as aspects of a single cosmic system. Recognising the value of some newly found texts, he propounded the virtues of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 and criticised some of his contemporary scholars for their obdurate adherence to their own ideas, irrespective of newly found evidence. His own historical record, the *Shi jing* 世經, varies from other accounts, both in the sequences of China's mythological rulers and in matters of dating. He argued for the retention of the honorary title conferred on Han Wudi 武帝 on the grounds that he had merited it, and thereby assured the continuity of that emperor's reputation. Against some, Liu Xin wrote in favor of addressing the cults of state to Heaven rather than to other deities. Calling on the *Zuo zhuan* to explain the occurrences of abnormalities of nature, he was also ready to identify the moral issues that were involved.

Keywords: Liu Xin, religion in Han dynasty, Wang Mang, imperial library of China, *Zuo zhuan*

Our primary sources for the history of Western Han, and many of the modern secondary writings that are based upon them, leave a general impression of a century of success followed by one of loss of purpose.¹ The reign of Wudi 武帝, from 141 to 87 B.C., is seen as an age in which the dynasty rose to a position of unprecedented strength, marked by forward looking enterprise and brave achievement; there followed a century of decline and weakness culminating in the closure of the dynasty and its replacement by the Xin 新 dynasty of Wang Mang 王莽 (45 B.C.–A.D. 23). In fact the situation was by no means as simple as it may sometimes be represented. For the first half of the dynasty, there were several occasions up to 90 B.C. when the security of the house of Liu 劉 was subject to threat and its survival was in question. For the second half, the last decades of Western Han witnessed major intellectual movements, changes in religious practice and the appearance of scientific ideas, all of which reflected differing views of cosmic reality. Some historians may deem such developments to be of lesser account than the strengths or weaknesses of an emperor, the victories and defeats of a general on a field of battle, or the extension or contraction of territory where officials implemented an emperor's commands. Others see the developments of those final decades as forcibly affecting the character of China's later dynasties and therefore being of more enduring significance.

In such circumstances it is proposed here to examine the achievements of Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 B.C.–A.D. 23), an outstanding figure whose influence affected many different issues of public life during the last fifty years of Western Han and the succeeding few years of Wang Mang's rule from 9 to 23. His family background is of significance; unlike others, such as Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (ca. 200 – 121 B.C.),² Liu Xin did not rise from a humble background but came from a privileged way of life. His father Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 B.C.)

* This article is the text of a lecture given by Professor Loewe at Hong Kong Baptist University on November 26, 2012. —Ed.

- 1 References that are given below to the Thirteen classics are to Ruan Yuan 阮元 *et al.* eds., *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1815); for *Shi ji* 史記, *Han shu* 漢書 and *Hou Han shu* 後漢書, they are to the punctuated editions of Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, 1962 and 1965.
- 2 Gongsun Hong started life as a farming labourer and rose to become Chancellor (*Chengxiang* 丞相) in 124 B.C.

was a descendant of Liu Jiao 劉交, a brother of Liu Bang 劉邦, founding emperor of the dynasty. As the generations passed this particular branch of the imperial family grew somewhat remote from the emperor himself; relationships of kin were by no means close. Nevertheless the importance of that relationship and the compelling strength of the rules of *li* 禮 would not allow such members of the Liu family to fall into low social status or become subject to impoverishment. Some members indeed fell victims of political intrigue or the jealousies of a family of one of the imperial consorts;³ quite exceptionally, one of them such as Liu Bingyi 劉病已, later to be known as Xuandi 宣帝 (r. 74–48 B.C.), was brought up outside the palaces and lived the life of a commoner. But there is nothing to show that Liu Xiang lived in a demeaned way; nor do we know that he was ever prominent at court. He may well have been too young to have realised the dangers to which the imperial line was subject at the sudden death of Zhaodi 昭帝 in 74 and the enthronement and speedy deposal of Liu He 劉賀 (92–59 B.C.). A few years later he may well have been more aware of the issues that were at stake in somewhat turbulent times. Huo Guang 霍光, whose grand-daughter had been the empress of Zhaodi and whose daughter that of Xuandi, died in 68, after exercising high-ranking power for some decades; the Huo family were eliminated in 66. Members of the imperial family could hardly ignore the dangers that might arise from associations of the past or the rivalries of the present.

At an early age Liu Xiang's interest in alchemy nearly cost him the death penalty. As a scholar he fastened his interest in the *Gu liang zhuan* 穀梁傳 and at the conference that was held in 51 B.C. he propounded the value of that text as against that of the *Gong yang zhuan* 公羊傳. Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之, who held the office of Imperial Counsellor (*Yushi dafu* 御史大夫) from 59 to 56 and was forced to suicide in 47, recommended Liu Xiang for service in public life at a time when members of the imperial family of Liu were not permitted to hold any senior post, save that of Commissioner for the Imperial clan (*Zongzheng* 宗正). Liu Xiang actually held that position from 48 to perhaps 46, and after demotion was re-instated in the lower position of Counsellor of the Palace (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫). By now he was highly placed in public

3 E.g., Wudi's Empress Wei 衛 and their son Liu Ju 劉據, the heir apparent, in 91 B.C.

life and was showing himself to be a sharp critic of some of the policies of the times. He deplored the loss of the ancient virtues, re-iterated the need to take account of the lessons of the past and protested at extravagance, such as that of the abortive plan to build a tomb for Chengdi 成帝 at Changling 昌陵. It is a matter of little surprise that, like his patron Xiao Wangzhi, he became subject to the animosity of the first of the eunuchs, Hong Gong 弘恭 (?–47 B.C.) and Shi Xian 石顯 (?–33 B.C.), to have achieved power in Han times. By the thirties and twenties he had become gravely disturbed by the growing power of members of the Wang family, relatives of Yuandi's 元帝 Empress.⁴

Such, briefly, was the significance of Liu Xiang and this may give us some idea of the circumstances in which his son Liu Xin was brought up. He benefited from the influence of a father who was well versed in learning and who had become involved in the issues of imperial government and of the court. Liu Xin was appointed to junior positions in his early years,⁵ at a time when some basic issues were in question: the conduct of religious rites was arousing controversy and confidence in the destiny of the dynasty was waning.

There were two religious issues under dispute in Liu Xin's time, that of the services paid to the imperial ancestors and that of the regular cults of state in which the emperor took part. By this stage in dynastic history it had become highly expensive to maintain shrines to so many of the emperor's forbears with the constant offerings that were stipulated. Memories of some of these individuals were dim and there had been a call to reduce the expenditure of the palace and the government. Some officials were bold enough to propose cutting down the extent of the services that were being paid, even to the point of suspending some of them altogether, including some that were dedicated to some of the emperors. One immediate question that arose was that of the services paid to Wudi; should they be as lavish as those dedicated to the founder or to the greatly revered Wendi? These acts of worship, which were

4 Wang Feng 王鳳, Wang Yin 王音, Wang Shang 王商 (2) and Wang Gen 王根 held the title of Marshal of State (*Da Sima* 大司馬) together with the position of general from 33 to 7 B.C., to be followed by Wang Mang.

5 He was Gentleman of the Yellow Gates (*Huang men lang* 黃門郎) in 28 B.C. and succeeded his father as Colonel of the Central Ramparts (*Zhonglei xiaowei* 中壘校尉) at the latter's death in 8 B.C.; during Aidi's reign he was Commandant, Imperial carriages (*Fengju duwei* 奉車都尉).

conducted by a specially established staff, took place at the memorial shrines that lay close to the tombs of the deceased emperors and their near relatives. This particular issue may well have affected the reputation that Wudi was to enjoy.

The question of the imperial cults arose early in the reign of Chengdi, about 31 B.C.⁶ At its foundation Han had inherited the cults of Qin, whereby the four deities or powers (*wu di* 五帝), symbolised by the colours of green, red, yellow and white, received obeisance and prayer. To these there were soon added the services to the fifth deity, of black, and from ca. 112 B.C. formal steps were taken to ensure that the emperor attended both at these rites, and others that were instituted to Houtu 后土 and Taiyi 泰一, at regular intervals. The sites of worship lay at some distance from Chang'an. Early in the reign of Chengdi a radical change was proposed; that these services should be replaced by those addressed to heaven and earth, at sites that lay north and south of Chang'an itself. Chengdi duly took part in the new rites in 31; animated discussion followed regarding the wisdom of such a change. At times it was revoked; at times the services to heaven and earth were re-introduced, as they were in 5 B.C., and thereafter it was to them that the emperor would present his account of his charge and pray for blessings from heaven and earth.

In dynastic terms a growing sense of urgency or even crisis arose during the reigns of Chengdi (33–7 B.C.) and his two short-lived successors, Aidi 哀帝 (r. 7–1 B.C.) and Pingdi 平帝 (r. 1 B.C.–A.D. 6). The accounts or opinions that we have of Chengdi himself seem at first sight to be contradictory, but they may all include some measure of truth. According to Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54) Chengdi “was dignified and grave when he attended court, inspiring awe like a god.”⁷ His son Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) wrote that Chengdi was “brilliant, shedding light when he attended court.”⁸ Others, such as Gu Yong 谷永 (d.9 B.C.), who wrote from personal knowledge of the times, saw Chengdi

6 For a fuller account of these matters, see Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974), chapter five (for the attendance by Wudi, Xuandi, Yuandi and Chengdi, see pp. 167–69); and Denis C. Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 661–68.

7 *Han shu*, 10.330.

8 *Han shu*, 100B.4239.

as a young wastrel who devoted his energies to the pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction of the lusts of the flesh; and he castigated Chengdi for choosing the company of men and women of a low social grade, while his favourites were capable of perpetrating loathsome cruelties on their rivals.⁹ From such accounts we may suppose that the young Liu Ao 劉鷺, who had become the emperor whom we know as Chengdi at the age of about eighteen, played his part in the palace according to the demands of public life, and that he did so to high admiration; and that also, wearied of an irksome deference to the customary call for dignity, he sought relaxation and relief in the company of those of his own age, in situations far removed from the prying eyes of his officials and courtiers.

Whatever view was or is taken of Chengdi's character and way of life, there remained the bleak fact that, however widely he had dispensed his favours, he had failed to produce an heir to succeed him. No other member of the Liu house, even from a collateral branch, would be an obvious choice to do so; bitter rivalries divided his various consorts, some of them empresses. How deeply he was involved in the murder of two sons borne to some of his women may be subject to question, but he can hardly be acquitted of complicity in those acts.¹⁰ The situation in the various palaces of Chang'an was fraught with discord. Some of his subjects were openly questioning whether the dynasty was approaching its end;¹¹ those who were most courageous warned him in no uncertain terms that he was failing to fulfil his duties as emperor.

Meanwhile control of the government was falling more and more into the hands of the Wang family, relatives of Yuandi's empress and Chengdi's mother Wang Zhengjun 王政君 (71 B.C.– A.D. 13). Like Liu Xiang, other men may well have felt dismay at these developments and recalled some of the events in the dynasty's past. There were the tales of the way in which the Empress Lü

9 See *Han shu*, 85.3443–50, 3458–64 and 3465–72 for Gu Yong's three memorials of 29, 16 and 15 B.C., and 85.3460 for the cruelties perpetrated by some of Chengdi's women.

10 For this incident, see *Han shu*, 97B.3990–94 and Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC–AD 24)* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2000), 610, s.v. Xie Guang 解光. Cao Gong 曹宮, one of the mothers of these infants who blamed paternity of her child on Chengdi, was a daughter of one of the slaves in the palace.

11 See *Han shu*, 75.3192 for the prophesies of Gan Zhongke 甘忠可; Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China 104 BC to AD 9*, 278–81.

had manipulated the powers of the throne. Some of those at Chengdi's court may have heard from their fathers of the open fighting seen in the streets of Chang'an towards the end of Wudi's reign; or they may have lived through the time of Zhaodi's death and Liu He's 劉賀 abortive bid to take the throne. The fathers of some of Chengdi's officials may well have been involved in the rise and fall of the fortunes of the Huo family, and perhaps suffered the fate of those who had associated with a party that lost out. Possibly the situation was particularly alarming for Liu Xin during the reigns of Chengdi's shortlived successors. Their succession had been subject to dispute; as an infant Pingdi could not be expected to exercise any of the powers that were expected of an emperor.¹² They would revert to an empress dowager.

In these circumstances one man stood out as a potential leader who carried influence in public life. Starting with Ban Gu, China's traditional historians have regularly depicted Wang Mang as an ambitious and unscrupulous "usurper" who schemed to seize the power of government from its rightful holders, the house of Liu. We may perhaps ponder on how historians would have handled this dynastic incident had the Xin dynasty survived for decades or even centuries; in place of the criticism such as that levelled against Qin and Sui, the Xin dynasty might well have merited the praise lavished on Han or Tang. We are in any case indebted to Hans Bielenstein for redressing the balance and correcting the long accepted hostile view of Wang Mang's actions.¹³

We are however more concerned with the reputation that Wang Mang earned during the life of Liu Xin. Amid the biased statements of the *Han shu* we may notice a number of incidents that point to very different qualities that Wang Mang possessed than those which the compiler chose to emphasise. Possibly we may see Wang Mang as a dutiful and purposeful member of the

12 For my personal view that these were constitutional rather than functional, see Michael Loewe, *The Men who Governed Han China: Companion to A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), chapter seventeen.

13 See Hans Bielenstein, *The Restoration of the Han Dynasty: With Prolegomena on the Historiography of the Hou Han Shu*, Vol. I (Stockholm: the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1954), 82–92; and "Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han dynasty, and Later Han" in *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. I, edited by Twitchett and Loewe, 232–40.

family of Chengdi's mother; it was her brothers who as Marshal of state (*Da Sima* 大司馬) had served to govern and maintain the Han empire during Chengdi's reign; Wang Mang himself held that title twice in the succeeding years.¹⁴ Conferment of the title of An Han Gong 安漢公 signalled that he stood out as a loyal supporter of the Han dynasty.¹⁵ Seen as another Zhou Gong 周公, he was acting in the most estimable and selfless way to ensure the continuity of the existing dynasty at a time when an infant emperor required guidance.¹⁶

As we know, the compiler of the *Han shu* took a different, highly cynical, view of some of these activities and we may well accept that, rising to high powers as he had, Wang Mang may well have encountered enmity and that he faced adversaries and opponents who envied him or distrusted his motives. But it is equally conceivable that to some of his contemporaries he stood out as the only man who commanded sufficient strength to save a declining dynasty from collapse and to prevent the onset of chaos. We need hardly be surprised that some of the highly intelligent persons of the day such as Huan Tan 桓譚 (43 B.C.–A.D. 28) and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.–A.D. 18) were ready to support him and assist his work of strengthening the Han dynasty at a time of weakness.¹⁷

So too did Liu Xin, who arranged for the marriage of Wang Mang's daughter to the young Pingdi.¹⁸ He sent a flattering address to Wang Mang on the death of his mother in A.D. 8,¹⁹ and as an arbiter where matters of *li* were concerned he prescribed mourning rites that fulfilled the duties of respect for the family (*xiao* 孝) without interfering with the work of governing the empire. Liu Xin gave full support for the appointment of Wang Mang as regent

14 He was appointed *Da Sima* first in 8 B.C. and then in 1 B.C.; *Han shu*, 19B.842, 852.

15 *Han shu*, 99A.4049.

16 *Han shu*, 12.349, 99A.4046–47.

17 We have a few frustratingly short references to the relationships among some of these men of letters. Huan Tan argued about intellectual problems and anomalies in company with Liu Xin and Yang Xiong (*bian xi yi yi* 辯析疑異; *Hou Han shu*, 28A.955). Yang Xiong was appointed a Gentleman (*lang* 郎) in company with Wang Mang and Liu Xin. Liu Xin was one of two men who are named as having admired Yang Xiong; Huan Tan regarded Yang Xiong as being quite unequalled (*Han shu*, 36.1972; 87B.3583).

18 *Han shu*, 12.355, 97B.4009.

19 *Han shu*, 99A.4090.

in A.D. 6.²⁰ He was ready to continue with his support after the abandonment of the imperial title of Han and the establishment of Wang Mang's own dynasty.²¹ It was after that event that he received the honorific titles of Guo shi 國師 and Jia Xin Gong 嘉新公 from no less a person than the Grand Empress Dowager of Han.²² We may suspect, but cannot prove, that as a man of letters he may well have composed some of the documents with which Wang Mang ruled.²³ He was one of those who carried out Wang Mang's order to re-institute the Ming tang 明堂 in A.D. 5²⁴ In A.D. 10 he advised him over economic matters such as the re-introduction of the monopolies of state and attempts to stabilise prices.²⁵ To confirm his support at a different level, Liu Xin had his daughter married to one of Wang Mang's sons.²⁶

Liu Xin was himself a member of the house of Liu. We may well ask, but will never know, how far if at all he was beset by perplexity at the change of the dynasty, and how far his conscience was troubled by his abandonment of the house of his forbears and wilful co-operation with that of their successor. Nor can we follow the exact steps whereby distrust and disillusionment with Wang Mang's rule entered into his mind and prevailed. Possibly his daughter's involvement in A.D. 21 in a plot to bring Wang Mang's rule to an end and her subsequent suicide may have hardened his mind.²⁷ In A.D. 23 he joined a conspiracy to restore the house of Liu. At its exposure he chose the path of suicide.

Liu Xin contributed to the formation and preservation of literature and to the attention that Chinese men of letters paid and would pay to historical writing. He stands out as one of the foremost intellectual figures of the early empires; he played a significant part in the choice of religious cults. In all these aspects he may be seen as both creator and critic.

20 *Han shu*, 99A.4080.

21 *Han shu*, 99B.4099.

22 *Han shu*, 99B.4100.

23 E.g., the rescript recorded in *Han shu*, 99B.4101–2.

24 *Han shu*, 99A.4069.

25 *Han shu*, 24B.1179.

26 *Han shu*, 97B.4009.

27 *Han shu*, 99C.4165.

He is probably best known for his work in collecting written texts; editing different copies of some of them with a view to forming a complete and approved version; reviewing their authorship and history; and arranging them in categories whereby they should be shelved in the imperial library. Liu Xin was not the first scholar of Han times to be engaged in this type of work. Gongsun Hong, Chancellor from 124 to 121 B.C., had been thus engaged, with the foundation of several depositories;²⁸ and we know of collections that were made by Liu De 劉德, king of Hejian 河間 (155–130 or 129 B.C.).²⁹ But on this occasion the project was marked by a finer professional standard and derived from a wider basis than previously, such that its values have long survived the passage of time.

The venture started in 26 B.C. when Liu Xin was some twenty years of age. A number of scholars, led by Liu Xiang, were ordered to collect the written works of different categories, ranging from those set aside as meriting the highest consideration, as *jing* 經, to works of the masters, poetry, military treatises. To some of those who were involved in this task, probably Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, there fell the duty of writing preliminary notices to accompany the texts. Unfortunately no more than a few of these survive. There also survives a summary of an abbreviated form of the list, or perhaps catalogue, that these scholars made, thereby constituting the earliest surviving work of a Chinese bibliographer. Of the 677 works listed there, 153 rest on our shelves as integral texts. Some of the manuscripts that have been found during the last fifty years are copies of works that are listed there and known ever since; some are texts of works that have not been received, whose titles may or may not have been included in the catalogue. In addition to reproducing the list of items named there, the *Han shu* gives the titles of the “Seven summaries” (*Qi lue* 七略) that Liu Xin prepared and which set out the different types of writings that had been collected.³⁰

In the course of this work Liu Xin had access to certain works that

28 For this statement, as from the *Qi lue*, see the note to “Wei Fan Shixing zuo qiu li Tai zai bei biao” 為范始興作求立太宰碑表, in *Wen xuan* 文選 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), 38.1749.

29 *Han shu*, 22.1035, 30.1712, and 30.1725 and 1726 for his own compositions.

30 *Han shu*, 30.1701.

had been kept in depositories for reserved writings, which were otherwise not available for public scrutiny. Thanks to this facility, and perhaps other circumstances, his attention had been drawn to three works which he thought well worthy of bringing to notice; these were the *Shang shu* 尚書 in archaic script (*gu wen* 古文) and sixteen *pian* 篇, the “Missing *li*” (*Yi li* 逸禮) in thirty-nine parts, and the historical account of the Chunqiu period of Zuo shi Qiuming 左氏丘明. It was the last of these that aroused most controversy, perhaps because this was no new matter. The dry and restrained record as seen in the *Chunqiu* itself had perhaps been gaining a higher reputation and attracting more attention than previously; for it was ascribed to the pen of Kongzi and by the time of Liu Xin more and more men of learning or officials were citing Kongzi, seen as a recognized master, to support their arguments.³¹ Attempts to explain the meaning and the tacit assumptions of that record and to demonstrate the force of its warnings had seen the formation of at least four groups of expositors, of which those known as the *Gong yang* and the *Gu liang* were the most prominent.³² Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 198–ca.107 B.C.) was among those who favoured the *Gong yang*’s explanations; Liu Xiang, as we have seen, preferred the *Gu liang*. The matter was of sufficient importance for the government to call a conference of learned men to discuss the relative values of these two types of interpretation.

This conference had been held in 51 B.C., some five years before Liu Xin’s birth. Some fifty years later when Liu Xin stood in high respect enjoying a favourable position at court, and possibly already known as a fine scholar,³³ he put forward the case that of all attempts to elucidate the *Chunqiu* that of the text of *Zuo shi*, which he was avidly bringing to attention, was superior.³⁴ One

31 For the increased attention to Kongzi in the later years of Western Han, see Loewe, *The Men who Governed Han China*, chapter ten, and Dong Zhongshu, *a ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 159–64.

32 *Han shu*, 30.1713 includes entries for the *Gong yang* and *Gu liang zhuan*, and also for the *Zuo shi zhuan* 鄒氏傳 and *Jia shi zhuan* 夾氏傳, each in eleven *juan* 卷.

33 Ban Biao remarked on the wide extent of Liu Xin’s attention to traditional learning, and his scholarly integrity (*Han shu*, 73.3131). This opinion may be set against the accusation made for political purposes in A.D. 21 that he had been subverting the interpretation of the *Wu jing* (*Han shu*, 99C.4170).

34 For Liu Xin’s work on this text with Yin Xian 尹咸, see *Han shu*, 36.1967.

reason that he put forward in this claim was that the *Zuo zhuan*, as we may call it, had been written at a time that was far closer to that of Kongzi and that it therefore had a greater chance of being valid. In maintaining this point of view, Liu Xin stood in marked difference from his father, the protagonist of the *Gu liang* school.

We may perhaps imagine how the elderly, well established and highly traditional scholars reacted to this assault on the views and principles that they had been nurturing for decades. Here was a favourite of the court and supporter of Wang Mang who was advancing views that brought into question the whole value of their life's work. How could this man pretend that he himself could rely on the years of experience of scholarly work that was necessary before he could dare to voice his opinions? And what indeed was the source of the document that he thought to be so valuable?

It is not difficult for those of us who have served in academic institutions to realise how this incident could arouse a bitter state of enmity, when Aidi (r. 7–1 B.C.) ordered Liu Xin to set out his arguments as against those of the established scholars. Fortunately we possess an account of how Liu Xin did so, in a letter which he addressed to the Commissioner for ceremonial (*Taichang* 太常) for transmission to the Academicians (*boshi* 博士).³⁵

This letter in effect sets out what was to become the traditional and accepted account of the early stages of China's cultural and literary development. Liu Xin took the story back to the time of the mythical sovereigns and he may have been writing partly with a view not to offend Aidi the current emperor. From the days of Yao and Shun he proceeded through to his own time. He called to mind the decline in cultural standards that had set in after the time of the kings of Zhou, and then after the death of Kongzi. He wrote about the repressions of the Qin emperor, mentioning the ban on the private ownership of certain texts.

Matters had improved in the early days of Western Han. About 195 B.C. Shusun Tong 叔孫通 had set about the task of establishing a code of conduct that would be worthy of a the new regime; the Qin emperor's ban had been

35 The text is preserved in *Han shu*, 36.1968–71, and *Wen xuan*, 43.1952–56. For a complete translation of this letter, see Loewe "Liu Xin's letter to the Academicians" (forthcoming).

revoked during Huidi's time (r. 195–188). Chao Cuo 鼂錯 (executed 154 B.C.) had taken part in the recovery of the text of the *Shang shu*; but, and here Liu Xin was beginning to be critical, the scholars of his own day did little more than read the text aloud, without attempting to explain its difficulties; and in some cases the teachers of the day were not able to handle the whole of an early text; they were accustomed to work together in groups in order to do so.

There were signs, however, that during the reign of Wudi (141–87 B.C.) the study of literature was growing. The discovery of documents in the old house that was said to have belonged to Kongzi was of great importance; but being retained in a depository for reserved books these were not available for scholars to study. All this had taken place some decades previously, and it was only from 26 B.C. that Chengdi ordered the work on which he himself and his father Liu Xiang had been engaged. But there were those who failed to recognise its results. These were men who were unable to take account of the material whose existence had only then come to light. They were reluctant to extend their enquiries beyond the narrowly limited topics on which they were engaged and they rejected any new evidence that had been found and which affected their view of earlier practices. As a result these scholars were quite incapable of showing how major affairs of state such as the performance of the *Feng* 封 and *Shan* 禪 rites should be conducted. And here Liu Xin wrote somewhat sharply:

All that they hoped to do was to protect something that was in effect spoilt and to preserve material that was defective. They were sticking to their personal ideas which they could only fear they would see lying in ruins, with no thought of adopting anything that would be better or of following what others took to be right. Maybe some of these persons were consumed with envy, never bothering to find out what the facts were. They banded together, their voices reverberating like thunder, simply accepting what they had heard when giving their own opinion of what was right or wrong. They rejected a study of the three recently found texts [the “Missing *Li*,” the *Documents*, and the work of Mr. Zuo]; they believed that the *Documents* in the form in which they had received it was complete, and claimed that Mr Zuo was no transmitter of the *Spring*

and *Autumn Annals*. Can there be anything more distressing ?³⁶

Liu Xin ended with a plea that full account should be taken of all the evidence that was available, together with its implications for a study of the past. It will be seen below how, in his own writing, he may well have taken note of his own advice.

Liu Xiang had produced no small amount of literature, as may be seen in the two surviving works that bear his name, the *Xin xu* 新序 and the *Shuo yuan* 說苑. We do not possess any text of such length that Liu Xin composed, but he is known as the author of several *fu* 賦, such as the “Sui chu fu” 遂初賦; and it is possible that an independent piece of his writing entitled *Zhong lü shu* 鍾律書 may have survived until early in the seventh century.³⁷

In addition, parts of Liu Xin’s writings which concern most of the topics that are under study here found their way into the chapter of the *Han shu* that is entitled *Lü li zhi* 律曆志 “The treatise on the pitch-pipes and the calendar.” The introductory passage of the chapter tells that at the foundation of the Han dynasty Zhang Cang 張蒼 made a start in the work of putting the pitch-pipes and the calendar in order, and during the reign of Wudi the office of music investigated how to regulate it. The passage continues:

Standing in control of the government in the period Yuanshi 元始 [1–A.D. 5], Wang Mang was hoping to enhance his reputation. He assembled some hundred or more specialists in musical instruments [*zhong lü* 鍾律] from all places beneath the skies; and he ordered Liu Xin, as Xihe 羲和, and others to prepare a set of proposals, in great detail. I [i.e., the compiler of the *Han shu*] have deleted any statements that are false and chosen those that are correct, for insertion here.³⁸

The chapter of the *Han shu* sets out to handle its subject under the five major headings of *bei shu* 備數, which may perhaps be rendered the application of numbers; *he sheng* 和聲, harmonisation of the musical notes; *shen du* 審度, comprehension of the linear measures; *jia liang* 嘉量, approval

36 *Han shu*, 36.1970.

37 The *Zhong lü shu* is under study in my “The *Jia liang hu*: a bronze vessel made for Wang Mang” (forthcoming).

38 *Han shu*, 21A.955.

of the measures of volume; and *quan heng* 權衡, weights and balances. They are to be studied in the context that includes the changes seen in the passage of time, material objects, invisible influences, human minds and faculties for sensual perception; and the evidence of the select writings (*jing* 經) and other written accounts (*zhuan* 傳).

From the start of the chapter there is a close association between these subjects and the twelve pitch-pipes, six known as *lǚ* 律 (characterised as yang) and six as *lǚ* 呂 (yin). Its first two sections are headed *shu*, which concerns numbers, and *sheng*, which concerns notes. Both of the structures that are set forth derive from *huang zhong* 黃鐘 (or 鍾), the longest of the twelve pitch-pipes.³⁹ The text describes the relations of twelve with the sequences of time, the influence of yin and yang and their own defined musical notes. There follows a section on the *san tong* 三統, the link that binds together the dispositions of the heavens, the transformations of earth and the activities of human beings.⁴⁰ This system of the *san tong* likewise involves the pitch-pipes, starting with the *huang zhong*, and the other influences that have been mentioned; its explanation calls on the *Zhou yi* 周易 and some of its ancillary writings. The idea and treatment of the *san tong* here differs basically from that which is described at length in one of the later chapters of the *Chunqiu fanlu*.⁴¹

The chapter of the *Han shu* then attends to the idea of the *san zheng* 三正, which is again dependent on the *Huang zhong* and is somewhat different from

39 The titles of these are set out with some detail in *Han shu*, 21A.958–59. The equipment found in tomb no. 1 Mawangdui included a set of these twelve pipes each within its own slot of a fabric case, and inscribed with its title. Being of reed rather than bronze, these were evidently made as replicas, for funerary furnishings, rather than for practical use; see Hunan sheng bowuguan and Zhongguo kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo, eds., *Changsha Mawangdui yi hao Han mu*, 長沙馬王堆一號漢墓, (2 vols.; Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1973), 1:107–9, Vol. II, Plate 204. The function of the pitch-pipes as seen here is to be distinguished from that of measuring the growth of the invisible energies (*qi* 氣), for which see Derk Bodde, “The Chinese cosmic magic known as watching for the ethers”; in *Studia serica Bernhard Karlgren dedicata*, edited by Søren Egerod and Else Glahn, (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959), 14–35.

40 Or perhaps “of all living creatures.”

41 *Chunqiu fanlu* 23 “San dai gao zhi zhi wen”; translated in Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 317–34.

the treatment of the *san zheng* in the *Bo hu tong*.⁴² Here it concerns the regular points in time and place that correspond with each of the twelve pitch-pipes and the repetitive sequence of the twelve stages that are symbolised by the Twelve Branches (*Shier zhi* 十二支). This is accompanied by the numerical values associated with Heaven, starting from 1 and ending at 25, and Earth, starting from 2 and ending at 30. A sequence of numbers is constructed, rising from 1 to 177, 147.⁴³

The three sections of the chapter which concern the three sets of measures give the scales that were in use followed by instructions on how instruments such as vessels of bronze should be constructed so as to form the standards. They are all stated to have originated from the *huang zhong*. The measures of length,⁴⁴ on a decimal scale, are explained in relation to yin and yang; the meanings implicit in the terms of the scale (e.g., *fen* 分, *cun* 寸, *chi* 尺, *zhang* 丈 and *yin* 引) are explained with a choice of, or even a play on, words; such as *zhang* 丈, which is explained as *zhang* 張, or *yin* 引, explained as *xin* 信. Careful instructions are given for the correct way in which to construct the five measures of capacity,⁴⁵ that are also set on a decimal scale, and whose size is determined by counting out 1,200 grains of a special type of millet. Again these measures are set out with reference to the values of yin and yang and the sound or note of the *Huang zhong*, and with explanations of the five terms of the scale (*hu* 斛, *dou* 斗, *sheng* 升, *ge* 合 and *yue* 龠).⁴⁶

The scale of measurement by weight is treated with a fuller attention to cosmic factors than are those for length and capacity.⁴⁷ The scale included five units rising from the *zhu* 銖 to the *liang* 兩 (24 *zhu*), *jin* 斤 (16 *liang*), *jun* 鈞 (30

42 Chen Li 陳立, *Bohu tong shuzheng* 白虎通疏證 (preface 1832; rpt. in two volumes with punctuation by Wu Zeyu 吳則虞, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), ch. 8 ('San zheng'), 360–68 and Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T'ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall* (two volumes; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1949–1952), 2:548–54.

43 *Han shu*, 21A.964.

44 *Han shu*, 21A.966.

45 *Han shu*, 21A.967.

46 For the introduction of the term *hu* as a unit of capacity in replacement of *shi* in the time of Wang Mang and Eastern Han, and the pronunciation of 石, see Loewe, "The *Jia liang hu*: a bronze vessel made for Wang Mang."

47 *Han shu*, 21A.969.

jin) and the *shi* 石 (4 *jun*). The text considers the mathematical relationships of the five units, as explained in terms of the *Zhou yi*, the movements of yin and yang, the seasons and four directions, the number of material objects, the movements of the moon, and the cycle of the Twelve Branches. The five material elements that symbolise the *wu xing* take their place in this account. There follows an account of the instruments used in making measurements, such as the compass (*gui* 規), square (*ju* 矩), leveller (*zhun* 準) and line (*sheng* 繩).

This section of chapter 21 ends by drawing the preceding subjects or themes together.⁴⁸ Citing the *Shang shu*,⁴⁹ it ascribes to Shun 舜 the system whereby music corresponds with the ordered function of heaven and earth, the four seasons and the moral qualities of human beings (*ren lun* 人倫). Based on yin and yang these are assimilated in a unity; only a sage such as Shun could so have unified the intention of all things beneath the skies. Finally Liu Xin refers to the successful achievements of the time in which he was writing, such as the promotion of traditional learning, the unification of weights and measures, the application of numbers and the harmonisation of music, all brought about for the benefit of the people of the earth and their unity. Readers of his own day could hardly have missed the lavish, if veiled, praise that was being heaped upon Wang Mang, who made a point of claiming that his ancestry derived from Shun.⁵⁰

Liu Xin's work as creator and critic and his view that all manner of beings fit their appropriate place in a well-ordered cosmos are seen conspicuously in the extensive parts of the chapter on *lǚ* and *li* that concern the calendar.⁵¹ He takes the subject back to the mythical sovereign Zhuan xu 顓頊 and through to the existence of a number of calendars in the *Zhan guo* period. The First Qin Emperor evidently had no leisure to attend to the consequent problems, and Liu Xin moves to the steps taken in 105–104 B.C. in which Gongsun Qing 公孫卿, Hu Sui 壺遂, Sima Qian 司馬遷 and Ni Kuan 倪寬 were

48 *Han shu*, 21A.972.

49 *Shang shu*, “Yi jì” 益稷, 5.5a.

50 See further discussion below.

51 *Han shu*, 21A.973.

concerned.⁵² Replacing the Xia 夏 calendar, the Taichu 太初 calendar was based on astronomical calculations and a reliance on the pitch-pipes and their measurements, in particular those of the *Huang zhong* with its extent or area of 81 inches, the sexagenary cycle, yin yang, and the symbols of the hexagram's lines. In the event Sima Qian was ordered to adopt the calendar that Deng Ping 鄧平 had proposed. The chapter goes on to record the occasion when the question of accuracy was raised, in 78 B.C., and the investigation that Liu Xiang undertook, with his composition of a text entitled *Wu ji lun* 五紀論.

Such is the preamble to the account of Liu Xin's own ideas and conclusions which is set out at some length.⁵³ The importance of the calendar is seen as a regulator of human activities in accordance with the seasons or chronological sequences set by heaven, just as *li* maintains a state of harmony therein. Liu Xin cites from the *Zuo zhuan*, the *Changes* and their elaborations. He writes of errors in calendrical calculation of the past and launches into the concept of *yuan* 元, in which the *san tong* are brought together with a correspondence with the pitch-pipes. Basic mathematical principles or truths, i.e., the one beginning (*yuan shi* 元始), the two seasons of spring and autumn, the *san tong* and the four chronological sequences, lie behind Liu Xin's exposition of the movements in the heavens and the essential matters that the calendar marks, such as the intercalary months. He follows this with a long passage that relates the cycles and the moments of time to movements of the planets, the *san tong*, the *wu xing* and the formation of the hexagrams. Mathematical and astronomical calculations fill a large part of the text of the chapter.⁵⁴

It is in the same chapter of the *Han shu*, the *Lü li zhi*, that we possess a comparatively short account of China's history that Liu Xin wrote; quite possibly our received text of this is abbreviated and shorn of some of its content.⁵⁵ We are probably safe in presuming that in addition to other historical records Liu Xin had a copy of the *Shi ji* at his disposal. It must however remain

52 See Loewe, *The Men who Governed Han China*, 167–71.

53 *Han shu*, 21A.979–86.

54 *Han shu*, 21B.991–1011.

55 *Han shu*, 21A.1011–24, with final passages inserted by another writer that concern times after Liu Xin's death.

open to question how far his copy corresponded with the received version of today. In particular it may be asked whether it included the ten chapters whose loss was noted by Zhang Yan 張晏 in the third or fourth century;⁵⁶ and the additions made by Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 (104 B.C.?–30 B.C.?).

We do not know the exact moment of time when Liu Xin composed his account, which is entitled *Shi jing* 世經, the “Passage of the generations.” We are however probably safe in assuming that it was written when the question of the legitimacy of a ruling house and its claims of descent from an acknowledged ancestor was particularly sensitive. This question affected any claims that Wang Mang might put forward for loyal support, especially from members of the imperial house of Liu. A written statement from Liu Xin, just such a person, could bring great weight to bear on the issue, whether to support or to refute Wang Mang’s claims. It would seem that the *Shi jing* was written before Wang Mang had taken the step of assuming the imperial title.

Perhaps characteristically, the *Shi jing* starts with a citation from the *Chunqiu* and the *Zuo zhuan*.⁵⁷ It sets out the succession of the mythological or historical monarchs from Tai hao di 太昊帝 to Tang 湯 of the Shang-Yin house. The author calls on the *Xi ci zhuan* 繫辭傳 and explains why some names, such as that of the highly controversial Gong Gong 共工, are omitted.

Liu Xin’s readiness to question the accuracy of the received texts, including the *Chunqiu* and his own highly venerated *Zuo zhuan*, is seen in his handling of some of the dates that are recorded therein. It has been shown that where there are discrepancies between those dates and the *San tong* (Triple concordance) system of the calendar, Liu Xin altered them so as to fit that system.⁵⁸

56 See note to *Shi ji*, 130.3321 for the statement by Zhang Yan.

57 *Chunqiu* and *Zuo zhuan*, Zhao Gong 17th year, 48.1a, 3b–4a.

58 See Gao Jiye 郜積意, “‘Shi jing’ san tong shu yu Liu Xin ‘Chunqiu’ xue” 世經三統術與劉歆春秋學, *Han xue yanjiu* 漢學研究 27.3 (2009): 1–34. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 404 cites L. de Saussure, *Les Origines de l’Astronomie Chinoise* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1930); and W. Eberhard, Rolf. Müller and Robert Henseling “Beiträge zur Astronomie der Han-Zeit II”, *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Jahrgang 1933*, Philosophisch-historische Klasse (Berlin; De Gruyter, 1933), 937–79, esp. 956–79.

There is one major difference between the line of transmission that Liu Xin traces and the one that is given in the *Shi ji*.⁵⁹ The *Shi ji* separates two lines of descent each deriving immediately from Huangdi 黃帝. One line, which is itself separated into two collateral lines in the third generation from Huangdi, includes Yu 禹, founder of the Xia dynasty in the fourth generation; and curiously enough it includes Shun at a later stage, in the eighth generation from Huangdi. Yao 堯 is descended from the second line of descent, in the fourth generation from Huangdi. Such a scheme is difficult to reconcile with the tradition that Yao preceded Shun and abdicated in his favour; it could be corrected by the simple change whereby the two names of Yu Shun and Xia Yu were substituted in the text by the one for the other, but without evidence or suggestions from China's traditional commentators it would be audacious or even rash to suggest that just such a substitution had occurred. As against the two lines of transmission of the *Shi ji*, Liu Xin sets out one single line of transmission with the direct sequence of Yao, Shun and Yu, founder of the house that ruled Xia on an hereditary basis.⁶⁰

The situation is further complicated by the statement that the *Han shu* carries as deriving directly from Wang Mang.⁶¹ According to this assertion Shun followed immediately after Yao; and while the house of Han derived from Yao, the line of his own family of Wang was transmitted from Shun. Elsewhere the *Han shu* has Shun being descended from Huangdi in the eighth generation and the Wang family tracing its descent from that line.⁶²

These apparent difficulties and possible contradictions can perhaps be explained by assuming that all these accounts were based on the accepted tradition; i.e., that so far from being Shun's father, Yao abdicated in favour of a person who was outside his own immediate family. It would thus be reasonable to distinguish the descent of the Liu family from one line and that of the Wang family from another. In this way it could be claimed on behalf of Wang Mang that, by replacing the Han Dynasty, he was re-enacting the highly reputable

⁵⁹ *Shi ji*, chapter 1.

⁶⁰ For a schematic view of these two schemes, see Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 298–99.

⁶¹ *Han shu*, 99B.4105.

⁶² *Han shu*, 98.4013.

procedure of long, long ago, without breaking the call of kinship or offending against the course of the legitimate transmission of authority. Liu Xin's "Passage of the Generations" could thus serve to encourage others, including members of the Liu family, to lend their support for Wang Mang. It may be asked whether Liu Xin's account, in the "Passage of the Generations", formed the basis upon which Wang Mang rested his assertion and enabled him to trace his authority directly from a single and unquestioned heritage.

The reputation of Han Wudi formed another historical question in which it seems that Liu Xin may have taken part. That emperor has generally been acclaimed as the hero-emperor of the Han dynasty who presided over its most glorious achievements, though both Ban Gu and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) deplored some of the aspects of his reign.⁶³ Some writers, such as the present one, find it difficult to show that Liu Che 劉徹 himself took part in attaining such results or in taking the decisions that led to their success.⁶⁴

Reference has been made above to the question of whether some of the memorial shrines dedicated to the memories of the emperor should continue to be maintained or whether the services at some of them should be suspended, in order to save expense. The question arose once more in 7 B.C., with the question of whether the highly honorific posthumous title *Shi zong* 世宗 should be conferred on Wudi. So far only Gaozu the founder and his grandson Wendi had received titles that included the term *zong* 宗, which carried with it the special privilege that services to their shrines should be maintained in perpetuity. For that reason, conferment of such a title on Wudi would have involved considerable expense.

It was Wang Shun 王舜 Commissioner for Transport (*Tai pu* 太僕) and Liu Xin, with the title of Colonel, Central Ramparts (*Zhong lei xiaowei* 中壘校尉), who argued forcibly that Wudi should be honoured with this title. They pointed to the successful achievements of the reign as seen in freeing the empire from the threats of invasion or humiliation by other peoples, whether from the north or the south. They praised Wudi for the attention paid to civil

63 *Han shu*, 6.212; *Xin jiao Zi zhi tong jian zhu* 新校資治通鑑注 (Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1956), 21.700.

64 For an account of Wudi and his reign, see Loewe, *The Men who Governed Han China*, 604–12.

matters, such as the assembly of men of high quality to serve the empire, calendrical and ritual changes and other matters that preserved the tradition of the kings of Zhou. The two memorialists called on the prescriptions of *li*; and they were probably the first of the Han officials who quoted from the *Zuo zhuan* to support their arguments. Their skilful advocacy served them well, securing the acceptance of their advice.

As has been noted above, the question of the deities to whom the cults of state should be addressed formed a live issue from 31 B.C. onwards; and this involved the choice of where these rites were to be performed. From the time of Wudi those dedicated to the Five Powers were held at Yong 雍, those to Hou tu at Fenyin 汾陰 and those to Tai yi at Ganquan 甘泉. These sites lay at a considerable distance from Chang'an thereby obliging the emperor to undertake a long journey in order to attend and take part. But when these ceremonies were offered so as to induce blessings from heaven they took place at the shrine and altar built immediately south of Chang'an city itself. Liu Xiang had advocated retention of the traditional cults, addressed to the Five Powers. Various changes had occurred after 31, and in A.D. 5 Liu Xin was one of sixty-seven officials who supported Wang Mang's call for a further change, by the resumption of the services to heaven.⁶⁵

Emperors, their advisors and men and women of all ranks of society could perform various acts of divination to seek answers to the questions that assailed them. They could do so by the age old methods of deliberately creating signals from occult sources, as seen in the cracks in the scorched shells of the turtle, or the lines of the hexagram produced by manipulating the yarrow stalks. To determine which moments of time would be suitable for certain activities, they could consult the written manuals that set these out in catalogue form, or they could use the instruments whose dials showed the place of such moments in cosmic terms. Others could look for advice in the living activities of nature, revealed in the patterns of the birds' flight, or the shape of the clouds or the direction and force of the winds.

By these means human beings sought to secure advice from occult

65 *Han shu*, 25B.1264–65. For an account of these major changes from early in Western Han times, see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China 104 BC to AD 9*, chapter 5.

sources. But along with such attempts there went the compulsive need to consult men of learning or seek the wisdom or advice of superhuman powers when a disastrous or abnormal event of nature seemed set to destroy the continued way of existence of the human race. Emperors might well fear the end of their dynastic heritage; they would call on officials and men of letters to explain the reason of these occurrences or to advise what actions could be taken to avert the consequences of these disastrous abnormalities.

The longest of the chapters of the *Han shu*, the *Wu xing zhi* 五行志, is divided into three major sections of which two are further sub-divided into two parts. It records the occurrences of these events and the opinions or interpretations that men of letters of Han times, including Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, saw fit or dared to express. The text also calls on citations from the *Jing Fang Yi zhuan* 京房易傳 to explain these phenomena. The great majority of the events that are recorded date from *Chunqiu* times. In addition to Liu Xin's comments on nearly seventy of these cases, the chapter includes his explanation for one event that took place in the reign of Wudi and one in 32 B.C., in his own lifetime, shortly after Chengdi's accession.⁶⁶ For forty-three of these events, the *Han shu* records the opinions of both Liu Xiang and Liu Xin; but while Liu Xiang's views were sometimes coupled with those of Dong Zhongshu, those of Liu Xin were not. As might perhaps be expected, Liu Xiang called on the *Gu liang zhuan* to support his explanations; Liu Xin called on the *Zuo zhuan* to do so. In general, Liu Xiang called on factual events, as read in historical documents; Liu Xin tended to look for moral issues or natural processes to see how these were connected with the events that had occurred.⁶⁷ Dong Zhongshu and after him Liu Xiang had explained abnormalities and disasters as the warnings that heaven sent to the leaders of mankind, in the hope that they would take due note and mend their ways. There are no records of Liu Xin calling on heaven's warnings or intentions, though he did attribute some events to heaven's intervention.⁶⁸ He also pointed to the improper

⁶⁶ *Han shu*, 27B(1).1353 and 27C(2).1506.

⁶⁷ For moral ideas, see *Han shu*, 27A.1321; B(2).1414; C(1).1445; for natural processes, see 27A.1340; B(1).1396; B(2).1409, 1412, 1434; C(1).1463.

⁶⁸ *Han shu*, 27C(1).1445.

behaviour of a leader in connection with some events, or even suggested that that had been its cause.⁶⁹ It is of interest that one such comment referred to the event that had taken place in Chengdi's reign.⁷⁰ There are a few references to yin yang but no specific calls on the theory of the *wu xing*. Possibly Liu Xin tended more to explain events that occurred on earth in terms of the movements and activities that took place in the heavens. His explanations of solar eclipses were of their own type that is not seen in the comments of others. They are of the form X Y *fen* 分, where X and Y are the names of states of the *Chunqiu* or *Zhanguo* periods. They are also the names of expanses of the heavens which were seen as corresponding with the territories of those states on earth; Liu Xin may well have been drawing attention to a parallel between the locations of the events that took place on earth and in the heavens.⁷¹

Apart from the attention that Liu Xin paid to *wu xing* in his account of chronological sequences, there are conspicuously few mentions of this theory in his writings, and it would be hard to show that he saw the five as agents which controlled the movements and events of all three states of the cosmos, those of heaven, earth and mankind. This comparative silence should be set against the important place that the theory seems to have held in the beliefs and aspirations of the man whose interests he served, Wang Mang. Wang Mang was the first emperor of China of whom one significant conclusion may be reached with confidence; that he took deliberate steps to claim that his rule was blessed by the protection of one of the Five, in this case that of Earth. There is nothing to suggest that it was due to the personal influence of Liu Xin that he sought to do so. Possibly this apparent discrepancy may be explained by the ways in which the theory attracted belief and a call for subservience to its order. Whereas it may well have found its way into popular usage at this time, it may not have been espoused by all those of the day who were forming their own ideas of the operation of the cosmos. Liu Xin perhaps was not convinced that the theory was valid; Wang Mang however was glad to profess the beliefs

69 *Han shu*, 27B(1).1388; B(2).1431; C(2).1479, 1503.

70 *Han shu*, 27C(2).1506.

71 These explanations are given in *Han shu*, 27C(2).1479–1500; e.g., see p. 1483: Chu Zheng fen 楚鄭分 and Lu Wei fen 魯衛分.

that the populace held as a means of calling on their loyal support.

Chapter 21 of the *Han shu* includes signs that Liu Xin was well able to turn his mind to practical as to well as theoretical matters. He writes about the enduring properties of bronze, despite changes of temperature, such that it is a suitable medium for making instruments, except where bamboo is necessary.⁷² He recognises the need for precision and shows himself familiar with the shapes of measures of weight and with the functions of different types of instrument.⁷³ As Xihe he seems to have borne final responsibility for seeing that the pitch-pipes were made to the correct measurements.⁷⁴ From elsewhere we learn that as an active official he supervised promulgation of the Ordinances of the Months.⁷⁵

As has been seen, Liu Xin differed from his father Liu Xiang over two matters. Liu Xiang favoured the *Gu liang zhuan*, and the rites of state that were dedicated to the Five Powers and others; Liu Xin promoted the cause of the *Zuo zhuan* and the services addressed to heaven. They also differed in their estimate of Dong Zhongshu and his influence. Liu Xiang wrote of Dong as the ancestor of those who devoted their attention to traditional teaching and a person whose fixed ideas brought benefit to all under heaven. He is also said to have singled out his abilities and talents as being unsurpassed. Liu Xin recognised Dong Zhongshu's qualities but regarded his father's praise as excessive.⁷⁶

Reference has been made above to the difficulties that Liu Xin may

72 *Han shu*, 21A.972. Bamboo was needed for constructing the very long linear measure of the *yin*, of 23 metres (*Han shu*, 21A.966).

73 *Han shu*, 21A.956, 969.

74 *Han shu*, 21A.956. Final responsibility for music lay with the *Taichang* 太常 (Commissioner for Ceremonial), for measures of length with the *Tingwei* 廷尉 (Commissioner for Trials), for those of capacity with the *Da Sinong* 大司農 (Commissioner for Agriculture) and for those of weight with the [*Da*] *Honglu* 大鴻臚 (Commissioner for State Visits); *Han shu*, 21A.965, 967, 968, 971.

75 See Gansu sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 甘肅省文物考古研究所, "Dunhuang Xuanquan Han jian shiwen xuan" 敦煌懸泉漢簡釋文選, *Wen wu* 2000.5: 33–36; Charles Sanft, "Edict of Monthly Ordinances for the Four Seasons in Fifty Articles from 5 C.E.: Introduction to the Wall Inscription Discovered at Xuanquanzhi, with Annotated Translation," *Early China* 12 (2008–2009): 125–99.

76 *Han shu*, 36.1930, 56.2526; Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, 58.

perhaps have suffered at the changes of regime in which he took part. May we perhaps credit him with a breadth of outlook and a depth of intellect that saw far beyond the immediate demands of the immediate present? May we wonder whether he saw the rise and fall of a dynastic house as no more than an incident that took its place in the regular sequences of the cosmos? That he placed the success or failure of human intentions within a wider context, that embraced the passage of time, the events that take place in the heavens, on earth and among human beings and whose movements are regulated by the inbuilt cycles and harmonies of the universe?

Alternatively we may ask whether Liu Xin suffered the curse of having lived in interesting times; whether he was subject to intense grief at witnessing the weakness and close of the dynasty of his own family; and whether he was deeply divided in his mind over where his loyalties were due, only to realise that the successor to the house of Liu had forfeited his right to support. Liu Xin seems to have been more forward looking than his father, being ready to accept new concepts and evidence and to explore new intellectual initiatives. His creative initiative is seen in his scheme whereby astronomy, harmonics, mathematics and history take their place as different but interacting elements of a cosmic whole, as set out in parts of the *Han shu*, and exemplified in his treatment of measures and weights. At the same time, as creator and critic he was studiously seeking rational explanations for what he observed and addressing the moral issues of the day. We may perhaps reflect that, in so far as Wang Mang was promoting the ideal of the reign of the Zhou kings, and in so far as Liu Xin was helping him to do so, Liu Xin may be seen as one of the forceful founders of China's long-lasting tradition and cultural heritage.

劉歆：創造者與批評家

魯惟一

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劉歆生活的年代，是個政局不穩的時期，歷經漢成帝、哀帝、平帝及王莽自立等，他在中國歷史上所做的貢獻主要在於學術史及文化傳承兩個方面。劉歆最為人所知的是他對文獻的蒐集及分類的工作，較諸其父劉向，他的著述體現了更大的自主性和更激進的思想。在學術思想上，劉歆是王莽的支持者，但他卻沒有為王莽撰寫過正式的制誥文書，反而因參與推翻王莽的密謀而自取滅亡。

劉歆傳世作品除了幾首賦以外，還著有《律曆志》，收入今本《漢書》，篇中把天文學、天人之學、算術和歷史作為其宇宙論體系中的幾個方面。他重視新獲文獻的價值，提倡《左傳》所述的美德；批評當代學人不理會新發現的資料，而只顧頑固地維護己見。劉歆自著史書《世經》另闢蹊徑，對神話傳說中的王者領袖的事蹟編年，發揮己見。他認為漢武帝的榮譽稱號是實至名歸的，因而確保了這位皇帝的名聲能繼續流傳後世。劉歆在神學思想上有忤逆他人處，在其寫作中他認同君權天授，而不是君權神授。此外，對於《左傳》所載的自然災異現象，劉歆驗諸相關的人為道德並視為天災的因由。

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關鍵詞： 劉歆 漢代宗教 王莽 祕府 《左傳》

