

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

HISTORIANS OF ABNORMALITY:
ANOMALY DISCOURSE IN HAN DYNASTY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND
ITS ANTECEDENTS IN WARRING STATES TEXTUAL TRADITIONS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY
DAVID H. HOGUE

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
JUNE 2023

In memory of my father,

Jerry F. Hogue

(1923-1994)

“When a peculiarly shaped, rather large toadstool grew up in a carpenter’s house in the short space of a few days (or, some said, a few hours), people came from miles around to see it, and everyone had some sort of explanation—some animist, some animatist, some not quite either—for it. Yet it would be hard to argue that the toadstool had any social value in Radcliffe-Brown’s sense, or was connected in any way with anything which did and for which it could have been standing proxy, like the Andaman cicada. Toadstools play about the same role in Javanese life as they do in ours, and in the ordinary course of things Javanese have about as much interest in them as we do. It was just that this one was ‘odd’, ‘strange’, ‘uncanny’—*aneh*. And the odd, strange, and uncanny simply must be accounted for—or, again, the conviction that it *could be accounted for* sustained. One does not shrug off a toadstool which grows five times as fast as a toadstool has any right to grow.” (Clifford Geertz, 1973)¹

“Studies of brain responses have shown that violations of normality are detected with astonishing speed and subtlety.” (Daniel Kahneman, 2011)²

¹ Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 101.

² Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 74.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	viii
Acknowledgments	x
Abstract	xii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Intrusive, Meaningful Abnormality: Bizarre Incidents Analyzed as the Effects of Human Corruption in a Textual Artifact of Eastern Han Cosmological Thought, the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (“Treatise of the Five Elements”).....	7
I. Introduction.....	7
II. An Eastern Han Compendium of Anomaly: Ban Gu’s 班固 “Wuxing zhi”.....	11
III. The “Wuxing zhi” Structure: Cataloguing Anomalous Events Recorded in Early Chinese Historical Texts.....	20
IV. Issues in Classifying According to the Six Terms for Anomalies in the <i>Zhuan</i> 傳 (“Tradition”).....	54
V. Conclusion.....	77
Chapter 2 “Cold and heat repeatedly came in response” 寒奧輒應: Human Corruption and Abnormal Meteorological Events in the “Wuxing zhi”.....	81
I. Introduction.....	81
II. Anomalous Weather Events and their Etiology.....	81
III. Anomalous Weather as Notable Because Destructive.....	90
IV. Conclusion.....	98

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Chapter 3	Comparative Analysis of Eastern Han Sources: Anomaly and Strangeness in Another Work of Eastern Han Cosmological Thought, the <i>Lun heng</i> 論衡 (“Arguments in the Balance”)...99	
I.	Introduction.....	99
II.	The Concept of <i>yao</i> 妖 (“ominously eerie occurrence”) in the <i>Lun heng</i>	100
III.	The Concept of <i>yi</i> 異 (“intense irregularity”) in the <i>Lun heng</i>	116
IV.	The Concept of <i>guai</i> 怪 (“prodigy”) in the <i>Lun heng</i>	121
V.	Conclusion.....	130
Chapter 4	Stratigraphic Analysis of the “Wuxing zhi”: Western Han Scholarship and the Grounding of Anomaly-Centered Political Thought in Systematized Material Philosophy and the Historic Record.....	134
I.	Introduction.....	134
II.	Secondary Literature on Western Han Anomaly-Centered Political Philosophy.....	136
III.	Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 1: Ban Gu’s Account of the Origins of the “Wuzing zhi” Conceptual View and His Analysis of Pre-Eastern Han Anomalies.....	162
IV.	Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 2: Engaging an Elaborated Material Philosophy of Anomaly for the Interpretation of Historical Events (Liu Xiang’s 劉向 Analysis of <i>Chunqiu</i> History Using the <i>Wuxing zhuan</i> 五行傳 [“Five Elements Tradition”] as an Analytical Tool).....	201
V.	Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 3: Dong Zhongshu’s 董仲舒 Grounding of Anomaly-Centered Political Philosophy in the <i>Chunqiu</i> Historical Record.....	226
VI.	Conclusion.....	243

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Chapter 5 The Antecedents of Western Han Anomaly Discourse in Pre-Han Textual Traditions.....	249
I. Introduction.....	249
II. Liu Xiang and the <i>Zuo zhuan</i> 左傳 (“Zuo Tradition”).....	249
III. Dong Zhongshu, the <i>Zhou yi</i> 周易 (“Changes of Zhou”), and the <i>Gongyang zhuan</i> 公羊傳 (“Gongyang Tradition”).....	257
IV. Conclusion.....	268
Conclusion	271
Bibliography	276

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Visual Form of the Graph <i>guai</i> 怪.....	42
Figure 4.1. Bielenstein's Chart (I): Yearly Mean Values of Recorded Eclipses Less Actual Eclipses ($E_r - E_a$) For the Reigns of the Western Han Emperors.....	144
Figure 4.2. Bielenstein's Chart (II): Yearly Mean Values of Recorded Anomalies Interpreted as Bad Omens (Excluding Eclipses) for the Reigns of the Western Han Emperors.....	146
Figure 4.3. Comparison of Time Distribution of Defined Sets of Anomalous Events Listed in the "Wuxing zhi" as Having Occurred in the Qin-Western Han Period (Shown by Recorded Year of Occurrence).....	186

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1. Passages of the “Hong fan” and Corresponding Passages of the <i>Zhuan</i> Cited in the “Wuxing zhi”	27
Table 1.2. Sub-Categories of Anomaly that Correspond to Corruption in the Five Matters and Royal Perfection.....	30
Table 1.3. Types of Vapor and Colors of Elements Affected by Corruption in the Five Matters and Royal Perfection.....	49
Table 1.4. Events Classified Using the Term <i>yao</i> 妖 (“eerie occurrence”) in Jing Fang’s <i>Yi zhuan</i>	68
Table 1.5. Events Classified Using the Term <i>yi</i> 異 (“intense irregularity”) in Jing Fang’s <i>Yi zhuan</i>	74
Table 4.1. Ban Gu’s Framework of Associations in the Preface to the “Wuxing zhi”.....	169
Table 4.2. No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” (Tabulated by Source).....	176
Table 4.3. No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” for which Comments by Liu Xiang are Appended (Tabulated by Source).....	177
Table 4.4. No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” for which Comments by Dong Zhongshu are Appended (Tabulated by Source).....	177
Table 4.5. No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” That Contain Either No Comments or Only Comments Without Attribution (Tabulated by Source).....	179

LIST OF TABLES (CONTINUED)

Table 4.6. *Wuxing zhuan* Terms Used by Liu Xiang.....**204**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the help and support of a number of key individuals. First and foremost, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to the three members of my dissertation committee. Professor Edward Shaughnessy, my committee chair, read through countless drafts of each chapter and consistently provided detailed and pointed feedback, pushing me to constantly improve the quality of my work. Professor Donald Harper challenged me to address important conceptual issues that lay at the center of my research and to maintain a high standard of precision and rigor in investigating early Chinese intellectual history. At several crucial moments during the initial process of developing my dissertation topic and then later as I advanced through the stages of writing and revision, Professor Haun Saussy provided indispensable encouragement and insightful suggestions about how to better present my ideas and relate them to currents in contemporary scholarship. I am deeply grateful for the generous contributions of all three of my committee members and for all I have learned under their auspices.

I must express my thanks to the University of Chicago Division of the Humanities for having provided me with fellowship funding that supported me through two years of dissertation research and writing. Likewise, I am indebted to the University of Chicago Center for East Asian Studies Committee on China Studies, which generously awarded me a grant that funded my third and final year of dissertation writing.

I was fortunate to have been allowed to complete my dissertation remotely from my current place of residence in South Korea. As I was researching and writing, Professor Kim Byung-joon 金秉駿 of Seoul National University (SNU) graciously invited me to speak about

my research at two separate meetings of his advisee study group. The thoughtful feedback I received from him, his colleagues (including Professor Choi Jin-mook 崔振默 of Yonsei University), and his students was invaluable. As I assayed different lines of progression from the starting point of the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 in the Eastern Han, Professor Shim Jae-hoon 沈載勳 of Dankook University (and Ph.D. alum of the University of Chicago) generously shared with me reference materials in early Chinese paleography. Professor Lee Dong-chul 李東哲 of Yong In University also provided critical help in obtaining physical copies of needed sources.

My greatest thanks I reserve for my mother, Harriett (née: Neff), for her unwavering encouragement and support; for my parents-in-law, who have been the source of all kinds of motivation and help; and for my wife, Sakong Kwansook 司空寬淑, who patiently indulged me in countless hours of conversation about the “Wuxing zhi” and early Chinese accounts of anomaly, and who has enriched my life in so many ways.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an account of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) tradition of locating the cause of certain natural anomalies in human political action and interpreting such anomalies as being associated with disruption and collapse. A significant component of Han dynasty political philosophy was expressed in the form of anomaly discourse, as were many of the important critical views on politics and history held by the preeminent scholars and thinkers of the age. Without developing an understanding of Han anomaly discourse, it is impossible to gain a comprehensive view of Han political philosophy or to understand the arguments that Han thinkers applied to basic questions like “What is a virtuous ruler?”, “What constitutes a successful or failing state?”, and “Is there such a thing as effective statecraft?” Here the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (“Treatise of the Five Elements”) chapter of the *Han shu* 漢書 (“Documents of the Han”) serves as a foundational source for understanding the concepts and terminology of this important trend in Han intellectual life. The “Wuxing zhi” is essentially a catalogue of some four hundred documented anomalous events. In this text, Eastern Han (25-220 C.E.) scholar Ban Gu 班固 (ca. 32-92 C.E.) presented a complicated theoretical apparatus which drew from a collective body of textual works and commentaries ascribed to multiple figures in the Western Han (206 B.C.E.-9 C.E.) tradition of anomaly discourse. Chapters 1 and 2 map the conceptual structure of the “Wuxing zhi.” Chapter 3 studies how certain chapters in Eastern Han scholar Wang Chong’s 王充 (27-c. 97 C.E.) *Lun heng* 論衡 (“Arguments in the Balance”) engage and discuss ideas embedded in the terms *yao* 妖, *yi* 異, and *guai* 怪, also found in the “Wuxing zhi.” Chapter 4 uses Ban Gu’s biographical accounts of the lives and scholarly work of Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-c. 6 B.C.E.) and Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195-ca. 115 B.C.E.) and records of

memorials submitted by them to the Han court to contextualize and further reconstruct the development of analytical approaches to historical anomalies in the Eastern and Western Han periods. Chapter 5 argues that just as Liu Xiang adopted the taxonomy of the *Wuxing zhuan* 五行傳 (“Five Elements Tradition”) commentary on the “Hong fan” 洪範 (“Great Plan”) to analyze history, Dong Zhongshu’s views were heavily informed by the hermeneutical system and terminology of the *Gongyang* 公羊 commentary on the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (“Springs and Autumns”). Thus, while historical study was the dominant preoccupation of Han anomaly discourse and the primary mode through which it sought to ground its political-philosophical claims, the analytical approaches developed in the tradition to observe the historical record came about as the absorption of trends in Western Han and Warring States (468-221 B.C.E.) hermeneutic scholasticism.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an account of the Han dynasty tradition of locating the cause of certain natural anomalies in human political action and interpreting such anomalies as being associated with disruption and collapse. It argues that previous approaches of modern scholarship to analyzing the principal source texts of Han anomaly discourse—namely, those contained in Eastern Han (25–220 C.E.) scholar Ban Gu’s 班固 (ca. 32–92 C.E.) *Han shu* 漢書 (“Documents of the Han”)—have been overly preoccupied with questioning the historicity and scientific value of the contents of those sources, and have neglected to take into consideration the likely susceptibility of those sources to copying and recording errors during the process of their compilation and transmission and the accretive nature of their compilation. These tendencies have had the effect of consigning the Han tradition of anomaly discourse to the status of superstition, at best, or when viewed less generously, to that of quackery and fraud, and has prevented the development of a precise and informative chronology of the history of Han anomaly discourse.

As this dissertation demonstrates, this is a lamentable oversight, since a significant component of Han dynasty political philosophy was expressed in the form of anomaly discourse, as were many of the important critical views on politics and history held by the preeminent scholars and thinkers of the age. Since Han political philosophy and anomaly discourse were so often intertwined, without developing an understanding of Han anomaly discourse, it can be reasonably argued that it is impossible to gain a comprehensive view of Han political philosophy or to understand the arguments that Han thinkers applied to basic questions like “What is a

virtuous ruler?”, “What constitutes a successful or failing state?”, and “Is there such a thing as effective statecraft?”

Orienting itself in relation to issues raised in previous scholarship, this dissertation constructs a chronology of the development and evolution of Han anomaly discourse that was expressed as a component of the discipline of political philosophy. It takes the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (“Treatise of the Five Elements”) chapter of the *Han shu* as a foundational source for understanding the concepts and terminology of this important trend in Han intellectual life. The “Wuxing zhi” is essentially a catalogue of some four hundred anomalous events that are recorded as having occurred at different times over the course of a period of time comprising the Spring and Autumn (722-468 B.C.E.) period, the period of Qin 秦 hegemony and empire (ca. 350-206 B.C.E.), and the Western Han (206 B.C.E.-8 C.E.) period. Within the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu presented a complicated theoretical apparatus which posited that the anomalous events in human history included in its record had been triggered by human corruption and demonstrated how details of these anomalies varied according to the nature and magnitude of the human failing that had putatively caused them. This apparatus itself was not produced *ex nihilo*, but was synthesized from a collected body of textual works and commentaries ascribed to multiple figures in the Western Han tradition of anomaly discourse. Chapters 1 and 2 map the conceptual structure of the “Wuxing zhi,” with its foundation in the framework of the *Wuxing zhuan* 五行傳 (“Five Elements Tradition”) commentary to the *Hong fan* 洪範 (“Great Plan”) chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (“Exalted Documents”), and identify and explicate its core terminology and principles.

In order to understand the extent to which terms and concepts expressed in Ban Gu's theoretical system were part of wider trends in Eastern Han discourse, Chapter 3 studies how certain chapters in Eastern Han scholar Wang Chong's 王充 (27-c. 97 C.E.) *Lun heng* 論衡 ("Arguments in the Balance") engage and discuss ideas embedded in the terms *yao* 妖 ("ominously eerie occurrence"), *yi* 異 ("intense irregularity"), and *guai* 怪 ("prodigy"), all of which appear in the "Wuxing zhi." Chapter 3 finds that while Wang Chong used those terms in ways remarkably similar to Ban Gu and employed a like system of material analysis to understand the immediately physical causes of anomalous events, unlike Ban Gu, he argued that there is no element or dynamic existing in the material or divine components of the universe that is responsive to human moral values. Despite points of difference with Ban Gu's system, Wang Chong's essays demonstrate that anomaly discourse was in the Eastern Han a vital topos in which debates about the forces that inform human history and the nature of divine influence unfolded.

Chapter 4 turns toward the Western Han tradition of anomaly discourse that is documented in the "Wuxing zhi." While the "Wuxing zhi" was compiled in the Eastern Han, since it was synthesized from texts, commentaries, and records produced in the Western Han, it is a rich and reliable source for constructing a chronology of the tradition as it developed in that earlier period. Chapter 4 adopts a "stratigraphic" method in order to track the accretive process by which the contents of the "Wuxing zhi" came into being. By this method, it delineates multiple layers of historical analysis corresponding to different points in time, starting from Ban Gu's adoption of the entire accreted body of historical analysis theory yielded by Western Han anomaly discourse in order to review the record of anomalies that were reported as having

occurred in Western Han history. Chapter 4 then moves on to identify and describe Liu Xiang's integration of the taxonomical terminology of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* 洪範五行傳 ("Great Plan Five Elements Tradition") into historical analysis of *Chunqiu* 春秋 ("Springs and Autumns") (722-468 B.C.E.) anomaly history (and, to some extent, Western Han anomaly history) in the late Western Han. It finishes by delineating Dong Zhongshu's seminal version of anomaly theory derived from his study of the *Gongyang* 公羊 commentary to the *Chunqiu* and built around concepts of *zai nan* 災難 ("disastrous harm"), *guai yi* 怪異 ("prodigious and ominously eerie occurrences"), and *xiang* 象 ("image"). Chapter 4 uses Ban Gu's biographical accounts of the lives and scholarly work of Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu and records of memorials submitted by them to the Han court to contextualize and further reconstruct the development of the analytical approaches to historical anomalies discerned from their comments on historical anomalies that are documented in the "Wuxing zhi." It demonstrates that Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu experienced a need to ground claims of anomaly-centered political philosophy in rigorously organized, external bodies of knowledge: for Liu Xiang, this was the elaborated material philosophy of anomalous occurrences based in *wuxing* 五行 ("five elements") theory that was articulated in the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*; and prior to Liu Xiang, Dong Zhongshu presented his claims as being his conclusions deduced from intensive study of the *Chunqiu* historical record.

Chapter 5 focuses in on the specific immediate influences exerted by late Warring States (468-221 B.C.E.) and Western Han hermeneutical scholasticism on the analytical positions of Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu. It argues that anomaly discourse contents in the *Zuo zhuan* had only a minor direct influence on Liu Xiang, but that Dong Zhongshu's views were heavily

informed by the hermeneutical position and terminology of the *Gongyang* commentary on *Chunqiu*.

The trend in Han intellectual history to locate the cause of certain natural anomalies in human political action and interpret such anomalies as being associated with disruption and collapse conventionally has been referred to as “omenology” in English-language scholastic literature. However, a significant component of the Han practice of observing anomalous events for the purpose of determining in those events (or conferring on them) meanings relevant to human society was a preoccupation with describing the external, objective features of those events as startling, abnormal occurrences in of themselves, prior to their being inlaid with any omenological significance. Accordingly, to refer to the tradition as a whole, I have adopted an English version of the nomenclature that is commonly used in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean-language scholastic literature to describe the claims of the tradition and is derived from the language of the tradition itself—i.e., *zaiyi lun* 災異論 (“arguments about disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”) or *sai’i setsu | jae’i seor* 災異說 (“discourse about disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”): I use the phrase “anomaly discourse” as an approximation of these. This mode of description has the advantage of being able to encompass the total process of argumentation seen in the Han tradition of observing and drawing conclusions from abnormal events, which typically moved from an account of the anomaly itself (at which point it was an event that merely might have been an omen) to statements that affirmed its status as a sign or proxy of something else and then determined what that something else was. Moreover, since the terms “portent” and “omen” carry an emphasis on the forewarning nature of events that are designated as such, their use creates a tension with a central conceptual feature of the Han

practice of observing and assigning meanings to abnormal events, which was that generally the natural anomalies designated as holding significance to human society were presented as being an indicator of both something that had already happened (i.e., human corruption or psychological disruption and concomitant changes in divine will, physical forces, or both) as well as something that was likely to happen in the future as a result of the behaviors or conditions that had stimulated the anomaly in the first place. With their implied emphases on future events, the terms “portent” and “omen” fail to communicate the portion of this conceptual view that refers to the conditions that had already taken place as of the time of the anomaly being observed and which were understood as its ultimate cause. The term “anomaly discourse,” which makes no reference to a particular time frame, is able to encompass this aspect, and is therefore, I believe, preferable to “omenology.”

**CHAPTER 1, Intrusive, Meaningful Abnormality:
Bizarre Incidents Analyzed as the Effects of Human Corruption in a
Textual Artifact of Eastern Han Cosmological Thought, the
“Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (“Treatise of the Five Elements”)**

I. Introduction

The present chapter is a study of concepts of anomaly and strangeness in the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (“Treatise of the Five Elements”), an Eastern Han (25-220 C.E.) text—compiled as a chapter in Ban Gu’s 班固 (32-92 C.E.) *Han shu* 漢書 (“Documents of the Han”)—that catalogues and theorizes anomalous incidents recorded in early Chinese history. In the past decades, scholarly discussion of Han cosmological thinking has directed itself to the analysis of certain key texts from that period, most prominent among which are perhaps the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (“Masters of Huainan”), a Western Han work of commentarial philosophy composed sometime in the mid-second century B.C.E., and the “Wuxing zhi” itself.¹ Studies directed at these two sources—either informed by or orienting themselves in relation to the descriptive category of “correlative thinking” inherited from earlier twentieth-century scholarship that followed a more general rubric encompassing early Chinese thought (with a focus on pre-Han sources) or traditional Chinese thought taken as whole²—have provided valuable insights into

¹ I understand the term “cosmology” as referring to knowledge concerned with the fundamental nature of the universe, its basic components, the principles that govern those components, and the place of humans in the cosmos. Notable examples of analyses of these two sources of Han cosmological thought are (for the *Huainanzi* 淮南子) Michael Puett, “Violent Misreadings: The Hermeneutics of Cosmology in the *Huainanzi*,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 72 (2000): 29-47; and (for the “Wuxing zhi” 五行志) the fourth chapter (“Moralizing Cosmology and Transforming Imperial Sovereignty”) of Aihe Wang 王愛和, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 129-72.

² Marcel Granet’s *La pensée chinoise*, written in 1934 using pre-Han sources as the basis of its analysis, was perhaps the earliest work of scholarship to explicitly use the terminology of “correlation” (i.e., *corrélations* and *corrélatifs*) to describe features of traditional Chinese thinking. See Marcel Granet, *La pensée chinoise* (N.p.: 2012, Kindle Edition [labelled as “Collection Etudes” and “Anthropologie”]), 299, 307, 357, et. al. However, as Haun Saussy points out, prior to *La pensée chinoise*, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss in the early years of the twentieth century, while not explicitly using such terms, had described what were in substance correlative patterns in traditional Chinese thinking in their sociological work, “On Some Primitive Forms of Classification: A Contribution

Han cosmological discourse. Among these have been glancing views into concepts of anomaly and strangeness as they were understood in Han thinking. However, despite these initial forays, a number of topics have been to a great extent overlooked. These include the essentially problematic nature of anomaly and strangeness in the Han view of human society in its relation to its material environment in the cosmos, the urgency with which Han thinking sought to position itself *vis-à-vis* the anomalous and the strange, and the specific features and vocabulary of such discourse in the Han.

For the purpose of building a picture of Han thinking on anomalies, the present chapter examines the “Wuxing zhi,” a textual artifact that comprises an important statement of Eastern Han cosmological beliefs. This chapter observes in detail the specific events and situations that it labels or describes as anomalous or strange, the meanings and explanations that it attaches to such events and situations, and the language by which the “Wuxing zhi” expresses ideas of anomaly and strangeness. It demonstrates three key features of the treatment of anomaly in the “Wuxing zhi”: (1) there is a broad range of events that the “Wuxing zhi” considers to be anomalous; (2) the “Wuxing zhi” interprets anomalies as having arisen ultimately because of human transgression; (3) while the “Wuxing zhi” draws on multiple lexica to describe and

to the Study of Collective Representations,” which in turn drew from the scholarship of a 19th-century forebear, ethnologist J.J.M. de Groot. See Haun Saussy, “Correlative Cosmology and Its Histories,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 72 (2000): 13-28. Cited in Saussy’s article are Emile Durkheim and Marcell Mauss, “De quelques formes primitives de classification: contribution à l’étude des représentations collectives,” *L’Année sociologique* 6 (1901-1902): 1-72; and Jan Jakob Maria de Groot, *The Religious System of China* (6 vols., 1892-1912; rpt., Taipei: Chengwen, 1967). It is common knowledge that the use of correlative cosmology as an analytical approach had a deep influence on later twentieth century scholarship aimed at early Chinese thought, as can be seen, for example, in A.C. Graham’s late twentieth century work *Disputers of the Tao*, which focuses primarily on pre-Han thought and discusses the origins of correlative cosmological thinking prior to the Han. See A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (Chicago and Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court Press, 2003), 315-370.

classify anomalous events for the purpose of relating them to human behavior, these share much of the same terminology (even if they imbue the same terms with subtly different meanings).

Using the “Wuxing zhi” as a source for Eastern Han language and thought has its advantages and limitations. For the advantages, the dating and authorship of the “Wuxing zhi” is well-established.³ It is a philosophical treatise that contains ample explanations of its terminology and plenteous context for their use, so that it is possible to develop a relatively firm understanding of the vocabulary that it uses to describe ideas of anomaly. Moreover, the “Wuxing zhi” can be used as a source for periods earlier than the era in which it was composed. Because the “Wuxing zhi” is built on a variety of pre-existing textual sources dated to the Western Han and the pre-Han period, in its self-conscious incorporation of these sources and its attention to explicating them, it provides a means of peering backwards into the past from its perspective in the Eastern Han while serving as an immediate source for Eastern Han thinking.

Despite this, caution is necessary. Immanent in the structure of the “Wuxing zhi” is the understanding that there was a continuous tradition (or at least a line of discourse that developed through time) of interpreting anomalous incidents as arising from human error that began in the Western Zhou period (c. 1045-c. 771 B.C.E.) with events recorded in the “Hong fan” 洪範 (“Great Plan”)—implicitly understood as a Western Zhou source—and continued up until the time of Ban Gu’s compilation of the “Wuxing zhi” in the Eastern Han. Although the existence of an exegetical tradition centered around the “Hong fan” was, judging from the contents of the *Han shu*, active in the Western Han (and possibly had already come into being prior to the Han

³ For the dating and authorship of the *Han shu*, see A.F.P. Hulsewé, “*Han shu* 漢書” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, Calif.: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), 129-36.

dynasty), it should be kept in mind that the historical framework that Ban Gu elaborates for the purpose of arranging theoretical explanations of anomaly into an account that lends them a basis in canonical text is most likely not accurate in all of its details (while at the same time reliably reflecting conventional scholastic views of his time). Moreover, in the case of at least one of the Western Han scholars Ban Gu cites, Jing Fang 京房 (77-37 B.C.E.), even though Jing Fang's statements are useful sources for vocabulary and treatment of anomaly in the Western Han period, Jing Fang's relation to any exegetical tradition centered on the "Hong fan" is unclear.

Another significant limitation of the "Wuxing zhi" is that although it provides abundant context for the terminology it uses, because much of its vocabulary is a codified lexicon used to express anomaly and strangeness, its terms might be thought of as being specific to the "Wuxing zhi" or to the putative exegetical tradition of which it presents itself as the synthesized exponent. Thus it is necessary to be aware when its terms carry meanings specific to the system of thought contained in the "Wuxing zhi" and when they occur in usages that it could be expected would also occur in other texts of the Eastern Han period.

While the extent to which the "Wuxing zhi" provides a completely accurate view of its source texts unclouded by its own potentially idiosyncratic interpretation of them is debatable, examining it with a critical eye in theory allows an observer a level of moderation. In many cases the contrasting uses of the same terminology among sources is so conspicuous that fault lines are clearly visible, and made all the more obvious by Ban Gu's frequent demarcation of which content comes from which sources. As for the use of the "Wuxing zhi" as an embodiment of the thought and language of its own time, it should not be thought of as having the final word on Eastern Han belief about the anomalous and the strange. However, the "Wuxing zhi" can be used

as a stable reference point for Eastern Han language and thought as well as a useful secondary source for research into Western Han and pre-Han time frames.

II. An Eastern Han Compendium of Anomaly: Ban Gu's 班固 “Wuxing zhi” 五行志 (“Treatise of the Five Elements”)

II.A. “A Loud Sound Like the Pealing of a Bell” 大聲如鐘鳴

The “Wuxing zhi” chapter of Ban Gu's *Han shu*, in its catalogue containing numerous accounts of strange and unusual incidents from early Chinese history, includes an episode that is said to have occurred at the Han court in the spring of 5 B.C.E., during the last years of Western Han rule:

哀帝建平二年四月乙亥朔，御史大夫朱博為丞相，少府趙玄為御史大夫，臨廷登受策，有大聲如鐘鳴，殿中郎吏陞者皆聞焉。上以問黃門侍郎楊雄，李尋。⁴

On the *yihai*₁₂ day of the fourth month—the first day of that month—in the second year [5 B.C.E.] of the Jianping period [6-3 B.C.E.] of Thearch Ai [r. 7-1 B.C.E.], Censorate Chief Prosecutor Zhu Bo became Chancellor, and Deputy Repositor Zhao Xuan became Censorate Chief Prosecutor. When they were just about to be greeted to go up and receive their commission at the imperial throne-hall, there was a loud sound like the pealing of a bell. The gentleman officers in the throne-hall and the guards at the stairs all heard it there. They went up and asked Yellow Gate Official Gentleman Yang Xiong and Li Xun about it.⁵

Like so many of the episodes catalogued in “Wuxing zhi,” this is essentially a story about a weird event. Ban Gu's account describes how, just before a commissioning ceremony in which two officials of the Han court, Zhu Bo 朱博 (d. 5 B.C.E.) and Zhao Xuan 趙玄 (fl. c. 5 B.C.E.), are to be promoted, there is “a loud sound like the pealing of a bell” 大聲如鐘鳴 that is heard at the entrance to the imperial throne hall when the two men arrive. There is nothing particularly

⁴ Ban Gu 班固 et al., *Han shu* 漢書 (Zhonghua shuju: Beijing, 1962 [22nd printing, 2019]), 1429. Abbreviated hereafter as *HS*.

⁵ The phrase *yushi dafu* 御史大夫 (“Censorate Chief Prosecutor”) has also been translated into English as “Imperial Grand Counselor.”

strange about the sound of bells *per se*, but here there is a sense of eeriness, because no bell has been rung. The sound seems to have come from a phantom realm.

The event is a shared, communal experience. Ban Gu recalls that “the gentleman officers in the throne-hall and the guards at the stairs all heard it there” 殿中郎吏陞者皆聞焉. No one can deny that strange sound was heard. The sense of alarm among the officers and guards at the entry of the throne hall is palpable in the promptness with which they go up into the inner chambers of the hall to ask about the sound. Clearly, the sound of a bell when no bell has been rung is troubling to them, and they feel that it demands some kind of explanation.

In their desire for an explanation, the officers and the guards seek out two individuals, Li Xun 李尋 (fl. late 1st century B.C.E.) and Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.), both of whom serve in the Western Han court and are accomplished scholars of their time. They share the title of Yellow Gate Officiant Gentleman 黃門侍郎, which carries a grandiosity that reflects their status as exemplars of learning. That the officers and guards have come to them seeking an explanation of the strange sound signifies that they are viewed as authorities possessed of special insight into the happenings of the world. If anyone can explain what is behind the noise, they can.

II.B. The Explanation of Li Xun 李尋 (et al.)

Ban Gu recounts the speech that Li Xun delivers to provide an explanation for the strange sound:

洪範所謂鼓妖者也。師法以為人君不聽，為眾所惑，空名得進，則有聲無形，不知所從生。其傳曰歲月日之中，則正卿受之。今以四月日加辰巳有異，是謂中

焉。正卿謂執政大臣也。宜退丞相、御史，以應天變。然雖不退，不出期年，其人自蒙其咎。⁶

This is a sounded eerie occurrence like those spoken of in the *Great Plan*. If one simply follows the precedents in order to serve as the ruler of humans, but is not astute, one will be misled by common people, and those of empty fame will obtain advancement; there will thus be sounds that do not have a physical shape, and no one will know how they have been generated. Its *Tradition* states that if it is in the middle of the year, month, and day, the chief ministers will thus receive it. Now there has been an intensely irregular occurrence on a day in the fourth month and, what is more, at the *chen*₅ double-hour and *si*₆ double-hour. The “chief ministers” refers to senior ministers holding office. Those who are in the positions of Chancellor and Chief Prosecutor should be made to resign, and so respond to the mutations of heaven. However, even if they do not resign, before the year is out these men will be brought to ruin by their own devices.

Li Xun’s explanation is a complex patchwork of technical jargon and schemata from what is presented in the “Wuxing zhi” as a tradition of cosmological theory in which anomalous events in nature were interpreted as reverberations of odious behaviors and practices in human society, generally perpetrated by political leaders (in an early Chinese context, these were either the lords of feudal states or emperors who presided over conglomerations of individual polities). At the center of this tradition is the “Hong fan” 洪範 (“Great Plan”), a Warring States text that joined political theory with material philosophy and was by the time of the Western Han a canonized work. Li Xun identifies the ringing of the phantom bell as a “sounded eerie occurrence” 鼓妖, an analytical term that he names as originating in the “Hong fan.”⁷ By Ban Gu’s own account elsewhere in the “Wuxing zhi,” in the exegetical tradition of the “Hong fan,”

⁶ *HS*, 1429. The phrase *shi fa* 師法, which I have translated as “follows the precedents,” might also be translated as “the precedents of masters.”

⁷ As the term “sounded eerie occurrences” 鼓妖 does not occur in extant versions of the “Hong fan,” it is likely that Li Xun’s attribution of the term to the “Hong fan” (“this is a sounded eerie occurrence like those spoken of in the *Great Plan*” 洪範所謂鼓妖者也) was understood as referring generally to the “Hong fan” together with its tradition of textual and oral commentary.

the term “sounded eerie occurrence” 鼓妖 refers to strange noises that are heard in times when political leaders fail to show “astuteness” 聰 in “listening” 聽. Ban Gu presents the latter two terms as also being prominently featured in that same tradition, appearing as they do in the “Hong fan” and its later commentaries.⁸

Having identified the odd sound, Li Xun explains its etiology by employing the terminology and ideas of this exegetical tradition surrounding the “Hong fan”—a tradition that, following the text on which it was centered, combined political and material philosophy. He tells how a failure to be “astute” 聰 can cause a political leader to be “misled by common people” 為眾所惑. As a result, individuals who are well-known but ultimately unmeritorious will rise to power; or, as Li Xun puts it, “empty fame will obtain advancement” 空名得進. When this happens, weird, apparently inexplicable phenomena will start to occur. As Li Xun observes, “there will thus be sounds that do not have a physical body, and it will not be known from where they emanate” 則有聲無形不知所從生. Li Xun’s description of sounds without a physical body that seem to come from nowhere fits precisely with the sound that is like the ringing of a bell that the officers and guards heard at the entrance to the throne. Were the detailed etiology provided by Li Xun not enough to identify the type and cause of the event, after Li Xun’s speech Ban Gu gives a brief account of the concurring opinion given by Li Xun’s colleague, Yang Xiong, who also uses the term “sounded eerie occurrence” 鼓妖 and the concept of “listening” 聽 from the “Hong fan” tradition: “Yang Xiong also understood the incident as being a sounded eerie occurrence and an image of the loss of the practice of listening” 楊雄亦以為鼓妖聽失之象也.⁹

⁸ See *HS*, 1421.

⁹ *HS*, 1429.

As a coda to all of these remarks on the nature of the phantom sound and its cause in errant human behavior, Ban Gu cites general comments about disembodied sounds made by Western Han scholar Jing Fang 京房 (77-37 B.C.E.), who had died some three decades prior to the incident at the Han court. Jing Fang writes in his *Yi zhuan* 易傳 (“Tradition of the Changes”)—a work of commentary on the Western Zhou (c. 1045-c. 771 B.C.E.) divination manual, the *Yi jing* 易經—that “if those in command do not refine their foundation, then those below will not be at ease; metal will move without cause, and it will be as if there were sound” 令不修本, 下不安, 金毋故自動, 若有音.¹⁰ This corroborates Li Xun’s and Yang Xiong’s diagnosis: the strange sound has happened because of deficiencies in political leadership, which has caused the metal 金 element in the environs of the throne-hall to vibrate spontaneously.

Now that the category into which the strange event falls and its cause have been identified, what is left is to work back from its details to uncover the flaw in government. Li Xun elaborates his etiology of the strange sound by referring to a work of exegesis on the “Hong fan” that he names as the *Zhuan* 傳 (“Tradition”). He tells how the *Zhuan* contains a schema for determining who are the errant individuals based on the time of an anomalous event. “If it is in the middle of the year, month, and day” 歲月日之中, he says, “the chief ministers will thus receive it” 則正卿受之 (i.e., the anomalous event will incriminate “the chief ministers” 正卿). Li Xun points out that the day and time at which the event occurred is “a day in the fourth month and, what is more, at the *chen*₅ double-hour and *si*₆ double-hour” 四月日加辰巳; as such, the

¹⁰ *HS*, 1429. For the dating and composition of the *Yi jing*, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “*I ching* 易經” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 216-28.

sound incriminates the “chief ministers” holding office in government. “Chief ministers” is a relatively vague term, so Li Xun specifies that it refers to the “senior ministers holding office” 執政大臣, which he further specifies as referring to the Chancellor 丞相 and Chief Prosecutor 御史. Fittingly, these are the two men who were just then being commissioned, Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan. Li Xun calls on them to resign.

II.C. Ban Gu’s Remarks

Ban Gu’s direct comments on the episode serve as a complement to Li Xun and Yang Xiong’s statements, providing more details on why it is that Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan were poor candidates for political promotion. “As a person,” Ban Gu says, “Zhu Bo pushed the limits of being domineering and engaged a great deal in schemes for power. He was suited to being a general but was not suited to being a minister. I am afraid that he had anger that was horrifying and fierce” 朱博為人疆豪多權謀宜將不宜相恐有凶惡亟疾之怒.¹¹ Ban Gu also recounts how Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan later that same year are found to be engaging in acts of conspiracy, which becomes their undoing: “In August, Bo and Xuan were convicted of having engaged in perfidious scheming” 八月博玄坐為姦謀博自殺玄減死論.¹² This fulfills Li Xun’s prediction that Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan would soon get their just deserts regardless of whether or not they resigned: “even if they do not withdraw, before the year is out these people will by their own means suffer their ruin” 雖不退不出期年其人自蒙其咎. Between the lines is a critique of the Han emperor, Thearch Ai, who was reigning at the time: his promoting such men to power clearly showed deficiencies in the emperor’s powers of discernment and judgment in listening;

¹¹ *HS*, 1429.

¹² *HS*, 1429.

presumably, he listened to bad advice from his counselors about whom he should elevate in his court and failed to steel himself against the flattery of fawning, duplicitous courtiers.

II.D. Features of Ban Gu's Account of an Anomalous Event

Viewing Ban Gu's account of the episode of the phantom bell as a textual embodiment of Eastern Han thinking on anomalous occurrences, there are a few points that this account shares with other like accounts in the "Wuxing zhi." These are useful for building a picture of Ban Gu's views on anomalous occurrences.

First, there is the identification of the sound as an anomaly. Li Xun in his speech explicitly uses the word *yi* 異 ("intensely irregular occurrence") to describe the event: "...now there has been something intensely irregular that has occurred" 今...有異. This follows a common-sense notion that when the sound of a bell is heard, there is either a bell that has been struck or there is something bell-like making the sound. The sound of a bell when there is no bell to be found is not normal and runs counter to rules that govern expectations of cause and effect. It is therefore "intensely irregular" 異: it is an anomaly.¹³

¹³ To distinguish between two basic terms that appear in the "Wuxing zhi" for describing anomalous events, *yi* 異 and *guai* 怪, based on the way that these two terms are used in a range of contexts within the "Wuxing zhi," I understand *yi* 異 as describing situations or incidents that have qualities that mark them as being objectively outside what is considered a "normal" range of occurrence (e.g., extreme cold in the summer or an unusually large quantity of snow). Occurrences labelled as *yi* 異 commonly (but not always) are unusual to such a degree that they cause observers to notice them with some level of rapt attention. The word *yi* 異 does not always have a pejorative connotation; and since it denotes events that, because they are unusual, compel attention, an apt translation might be "marvel" (as a noun) or "wondrous" (as an adjective). However, in order to emphasize an objective quality inherent in the word—following its denotation of neutral, objective dissymmetry, as in the phrase *yi xing* 異姓 ("a different surname," rather than "an unusual surname"), which appears elsewhere in the "Wuxing zhi," I translate *yi* 異 as "intensely irregular" or "intensely irregular occurrence." In contrast, I understand *guai* 怪 as describing a subjective (and often acute), mental or emotional sense of uncanniness or weirdness that certain anomalous events stimulate in human observers. I therefore translate *guai* 怪 as "strange" or "prodigy."

Second, the incident, beyond being anomalous, has a valence of strangeness to it. The sound of the phantom bell is clearly eerie to those who are present when the sound occurs, the officers and guards on the steps of the throne-hall. This is seen in their sense of urgency to find out an explanation. Since all events that are outside of the range of the “normal” do not necessarily elicit feelings of eeriness or provoke an urgent call for an explanation of the cause, it is important here to point out that this episode constructs the event as being an anomaly that *does* stimulate those feelings of strangeness and a drive for an explanation. It is an unsettling event, and this is reflected in the language (“sounded eerie occurrence” 鼓妖) that Li Xun and Yang Xiong use to describe it.

Third, the nature and ultimate cause of the event is explained using terms and concepts from a philosophical tradition based in the “Hong fan” and its exegesis by means of written or oral commentary. This tradition has a distinct vocabulary, featuring technical terminology like “listening” 聽, “astute” 聰, and “sounded eerie occurrence” 鼓妖. A foundational concept of this tradition is that corruption in the fabric of society causes strange, anomalous events to happen in nature, and in ways that do not at first sight appear to be connected to human action. Nevertheless, by means of analysis on the part of learned specialists, it is possible to understand their root causes. Ban Gu inserts the content of this tradition through the voices of Li Xun and Yang Xiong, through the remarks of another authority ostensibly connected to that tradition, Jing Fang, and through his own commentary.

Fourth, in Ban Gu’s account, the etiology of the anomalous event that links it to human behavior understands the anomaly primarily as a sign of what has *already taken place*. In his explanation of the cause of event, Li Xun says that if “one is the ruler of humans without being

astute” 為人君不聰 there will “*thus* be sounds that do not have a physical body” 則有聲無形。

His phrasing is not “if there are embodied sounds, *then* there will come rulers who are not astute.” Anomalous events indicate corruption or errancy that has already taken place or is in the process of taking place.

Fifth, although anomalous events indicate actions that have already taken place or are in the process of taking place, they can nevertheless be used to make predictions about the future. Since anomalous events are signs of activity in the human world, an observer can, using the rules and patterns of human society, reason toward what is a likely outcome of the situation in the human world that the anomalous sign points to. Li Xun’s prediction of Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan’s demise (“even if they do not withdraw, before the year is out these people will by their own means suffer their ruin” 雖不退不出期年其人自蒙其咎), suggesting that their own vices will bring about their end, operates on the common sense logic that if their appointment has been enough to trigger the strange sound, then there must be something very wrong in their character; and unless they resign, they “have it coming to them.” (This prediction is borne out by events, making it a convenient prescience that is probably in no small part owing to Ban Gu’s retrospective narration.) However, the phantom sound indicates nothing inevitable about Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan’s demise. The conditional clause (“even if they do not withdraw” 雖不退) in Li Xun’s prediction suggests that they still have a way out; they could still resign and mend their ways. Li Xun as a practitioner of material-political philosophy thus observes an intensely strange, anomalous event, deduces through material philosophy what the anomaly means about human society in the present moment, and then makes a reasoned, common-sense prediction about the future based on that information.

Sixth, and finally, Li Xun's language intimates that the strange event reflects "mutations of heaven" 天變. It is not clear what image of heaven Li Xun has, whether it is an anthropomorphic heaven that observes the human world and is conscious of its happenings, or a non-anthropomorphic ecosphere that changes without sentience in response to human affairs. Nevertheless, Li Xun's observation of the "mutations of heaven" in response to the promotion of two conspiratorial officials suggests that heaven is responsive to the ongoings of human society and has something to do with the occurrence of anomalous events. Anomalous events thus embody the status of heaven, and prudent human action should "respond" 應 to such changes.

III. The "Wuxing zhi" Structure: Cataloguing Anomalous Events Recorded in Early Chinese Historical Texts

Ban Gu's "Wuxing zhi" contains numerous accounts of anomalous events similar to this record of the phantom bell sound at the Han court. These accounts include anomalous occurrences in nature (such as irregular weather, aberrant astronomical phenomena, and unusual animal behavior), anomalies directly involving the human body (like birth deformities and descriptions of the revenant dead) or present in human culture, and the paranormal (such as sightings of mythic creatures and bizarre, inexplicable sounds like the one described above).¹⁴

¹⁴ Lillian Lan-ying Tseng in her discussion of Han scholarly interest in anomalous events observes that Ban Gu wrote the "Wuxing zhi" in order to address the multitude of historical accounts of strange incidents present in archives that he visited: "In the first century, when Ban Gu combed various archives to compile the official history of the Western Han, he wrote *Treatise on the Five Phases (Wuxing zhi 五行志)* to deal with the large corpus of documents about visitations, prodigies, and auspicious omens." See Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2011), 106. (It should be pointed out that there are actually few accounts, if any, in the "Wuxing zhi" of what can be called an "auspicious omen." There are, however, many references to anomalous events that are labelled using the term *xiang* 祥, where it refers to obvious signs of human corruption that foretell likely social disruption to come. In early Chinese texts generally, the term *xiang* 祥 refers to both omens of propitious circumstances and portents of harm. Because of this polysemy, the term can thus be misunderstood as meaning "auspicious omen" in contexts where it actually carries the opposite meaning.) For a basic general analysis of the "Wuxing zhi," see Aihe Wang, 130-55.

The “Wuxing zhi” pulls these accounts from what were in the Eastern Han canonical works of history, like the early Warring States text of the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (“Springs and Autumns”), the Warring States period text of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (“Zuo Tradition”), and Western Han scholar Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (145-86 B.C.E.) *Shi ji* 史記 (“Records of the Historian”), or else recounts the episodes directly. Most of the events that the “Wuxing zhi” catalogues (if not all) are recorded as having happened at different points along a stretch of time spanning the Spring and Autumn (722-468 B.C.E.), Warring States, Qin (221-206 B.C.E.), and Western Han periods. The “Wuxing zhi” is thus a compendium of accounts of anomalous events recorded as having happened in early Chinese history and viewed from the time perspective of the Eastern Han. It is therefore a useful source for Eastern Han beliefs about anomaly and the strange.

While Ban Gu makes his own remarks about the incident of the phantom bell that is catalogues as having taken place in the last years of Western Han rule, his full treatment of the account is not fully visible in his immediate comments on it. This is because of the tiered structure of the “Wuxing zhi.” The “Wuxing zhi” takes as its conceptual foundation a number of key passages from the “Hong fan,” and then elaborates on these passages by means of layers of commentary from the exegetical tradition surrounding that canonical text. Ban Gu provides his own explications of the language and ideas of this tradition, often citing other scholarly sources when he does, and then lists episodes from history in a catalogue organized according to the concepts expressed in the “Hong fan” and its exegetes. He also appends his own remarks to many of these individual episodes as he does in the example above. Thus, in order to fully understand his view on the phantom bell and other anomalous incidents that are portrayed as arising from failures in listening, it is necessary to understand his general comments on

dysfunction in human listening and how it affects the material world, as well as the context of these comments in the multi-tiered structure of the “Wuxing zhi.” Observing the super-structure of the “Wuxing zhi” also leads to an understanding of Ban Gu’s thinking on anomaly in general. What he presents is a comprehensive view (or what purports to be a comprehensive view) that explains a wide range of anomalous events by reference to multiple dimensions of human failure.

III.A. Fundamental Components: The View of the Material World and Human Action Depicted in the “Hong fan” 洪範

In the “Wuxing zhi,” accounts of anomalous events in history are woven into a portrait of nature in which the “five elements” (*wuxing* 五行), “vapors” (*qi* 氣), and flows of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 constitute the basic substances of the material world. Human behavior resonates physically out into the universe through the operation of the five elements and *qi*. This produces effects in the form of anomalous and strange events that cannot immediately be traced to any human action, but nevertheless, through analysis based in the concepts of the five elements, *qi*, and *yin* and *yang*, are found to have ultimately originated in human behavior. In the “Wuxing zhi,” the anomalous and the strange are thus outgrowths of human action.

This connection between human behavior and the anomalous through the operation of the fundamental components of the material world is outlined in a theoretical apparatus articulated by quoting passages from a variety of sources and then explicating them. As is discussed above, of these sources, the “Wuxing zhi” affords the highest level of authority to the text of the “Hong fan.” The “Hong fan,” a “new text” (*jin wen* 今文) chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (“Exalted Documents”), was traditionally understood as having originated in the Western Zhou (c. 1045-c. 771 B.C.E.) period during the reign of King Wu 武王 (r. 1045-1043 B.C.E.), the founder of the

Western Zhou dynasty, but it has been dated by modern scholars to the 4th century B.C.E.¹⁵

While the “Wuxing zhi” makes no statements about the dating of the “Hong fan,” it presumably understands the text to be a relic of the Western Zhou period and the earliest written account of the origin of five elements knowledge. It is therefore at the foundation of the connection that the “Wuxing zhi” draws between human behavior and anomalous events.

The “Hong fan” is an expository text with a basic narrative frame that recounts a conversation between Zhou King Wu and Jizi 箕子 (trad. fl. 11th century B.C.E.), a skilled and knowledgeable retainer of the fallen Shang 商 (ca. 1600-ca. 1045 B.C.E.) dynasty. The preface of the “Hong fan” describes how, in the wake of his conquest of the Shang, King Wu visited Prince Ji to ask how the “unvarying principles” 彝倫 that “heaven” 天 uses to “secure the tranquility of the people below” 驚下民 (i.e., principles for exercising political power to the satisfaction of the ruled) can be “set forth in due order” 攸敘.¹⁶ Prince Ji responded by telling King Wu that in the days of remote antiquity, heaven had given legendary king Yu 禹 such principles, sequenced in the correct order.¹⁷ Jizi then outlined these nine divisions (Jizi refers to them as the “great plan with its nine divisions” 洪範九疇) according to their heaven-granted sequence.

¹⁵ For the traditional attribution of the “Hong fan” and its dating, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “*Shang shu* 尚書 (*Shu ching* 書經)” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 378-9. For dating, see also Michael Nylan, “A Modest Proposal, Illustrated by the Original ‘Great Plan’ and Han Readings,” *Cina* no. 21 (1988): 261, n. 1 [the full article is 251-264]; and Michael Nylan, *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings* (Institut Monumenta Serica in Sankt Augustin and Nettetal in Steyler Verlag, 1992).

¹⁶ The English translation of these phrases from the “Hong fan” is based on James Legge’s (1815-1897) translation in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Hong Kong: At the Author’s; London: Trübner & Co., 1865), 320.

¹⁷ Legge, 323.

The cosmology that the “Wuxing zhi” develops and details is anchored in the content of the nine divisions outlined by Prince Ji in the “Hong fan.” Of these nine divisions, the “Wuxing zhi” places particular emphasis on the first division, which consists of the five elements (water 水, fire 火, wood 木, metal 金, and earth 土), and the second division, which outlines the “five matters” 五事 (demeanor 貌, speech 言, seeing 視, hearing 聽, and thinking 思) that refer to different aspects of human behavior.¹⁸ Along with (1) Jizi’s explanation of the provenance of the nine divisions and (2) Jizi’s overview of them in which he briefly names each division, his detailing of (3) the five elements and (4) the five matters (along with their “verifications” 徵 named in the eighth division) comprise the four passages of the “Hong fan” that the “Wuxing zhi” directly quotes.¹⁹ The commentary to the “Hong fan”—referred to simply as the *Zhuan* 傳 (“Tradition”)—that the “Wuxing zhi” saliently and repeatedly cites to explain the “Hong fan” also makes reference to the fifth division that Prince Ji names: royal perfection 皇極.²⁰ Additionally, the *Zhuan* incorporates into its commentary the terms of the “six extreme evils” 六極 named in the ninth division of the “Hong fan.” The five elements, the five matters and their verifications, the concept of royal perfection, and the six extreme evils as described in the “Hong fan” are thus at the core of the cosmological view outlined in the “Wuxing zhi.”

The “Hong fan” itself makes no explicit statements referring to strange, anomalous events. However, it does describe how human behavior can disrupt the activity of the five

¹⁸ Legge, 323-327.

¹⁹ Jizi’s explanation of the origin of the nine divisions of the “Hong fan” as quoted in the “Wuxing zhi” is in *HS*, 1315. Jizi’s overview of the nine divisions is in *HS*, 1316. The detailing of the five elements is in *HS*, 1318. The detailing of the five matters is in *HS*, 1351.

²⁰ The “Hong fan” passage that explains the concept of royal perfection is in Legge, 328-333. The passage of *Zhuan* (quoted in the “Wuxing zhi”) referring to the concept of royal perfection described in the “Hong fan” is in *HS*, 1458.

elements, as expressed in Prince Ji’s recollection that “in old times, Gun dammed up the inundating waters, throwing their five elements into a disorderly arrangement” 在昔鯀堙洪水，汨陳其五行。²¹ Also, it describes how transgressive human practices bring about extreme weather; such weather is said to constitute the “unfavorable verifications” 咎徵: “there are the unfavorable verifications: namely, of recklessness (like constant rain); of usurpation (like constant *yang*); of indolence (like constant heat); of haste (like constant cold); and of stupidity (like constant wind)” 咎徵: 曰狂，恆雨若；僭，恆陽若；舒，恆奧若；急，恆寒若；霧，恆風若。²² Nevertheless, extreme weather is not explicitly labelled as strange or anomalous; it is placed adjacent to favorable weather on a scale that tilts to the one side or the other according to the constructive or corrupt practices of human society (with a focus on the practices of political leadership in particular). It is the passages of the commentary quoted from the *Zhuan* that are exclusively devoted to expanding these two themes sounded in the “Hong fan”—the potentially disruptive effects of human behavior on the five elements and the connection between human transgression and immediately perceivable events in nature—that introduce a vocabulary expressing anomaly and strangeness.

III.B. Terms for Anomaly: The *Zhuan* 傳 (“Tradition”) to the “Hong fan”

There are divergent views on the authorship of the *Zhuan*, which is frequently referred to by scholars—both ancient and contemporary—as the *Hong fan wuxing zhuan* 洪範五行傳 (“Five Elements Tradition to the Great Plan”). In the Chinese scholastic tradition, the *Zhuan* has been alternately attributed to three different figures who lived during the Warring States, Qin,

²¹ Legge, 323.

²² Legge, 340-1.

and Western Han periods: Fu Sheng 伏生 (fl. ca. 221-178 B.C.E.), Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 (fl. ca. 144-87 B.C.E.), and Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 B.C.E.).²³ Regardless of the uncertainty in its authorship, the *Zhuan* cited in the “Wuxing zhi” seems to have emerged from a tradition of teaching and explication of the text of the “Hong fan” at some point in this period of time spanning the late Warring States, Qin, and Western Han periods.

The “Wuxing zhi” places the *Zhuan* in a prominent position in the interpretation and elaboration of the language of the “Hong fan.” Ban Gu’s citation of passages from the *Zhuan* follows a symmetrical pattern that reflects the penta-dyadic structure of the five elements theory expressed in the “Hong fan.” Of the eleven passages from the *Zhuan* that are quoted in the “Wuxing zhi,” five are devoted to explicating and expanding the description of the five elements made in the “Hong fan,” and five more to the five matters; the one remaining passage corresponds to the concept of royal perfection. In commenting on the five elements, the *Zhuan* lists errant human behaviors that disrupt the normal properties of each of the five elements. Likewise, in explaining the five matters, the *Zhuan* describes how failure to achieve prescribed states of well-being for each of these five aspects of human activity creates abnormal occurrences in nature and human culture. In the “Wuxing zhi,” the position of these passages of the *Zhuan* in relation to the sections of the “Hong fan” that they explicate creates a layered structure that can be mapped as follows:

²³ For recent scholarship discussing the authorship of the *Zhuan* cited in the “Wuxing zhi,” see Ma Nan 马楠, “*Hong fan wuxing zhuan zuozhe buzheng*” 洪範五行傳作者補證 (“Supplementary Proof Regarding the Author of the Great Plan Five Elements Tradition”), *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究 (2013.1): 144; and Ren Milin 任蜜林, “*Hong fan wuxing zhuan xin lun*” 洪範五行傳新論, *Hebei shifan daxue xuebao* 河北師範大學學報 (2020.5): 87-93. Aihe Wang follows the understanding that the *Zhuan* is the chapter that corresponds to the “Hong fan” in Fu Sheng’s commentary on the *Shang shu*, the *Shang shu Da zhuan* 尚書大傳, which was “submitted to the Han Court between 179 and 157 [B.C.E.].” See Aihe Wang, 156, n. 59.

Table 2.1.: Passages of the “Hong fan” and Corresponding Passages of the *Zhuan* Cited in the “Wuxing zhi”

<p>“Hong fan” passage (first division: the five elements)</p>	<p>初一日五行. 五行: 一曰水, 二曰火, 三曰木, 四曰金, 五曰土. 水曰潤下, 火曰炎上, 木曰曲直, 金曰從革, 土爰稼穡.²⁴ (A)</p> <p>Of the divisions, the first is called the five elements. The first is named water; the second, fire; the third, wood; the fourth, metal; the fifth, earth. The nature of water is to soak and descend; of fire to blaze and ascend; of wood, to be crooked and to be straight; of metal to obey and to change; the virtue of earth is seen in seed-sowing and ingathering.²⁵</p>
<p>Corresponding <i>Zhuan</i> passages</p>	<p>田獵不宿, 飲食不享, 出入不節, 奪民農時, 及有姦謀, 則木不曲直.²⁶ (A1)</p> <p>If there is hunting in the open country without respite, sacrificial feasts of food and drink are not made, there is going out and coming in without moderation, the people are deprived of time to farm, or it reaches the degree that there are perfidious deliberations, then wood will not be crooked or straight.</p> <p>棄法律, 逐功臣, 殺太子, 以妾為妻, 則火不炎上.²⁷ (A2)</p> <p>If laws and regulations are abandoned, meritorious vassals are driven out, the grand heir is murdered, or a concubine is installed as a wife, then fire will not blaze or ascend.</p> <p>治宮室, 飾臺榭, 內淫亂, 犯親戚, 侮父兄, 則稼穡不成.²⁸ (A3)</p> <p>If houses and habitations are built, terraces and pavilions are adorned, prodigality and chaos are brought inside, kith and kin are offended, or fathers and elder brothers are insulted, then seed-sowing and ingathering will not be brought to completion.</p> <p>好戰功, 輕百姓, 飾城郭, 侵邊境, 則金不從革.²⁹ (A4)</p> <p>If martial accomplishments are delighted in, the one hundred names are treated lightly, the inner and outer city walls are adorned, or borders with neighboring states are violated, then metal will not obey or change.</p> <p>簡宗廟, 不禱祠, 廢祭祀, 逆天時, 則水不潤下.³⁰ (A5)</p> <p>If the ancestral temple is neglected, prayer and offerings to the gods are not made, sacrifices to the spirits are discarded, or the time of heaven is gone against, then water will not soak or descend.</p>
<p>“Hong fan” passage (second and eighth divisions: the five matters and their verifications)</p>	<p>羞用五事. 五事: 一曰貌, 二曰言, 三曰視, 四曰聽, 五曰思. 貌曰恭, 言曰從, 視曰明, 聽曰聰, 思曰睿. 恭作肅, 從作艾, 明作愆, 聰作謀, 睿作聖. [Passage quoted from the eighth division:] 休徵: 曰肅, 時雨若; 艾, 時陽若; 愆, 時輿若; 謀, 時寒若; 聖, 時風若. 咎徵: 曰狂, 恆雨若; 僭, 恆陽若; 舒, 恆輿若; 急, 恆寒若; 霧, 恆風若.³¹ (B)</p> <p>The reverent practice of the five matters. Of the five matters. The first is called demeanor; the second, speech; the third, seeing; the fourth, listening; and the fifth, thinking. The virtue of the demeanor is called respectfulness; of speech, accordance with reason; of seeing, clearness; of hearing, astuteness; and of thinking, perspicacity. The respectfulness becomes manifest in gravity; accordance with reason, in orderliness; the clearness, in wisdom; the astuteness, in deliberation; and the perspicacity, in sageness.³² [Passage quoted from the eighth division:] There are the favorable verifications: namely, of gravity (like seasonable rain); of orderliness (like seasonable yang); of wisdom (like seasonable heat); of deliberation (like seasonable cold); and of sageness (like seasonable wind). There are also the unfavorable verifications: namely, of</p>

²⁴ HS, 1318.

²⁵ English translation is based on Legge, 324-6.

²⁶ HS, 1318.

²⁷ HS, 1320.

²⁸ HS, 1338.

²⁹ HS, 1339.

³⁰ HS, 1342.

³¹ HS, 1351.

³² English translation is based on Legge, 324, 326-7.

Table 1.1. (continued):

“Hong fan” passages	wildness (like constant rain); of usurpation (like constant <i>yang</i>); of indolence (like constant heat); of haste (like constant cold); of stupidity (like constant wind). ³³
Corresponding <i>Zhuan</i> passages	<p>貌之不恭, 是謂不肅, 厥咎狂, 厥罰恆雨, 厥極惡。時則有服妖, 時則有龜孽, 時則有雞旤, 時則有下體生上之痾, 時則有青眚青祥。唯金沴水(木).³⁴ (B1)</p> <p>The demeanor being without respectfulness: this means being without gravity. Its unfavorable state is wildness. Its punishment is constant rain. Its extreme evil is wickedness. At times there will thus be eerie occurrences in clothing. At times there will thus be abnormalities in turtles. At times there will thus be startling maladies in chickens. At times there will thus be infections normally on the lower part of the body that appear on the upper part. At times there will thus be dark green aberrant generations and dark green salient deviations. These originate from metal disrupting wood.</p>
	<p>言之不從, 是謂不艾, 厥咎僭, 厥罰恆陽, 厥極憂。時則有詩妖, 時則有介蟲之孽, 時則有犬旤, 時則有口舌之痾, 時則有白眚白祥。惟木沴金.³⁵ (B2)</p> <p>Speech not according with reason: this means being disorderly. Its unfavorable state is usurpation. Its punishment is constant <i>yang</i>. Its extreme evil is distress of the mind. At times there will thus be eeriness occurrences in poetry. At times there will thus be abnormalities of creatures that have a hard shell. At times there will thus be startling maladies in dogs. At times there will thus be infections of the mouth and tongue. At times there will thus be white aberrant generations and white salient deviations. These originate from wood disrupting metal.</p>
	<p>視之不明, 是謂不愆, 厥咎舒, 厥罰恆暵, 厥極疾。時則有草妖, 時則有羸蟲之孽, 時則有羊旤, 時則有目痾, 時則有赤眚赤祥。惟水沴火.³⁶ (B3)</p> <p>Seeing not being clear: this means being unwise. Its unfavorable state is indolence. Its punishment is constant heat. Its extreme evil is illness. At times there will thus be eerie occurrences in plants. At times there will thus be abnormalities of whelk creatures. At times there will thus be startling maladies in goats. At times there will thus be infections of the eye. At times there will thus be red aberrant generations and red salient deviations. These originate from water disrupting fire.</p>
	<p>聽之不聰, 是謂不謀, 厥咎急, 厥罰恆寒, 厥極貧。時則有鼓妖, 時則有魚孽, 時則有豕禍(旤), 時則有耳痾, 時則有黑眚黑祥。惟火沴水.³⁷ (B4)</p> <p>Listening not being astute: this means not deliberating. Its unfavorable state is haste. Its punishment is constant cold. Its extreme evil is indigence. At times there will thus be sounded eerie occurrences. At times there will thus be abnormalities in fish. At times there will thus be startling maladies in pigs. At times there will thus be infections of the ear. At times there will thus be black aberrant generations and black salient deviations. These originate from fire disrupting water.</p>
	<p>思心之不睿, 是謂不聖, 厥咎霧, 厥罰恆風, 厥極凶短折。時則有脂夜之妖, 時則有華孽, 時則有牛禍(旤), 時則有心腹之痾, 時則有黃眚黃祥, 時則有金木水火沴土.³⁸ (B5)</p> <p>The thinking mind not being perspicacious: this means not being sagacious. Its unfavorable state is stupidity. Its punishment is constant wind. Its extreme evil is mishap cutting short the life. At times there will thus be eerie occurrences of greasy nights. At times there will thus be abnormalities in flower blossoms. At times there will thus be startling maladies in cows. At times there will thus be infections of the heart and belly. At times there will thus be yellow aberrant generations and yellow salient deviations.</p>

³³ English translation is as in Legge, 340-1.

³⁴ *HS*, 1352.

³⁵ *HS*, 1376.

³⁶ *HS*, 1405.

³⁷ *HS*, 1421.

³⁸ *HS*, 1441.

Table 1.1. (continued):

<p>“Hong fan” passage (fifth division: royal perfection) [not quoted in the “Wuxing zhi”]</p>	<p>[皇極. 皇建其有極, 斂時五福, 用敷錫厥庶民. 惟時厥庶民于汝極, 錫汝保極.³⁹] (C) [Royal perfection. The sovereign having established his highest point of excellence, he concentrates in himself the five happinesses, and then diffuses them so as to give them to his people: then on their part the multitudes of the people, resting in your perfection, will give you to the preservation of it.⁴⁰]</p>
<p>Corresponding <i>Zhuan</i> passage</p>	<p>皇之不極, 是謂不建, 厥咎眊, 厥罰恆陰, 厥極弱. 時則有射妖, 時則有龍蛇之孽, 時則有馬禍(旤), 時則有下人伐上之痾, 時則有日月亂行, 星辰逆行.⁴¹ (C1) The sovereign does not reach the highest point of excellence: this means that establishment has not been achieved. Its unfavorable state is disarray. Its punishment is constant <i>yin</i>. Its extreme evil is weakness. At times there will thus be eerie occurrences in darts. At times there will thus be abnormalities of dragons and snakes. At times there will thus be startling maladies in horses. At times there will thus be infections in which humans who are below attack those who are above. At times the sun and moon will thus depart from their normal paths of motion. At times stars and celestial bodies will thus move against their normal paths of motion.</p>

As can be seen in the above chart, each passage of the *Zhuan* quoted in the “Wuxing zhi” corresponds to a passage of the “Hong fan.” The *Zhuan* passages that correspond to the “Hong fan” description of the five matters (B1-5) feature terms that describe six categories of irregular phenomena: “eerie occurrences” 妖, “abnormalities” 孽, “startling maladies” 旤, “infections” 痾, “aberrant generations” 眊, and “salient deviations” 祥.⁴² The *Zhuan* links these categories of anomaly to human failure to achieve the desired virtues of the five matters; failure results in “unfavorable states” 咎 that feed a process leading to both extreme weather and the events that fall into the six categories of anomaly.

³⁹ Chinese text of this passage of the “Hong fan” is as in Legge, 328.

⁴⁰ Legge, 328-9.

⁴¹ *HS*, 1458.

⁴² My English translation of these terms is based on (1) how they are discussed and applied in the “Wuxing zhi,” (2) the description of these terms in the passages of the *Shuo* 說 (“Discussions”) quoted in the “Wuxing zhi,” (3) entries for the terms in the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (“Discussion of Pictographs and Explanation of Semantographs”), and (4) Eastern Han scholar Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127-200 C.E.) commentary to the *Zhuan*. I have also referred to Donald Harper’s translation of these terms as they appear in the “Wuxing zhi” in his English translation of the second volume of Li Ling 李零 ed., *Zidanku boshu* 子彈庫帛書 (“Zidanku Silk Document”) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017) that he has kindly shared with me. See Donald Harper trans., Unpublished English translation of Li Ling ed., *Zidanku boshu* 子彈庫帛書, vol. 2 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017), 14.

The material medium by which this connection between human behavior and anomalous events happens is presumably the activity of the five elements. (This is how later commentators, including Ban Gu, interpret the *Zhuan*.) The five elements are disrupted by deficient or odious human practices. This relationship between human behavior and the five elements is established in the five *Zhuan* passages that correspond to “Hong fan” content about the five elements (A1-5). There, the *Zhuan* lists examples of errant human behavior that cause each of the elements to malfunction.⁴³

All six categories of anomalous event can occur when there is transgression against any of the five matters or the standard of royal perfection. The anomalies that correspond to violations against each of the five matters and royal perfection as presented in the *Zhuan* are as follows:

Table 1.2.: Sub-Categories of Anomaly that Correspond to Corruption in the Five Matters and Royal Perfection

Anomaly Principle	eerie occurrences 妖	abnormalities 孽	startling maladies 眚	infections 疢	aberrant generations 眚	salient deviations 祥
demeanor 貌	服妖: eerie occurrences in clothing	龜孽: abnormalities in turtles	雞眚: startling maladies in chickens	下體生上之疢: infections usually on the lower part of the body that appear on the upper part	青眚: dark green aberrant generations	青祥: dark green salient deviations
speech 言	詩妖: eerie occurrences in poetry	介蟲之孽: abnormalities in creatures that have a hard shell	犬眚: startling maladies in dogs	口舌之疢: infections of the mouth and tongue	白眚: white aberrant generations	白祥: white salient deviations

⁴³ As is discussed below, the activity of the five elements (as well as *qi* 氣) was understood by Eastern Han commentators such as Ban Gu and Zheng Xuan as being the connecting medium between human action and anomalous events.

Table 1.2. (continued):

seeing 視	草妖: eerie occurrences in plants	羸蟲之孽: abnormalities in whelk creatures	羊疘: startling maladies in goats	目痾: infections of the eye	赤眚: red aberrant generations	赤祥: red salient deviations
listening 聽	鼓妖: sounded eerie occurrences	魚孽: abnormalities in fish	豕疘: startling maladies in pigs	耳痾: infections of the ear	黑眚: black aberrant generations	黑祥: black salient deviations
thinking 思	脂夜之妖: eerie occurrences [in the form of] of greasy nights	華孽: abnormalities in flower blossoms	牛疘: startling maladies in cows	心腹之痾: infections of the heart and belly	黃眚: yellow aberrant generations	黃祥: yellow salient deviations
royal perfection 皇極	射妖: eerie occurrences in darts	龍蛇之孽: abnormalities in dragons and snakes	馬疘: startling maladies in horses	下人伐上之痾: infections in which humans who are below attack those who are above	[日月亂行: the sun and moon depart from their normal paths of motion]	[星辰逆行: stars and celestial bodies move against their normal paths of motion]

III.C. Explaining *Zhuan* Terminology

(1) The *Shuo* 說 (“Discussions”)

After individual passages of the *Zhuan*, the “Wuxing zhi” often cites a source it refers to as the *Shuo* 說 (“Discussions”), which further explains the language of the *Zhuan*. Scholars have asserted that the title *Shuo* refers collectively to the works of a group of Western Han scholars that included Ouyang Sheng 歐陽生 (fl. c. early 2nd cent. B.C.E.), Ouyang Gao 歐陽高 (fl. c.

late 2nd cent. B.C.E.), Xiahou Shichang, and Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (fl. 74 B.C.E.).⁴⁴ These figures were in a tradition of reading and interpreting the *Shang shu* and are among those counted as the intellectual inheritors of Fu Sheng. Regardless of its authorship, content from the *Shuo* is critical to understanding the conceptual view of anomalous events articulated in the “Wuxing zhi.”

Directly after the passage of the *Zhuan* (labeled in the above chart as B1) that discusses the first of the five matters (demeanor 貌) and introduces for the first time the six categories of anomaly that occur as a result of transgression against the five matters, the “Wuxing zhi” cites a passage from *Shuo* that provides a kind of glossary explaining the logic behind these six terms:

說曰：凡草物之類謂之妖。妖猶天胎，言尚微。蟲豸之類謂之孽。孽則牙孽矣。及六畜，謂之旤，言其著也。及人，謂之痾。痾，病貌，言浸深也。甚則異物生，謂之眚；自外來，謂之祥。祥猶禎也。氣相傷，謂之沴。沴猶臨蒞，不和意也。每一事云「時則」以絕之，言非必俱至，或有或亡，或在前或在後也。⁴⁵

Discussions states: All plant objects and such of that kind are described as *yao* 妖. *Yao* is like a tiny embryo, and it means that it is still slight. Legged and crawling insects and such of that kind are described as *nie* 孽. From *nie*, there are therefore *nie* sprouts. When it reaches the six husbanded animals, it is described as *huo* 旤, which means that it is conspicuous. When it reaches humans, it is described as *ke* 痾. *Ke* is to say that there is the appearance of illness, and it means that the level of penetration has deepened. When it becomes even more intense, intensely irregular [*yi* 異] objects are generated, and this is described as *sheng* 眚; when it comes from the outside, it is described as *xiang* 祥. *Xiang* are like signs of receiving blessings [*zhen* 禎]. When vapors [*qi* 氣] injure [*shang* 氣] one another, it is called disruption [*li* 沴]. Disruption is like looking down at turbulent waters, expressing that which does not accord with one’s intent. After every item, it says “at times there will thus be,” which means that all of these will not necessarily

⁴⁴ Aihe Wang holds this view, following the identification of the authors of these comments by Qing dynasty (1644-1912) scholar Wang Mingsheng 王鳴盛 (1722-1797), as cited in Qing dynasty and Republican era (1912-1949) scholar Wang Xianqian’s 王先謙 (1842-1918) *Han shu buzhu* 漢書補注. See Aihe Wang, 156 and 156 n. 60-62.

⁴⁵ *HS*, 1352.

come: they might be there or they might not be there; they might come before or they might come after.⁴⁶

This glossary explains some of these six terms introduced in the *Zhuan* by engaging the polysemy latent in them. For example, *Shuo* explains that the terms *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 are used to describe, respectively, plants and insects. It does not indicate in what sense these terms are used to describe plants and insects, but (as discussed below), likely its meaning is that these refer to peculiar phenomena in the plant and insect world. Giving a second dimension to the meanings of these terms, the *Shuo* notes that *yao* 妖 is related to *yao tai* 夭胎, a term for seeds and embryos, and *nie* 孽 appears in the phrase *nie* sprouts 孽牙. Since there is generally speaking nothing out of place about embryos and sprouts, the *Shuo* seems to be implying that, following the usage of these related terms to refer to living objects that are in their nascent phase (seeds that have not sprouted, eggs that have not hatched, or sprouts that are just budding), the magnitude of severity involved in anomalous occurrences of the *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 kind is relatively small. As the *Shuo* points out, *yao* 妖 indicates “still slight” 尚微. However, like embryos and sprouting seeds, these blips in the fabric of the material world have the potential to grow.

In the background of the *Shuo*'s analysis is the Eastern Han use of these two terms to indicate strangeness in plants and animals, as attested in the Eastern Han encyclopedia of language, the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (“Discussion of Pictographs and Explanation of Semantographs”) compiled by Eastern Han scholar Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58-ca. 148 C.E.). The *Shuowen* entry for the graph *nie* 孽 reads, “In the ‘Songs and Ditties on Clothing’, prodigies of

⁴⁶ For the English translation of this passage, I have referred to Aihe Wang's translation in Aihe Wang, 165.

grasses and trees are called *yao* 袄. Prodigies of beasts, fowl, creatures, and insects are called *nie* 孽”衣服歌謠草木之怪謂之袄禽獸蟲蝗之怪謂之孽.⁴⁷ Because the graphs *yao*/*ʔau 袄 and *nie*/*naŋ 孽 are homophonic variants of the graphs *yao*/*ʔau 妖 and *nie*/*naŋ 孽 used in the *Zhuan*, the *Shuowen* entry shows that these two terms that appear in the *Zhuan* likely carried meanings of strangeness, in plants for *yao* 妖 and in animals for *nie* 孽.⁴⁸ The *Shuo* explanation for these two terms as they appear in the *Zhuan* thus engages a range of meanings it sees as being latent in the terms, combining senses of (1) plants and insects, (2) slightness of degree, and (3) strangeness.

Although the *Shuo* explanation points out that the terms *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 are commonly used to describe plant and insect phenomena, the *Zhuan* adopts these terms and reframes them for use in its system of classifying anomalous events. In the *Zhuan*, *yao* 妖 encompasses a range of aberrational incidents or trends in nature and human culture, comprising “eerie occurrences in clothing” 服妖, “eerie occurrences in poetry” 詩妖, “eerie occurrences in plants” 草妖, “eerie occurrences [in the form] of greasy nights” 脂夜之妖, “eerie occurrences in darts” 射妖, and “sounded eerie occurrences” 鼓妖 (i.e., strange sounds)—an example of the last term being the sound of phantom bell at the Han court. Likewise, in the *Zhuan*, *nie* 孽 includes strangeness in a

⁴⁷ *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, Duan Yucui 段玉裁 (1735-1815) ed., (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju [reproduction of the Waseda University 稻田大学 1847 edition prefaced by Obata Kōkan 小畑行簡 (1794-1875)], 2020), 680a. I have referred in my translation of this passage of the *Shuowen* to Donald Harper’s translation in Donald Harper trans., Unpublished English translation of Li Ling, 13. In this passage, Xu Shen appears to be analyzing with the semantic significs of these graphs in mind, with the “grass” (*cao* 艸) semantic signific in the graph *yao* 袄 leading to a meaning involving plants and the “creature” (*chong* 虫) semantic signific in the graph *nie* 孽 pointing to animals. (I credit here Edward L. Shaughnessy for his observation of the likelihood of this logic in Xu Shen’s analysis in a private e-mail correspondence sent Wed., July 28, 2021.) Xu Shen’s reference to “Songs and Ditties on Clothing” 衣服歌謠 is presumably to a written source that recorded lyrical compositions about clothing.

⁴⁸ Old Chinese phonetic reconstruction is from Axel Schuessler, *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese: A Companion to Grammata Serica Recensa* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 196 and 232.

variety of animals (mollusks, fish, and reptiles), weird phenomena in flowering plants, and the apparition of dragons, comprising “abnormalities in creatures that have a hard shell” 介蟲之孽, “abnormalities in whelk creatures” 贏蟲之孽, “abnormalities in fish” 魚孽, “abnormalities in turtles” 龜孽, “abnormalities in flower blossoms” 華孽, and “abnormalities of dragons and snakes” 龍蛇之孽. There is thus a slight tension between the *Zhuan*’s re-purposed use of the terms *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 and what the *Shuo* and the *Shuowen* passages indicate was the range of their common, vernacular use in the Western Han (assuming that the *Shuo* was composed in the Western Han) and Eastern Han periods, respectively. Nevertheless, in both contexts these terms are used to describe strange phenomena.

The *Shuo* explanation notes that the *Zhuan* orders *yao* 妖, *nie* 孽, and the four other terms for strange occurrences in a sequence of increasing intensity. Beyond eerie occurrences and abnormalities, once the magnitude of the reverberations of human errancy reaches a certain level, strange things begin to happen to the six husbanded animals 六畜 in the form of “startling maladies” (*huo* 𪚩).⁴⁹ In the incidents cited in the “Wuxing zhi,” the term *huo* 𪚩 refers often to unusual bodily afflictions in livestock or the sudden, inexplicable death of one kind of livestock

⁴⁹ The version of the *Han shu* published in 1962 by the Zhonghua shuju 中華書局 (based on the Ji gu ge 汲古閣 edition of 1641) uses two different graph variants that were presumably homophonous, *huo*/*ɣuai 禍 and *huo*/(?) 𪚩, for the category of anomaly that afflicts the six husbanded animals. (For an explanation of the principal editions of the *Han shu*, see A.F.P. Hulsewé, “*Han shu* 漢書” in Loewe, 131-2. This LHan phonetic reconstruction of *huo* 禍 is as in Schuessler, 220.) Both variants appear in roughly the same proportion. However, in the passages of the “Wuxing zhi” that discuss the meaning of the graph as it appears in the “Wuxing zhi,” the variant *huo* 𪚩 is used. The semantic meanings of the two graphs were distinct. The graph *huo*/*ɣuai 禍 denoted “calamity.” As discussed here, the graph *huo* 𪚩 according to the gloss in the *Shuowen* denoted a sense of surprise or startlement at something disgusting or repulsive. Because Ban Gu’s direct commentary in the “Wuxing zhi,” the statements of the *Shuo*, and Zheng Xuan’s commentary all stress that what was notable about events classified using the *Zhuan*’s six terms for anomalies was their quality of inducing awe and wonder (rather than any damage or destruction caused), this suggests the meaning denoted by graph *huo* 𪚩 is more apt in this context. Therefore, in citations from the “Wuxing zhi” in which the graph *huo* 禍 is used as one of the six categories of anomaly, I replace it with the graph *huo* 𪚩.

in alarmingly large numbers within a short period of time. The *Shuo* points out that these are anomalies that are at the level of “conspicuousness” 著. The *Shuowen* entry for the graph *huo* 𩇛 suggests that the term was as of the Eastern Han commonly used to signify the subjective sense of surprise and shock when in the presence of something that is odious: “a word for startlement when that which is disgusting is encountered” 𩇛惡驚𩇛也.⁵⁰ The term denotes a sense of surprise and alarm that observers likely experienced when witnessing rashes of death or bizarre bodily afflictions in livestock.

Next, anomaly reaches the level of humans in the form of “infections” 痾. In the *Zhuan*, “infections” 痾 are ailments affecting different parts of the human body, except in the case when “the sovereign does not reach the highest point of perfection” 皇之不極, and then “infections” take the form of revolts in which “humans who are below attack those who are above” 下人伐上. The *Shuo* observes that “startling maladies” 𩇛 and “infections” 痾 mean that “the level of penetration has deepened” 浸深: the magnitude of the vibration (caused by human error) out into the material world has thus increased, affecting livestock and the human body in more readily visible ways than in *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 occurrences.

The next stage is “aberrant generations” 眚 in which, according to the *Shuo*, “intensely irregular objects are generated” 生異物. This occurs when the level of error has become even more “intense” 甚. The *Shuowen* entry for the graph 眚 indicates a meaning related to the formation of cataracts in the human eye: “the eye is diseased and generates a screen” 目病生翳

⁵⁰ *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 419a.

也。⁵¹ The *Shuowen* entry suggests that anomalous events named as “aberrant generations” 眚 involve unusual objects coming into being in the same way that pathological structures are generated in living tissue.

The final stage is “salient deviations” 祥, which the *Shuo* describes as “coming from the outside” 自外来. The *Zhuan* appears to understand the two categories of “aberrant generations” 眚 and “salient deviations” 祥 as belonging to a pair. They are both, unlike the other terms, associated with colors, and both are omitted from the description of the effects of a ruler’s failure to achieve perfection. Instead, there the *Zhuan* observes that after startling maladies and infections, the next level of anomaly is that “sun and moon will depart from their normal paths of motion” 日月亂行 and “stars and celestial bodies will move against their normal paths of motion” 星辰逆行: when a ruler’s corruption according to the standards of royal perfection has reached its absolute apex, the paths of the celestial bodies become warped.⁵²

(2) Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 Commentary on the *Zhuan*

Eastern Han scholar Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127-200 C.E.) *Shang shu Da zhuan zhu* 尚書大傳注 (“Commentary to the Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents”) has a section that, like the *Shuo*, explains the language and logic of the passage of the *Zhuan* (B1) that first uses the terms of the six anomalies. In his comments, Zheng Xuan outlines a material process that

⁵¹ *Shuowen*, 135b.

⁵² In his general remarks about anomalies that occur when there is corruption in royal perfection 皇極, Ban Gu explains that because corruption in royal perfection eventually affects the vapors (*qi* 氣) of heaven (rather than the vapors of any terrestrial element), therefore the highest levels of anomaly that occur when there are violations against royal perfection are of a celestial nature, unlike all other types of anomalies for the five matters and royal matters. (See *HS*, 1458-9.) It is not clear if Ban Gu or the author/(s) of the *Zhuan* believed that astronomical anomalies are to be considered as aberrant generations 眚 and salient deviations 祥 or as constituting a unique type of anomaly.

connects human transgression to anomaly through the medium of vapors (*qi* 氣). He uses language denoting an intense sense of oddity, including the term *guai* 怪 (“prodigy”), to describe the six categories of anomaly named in the *Zhuan*:

凡貌, 言, 視, 聽, 思: 心. 一事失, 則逆人之心, 人心逆則怨, 木金水火土氣為之傷, 傷則衝勝來乘沴之, 於是神怒人怨, 將為禍亂. 故五行先見變異, 以譴告人也. 及妖, 孽(孽), 禍(既), 疴(痾), 眚, 祥, 皆其氣類暴作非常, 為時怪者也. 各以物象為之占也.⁵³

For all acts of demeanor, speech, seeing, hearing, and thinking: they are of the mind. If one matter is out of place, it thus goes against the minds [*xin* 心] of humans. When the minds of humans are gone against, there is thus loathing [*yuan* 怨]. The vapors [*qi* 氣] of wood, metal, water, fire, and earth are injured [*shang* 傷] by this. When they are injured, a rush that overwhelms thus comes, warping [*guai* 乖] and disrupting [*li* 沴] them. Therefore, when spirits [*nu* 怒] are angry and humans feel loathing [*yuan* 怨], there is soon to be calamity [*huo* 禍] and disorder [*luan* 亂]. For this reason, the five elements first show forth mutations [*bian* 變] and irregularity [*yi* 異], and censure and alert humans. It then reaches the intensity of eerie occurrences, abnormalities, startling maladies, infections, aberrant generations, and salient deviations: all of these are of the types of vapor [*qi* 氣] that they are. Suddenly that which is not normal [*fei chang* 非常] is instigated, creating at the time incidents that are prodigies [*guai* 怪]. For each, the forms of the objects involved are used to decipher it.

Zheng Xuan explains that the five matters have a particular effect on the human mind 心.

If there is something amiss in one of the five matters, then it offends the minds of observers, and

⁵³ Zheng Xuan’s commentary is as cited in late Qing and early Republican period (*primo anno*: 1912) scholar Wang Kaiyun’s 王闓運 (1833-1916) *Shang shu Da zhuan bu zhu* 尚書大傳補註 (“Supplementary Commentary to the Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents”). See Wang Kaiyun, *Shang shu Da zhuan bu zhu* 尚書大傳補註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), 66. This passage of Zheng Xuan’s commentary to the *Da zhuan* is also cited in Qing dynasty scholar Chen Shouqi’s 陳壽祺 (1771-1834) edition of the *Shang shu da zhuan* 尚書大傳 (“Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents”) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, *Zhonghua Minguo* 26 nian [1937]), 2.64. (There is no date for the compilation of Chen Shouqi’s edition indicated in the Shangwu yinshuguan reprint, but the year Jiaqing 嘉慶 10 nian [i.e., 1805] is mentioned in the materials that Chen Shouqi lists in the *Xu lu* 序錄 [“Record of Prefaces”] section. See p.15 of the *Xu lu* section.)

this produces loathing 怨 in living humans and anger 怒 in spirits, which initiates a chain reaction that disrupts the fundamental elements of the material world and leads to anomaly:

one of the five matters is out of place →

the minds of humans are gone against →

there is loathing in living humans and anger in the spirits →

vapors of the elements are injured →

the elements become warped and disrupted →

the elements change and become irregular →

eerie occurrences, abnormalities, startling maladies, infections, aberrant generations, and salient deviations are produced

Much of the terminology that Zheng Xuan uses to describe this process is more or less identical to the *Shuo*. For example, he names “disruption” (*li* 沴) and “injury” (*shang* 傷) to vapors (*qi* 氣) as the material cause of anomalies, which is language that appears in the *Shuo* and that is used in exactly the same way. To describe the warped state of the elements in the presence of human loathing, Zheng Xuan also uses the term *yi* 異 (“irregularity”), another term that appears in the *Shuo* in its description for aberrant generations 眚.

However, compared to the *Shuo*, Zheng Xuan is even more explicit and emphatic in calling events that belong to the six categories overtly strange. He characterizes the six specific kinds of anomalies named in the *Zhuan* as “that which is not normal” (*fei chang* 非常) and “prodigies” (*guai* 怪). The latter term recalls the association between *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 and the concept of intense strangeness (expressed as *guai* 怪) in Xu Shen’s remarks on those two terms in the *Shuowen*. Zheng Xuan applies such language to all six kinds of anomaly, not just to *yao* 妖

and *nie* 孽. Zheng Xuan's commentary thus gives a strong impression that events belonging to the six kinds of anomalies named in the *Zhuan* were understood as arousing an intense mental or emotional sense of unsettledness because of how odd they were perceived as being.

(3) Ban Gu's Comments on *huo* 眚 and the Significance of the Descriptor *guai* 怪

Ban Gu's own general comments describing events that he classifies as being in the startling maladies 眚 category of anomaly also emphasize this quality of intense strangeness. His description of *huo* 眚 repeatedly uses the word *guai* 怪 ("strange" or "prodigy"), the same term associated with eerie occurrences (*yao* 妖) and abnormalities (*nie* 孽) in the *Shuowen*, and the same term that Zheng Xuan uses to describe all of the six anomalies outlined in the *Zhuan*. The term is in Ban Gu's language describing all of the specific permutations of startling maladies 眚 that occur when there is corruption in the five matters or in royal perfection:

...故有雞眚. 一日, 水歲雞多死及為怪...⁵⁴

...therefore there will be startling maladies in chickens. In a single day, during a water year, a good many chickens died, to the point that it was a prodigy...

... 故有犬眚. 一日, 旱歲犬多狂死及為怪...⁵⁵

...therefore there will be startling maladies in dogs. In a single day, during a drought year, a good many dogs died, to the point that it was a prodigy...

... 故有羊眚. 一日, 暑歲羊多疾死, 及為怪...⁵⁶

...therefore there will be startling maladies in goats. In a single day, during a hot year, a good many goats died, to the point that it was a prodigy...

... 故有豕禍(眚). 一日, 寒歲豕多死, 及為怪...⁵⁷

...therefore there will be startling maladies in pigs. In a single day, during a cold year, a good many pigs died, to the point that it was a prodigy...

⁵⁴ *HS*, 1353. Varying punctuation in this and the following passages describing startling maladies 眚 is as in *HS*.

⁵⁵ *HS*, 1377.

⁵⁶ *HS*, 1406.

⁵⁷ *HS*, 1421.

... 故有牛禍(旤). 一日, 牛多死及為怪...⁵⁸

...therefore there will be startling maladies in cows. In a single day, a good many cows died, to the point that it was a prodigy...

... 故有馬禍(旤). 一日, 馬多死及為怪...⁵⁹

...therefore there will be startling maladies in horses. In a single day, a good many horses died, to the point that it was a prodigy...

Rather than the loss of food and property—the material damage—that occurred in epidemics of livestock deaths, Ban Gu stresses that it is the oddly coincidental nature so many of the same kind of livestock dying at the same time that made these incidents stand out as bizarre.

Since multiple Eastern Han sources (the *Shuowen*'s entries for *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽, Ban Gu's comments on *huo* 旤, and Zheng Xuan's comments on all of the six terms for anomaly named in the *Zhuan*) associate the word *guai* 怪 with the six terms for anomaly named in the *Zhuan*, it is clearly an important item for registering the full sense in which these terms were used in the context of the “Wuxing zhi.” The word as it stands alone occurs only eleven times in the whole of the “Wuxing zhi.” However, since Eastern Han commentators (including Ban Gu) so frequently associate the word with the terminology of the six anomalies, this lexicon is thus deeply imbued with the concept represented by *guai* 怪. Accordingly, if each time one of the terms of the six anomalies is used is also tabulated as a conceptual occurrence of *guai* 怪, then it occurs some 246 times in the “Wuxing zhi.” This stands as strong evidence of the centrality of the concept of strangeness to portrayal of anomaly in the “Wuxing zhi.”

While an exhaustive exploration of the uses of *guai*/*kue^C 怪 in the Eastern Han is necessary for unlocking all the nuances of the term as it applies to the “Wuxing zhi,” for the

⁵⁸ *HS*, 1442.

⁵⁹ *HS*, 1458.

purpose of understanding its use within the “Wuxing zhi,” the explanation of the meaning of the graph in its *Shuowen* entry along with the analysis of the visual form given there provide useful guidance.⁶⁰ The word is explained succinctly in the *Shuowen* as being equivalent to *yi*/*jə^C 異 (“intensely irregular”).⁶¹ The visual form of the graph is presented in the *Shuowen* as:

Figure 1.1.: Visual Form of the Graph *guai* 怪



(Source: *Shuowen*, 514a.)

The *Shuowen* entry analyzes the graph as consisting of semantic signific *xin*/*sim 心 (“heart” or “mind”) and phonetic signific *sheng*/*wu^C<wuə^C 圣.⁶² The presence of the *xin*/*sim 心 signific in the graph *guai*/*kue^C 怪 suggests a subjective, mental or emotional experience of uncanniness, of affecting strangeness. The concept of *guai*/*kue^C 怪 as an aspect of the experience of intense irregularity, an aspect that would register in observers on a mental or emotional level, is thus understood within the “Wuxing zhi” as an integral feature of the many anomalous events that are classified using the six terms of the *Zhuan*. Ban Gu’s language, the language of the sources he quotes, and the language of Zheng Xuan suggest that this feeling of potent strangeness was understood as having been experienced by observers upon witnessing or learning of the abnormal events catalogued in the “Wuxing zhi.”

⁶⁰ The pronunciation of the graph *guai* 怪 indicated here is the Later Han Chinese (LHan) reconstruction given in Schuessler, 94.

⁶¹ *Shuowen*, 514a. LHan phonetic reconstruction of the graph *yi* 異 is as in Schuessler, 110.

⁶² LHan phonetic reconstruction of the graph *xin* 心 is as in Schuessler, 368. Schuessler proposes that the phonetic component of *guai*/*kue^C 怪 is possibly *you* 又. (See Schuessler, 94.) Therefore, the pronunciation of the graph *sheng* 圣 (named in the *Shuowen* as the phonetic component of *guai*/*kue^C 怪) indicated here is Schuessler’s LHan reconstruction of *you* 又, *wu^C<wuə^C. (See Schuessler, 95.)

III.D. Qi 氣 (“Vapor”) as a Medium of Anomaly: Ban Gu’s Commentary to the *Zhuan*

In addition to its frequent citing of the *Shuo*, the “Wuxing zhi” provides its own explication after each individual passage of the *Zhuan* that it quotes. Ban Gu’s explication consists of direct exegesis by Ban Gu and frequently the citation of Western Han scholarly authorities such as Liu Xiang or his son Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 B.C.E.-23 C.E.), or other works of commentary, like Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan*. As an example of Ban Gu’s comments on the *Zhuan*, the following is his explanation of the *Zhuan* passage that describes what anomalies appear as a consequence of failure in human listening 聽 practices (labelled in the chart above as B4). The section devoted to the *Zhuan*’s description of failures in listening is where Ban Gu places the account of the disembodied bell sound at the Han court discussed above. Much of the content of his extensive comments is immediately relevant to that episode:

「聽之不聰，是謂不謀」，言上偏聽不聰，下情隔塞，則不能謀慮利害，失在嚴急，故其咎急也。

“Listening not being astute: this means not deliberating” is to say those above tending to listen while not being astute and those below being cut off and obstructed, so that it is not possible to deliberate and consider what is beneficial and what is harmful. The remissness is severe haste. Therefore, its unfavorable state is haste.

盛冬日短，寒以殺物，政促迫，故其罰常寒也。

In deep winter, the days are short, and cold kills animate things. Administration is rushed and coercive. Therefore, its punishment is enduring cold.

寒則不生百穀，上下俱貧，故其極貧也。

Because of the cold, the one hundred grains will not come forth, and those above and those below will all be indigent. Therefore, its extreme evil is indigence.

君嚴猛而閉下，臣戰栗而塞耳，則妄聞之氣發於音聲，故有鼓妖。

The ruler will become severe and fierce, and close off those who are below, and counselors will tremble and quake and obstruct their ears. And so the vapors [*qi* 氣] of preposterous rumors will be sent forth in the sounds of voices. Therefore, there will be sounded eerie occurrences.

寒氣動，故有魚孽。雨以龜為孽，龜能陸處，非極陰也；魚去水而死，極陰之孽也。

Cold vapors [*han qi* 寒氣] will move. Therefore, there will be abnormalities in fish. Abnormalities of the rain are in turtles. If turtles are able to take to the land, it is not owing to an extremity of *yin* [陰]. If fish leave the water and die, it is an abnormality owing to an extremity of *yin* [陰].

於易坎為豕，豕大耳不聰察，聽氣毀，故有豕禍也。一曰，寒歲豕多死，及為怪，亦是也。

In the *Changes*, the pit trigram is a pig. A pig has large ears but is not astute in its perception. The vapors of listening [*ting qi* 聽氣] will be ruined. Therefore, there will be startling maladies in pigs. There is one account in which during a cold year a good many pigs died; it reached the point that it constituted a prodigy. It was precisely what is spoken of here.

及人，則多病耳者，故有耳癩，水色黑，故有黑眚黑祥。

As for people, there will in their case be a good many who find that their ears have a disease. Therefore, there will be infections of the ear. The color of water is black. Therefore, there will be black aberrant generations and black salient deviations.

凡聽傷者病水氣，水氣病則火沴之。其極貧者，順之，其福曰富。⁶³

All injuries in listening bring disease to water vapors [*shui qi* 水氣]. When there is disease in water vapors [*shui qi* 水氣], fire thereby disrupts it. The extremity evil of this is states of indigence. If they [*i.e.*, water vapors: *shui qi* 水氣] are given smooth course, the happiness [arising from] them is called prosperity.

Ban Gu's theory of anomaly surrounding failures in listening emerges from a complex, orchestrated reasoning through connections between six key concepts named in the "Hong

⁶³ HS, 1421-22.

fan”—listening 聽, astuteness 聰, deliberation 謀, haste 急, indigence 貧, and cold 寒—and elaborated in the *Zhuan*. Ban Gu first explains that lack of astuteness in listening leads to a failure to deliberate, which creates haste in government administration, and then indigence when winter—which requires advance planning to create food stores—comes. These are connections based on the demands of logistics and reasoned through common sense, and they are explained without needing to refer to a developed material philosophy. But such reasoning is not enough to account for the anomalies that the *Zhuan* names as the result of failed listening.

In order to establish a connection between human action and anomalous events, after moving through his common sense reasoning of how failure in listening leads to indigence, Ban Gu pivots toward the concept of vapors (*qi* 氣), a term that is not present in either the “Hong fan” or the *Zhuan*, but which occurs frequently in exegetical texts about them, as seen in the *Shuo* and in Zheng Xuan’s comments. Ban Gu explains that at various points in the chain of causation between failures in listening and its ultimate result of indigence, vapors (*qi* 氣) will begin to react, as he describes in four statements: (1) “the vapors of preposterous rumors will be sent forth in the sounds of voices” 君嚴猛而閉下臣戰栗而塞耳則妄聞之氣發於音聲; (2) “cold vapors will move” 寒氣動; (3) “the vapors of listening will be ruined” 聽氣毀; and (4) “all impairments in listening bring disease to water vapors” 凡聽傷者病水氣.

Ban Gu tells how corruption in human listening affects certain vapors, and specifically harms “water vapors” (*shui qi* 水氣) and “vapors of listening” (*ting qi* 聽氣). This produces permutations of the six kinds of anomalies that are particular to corruption in listening: “sounded eerie occurrences” 鼓妖, “abnormalities in fish” 魚孽, “startling maladies in pigs” 豕禍,

“infections of the ear” 耳痾, “black aberrant generations” 黑眚, and “black salient deviations” 黑祥. “Sounded eerie occurrences” 鼓妖 (i.e., strange sounds) erupt as a consequence of “the vapors of preposterous rumors” 妄聞之氣 being “sent forth in the sounds of voices” 發於音聲 as the members of court and the general population react to their ruler’s growing opacity and aggression stemming from his incapacity in listening.

For the animals and colors involved, Ban Gu explains that these are affected according to the vapor connection between each of these and corruption in the human act of listening. Ban Gu claims that pigs have naturally weak powers of listening and are therefore especially vulnerable in their bodily health to the effects of damage to vapors of listening. When the vapors of listening are damaged, large numbers of pigs become sick and die. Likewise, fish are especially sensitive to damage to water vapors, and so unusual behavior in fish is one possible effect of corrupted human listening. Similarly, because the visual nature of water is understood as being black (i.e., “the color of water is black” 水色黑), the more extreme categories of strange anomalies, aberrant generations 眚 and salient deviations 祥, are classified as being of the color black. This same logic appears to hold true for body parts. Although Ban Gu does not state this explicitly, presumably, damage to the vapors of listening harms the health of the human ear, the sense organ of aural perception.

For each passage cited in the “Wuxing zhi” from the *Zhuan* that treats of the five matters and the principle of royal perfection, Ban Gu makes comments that explain the connection between human failure to achieve these standards and the occurrence of the six categories of strange anomalies. As with corruption in listening, reference to the concept of vapors (*qi* 氣) is usually at the crux of Ban Gu’s reasoning. This is accompanied by a similar explanation of the

material connection between the type of vapor that is damaged and the animals, colors, and body parts affected.

For example, corruption in demeanor damages the “vapors of demeanor” 貌氣 and “wood vapors” 木氣. Damage to the vapors of demeanor especially affects chickens, since chickens have a particularly majestic physical appearance that withers when the vapors of demeanor fail.⁶⁴ Because the visual nature of wood is understood as being dark green 青, aberrant generations and salient deviations caused by corruption in demeanor are likewise classified as being of the color dark green 青.⁶⁵ Ban Gu also explains that damage to the vapors of demeanor makes “water kind move” 水類動, which especially affects turtles, causing abnormalities involving turtles.⁶⁶ (For this last connection, there does not seem to be a strong material connection, but Ban Gu was maybe at a loss to explain why the *Zhuan* holds that damage to wood vapors affects turtles, who live mostly in water.) In the case of the particular physical ailment to humans that comes from corruption in demeanor (i.e., infections usually on the lower part of the body that appear on the upper part 下體生上之癩), there is no explicit material connection. Ban Gu explains this by describing the political situation that emerges when the ruler’s demeanor has been corrupted.⁶⁷ As he explains, “when those who are above lose their dignified deportment, then down below there will be vassals of the borderlands who harm the ruler and rise” 上失威儀, 則下有疆臣害君上者.⁶⁸ Presumably, this upheaval affects the

⁶⁴ See *HS*, 1353.

⁶⁵ *HS*, 1353.

⁶⁶ *HS*, 1353.

⁶⁷ *HS*, 1353.

⁶⁸ *HS*, 1353.

ecosphere of vapors in a way that causes infections of the lower part of the human body to rise up and afflict the upper parts.

Occasionally, Ban Gu breaks with the pattern of explaining anomalous phenomenon through the concept of vapors. For example, his explanation of the nature of the particular type of eerie occurrences triggered by corruption in demeanor (eerie occurrences in clothing 服妖) demonstrates a logic that resembles anthropologic or sociologic analysis devoid of reference to purely material forces. As Ban Gu observes, “if the climate of customs is deranged and indolent, and that which moderates and rules is altered and changed, then sheared, lightweight clothing that is bizarre will be fashioned” 風俗狂慢變節易度則為剽輕奇怪之服.⁶⁹ The reasoning here appears to be that communities will imitate those who hold positions of political authority within them, so that if the ruler’s demeanor and physical appearance suggests laxness and depravity, the customs of the subjects will follow suit, leading to the wearing of what is characterized as bizarre, immodest clothing. There is no need to use the concept of vapors to explain this connection. At times, anomalous events or (as in the case of clothing customs) bizarre cultural trends, can be explained by reference to the rules and patterns of human society.

These material connections between human transgression and anomaly according to the principle of behavior, the type of vapor affected, and its corresponding color as indicated in Ban Gu’s general comments about each of the five matters and royal perfection according to the schema of the *Zhuan* are as follows:

⁶⁹ *HS*, 1353.

Table 1.3.: Types of Vapor and Colors of Elements Affected by Corruption in the Five Matters and Royal Perfection

Corrupted Principle	Vapor Type Affected	Color of Affected Element
demeanor 貌 ⁷⁰	vapors of demeanor 貌氣: harmed wood vapors 木氣: harmed yin vapors 陰氣: prevail	wood 木: dark green 青
speech 言	vapors of speech 言氣: harmed metal vapors 金氣: harmed yang vapors 陽氣: prevail vapors of loathing and slander 怨謗之氣: generated	metal 金: white 白
seeing 視	vapors of seeing 視氣: harmed fire vapors 火氣: harmed humidity 奧 [not explicitly named as a type of vapor 氣]: fostered	fire 火: red 赤
listening 聽	vapors of listening 聽氣: harmed water vapors 水氣: harmed cold vapors 寒氣: move vapors of preposterous rumors 妄聞之氣: generated	water 水: black 黑
thinking 思	vapors of the thinking mind 思心氣: harmed four vapors 四氣 (i.e. demeanor, speech, seeing, and listening): disarrayed earth vapors 土氣: harmed ground vapors 地氣: flourish	earth 土: yellow 黃
royal perfection 皇極	vapors of heaven 天氣: disarrayed vapors of the ruler 君氣: harmed yin vapors 陰氣: move	no element affected (elements are terrestrial, not heavenly)

III.E. Analyzing Anomalies in History with the Terminology of the Tradition: The “Wuxing zhi” Taxonomical Catalogue of Anomalous Events in the Record of Early China

After his general comments, Ban Gu then lists accounts of strange events taken from canonical sources of history or else, like the sound of the bell at the Han court, directly recounted by Ban Gu. For corruption in listening, for example, there are forty-four separate accounts of anomalous events from Spring and Autumn, Warring States, and Western Han history that are

⁷⁰ For Ban Gu’s general comments on demeanor, speech, seeing, listening, thinking, and royal perfection, see (respectively) *HS*, 1353-4, 1376-7, 1405-6, 1421-2, 1441-2, 1458-9.

listed as illustrations of anomalous events that occur when there is dysfunction in the act of listening; the story of the sound of the bell at the Han court is nineteenth among these. Each episode is defined by its place in this structure and must be understood in the context of its connection to the passage of the *Zhuan* and the “Hong fan” that corresponds to it. Often Ban Gu appends to these historical accounts further commentary of his own or citations from Western Han scholarly authorities like Liu Xiang and Jing Fang.

Ban Gu does not directly attach any remarks about vapors (*qi* 氣) to the episode about the phantom bell. However, the place of this episode in the structure of the “Wuxing zhi,” listed after Ban Gu’s comments on the passage of the “Hong fan” and the *Zhuan* that describe failures in listening and the anomalous events that they cause through the medium of vapors (*qi* 氣), implies that the same principles hold true for the strange sound heard at the Han court. Putting these principles next to the specific events of the story leads to the understanding that Thearch Ai’s lack of discernment in listening to bad counsel—the kind of bad counsel that had guided him to promote conspirators to the highest levels of official position—was already sending growing ripples of concern through the community in the Han court and beyond, in some form similar to “the vapors (*qi* 氣) of preposterous rumors” 妄聞之氣 which are “sent forth in the sounds of voices” 發於音聲 that Ban Gu names in his general comments on listening. Following the lines of Ban Gu’s reasoning, these disturbances in the vapors (*qi* 氣) were the connecting medium in the chain of causation that gave rise to the sound of the bell.

“A Sound Like an Ox’s Bellow Coming from the Coffin” 柩有聲如牛

One additional example of the historical accounts that Ban Gu lists provides a more developed picture of some of the features of Ban Gu’s thinking about anomalous events and the

language that he uses to describe them. Among episodes from history that illustrate the anomalies that arise from failures in listening, Ban Gu includes another (the eighteenth among these) about a strange sound, an episode that was originally recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*:

左傳曰釐公三十二年十二月己卯，晉文公卒，庚辰，將殯于曲沃，出絳，柩有聲如牛。

The *Zuo Tradition* states that on the *jimao*₁₆ day of the second month of the thirty-second year of Lord Xi [628 B.C.E.], Lord Wen of Jin died. On the *gengchen*₁₇ day, his coffin was about to be conveyed to Quwo to await burial. As it was leaving Jiang, there was a sound like an ox coming from the coffin.

劉向以為近鼓妖也。

Liu Xiang held that this was close to a sounded eerie occurrence.

喪，凶事；聲如牛，怒象也。將有急怒之謀，以生兵革之禍。

Funeral rites are matters that pertain to death. The sound was like an ox; it was a sign of anger; there were about to be hasty, angering deliberations, and this would generate a calamity of weapons and armor.

是時，秦穆公遣兵襲鄭而不假道，還，晉大夫先軫謂襄公曰，秦師過不假塗，請擊之。遂要崤隄，以敗秦師，匹馬旃輪無反者，操之急矣。

At this time, Lord Mu of Qin dispatched soldiers to surprise-attack Zheng, but they did not make use of the thoroughfares. They started on their return. Xian Zhen, Grand Master of Jin, spoke to Lord Xiang, stating, “The Qin army is passing by without making use of the roads. Please attack them.” They pursued and intercepted them at Xiao’e, and thus defeated the Qin army. There was none that returned—not even one horse or a set of wheels; they were hastily unrelenting in their taking hold of captives.

晉不惟舊，而聽虐謀，結怒疆國，四被秦寇，禍流數世，凶惡之效也。⁷¹

The state of Jin did not uphold past commitments but listened to ruthless deliberations that tied its neighboring country to anger; four times it suffered

⁷¹ *HS*, 1428. “Lord Xi” 釐公 refers to Lord Xi 僖公 of the state of Lu 魯 (r. 659-627 B.C.E.). Sui (581-618 C.E.) and Tang (618-907 C.E.) dynasty scholar Yan Shigu’s 顏師古 (581–645 C.E.) commentary to the *Han shu* provides the historical background of this episode, detailing relations between the states of Qin 秦 and Jin 晉. See *HS*, 1429.

pillaging by Qin; calamity flowed for several generations; it was the result of deadly malevolence.

This is a series of events beginning with “a noise like an ox” 聲如牛 (presumably, mooing) that comes from the coffin of Lord Wen 文公 of Jin 晉 (r. 636-628 B.C.E.), who had recently died, as it is being sent to Quwo 曲沃 for burial. Soon after, a Jin noble, Grand Master Xian Zhen 大夫先軫 (fl. mid- to late-7th century B.C.E.), encourages Lord Wen’s successor, Lord Xiang 襄公 (r. 628-621 B.C.E.), to exploit the momentary vulnerability of the Qin army that is just then returning from a campaign against Zheng 鄭. Lord Xiang consents, and Jin soldiers attack and obliterate the Qin army. Ban Gu’s retelling describes the ruthlessness of the Jin army: “there was none that returned—not even one horse or a set of wheels; they were hastily unrelenting in their taking hold of captives” 逐要崤隄以敗秦師匹馬輪無反者操之急矣. As retaliation, the Qin army launches a series of campaigns that bring ruin to the state of Jin.

Into this sequence of events, Ban Gu inserts an analysis that uses the language of the “Hong fan” and the *Zhuan* to explain the strange incident and connect it to subsequent events (i.e., Jin’s decision to take military action against Qin and Qin’s retaliation). Citing Liu Xiang, Ban Gu labels the strange cry coming from Lord Wen’s coffin as a sounded eerie occurrence 鼓妖. Ban Gu explains that it has happened because of “hasty, angering deliberations” 急怒之謀 that would soon take place, referring to Xian Zhen’s advice to attack the Qin army. Repeating the term “deliberations” 謀, Ban Gu explains that the ruin brought to Jin stemmed from Lord Xiang’s “listening to ruthless deliberations” 聽虐謀. By using the terminology of the “Hong fan” and its *Zhuan* in the language of sounded eerie occurrences 鼓妖, haste 急, deliberations 謀, and

listening 聽, Ban Gu's analysis ties the account of the paranormal noise and the subsequent war between Jin and Qin to concepts outlined in the "Hong fan" and its tradition: corrupted human listening and its effects in the material environment in the form of anomalous happenings.

There are a few crucial points in Ban Gu's treatment of this episode that characterize his approach to anomaly in the "Wuxing zhi" in general:

First, there is an emotional valence to the forces that Ban Gu says connect human behavior and anomalous events. Ban Gu understands phenomena associated with oxen as signifying anger: "the sound was like an ox; it was a sign of anger" 聲如牛怒象也. Ban Gu then connects this to "hasty, angering deliberations" 急怒之謀 by Jin grandmaster Xian Zhen, who convinces Lord Xiang to betray Qin. Ban Gu observes that this "tied its neighboring country [Qin] to anger" 結怒疆國. Ban Gu in his analysis thus treats anger 怒 as a force similar to vapors (*qi* 氣). Jin's "hasty, angering deliberations" and Qin's enraged acts of vengeance stimulate a weird noise from Lord Wen's coffin that, being like the cry of an ox, is a representation of anger.

Second, there is a duality to the anomalous event in terms of the time frame in which it occurs. Judging from the emphasis on anomalous events being caused by situations that have already taken place (or are in the process of taking place) in Ban Gu's comments about anomalies related to corruption in listening, the ox-like cry from Lord Wen's coffin would have been brought about by acts of angering counsel that have already taken place or were in the process of taking place. Presumably, the atmosphere of conspiracy was already in the process of forming, which would have meant that Xian Zhen was already harboring ill will towards Qin and making plans to strike against it. Yet, Ban Gu's language points forward in time. He notes that "there were *about to be* hasty, angering deliberations" 將有急怒之謀. The precipitating incident

explicitly named in Ban Gu's version of the account (Xian Zhen's counsel to Lord Xiang) happens after the noise from the coffin is heard. Anomalous incidents stimulated by activity in the human world thus seem to exist in a state of a-chronicity with reference to their causes, so that they can point backwards or forwards in time (or simultaneously point both ways).

Third, like the sound of the phantom bell at the Han court, the cry of an ox suggests a destructive denouement that occurs according to the rules of human society. Just as Li Xun predicts that Zhu Bo and Zhao Xuan would fall, Ban Gu points out that the angering deliberations that triggered the sound would produce "a calamity of weapons and armor" 兵革之禍, which comes about in the form of Qin pillaging Jin. Ban Gu emphasizes the damage caused to Jin by repeating the term "calamity" 禍 in the statement "calamity flowed for several generations" 禍流數世. While according to Ban Gu's analysis, it was not this eventual calamity that triggered the anomalous event (counsel given in reckless anger did), nevertheless, the dysfunction in the human world betokened by the strange sound suggested an eventual, damaging breakdown.

IV. Issues in Classifying According to the Six Terms for Anomalies in the *Zhuan* 傳 ("Tradition")

The two accounts listed above (the bell sound at the Han court and the cow cry coming from Lord Wen's coffin) demonstrate events recorded in official history that Ban Gu labels as "eerie occurrences" *yao* 妖. In order to illustrate the nature of the other categories of anomalies outlined in the *Zhuan*, the following two accounts are examples of how the "Wuxing zhi" applies the terms "abnormalities" 孽, "aberrant generations" 眚, "startling maladies" 眚, and "salient deviations" 祥 to historical events.

IV.A. *Baih* Bugs 蜚 in the Kingdom of Lu 魯 as “abnormality” 孽 or “aberrant generation” 眚?

As a telling example that reveals the complexity involved in Ban Gu’s attempt to classify anomalies in history, listed under corruption in listening, there is a brief account of an infestation of a type of insect. The two-graph record of the infestation is quoted from the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (“Springs and Autumns”)—a canonical work of history based on records prepared during the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.E.) by scribe-historians in the court of the kingdom of Lu 魯—where it is recorded as having occurred during the reign of Lord Zhuang 莊公 (r. 693-662) of Lu:

嚴公二十九年「有蜚」。

In the twenty-ninth year [665 B.C.E.] of Lord Yan [i.e., Lord Zhuang], “there were *baih* bugs.”

Ban Gu presents two possibilities for its classification, one raised by Liu Xin and one by Liu Xiang:

劉歆以為負蟄也，性不食穀，食穀為災，介蟲之孽。

Liu Xin held: that they were burdened by *ban* bugs, which do not by nature feed on grains; that these fed on grains, which created a disaster; and that it was an abnormality in creatures that have a hard shell.

劉向以為蜚色青，近青眚也，非中國所有。南越盛暑，男女同川澤，淫風所生，為蟲臭惡。

Liu Xiang held: that the color of *baih* bugs is dark green, and that it was close to dark green aberrant generations; and also that these are not present in the Inner States. In South Yue, when the summer heat is at peak intensity, men and women bathe in the same river, and these are generated out of the winds of licentiousness. As creatures, they are malodorous and pernicious.

是時嚴公取齊淫女為夫人，既入，淫於兩叔，故蜚至。天戒若日，今誅絕之尚及，不將生臭惡，聞於四方。

At this time, Lord Yan took a licentious woman of Qi as his wife. Having installed her, she brought licentiousness to two of her husband's younger brothers, and therefore *bāih* bugs came. Heaven abhors such days, and in present times censures and cuts off their advancing, so that they do not generate foul-smelling iniquity, which would be heard of in all the four directions.

嚴不寤，其後夫人與兩叔作亂，二嗣以殺，卒皆被辜。⁷²

Lord Yan did not realize what was going on, and afterwards his wife and his younger brothers created disorder. The two heirs were murdered, and their foot soldiers were all dismembered.⁷³

Although Ban Gu does not explicitly resolve which category to which he believes the infestation belongs, the explanations of Liu Xin and Liu Xiang are telling about the nature of the two categories they name in the context of the “Wuxing zhi” and problems of classification that were present because of varying understandings about the details of the historic record.

Both Liu Xin and Liu Xiang adduce details about the infestation not named in the *Chunqiu* account to portray the incident as anomalous and classify it. Liu Xin believed that the *bāih* 蜚 insects named in the *Chunqiu* were actually a type of insect called *ban* 蟞 that does not normally eat grain. However, that year in Lu (665 B.C.E.), the *ban* bugs fed on grain, oddly in contrast to their nature, and to such a degree that it was a calamity. (The source of Liu Xin's information on the infestation that year is not named in the “Wuxing zhi.”) From this, Liu Xin concludes that the infestation was an abnormality in insects with a hard shell 介蟲之孽.

Liu Xiang, in contrast, thought that what was odd about the *bāih* insects that appeared that year in Lu was not that they were acting against their nature, but that they were outside of

⁷² *HS*, 1431-2.

⁷³ Reconstructed pronunciation of the graph *fei* 蜚 is as in Schuessler, 288. Reconstructed pronunciation of *fan* 蟞 is as according to the homophonic graph *fan* 煩 in Schuessler, 262.

their usual habitat, and that they were essentially an abnormal form of life that was physically generated out of a material climate of moral corruption. Liu Xiang explains that *beih* insects appear usually in South Yue (a region in what is present-day southern China that included parts of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian provinces), generated out of “licentious winds” 淫風 formed by local customary practices in which men and women bathed together in rivers during the hottest days of the summer. Liu Xiang believed the *beih* bugs, the weird spawn of iniquity (becoming all the more out of place because appearing in the Inner States region), appeared in Lu because Lord Zhuang took as his wife a “licentious woman of Qi” 齊淫女 who committed adultery with his two younger brothers. Liu Xiang thus classifies the appearance of *beih* bugs in Lu as a dark green aberrant generations 青眚, on the basis of his understanding that *beih* bugs are dark green in color.

There are a few things that are out of place about how the incident is classified in the “Wuxing zhi.” For one, it is among the records of strange events from history that Ban Gu lists after his general comments on corruption in listening, even though there is no content in the account or in the comments of Liu Xin or Liu Xiang that pertain to listening. In the *Zhuan*, abnormalities in insects with a hard shell 介蟲之孽 correspond to corruption in speaking. Dark green aberrant generations 青眚 are caused by corruption in demeanor. The historical content of Liu Xiang’s comments also reflects violations against demeanor, not listening. The only possible connection to corruption in listening is suggested by Ban Gu’s comments after the immediately preceding historical account (recording the apparition of locusts), in which Ban Gu recalls Liu Xin believed that abnormalities in insects with a hard shell 介蟲之孽 should be “divined together with fish” 與魚同占, which might account for why Ban Gu lists the account under

corruption in listening, as in the *Zhuan*, abnormalities in fish 鱼孽 occur when there is dysfunction in listening.⁷⁴

Despite these inconsistencies, Liu Xin and Liu Xiang's comments are telling in terms of the meanings of the terms abnormality 孽 and aberrant generation 眚. Judging from how they are applied here, the former is a term for strange behavior in animals caused by human corruption, and the latter for creatures that are entirely generated from the atmosphere exhaled out of human iniquity. This use of the term aberrant generation 眚 here to refer to odd creatures coming into being in the atmosphere of human errancy reflects the description of the term (discussed above) in the *Shuo*, where it is noted that “irregular objects are generated” 異物生 when the level of human corruption becomes “more intense” 甚.

The disparate comments of Liu Xin and Liu Xiang demonstrate a multiplicity in the use of classificatory terms in the “Wuxing zhi.” In this case the difference in their opinions turns on their divergent positions on what had actually happened in history and what type of insect was involved, and are not because they disagree about what their classificatory terms stand for conceptually. To Liu Xin, an insect infestation documented in the historical record was strange because an insect was eating grain when it did not normally do so. To Liu Xiang, it was unusual because it was an essentially abnormal creature that had been generated from miasms of human corruption and was also outside of the region where it normally appeared. Rather than offering finished solutions for this problem of classification, the “Wuxing zhi” often leaves such contradiction unresolved, so that frequently the “Wuxing zhi” resembles a forum in which

⁷⁴ *HS*, 1431.

different authorities within the same school of thought debate over how to apply their theoretical principles. In the putative tradition of thought that of which Ban Gu presents himself as an exponent, while there seems to have been a general agreement about the basic meaning of these terms among the different sources cited in the “Wuxing zhi,” a given historical account could produce multiple classifications based on divergent understandings of the details of history.

IV.B. Field Mice 麩鼠 Nibbling Ox Horns as Both “startling malady” 旤 and “salient deviation” 祥

Another account of a strange incident involving animals elucidates two of the other terms for anomaly while demonstrating a similar multiplicity in how the “Wuxing zhi” applies such terms to the classification of odd events. Among the episodes from history that Ban Gu lists to illustrate anomalous events that happen when a ruler fails to adhere to the principle of demeanor 貌, he cites an account from the *Chunqiu* recorded in the seventh year (584 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Cheng 公成 of Lu 魯 (r. 590-573 B.C.E.) in which field mice repeatedly gnaw at the horns of an ox being prepared for sacrifice in the kingdom of Lu:

成公七年「正月，麩鼠食郊牛角；改卜牛，又食其角」。⁷⁵

In the seventh year [584 B.C.E.] of Lord Cheng [r. 590-573 B.C.E.]: “In the first month of the year, field mice had gnawed at the horns of the ox designated for the sacrifice in the outskirts. We divined about using another ox. The field mice again gnawed at its horns.”⁷⁶

To this, Ban Gu appends the comments of Liu Xiang, and then transitions to his own remarks that provide the historical context of the incident and his own views:

⁷⁵ *HS*, 1372.

⁷⁶ English translation based on that in Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, *Zuo Tradition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016) [abbreviated hereafter as DLS], vol. 2, 763.

劉向以為近青祥, 亦牛旤也. 不敬而備, 霧之所致也.

Liu Xiang held that it was close to dark green salient deviations, and that it was also a startling malady in cows. Irreverence and ignorance are that which bring about murkiness.

昔周公制禮樂, 成周道, 故成王命魯郊祀天地, 以尊周公.

In old times, the Duke of Zhou [r. 1042-1035 B.C.E.] crafted rites and music. This became the way of the Zhou. Therefore, King Cheng [r. 1042-1021 B.C.E.] ordered Lu to make sacrifices to heaven and earth at the outskirts, and thereby honor the Duke of Zhou.

至成公時, 三家始顛政, 魯將從此衰. 天愍周公之德, 痛其將有敗亡之旤(禍), 故於郊祭而見戒云.

When it came to the time of Lord Cheng [r. 590-573 B.C.E.], the three households began to exercise exclusive control in governmental authority. From this point on, Lu would decline. Heaven grieved for the virtue of the Zhou and was pained that it was going to suffer the calamity of being overthrown and perishing. Therefore, it was said that it displayed its condemnation at the outskirts sacrifices.

鼠, 小蟲, 性盜竊, 鼯又其小者也. 牛, 大畜, 祭天尊物也. 角, 兵象, 在上, 君威也.

Mice are small creatures. Their nature is to rob and steal. Moreover, field mice are the smallest of their kind. The ox is a large livestock animal. It is a venerable object for making sacrifices to heaven. Horns are a sign of weapons. They are located above. They are the dignified department of the ruler.

小小鼯鼠, 食至尊之牛角, 象季氏乃陪臣盜竊之人, 將執國名以傷君威而害周公之祀也. 改卜牛, 鼯鼠又食其角, 天重語之也.

Teeny-tiny field mice gnawed the horns of an ox, which expresses the utmost degree of honor. They represented the Ji lineage, those people who were accompanying vassals who robbed and stole. They would commandeer the titles of their country and thereby injure the dignified department of their ruler, and then harm the sacrifices of the Duke of Zhou. Using another ox was divined about. The field mice again gnawed at its horns. Heaven thus spoke about them twice.

成公怠慢昏亂，遂君臣更執于晉。至于襄公，晉為溴(溟)梁之會，天下大夫皆奪君政。其後三家逐昭公，卒死于外，幾絕周公之祀。⁷⁷

Lord Cheng was negligent, indolent, dim-witted, and disorderly. Consequently, the ruler and his vassal were detained in Jin, one after the other. When it came to the time of Lord Xiang, Jin arranged a meeting at Ju Dam, and the Grandmasters of the realms under heaven all usurped the ruler's governmental authority. After that, the three households drove out Lord Zhao [r. 541-510 B.C.E.]. He died in exile. They nearly cut off the sacrifices of the Duke of Zhou.

Liu Xiang's remark that "irreverence and ignorance are that which bring about murkiness" 不敬而備霧之所致也 emphasizes the importance of reverence 敬 and the effects of its corruption. Reverence 敬 is a close synonym of respectfulness 恭, which is associated in the "Hong fan" and *Zhuan* with demeanor. Accordingly, Liu Xiang analyzes this episode as "being close to dark green salient deviations" 進青祥.⁷⁸ Describing the incident as being dark green 青 is in keeping with the *Zhuan*, since according to the *Zhuan*, dark green salient deviations 青祥 arise from corruption in demeanor, which affects the dark green element, wood. Liu Xiang also classifies the incident as being essentially a startling malady in cows 牛甌. According to the *Zhuan*, startling maladies in cows occur when there is corruption to thinking 思. Liu Xiang's reference to murkiness 霧 caused by irreverence 不敬 and ignorance 備 suggests his belief that corruption in thinking 思 was also implicated in the strange damage to the ox horns done by field mice.

While Ban Gu does not directly explain the logic behind Liu Xiang's classification, the details of the incident are enough to connect the dots. The incident brought harm to the material body of a livestock animal (either damage to the sacrosanct body of the slain sacrificial animal,

⁷⁷ *HS*, 1372.

⁷⁸ *HS*, 1372.

or physical injury if it was still alive at the time) in an unusual, startling way, and this was most likely the reason that Liu Xiang classifies it as being essentially a startling malady in oxen 牛旤. Moreover, presumably because the aberrant incident involved an animal intended for the outskirts sacrifices—a context that was bound up with what was among the most important of a ruler’s duties, paying homage to the powers of heaven and earth—Liu Xiang believed it had also simultaneously reached the most urgent, most apparent level of anomaly, salient deviations 祥.

Ban Gu’s own comments (to which he transitions seamlessly from Liu Xiang’s, so that it is difficult to tell where Liu Xiang’s comments end and Ban Gu’s begin) provide details of the historical background of the incident. Ban Gu says that Lord Cheng, then the ruler of the Lu, was “negligent, indolent, dim-witted, and disorderly” 怠慢昏亂.⁷⁹ During his reign, the “three households” 三家 of Lu—lineages in Lu descended from three sons of Lord Cheng’s ancestral predecessor, Lord Huan 桓公 (r. 711-694 B.C.E.) of Lu, which had consolidated substantial political power in the time since they were established in the early 7th century B.C.E.—began to usurp his authority and administer the affairs of state.⁸⁰ Ban Gu recounts that as an additional

⁷⁹ *HS*, 1372.

⁸⁰ The sons of Lord Huan from whom the three households were descended were Gongzi Qingfu 公子慶父 (d. 660 B.C.E.), Gongzi Ya 公子牙 (d. 662 B.C.E.), and Gongzi You 公子友 (d. 644 B.C.E.). They were brothers to Lord Zhuang 莊公 but never acceded to the monarchy of Lu. Gongzi Qingfu was ancestor of the Meng 孟 lineage, Gongzi Ya was the ancestor of the Shusun 叔孫 lineage, and Gongzi You 公子友 was ancestor of the Ji 季 lineage. Their actions are recorded in the *Chunqiu* and the *Zuo zhuan*. Entries in either of those works that relate to these three figures span a period of time beginning at the second year (692 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Zhuang and going down the thirty-second year (510 B.C.E.) of Lord Zhao. For a full list of references, see the “Personal Name Index” section of DLS, vol. 3, 2053-147.

The record of the *Zuo zhuan* for the thirty-second year (510 B.C.E.) of Lord Zhao contains a passage that highlights the Ji lineage of Gongzi You, who was the son of Wen Jiang 文姜 and therefore the full brother of Lord Zhuang. See DLS, vol. 3, 1724-5. In contrast to Ban Gu, the *Zuo zhuan* passage is an encomium to Gongzi You and his lineage. The passage portrays the hereditary lineage of Lu rule as dissolute and emphasizes the accomplishments and *de facto* power of the Ji line. It asserts that the authority of the Lu hereditary line began to wane after the death of Lord Wen 文公 (r. 626-609 B.C.E.)—a generation prior to Lord Cheng’s accession—when Xiangzhong 襄仲 of Lu (d. 601) assassinated Lord Wen’s legitimate heir and “established the son of a secondary consort as ruler” 立庶.

symptom of Lord Cheng's lagging power, on multiple occasions either Lord Cheng himself or his vassal was detained in Jin 晉.⁸¹ The power of the Lu monarchy continued to decline into the reign of Lord Cheng's successor, Lord Xiang 襄公 (572-542 B.C.E.). This decline became painfully obvious with the Ju Dam 淩梁 conference (held in 557 B.C.E.), where the retainers of Lu independently formed an alliance with their peers in other dukedoms, which constituted a severe violation of the sovereignty of the Lu dukedom.⁸² This erosion in the power of the Lu dukedom reached a climax when members of the three households drove Lord Xiang's successor, Lord Zhao 昭公 (r. 541-510 B.C.E.) out of the kingdom of Lu entirely.

Such details corroborate Liu Xiang's dual classification. The *Zhuan's* general account of demeanor values the concepts of respectfulness 恭 and gravity 肅. The language of Ban Gu's account likewise features terms like honor 尊 (the purpose of Lu's outskirts sacrifices to heaven and earth are to honor the Duke of Zhou 周公) and dignified deportment 威: values that, if not exactly identical to the terms in the *Zhuan*, closely mirror them. Ban Gu's account emphasizes the moments in Lu history of the 6th century B.C.E. in which the outward image of the Lu

According to the *Zuo zhuan* passage, from the time of this shift in the ruling line after the death of Lord Wen until the 510 B.C.E., "administrative power has remained with the Ji lineage; for four rulers, up to Lord Zhao" 政在季氏於此君也四公矣. The apparent preeminence of the Ji line in terms of domestic political power within Lu for the duration of the 6th century B.C.E. is most likely the reason that, of the three households that held power in Lu during Lord Cheng's reign, the Ji lineage is the only one that is mentioned by name in Ban Gu's account.

⁸¹ The *Zuo zhuan* records that in the tenth year (581 B.C.E.) of Lord Cheng's rule, Long Cheng was detained by "people of Jin" 晉人 while on an official visit to Jin, and was not allowed to return until the following year. See DLS, vol. 2, 788-9. The *Zuo zhuan* also records that in the sixteenth year (575 B.C.E.) of Lord Cheng's rule, Lu official Ji Wenzi 季文子 was arrested by "people of Jin" 晉人. Lord Cheng petitioned for Ji Wenzi's release, and Ji Wenzi was released after negotiations between a representative of Lord Cheng, Zishu Shengbo 子叔聲伯 of Lu, and the Jin official who had overseen Ji Wenzi's detainment, Xi Chou 郤犨 of Jin. See DLS, vol. 2, 848-51.

⁸² The meeting at Ju Dam is recorded in the *Chunqiu* in the sixteenth year (557 B.C.E.) of Lord Xiang and in the corresponding passages of the *Zuozhuan*. Grandmaster Shusun Bao 大夫叔孫豹 (d. 538 B.C.E.), a noble from Lu, took part in the alliance, subverting Lord Xiang's authority. See DLS, vol. 2, 1036-9.

sovereign as inviolable were severely compromised: Lord Cheng's detainment by the officers of Jin, the gross usurpation of Lord Xiang's authority by his retainers at the Ju Dam conference, and the humiliating exile of Lord Zhao. Certainly these events demonstrated the dramatic decay of venerability and gravity in the Lu dukedom to a degree that would have (according to the view of the *Zhuan*) triggered an anomalous event of the most intense degree (a salient deviation 祥). Ban Gu understands the material effects of the collapse of the Lu dukedom's ability to project authority as penetrating into the hallowed space of the sacrifices to heaven and earth, creating a sign that betokened Lord Cheng's lapse in prestige and anticipated severe disruption to come. Ban Gu's attention to the deficiencies in Lord Cheng's mental capacities, especially his observation that Lord Cheng was "dim-witted" 昏, connects to the idea of startling maladies in cows 牛鬪 caused by deficiencies in a ruler's powers of thinking. The historical background provided by Ban Gu mingles concepts surrounding demeanor and thinking outlined in the *Zhuan* to make Liu Xiang's double interpretation viable.

IV.C. Nuances in *xiang* 祥

The six terms for anomaly outlined in the *Zhuan* and used by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin comprise a systematized selection of vocabulary fashioned for the specific purpose of describing and classifying anomalous occurrences connected to human corruption. As suggested by entries for these terms in the *Shuowen*, these terms also had an independent existence outside their functioning as nomenclature for the highly structured material-political philosophy reflected in the *Zhuan*. In most cases, this does not present a problem, but in the case of the term *xiang* 祥, there occasionally appears to be subtle variation in how the term is used in different contexts in the "Wuxing zhi."

There is its use in a technical, tightly circumscribed way alongside the five other terms named in the *Zhuan* to taxonomize anomalous occurrences. In this context, the term is used as a counter that indicates the highest, most apparent level of anomaly as distinct from the other five terms. To reflect this more narrowly defined use, I have translated it as “salient deviation.” Its use in this more narrowly circumscribed way is signaled when it is paired with color, as it is in the account of the nibbling mice, where the incident is labeled by Liu Xiang as being a dark green salient deviation 青祥.

But there is also its use in a more general sense to indicate obvious signs of dysfunction that bode ill for the future. An example of Ban Gu’s inclusion of this more general use of the term is among the historical episodes listed under violations of demeanor. This is Ban Gu’s direct account of a short speech made by Han minister Gu Yong 谷永 (d. 8 B.C.E.) sometime during the Hongjia 鴻嘉 (20-17 B.C.E.) and Yongshi 永始 (16-13 B.C.E.) eras of the reign of Thearch Cheng 成帝 (r. 33-7 B.C.E.) in the Western Han. Gu Yong remonstrates to other Han ministers about Thearch Cheng’s dissolute behavior, which includes the abuse of his powers as emperor to amass private lands and wealth. Evoking a figuration that serves as a parallel to Thearch Cheng, Gu Yong recalls a story from antiquity (recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* in the thirty-second year of Lord Zhuang 莊公, i.e. 662 B.C.E.) in which the Duke of Guo 虢公 (fl. c. 662 B.C.E.)—the ruler of the kingdom of Guo 虢 who, like Thearch Cheng, had a reputation for lacking self-discipline—has a dream of a spirit who promised him lands:

昔虢公為無道，有神降曰：「賜爾土田」，言將以庶人受土田也。諸侯夢得土田，為失國祥，而況王者畜私田財物，為庶人之事乎！⁸³

In old times, the Lord of Guo did things that were not of the way. A spirit descended and stated: “You shall be granted lands and fields.” This meant that he would receive lands and fields just like the commoners. When one of the many vassal lords dreamed of getting lands and fields, it was a prominent sign that his country would be lost. It is even more so when one who is a king garners his own private fields and material wealth. These are the acts of commoners!”

The *Zuo zhuan* records that the kingdom of Jin 晉 destroyed Guo seven years after the Lord of Guo’s dream, in the fifth year (655 B.C.E.) of the reign Lord Xi 僖公 of Lu (r. 659-627 B.C.E.).⁸⁴ No doubt with this timeline in mind, Gu Yong labels the Duke of Guo’s dream a *xiang* 祥. Here the term is not paired with a color, and there is no attempt to link it to the system of classificatory terms named in the *Zhuan*. Rather, it has the feeling of being used as a general term to describe a remarkably unusual event that signals that something is urgently wrong in the human order. Here the dysfunction is errancy in a political leader: Gu Yong says the Duke of Guo “did things that were not of the way” 為無道. Gu Yong views the dream as an indication that the Duke of Guo’s transgressive behavior, his avariciousness embodied in his dream in which a spirit promises him lands, will lead to his and his country’s destruction (“it was a prominent sign that his country would be lost” 為失國祥). There is therefore some emphasis on future calamity.⁸⁵ The term *xiang* 祥 as used by Gu Yong encompasses this complexity of

⁸³ *HS*, 1368. The episode is recorded in an alternative version in the *Zuo zhuan*, see *DLS*, 222-23. The *Zuo zhuan* version records that a spirit descended 降 into a territory of Guo and dwelt 居 there for six months. Gu Yong’s specific account of the Duke of Guo’s dream is not present in the *Zuo zhuan* account.

⁸⁴ See *DLS*, 278-79.

⁸⁵ The phrase *wei shi guo xiang* 為失國祥 might also be translated as “it is a prominent sign of a foundering country,” which indicates a present, rather than a future, state. Nevertheless, the knowledge that Guo is eventually destroyed places attention on the eventual, future outcome of the Duke of Guo’s greed.

meaning, whereby the term stands for a strange event that indicates present corruption that will very likely lead to future breakdown. I therefore translate it here as “prominent sign.”

These two different uses of the term *xiang* 祥 have one aspect in common. Both incidents of the Duke of Guo’s dream and the nibbling mice share the point that they happen in the intimate space inhabited by a ruler, either at the venue of sacrifices to heaven and earth over which Lord Cheng presided or in what might be called the “dream space” of the Duke of Guo. This proximity to the ruler in both cases marks the strange event as being of the utmost urgency and saliency. Strange incidents referred to as *xiang* 祥 (whether in its general or narrower, technical usage) thus had a quality of obviousness, weight, and extreme urgency.

IV.D. Jing Fang’s 京房 System of Classification Featuring *yao* 妖 and *yi* 異

The term *yao* 妖 (“eerie occurrence”) occurs 85 times in the text of the “Wuxing zhi,” more than any of the other terms for anomalous events mentioned in the *Zhuan*. Its frequent appearance indicates the centrality of the term to the “Wuxing zhi” view on anomaly.

The *Zhuan* subdivides the category *yao* 妖 into different kinds of *yao* 妖 anomaly that correspond to human failure in one of the five matters 五事 or royal perfection 皇極.⁸⁶ Standing in contrast to this highly specific framing of the term *yao* 妖 is Ban Gu’s frequent citation of passages from Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan* after individual accounts of anomalous incidents in history. While Jing Fang also uses the term to refer to a range of bizarre or uncanny events that are understood as arising from transgressive human behavior, the events that he labels as *yao* 妖

⁸⁶ As noted above, the sub-categories of *yao* 妖 named in the *Zhuan* are “eerie occurrences in clothing” 服妖, “eerie occurrences in poetry” 詩妖, “eerie occurrences in plants” 草妖, “sounded eerie occurrences” 鼓妖, “eerie occurrences of greasy nights” 脂夜之妖, and “eerie occurrences in darts” 射妖.

frequently conflict with how they are classified by other sources that Ban Gu cites. In the “Wuxing zhi,” there are some thirty-three citations from Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan* that use the term *yao* 妖:

Table 1.4.: Events Classified Using the Term *yao* 妖 (“eerie occurrence”) in Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan*

Human Transgression	Corresponding “eerie occurrence”	Pagination in <i>Han shu</i>⁸⁷
君不思道 the ruler does not consider the way	厥妖火燒宮 its eerie occurrence is fires burning the palace	1329
君不正, 臣欲篡 the ruler is not proper; vassals desire to usurp power	厥妖狗冠出朝門 its eerie occurrence is a dog wearing the formal cap and going out the gate of the ruler’s court	1367
有始無終 there is a beginning without a finish	厥妖雄雞自嚙斷其尾 its eerie occurrence is a male chicken gnawing at itself and severing its own tail	1369
賢者居明夷之世, 知時而傷, 或眾在位 those who are worthy dwell in an era of damage to brightness; those who know of the timing (of heaven) are thereby harmed; or commoners occupy positions of power	厥妖雞生角 its eerie occurrence is a chicken growing horns	1371
祭天不慎 in making sacrifices to heaven, not being meticulous	厥妖鼠嚙郊牛角 its eerie occurrence is tiny mice gnawing at the horns of the ox designated for sacrifice at the outskirts	1372
誅不原情 an execution is made, but it does not return the situation to its original state	厥妖鼠舞門 its eerie occurrence is mice dancing at the gate	1374
臣私祿罔辟 vassals use official funds for private gain and entangle their ruler	厥妖鼠巢 its eerie occurrence is mice making a nest	1374
上下咸諄 those above and those below are all in error	厥妖城門壞 its eerie occurrence is that the gate of the city wall breaks	1376

⁸⁷ Ban Gu 班固 et al., *Han shu* 漢書 (Zhonghua shuju: Beijing, 1962 [22nd printing, 2019]).

Table 1.4. (continued):

執政失, 下將害之 those holding administrative power are remiss; the generals below will harm them	厥妖狗生角 its eerie occurrence is a dog growing horns	1398
君子苟免, 小人陷之 despite the noble master's evasions, the petty person snares him	厥妖狗生角 its eerie occurrence is a dog growing horns	1398
夫婦不嚴 husband and wife are not earnest	厥妖狗與豕交 its eerie occurrence is a dog fornicating with a pig	1398
前樂後憂 one is at first merry and then afterward fretful	厥妖天雨羽 its eerie occurrence is heaven raining down feathers	1401
棄正作淫 abandoning upright ways and engaging in lewdness	厥妖木斷自屬 its eerie occurrence is wood severing that which is of its own kind	1413-4
君吝於祿, 信衰賢去 the ruler is stingy with official funds; credibility declines and worthiness departs	厥妖天雨草 its eerie occurrence is heaven raining down grass	1414
逆親親 going against being close with one's kin	厥妖白黑鳥鬪於國 its eerie occurrence is white and black birds fighting in the capital city	1415
專征劫殺 being solely concerned with military expeditions, plunder, and killing	厥妖鳥鵲鬪 its eerie occurrence is birds and magpies fighting	1416
辟退有德 the ruler dismisses those who possess virtue	厥妖水鳥集于國中 its eerie occurrence is water birds gathering in the center of the capital city	1416
尊卑不別 the venerable and the lowly are not differentiated	厥妖女生赤毛 its eerie occurrence is women growing red hair	1420
眾逆同志 the common people go against and are of the same intent	厥妖河魚逆流上 its eerie occurrence is river fish going against the flow and moving upstream	1430

Table 1.4. (continued):

眾心不安君政 the hearts of the commoners are not at ease with the administration of the ruler	厥妖豕入居室 its eerie occurrence is a pig entering and occupying one's house	1437-8
興繇役, 奪民時 raising corvée labor; stealing the time of the subjects	厥妖牛生五足 its eerie occurrence is an ox growing five legs	1447
誅不原情 an execution is made, but it does not return the situation to its original state	厥妖鼠舞門 its eerie occurrence is mice dancing at the gate	1449
小人剝廬 petty people strip away the exterior of the cottage	厥妖山崩 its eerie occurrence is a mountain collapsing	1455
眾心不安 the hearts of the commoners are not at ease	厥妖龍鬪 its eerie occurrence is dragons fighting	1466
有德遭害 that which has virtue encounters harm	厥妖龍見井中 its eerie occurrence is dragons appearing at the center of the well	1467
立嗣子疑 there is suspicion about the successor child that is installed	厥妖蛇居國門鬪 its eerie occurrence is snakes occupying the gate of the capital city and fighting	1467
方伯分威 the sire of a region parcels out his authority	厥妖牧馬生子 its eerie occurrence is a horse that one tends giving birth to a child	1469
亡天子, 諸侯相伐 the son of heaven perishes; the many vassal lords wage battle against one another	厥妖馬生人 its eerie occurrence is a horse giving birth to a human	1470
臣易上, 政不順 vassals change into those above; administration is not abided by	厥妖馬生角 its eerie occurrence is a horse growing horns	1470
君暴亂, 疾有道 the ruler is brutal and disorderly; illness has a pathway	厥妖長狄入國 its eerie occurrence is the Tall Di entering the capital city	1471

Table 1.4. (continued):

子三年不改父道, 思慕不皇, 亦重見先人之非, 不則為私 the child for three years does not alter the way of the father, thinks about him with intense yearning without cessation, and also repeats the wrongdoings of its forebears and does not follow norms in its comportment	厥妖人死復生 its eerie occurrence is humans dying and returning to life	1473
「睽孤, 見豕負塗」 “contrary solitude; there appears a hog that carries mud on its back”	厥妖人生兩頭 its eerie occurrence is a person being born with two heads	1473
冢宰專政 the prime minister has sole control over administration	厥妖人生角 its eerie occurrence is humans growing horns	1474
君不任賢 the ruler does not put trust in the worthy	厥妖天雨星 its eerie occurrence is heaven raining down stars	1511

There are a few features of Jing Fang’s use of *yao* 妖 that are worth noting:

First, Jing Fang’s category *yao* 妖 is not divided into further sub-categories as it is in the *Zhuan*.

Second, as can be seen from the above chart, the overwhelming majority of the events covered by Jing Fang’s concept of *yao* 妖 are either odd behavior or conditions in animals (such as “mice dancing at the gate” 鼠舞門 or “an ox growing five legs” 牛生五足) or bizarre incidents involving humans (like “humans dying and returning to life” 人死復生).⁸⁸ (One striking event, a horse giving birth to a human 馬生人, transcends the border between the animal and human worlds, but still is within an animal-human range.)

⁸⁸ Two events in particular, “the Tall Di entering the capital city” 長狄入國—i.e., members of one of the barbarian communities located at the periphery of the *zhongyuan* 中原 region coming to a center of political power in the interior—and “women growing red hair” 女生赤毛, give an idea of the relative nature in some cases of what was considered strange for members of the scholastic community living within the borders of the Western Han empire.

Third, most (and arguably all) of the events that Jing Fang's names as being *yao* 妖 are benign. Jing Fang's concept seems to revolve around a characterization of *yao* 妖 events as being bizarre occurrences that are not in of themselves immediately harmful. Ban Gu's own general comments on *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 separate the two concepts (as they appear in the *Zhuan*) from the idea of harm: "in all cases, *yao* and *nie* respond to the elements and appear in of themselves; it is not that they appear and thus cause harm" 夫妖孽應行而自見非見而為害也.⁸⁹ Jing Fang's concept of *yao* 妖 shares this benign quality with the *yao* 妖 and *nie* 孽 of the *Zhuan* schema.

Fourth, Jing Fang's concept apparently excludes those dimensions of *yao* 妖 that pertain to human culture and to strange sounds (which are included in the *Zhuan*'s use of *yao* 妖). Jing Fang's *yao* 妖 seems to generally require that a physical body of a biological life form (whether plant, animal, or human) be directly involved.

Fifth, Jing Fang's concept with its frequent involvement of animals encompasses the *Zhuan*'s category of *nie* 孽 and those incidents classed as *huo* 魮 that are not seriously harmful to the animals involved. For example, among the historical accounts that Ban Gu lists under corruption in demeanor, there is an account of an episode taken from the *Zuo zhuan* that records a peculiar incident involving a chicken: "The *Tradition of the One of the Zuo Lineage* states that in the time of King Jing of the Zhou, Grandmaster Bin Qi saw a male chicken sever its own tail" 左氏傳曰周景王時大夫賓起見雄雞自斷其尾.⁹⁰ Ban Gu records that Liu Xiang labelled the event as being a startling malady in chickens 雞魮.⁹¹ In contrast, Jing Fang would label the

⁸⁹ *HS*, 1468.

⁹⁰ *HS*, 1368. The episode is recorded in the twenty-second year (520 B.C.E.) of Lord Zhao of Lu. See DLS, 1606-7.

⁹¹ *HS*, 1368.

incident as an eerie occurrence 妖, with the observation that “when there is a beginning without a finish, its eerie occurrence is a male chicken gnawing at itself and severing its own tail” 有始無終厥妖雄雞自嚙斷其尾.⁹² Another example of such disagreement is in the comments that Ban Gu cites to analyze an account of strange behavior in fish recorded in the *Shi ji*: “In the *Records of the Historian*, in the eighth year of Qin Shihuang, river fish went up[river] in great [numbers]” 史記秦始皇八年河魚大上.⁹³ Ban Gu notes that Liu Xiang viewed this as “being close to abnormalities in fish” 近魚孽.⁹⁴ Ban Gu’s citation from Jing Fang, however, describes such behavior as belonging to the general category of eerie occurrence 妖: “when the common people go against and are of the same will, its eerie occurrence is river fish going against the flow and moving upstream” 眾逆同志厥妖河魚逆流上.⁹⁵ (Ban Gu characteristically does not attempt to adjudicate between these divergent classifications.) Jing Fang’s *yao* 妖 thus merges elements that belong to multiple discrete categories in the *Zhuan* schema.

Jing Fang’s category of *yao* 妖 thus is used to describe much of what is or would be labelled as belonging to a mix of the six categories of anomaly described in the *Zhuan*. While not being perfectly equivalent to an all-embracing, sum total of these six categories, Jing Fang’s version of the term *yao* 妖 appears to encompass much of them, excluding events that are seriously harmful (like the portion of startling malady 眚 events that are livestock deaths or

⁹² *HS*, 1368.

⁹³ *HS*, 1430.

⁹⁴ *HS*, 1430.

⁹⁵ *HS*, 1430.

afflictions in humans represented by the term infections 痾). The capacity to attract attention in events labelled by Jing Fang as *yao* 妖 is purely their intensely weird, uncanny quality.

Other than *yao* 妖, passages of Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan* cited in the “Wuxing zhi” also use the term *yi* 異 to describe anomalous events. There are fourteen such occurrences of Jing Fang’s use of the term *yi* 異:

Table 1.5.: Events Classified Using the Term *yi* 異 (“intense irregularity”) in Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan*

Human Transgression	Corresponding “intense irregularity”	Pagination in <i>Han shu</i>⁹⁶
臣有緩茲謂不順 vassals are dilatory: this is called not being compliant	厥異霜不殺也 its intense irregularity is frost not killing	1409
有德遭險, 茲謂逆命 there is virtue that encounters danger: this is called going against vitality	厥異寒 its intense irregularity is cold	1422
天子弱, 諸侯力政 the son of heaven is weak; the many vassals wield government authority by force	厥異水鬪 its intense irregularity is deluges of water	1437
君湎於酒, 淫于色, 賢人潛, 國 家危 the ruler is besotted with wine and licentious in sexual desire, worthy people are swept away, and the country is in danger	厥異流水赤也 its intense irregularity is flowing water is red	1439
潛龍勿用, 眾逆同志, 至德乃潛 the dragon submerged in water: do not act; the multitudes go against and are all of one will; consummate virtue is thereby submerged	厥異風 its intense irregularity is wind	1443
君臣相背 the ruler and vassals turn backs against one another	厥異名水絕 its intense irregularity is renowned waters stop flowing	1452

⁹⁶ Ban Gu 班固 et al., *Han shu* 漢書 (Zhonghua shuju: Beijing, 1962 [22nd printing, 2019]).

Table 1.5. (continued):

臣私祿及親, 茲謂罔辟 vassals secretly give emoluments to kin: this is called hoodwinking the sovereign	厥異蒙, 其蒙先大濇, 已蒙起, 日 不見 its intense irregularity is haze; its haze appears as an intense warmth; once the haze has formed, the sun does not appear	1460
庶正蔽惡, 茲謂生孽災 the rectitude of commoners conceals malevolence: this is called generating disasters of disobedience	厥異霧 its intense irregularity is fog	1461
美不上人, 茲謂上弱 that which is beautiful does not revere people: this is called that which is above being weak	厥異日白, 七日不濇 its intense irregularity is the sun turning white; for seven days, it is not warm	1507
辟讐公行, 茲謂不伸 the sovereign transgresses, and does so openly: this is called not being exonerated	厥異日黑, 大風起, 天無雲, 日光 晦 its intense irregularity is the sun turning black; a great wind picks up, the sky is cloudless, but the rays of the sun are dark	1507
辟不聞道, 茲謂亡 the sovereign does not learn of the way; this is called perishing	厥異日赤 its intense irregularity is the sun turning red	1507
祭天不順茲謂逆 in making sacrifices to heaven, not being compliant: this is called going against	厥異日赤, 其中黑 its intense irregularity is the sun turning red, and in the middle there is black	1508
聞善不予, 茲謂失知 learning of benevolence but not practicing it: this is called forfeiting knowledge	厥異日黃 its intense irregularity is the sun turning yellow	1508
距諫自強, 茲謂却行 to distance oneself from remonstration yet strengthen oneself: this is called going backwards	厥異鷓退飛 its intense irregularity is a heron flying backwards	1519

As can be seen, in all but one of these occurrences of the term *yi* 異 in Jing Fang's usage, it is used to label abnormal meteorological or astronomical phenomenon (or a combination of the two). This suggests that Jing Fang viewed the term *yi* 異 as generally applying to anomalous events involving dynamic, elemental forces of nature that have an existence outside the realm of biological life.

The nature of the anomalies classified as *yi* 異 is thus somewhat different from those classified as *yao* 妖. Wrapped into Jing Fang's concept of *yao* 妖 anomalies, there is a quality of human surprise that can be expected for those who witness an animal or living object experience an uncanny change that is outside of its usual nature (a dog grows horns) or take a physical form that is entirely unforeseen (like a child being born with two heads in what appears to be a case of conjoined twins), or observe a weather event that involves an uncanny object (as when feathers or grass rain down from the sky). In contrast, while the weather and astronomical events classified by Jing Fang as *yi* 異 are indeed alarming, they do not involve an elemental force of nature suddenly presenting an appearance that was entirely inconceivable before. An example of an event that comes close to doing so is Jing Fang's description of the sun going dim when "the sovereign transgresses, and does so openly" 辟魯公行: "its intense irregularity is the sun turning black; a great wind picks up, the sky is cloudless, but the rays of the sun are dark" 厥異日黑大風起天無雲日光晦. The sun going dark in a cloudless sky certainly is intensely abnormal, but a darkened sun in "normal" circumstances (say, when it is covered by a cloud) is a natural prefiguration of the sun darkening on a cloudless day. The sun dimming on a cloudless day is one kind of abnormal. But the sun suddenly becoming unhinged, dancing around the sky, and

then shining down rays of flowers (a purely theoretical proposition that follows the pattern of *yao* 妖 events) would be of another kind altogether.

This distinction between the use of the terms *yao* 妖 and *yi* 異 by Jing Fang reflects the underlying logic of how anomalies are differentiated in the “Wuxing zhi” as a whole. The “Wuxing zhi” generally does not associate the term *guai* 怪 (“strange” or “prodigy”) with abnormal weather or astronomical events like it does with occurrences labeled as belonging to the six categories of anomaly. Conversely, the six categories of anomaly (which are described in various sources using the term *guai* 怪) seldom include abnormal weather or astronomical events. (Notable exceptions are uncanny weather events, such as greasy rain, and occasional anomalous astronomical events that are classified as salient deviations 祥.) This suggests that unusual weather and astronomical events, while treated as being anomalous and attention-grabbing, are not understood within the “Wuxing zhi” as indicating the same sense of startlement or sudden mental or emotional sense of uncanniness as events labelled with any of the terms for the six anomalies. In the “Wuxing zhi,” there appears to be a categorical difference between snow at an unusual time of year and the sky snowing feathers, and this is evinced by patterns in the language by which it labels anomalous events.

V. Conclusion

From the perspective of Ban Gu’s treatment of anomaly in the “Wuxing zhi,” for scholars living in the Eastern Han period, anomaly and strangeness were matters of historical record. Anomaly was something to be experienced by reading the historical record and analyzed according to concepts presented in canonical texts and their exegeses; Ban Gu does not present himself as experiencing anomaly directly, as a first-hand witness or a contemporary observer. In

the view articulated in the “Wuxing zhi,” anomalous events, like the severe political decay that had instigated them and the dramatic disruption that they presaged, might happen a handful of times within the period of a lifetime. In times of growing turmoil, as occurred in the final decades of Western Han rule, they were posited as occurring with increased frequency. But from the perspective of Ban Gu’s catalogue and theory, it was unlikely that any given historical actor would witness first-hand an event classified under the six categories of anomalies named in the *Zhuan*.⁹⁷ They were experienced as part of the written historical record, or else were imagined as events that might be experienced on a broad, society-wide level (as events witnessed directly by a handful of people but then heard of widely through hearsay) in years to come, should Eastern Han rulers grow corrupt and fail to achieve the standards of behavior that constituted the five matters and royal perfection.

In order to make sense of accounts of anomalous and strange events in the historical record, Ban Gu taxonomizes. In the “Wuxing zhi,” he refers to at least two different classificatory systems. He puts his main focus on the lexicon consisting of six categories (*yao* 妖, *nie* 孽, *huo* 眚, *ke* 疢, *sheng* 眚, and *xiang* 祥) named in the *Zhuan* and used by past authorities like Liu Xiang and Liu Xin in their comments on the historical record. He also frequently mentions Jing Fang’s language for classifying anomalous events in the *Yi zhuan* (which uses a simple dichotomy consisting of *yao* 妖 and *yi* 異). The two systems have points of divergence but are generally consistent in their underlying logic. When the two systems do diverge, Ban Gu

⁹⁷ Unusual meteorological trends, such as unseasonal warmth and cold or intense seasonal warmth and cold, and astronomical anomalies, such as eclipses, also make up a significant proportion of the anomalies catalogued by Ban Gu. In the understanding of the “Wuxing zhi,” these were presumably experienced by a large number of individuals at the time in which they occurred. In the “Wuxing zhi,” unusual meteorological events (and the damage they caused) generally fall outside of the six categories of anomalies. Astronomical events also appear to have been excluded from the six anomalies.

does not attempt to mediate between them. Ban Gu's language includes two terms that he uses generically as descriptors for anomalies which appear in other Eastern and Western Han texts about anomalous events: *yi* 異 and *guai* 怪. He also repeatedly uses two terms for disaster (*huo* 禍 and *zai* 災) to refer to the eventual destruction that is caused when human transgression signaled by anomalous events goes unchecked.

The concepts of the five elements (*wuxing* 五行) and vapors (*qi* 氣) are at the core of Ban Gu's understanding of accounts of anomaly in the historic record. These provide a material philosophy to explain accounts of anomalies that were said to have taken place in history and connect them to human failure and dysfunction. Anomaly and human corruption are thus indelibly intertwined in the "Wuxing zhi" through the material basis provided by these cosmological concepts.

This study of the "Wuxing zhi" leads to certain questions about Ban Gu's motivation for compiling the "Wuxing zhi." In taxonomizing accounts of anomaly, was Ban Gu acting primarily in response to a curatorial impulse that he no doubt experienced as a custodian of the Eastern Han imperial library? This would have meant that he was a somewhat disinterested observer of the historical record, who saw his role as being that of a mere cataloguer without anything personally at stake for him in this project of collection and explanation. Is it possible that, in addition to his identity as a librarian, he viewed himself as a sincere material philosopher prompted by an impulse to deduce from human history principles that could be used by observers and ministers of state as technical knowledge to gauge when the practices of society and actions of political leaders had gone awry, sowing disorder into nature and the human world?

These are crucial questions about Eastern Han intellectual history that go beyond the scope of my purpose in studying the “Wuxing zhi.”⁹⁸ However, it suffices to observe for the present dissertation that based on the “Wuxing zhi,” there was in both the Western and Eastern Han period keen scholarly interest in anomalous events in the historical record and a distinct language that scholars in the Han period used to refer to them. Anomalous events were conceived as being connected to corruption in human society and foreboding disruption or disaster if the corruption was left unchecked. In fact, anomaly was seen as being such a significant component of political theory and history that the “Wuxing zhi” makes up about 5% of the entire contents of the *Han shu*.⁹⁹ Anomaly and strangeness were thus seen as essential to political philosophy and the telling of history.

Moreover, the kinds of anomalies that Han scholars flagged as being significant generally resembled events that a modern observer would also consider uncanny. While for a small number of events recounted in the “Wuxing zhi” (such as members of so-called “barbarian” communities on the fringes of the Han empire appearing in the capital or women growing red hair), their status as anomalies is specific to the social and historical context of the Han period, the great majority (such as a dog growing horns, a horse giving birth to a human, etc.) would

⁹⁸ For a discussion of the Ban Gu’s motives in writing the “Wuxing zhi,” see Anthony E. Clark, *Ban Gu’s History of Early China* (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008), 164-5. Clark analyzes Ban Gu’s motives according to his particular political and social context in the Eastern Han. According to Clark, Ban Gu was spurred by the need to discredit Wang Mang’s claims to the mandate of heaven, a need Ban Gu experienced as a member of the system of patronage maintained by the leaders of the Eastern Han regime. This need led him to appropriate the ready-made cosmology of the five elements in order to incriminate Wang Mang and critique the last emperors of the Western Han, whose negligence and failures in political rule had weakened Han authority. In contrast to Clark’s view, Lillian Lan-ying Tseng proposes that the “Wuxing zhi” was written to explain accounts of anomalous incidents contained in the records of the Eastern Han imperial library. See Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China*, 106.

⁹⁹ This is based on a simple ratio of page counts according to the 1962 Zhonghua shuju edition of the text. The text of the “Wuxing zhi” is printed on 207 (4.84 percent) of the total 4273 pages.

likely be considered out of the ordinary if heard about in most (if not all) social and cultural contexts.¹⁰⁰

The “Wuxing zhi” is also useful because it studiously documents an intellectual tradition that preceded its compilation. Within this tradition, anomalies were interpreted as being the outcome of human transgression, and there was a distinct set of terms employed to describe strange events and demarcate their relation to human behavior. While some of the details of Ban Gu’s description of this tradition do not accord with the views of modern scholarship (such as the time of the compilation of the “Hong fan”), nevertheless the general impression drawn by the “Wuxing zhi”—that this tradition was already active prior to the Eastern Han and featured a distinct terminology for describing anomaly—is borne out by an investigation into the chronology of the tradition as it unfolded in the Western Han. This topic will be taken up in Chapter 4 of the present dissertation.

¹⁰⁰ See n. 89 of the present chapter.

CHAPTER 2, “Cold and heat repeatedly came in response” 寒奧輒應: Human Corruption and Abnormal Meteorological Events in the “Wuxing zhi”

I. Introduction

Along with incidents that fall into the six categories (“eerie occurrences” 妖, “abnormalities” 孽, “startling maladies” 飮, “infections” 痾, “aberrant generations” 眚, “salient deviations” 祥) of what might be called “anomalies of strangeness” outlined in the *Zhuan* to the “Hong fan,” Ban Gu also shows particular interest in aberrant weather events as signs of human corruption and bellwethers of the future consequences of human folly. The language that Ban Gu uses to describe aberrant weather events and the underlying material link between these and errant human behavior is the same as with the anomalies of strangeness. Consistent with Western Han scholar Jing Fang’s apparent distinction between events categorized as being intensely odd (for the most part excluding meteorological and astronomical events), for which Jing Fang uses the term *yao* 妖 as a formal category, and abnormal meteorological and astronomical events, which Jing Fang categorizes as *yi* 異, Ban Gu’s discussion of aberrant weather events in the “Wuxing zhi” also prominently features the term *yi* 異 in the two-graph compound *zai yi* 災異 (“disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”). As with anomalies of strangeness, Ban Gu presents the concept of *qi* 氣 (“vapors”) to describe the material forces that connect human behavior and the physical environment.

II. Anomalous Weather Events and their Etiology

To cite an illustrative example that characterizes Ban Gu’s treatment of aberrant weather events in the “Wuxing zhi,” after his general remarks on anomalies that arise from failures in human listening (which connect anomalous events to human transgression through the concept of

qi 氣), Ban Gu gives an extensive account of unusual eruptions in cold (*han* 寒) that occur when there is dysfunction in listening:

劉歆聽傳曰有介蟲孽也, 庶徵之恆寒.

Liu Xin's *Tradition* on [the concept of] listening states that there will be abnormalities in creatures that have a hard shell. Of the several verifications, its verification is constant cold.

劉向以為春秋無其應, 周之末世舒緩微弱, 政在臣下, 奧煖而已, 故籍秦以為驗.

Liu Xiang held that there was nothing corresponding to it in the *Springs and Autumns*. The last generations of Zhou were slack, languid, diffident, and weak. Administrative power was in the hands of vassals below. There was only heat and warmth. So Qin is used to demonstrate [this principle].

秦始皇帝即位尚幼, 委政太后, 太后淫於呂不韋及嫪毐, 封毐為長信侯, 以太原郡為毐國, 宮室苑囿自恣, 政事斷焉.

When he ascended to power, Qin Shihuang was still young. Administrative power was given in proxy to the heir designate's mother. She committed indecent acts with Lü Buwei [d. 235 B.C.E.] and Lao Ai [d. 238 B.C.E.]. She enfeoffed Ai as the Marquis of Changxin and converted Taiyuan Commandery into the Ai Kingdom. She indulged herself with houses and habitations, and parks and menageries. The affairs of administration came to a sudden stop with her as though they had been severed off completely.

故天冬雷, 以見陽不禁閉, 以涉危害, 舒奧迫近之變也.

Therefore, heaven thundered in the winter—so as to display that *yang* 陽 could not be reined in and closed off, so as to swamp with danger and harm—and unfurled mutations that coerced and encroached on heat.

始皇既冠, 毐懼誅作亂, 始皇誅之, 斬首數百級, 大臣二十人, 皆車裂以徇, 夷滅其宗, 遷四千餘家於房陵.

Once Shihuang [r. 246-210 B.C.E.] had been officially capped, Ai feared that he would be executed and instigated a revolt. Shihuang executed him. Several hundred of the captured insurgents were beheaded. Twenty grand-vassals were all torn apart by chariot, and so followed them in death. Their kin-groups were

completely eradicated. Four thousand and some-odd families were relocated to Fangling.

是歲四月，寒，民有凍死者。數年之間，緩急如此，寒奧輒應，此其效也。

In the fourth month of that year, there was cold, and among the subjects there were those who froze to death. For several years, it was alternately languid and hasty like this. Cold and heat repeatedly came in response [to human errancy]. These were their effects.

劉歆以為大雨雪，及未當雨雪而雨雪，及大雨雹，隕霜殺叔草，皆常寒之罰也。¹

Liu Xin held that there were great falls of snow. It was to the point that even when snow was not supposed to fall, snow fell all the same. It was to the point that there were great showers of hail, and frost descended and killed the tender grass. These were all part of the punishment of enduring cold.

The theory of anomaly in weather that Ban Gu presents is built on concepts of extreme weather described in the *Hong fan* and its *Zhuan*. According to this theory, weather anomalies are, like anomalies of strangeness, caused by human errancy. In the case of errors in listening, extreme weather comes in the form of “constant cold” 恆寒. Ban Gu portrays “cold” 寒 as a fundamental, material force of nature. Presumably, cold is identical to the “cold vapor” (*han qi* 寒氣) that Ban Gu names elsewhere in the “Wuxing zhi” as the immediate cause of abnormalities (*nie* 孽) in fish.² However, instead of introducing the operation of cold as he does with *qi* 氣, through a number of abstract formulations describing material processes, Ban Gu describes it through a specific historical case study using a series of events that are said to have happened in the kingdom of Qin 秦 during the reign of Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 (r. 247-210 B.C.E.), the founder of the Qin dynasty (221-206 B.C.E.). Ban Gu connects this particular case

¹ *HS*, 1422.

² As cited in Ch. 1: “Cold *qi* will move. Therefore, there will be abnormalities in fish” 寒氣動故有魚孽. (*HS*, 1421.)

study devoted to the “demonstration” 驗 of the operation of cold caused by human error to Liu Xiang. Ban Gu’s historical proof was clearly informed by Liu Xiang’s views.

According to Ban Gu’s view, the cause of anomalous eruptions in cold in Qin begins in the first years of Qin Shihuang’s reign. Since Qin Shihuang was still young, his mother ruled as his proxy. She was a poor ruler. She gave lavish gifts of land and titles to her favored cronies, and “indulged herself” 自恣 by building residences and pleasure parks for her own comfort and enjoyment. In a mirror image of the hypothetical ruler who does not listen well and “closes off those who are below” 閉下 (described by Ban Gu in his general comments on listening), she cut herself off from her responsibilities, and “government affairs come to a sudden stop with her as though they had been severed completely” 政事斷焉。³

Qin Shihuang, in contrast to his mother, is a thoroughly hands-on ruler, but shows an insensitivity to the right amount of moderation in political decision-making that resembles his mother’s own obtuseness that led her to shut herself off from government affairs. After Qin Shihuang ascends to power, he crushes a movement against him led by his mother’s crony, Lao Ai 嫪毐 (d. 238 B.C.E.). Qin Shihuang is relentlessly brutal in punishing members of the revolt. He executes Lao Ai, beheads several hundred of his supporters, puts to death twenty grand-vassals by having them torn apart by chariots (while exterminating their families), and banishes thousands of additional families to the hinterlands south of Qin.

This persistent callousness, expressed in the mother’s wanton neglect and the son’s brutality, causes nature to erupt with cold 寒. In the years of the mother’s proxy rule, “heaven

³ Ban Gu describes when suffering failure in listening “the ruler will...close off those who are below” 君...閉下. (HS, 1421.)

thundered in the winter—so as to display that *yang* 陽 could not be reined in and closed off, so as to swamp with danger and harm—and unfurled change that coerced and encroached on heat” 天冬雷以見陽不禁閉以涉危害舒奧迫近之變也. The cold becomes more severe in its effects after Qin Shihuang’s ascension to power: “in the fourth month of that year, there was cold, and among the subjects there were those who froze to death” 是歲四月寒民有凍死者. Quoting Liu Xin, Ban Gu recalls that, “it was to the point that even when snow was not supposed to fall, snow fell all the same. It was to the point that there were great showers of hail, and frost descended and killed the tender grass” 及未當雨雪而雨雪及大雨雹隕霜殺叔草. The harsh, unfeeling nature of Qin rule coincides with abnormal cold.

Ban Gu’s account links these cold weather events to failures in listening by way of the concepts and terminology used in the “Hong fan” and the *Zhuan*. Intervals of cold 寒 and heat 奧 that alternate over a period of years in Qin are said to be caused by revolving practices of hastiness 急 and languidness 緩 in the Qin government. Ban Gu emphatically states that such alternating cold and heat are “their effects” (*qi xiao* 其效) (i.e., the effects of hastiness and languidness in Qin administrative practices). Using a phrase that is synonymous with the “constant cold” 恆寒 named in the “Hong fan,” he concludes that unseasonable snow, intense showers of hail, and frost that is so severe that cause plant life to wither and die are “all part of the punishment of enduring cold” 皆常寒之罰也. These relationships between corruption in listening, hastiness, and eruptions of cold are laid out in the “Hong fan” and the *Zhuan* using the same vocabulary: in those texts, “hastiness” 急 is the “unfavorable state” 咎 caused by a “lack of astuteness” 聰 in listening, and the punishment of “enduring cold” 恆寒 is how nature’s morally

sensitive ecology responds to this state of dysfunction in human society.⁴ Used in the analysis of the events surrounding Qin Shihuang's rule, Ban Gu presents these principles as having traction in historical fact.

Ban Gu appends to this historical account Jing Fang's 京房 (77-37 B.C.E.) comments on cold as recorded in the *Yi zhuan* 易傳 ("Tradition of the Changes"):

京房易傳曰：「有德遭險，茲謂逆命，厥異寒。誅過深，當奧而寒，盡六日，亦為雹。害正不誅，茲謂養賊，寒七十二日，殺蜚禽。道人始去茲謂傷，其寒物無霜而死，湧水出。戰不量敵，茲謂辱命，其寒雖雨物不茂。聞善不予，厥咎聾。」⁵

Jing Fang's *Tradition of the Changes* states, "When there is potency and it encounters danger, it is called going against vitality. Its irregularity is cold. When executions are too deep [i.e., too extensive and numerous], then when it should be hot, it is cold instead; this lasts six days, and there is hail. When justice is harmed and executions are not performed, it is called cultivating bandits. Cold will last for seventy-two days and will kill crop-eating insects and birds. When humans who are of the way begin to depart, this is called injury. Its cold is organisms dying without there being any frost. Gushing water comes out. To engage in warfare without measuring the enemy: this is called an insult to vitality. Its cold is that although organisms receive rain, they do not thrive. When one's sense of hearing is excellent, but one does not apply oneself: its unfavorable state is deafness."

Jing Fang's explanation contains no specific historical events, but like the "Hong fan" and the *Zhuan* links unusual levels of cold to human transgression in abstract terms. There are differences in Jing Fang's view compared to the one that Ban Gu presents in his comments on Qin history. In contrast to Ban Gu, Jing Fang does not name corruption in listening outright as the ultimate cause of anomalous cold. While he does refer to failures in hearing in his closing remarks of the passage, to introduce the cause of cold, he names a more general state that he describes as "when there is potency and it encounters danger" 有德遭險. He then describes a

⁴ See the passages of the "Hong fan" and the *Zhuan* labelled as B and B4 in Ch.1.

⁵ *HS*, 1422.

number of scenarios related to political rule that he says cause excesses of cold. Of these, two fit with Ban Gu's account of Qin Shihuang's mistakes in rule: "executions are too deep [i.e., too extensive and numerous]" 誅過深 and "humans who are of the way begin to depart" 道人始去. Other scenarios do not resemble the circumstances of Qin Shihuang's rule: "justice is harmed and executions are not performed" 害正不誅 and "engaging in warfare without measuring the enemy" 戰不量敵. Though Jing Fang asserts that aberrant cold originates in errancy and dysfunction in human society, the concept that he uses to encompass all of these conditions of disorder is danger 險 to potency 德. Failures in listening are only one kind of human behavior that bring danger to potency and cause eruptions in cold.

Some of the cold weather events that Jing Fang describes as occurring as a consequence of errant policy and poor political decision-making resemble those from the account of the weather events that Ban says were occurring in Qin: e.g., "when it should be hot, it is cold instead; this last six days, and there is hail" 當奧而寒, 盡六日, 亦為雹; and "cold will last for seventy-two days, and will kill crop-eating insects and birds" 寒七十二日, 殺蜚禽. However, cold-related anomalies also include events explained by a conceptual understanding of "cold" 寒 as meaning the general closing off of vitality: e.g., "organisms dying without there being any frost; gushing water comes out" 物無霜而死湧水出; and "although organisms receive rain, they do not thrive" 雖雨物不茂. This is a wider view of the definition of cold, encompassing not only cold temperatures and unseasonable snow, but a more general condition of the slowing down and disappearance of life force. Jing Fang's comments are more concerned with and practices and circumstances that harm "vitality" (*ming* 命) broadly, rather than with only failures in listening,

which in Jing Fang's view is one type of human dysfunction among many that brings harm to vitality.

While Jing Fang's comments do not line up perfectly with Ban Gu's singular focus on listening, Ban Gu's inclusion of Jing Fang's comments create a synthesis in which Qin Shihuang's failures as a ruler are presented not only according to a one-dimensional standard of listening, but with a broader awareness that attends to other failures in Qin Shihuang's rule: his brutality and harshness. When viewed through the lens of Jing Fang's comments, Qin Shihuang's inability to listen well is thus seen as connected to brutality of action, since both bring about similar effects in nature in the form of injured vitality and eruptions of cold.

Ban Gu's treatment of cold weather anomalies as a consequence of human failures in listening can be seen as generally representing his view of anomalous weather events. Aberrant weather was a potential signal of dysfunction in human society. However, it should be pointed out that Ban Gu's extensive explanation of the anomalous weather that can appear when the practice of listening has been violated represents his treatment of only some categories of extreme weather that are said to happen when there are failures in the prescribed behavior outlined in the *Hong fan* and the *Zhuan*. For violations of royal perfection 皇極, he does provide an extended discussion by historical example, describing a thick fog (caused by excesses of *yin* 陰) that descended and blocked out the sun after Liu He 劉賀 (r. 74 B.C.E.) was established as the successor to Han emperor Thearch Zhao 昭帝 (r. 87-74 B.C.E.) following his death.⁶ However, for demeanor 貌 and seeing 視, he provides only a brief general description of the relationship between these and the anomalous weather that corresponds to them. And in the case

⁶ See *HS*, 1459.

of speaking 言 and thinking 思, he provides no discussion of the corresponding extreme weather named in the “Hong fan” and *Zhuan*. Beyond general explanations, for thinking, seeing, listening, and royal perfection, Ban Gu lists accounts of anomalous weather incidents recorded in historiographical sources of the canon or else directly recounted by him. For demeanor and speaking, he does not list any historical examples of anomalous weather. Despite these inconsistencies, when viewed in toto, Ban Gu’s thinking connects anomalous weather to failures in human action as presented in the system of correlations described in the “Hong fan” and its *Zhuan*.

III. Anomalous Weather as Notable Because Destructive

Distinguishing between local, small-scale destructive anomalies that are signs of human transgression and point to coming disruption in the human world and the event that *is* the coming disruption itself (such as ruination or collapse of a country or the fall of a regime), viewed as the denouement of the chain of causation beginning with human errancy, is important to many of the anomalous weather events that Ban Gu cites from historiographical records. This is because so many of these anomalous weather events, treated as having arisen from human transgression and as anticipating disruption to come, are harmful in of themselves. While this destructive quality is one that often occurs with the weather anomalies that Ban Gu describes and is seen as an essential part of their power to signify, Ban Gu does not present destructiveness as a central quality of the six anomalies of strangeness (and as discussed in Chapter 1). In the “Wuxing zhi,” there is thus a distinction between anomaly that is attention-catching because it is so bizarre and anomaly that is attention-catching because it is harmful—or harmful in a special way. The latter is a feature of a large portion of the anomalous weather events.

III.A. Relatively Limited Damage Foreboding Major Disruption

For example, Ban Gu includes his direct account of a deadly snowstorm among the anomalies that arise from transgressions against listening (the sixth among the anomalous events from history listed for listening):

武帝元狩元年十二月大雨雪，民多凍死。是歲淮南、衡山王謀反，發覺，皆自殺。使者行郡國，治黨與，坐死者數萬人。⁷

In the twelfth month of the first year [122 B.C.E.] of the Yuanshou era [122-117 B.C.E.] of the reign of Thearch Wu [r. 141-87 B.C.E.], it showered snow, and among the subjects, there were a good many that froze to death. That year, the kings of Huainan and Hengshan held deliberations, making plans to revolt. They were discovered and both killed themselves. Deputies acted provisionally as the administrators of their commandery-kingdoms. Their co-conspirators were brought to discipline. Those who were put to death as punishment were in the many tens of thousands of people.

The offensive conduct here appears to be twofold: it includes the conspiring kings of Huainan (d. 122 B.C.E.) and Hengshan (d. 122 B.C.E.), but also Thearch Wu's 武帝 brutal reprisals that involved the execution of “many tens of thousands” 數萬 of those involved in the conspiracy. Ban Gu names “deliberating, making plans to revolt” 謀反 as their offense, with the term deliberations 謀 (presumably referring to listening to bad counsel) as this episode's connection to the theme of listening 聽 present in the “Hong fan” and *Zhuan*. Ban Gu offers no discursive commentary to explain the dynamics of the connection between this and the intense snow event. However, from his general discussion on the connection between errors in listening and the cold 寒 by which he analyzes unusual cold during Qin Shihuang's rule, it can be

⁷ *HS*, 1424.

reasonably inferred that the same dynamic (flows of cold *qi* 氣 brought about by conspiratorial plotting) are understood as applying here.

The anomalous cold weather event that flows from the errancy of the kings of Huainan and Hengshan is immediately destructive: Ban Gu recounts that “among the subjects, a good many froze to death” 民多凍死. This is just a prelude to the much wider calamity that occurs exclusively within human society as an outcome of the combination of the transgressive behavior and brutality of which the deadly snow event is a symptom: the two kings commit suicide, and tens of thousands of their suspected followers are executed. While the anomalous weather remembered here had immediately harmful effects, these are much more limited in scale than the damage that occurred because the errant behavior did not cease. What is more, the event of the higher level of damage, the “main” calamity that concludes the chain of causation, occurs entirely within the sphere of human society; it is not a natural disaster like a flood or an earthquake. Natural anomaly is thus the symptom of human transgression, and while possibly destructive, is often of a much lower level of intensity than the disruption in the human world that it presages.

III.B. Weather Anomalies and the Term *zai yi* 災異 (“disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”)

Within the “Wuxing zhi,” at least one anomalous weather event is associated with the term *zai yi* 災異 (“disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”) that is used a handful of times in the “Wuxing zhi.” This is another event listed as an excess of cold resulting from corruption in listening and directly recounted by Ban Gu. Ban Gu recalls that in the fourth year (35 B.C.E.) of the Jianzhao 建昭 era (38-34 B.C.E.) of the reign of Han Thearch Yuan 元帝 (49/48-33 B.C.E.),

“there were showers of snow, and a good many swallows died” 雨雪, 燕多死.⁸ Ban Gu then quotes the comments of Han minister Gu Yong 谷永 (d. 8 B.C.E.), who uses the term *zai yi* 災異 to describe an unusually destructive storm that brings fierce, cold winds and snow:

皇后桑蠶以治祭服, 共(恭)事天地宗廟, 正以是日疾風自西北, 大寒雨雪, 壞敗其功, 以章不鄉(嚮).

The August Wife used the silkworm cocoons of mulberry trees to make her garments to be worn at sacrifices, and in this way worshipped and carried out her duties to heaven and earth and at the ancestral temple. It was exactly on that day that a fierce wind came from the northwest. There was great cold and showers of snow. It broke and destroyed any sense of merit in the rites and displayed that the sacrifices were not partaken of.

宜齋(齋)戒辟(避)寢, 以深自責, 請皇后就宮, 鬲閉門戶, 毋得擅上. 且令眾妾人人更進, 以時博施. 皇天說喜, 庶幾可以得賢明之嗣.

One should purify oneself and avoid one's bed chambers, so as to deepen one's self-atonement. One should ask the August Wife to take to her chambers, and she should block off and close the doors and windows, and not go up to where the sovereign is of her own accord. Also, each and every one of the many concubines should be ordered to be presented in alternating turns, so that dissemination will occur widely over the course of time. August heaven will be delighted and joyful, and surely it will be possible to get an heir who is worthy and enlightened.

即不行臣言, 災異俞甚, 天變成形, 臣雖欲復捐身關策, 不及事已.⁹

But since he does not carry out the suggestions of his humble servant, disastrous irregularities have become greater in magnitude, and heaven's change takes a form. His humble servant would desire to again hazard his person and communicate good policy, but it would never reach the point where it would be used, and that would be the end of it.

Ban Gu thus recalls two anomalous weather incidents. The first is a heavy snowfall that kills a large number of swallows during the reign of Thearch Yuan. The second is a storm of cold wind and snow that occurs during the sacrificial rites performed by the emperor for heaven,

⁸ *HS*, 1425.

⁹ *HS*, 1425.

earth, and the ancestral spirits. It destroys the burnish on the ceremonies and is understood as a sign that the sacrifices have not been accepted; Gu Yong comments that the storm “broke and destroyed any sense of merit in the rites, and displayed that the sacrifices were not partaken of” 壞敗其功, 以章不鄉嚮. Most likely, the two incidents are simply different effects of the same weather event.

For the second incident, Gu Yong connects the disruptive storm to the emperor’s failure to uphold proper guidelines in preparing for and carrying out sacrificial rites to the ancestors. Gu Yong focuses particularly on the empress’ behavior. While preparations for the rites stressing penance (i.e., “self-atonement” 自責) require her to remain in her chambers during the time leading up to the sacrificial rites, it does not appear that such prescriptions are followed. In contrast to the desired atmosphere of atonement, the empress has a lavish costume made using silk from “the silkworm cocoons of mulberry trees” 桑蠶 that she wears to the sacrificial rites. The emperor also appears to be showing favoritism to certain of his concubines, against the conventional recommendation that “each and every one of the many concubines should be ordered to be presented in alternating turns” 令眾妾人人更進, so that the emperor will be able to father a broad selection of potential heirs.

Gu Yong’s final comments can easily be construed as relating the emperor’s laxness and the disruptive storm to failures in listening. Referring to himself, he concludes that the emperor “does not carry out the suggestions of his humble servant” 不行臣言. Gu Yong believes that if the emperor were willing, he could be steered back to the proper observation of ceremonies, but unfortunately the emperor does not want to listen to prudent counsel.

Gu Yong's remark that "disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences grow all the more intense" 災異俞甚 labels the snowstorm as a "disastrous and intensely irregular occurrence" 災異. The phrasing "grow all the more intense" 俞甚 suggests a series of similar damaging anomalous occurrences of ascending magnitude that indicate the emperor's failure with increasing emphasis. The term "disastrous and intensely irregular occurrence" 災異 highlights two features of such events: that they are unusual, expressed by the graph *yi* 異 ("intensely irregular"), and that they are damaging, represented by the graph *zai* 災 ("disastrous"). Gu Yong's language describing the storm's effect on the rites at the ancestral temple reflects this destructive aspect; as he observes, it "broke and destroyed the merit [of the rites]" 壞敗其功. This destructive quality is also patently present in the fact that so many birds died in the storm.

Ban Gu's account of the event concludes with a statement about the demise of Xu shi 許氏 (d. 1 B.C.E.), who was Thearch Yuan's cousin and the empress of Thearch Yuan's successor, Thearch Cheng 成帝 (r. 33-7 B.C.E.): "after this, Xu, the Wife of the Thearch, was implicated in maledictions and imprecations and was discarded" 其後許后坐祝詛廢.¹⁰ Xu shi's end at first sight seems to be a relatively mild outcome of Thearch Yuan's corruption (which has been severe enough to cause eruptions of cold), but her removal was against the backdrop of the weakening of Han rule that marked Thearch Yuan's reign owing to his inability to prevent factional infighting among officials in his court and his favoring of a number of corrupt officials.¹¹ The removal of his cousin from her role as empress to his successor, Thearch Cheng,

¹⁰ *HS*, 1425.

¹¹ For example, the "Wuxing zhi," among the other errors of Thearch Yuan's reign, records the power and influence that he granted the corrupt minister of his court, Shi Xian 石顯 (d. 32 B.C.E.). See *HS*, 1427. Shi Xian's biography,

can thus be read as a token of the unravelling of Thearch Yuan's own legacy and the fraying of Han rule in general. This unravelling that began in Thearch Yuan's reign continued through the reigns of his successors, culminating in the usurpation of Han power by Wang Mang in 6 C.E. The cold weather event is a symptom of failure in Han governing practices, and the greater disruption it points to is the complete collapse of Western Han power.

The term *zai yi* 災異 thus appears in the “Wuxing zhi” as a term for an anomalous weather event that arises because of human failing, suggests greater change and calamity to come within human society, and is in of itself harmful to a certain extent. This makes it a discrete concept from the six anomalies outlined in the *Zhuan*, since for the six anomalies of strangeness, the bizarre nature of the events they represent is the main focus of discourse surrounding them, rather than whatever relatively marginal harm they may cause. While the terms “startling maladies” 眚 and “infections” 疢 often label events that are harmful (as in the inexplicable widespread death of livestock), even these terms are categories of events that are set apart for being bizarre, rather than what harm they entail. This is seen, for example, when the term “startling maladies” 眚 is used to label an account of an incident in which a horse is reported to have given birth to a human (*ma sheng ren* 馬生人), as Ban Gu notes Liu Xiang does for this event recorded in Sima Qian's *Shi ji*.¹² In this case, the extreme uncanniness of the event, rather than any harm immediately caused by it, is the primary focus.

with its focus on his misdeeds in the Han court, is recorded in the “Ning xing zhuan” 佞幸傳 (“Traditions of Royal Favor Given to Sycophants”) chapters of the *Han shu*. See *HS*, 3726-30.

¹² According to Ban Gu, the incident is recorded in the *Shi ji* as occurring in the twenty-first year (341 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Xiao 孝公 of Qin 秦 (r. 361-338 B.C.E.). *HS*, 1469.

Further distinguishing the terminology of the six anomalies from *zai yi* 災異 is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the events labelled as belonging to the six anomalies do not refer to weather events. When the language of the six anomalies is occasionally applied to incidents that resemble weather events, as for example in the case of Jing Fang naming “heaven raining down feathers” 天雨羽 as an “eerie manifestation” 妖, the essentially bizarre nature of the event is again at the fore, rather than it being an otherwise normal weather event that is occurring at an unusual time or with an unusually severe degree of magnitude.

In contrast to the six anomalies of the *Zhuan*, Ban Gu in the “Wuxing zhi” does not place much of an emphasis on the term “disastrous and intensely irregular occurrence” 災異. In the entire text of the “Wuxing zhi,” it is mentioned only four times. In contrast, “eerie manifestation” 妖 is used eighty-five times, “startling malady” / “calamity” 疢 is used seventy-eight times, “abnormality” 孽 and “salient deviation” / “obvious sign” 祥 are each used forty-three times, and “aberrant outgrowth” 眚 is used eighteen times. While the term “disastrous and intensely irregular occurrence” 災異 is associated with anomalous weather events, Ban Gu appears to have preferred to let the weather events stand for themselves (with certain introductory content suggesting that disruptions in the activity of *qi* or the stimulation of elemental forces such as cold 寒 causes anomalous weather events), rather than applying further analytic terminology to describe or classify them. Nevertheless, the occasional use of the term “disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences” 災異 reveals the pair of essential qualities that made these weather events stand out: their abnormality combined with their destructiveness.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, Ban Gu viewed errant human behavior (especially that of political leaders) the cause of certain abnormal weather events. This view he inherited from intellectual forebears such as Liu Xiang and Jing Fang and the conceptual frameworks provided by the “Hong fan” and its *Zhuan*. Following these sources, Ban Gu placed abnormal weather events into different categories (such as cold 寒 and heat 奧) and traced the cause back to errant human behavior, which he analyzed into the rubric of the five matters and royal perfection. Human behavior was connected to elemental forces of weather through the operation of *qi* 氣. In contrast to the six categories for anomalies of strangeness, abnormal weather events are not placed onto a scale of magnitude. Weather events correspond to anomalies of strangeness, constituting a general category of anomaly connected to errant human behavior and suggesting intense disruption and harm to occur in human society in the future if the errant human behavior that caused them was not redressed. The phrase “disastrous and intensely irregular occurrence” 災異 is used in Ban Gu’s accounts of abnormal weather events, indicating that these events were notable because they were abnormal and destructive to a significant degree in of themselves.

CHAPTER 3, Comparative Analysis of Eastern Han Sources: Anomaly and Strangeness in Another Work of Eastern Han Cosmological Thought, the *Lun heng* 論衡 (“Arguments in the Balance”)

I. Introduction

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the “Wuxing zhi” uses a distinct set of terms to categorize and describe anomalous events and disruption or harm related to them. This set of terms principally includes *yao* 妖 (“eerie occurrence”), *nie* 孽 (“abnormality”), *huo* 飢 (“startling malady”), *ke* 痲 (“infection”), *sheng* 眚 (“aberrant generation”), and *xiang* 祥 (“salient deviation”). These constitute the categories of a kind of taxonomical system. Generic descriptors of the events placed into these categories in the “Wuxing zhi” include *yi* 異 (“intensely irregularity”) and *guai* 怪 (“strange” or “prodigy”). (Though as discussed in Chapter 1, within Jing Fang’s system, *yi* 異 was assigned a more specific, circumscribed meaning by which it referred to abnormal meteorological and astronomical events.) The term *zai yi* 災異 (“disastrous and intensely irregular occurrence”) is used to signify abnormal, damaging events that arise in nature. The term *huo* 禍 (“catastrophe”) is often connected to harmful events that are directly caused by errant human behavior. In the “Wuxing zhi,” these terms occur in the context of political-cosmological discourse in which dysfunction in human society is understood as stimulating abnormal events in nature that presage greater disruption to come if the dysfunction is not remedied. The following chapter is a study of some of these terms as they were used in another source of Eastern Han discourse, Wang Chong’s 王充 (27-c. 97 C.E.) *Lun heng* 論衡 (“Arguments in the Balance”).

The terms *yao* 妖 (“eerie occurrence”), *yi* 異 (“intense irregularity”), and *guai* 怪 (“strange” or “prodigy”) occur prominently in the titles of three chapters of the *Lun heng*: “Ji yao” 紀妖 (“Disentangling Ominously Eerie Occurrences”), 異虛 “Yi xu” (“Emptiness in Intense Irregularities”), and “Qi guai” 奇怪 (“Wondrous Prodigies”). The term *xiang* 祥 (“salient deviation” / “prominent sign”) also occurs frequently in Wang Chong’s discussion of anomalous events in nature. While Wang Chong’s views on the underlying causes of the anomalies named by these terms differs from Ban Gu, his use of these terms is similar to the way that they are used in the “Wuxing zhi.”

II. The Concept of *yao* 妖 (“ominously eerie occurrence”) in the *Lun heng*

An example of Wang Chong’s usage of these terms is the “Ji yao” chapter. The “Ji yao” is devoted to a discussion of strange incidents that Wang Chong views as signaling information about the workings of the universe.¹ In this chapter, *yao* 妖 is treated as a distinct category of event, separate from, for example, the concept of ghosts (*gui* 鬼) that Wang Chong discusses in the “Ding gui” 訂鬼 (“Evaluating Ghosts”) chapter of the *Lun heng* or from the idea of miracles (such as the divine conceptions of the kings of Chinese legendary antiquity) that he describes in the “Qi guai” 奇怪 (“Wondrous Prodigies”) chapter.² Like Ban Gu, Wang Chong’s discussion in the “Ji yao” is about bizarre, anomalous incidents that are recorded in canonical historical

¹ German sinologist Alfred Forke (1867-1944) in his English translation of the *Lun heng* 論衡 translates the chapter title “Ji yao” 紀妖 as “Spook Stories.” See *Lun-hêng (Part I. Philosophical Essays of Wang Chung.)*, Alfred Forke trans. (Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1907), 220-223. I refer to it here because the term “spook” captures something of the essence of the concept of *yao* 妖: the term refers to events that are strange because outside of the norm, but also intensely startling.

² Forke translates the chapter title *Qi guai* 奇怪 as “Miracles.” His translation presumably understands the term contextually: the strange events in the narratives recounted in that chapter have a miraculous, beneficial quality.

sources like the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (“Zuo Tradition”) and the *Shi ji* 史記 (“Records of the Historian”). Among accounts of events that Wang Chong labels as *yao* 妖 are apparitions of what were ostensibly spirits of the dead, extraordinary behavior in animals, supernatural creatures, and phantom music.

Wang Chong’s purpose in writing the “Ji yao” chapter was in no way to discredit the veracity of accounts of anomalies in canonical history, but rather to refute traditional understandings of the underlying nature of these events. Wang Chong’s analysis of anomalies in the “Ji yao” articulates the view that anomalies express information about the deeper workings of the universe and the effects of these on human society, and that such events therefore presage the coming tide of events. His core argument in the “Ji yao” is that while such accounts of such events often portray eerie, anomalous events as being caused by the behavior of ghosts (i.e., the sentient, active spirits of the dead), such incidents in fact were caused by the natural, material forces of the universe and had no underlying connection to ghosts or spirits. Wang Chong holds that the spirits of the dead have no material existence, and therefore cannot interact with living humans. “Ominously eerie occurrences” (*yao* 妖) are real, however, and reveal information about the underlying workings of the cosmos, which he understands as consisting of frequently shifting forces that profoundly affect human society.

II.A. The Concept of *yao* 妖 in the *Lun heng*, Example 1: Phantom Music

An example of Wang Chong’s position is his discussion about an episode involving phantom music and paranormal meteorological phenomena that is recorded as having occurred in the late Spring and Autumn period (722-468 B.C.E). Accounts of the episode are contained in sources that predate Wang Chong, including the *Han Fei zi* 韓非子 (“Master Han Fei”), a Warring

States text, and the Western Han text of the *Shi ji*.³ As Wang Chong tells in his recounting of the episode, Lord Ling 靈公 of Wei 衛 (r. 534-493 B.C.E.) hears phantom sounds while traveling past a river on his way to the state of Jin 晉:

衛靈公將之晉，至濮水之上，夜聞鼓新聲者，說之，使人問之，左右皆報弗聞。

Lord Ling of Wei was about to arrive at Jin. He came to the banks of the Pu Waters. At night, he heard someone thrumming a new melody. It pleased him. He dispatched people to inquire about it, but all those nearby to the right and left reported that they had not heard the music.

召師涓而告之，曰：「有鼓新聲者，使人問左右，盡報弗聞。其狀似鬼，子為我聽而寫之。」師涓曰：「諾。」因靜坐撫琴而寫之。明日報曰：「臣得之矣！然而未習，請更宿而習之。」靈公曰：「諾。」因複宿。明日已習，遂去之晉。

He summoned Master Juan [fl. c. mid-6th cent. B.C.E.] and beseeched him, saying, “There was someone thrumming a new melody. I dispatched people to inquire about it of those nearby to the right and left, but they all reported that no one had heard it. It is as though it were a ghost. Can you listen to it for me and write the melody down?” Master Juan said, “Yes!” So he sat quietly plucking a zither and wrote the melody down. The next day he reported, saying: “Your minister has gotten it! But I have not yet practiced it. Please allow me one more night to practice it.” Lord Ling said, “Yes!” So he took one more night. By the next day, he had practiced it to satisfaction, and he followed Lord Ling, leaving that place and arriving at Jin.

晉平公觴之施夷之臺。酒酣，靈公起曰：「有新聲，願請奏以示公。」公曰：「善。」乃召師涓，令坐師曠之旁，援琴鼓之。

Lord Ping of Jin [r. 557-532 B.C.E.] regaled them with wine at the terrace of Shiyi. After they drank their fill of wine, Lord Ling stood up, saying, “I have happened upon a new melody. I wish to invite someone to play it so that it can be presented to Your Lord.” Lord Ping said, “Excellent!” So Lord Ling summoned Master Juan and had him sit beside Master Kuang [fl. c. mid-6th century B.C.E.], take a zither in hand, and thrum out the melody.

³ An account of this episode is recorded in the *Shi guo* 十過 (“Ten Excesses”) chapter of the *Han Fei zi*. See Han Fei 韓非, *Han Fei zi jishi* 韓非子集釋 (“Master Han Fei: Collected Interpretations”), Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 collations and annotations (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1974), 170-72. Another account is recorded in the *Yue shu* 樂書 (“Music Documents”) chapter of the *Shi ji*. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shi ji* 史記 (“Records of the Historian”), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959 [rpt., 2021]), 1235-36.

未終，曠撫而止之，曰：「此亡國之聲，不可遂也。」平公曰：「此何道出？」師曠曰：「此師延所作淫聲，與紂為靡靡之樂也。武王誅紂，懸之白旄，師延東走，至濮水而自投，故聞此聲者，必於濮水之上。先聞此聲者，其國削，不可遂也。」

Before he had finished playing the tune, Kuang grabbed the instrument and stopped him, saying, “This is the melody of a country that will perish; you cannot continue.” Lord Ping said, “For what reason have you done this?” Master Kuang said, “This is a depraved melody composed by Master Yan; he composed lascivious music for Zhou. King Wu [d. 1043] executed Zhou, hanging him from a white ox-tail pennant. Master Yan fled to the east, arriving at the Pu Waters and throwing himself down into the water. Therefore, to hear this melody, one must be on the banks of the Pu Waters. As for those who have heard this melody before, their countries will fall to ruin. [alt.: The countries of those who heard this melody in times past fell to ruin.] It must not be allowed to continue.”

平公曰：「寡人所好者音也，子其使遂之。」師涓鼓究之。

Lord Ping said: “Music is what I, the deficient one, am fond of. Let him continue.” Master Juan finished the tune.

平公曰：「此所謂何聲也？」師曠曰：「此所謂清商。」公曰：「清商固最悲乎？」師曠曰：「不如清徵。」公曰：「清徵可得聞乎？」師曠曰：「不可。古之得聽清徵者，皆有德義之君也。今吾君德薄，不足以聽之。」公曰：「寡人所好者音也，願試聽之。」

Lord Ping said, “What is this scale called?” Master Kuang said, “This is called clear *shang*.” Lord Ping said: “Is clear *shang* for sure the most plaintive scale?” Master Kuang said: “It is not quite as intense as clear *zheng*.” Lord Ping said, “Could I please hear clear *zheng*.” Master Kuang said, “That is not possible. In ancient times, those who were permitted to hear clear *zheng* were all princes who had innate power and were right-minded. In contrast, in these times, my prince’s innate powers are weak, so you are not at the sufficient level to hear it.” Lord Ping said, “Music is what I, the deficient one, am fond of. I would like to try and listen to it.”

師曠不得已，援琴鼓之。一奏，有玄鶴二八從南方來，集於郭門之上危；再奏而列；三奏，延頸而鳴，舒翼而舞。音中宮商之聲，聲徹于天。

Master Kuang had no other recourse, and so he took the zither in hand and thrummed it out. When he played the first part, two times eight black cranes came from the south and alighted together on the upper peaks of the outer ramparts. When he played again, they arranged themselves into rows. When he played the

third part, they stretched their necks and began cawing. They extended their wings and began to dance. The music struck the right balance between the *gong* and *shang* notes, and the sound went upward all the way to the heavens.

平公大悅，坐者皆喜。平公提觴而起，為師曠壽，反坐而問曰：「樂莫悲于清徵乎？」師曠曰：「不如清角。」平公曰：「清角可得聞乎？」師曠曰：「不可。昔者黃帝合鬼神於西大山之上，駕象輿，六玄龍，畢方並轄，蚩尤居前，風伯進掃，雨師灑道，虎狼在前，鬼神在後，蟲蛇伏地，白雲覆上，大合鬼神，乃作為清角。今主君德薄，不足以聽之。聽之，將恐有敗。」平公曰：「寡人老矣；所好者音也，願遂聽之。」

Lord Ping was greatly pleased, and those who were sitting in attendance were all delighted. Lord Ping raised his goblet and stood up, toasting the health of Master Kuang. He returned to his seat and asked, "In music, is there nothing more plaintive than clear *zheng*?" Master Kuang said, "It is not quite as intense as clear *jiao*." Lord Ping said, "Could I please hear clear *jiao*?" Master Kuang said, "That is not permitted. In the days of old, the Yellow Emperor gathered the ghosts and deities at the summit of the Great Mountain of the West. He drove an ivory carriage to which were yoked six black dragons. The *bi fang* bird followed alongside the wheel-axle cap. *Chiyou* was seated at the front. The Earl of the Wind went forward, sweeping. The Master of the Rains washed the path ahead. Tigers and wolves moved along ahead and ghosts and deities trailed along behind. Insects and reptiles lay low on the ground. White clouds covered above. It was a grand gathering of ghosts and deities. And then music was played in the clear *jiao* scale. In contrast, in these times, my ruler, the prince, is of weak innate power, so you are not at the sufficient level to hear it. If you do hear it, I fear that you will be overthrown." Lord Ping said, "I, the deficient one, am growing old! Music is what I am fond of. I would like to keep going and listen to it."

師曠不得已而鼓之。一奏之，有雲從西北起；再奏之，風至，大雨隨之，裂帷幕，破俎豆，墮廊瓦。坐者散走。平公恐懼，伏于廊室。晉國大旱，赤地三年。平公之身遂癯病。

Master Kuang had no other recourse, so he thrummed it out. When he played the first part, clouds began to rise from the west. When he played again, the wind came, and a great rain followed it. It tore the veil and canopy, shattered the meat tray and stemmed bowl, and threw down the tiles of the inner palace buildings. Those sitting in attendance dispersed and fled. Lord Ping was stricken with terror and cowered in the inner chamber of the palace. A severe drought befell the state of Jin. The earth lay bare for three years. Lord Ping's body was completely enfeebled thereafter.

是何謂也? 曰:是非衛靈公國且削,則晉平公且病,若國且旱亡妖也.師曠曰:
「先聞此聲者國削.」二國先聞之矣.

What would one call this? I say: This was not the ominously eerie occurrence of the depletion of the country of Lord of Wei; rather it was that of Lord Ping of Jin's illness and the drought and ruination of his country. Master Kuang said, "As for those who have heard this melody before, [their] countries will fall to ruin." The two countries had in fact both heard the melody before.

何以知新聲非師延所鼓也? 曰:師延自投濮水,形體腐於水中,精氣消於泥塗,安能復鼓琴? 屈原自沉於江,屈原善著文,師延善鼓琴,如師延能鼓琴,則屈原能復書矣. 楊子雲弔屈原,屈原何不報? 屈原生時,文無不作,不能報子雲者,死為泥塗,手既朽,無用書也. 屈原手朽無用書,則師延指敗無用鼓琴矣. 孔子當泗水而葬,泗水却流,世謂孔子神而能却泗水. 孔子好教授,猶師延之好鼓琴也,師延能鼓琴於濮水之中,孔子何為不能教授於泗水之側乎?

How can one be certain that the melody was, in fact, not thrummed out by Master Yan? I say: Master Yan threw himself into the Pu Waters. His body decomposed in the water, and his essential *qi* 氣 ("vapor") dispersed into the mud and soil. How could he have thrummed the zither? Qu Yuan sank himself into a river. Qu Yuan excelled at composing literature, just as Master Yan excelled at thrumming the zither. If Master Yan was still able to thrum the zither, then Qu Yuan would have been able to write again! Yang Ziyun mourned Qu Yuan, so why did Qu Yuan not show his gratitude? When Qu Yuan was alive, he was an endlessly active writer, so the reason that he could not show his gratitude was that he had died and become mud and soil. His hand had long before decayed, and so he could not use it to write. Just as Qu Yuan's hand decayed so that he could not use it to write, so too had Master Yan's fingers withered so that he could not use them to thrum the zither! Master Kong was buried at the Si Waters, and the Si Waters reversed their flow. For generations, it has been said that Master Kong became a deity and was able to reverse the flow of the Si Waters. Master Kong was very fond of teaching, just as Master Yan was fond of thrumming the zither. If Master Yan was able to thrum the zither amidst the Pu Waters, how is it that Master Kong is not able to teach beside the Si Waters?⁴

⁴ See *Lun heng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 ("Arguments in the Balance: Collation and Interpretation"), Huang Hui 黃暉 (1909-1974) annot., (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990 [rpt.: 2017]), 1057-60. I have referred in my English translation to Alfred Forke's translation. See *Lun-hêng (Part I. Philosophical Essays of Wang Chung.)*, 220-223. Huang Hui understands Shiyi 施夷 as being another name for Siqu 虬祁, a place in the kingdom of Jin 晉. See *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 1057. Lord Ping 平公 (r. 557-532 B.C.E. / Forke: r. 556-530 B.C.E.) is remembered in the Chinese historiographical tradition as being the mid-sixth century B.C.E. ruler of the kingdom of Jin who died amidst upheaval in Jin society that contemporaneous observers whose views are recorded in historiographical texts such as the *Zuo zhuan* attributed to Lord Ping's prodigality. Lord Ping is said to have recruited Jin subjects for onerous construction projects, including the building of a lavish palace at Siqu where much of the action of this story takes place. As recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*, the construction of the palace was ongoing as of 533 B.C.E. Lord Ping's reign ended

Interpretation of the language of Wang Chong's analysis of the status of the narrative as being *yao* 妖 (or not) is problematic. Alfred Forke in his English translation of the *Lun heng* renders Wang Chong's evaluation of the tale as:

是非衛靈公國且削，則晉平公且病，若國且旱亡妖也。

Since the State of Duke *Ling* of *Wei* was not going to ruin, whereas Duke *P'ing* of *Chin* fell sick, and his State suffered from a drought, it was not spook.⁵

Forke interprets the graph *wang* 亡 as an alternate of *wu* 無 (“not having” or “without”), and understands that Wang Chong asserts that nothing in this episode can be considered as an instance of “ominously eerie occurrence” (*yao* 妖)—or “spook,” as Forke translates it—since the prophecy spoken by Master Kuang was that the countries of those who heard the forbidden music would be brought to ruin, whereas the episode does not describe the destruction of the

with his death in 532 B.C.E. Since Lord Ling 靈公 (r. 534-493 B.C.E. / Forke: r. 533-499 B.C.E.) of Wei's reign began in ca. 534 B.C.E., his visit to Jin in which he met with Lord Ping would mostly likely have taken place between 534 B.C.E. and 532 B.C.E. If indeed the “terrace of Shiyi” (*Shiyi zhi tai* 施夷之臺) was a site at Siqu, the scene of Lord Ping's reception of Lord Ling and his retinue in which Master Juan 師涓 (c. mid-6th cent. B.C.E.) plays the phantom music would have taken place at the site of the palace of Siqu just then under construction (or newly finished)—a significant detail in this story that mingles strange event, portentous meaning, and Lord Ping's death amidst the famine that befalls Jin.

Master Yan 師延 is said to have served as the court musician under Zhou 紂, the dissolute ruler of the Shang 商 dynasty whose reign was the last of the Shang kings. In early Chinese historiography, Master Yan is also remembered as having served as a minister of music in the time of the early mythical kings of China, during the Xia 夏 dynasty, and for the duration of the Shang dynasty. When the Shang dynasty fell at the hands of the first Zhou 周 kings, Master Yan is said to have fled and drowned himself in the Pu Waters 濮水. The five tones of the ancient Chinese musical scale are *gong* 宮, *shang* 商, *jiao* 角, *zheng* 徵, and *yu* 羽. The *bi fang* bird was a mythical bird described in the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (“Classic of Mountains and Seas”) and the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (“Masters of Huainan”). The *Shanhai jing* describes it as a bird resembling a crane with a white beak, one leg, and green feathers bearing a red-colored pattern. Chiyou 蚩尤 is a figure described in early Chinese historiography as a rebel who fought against and was defeated by the Yellow Emperor 黃帝. *Fengbo* 風伯 (“Earl of the Wind”) is described in early Chinese historiography as being a brother of Chiyou and was understood as a divine being who was able to control the wind. The late western Han 漢 dynasty scholar Yang Ziyun 楊子雲 (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.)—also known as Yang Xiong 楊雄—is described in the *Han shu* as having been a devoted reader of the figure Qu Yuan 屈原 (340-278 B.C.E.) and as having thrown himself into a river at the mountain Minshan 嶧山 as a way to mourn Qu Yuan's self-inflicted drowning death.

⁵ *Lun-hêng* (Part I. *Philosophical Essays of Wang Chung.*), 222.

state of Wei, despite Lord Ling of Wei having heard the music. Rather, it describes the illness of Lord Ping and drought in the state of Jin. Therefore (according to Forke's interpretation), Wang Chong refutes that the episode is an eerie occurrence.

In contrast, Huang Hui's 黃暉 (1909-1974) annotation—on the basis of the structure of Wang Chong's use of language in passages featuring the term ominously eerie occurrences (*yao* 妖) elsewhere in the *Ji yao* chapter—interprets the graph *wang* 亡 in the line as a miscopying of the possessive particle *zhi* 之.⁶⁶ He thus understands the line to mean that this is an episode describing an ominously eerie occurrence (*yao* 妖), but one that anticipates the illness of Lord Ping and the drought in the state of Jin, not the ruination of the countries of those who listen to the forbidden music. The logic in this interpretation is that since Master Kuang's prophecy called for the ruination of the countries of people who had heard the forbidden music, because the leaders of Wei also heard the music, but their country was apparently unaffected, the strange music must have been connected to Lord Ping specifically, rather than the music itself having a magically noxious quality of destruction given to it by the power of the specter of Master Yan.

While it is difficult to resolve this ambiguity, more evidence leans towards Huang Hui's interpretation in which these opening lines of Wang Chong's commentary affirm that the story is an example of *yao* 妖. In fact, interpreting the graph *wang* 亡 simply as "ruination" provides a natural reading of this line of Wang Chong's evaluation: "This was not the ominously eerie occurrence of the depletion of the country of Lord of Wei; rather it was that of Lord Ping of Jin's illness and the drought and ruination of his country." The story in Wang Chong's telling is

⁶⁶ See *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 1060.

largely devoted to recalling the strange music heard by Lord Ling of Wei on the banks of the Pu 濮 river and on the hubris of Lord Ping in insisting on hearing the forbidden music fit for the princes who lived in times past and “had innate power and were right-minded.” The attention given to his subsequent illness along with the drought in Jin told about in the final sentences of the narrative suggest these are important components in the story and are the denouement of the preceding strange events. Certain components resemble the narrative elements of similar accounts recorded in the “Wuxing zhi”: a strange auditory phenomenon, a situation awry in political leadership, and the subsequent disaster that befalls the Lord Ping and the state of Jin. From a “Wuxing zhi” perspective, this is squarely in the category of *yao* 妖.

Most of Wang Chong’s commentary on this episode is devoted to demonstrating the absurdity of the idea that the ghosts of the dead or deities can communicate and physically interact with humans or have a physical existence. He does not refute that Lord Ling heard the odd melody on the river; he only protests that it did not originate from a ghost. Wang Chong is more interested in disentangling ghosts and spirits from the concept of *yao* 妖 (i.e., oddities that have a material basis, can be understood by material philosophy, as seen in the “Wuxing zhi,” and that reflect cosmic forces that have a bearing on human society). For Wang Chong, *yao* 妖 was a concept that was separate and distinct from the idea of the behavior of ghosts; it referred to weird phenomena that arose naturally and were relevant to events in human society, but which had to be explained correctly (and often were not).

Similar to Ban Gu’s attitude toward such events, Wang Chong views the phantom music drifting over the Pu Waters 濮水 as a portent of the future: “This was the eerie occurrence of Lord Ping of Jin’s illness and the drought and ruination of his country” 是... 晉平公且病若國且

旱亡妖也。Wang Chong analyzes the event as an abnormal occurrence in nature connected somehow with future events. He does not explain here the material connection between the music, on the one hand, and Lord Ping's illness and the drought in Jin, on the other. However, he is certain that these latter events are not the result of a magical or demonic property inherent in the phantom melody that was heard over the Pu Waters. This is because, as he points out (referring to the nobles of Wei and Jin), "the two countries had in fact both heard the melody before" 二國先聞之矣. His implication appears to be that because nobles of both the countries had heard the melody, but only Jin had suffered catastrophe, there was nothing noxious in the music itself. Wang Chong concludes that the eerie occurrence (*yao* 妖) of the phantom melody was a sign of devastation that was to come (or was already on its way) to the state of Jin. Presumably, it was because it occurred in such proximity to Jin (and resonated with such dramatic effects in the Jin court), that Wang Chong concludes that it was a sign pointing to Jin.

II.B. The Concept of *yao* 妖 in the *Lun heng*, Example 2: Simulative Visual and Tactile Phenomena

Wang Chong's affirmation of the reality of *yao* 妖 as separate from the behavior of spirits of the dead or deities can be seen in another narrative of a weird occurrence recorded in the *Shi ji* that he includes in the "Ji yao" chapter and comments on there. The account occurs in the year that Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 died (210 B.C.E.) and features the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, Thearch Gao 高帝 (256-195 B.C.E.):

漢高皇帝以秦始皇崩之歲，為泗上亭長，送徒至驪山。徒多道亡，因縱所將徒，遂行不還，被酒，夜經澤中，人居前。前者還報曰：「前有大蛇當道，願還。」高祖醉曰：「壯士行，何畏？」乃前，拔劍擊斬蛇，蛇遂分兩，徑開。行數里，醉因臥。高祖後人至蛇所，有一老嫗夜哭之。人曰：「嫗何為哭？」嫗曰：「人殺吾

子。」人曰：「媼子為何見殺？」媼曰：「吾子，白帝子，化為虵，當徑。今者，赤帝子斬之，故哭。」人以媼為妖言，因欲笞之。媼因忽不見。

In the year that Qin Shihuang died, August Thearch Gao of the Han was serving as precinct chief in Sishang, and he was on an errand accompanying corvée laborers to Lishan. A good many of the corvée laborers ran away on the road there, so he released the corvée laborers that he was escorting. Thereafter, he departed but did not go back. He became sodden with wine, and while passing through the middle of a marsh at night, he had someone go ahead in front of his party. The person who had gone ahead came back and reported, stating, “Up ahead there is a huge snake that is blocking the road, so I decided to turn back.” Ancestor Gao was drunk and stated, “With hale soldiers following at one’s back, what does one have to fear?” With that he went ahead, drew his sword, and set about striking and hacking the snake, so that soon the snake had been cleaved in two, and the thoroughfare was open again. He walked a few more *li*, and because he was drunk, laid down. Those people following after Ancestor Gao arrived at the place where the snake was, and found that there was an old woman who was crying near the snake in the darkness of the night. The people stated, “Why are you crying, old woman?” The old woman stated, “Someone killed my child.” The people stated, “How did your child, old woman, come to be killed?” The old woman stated, “My child was the child of the White Emperor. He turned into a snake and blocked the road. As for what happened today, the child of the Red Emperor hacked him to death, and so therefore I am crying.” The people thought the woman was talking eerie words, and therefore they were just about to flog her. At that, the old woman suddenly vanished.

(是)何謂也？曰：是高祖初起威勝之祥也。何以明之？以媼忽然不見也。不見，非人，非人則鬼妖矣。夫以媼非人，則知所斬之虵非虵也。云白帝子，何故為虵夜而當道？謂虵白帝子，高祖赤帝子，白帝子為虵，赤帝子為人。五帝皆天之神也，子或為虵，或為人。人與虵異物，而其為帝同神，非天道也。且虵為白帝子，則媼為白帝後乎？帝者之後，前後宜備；帝者之子，官屬宜盛。今一虵死於徑，一媼哭於道，云白帝子，非實，明矣。夫非實則象，象則妖也，妖則所見之物皆非物也，非物則氣也。高祖所殺之虵非虵也，則夫鄭厲公將入鄭之時，邑中之虵與邑外之虵鬪者非虵也。厲公將入鄭，妖氣象虵而鬪也。鄭國鬪虵非虵，則知夏庭二龍為龍象，為龍象，則知鄭子產之時龍戰非龍也。天道難知，使非，妖也；使是，亦妖也。

What would one call this? I say: This was a portentous, conspicuous occurrence anomaly indicating the initial rise and fearsome triumph of Ancestor Gao. She vanished, so she is not a human. She is not a human, but rather is a ghost eerie occurrence. Likewise, because the old woman is not a human, thereby is it possible to know that the snake that was hacked in two was not a snake. She said that it was the “child of the White Emperor,” but why did he turn into a snake and

block the road at night? She asserted that the snake was a child of the White Thearch and that Ancestor Gao was a child of the Red Thearch, and thus the child of the White Thearch turned into a snake, and the child of the Red Thearch turned into a human. The Five Thearchs are all deities of heaven. So this would mean that their child in one case had turned into a snake and in the other had turned into a human. Humans and snakes are different beings, and their being of the same deity-existence as the thearchs is not the way of heaven. Moreover, if the snake was a child of the White Thearch, is the old woman therefore the empress of the White Thearch? An empress of a thearch would have her escort in front and behind her; the child of a thearch would be accompanied by a throng of his officials and retainers. On that day, in contrast, one snake died on the thoroughfare and one old woman was crying in the road. Her claim that it was the child of the White Thearch is not true; this is obvious! Likewise, if it is not true, then it must have been a semblance; and if it was a semblance, then it was an ominous, eerie occurrence. For ominous, eerie occurrences, none of the objects that appear are actual objects; if they are not actual objects, then they must be *qi* [氣 “vapor”]. The snake that was killed by Ancestor Gao was not a snake, and likewise at the time when Lord Li of Zheng entered Zheng, the snakes from within the capital city and the snakes from outside the capital city that were fighting were not snakes. When Lord Li was about to enter Zheng, the *qi* [氣 “vapor”] of ominous, eerie occurrences took the semblance of snakes and fought. Since the snakes that were fighting in the state of Zheng were not snakes, so one knows that the two dragons of the Xia court were the semblance of dragons. Because they were the semblance of dragons, one knows the battle of the dragons that took place in the time of Zichan of Zheng was also not dragons. The way of heaven is difficult to know. It is actuated by [*shi* 使, alt.: transmits information about] wrongdoing, and these are ominous, eerie occurrences; it is actuated by [*shi* 使, alt.: transmits information about] right deeds, and these are also ominous, eerie occurrences.⁷

Wang Chong’s commentary to this episode resembles aspects of his thoughts on the story of Lord Ping and the phantom music. He understands the episode as a portentous event (*xiang* 祥, translated here as “conspicuous, portentous occurrences”) of Thearch Gao’s future establishment of the Han dynasty in victory over the remains of the Qin empire. However, Wang Chong denies the explanation of the old woman that the snake is a child of the White Thearch

⁷ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 1076. Lishan 驪山 is located in modern-day Shaanxi 陝西 province. Content from the *Shuihudi* 睡虎地 daybooks draw a connection between strange speech and flogging.

and that she is its mother. In fact, because the woman disappears preternaturally, he argues that the woman is not a human at all; instead, he regards her as being an “ominously eerie occurrence of a ghostly nature” (*gui yao* 鬼妖).

不見，非人，非人則鬼妖矣。

She vanished, so she is not a human. She is not a human, but rather is an ominously eerie occurrence of a ghostly nature.⁸

Based on other statements in the “*Ji yao*” chapter, Wang Chong understands a ghost in this context as being the apparition of a human figure that is nevertheless not the actual spirit of a human:

凡妖之發，或象人為鬼，或為人象鬼而使，其實一也。

As for the transpiring of all ominously eerie occurrences, some are actuated as a resemblance of a person and thereby exist as a ghost, and some are actuated as a person resembling a ghost; but they are, essentially, the same thing.⁹

Wang Chong’s thinking in “*Ji yao*” follows a central line of argument that what is commonly interpreted as being the appearance of the spirit of a dead human (i.e., a ghost) is, in fact, actually the physical forces of the universe taking on the visual form of a person who has died. Accordingly, what is interpreted as the possession of a person by the spirit of another person is actually these physical forces of the universe inducing a person to resemble (such as speak and act like) someone who has died.

⁸ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 924-5.

⁹ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 923. A person “resembling a ghost” is presumably a person speaking as though he or she were someone who had died.

In the same way, Wang Chong asserts that the snake that Thearch Gao cuts in two is not an actual snake, but like the old woman is an image resembling a physical form that has appeared because of the operation of natural forces in the universe:

云白帝子, 非實, 明矣。夫非實則象, 象則妖也, 妖則所見之物皆非物也, 非物則氣也。

Her claim that it was the child of the White Thearch is not true; this is obvious! Likewise, if it is not true, then it must have been a semblance; and if it was a semblance, then it was an ominously eerie occurrence. For ominously eerie occurrences, none of the objects that appear are actual objects; if they are not actual objects, then they must be *qi* 氣 [“vapor”].¹⁰

A crux of Wang Chong’s interpretation of the episode is his understanding of what is actually an “object” (*wu* 物) and what is something that is actually “vapor” (*qi* 氣) that “resembles” (*xiang* 象) an object. In Wang Chong’s opinion, ominously eerie occurrences (*yao* 妖) happen when *qi* 氣 (“vapor”) takes the semblance of an object (or person) without actually being that object. In the case of the snake that Thearch Gao has encountered, *qi* 氣 (“vapor”) arose and resembled an old woman and a snake. Wang Chong’s attention to the details of the apparition strikes away any identification between the figures of the apparition and any child or wife of the White Thearch that may have existed as historical figures:

帝者之後, 前後宜備; 帝者之子, 官屬宜盛。

An empress of a thearch would have her escort in front and behind her; the child of a thearch would be accompanied by a throng of his officials and retainers. On that day, in contrast, one snake died on the thoroughfare and one old woman was crying in the road.¹¹

¹⁰ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 925.

¹¹ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 924-925.

This inconsistency, Wang Chong holds, is further evidence that the figures of the apparition have nothing to do with the spirits of any empress or child of the White Thearch.

Wang Chong's interest in the mechanics of ominously eerie occurrences draws his discussion to other moments in which snakes or dragons (as snake-like creatures) have appeared in strange ways in recorded history. His analysis includes reference to (1) an account of snakes dueling at the gate of the capital of the state of Zheng 鄭 recounted in the *Zuo zhuan* material for the fourteenth year (680 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Zhuang 莊公 (r. 693-662 B.C.E.) and (2) a later episode recorded (also in the *Zuo zhuan*) in the nineteenth year (522 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Zhao 昭公 (r. 541-510 B.C.E.) in which “dragons” (*long* 龍) battle in a pool located near the south gate of the Zheng capital.¹² Wang Chong also recalls an episode narrated in the *Shi ji* and the “Wuxing zhi” in which two dragons appear in the court of the Xia kings.¹³ Wang Chong's discussion draws these three episodes together to deny that these were actually snakes or dragons:

高祖所殺之蛇非蛇也，則夫鄭厲公將入鄭之時，邑中之蛇與邑外之蛇鬪者非蛇也。厲公將入鄭，妖氣象蛇而鬪也。鄭國鬪蛇非蛇，則知夏庭二龍為龍象，為龍象，則知鄭子產之時龍戰非龍也。天道難知，使非，妖也；使是，亦妖也。

The snake that was killed by Ancestor Gao was not a snake, and likewise at the time when Lord Li of Zheng entered Zheng, the snakes from within the capital city and the snakes from outside the capital city that were fighting were not snakes. When Lord Li was about to enter Zheng, the *qi* 氣 [“vapor”] of ominous, eerie occurrences took the semblance of snakes and so they fought. Since the snakes that were fighting in the state of Zheng were not snakes, one therefore knows that the two dragons of the Xia court were the semblance of dragons. Because they were the semblance of dragons, one knows the battle of the dragons that took place in the time of Zichan of Zheng was also not dragons. The way of heaven is difficult to know. It actuates [*shi* 使, alt.: transmits information about]

¹² See DLS, 1566-1567.

¹³ *Han shu*, 1464-1465.

wrongdoing, and these are ominously eerie occurrences; it actuates [*shi* 使, alt.: transmits information about] right deeds, and these are also ominously eerie occurrences.¹⁴

Wang Chong's argument for these other episodes is an extension of his views on the apparition of the snake and the old woman that Thearch Gao and his party encounter. The odd snakes and sightings of dragons recorded elsewhere in history are, like the snake that Thearch Gao kills and the old woman, images projected to humans by the natural forces of the universe that correlate with tectonic shifts in human society—like sparks emitted by the motion of the forces of the universe propelled by the “way of heaven” (*tian dao* 天道)—and can be read by those who observe them as signalling these changes.

It is important here to note that the fact Wang Chong desires to spend so much time persuading his audience that the behavior of ghosts and deities could not be the cause of eerie incidents suggests that these categories were often intertwined in his time. In contrast, the “Wuxing zhi” in its theoretical taxonomy and analysis of *yao* 妖 and other anomalous events does not give much attention to ghosts or deities at all; the spirits of the dead and deity presences do not have a part in the strange occurrences it describes. While the graph *yao* 妖 occurs 85 times in the “Wuxing zhi,” the graph *gui* 鬼 occurs only 4 times and *shen* 神 moderately at 17 times. In contrast, in the *Ji yao*, where *yao* 妖 appears 28 times, *gui* 鬼 appears 17 times and *shen* 神 24 times. Wang Chong's preoccupation with ghosts and deities reflects his opposition to elements of the narratives that he discusses in which spirit elements interact physically with humans; the strong tenor of his opposition indicates that such elements were common features of

¹⁴ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 925.

narratives centered on the kinds of strange events in nature that Wang Chong and Ban Gu label as *yao* 妖. While this was likely a common understanding of the underlying causes of such anomalies recorded in history, it is clear that as an analytical term in Eastern Han scholastic cosmological philosophy, *yao* 妖 was separate from the concept of ghost and spirits.

III. The Concept of *yi* 異 (“intense irregularity”) in the *Lun heng*

Wang Chong shares many of Ban Gu’s views regarding anomalous occurrences labelled as *yao* 妖. They agree that these correlate with events in human society, that *yao* 妖 was a concept distinct from that of ghosts and spirits, and that the underlying material medium that causes such events to arise was *qi* 氣 (“vapor”). However, at times, they disagree about whether or not the forces of the universe respond to human action. This can be seen in Wang Chong’s discussion of cosmic indifference in the “*Yi xu*” 異虛 (“Emptiness in Intense Irregularities”) chapter of the *Lun heng*. While Ban Gu held that the cosmos had a moral valence that reacted to human behavior according to its quality of virtue or vice, Wang Chong in the “*Yi xu*” argues the universe is indifferent to moral values, and therefore anomalies do not arise in response to human behavior. Rather, anomalies were an effect of the tides of the forces of nature which might happen to favor or disfavor a particular human individual or human community or political entity, but these forces were in no way influenced by a qualities of virtue or vice or salutary or deleterious human behavior: the fate of individuals and political bodies lay in the “way of heaven” (*tian dao* 天道), which Wang Chong held to be inscrutable or, as he put it, “difficult to know” (*nan zhi* 難知).

Moreover, in contrast to Wang Chong, Ban Gu does not articulate a view that some anomalies do not reflect deeper forces at work in the universe: that is, that sometimes odd things

happen randomly and without any deeper meaning or correlation to the tides of the cosmos. Wang Chong, however, devotes a large portion of the “Yi xu” 異虛 (“Emptiness in Intense Irregularities”) chapter to exploring this idea. It is in this chapter that his view of the amorality of the universe in its workings is articulated in order to show that some anomalous events are at bottom “empty” (*xu* 虛), unconnected from any deeper forces at work in the universe.

Wang Chong’s discussion of these two ideas—that (1) sometimes anomalies have no particular meaning and (2) the forces of the universe are indifferent to human moral action—is contained in his evaluation of an episode that is recorded as having occurred during the Shang dynasty (c. 1550-1046 B.C.E.), in the years of the reign of Shang king Wuding 武丁 (trad., 1324-1266 B.C.E.), who is referred to by Wang Chong as Gaozong 高宗 (“the High Founding Ancestor”):

殷高宗之時，桑穀俱生於朝，七日而大拱。高宗召其相而問之，相曰：「吾雖知之，弗能言也。」問祖己。祖己曰：「夫桑穀者，野草也，而生於朝，意朝亡乎。」高宗恐駭，側身而行道，思索先王之政，明養老之義，興滅國，繼絕世，舉佚民，桑穀亡。三年之後，諸侯以譯來朝者六國，福。

In the days of the High Founding Ancestor of the Yin, a mulberry tree and a paper mulberry tree together sprouted at the royal court. Within seven days, they had grown to the size of two large fists pressed together. The High Ancestor summoned his ministers and asked them about this. His ministers stated, “Although I know of this, I cannot speak about it.” He asked Zu Ji about it. Zu Ji stated: “Mulberry and paper mulberry are wild plants. Despite this, they have sprouted at the royal court. It means the royal court will perish.” The High Founding Ancestor was frightened and fell into a panic. He bore forward into the task and followed the Way. He desired and sought out the practices of government used by the kings of the past. He discerned the propriety of nurturing the elderly. He raised up a foundering state. He extended an era that had come to its end. He elevated a dejected people. The mulberry tree and paper mulberry tree perished. Among the assembly of noble lords, those of six states came to the royal court with the aid of interpreters. It was a time of blessings.

高宗，賢君也，而感桑穀生而問祖己，行祖己之言，修政改行，桑穀之妖亡，諸侯朝而年長久。脩善之義篤，故瑞應之福渥。

The High Founding Ancestor was a worthy ruler. He was roused by the sprouting of a mulberry tree and a paper mulberry tree, and he asked Zu Ji about it. He followed the words of Zu Ji. He refined his governing practices and reformed his conduct. The ominously eerie occurrence of the mulberry tree and the paper mulberry tree dissipated. The assembly of noble lords came to his court and his years were long-lasting. Because his refinement of himself towards benevolence was proper and earnest, therefore he soaked in the blessings that were the propitious response [to his good deeds].

此虛言也。

These are empty words.

祖己之言，朝當亡哉。夫朝之當亡，猶人當死。人欲死，怪出；國欲亡，期盡。人死命終，死不復生，亡不復存。祖己之言政，何益於不亡？高宗之脩行，何益於除禍？夫家人見凶脩善，不能得吉；高宗見妖改政，安能除禍？除禍且不能，況能招致六國，延期至百年乎？故人之死生，在於命之夭壽，不在行之善惡；國之存亡，在期之長短，不在政之得失。

Zu Ji's words were that the royal court was on the verge of collapse! A royal court being on the verge of collapse is like a human being on the verge of dying. When a person is going to die, prodigies emerge. When a state is going to collapse, its ordained time has run out. When humans die, their ordained life span comes to an end. Once dead, they cannot come back to life. Once something has perished, it cannot continue to exist. In what way did Zu Ji's words about government practices contribute to [the Shang state] not collapsing? In what way did the High Founding Ancestor's refinement of his conduct contribute to the eradication of catastrophe? If the members of a family see unpropitiousness and refine themselves towards benevolence, they cannot obtain propitiousness. The High Founding Ancestor saw ominously eerie occurrences and reformed his governing practices, but how could this have eradicated catastrophe? Since it is not possible to eradicate catastrophe, how much less possible is it to summon [the nobles] of six states and to extend [a state's] ordained time by one hundred years? Therefore, the birth and death of humans is a matter of the brevity or length of their ordained life span. It is not a matter of the benevolence or wickedness of their conduct. The continuity or collapse of a state is a matter of the brevity or length of its ordained life span. It is not a matter of the accomplishment or failure of its governing practices.

案祖己之占，桑穀為亡之妖，亡象已見，雖脩教行，其何益哉？何以效之？

According to the prognostication of Zu Ji, the mulberry tree and paper mulberry tree were an ominous, eerie occurrence indicating collapse. If the image of collapse had already appeared, although teachings and conduct were reformed, what good would it have done? How can one adopt this as a model?¹⁵

Wang Chong's position taken in his discussion of traditional accounts of the oddity of mulberry trees taking seed in the Shang court has two aspects that make it distinct from Ban Gu's discussion on anomalies: one is Wang Chong's radical fatalism, and the other is his view that some abnormal occurrences recorded in history did not have any connection with deeper cosmic forces at work. For the first, Wang Chong makes it clear that he thinks that the forces of the universe do not respond to the moral value of human action. This view informs several of his statements:

夫家人見凶脩善，不能得吉。

If the members of a family see malpropitiation and refine themselves towards benevolence, they cannot obtain propitiousness.

故人之死生，在於命之夭壽，不在行之善惡。

...the birth and death of humans is a matter of the brevity or length of their ordained life span. It is not a matter of the benevolence or wickedness of their conduct.

In terms of personal or collective well-being, good deeds do not affect cosmic sympathy and assistance or good fortune. Wang Chong formulates a version of this position when it comes to the fortunes of state entities:

國之存亡，在期之長短，不在政之得失。

The continuity or collapse of a state is a matter of the brevity or length of its ordained time span. It is not a matter of the accomplishment or failure of its governing practices.

¹⁵ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 250-52.

For Wang Chong, personal and collective outcomes have nothing to do with personal or collective action: they are simply the result of the motions of an indifferent universe, which determines the longevity of individual human life spans (*ming* 命) and the time spans (*qi* 期) allotted to state entities that decides how long they endure.

Even though human action has nothing to do with the fate of individuals or states, Wang Chong still believes the workings of the universe produce strange effects perceivable to humans in the form of *yao* 妖 events, as he describes in the “Ji yao” chapter of the *Lun heng*. Once such an event has occurred, it indicates that the tides of the universe are on the move, and no act by a human being can reverse them. He expresses this attitude of the inevitability of fate once its signs are observed in statements such as “when conspicuous, portentous occurrences of beneficence emerge, the state will definitely rise; when conspicuous, portentous occurrences of malignancy appear, the royal court will definitely perish” 善祥出國必興惡祥見朝必亡.¹⁶

According to this inevitability that accompanies anomalies generated by the motions of cosmic forces, once such anomalies appear, the die has been cast. Therefore, the wild trees growing in the Shang court that were prognosticated by Zu Ji as betokening the collapse of the Shang state could not possibly have been an effect of cosmic forces, because if such forces had in fact turned against the Shang, then there would have been no redeeming of the Shang or extension of Shang rule as was seen in the years of Wuding’s reign. The trees were thus merely a random, strange occurrence unconnected with anything else, a category of event that Wang Chong labels with the term that is the chapter’s title: 異虛 *yi xu* (“emptiness in intense irregularities”). This is distinct

¹⁶ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 254.

from the categories *yao* 妖 and *xiang* 祥, which are strange events that are, in contrast, connected with deeper forces at work in the universe.

IV. The Concept of *guai* 怪 (“prodigy”) in the *Lun heng*

Like Ban Gu, Wang Chong uses the term *guai* 怪 in a generic way to describe abnormal events that are connected with the underlying forces of the universe, pointing to the quality of the strange in them that makes them noticeable. An example of this usage is in his discussion (cited above) of the mulberry trees at the Shang court and the inevitability of fate once substantive anomalies appear, where he points out what he believes to be a similar dynamic in abnormalities that signal death: “when a person is going to die, prodigies emerge” 人欲死怪出. This use of the term expresses the experience of strangeness that accompanied the human observation of abnormal events. In addition to this generic usage, Ban Gu also uses the term *guai* 怪 as a formal, separate category for abnormal events that are recorded as having occurred in history and had a miraculous quality to them, being traditionally understood as having been brought about by divine acts of creation or intervention.

Accounts of miraculous conceptions of the putative ancestors of early political dynasties typify the category of *guai* 怪 as Wang Chong presents it in the “*Qi guai*” 奇怪 (“Wondrous Prodigies”) chapter of the *Lun heng*. These accounts include the conceptions of Yu 禹, the legendary founder of the Xia 夏 dynasty, Xie 髡 (whose name is also represented in canonical histories as Xie 契, using a variant graph form), the legendary founding ancestor of the family line of enfeoffed nobles whose descendants established the Shang dynasty, and Hou Ji 后稷, the

legendary founder of the family line whose descendants established the Zhou 周 dynasty. Wang

Chong writes:

禹母吞薏苡而生禹，故夏姓曰姒；高母吞燕卵而生高，故殷姓曰子；后稷母履大人跡而生后稷，故周姓曰姬。

Yu's mother swallowed tear-grass and gave birth to Yu. Therefore, the surname of the Xia was Si. Xie's mother swallowed the egg of a martin and gave birth to Xie. Therefore, the surname of the Yin was Zi. Hou Ji's mother trod in the tracks of a giant and gave birth to Hou Ji. Therefore, the surname of the Zhou was Ji.¹⁷

As Wang Chong notes, Yu's mother is recorded in historical sources as having conceived Yu after swallowing tear-grass, Xie's mother conceived Xie after she swallowed the egg of a martin, and Hou Ji's mother conceived Hou Ji because she followed in the footprints of a giant.

Wang Chong in the opening lines of the "Qi guai" chapter notes that common explanations made by Ruists 儒者 about these miraculous events connect them to the identities of Yu, Xie, and Hou Ji as sages (*sheng ren* 聖人):

儒者稱聖人之生，不因人氣，更稟精於天。

Ruists claim that the birth of sagacious humans does not occur according to the *qi* 氣 ["vapors"] of humans; instead, vital essence [*jing* 精] is bestowed on them by heaven.¹⁸

The Ruist idea, according to Wang Chong, is that miraculous conception of individual sages happens through divine intervention, through heaven's infusion of vital essence (*jing* 精) into the bodies of the women who conceive them, presumably through material media such as those that appear in these accounts (grass, a bird egg, the soil of the footprints of a giant). Wang Chong disputes these accounts of divine conception on materialist grounds, arguing that matter that is

¹⁷ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 184-85.

¹⁸ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 184.

not human cannot cause the generation of a human fetus and that divine presences cannot interact materially with humans.¹⁹ While he appears to believe in the historicity of the figures featured in these accounts, he denies accounts of their divine conception and thus by implication holds that they were born just like all humans are born, as the result of procreation between a male and female human.

Wang Chong points out that these accounts were useful for purposes of the political actors who identified with these historical figures to enhance their own charisma or prestige:

世好奇怪, 古今同情, 不見奇怪, 謂德不異, 故因以為姓。

The world is fond of wondrous prodigies. This sentiment was as true in ancient times as it is today. If wondrous prodigies do not appear, it is said that there is nothing out of the ordinary about [a person's] innate powers. Therefore, surnames were made based on these.²⁰

Wang Chong observes that there is a kind of perennial enthusiasm in “the world” (*shi* 世) (likely by this term he meant a general populace consisting mostly of unscholarly, lay people) for accounts of miraculous events, even to the point that miraculous events are conventionally viewed as a standard for authenticating the “innate power” (*de* 德) of political actors. This has invited the appropriation of such accounts as a means for establishing and shoring up political authority. However, Wang Chong maintains that such accounts of miraculous happenings that come about through divine intervention—happenings that he labels using the term “wondrous prodigies” (*qi guai* 奇怪)—are false.

¹⁹ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 188-89.

²⁰ See *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 193.

Wang Chong's fundamental denial of the historicity of divine miracles—*qi guai* 奇怪—is in contrast to his views about the historical reality of *yao* 妖 and *yi* 異 events. For *yao* 妖 and *yi* 異 events, Wang Chong holds that these abnormal events did occur as recorded in historical records; it is just that traditional explanations of the nature and underlying causes of these anomalies was inaccurate. In contrast to this, Wang Chong believes that the *qi guai* 奇怪 events recorded in historical accounts (or at least many of those that he recounts) simply never took place. Also, as compared to his discussion of *yao* 妖 and *yi* 異, events, he uses remarkably strong language to refute accounts of divine miracles, calling them “empty, preposterous words” (*xu wang yan* 虛妄言).

Wang Chong's comments expressing intense skepticism about the fundamental historicity of *qi guai* 奇怪 events can be laid beside his remarks in the “An shu” 案書 (“According to Books”) chapter of the *Lun heng*, where he describes the *Zuo zhuan* commentary to the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (“Springs and Autumns”) as heavily laden with records of events that Wang Chong labels as *guai* 怪 (“prodigy”):

春秋左氏傳者，蓋出孔子壁中。孝武皇帝時，魯共王壞孔子教授堂以爲宮，得佚春秋三十篇，左氏傳也。公羊高、穀梁寘、胡毋氏皆傳春秋，各門異戶，獨左氏傳爲近得實。何以驗之？禮記造於孔子之堂，太史公漢之通人也，左氏之言與二書合，公羊高、穀梁寘、胡毋氏不相合。又諸家去孔子遠，遠不如近，聞不如見。劉子政玩弄左氏，童僕妻子皆呻吟之。光武皇帝之時，陳元、范叔(升)上書連屬，條事是非，左氏遂立。范叔(升)尋因罪罷。元、叔(升)天下極才，講論是非，有餘力矣。陳元言訥，范叔(升)章誦，左氏得實，明矣。言多怪，頗與孔子不語怪力相違反也。呂氏春秋亦如此焉。國語，左氏之外傳也，左氏傳經，辭語尚略，故復選錄國語之辭以實。然則左氏、國語，世儒之實書也。

The material of Mister Zuo's *Tradition of the Springs and Autumns* most likely was taken out from inside the wall of Master Kong. In the time of August Thearch Xiao Wu [r. 141-87 B.C.E.], King Gong of Lu [r. 154-128 B.C.E.] destroyed

Master Kong's hall of teaching and instruction in order to make his palace. He obtained a lost edition of the *Springs and Autumns* consisting of thirty chapters. This was Mister Zuo's *Tradition*. Gongyang Gao [trad. fl. 5th-4th cent. B.C.E.], Guliang Zhi [trad. fl. 2nd-1st cent. B.C.E.], and Mister Humu [trad. fl. 2nd cent. B.C.E.] all transmitted the *Springs and Autumns*. Each belonged to their own faction and came from a different school. Only the *Tradition* of Mister Zuo came close [to the text of the *Springs and Autumns*] and captured the true state of affairs [alt.: ...came close and was verified]. How can this be proven? The *Record of Rites* was fashioned in Master Kong's hall. The Grand Scribe, his Lordship, was a person of the Han who was of capacious learning. The words of Mister Zuo matched the contents of the two books. Those of Gongyang Gao, Guliang Zhi, and Mister Humu did not match. Also, the several lineages were far away from Master Kong, and that which is far away is not as good as that which is close. Hearing news of something is not as good as actually seeing it. Liu Zizheng [2nd(?)-1st(?) cent. B.C.E.] enjoyed and amused himself with [the writings of] Master Zuo. His varlets, servants, wife, and children all could recite it by rote. In the years of August Thearch Guang Wu [25-57 C.E.], Chen Yuan [fl. 1st cent. C.E.] and Fan Sheng [fl. 1st cent. C.E.] continuously submitted letters to the sovereign. They arranged facts, asserting what was true and denying what was false. Subsequently, Mister Zuo [i.e., Mister Zuo's *Tradition*] was established. Fan Sheng sought reasons to asperse and remove it. Yuan and Sheng were exceeding talents, surpassing all others under heaven. They discussed and debated what was true and what was false. There was a surfeit of ability. Chen Yuan's views were adopted. Fan Sheng's memorials were dismissed. It is clear that Mister Zuo captured the true state of affairs [alt.: ...Mister Zuo was verified]. He speaks of a great number of prodigies. This runs counter to [the account in the *Lun yu* 論語 (“Arguments and Discourses”) in which it is said that] Master Kong did not speak of prodigies or force. The *Springs and Autumns* of Master Lü is also similar in this way. The *Discourses of the States* is an external tradition to Mister Zuo. Mister Zuo transmitted the canonical text. His expressions and language were still succinct. Therefore, the explanations of the *Discourses of the States* were additionally selected and recorded, so as to express the true state of affairs [alt.: ...recorded, and it was verified]. In this way, Mister Zuo and the *Discourse of the States* were true books [alt.: verified books] of generations of Ruists.²¹

Wang Chong's observation about the *Zuo zhuan* is that within that text, “a great number of prodigies” (*duo guai* 多怪) are “spoken of” (*yan* 言). As Wang Chong points out, this runs counter to an interdiction on speaking about “prodigies” (*guai* 怪) ostensibly observed by Ruist

²¹ *Lun heng jiaoshi*, 1349-54.

practitioners, owing to the reticence toward discussing such things maintained by Master Kong 孔子, the founding patriarch of Ruism, as recorded in the *Lun yu* 論語 (“Arguments and Discourses”): “The Master did not speak of prodigies, force, disorder, or spirits” (*zi bu yu guai li luan shen* 子不語怪力亂神).²² Since Master Kong was the arch-paragon of Ruist practice, his unwillingness to discuss “prodigies” (*guai* 怪) implicitly constituted a prohibition. Nevertheless, as Wang Chong points out, Ruist practitioners enshrined the *Zuo zhuan*, with its many accounts of “prodigies” (*guai* 怪), in the Eastern Han imperial canon, as an accurate account of Spring and Autumn period history.

Wang Chong does not elaborate or name specifically which accounts in the *Zuo zhuan* he thinks of as being “prodigies” (*guai* 怪). The “Qi guai” chapter of the *Lun heng*, as discussed above, uses the compound word *qi guai* 奇怪 (“wondrous prodigies”) to refer to incidents in which divine entities physically interact with human beings with miraculous effects. There are certainly accounts of divine beings and the deified spirits of dead humans interacting with living humans through dreams in the *Zuo zhuan*. However, these constitute only a small part of the abnormal phenomena recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*, which also include meteorological and astronomical anomalies, unusual occurrences involving animals and inanimate objects, and visitations by non-divine spirits of the dead. It seems likely that Wang Chong’s use of the term “prodigies” (*guai* 怪) here in his discussion of the *Zuo zhuan* denotes a more general category of “abnormal phenomena.” This usage is in line with his generic use of the term in the “Yi xu”

²² Cheng Shude 程樹德 (1877-1944), *Lun yu jishi* 論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990 [rpt.: 1997]), 480.

chapter of the *Lun heng* (cited above), where it appears to refer generally to strange things that happen when a person is about to die and suggests a range of abnormal occurrences.

This more general category of *guai* 怪 is also consistent with late Han and early medieval commentary to the *Lun yu* passage that Wang Chong cites, where it appears to have been understood as a term for abnormal occurrences broadly. For example, in his comments to this passage of the *Lun yu*, late Eastern Han (25-220 C.E.) and Three Kingdoms (220-280 C.E.) scholar Wang Su 王肅 (195-258 C.E.) explicates the term *guai* 怪:

怪, 怪異也.

Prodigies: this means prodigies and intense irregularities.²³

Wang Su's explication suggests an understanding of the term *guai* 怪 in which it refers broadly to strange and abnormal phenomena, which would therefore likely include those that are recorded under the rubric of the six anomalies in the "Wuxing zhi." Ban Gu's exclusion of ghosts and spirit entities from his discussion in the "Wuxing zhi" is possibly also reflected in the term *guai* 怪 as appearing in the *Lun yu* passage and in Wang Chong's remarks on the *Zuo zhuan*, since the *Lun yu* passage lists *guai* 怪 and *shen* 神 (Wang Su glosses *shen* 神 as meaning "ghosts and spirits" 鬼神) separately, as though they belonged to discrete categories.²⁴

²³ See *Lun yu jishi*, 481. Wang Su's commentary to the text of the *Lun yu* is cited in Qing dynasty (1636-1912) scholar Ruan Yuan's 阮元 (1764-1849) edition of the *Lun yu zhushu* 論語注疏 ("Arguments and Discourses: Annotations and Sub-Annotations"). Northern Song period (960-1127) scholar Xing Bing 邢昺 (932-1010) authored sub-annotations to the *Lun yu jijie* 論語集解 ("Arguments and Discourses: Collected Interpretations") by late Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms scholar He Yan 何宴 (190-249 C.E.) et al., thereby producing the *Lun yu zhushu*, which included the text of the *Lun yu jijie* in which Wang Su's commentary was recorded. The *Lun yu jijie* is a lost book, but has been preserved through Xing Bing's *Lun yu zhushu*.

²⁴ See *Lun yu jishi*, 481.

Rather than implying accounts of interactions between humans and divine entities, the *guai* 怪 that Wang Chong uses to describe accounts contained in the *Zuo zhuan* likely referred to strange, abnormal occurrences in general. Perhaps some of these occurrences might involve elements traditionally understood as being connected to divine beings or the spirits of dead humans (as in the two events that Wang Chong includes in the “Ji yao” chapter that are discussed above), but what was essential to the category was the abnormality and subjective sense of strangeness that these events provoked in those who learned of them.

In this passage of the “An shu” describing the process by which the *Zuo zhuan* was canonized in the Eastern Han and its legacy in the Ruist tradition of having been treated as a faithful commentary to the *Chunqiu*, Wang Chong places particular emphasis on the idea in the Ruist tradition that the contents of the *Zuo zhuan* were an historically accurate depiction of the events in the Spring and Autumn period. Compared to the other commentaries on the *Chunqiu* that had emerged as explications of its contents, Wang Chong observes that “only the *Tradition* of Mister Zuo came close and captured the true state of affairs” 獨左氏傳為近得實. He repeats the term *de shi* 得實 again in the same passage to speak of the *Zuo zhuan*: “it is clear that Mister Zuo captured the true state of affairs” 左氏得實明矣. His closing remarks in the passage echo this notion of the veracity of the *Zuo zhuan* as it was understood in the Ruist tradition: “Mister Zuo and the *Discourse of the States* were true books of generations of Ruists” 左氏國語世儒之實書也. And this despite the “great number of prodigies” (*duo guai* 多怪) recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*. The Ruist conception of Spring and Autumn history, therefore, is one to which accounts of anomalous events are indelibly welded, so that Ruist history, despite its tenet to the contrary (as set out in *Lun yu*), in effect embraced accounts of the strange.

As for Wang Chong's own position on the veracity of these accounts in the *Zuo zhuan*, he does not clarify his position. He appears to be preoccupied with establishing that the canonization of the *Zuo zhuan* and its status within the Ruist tradition were incontrovertible historical fact, without articulating his own attitude in this passage of the "An shu." By this token, his goal was to expose a contradiction within the Ruist tradition with regard to discussing accounts of "prodigies" (*guai* 怪)—a project for which Wang Chong (based on the contents of the *Lun heng*) had an obvious enthusiasm.²⁵ Presumably, this reduced the prestige of Ruist

²⁵ In the same chapter of the *Lun heng* (the "An shu"), Wang Chong's interest in exposing contradictions in Ruist thinking seems to underlie his analysis of Ruist reasons for disavowing Moist beliefs:

儒家之宗，孔子也；墨家之祖，墨翟也。且案儒道傳而墨法廢者，儒之道義可為，而墨之法議難從也。何以驗之？墨家薄葬、右鬼，道乖相反違其實，宜以難從也。乖違如何？使鬼非死人之精也，右之未可知。今墨家謂鬼審（死）人之精也，厚其精而薄其屍，此於其神厚而於其體薄也。薄厚不相勝，華實不相副，則怒而降禍，雖有其鬼，終以死恨。人情欲厚惡薄，神心猶然。用墨子之法，事鬼求福，福罕至而禍常來也。以一況百，而墨家為法，皆若此類也。廢而不傳，蓋有以也。

The forebear of the Ruist practitioners was Master Kong. The founding ancestor of the Moist practitioners was Mo Di. And according to those who transmitted the way of the Ruists and abandoned the rules of the Moists, the meaning of the way of Ruism is practicable, whereas the counsel of the rules of Moism is hard to follow. How can this be proven? That the practitioners of Moism hold burial practices in thin regard and place ghosts to the right, in a place of honor, shows that they run counter to the way, operating backwards, and depart from the true state of affairs. This is consistent with the idea that, if [such views] are adopted, they would be hard to follow. How is it that they run counter and depart [from the true state of affairs]? If ghosts are thought to be not the vital essence of a dead human, then to place ghosts to the right, in a place of honor, could not be conceived of. Today, Moist practitioners declare that ghosts are indeed the vital essence of [dead] humans. This is to hold their [i.e., humans'] vital essence in thick regard and to hold their corpses in thin regard. This proceeds from the notion that their spirits are thick and proceeds from the notion that their bodies are thin. If that which is thin and that which is thick are not in equal measure to one another, and the fluorescence and the substantiation do not match one another, there will be anger, and catastrophe will descend. Although their ghosts will exist, in the end, a death-like resentment will be turned to. Human predilection desires thickness and detests thinness. This is also the case in the minds of spirits. If the rules of the Moists are used, and services are rendered to a ghost in order to pursue good fortune, then good fortune will rarely arrive and catastrophe will frequently come. If one [tenet] can be used as a basis of comparison with one hundred, then every act of upholding the rules of the Moist practitioners will all be as this kind. This was most likely the basis for abandoning [Moist practices] and not transmitting [them]. (*Lun heng jiaoshi*, 1348-49.)

Here, Wang Chong claims that Ruist disavowal of Moist belief is based in the Ruist embrace of a "common sense" idea that the spirits of dead humans desire that their own corpses be treated with care and honored in the form of proper burial rites, in contrast to Moist belief which, according to Wang Chong, neglects the corpses of the dead and

practitioners and made them seem hypocritical, since their canonical texts were out of step with the tenets that they professed. It also opened up space for Wang Chong's extensive discussion of such prodigies that he undertakes in the *Lun heng*. At the same time, Wang Chong's repeated comments about the veracity of the *Zuo zhuan* as it was perceived in the Ruist tradition (especially his remark that, of all the commentaries on the *Chunqiu*, "only the *Tradition of Mister Zuo* came close and captured the true state of affairs") suggest that he sympathized with the idea of the historicity of the *Zuo zhuan*. As discussed above, elsewhere in the *Lun heng*, Wang Chong affirms the reality of so many accounts of abnormal occurrences and the strange held in canonical histories, if disagreeing with their underlying nature and causes. This attitude is entirely consistent with a view that the *Zuo zhuan* was an historically accurate depiction of Spring and Autumn period history—"prodigies" (*guai* 怪) and all.

V. Conclusion

A study of the language that Wang Chong uses to discuss anomalous occurrences and his approach to accounts of such events as recorded in canonical history shows a strong resemblance to these aspects of Ban Gu's "Wuxing zhi." While Wang Chong does not use a system of articulated taxonomical categories as Ban Gu does, his language employs the same basic terminology, including the terms *yao* 妖, *yi* 異, *guai* 怪, and *xiang* 祥 used in similar ways. Like Ban Gu, Wang Chong affirms the veracity of many (though certainly not all) of the anomalous occurrences that are recorded in the historical canon. Events described as *yao* 妖 ("ominously eerie occurrence") and *xiang* 祥 ("portentous, conspicuous occurrence") were abnormal events

seeks to principally honor the spirits of the dead. This would be contradictory, because then Ruist beliefs necessarily involve beliefs about the nature of the spirits of the dead, despite Ruist tenets against discussion of "ghosts and spirits" (*shen* 神), based in the remarks of the *Lun yu* about Master Kong's aversion to such discourse.

that reflected the motions of the fundamental forces of the universe. Wang Chong views such events as being entirely unrelated to the actions of ghosts or deities, which he holds cannot physically interact with humans or have any kind of material existence. Wang Chong's view on this point is consistent with Ban Gu's general exclusion or reference to ghosts or deities when discussing anomalous events. Both Wang Chong and Ban Gu point to *qi* 氣 (“vapor”) as being the material force underlying the abnormal and the anomalous. Moreover, Wang Chong affirms the veracity of events he labels as *guai* 怪, which he uses as a general term for strange occurrences, and he commends the canonical history of the *Zuo zhuan* for having recorded such events.

This is not to say that Wang Chong is absolutely identical to Ban Gu. Unlike Ban Gu, his discussion is principally aimed at discrediting certain traditional explanations of the significance or underlying causes of anomalous events. This is seen, for example, in his adamant refusal that the concept of ghosts and deities should have any place in a view on the underlying causes of *yao* 妖 events. For this purpose of refutation, Wang Chong fashions a terminology to denote those anomalous events that have been either traditionally misread (as in the case of “empty intense irregularities” [*xu yi* 虛異]) or are essentially false (for which he employs the term “wondrous prodigies” [*qi guai* 奇怪]). Wang Chong's coining of terms was done by adding a qualifying adjective to a noun describing an abnormal occurrence, thereby creating a new category indicating anomalies that were dubious, as opposed to those anomalies that he held to have actually taken place: “prodigies” (*guai* 怪) were real, while “wondrous prodigies” (*qi guai* 奇怪)—or, possibly a translation of “dubiously curious prodigies” would be more apt—were false. Distinct on this point from Ban Gu, Wang Chong wanted to emphatically negate what he

believed to be false accounts of anomalous events or inaccurate explanations of their underlying causes, so as to produce an accurate account of the strange based in material philosophy (although the material philosophy that he advocated was similar to Ban Gu's in its use of the concept of *qi* 氣).

Another point of departure from Ban Gu is Wang Chong's views on the amorality of the forces of the universe and the futility of human action to alter the course of events. Ban Gu's fundamental conviction is that errant human action disrupts the material environment, causing anomalies that are signs of growing dysfunction in human society. If errant human behavior is checked, then anomalies will cease to occur. In contrast, Wang Chong views anomalies (the subset of anomalies that are outgrowths of the turning of the gears of the cosmos) as being stimulated by shifts in the underlying forces of the universe that operate autonomously and are unresponsive to the moral valence of human action (or to any human action). While these forces profoundly influence events of human society, no act by humans as individuals or collective entities can alter the course of events in opposition to the motions of these tectonic tremors and shocks.

Despite these points of difference between Ban Gu and Wang Chong, the significant overlap between the two of them in terms of their usage of terms to describe anomalies and their affirmation of the reality of anomalous events (for Wang Chong it was a partial affirmation) as recorded in canonical histories demonstrates that there was a shared language in the Eastern Han for talking about anomalous events and a shared appreciation of their veracity and significance in signaling the operation of deeper material forces at work. Anomalies were understood as problematic and in urgent need of investigation, analysis, and interpretation. Ban Gu's treatment

of anomalies was not an isolated view embraced by a single scholar (and whatever scribal or biblio-technical assistants he may have been working with in concert) working in a position of relative insulation from general society as a custodian of the Eastern Han imperial library, but in many fundamental aspects reflected views toward anomalies common among the scholastic members of Eastern Han society. Comparison with Wang Chong's discussion allows perspective to observe these shared commonalities as well as lines of variance.

CHAPTER 4, Stratigraphic Analysis of the “Wuxing zhi”: Western Han Scholarship and the Grounding of Anomaly-Centered Political Thought in Systematized Material Philosophy and the Historic Record

I. Introduction

Regardless of the status of Ban Gu’s belief (or non-belief) in the theory of anomaly articulated in the “Wuxing zhi” or his intentions in compiling it, the “Wuxing zhi” stands as a compendium of knowledge about the material makeup of the universe, the nature of the relationship between humans and their material environment, and the underlying dynamics informing the occurrence of anomalies.¹ It can be reasonably surmised that it reflects knowledge that was available to Ban Gu in his time.²

The conceptual view articulated by the “Wuxing zhi” has three different aspects: a philosophical (or cosmological) aspect, an historical aspect, and a hermeneutical aspect. Its philosophical aspect is that it makes statements about the nature of matter and the relationship between humans and their material environment. Its historical aspect is that it points to records of the past (primarily, the *Chunqiu*, its commentaries, and unattributed accounts of Western Han history) and claims to find events in history that reflect the principles of its philosophy. Its third aspect, the hermeneutical aspect, grows out of this historical aspect. Because much of what it

¹ Michael Nylan points out the plausibility of the argument of contemporary scholar He Ruyue 何如月 that “the compiler(s) of the *Hanshu* ‘Wuxing treatise’ had a specific agenda: to remove important powers—powers that had been famously abused in the past—from the hands of the professional court diviners by generating a systematic theory that could be understood and, crucially, *applied* by non-specialists at court, as needed.” Quoted from Michael Nylan, “On *Hanshu* ‘Wuxing zhi’ 五行志 and Ban Gu’s Project” in Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan eds., *Technical Arts in the Han Histories: Tables and Treatises in the Shiji and Hanshu* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 213-79 [quoted from 214].

² As Michael Loewe points out, the *Han shu* had multiple authors: “The *Han shu* was begun by Pan Piao (A.D. 3-54), whose essay on sovereignty forms a basic document in the history of political ideas. The work was completed mainly by his son Pan Ku (A.D. 32-92), whose sister Pan Chao (A.D. 248-?116) added some contributions.” Quoted from Michael Loewe, “Introduction” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, 4. As a shorthand, I refer to all three collectively as “Ban Gu,” recognizing that this is an elided description of the *Han shu*’s authorship.

claims to be history is based on the record of the *Chunqiu*, it cannot separate itself from the act of exegesis. It cites Western Han scholarly authorities' exegeses of the contents of the *Chunqiu* (finding among these a patterned record of anomalies that justify its philosophical claims); and to interpret the record of the past contained in that work, those Western Han scholar-exegetes in turn depended (at least partially) on the commentarial traditions surrounding the *Chunqiu*, which was by the early Western Han period already viewed as an authoritative rendering of history. Since the "Wuxing zhi" is constructed from the scholastic heritage of the Western Han, it is thus a record of these three aspects of scholarly activity in the Western Han.

This chapter attempts to reconstruct the evolution of the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy embodied in the "Wuxing zhi" through time. The "Wuxing zhi" conceptual view had its immediate origins in traditions of Western Han scholarship that integrated the separate but inter-related activities of (1) theorizing about the relationship between human action and the material world and (2) studying texts that contained a record of history (or at least what was presented and for the most part accepted as history). Modern scholarly accounts of Western Han anomaly-centered political philosophy have tended to adopt a totalizing approach to this tradition in which specified individual moments or aspects of it are analyzed in isolation, and conclusions from such analyses are used to characterize the tradition as a whole. Inadequate attention has been given to the composite nature of the "Wuxing zhi" and the accretive, diachronic process of textual accumulation that it reflects. This has led to analyses premised on the idea that the contents of the "Wuxing zhi" belong to an unvariegated whole.

This chapter argues that the multi-layered nature of the "Wuxing zhi" must be considered when using it as a source for reconstructing Western Han anomaly-centered political philosophy.

This view of the “Wuxing zhi” lends itself to the realization that it is difficult to reach a singular account of this tradition in the Western Han that can accurately characterize all of the currents, attitudes, and actors that are understood as either belonging to it or having been responsible for its documentation. Through an analysis of “Wuxing zhi” that takes into account the multiple layers of source texts from which it was compiled, this chapter demonstrates that the three major contributors to the contents of the “Wuxing zhi”—Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang, and Ban Gu—were in their own distinct ways participating in a practice of cataloguing anomalies in the historical records available in their time and in interpreting these from the perspective of material-political philosophy, but the concepts that they were using and the nature of their acts of textual production and compilation differed in dramatic and important ways, being a function of the different historical moments that they separately inhabited and the different materials that were available to them as they looked back on the past from their respective places in time.

II. Secondary Literature on Western Han Anomaly-Centered Political Philosophy

In modern scholarship, there have been two main trends in the study of the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy. The first of these has been a line of inquiry into the historicity of the anomalous events recorded in that tradition and the significance of that record of anomalies. The second has been a study of the history of the tradition as it is recounted or embodied in a number of texts, primarily consisting of those contained in the *Han shu*.

II.A. Debating the Historicity of the Anomalies Recorded in the “Wuxing zhi”

II.A.1. Wolfram Eberhard: Discrepancies in the Record and Doubts

The first trend emerged from the interest of German sinologist and anthropologist Wolfram Eberhard (1909-1989) in the accuracy of astronomical data recorded in *Han shu*. In his 1933 doctoral dissertation, titled *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der*

Han-Zeit (“Contributions to Chinese Cosmological Speculation in the Han Period”) and written while he was enrolled at Berlin University, Eberhard proposed to evaluate the authenticity of the solar eclipses recorded in the *Han shu* by means of mathematical calculation backwards in time. By such calculations, he created a schedule indicating when actual solar eclipses visible from ancient China had occurred, and then compared it to the data recorded in the *Han shu*.³ As Eberhard observed in his dissertation, “This list of the eclipses is...of particular importance because we now have here the ability to calculate with mathematical precision whether and how the events really took place. This is not possible with any of the other lists of floods, fires, and other natural events that are given in the *Wu-hsing chih*.”⁴

Eberhard found that while most (39) of the total number (54) of solar eclipses recorded in the *Han shu* as having in occurred in the Western Han matched his mathematically derived list (in which it could be showed that there occurred 63 eclipses in the Western Han), a number (15) of the recorded eclipses were not in the mathematically determined list.⁵ Conversely, several eclipses (23) that were mathematically verifiable as having occurred in the Western Han and that would have been clearly visible at the time were not recorded in the *Han shu*.⁶

In order to interpret these discrepancies, Eberhard reasoned from the idea that anomalous events were open to being used as the basis for political critique in the Han period. On this

³ The table of mathematically verifiable solar eclipses is in Wolfram Eberhard, *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, Ph.D. dissertation (1933), University of Berlin, 88-89. Eberhard tabulated the solar eclipses recorded in the *Han shu* using the eclipses in the “*Wuxing zhi*” and those in the *ben ji* chapters.

⁴ The English translation of this and the following passage from Eberhard’s dissertation is my own. Original text: “Diese Übersicht über die Finsternisse ist...von besonderer Bedeutung, weil wir nun hier die Möglichkeit haben, genau mathematisch nachzurechnen, ob und wie die Ereignisse wirklich stattgefunden haben. Bei allen anderen Übersichten über Überschwemmungen, Brände und andere Naturereignisse, die im *Wu-hsing chih* gegeben werden, ist uns das nicht möglich.” Quoted from *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, 86.

⁵ *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, 89-90.

⁶ *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, 90.

premise, he proposed that recorders and historians who created and maintained records of the Western Han recorded only those anomalies that were needed to serve as ammunition for political critique. The same recorders and historians also either contemporaneously or retrospectively inserted false accounts of anomalies into the historical record in order to asperse those emperors and officials whom they wished to criticize. As he observed:

The recording of eclipses in both the Pen chi [i.e., the *ben ji* 本紀: “Basic Annals”] and the Wu-hsing chih [i.e., the “Wuxing zhi”] is an act of tendentiousness, not an act of scientific observation!...One recorded only for the purpose of critique. Therefore, eclipses were left out when one did not want to engage in blame, when one was satisfied with the government and considered it to be without fault. By the same token, one invented eclipses when one wanted to engage in blame, when one was dissatisfied and, contrary to expectation, no darkness appeared in the sky. The proof is not exact; it is open to question; but after all the probability speaks for our hypothesis.⁷

Who exactly it was Eberhard believed was in control of the writing of the history of anomalies—omitting abnormal events when irrelevant to political critique and inserting false records of eclipses into the historic record when needed—and in what time frame with regard to the events portrayed in the *Han shu* is not clear from his dissertation. In other articles by Eberhard published the same year (1933), he called attention to Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, claiming that it could be definitely proven that they had inserted records of eclipses that never happened into the classic texts that they had putatively edited (namely, the *Chunqiu* and its *Zuo zhuan* and *Guliang zhuan* commentaries).⁸ In his dissertation, Eberhard also claimed that Liu Xin had

⁷ Original text: “Die Aufzeichnung der Finsternisse sowohl in den Pen chi wie im Wu-hsing chih ist eine tendenziöse, keine wissenschaftliche!...Man zeichnete nur auf, um damit eine Kritik zu geben. Darum liess man Finsternisse aus, wenn man nicht tadeln wollte, wenn man mit der Regierung zufrieden war, sie für richtig hielt; darum erfand man Finsternisse, wenn man tadeln wollte, wenn man unzufrieden war und am Himmel eben wider Erwarten keine Finsternis erschien...der Beweis ist nicht exakt, er ist angreifbar, aber nach allem spricht doch die Wahrscheinlichkeit für unsere Hypothese.” Quoted from *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, 93-94.

⁸ See Wolfram Eberhard, “Beiträge zur Astronomie der Han-Zeit II” (“Contributions to the Astronomy of the Han Period II”), *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse*

edited the *Chunqiu* record of eclipses.⁹ Likely, as of the time of the writing of his dissertation, Eberhard suspected that similar intentional falsifications had been retrospectively inserted into historical records containing accounts of the Western Han by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, and that historical records on anomalies for the Western Han period had in general been edited by them to reflect their political views. Eberhard certainly came to believe that the contents of the “Wuxing zhi” itself had been copied more or less *in toto* from a text that had been compiled by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin.¹⁰

II.A.2. Homer Dubs: Arguing for the Veracity of the *Han shu* Record

In the critical material attached to his translation of the *Han shu* (published in three volumes between 1938 and 1955), American sinologist Homer Dubs (1892-1969) made observations similar to those of Eberhard, but with critical differences in his interpretation of the data. Writing in 1938, Dubs described how he performed a similar comparison of actual, mathematically verifiable solar eclipses with those recorded in the *Han shu*. Dubs found that “the Chinese accounts are predominatingly reliable, even for the beginning of the Han period.”¹¹ Like Eberhard, Dubs also observed a number of discrepancies between the actual record of eclipses and the *Han shu* record. Some eclipses that did occur were not recorded, and several eclipses that

(“Proceedings of the Prussian Academy of Science, Philosophy-History Category”), (1933), 937-79 [discussion of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin is in 956-79]; and “Neuere Chinesische und Japanische Arbeiten zur altchinesischen Astronomie” (“Recent Chinese and Japanese Works on Ancient Chinese Astronomy”), *Asia Major*, (1933), 601 ff. As summarized in Wolfram Eberhard, “Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China” in John K. Fairbank, Robert Redfield, and Milton B. Singer eds., *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 45. Eberhard’s views on Liu Xiang and Liu Xin were influenced by late Qing and Republican period scholar Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), who believed that Liu Xiang and Liu Xin had fabricated the “Old Text” 古文 versions of the classics wholesale.

⁹ *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, 96.

¹⁰ See “Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” 44-45.

¹¹ Homer H. Dubs trans. and ed., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938), 289.

did not actually occur appear in the record.¹² Like Eberhard, Dubs proposed that the political significance of actual eclipses had an influence on whether or not they were recorded: “eclipses were considered as warnings to the ruler from Heaven, so that during an unpopular reign all visible eclipses were recorded, while during a decade in a ‘good’ reign no eclipses were recorded, not even a conspicuous comet.”¹³ However, when it comes to those eclipses that did not occur but that nevertheless appear in the historical record, rather than explaining these as being the result of intentional falsification of historical records for the purpose of political critique, Dubs imputes them to “errors of recording or transmission of the text [of the *Han shu*]” or of the records from which it was compiled.¹⁴

Using the same approach as Eberhard, Dubs made similar findings, but called attention to the overall authenticity of the *Han shu* record. This was a position that he maintained throughout his career. In an appendix (titled “Solar Eclipses During the Former Han Period”) to vol. 3 of his translation of the *Han shu*, published in 1955, Dubs again emphasized the accuracy of the *Han shu* record, noting that 38 (as he put it, “more than two-thirds”) of the eclipses recorded in the *Han shu* as having occurred in the Western Han were accurate.¹⁵ Dubs also noted that “[f]ourteen other eclipses can be fitted into the actual dates, usually by only slight changes in the text”; and that “[o]nly at most three recordings are hopelessly erroneous,” adding that “two of these are due

¹² *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 1, 288-89.

¹³ *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 1, 290. The “conspicuous comet” refers to Halley’s comet, which would have been visible from Han China in 163 B.C.E. but is not listed in the records of the *Han shu*. See *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 1, 289.

¹⁴ *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 1, 289.

¹⁵ Homer H. Dubs trans. and ed., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3 (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1955), 551: “More than two-thirds of the recorded eclipses, some 38 in all, are recorded correctly in the present text. Considering the length of time since the *HS* was written in the first century A.D., and the many opportunities for mistakes, both by astronomers and annalists before the *HS* was compiled and the opportunities for errors in transmitting the *HS* text, this is an excellent record.”

to errors in the transmission of the data.”¹⁶ He concluded that “[t]he outstanding impression left by the Chinese recordings of eclipses in the Former Han period is their high degree of fidelity to fact.”¹⁷ Dubs refuted the possibility that the inaccurate eclipses that appear in the *Han shu* record were due to intentional falsification of the record, observing that “[t]he Chinese were not to any great extent interested in fabricating eclipses as portents and it was dangerous to do so.”¹⁸ He repeated again his view that such discrepancies were merely due to errors in the making and transmission of records, noting that there were “many opportunities for mistakes, both by astronomers and annalists before the *HS* was compiled” and during the process that the text of the *Han shu* was being transmitted.¹⁹ In summary, Dubs’ position was that while political contentment in different periods in the Western Han might have made it so that eclipses that actually occurred in the Western Han did not make it into the historical record, it was very seldom the case that a solar eclipse that did not actually happen was recorded in the *Han shu* owing to intentional falsification.

II.A.3. Hans Bielenstein: The *Han shu* Record of Anomalies as an Index of Political Sentiments in the Western Han

The next contributor to this conversation about accounts of anomalies in the *Han shu* was the Swedish sinologist Hans Bielenstein (1920-2015). In his well-known article, “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” published in *Bulletin of the Museum of Far*

¹⁶ *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 551: “Fourteen other eclipses can be fitted into the actual dates, usually by only slight changes in the text. Only at most three recordings are hopelessly erroneous; two of these are due to errors in the transmission of the data. When we consider how very easy it is to write mistakenly the number of a month or the cyclical day, the essential correctness of the *HS* is marked evidence of the care that was exercised in compiling it and in preserving and copying faithfully its text.”

¹⁷ *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 559.

¹⁸ *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 559.

¹⁹ *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 551.

Eastern Antiquities in 1950, Bielenstein responded to the positions of Eberhard and Dubs.²⁰

Bielenstein used the same method as Eberhard and Dubs of comparing the list of mathematically verifiable, historical eclipses that occurred in the Western Han with the record of the *Han shu*.²¹

He likewise noted that some verifiable eclipses that did actually occur do not appear in the *Han shu* record, while some eclipses that are in the *Han shu* record did not actually occur.²²

Bielenstein shared the view (held in common by Eberhard and Dubs) that in the Western Han period, solar eclipses had the potential to be used as substance for the critique of political leadership. In Bielenstein's view, this led to three practices: reporting actual eclipses as they happened in order to critique errant leaders, "concealing" actual eclipses, and "inventing" eclipses. According to his understanding, "[c]oncealing" no eclipses "would certainly have indicated a very strong indirect criticism, while a recording of only some of them would have meant the contrary."²³ By the same logic, the "invention" of eclipses would have occurred "under a reign with few observable eclipses" when "there was any temptation to manufacture" additional eclipses owing to "strong reason for criticism."²⁴ For example, Bielenstein believed that a falsely recorded eclipse in the reign of empress dowager Lü Zhi was an "invented" eclipse.²⁵ On the whole, however, Bielenstein posited that "[i]t was of course always dangerous to invent an eclipse that had actually never occurred," and on this basis resolved that "the

²⁰ In some respects, Bielenstein's representation of their positions was somewhat misleading. For example, he claimed that "Dubs on the whole adopts the theory of Eberhard," which is accurate in the sense that both Eberhard and Dubs posited their views on the understanding that any given eclipse had potential political significance in the Western Han. (Quoted from "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 129.) However, Bielenstein did not observe the significant differences in Eberhard's and Dubs' conclusions about the veracity of the *Han shu* record of eclipses and their explanations of the reasons for divergences between the *Han shu* record and the mathematically verifiable schedule of eclipses.

²¹ "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 130.

²² "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 130.

²³ "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 130.

²⁴ "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 130.

²⁵ "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 130.

concealing of eclipses must a priori have played a greater role than their invention” in the making of records—a view likely deduced in part from observing that the number of actual, mathematically verifiable eclipses not present in the *Han shu* record (some 23) was greater than the number of what Bielenstein understood as “invented” eclipses recorded in the *Han shu* (some 15).

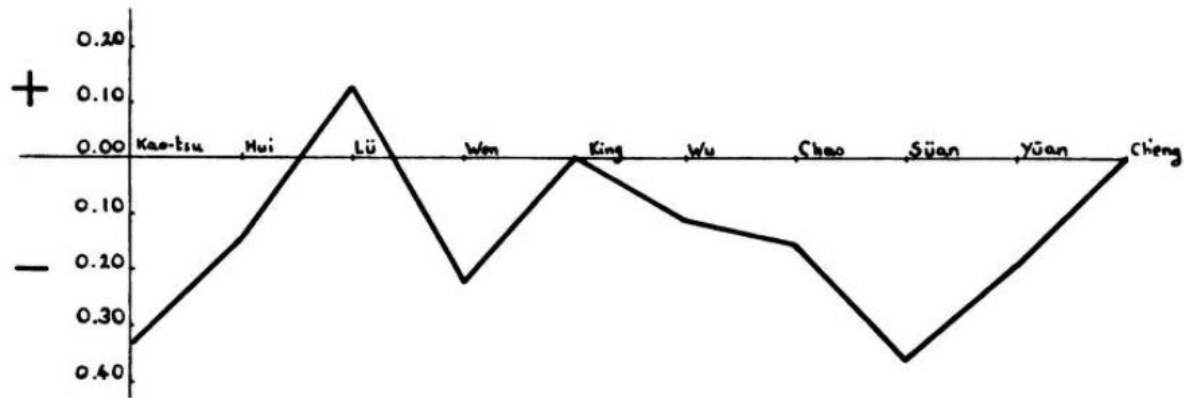
Bielenstein took this idea—that reporting eclipses in the *Han shu* reflected criticism of the emperors in power at the times in which they are recorded as having occurred, and the “concealing” of eclipses reflected abstention from criticism—as a fundamental assumption and proposed that the intensity of criticism directed at each reign (as expressed in the *Han shu* record) could be quantified by subtracting the actual number of mathematically derived, observable solar eclipses (which I for the purpose of description express here as E_a) that occurred in each reign from the number of solar eclipses that are recorded in the *Han shu* as occurring in each reign (E_r).²⁶ (To tabulate E_r , Bielenstein used the “Wuxing zhi” and the *ben ji* 本紀 [“Basic Annals”] chapters of the *Han shu*.) For any given reign, when the number of eclipses that are recorded in the *Han shu* exceeded the number of actual eclipses (i.e., more eclipses were recorded than actually happened), this yielded a positive (+) value. When the number of actual eclipses was greater than the number of recorded eclipses (i.e., more eclipses actually happened than were recorded), this yielded a negative (-) value. Bielenstein then compared the resulting

²⁶ There is an apparent error in Bielenstein’s explanation of his quantitative methods. Bielenstein wrote, “What we have to do is to take for each reign the number of the observable eclipses that did actually occur, a figure obtained through astronomical calculations. From this figure we have to subtract the number of eclipses recorded in the history. If the number in both cases is the same, we get 0. If perchance the number of recorded eclipses is higher than the number of those actually occurred, we get a + value. If, as is almost invariably the case, the situation is the contrary, we get a – value.” (Quoted from “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” 130-31.) Based on the logic of his quantitative analysis, the first sentences of this explanation should read, “What we have to do is to take for each reign the number of eclipses recorded in history. From this figure we have to subtract the number of observable eclipses that did actually occur, a figure obtained through astronomical calculations.”

values of $E_r - E_a$ for each reign by producing annualized averages by dividing the values $E_r - E_a$ for each reign by the number of years in the reign to which each value corresponded.

Bielenstein's charted his quantitative model in the following way:

Figure 4.1. Bielenstein's Chart (I): Yearly Mean Values of Recorded Eclipses Less Actual Eclipses ($E_r - E_a$) For the Reigns of the Western Han Emperors²⁷



(Source: "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 132.)

The y-axis point of 0 represents when for a reign $E_r - E_a = 0$. All other points on the y-axis represent when for a reign $E_r - E_a$ is a positive or negative value. As an example of Bielenstein's quantitative method, for the reign of the empress dowager Lü Zhi 呂雉 (r. 188-180 B.C.E.), the *Han shu* account records that two solar eclipses occurred, and both are recorded as having taken place in 188 B.C.E.²⁸ E_r is therefore 2. There were indeed two eclipses that occurred during Lü Zhi's reign, but only one happened in 188 B.C.E. The other one occurred in 181 B.C.E. However, the latter eclipse was (as Dubs observes) "hardly visible."²⁹ E_a is therefore 1. For Lü

²⁷ From "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 132.

²⁸ Bielenstein does not list the data set from which he constructs his chart. He appears to at least partially use data from Homer Dubs' *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vols. 1-2. See "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 130. For Dubs' composite list of eclipses recorded in the *Han shu* compared with a list of mathematically verifiably eclipses, see *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 547-50.

²⁹ *History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 547.

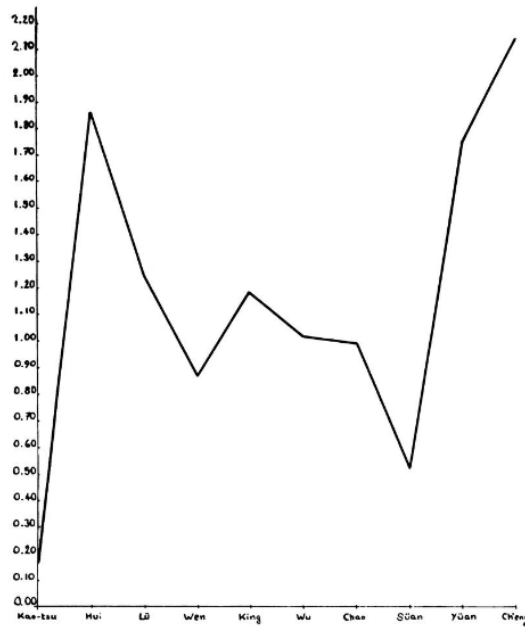
Zhi's reign, $E_r - E_a = 1$. Dividing by the number of years of her reign (8), yields a yearly mean value of 0.125, the value represented in Bielenstein's chart.

Bielenstein proposed that his above graph could potentially be read as a measure of the relative levels of criticism towards Western Han emperors reflected by the record of the *Han shu*. Moving upward on the y-axis indicated more recording of solar eclipses (both actual and false) and therefore greater criticism. Moving downward indicated less criticism.

At this point in his thinking, Bielenstein created an innovation to Eberhard's and Dubs' lists of actual and recorded solar eclipses—one that corroborated this potential reading of the above chart. He compared the data of this first quantitative model to a similar model showing the number of all other anomalies that were recorded in the *Han shu* as occurring in the reigns of Western Han emperors and interpreted as bad omens, calculated as an annual mean for each reign.³⁰ This second model yielded the following chart:

³⁰ Bielenstein points out in the first footnote of his study that “[t]he auspicious omen forms a special category which is not discussed in the present study.” See “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu,” 127.

Figure 4.2. Bielenstein's Chart (II): Yearly Mean Values of Recorded Anomalies Interpreted as Bad Omens (Excluding Eclipses) For the Reigns of the Western Han Emperors



(Source: "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-Shu," 133.)

Graphing the data in this way, Bielenstein noted a correlation between the two sets of data. For all reigns, the relative differences between yearly mean values of recorded anomalies (excluding eclipses and those anomalies interpreted as good omens) roughly resembled the relative differences between yearly mean values of $E_r - E_a$. Considering the reporting of anomalies as a form of indirect criticism of rulers, Bielenstein argued that together, the two models displayed the different levels of intensity of indirect criticism targeted at the emperors for each reign by the record indicated in the *Han shu*. In reigns for which there was greater criticism, there was more reporting of anomalies as an indirect form of criticism—to the point that some anomalies that did not happen were entered into the record. In reigns for which there was lesser criticism, anomalies were reported less and were therefore omitted from the record.

In analyzing reign by reign, Bielenstein observed, “[w]e then find that the curve of indirect criticism was very low under Kao-tsu, very high under Hui and the Empress Dowager née Lü, low under Wen, high under King, successively lower under Wu and Chao, very low under Süan and very high under Yüan and Ch’eng.”³¹

Bielenstein then attempted to identify the individual or individuals whose different levels of criticism were thus reflected in the record of the *Han shu*. He rules out the possibility that the *Han shu* record reflects Ban Gu’s views, since the record of observed anomalies indicates high levels of criticism for Thearch Jing 景, whereas Ban Gu spoke highly of Thearch Jing.³² He also refutes the possibility raised by Dubs that accounts of anomalies recorded in the *Han shu* reflected the views of the general populace during the different reigns of Han emperors, since during the reigns of emperors who presided over times of general peace and prosperity, such as Thearch Hui 惠, the empress dowager Lü Zhi, Thearch Jing, and Thearch Yuan 元, there were more numerous reports of anomalies.³³ For all of these reigns, Bielenstein proposes, on the basis of descriptions of these periods in the *Han shu*, it was the class of officials (and especially those in the capital) alive at the time who had the greatest reason to feel discontent, and so he concludes that the frequency and intensity of the observation of anomalies and their entry into the historical record correlated with levels of dissatisfaction experienced by officials.³⁴ Thus, Bielenstein believed that accounts of anomalies in the “Wuxing zhi” were the reports of observers in the official class who were reporting (or “concealing”) anomalies in real time and wished to use them to criticize the emperors then in power (or, when “concealing” anomalies, to

³¹ “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” 130.

³² “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” 135.

³³ “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” 136-37.

³⁴ “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu,” 137-39.

nullify their potential to be used as criticism in times of contentment), rather than reflecting the tendentious views of later historians (namely, Ban Gu). The occasional false records of anomalies (such as eclipses that never happened) had been fabricated at the time (or sometime relatively close to the time) at which the falsified events were purported to have happened and were not interpolations made by later historians.

II.A.4. Synthesizing the Arguments: Shared Views, Points of Divergence, and Critical Evaluation

While Eberhard, Dubs, and Bielenstein all agreed that there is a discrepancy between the schedule of mathematically verifiable eclipses and those recorded in the *Han shu*, their explanations of the reason for the discrepancy are significantly different. Eberhard thought that the *Han shu* record had been compiled from records that had been constructed (and in some places falsified) by later historians to reflect their political views. Judging from his collective body of work on this subject, he appears to have believed, based on his notion that Liu Xiang and Liu Xin were the ones who had compiled the “Wuxing zhi” record of Western Han anomalies, that the accounts of anomalies in that text had been selected and in some places fabricated by them, and then were compiled by them into a whole that reflected their political views.³⁵ In contrast, Bielenstein believed that the *Han shu* record of anomalies reflected the views of court officials alive at different points at time during the Western Han. In his view, the fluctuations in the different levels of attentiveness toward anomalies (and the occasional observation of a false anomaly) was the result of contemporaneous observation and recording (and sometimes fabrication) in each reign, rather than these being the work of a small number of authors who had compiled a history of anomalies to suit their political views long after the fact. On the whole,

³⁵ This view is especially apparent in “Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” 44-45.

however, Bielenstein held that it was difficult to fabricate records of anomalies and that such fabrication happened only very occasionally.³⁶ Nevertheless, he believed there were varying levels of attentiveness in different reigns to those anomalies that actually occurred depending on the level of discontent among court officials.

Dubs rejected altogether the idea that any of the anomalies in the *Han shu* were intentionally falsified (with perhaps one or two exceptions), imputing discrepancies to recording and transmission errors. However, when it comes to eclipses that were not reported, he admits that omitted eclipses may have been a function of a lack of desire to observe anomalies in times of political contentment. At the same time, Dubs also proposed that many of the mathematically verifiable eclipses that were apparently not recorded were actually in fact recorded, but because of recording and transmission errors, such entries were transmitted as the record of eclipses that never happened. The consequence of this would be that the observation and recording of anomalies was actually done in an objective way that had little to do with political considerations: anomalies were neither falsified nor omitted.

The methods and views of each of these three scholars can be found to have shortcomings. Eberhard appears to have been particularly dismayed by the discrepancies between the mathematically verifiable schedule of records and the record presented by the “Wuxing zhi” and the *ben ji*. Eberhard viewed the *Han shu* record from the perspective of pure mathematical reasoning, found it lacking, and seems to have believed the likeliest possibility by

³⁶ American sinologist and historian of science Nathan Sivin (1931-2022) wrote that “Bielenstein has stressed (private communication) the importance of a statement in the biography of Wang Mang that at one time Wang sent to prison unauthorized persons found to be reporting auspicious omens for their own advantage.” Quoted from Nathan Sivin, “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy,” *T'oung Pao*, vol. 55 (1969): 1-73 [quoted from 54, n. 1].

which such a record could have come into existence was by individual design, involving intentional fabrication and a tendentious portrayal of history by a small group of *post facto* editors. Other than in fleeting moments, he did not consider (and therefore failed to rule out) the possibility of recording and transmission errors (brought up by Dubs) to explain the record of false eclipses.³⁷ Moreover, while the “Wuxing zhi” frequently quotes the comments of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin on historical incidents, the idea that Liu Xiang and Liu Xin had themselves compiled the “Wuxing zhi” (as Eberhard argued) is incompatible with Ban Gu’s comments on his own authoring of the “Wuxing zhi” in the *Han shu* account and with internal evidence in the text of the “Wuxing zhi” that demonstrate that it was an accretive text, a patchwork of contents written and edited by different individuals at different points in time. (This point will be discussed further below.) It is also somewhat difficult to imagine that Liu Xiang and Liu Xin could have inserted false content into historical records or edited them heavily without it being noticed and denounced (or noted later by Ban Gu), but the idea is at least possible—though very difficult to definitively prove.

The shortcoming of Dubs’ view is that there is no way, in turn, to prove that the inaccurate eclipses in the *Han shu* record were the results of errors in recording and transmission.

Like Eberhard, Bielenstein did not consider the possibility of recording and transmission errors as having been the reason for false eclipses in the *Han shu* record, and therefore also fails to rule out this possibility. Bielenstein admitted that inserting false eclipses into the historical record contemporaneously would have been extremely difficult to accomplish, and so believed that such false insertions happened only occasionally. As for unrecorded eclipses that actually

³⁷ Eberhard briefly considers the idea of *Textverderbnis* (“corruption of text”) in *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit*, 90.

did happen, Dubs' proposal that most of the false eclipses in the *Han shu* can be understood as actually having originally been a large portion of the apparently unrecorded eclipses that were simply mis-recorded or copied in error, while difficult to prove, is extremely problematic to the idea (relied most heavily on by Eberhard and Bielenstein) that during different reigns or periods of time within reigns, there were tendencies of abstaining from entering solar eclipses (and anomalies in general) into the historical record. This problem increases in intensity if one admits the view posited by Gary Arbuckle that Ban Gu dated some events inaccurately.³⁸

Bielenstein's model also assumes that the recording of anomalies was an intrinsically political act, but so many of the anomalies recorded in the "Wuxing zhi" are accounts of events (such as fires, floods, droughts, extreme weather) that, unlike eclipses, would have had immediate practical reasons motivating their recording. Bielenstein's argument relies on the idea that, in certain periods, politically contented actors, out of a desire to protect their favored ruler from potential aspersion based on anomaly interpretation, worked to keep any trace of these events from being entered into official records, and that this impulse overcame the practical necessity of keeping a record of such events. This might be persuasive were there historical accounts of such a practice, but Bielenstein never cites any. Moreover, for a significant portion of the anomalous events that are recorded in the "Wuxing zhi" as having occurred in the Western Han (some 119 of 220), there is no evidence that these were understood as having been interpreted as being omenologically significant at the time at which they occurred or indeed prior to Ban Gu's entering these events into the "Wuxing zhi" record in the Eastern Han. (This point is discussed in further detail below). Judging from these points, the notion that the act of recording

³⁸ Gary Arbuckle, "Restoring Dong Zhongshu (BCE 195-115): An Experiment in Historical and Philosophical Reconstruction," Ph.D. dissertation (1991), University of British Columbia, 31-33.

contemporaneous anomalous events itself had a strong, innate quality of intrinsic political critique directed at the emperor in the Western Han becomes more tenuous, as does the idea that the very record of anomalous events that occurred in the Western Han presented by the “Wuxing zhi” is in its totality an imprint of implicit criticism of emperors by the official class through the Western Han.

As noted by Eberhard, Dubs, and Bielenstein, the majority of solar eclipses that are recorded in the *Han shu* are historically verifiable by astronomical proof. To use the eclipse ratio as a proximate index of reliability, the *Han shu* record, in terms of the events that are recorded in it, is thus significantly reliable—at least about 69% reliable, based on the over two-thirds (38/55) of mathematically verifiable solar eclipses that the *Han shu* documents—this is by Dubs’ count, which differs only slightly from Eberhard’s. While it is possible that a number of those eclipses that are not mathematically verifiable were inserted into the record either contemporaneously or long after the fact as an act of intentional falsification, the difficulties involved in either scenario (and especially the former)—emphasized by both Dubs and Bielenstein—reduce the likelihood of this and increase the probability that the record of false eclipses was the result of recording and transmission errors, as Dubs proposes. (This becomes even more likely considering the many accounts in the *Han shu* in which the persuasive power of the interpretation of anomalies as contemporary political critique was premised on the idea that the anomaly in question was an objectively verified event that had captivated the attention of the political community at the time.³⁹) On the condition that one accepts Dubs’ restoration of all 14 of the 17 inaccurate eclipses that he said could be performed with only small changes in the text of the record, based

³⁹ For a list of such interpretations, see “Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” 60-62.

on the record of eclipses, the likelihood that an anomalous event recorded in the *Han shu* actually happened (regardless of the accuracy of its dating as indicated in the *Han shu*) might be as high as 94.5%.

There is a fundamental point that was overlooked in this conversation and must be observed as far as the “Wuxing zhi” is concerned. Looking for any particular time frame to define the “Wuxing zhi” presentation of anomalies disregards the layered nature of that text. There are in the *Han shu* listed many (15) examples of officials submitting memorials observing recent anomalies and interpreting them as having political significance.⁴⁰ A portion of the anomalous events listed in the *Han shu* record were thus memorialized and viewed as omenologically significant at the time, which demonstrates contemporaneous observation and interpretation. However, as pointed out above, over half (some 119 of 220) of the natural anomalies (such as droughts, floods, etc.) that are recorded by Ban Gu in the “Wuxing zhi” as having occurred in the Western Han are not recorded as having aroused any contemporary interpretation as omens (or even any interpretation before Ban Gu’s compilation of the “Wuxing zhi” in the Eastern Han). Fitting these into an omenological conceptual view and interpreting them by the “Hongfan”-*Wuxing zhuan* schema thus appears to have been an act performed by Ban Gu. For a certain portion of Qin and Western Han natural anomalies, the comments of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin are appended, which shows that a number of events had already come to the attention of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin and had been at least pointed out as omenologically significant by them. These points together suggest that the “Wuxing zhi” was the amalgam of many different moments in which anomalies were noted and interpreted as politically significant:

⁴⁰ See “Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” 60-62.

these included contemporaneous observation and recording, contemporaneous interpretation, the cataloguing and interpretation of Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, and the cataloguing and interpretation of Ban Gu. Since the “Wuxing zhi” involves multiple time frames in this way, it is misleading to interpret its contents from the sole perspective of either contemporaneous observation (as Bielenstein does) or late Western Han scholar-historians (as Eberhard seems to).

Since the “Wuxing zhi” reflects multiple layers of compilation, if it evinces any patterns, these would thus be an amalgam of patterns in the recording tendencies of contemporary reporters and interpreters and the cataloguing tendencies of multiple later historians (like Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and Ban Gu) compiling and commenting at different points. If the pattern of anomalies listed in the “Wuxing zhi” corresponds to the concerns of the high officials (as Bielenstein proposes), then it may have been because it was the accumulation of acts of recording and compilation in a tradition of anomaly observation and interpretation in which the main participants (if not all of the participants) were indeed the members of the high official class (though the notion of a diachronic Han high official class in which there was a uniformity of views and ability to express criticism is in the end unlikely). Likely, as an historian Ban Gu would have accepted—or even been biased towards the act of demonstrating—an increase in anomalies happening towards the end of the Western Han (as the authority of Western Han emperors declined and time grew nearer to Wang Mang’s rebellion) as signs of the waning virtue of the last Western Han emperors and the concomitant disorder that followed their reigns. Moreover, for the content that he contributed, Ban Gu might also have simply had more records or less records of different periods of the Western Han period to go on, which would affect the numbers of anomalies he catalogues in each period. Nevertheless, any broadly targeted statement explaining the record of anomalies in the *Han shu* as reflecting the views of any one putative

compiler at any single point in time ignores the layered nature of the *Han shu* records and fails to describe any given individual account of anomaly contained in the “Wuxing zhi.” Treating accounts of anomaly in the *Han shu* on a case-by-case basis (as a first step), analyzing by the internal textual features of each account (an approach that seems to have been partially adopted by later scholars who built on the work of Eberhard, Dubs, and Bielenstein) leads to a more firmly grounded description of the contents of the *Han shu* that are related to anomalous events.

II.A.5. The Legacy of Studies in Anomaly Authentication

Mid-twentieth century studies in the authentication of Western Han anomalies recorded in the *Han shu* have had a lasting influence on the study of Western Han science and political history. Later studies of the anomalies recorded in the *Han shu* can be found to have integrated or responded to some part of the shared or individual views of Eberhard, Dubs, and Bielenstein.

For the purpose of studying Western Han astronomy, American sinologist and historian of science Nathan Sivin (1931-2022) adopted Dubs’ views regarding the overall accuracy of *Han shu* record of solar eclipses, and thus used the *Han shu* as data to posit the level of sophistication reached by Western Han astronomical science.⁴¹

Decades later, Martin Kern adopted the idea (shared by Eberhard, Dubs, and Bielenstein) that anomalous events held potential political significance in the Western Han to examine anomalous events reported during the reign of Thearch Wu 武帝 (r. 141-87 B.C.E.) that were contemporaneously or retrospectively interpreted as auspicious.⁴² From his study of such events, Kern argued that Bielenstein’s idea that the *Han shu* record of anomalous events reflected only

⁴¹ See Nathan Sivin, “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy,” 1-73 [especially 52-64].

⁴² See Martin Kern, “Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi 漢武帝 (141-87 B.C.),” *Studies in Chinese History*, no. 10 (Dec. 2000): 1-31.

contemporaneous levels of criticism originating from the official class needed to be adjusted. Some of the anomalous events in the *Han shu* were interpreted at the time as auspicious, and among these were events (such as reports of the appearance of unicorns) that textual evidence suggests were promoted by Thearch Wu himself to demonstrate that cosmic powers approved of his reign. Thus, not only officials, but the emperor himself had agency to invent, call attention to, and interpret anomalies to his benefit. Moreover, Kern proposes that because anomalous events recorded in the *Han shu* were sometimes first interpreted contemporaneously and then re-interpreted in an entirely different way many years later, anomalous events recorded in the *Han shu* cannot be analyzed as a totality from the perspective of any single time frame.

Another more recent study by Liang Cai has analyzed the Western Han tradition of attentiveness to anomalies with a view towards constructing a skeptical reading of the practice.⁴³ This reading is based on an episode described in the *Han shu* in which Liu Xiang's clique at court and an opposing faction both used the interpretation of anomalies to target one another, and it proposes that historical actors in the Western Han cynically took advantage of reports of anomalous events to their own advantage without any authentic belief in any idea of a "true" moral value of anomalies; the interpretation of anomalies was thus a practice that exploited superstitious belief and the gullibility of the wielders of power for the purpose of political gain on the part of the reporters and interpreters of anomalies. Liang Cai's conclusions are in line with Eberhard's observations made some fifty years prior that "[t]he fact that some portents were fabricated, that others were used in factional struggles to prove the arguments of one or the other side, makes us inclined to assume that at least some persons did not believe in portents at all,"

⁴³ See Liang Cai, "The Hermeneutics of Omens: The Bankruptcy of Moral Cosmology in Western Han China (206 BCE-8 CE)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Jul. 2015): 439-459.

and that “on the basis of a vague belief that there was a connection between abnormal natural phenomena and social life, there grew up a practice of utilizing this belief as a tool in the political struggle.”⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Shao-yun Yang argues from accounts in the *Han shu* that the uptick in the reporting of anomalies in the reign of Thearch Cheng (r. 33-7 B.C.E.) was due (at least in part) to factional infighting at the Han court.⁴⁵ Liang Cai and Shao-yun Yang’s observations thus expand the uses of the reporting of anomalies to include not just criticism of the emperor or, alternately, the shoring up of the emperor’s claims to authority, but also as tools by which court officials criticized each other.

II.B. Studies in the History of Western Han Anomaly-Centered Political Philosophy

The second trend in the study of the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy has been to construct accounts of the history of this tradition on the basis of evidence in a number of texts: these include the “Wuxing zhi” (which is partially devoted to the documentation of the tradition in the Western Han), those texts that were integrated into the tradition during the Western Han period (such as the “Hong fan” and its commentary, the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*), accounts and records contained in the *Han shu* and the *Shi ji*, and sources of Western Han intellectual history like the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露

⁴⁴ “Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China,” 69-70. In this later expression of his views (published in 1957), Eberhard seems to have embraced a more multi-layered view of the *Han shu*’s record of anomalies in which this record was seen as reflecting a combination of contemporaneous reporting of anomalies by political actors for self-advancement in factional struggles and the views of *post facto* editors like Liu Xiang and Liu Xin.

⁴⁵ See Shao-yun Yang, “The Politics of Omenology in Chengdi’s Reign” in Michael Nylan and Greit Vankeerberghen eds., *Chang’an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015), 323-46 [see 326-31 for discussion of the reporting of anomalies as the result of factional infighting]. Yang observes that “[t]he striking tendency of omen interpretations to serve political and factional interests is better explained, however, by the capacity for a person’s perceptions of truth and reality to be influenced, even determined, by calculations of self-interest.” Quoted from “The Politics of Omenology in Chengdi’s Reign,” 341.

(the latter of which has traditionally been ascribed to Dong Zhongshu, while recent scholarship has pointed out doubts by which a significant portion of its contents is suspected as not having originated from Dong Zhongshu).⁴⁶

Historical accounts of the tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy in the Western Han have often been included as part of studies of prominent figures who contributed to that tradition. Among the figures associated with the tradition, Dong Zhongshu is perhaps most often the focus of historical studies devoted to a single figure.⁴⁷ There have also been a number of works devoted specifically to the dimension of Dong Zhongshu's thought that had to do with anomalies.⁴⁸ Among other figures associated with the tradition, after Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang

⁴⁶ See Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu: A 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011), 191-224; and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1904-1982), *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史 ("Intellectual History of the Former and Latter Han Periods"), (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2020 [4th printing]), vol. 2, 286-90.

⁴⁷ Such studies include *Dong Zhongshu: A 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*; Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Wang Yongxiang 王永祥, *Dong Zhongshu ping zhuan* 董仲舒評傳 ("Dong Zhongshu: A Critical Biography"), (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1995); Michael Loewe, "Imperial Sovereignty: Tung Chung-shu's Contribution and His Predecessors" in Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 121-141; Marianne Bujard, "La Vie de Dong Zhongshu: Enigmes et Hypothèses," *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 280 [nos. 1-2] (1992): 145-217; and Gary Arbuckle, "Restoring Dong Zhongshu (BCE 195-115): An Experiment in Historical and Philosophical Reconstruction."

⁴⁸ Among these, perhaps the study that has had the widest influence is Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, "Chūgoku godai no tenjin sōkan non: Tō Chūjyo no bāi" 中国古代の天人相關論—董仲舒の場合 ("Ancient Chinese Arguments About the Interrelatedness of Heaven and Humans: The Case of Dong Zhongshu") in Mizoguchi Yūsō 沟口雄三 (1932-2010), Hamashita Takeshi 濱下武志, Hiraiishi Naoaki 平石直昭, and Hiroshi Miyajima 宮嶋博史 eds., *Ajia kara kangaeru sekaizō no keisei* アジアから考える世界像の形成 ("The Formation of Worldviews as Considered from the Perspective of Asia"), (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku shuppanshya, 1994). Ikeda's article has been translated into both Chinese and Korean. The Chinese version is Ikeda Tomohisa, "Zhongguo gudai de tianren xiangguan lun—Dong Zhongshu de qingkuang" 中國古代的天人相關論—董仲舒的情況 ("Ancient Chinese Arguments about the Interrelatedness of Heaven and Humans: The Case of Dong Zhongshu") (trans. Tian Renlong 田人隆) in Mizoguchi Yūsō and Kojima Tsuyoshi 小島毅 eds., *Zhongguo de siwei shijie* 中國的思維世界 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2006). The Korean version is Ikeda Tomohisa, "Kodae chungkuk ei cheon'in sangkuan ron ei guan han yeongu—Dong Chungseo leul chungshim eu ro" 고대중국의天人相關論에 관한 연구—董仲舒를 중심으로 ("A Study of Ancient Chinese Arguments about the Interrelatedness of Heaven and Humans: With a Focus on Dong Zhongshu") (trans. Lee Sung Ryule 李承律 [이승율]) in *Inmun yeongu nonjip* 인문연구논집 ("Humanities Studies Essay Collection"), vol. 3 (1998), no. 2: 183-259. See also Chen Kanli 陳侃理, *Dong Zhongshu de 'Chunqiu' zaiyi lun* 董仲舒的春秋災異論 ("Dong Zhongshu's Arguments about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences Derived from the *Springs and Autumns*"), *Wenshi* 文史 (2010), no. 2: 65-90; and Kim Dongmin 金東民 [김동민],

is perhaps the figure who has received the most attention in terms of general studies of his life, thought, and work.⁴⁹ He has also been the subject of a number of studies focusing specifically on his views on anomalies.⁵⁰ In addition, Chen Kanli 陳侃理 has produced a comprehensive monograph-length study devoted to the tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy itself as a coherent, diachronic trend in Western Han intellectual history.⁵¹ More recent works of scholarship have incorporated elements of Chen’s work.⁵²

An important point of difference between studies of the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy is in terminology. Studies published in Western languages have tended to use terms such as “omen,” “portent,” or “Vorzeichen” (lit. “fore-sign, i.e., “omen”) to describe the anomalous events that were the subject of so much attention in the tradition. This is to characterize these events by the significance that they came to have within the tradition after they were interpreted and given meaning relevant to human society and

“Dong Jhungseo Chunchu hak ei cheon’in kam’eung ron ei dehan kochar—sangseo jae’i seor eul jungshim eu ro” 董仲舒 春秋學의 天人感應論에 대한 고찰—祥瑞災異說을 중심으로 (“A Study of Arguments about Sentient Responsiveness Between Heaven and Humans in Dong Zhongshu’s Scholarship of the *Springs and Autumns*—With a Focus on Discourse About Portentous Anomalies Indicating Propitiousness and Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences”), *Dongang cheorhak yeongu* 東洋哲學研究, vol. 36 (2004): 313-48.

⁴⁹ Studies of Liu Xiang’s scholarship that contain accounts of his views on anomaly-centered political philosophy include, for example, Xu Xingwu 徐興無, *Liu Xiang ping zhuan* 劉向評傳 (“Liu Xiang: A Critical Biography”), (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2009 [third printing]), 283-306.

⁵⁰ Such studies include Wang Gaoxin 汪高鑫, *Liu Xiang zaiyi lun zhiqu tan wei* 劉向災異論旨趣探微—兼論劉向、劉歆災異論旨趣的不同及其成因 (“Probing the Core Concepts of Liu Xiang’s Arguments about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences: A Discussion of the Differences Between Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s Arguments about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences and their Origins”), *Anhui daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 安徽大學學報(哲學社會科學版), vol. 27, no. 2 (2003): 104-110; and Tanaka Masami 田中麻紗巳 “Ryu Kyo no sai’i setsu ni tsuite—zenkan sai’i shisō” 劉向の災異說について—前漢災異思想 (“On Liu Xiang’s Discourses about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences: Western Han Thought Regarding Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences”), *Shūkan Tōyōgaku* 集刊東洋學, vol. 24 (1970): 29-42.

⁵¹ Chen Kanli, *Ruxue shuxue yu zhengzhi—Zaiyi de zhengzhi wenhua shi* 儒學數術與政治—災異的政治文化史 (“Ruism, Numerology, and Politics: A History of the Political Culture of Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences”), (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015). Chen Kanli’s study contains an extensive bibliography. See *Ruxue shuxue yu zhengzhi*, 312-27.

⁵² Michael Nylan notes in her recent study of the “Wuxing zhi” that her views have been informed by Chen’s observations. See “On *Hanshu* ‘Wuxing zhi’ 五行志 and Ban Gu’s Project,” 214.

politics. Thinking and discourse centered around such events that are treated in the tradition is accordingly described as “omenology.”

In studies written in East Asian languages, in contrast, the tendency has been to describe these events in terms of their qualities prior to and independent of having been overlaid with such significances. These pre-interpretation qualities were primarily their abnormal nature or a combination of their abnormal and destructive aspects—qualities that set them apart from normal events and distinguished them as having the potential to be interpreted as omens. Accordingly, scholarly literature in East Asian languages describes the tradition in terms of *zaiyi lun* 災異論 (“arguments about disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”) or *sai’i setsu | jae’i seor* 災異說 (“discourse about disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences”), which uses the term *zaiyi | sai’i | jae’i* 災異, a phrase that appears directly in texts that emerged from that tradition. This mode of description has the advantage of being able to describe the process of argumentation that moved from the accounts of anomalies themselves (at which point they were simply strange events that *might* have been omens) to statements that affirmed their status as omens and determined their omenological significance. Rather than “omenology” *per se*, descriptive language denoting the arguments and discussions surrounding anomalous events in the tradition includes terms such as *tian ren xiang guan lun | tenjin sōkan non | cheon’in sangkuan ron* 天人相關論 (“arguments about the interrelatedness of heaven and humans”) and *cheon’in kam’eung ron* 天人感應論 (“arguments about sentient responsiveness between heaven and humans”). Such terminology characterizes the discussions surrounding anomalous events by the concept of a feedback existing between the human and the natural (or natural-divine) dimensions of reality

that was adduced to connect anomalous events to human society and relate them to human action.

II.C. Stratigraphic Analysis of the “Wuxing zhi”

This chapter draws on the works of previous scholars to reconstruct the history of the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy from textual evidence in the “Wuxing zhi” and other texts contained in the *Han shu*. It adopts the awareness (shared by Eberhard, Dubs, and Bielenstein) that in the Western Han, accounts of anomalies were integrated into political positions and critique, but rather than addressing the question of the ultimate historicity of the anomalous events that are recorded in the *Han shu*, it focuses on the arguments that were used to connect accounts of anomalies to claims about human corruption and errant political action. It responds to the need for a layered, multi-chronic view of the “Wuxing zhi” in understanding the history of the tradition in the Western Han, and so analyzes the contents of the “Wuxing zhi” from three different time frames: the time of the composition of the “Wuxing zhi” in the Eastern Han period (i.e., the first century C.E.), the time of Liu Xiang’s integration of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* into the hermeneutical examination of the historical record during the second full century of the Western Han (i.e., the first century B.C.E.), and the time of Dong Zhongshu’s study of the historical record in the first full century of the Western Han (i.e., the second century B.C.E.). It demonstrates that in important moments in the development of the tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy in the Western Han documented in the “Wuxing zhi,” the tradition developed as a response to a recurrent need to ensure that critique of human corruption and errant political action from the perspective of anomaly theory was grounded in both historical scholarship (based in the canonical work of the *Chunqiu*) and rigorous material philosophy.

III. Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 1: Ban Gu's Account of the Origins of the "Wuzing zhi" Conceptual View and His Analysis of Pre-Eastern Han Anomalies

III.A. Ban Gu's Account of the Origins of the "Wuxing zhi" Conceptual View

III.A.1. Part One: Primal Knowledge

Ban Gu's preface to the "Wuxing zhi" contains important clues in developing a chronology of the process of textual accretion embodied in the "Wuxing zhi." The preface begins with Ban Gu's account of the origins of the conceptual knowledge underpinning the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered material-political philosophy documented in the "Wuxing zhi." The first part of his account begins in the distant, primordial past and goes up to the last days of the Spring and Autumn period (722-468 B.C.E.)⁵³:

1 易曰:

The *Changes* states:

2 「天垂象，見吉凶，聖人象之。河出圖，雒出書，聖人則之。」

"Heaven hangs images. It manifests propitiousness and unpropitiousness. Sagacious humans create the image of these. The [Yellow] River put forth graphic representations. The Luo [River] put forth writing. Sagacious humans make these the model."

3 劉歆以爲:

Liu Xin held that:

4 慮羲氏繼天而王，受河圖，則而畫之，八卦是也。禹治洪水，賜雒書，法而陳之，洪範是也。

The one named Fu Xi succeeded Heaven and ruled as king. He [Fu Xi] received the River's graphic representations. He [Fuxi] made these the model and drew them. These are the Eight Trigrams. Yu controlled the great waters, was bequeathed the Luo writings, and made these into a practice and put them into an order. These are the "Great Plan."

5 聖人行其道而寶其真。降及于殷，箕子在父師位而典之。

Sagacious humans implemented their Way [i.e., the Way of the Eight Trigrams and the "Great Plan"] and treasured their truth.

⁵³ The following passage is from *HS*, 1315-16.

- 6 降及于殷, 箕子在父師位而典之。
When it came down to the [time of] the Yin, Jizi was in the position of fatherly teacher and canonized these.
- 7 周既克殷, 以箕子歸, 武王親虛己而問焉。
The Zhou having conquered the Yin, Jizi thereupon went into hermitage. King Wu personally humbled himself and addressed questions to him.
- 8 故經曰:
Therefore, the classic states:
- 9 「惟十有三祀, 王訪于箕子, 王乃言曰:
“In the thirteenth year, the king paid a visit to Jizi. The king thereupon spoke, stating,
- 10 『烏嚀, 箕子. 惟天陰鷲下民, 相協厥居, 我不知其彝倫迺敘.』
‘Alas, Jizi! Indeed, Heaven shelters and stabilizes the humans below. [For the purpose of] assisting its settling, I do not know the sequence in which its cardinal principles should be expressed’.
- 11 箕子乃言曰:
Jizi thereupon spoke, stating,
- 12 『我聞在昔, 鯀陞洪水, 汨陳其五行, 帝乃震怒, 弗畀洪範九疇, 彝倫迺斁. 鯀則殛死, 禹乃嗣興, 天乃錫禹洪範九疇, 彝倫迺敘.』』
‘I have heard that in ages past, Gun dammed up the great waters, throwing their five elements into a disorderly arrangement. The Thearch thereupon rumbled with anger and did not confer the Nine Divisions of the “Great Plan.” Gun was therefore killed. Yu thereupon succeeded [him] and rose up. Heaven thereupon granted Yu the Nine Divisions of the “Great Plan,” the form in which its cardinal principles are expressed’.”
- 13 此武王問雒書於箕子, 箕子對禹得雒書之意也。
This means that King Wu addressed questions to Jizi about the Luo writings, and that Jizi responded [by recounting] Yu’s obtainment of the Luo writings.
- 14 「初一日五行. 次二曰羞用五事. 次三曰農用八政. 次四曰^計(協)用五紀. 次五曰建用皇極. 次六曰艾用三德. 次七曰明用稽疑. 次八曰念用庶徵. 次九曰響用五福, 畏用六極.」
“[Of the Nine Divisions,] the first in sequence is called ‘the Five Elements’. The second in sequence is called ‘the reverent practice of the Five Matters’. The

third in sequence is called ‘earnest devotion to the Eight Objects of Government’. The fourth in sequence is called ‘the harmonious use of the Five Arrangements’. The fifth in sequence is called ‘the establishment and practice of Royal Perfection’. The sixth in sequence is called ‘the cultivation and use of the Three Innate Powers’. The seventh in sequence is called ‘the intelligent use of the Examination of Doubts’. The eighth in sequence is called ‘the thoughtful use of the Various Verifications’. The ninth in sequence is called ‘the hortatory use of the Five Happinesses and the awing use of the Six Extremities’.”⁵⁴

15 凡此六十五字, 皆雜書本文, 所謂天乃錫禹大法九章常事所次者也。

All of these sixty-five graphs in their entirety are the original text of the Luo writings. These put into words the Nine Sections of the Great Practice and the Constant Matters that had been granted to Yu by Heaven in the order in which they had been sequenced.

16 以爲河圖、雜書相為經緯, 八卦、九章相為表裏。

It can be held that the River’s graphic representations and the Luo writings relate to each other like weft and warp. The Eight Trigrams and Nine Sections are the exterior and interior [parts of the same object].

17 昔殷道弛, 文王演周易. 周道敝, 孔子述春秋. 則乾坤之陰陽, 效洪範之咎徵, 天人之道粲然著矣。

In ages past, in the [rule of] the Yin, the Way slackened, and King Wen elaborated the *Changes of Zhou*. In the [rule of] the Zhou, the Way decayed, and Master Kong expounded the *Springs and Autumns*. When the *yin* and *yang* of the *qian* and *kun* are taken as the model, and the unfavorable verifications of the “Great Plan” are abided by, the Way of Heaven and Humans shines brightly and is clearly expressed.

Ban Gu’s account is built on a fundamental idea, expressed in the “Xi ci shang” 繫辭上

(“Appended Remarks, Upper Section”) chapter of the *Yi jing* 易經 (“Classic of Changes”)⁵⁵, that

⁵⁴ This English translation of this passage of the “Hong fan” quoted by Ban Gu essentially duplicates James Legge’s translation in James Legge, *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*, vol. 3, pt. 2, 324.

⁵⁵ These lines from the *Yi jing* are an extension of the quote that begins the coda that closes the section listing the *Shang shu* and its commentaries in the “Yiwen zhi” 藝文志 (“Treatise of Arts and Cultivation”). In the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu includes the quote as cited in the “Yiwen zhi” and adds the preceding line. The *Yi jing* holds the initial (and therefore presumably the highest) place in Ban Gu’s bibliography of textual sources in the “Yiwen zhi.” The codas that serve as partitions between the different sections of the “Yiwen zhi” frequently begin with a quote from the *Yi jing*. This is the case for the sections separately devoted to canonical works like the *Yi jing* itself, the *Shang shu*, the *Li jing* 禮經 (“Classic of Rites”), and the *Yue jing* 樂經 (“Classic of Music”). Evidently, the observations of

the nature and activity of the forces that inform the cosmos can be understood through the study of the “images” (*xiang* 象) that manifest themselves in the material world but are links to that deeper reality: “Heaven hangs images. It manifests propitiousness and unpropitiousness. Sagacious humans create the image of these” 天垂象見吉凶聖人象之. (2) In order to interpret those signs put forth by the universe, particularly as far as they indicate “propitiousness and unpropitiousness” (*ji xiong* 吉凶), early in human history, graphic and textual images that appeared (i.e., were divinely revealed) in flowing bodies of river water were studied and found to provide a means of guiding humans to correct interpretation: “The River put forth graphic representations. The Luo [River] put forth writing. Sagacious humans made these the model” 河出圖雒出書聖人則之. (2) Ban Gu quotes Western Han scholar Liu Xin to elaborate this mytho-historical account of the origins of interpretative knowledge. (3) According to Ban Gu, Liu Xin believed that the “graphic representations” (*tu* 圖) yielded by the River (*he* 河) had emerged as a revelation by Heaven to the legendary figure of high antiquity, Fu Xi 伏羲, who drew them out, producing a template that eventually came to constitute the *ba gua* 八卦 (“eight trigrams”) described and interpreted in the *Yi jing*. (4) The textual forms (“writing” 書) that appeared in the Luo 雒 River were transmitted by the mythic sage-king and putative founder of the Xia dynasty, Yu 禹, in the form of a written record. (5-6) These were taken as foundation and expanded, eventually becoming the “Hong fan” chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (“Exalted Documents”). (4, 15) In this way, Ban Gu constructs the history of anomaly-centered material-political philosophy

the *Yi jing* were seen by Ban Gu as authoritative statements on the sources of human knowledge and its applications, and so he used these as categories for organizing texts according to their subject matter and content.

as comprising knowledge gleaned from forms revealed by Heaven that were recorded and transmitted in the form of the *ba gua* and the “Hong fan” chapter.

Since the “Wuxing zhi” is built from the theoretical framework of the “Hong fan” and its commentary, the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*, Ban Gu devotes particular attention to detailing the provenance of the “Hong fan.” From the “Hong fan,” Ban Gu quotes remarks made by Shang 商 dynasty (ca. 1500-1045 B.C.E.) vassal Jizi 箕子 (“Master Winnowing Basket”) to King Wu 武 of the Zhou 周 (r. 1049/45-1043 B.C.E.)⁵⁶ on the origins of the “Hong fan.” (12) According to Jizi, Heaven had bestowed the “Nine Divisions” (*jiu chou* 九疇) of the “Hong fan” on Yu. (12) Ban Gu understands the Nine Divisions as having belonged to (or entirely constituted) the Luo writings and as being identical to the 65-graph passage of the “Hong fan” that names the Nine Divisions. (14-15) Ban Gu also refers to the Nine Divisions as the “Nine Sections” (*jiu zhang* 九章). According to Liu Xin, Yu developed these into a practice and arranged them into their proper order (*fa er chen zhi* 法而陳之), and they were thus inherited by subsequent generations. (5-6) Ban Gu observes that the contents of the Luo writings contained in the “Hong fan” (as its oldest section and central core) reflect Yu’s sequencing of the Nine Divisions/Sections. (15)

While Ban Gu devotes particular attention to detailing the provenance of the “Hong fan,” he envisions a process of transmission by which the “Hong fan” and the *ba gua* were both revered by the generations who came after Yu and used as the basis for political action. Referring to the “Hong fan” with the demonstrative pronoun *qi* 其 (“its”) that likely also includes

⁵⁶ *HS*, 1315. For the dates of the reign of King Wu, see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 292.

the *ba gua*), Ban Gu recounts that “sagacious humans implemented their Way and treasured their truth” 聖人行其道而寶其真. (5) These texts were transmitted faithfully through the centuries until the last days of the Shang, when they reached the hands of Jizi who “canonized” (*dian* 典) them. (6)

Reaching the time of the Shang, Ban Gu then returns to details about the transmission of “Hong fan.” It is unclear from Ban Gu’s account if he understood that Yu had produced the entire “Hong fan” from the core Nine Sections that had been granted by heaven, or if the “Hong fan” was the result of additions during its transmission, including contributions by Jizi. What is certain is that Ban Gu believed Jizi had possession of the full text of the “Hong fan.” According to the account that Ban Gu cites from the text of the “Hong fan” itself, after the Zhou conquest of the Shang, Jizi went into hermitage.⁵⁷ (7) Sometime later, King Wu visited Jizi and asked him about “the sequence in which its [i.e., Heaven’s] cardinal principles should be expressed” 其彝倫迪敘 for use in the project of assisting Heaven in “sheltering and stabilizing the humans below” 陰鷲下民. (8-10) Jizi’s response was an explanation of the provenance of the “Hong fan.” (11-12) Ban Gu adopts the insinuation of the “Hong fan” account that the main contents of the “Hong fan” were then transmitted to King Wu in this interaction between him and Jizi. (13)⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Alternately, depending on the interpretation of the phrase *yi ji zi gui* 以箕子歸, Jizi was taken by King Wu back to the Zhou kingdom.

⁵⁸ That the “Hong fan” account describes the contents of the “Hong fan” as being communicated to King Wu in response to his questions about governing practices that fully realize divine design for tranquility in human society suggest a characterization of the “Hong fan” as a comprehensive guide for human rule to realize the full potential of divine will. This denotes a broader understanding of the “Hong fan” than might be intimated by Ban Gu’s explanation of its emergence under the rubric of knowledge developed for the interpretation of the deeper significances of “image” phenomena described in the passage of the “Shang xi” chapter quoted by Ban Gu. However, in the “Hong fan” as it is interpreted in the “Wuxing zhi,” the two activities of interpreting and governing are part of an integral whole.

In transitioning to his account of the Zhou period, Ban Gu returns to a consideration of the *ba gua* and the *Luo shu* as complementary parts of an integrated whole. Ban Gu claims that the River's graphic representations (*he tu* 河圖) and the eight trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦) into which they were refined worked in tandem with the Luo writings (*Luo shu* 雜書) and the Nine Sections (*jiu zhang* 九章) into which the Luo writings were organized. (16) These original building blocks of knowledge (that exactly duplicate and express the material forces underpinning the physical world) were the guiding principles informing the composition of two classic works: the *Zhou yi* 周易 ("Changes of Zhou"), which Ban Gu attributes to King Wen 文 (r. 1099-1050 B.C.E.) of the Zhou, and the *Chunqiu* 春秋 ("Springs and Autumns"), which Ban Gu understands as having been compiled by the seminal scholar and philosopher of the late Spring and Autumn period, Kongzi 孔子 (trad. 551-479 B.C.E.).⁵⁹ (17) Ban Gu names the *yin yang* 陰陽 of the *qian kun* 乾坤 ("generative and receptive") conceptual view alongside the "unfavorable verifications" (*jiu zheng* 咎徵) of the "Hong fan" as being fundamental concepts around which these two canonical works were structured. (17)

From the parallelism in Ban Gu's account, it is clear that he thought that knowledge of *yin yang* informed the *Zhou yi* and that the unfavorable verifications of the "Hong fan" served as guiding principles in the composition of the *Chunqiu*. With regard to the *Chunqiu* in particular, Ban Gu's mention of the "unfavorable verifications of the 'Great Plan'" 洪範之咎徵 in close proximity to his description of the composition of the *Chunqiu* implies an understanding that the *Chunqiu*'s cosmologic view reflected a fundamental idea expressed in the "Hong fan" that

⁵⁹ For the dates of the reign of King Wen of the Zhou, see *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, 292.

human corruption and error have effects on the material environment that become visible in the form of abnormal, adverse weather events (i.e., the “unfavorable verifications”⁶⁰ named in the “Hong fan”). (17) According to this understanding, the *Chunqiu*’s documentation of unusual and destructive weather events was an expression of Master Kong’s embrace of the perspective of the “Hong fan” principles and an indication of moments where human virtue and prudent government failed.

Ban Gu’s framework of associations can be arranged according to each analogous pair (or set of terms) and charted in the following way:

Table 4.1.: Ban Gu’s Framework of Associations in the Preface to the “Wuxing zhi”

knowledge, figures, and texts associated with the <i>he tu</i> 河圖	knowledge, figures, and texts associated with the <i>Luo shu</i> 雒書
Fu Xi 伏羲	Yu 禹
<i>ba gua</i> 八卦	“Hong fan” 洪範 / <i>jiu chou</i> 九疇 / <i>jiu zhang</i> 九章
<i>Yi jing</i> 易經 / <i>Zhou yi</i> 周易	<i>Chunqiu</i> 春秋
<i>qian kun</i> 乾坤 / <i>yin yang</i> 陰陽	<i>jiu zheng</i> 咎徵

III.A.2. Part Two: Western Han Renaissance

Ban Gu’s preface to the “Wuxing zhi” moves on to trace Western Han scholarship as being founded on knowledge he claims was ultimately derived from the *he tu* and *Luo shu*⁶¹:

⁶⁰ See Ch. 1 of the present dissertation (Table 1.1.) for the section of the “Hong fan” that refers to the “unfavorable verifications.”

⁶¹ The following passage is from *HS*, 1317.

- 1 漢興, 承秦滅學之後, 景、武之世, 董仲舒治公羊春秋, 始推陰陽, 為儒者宗。
The Han arose, inheriting the aftertimes of the snuffing out of learning by the Qin. In the ages of [Thearch] Jing and [Thearch] Wu, Dong Zhongshu mastered the *Springs and Autumns of Gongyang*. He began promoting *yin yang*. He was the forebear of the Ruists.
- 2 宣、元之後, 劉向治穀梁春秋, 數其甌福, 傳以洪範, 與仲舒錯。
After [Thearch] Xuan and [Thearch] Yuan, Liu Xiang mastered the *Springs and Autumns of Guliang*, tabulated its calamities and fortunes, and transmitted it using the *Hong fan*. It [i.e., Liu Xiang's scholarship on the *Guliang Chunqiu*] is different from [*alt.*, interlocks with] Zhongshu.
- 3 至向子歆治左氏傳, 其春秋意已乖矣。言五行傳, 又頗不同。
By the time at which Xiang's son Xin mastered the *Tradition of the One Named Zuo*, his understanding of the *Springs and Autumns* had already become distorted. Talk about the *Five Elements Tradition* was also exceedingly divergent.
- 4 是已摭仲舒, 別向、歆, 傳載眭孟、夏侯勝、京房、谷永、李尋之徒所陳行事, 訖於王莽, 舉十二世, 以傳春秋, 著於篇。
Therefore, I have embraced Zhongshu, made a distinction between Xiang and Xin, and transmitted and recorded the actions and affairs of Sui Meng, Xiahou Sheng, Jing Fang, Gu Yong, and Li Xun as they have been related by their disciples. Going up until Wang Mang, I proffer twelve generations, and thereby transmit the *Springs and Autumns*, compiling [all of this] into a chapter.

According to Ban Gu's account, after undergoing a period of being “snuffed out” 滅 during the ascendancy of the Qin state and empire, the traditions of knowledge derived from the *he tu* and the *Luo shu* experienced a revival in the Western Han when scholars began to use the principles of the *yin yang* and the “Hong fan” as tools for interpreting the record of the Spring and Autumn (722-465 B.C.E.) period contained in the *Chunqiu*. (1-2) During the reigns of Han thearchs Jing 景 (r. 157-141 B.C.E.) and Wu 武 (141-86 B.C.E.), Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179-104 B.C.E.) “mastered” (*zhi* 治) the *Gongyang Chunqiu* 公羊春秋 (“Springs and Autumns of Gongyang”) commentary to the *Chunqiu*, and began to “promote” (*tui* 推) the material

philosophy of *yin yang* (which Ban Gu associates with *qian kun* and thus the *Yi jing* and *he tu*).

(1) The idea appears to be that Dong Zhongshu in his study of the *Chunqiu* applied principles of *yin yang* material cosmology to understand the material dynamics of events recorded in the *Chunqiu*. After Dong Zhongshu, during the reigns of Han thearchs Xuan 宣 (r. 73-49 B.C.E.) and Yuan 元 (r. 48-33 B.C.E.), Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 B.C.E.) also participated in this restoration of primal knowledge. (2) He “mastered” (*zhi* 治) the *Guliang Chunqiu* 穀梁春秋 (“Springs and Autumns of Guliang”), making a tally of the “calamities and good fortunes” (既福) recorded therein, and explained these and other events documented in the *Chunqiu* by concepts outlined in the “Hong fan” (*chuan yi hong fan* 傳以洪範). (2)

According to Ban Gu, since the theories by which Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang were interpreting the historical record differed slightly (or at least were different parts of the same conceptual whole), and the historical records themselves that they were interpreting were also slightly different (since they were using different versions of the *Chunqiu* and relying on different commentaries to it), Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang diverged in their ideas and recollection of Spring and Autumn period history. (2) By the time Liu Xiang’s son, Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 B.C.E.-23 C.E.), had “mastered” (*zhi* 治) yet another commentary to the *Chunqiu*, the *Zuo shi zhuan* 左氏傳 (“Tradition of the One Named Zuo”), ideas about the meaning of the language in the *Chunqiu* and its view of history had become, in Ban Gu’s view, altogether “distorted” (*guai* 乖). (3)

At some point (Ban Gu does not specify exactly when), there also came into the scholarly tradition a text referred to by Ban Gu as the *Wuxing zhuan* 五行傳 (“Tradition of the Five

Elements”). (3) Ban Gu does not indicate to what this text served as a commentary, but it has traditionally been understood as a being the exegesis of the “Hong fan” that Ban Gu repeatedly cites in the “Wuxing zhi” as the “Tradition” (*zhuan* 傳).⁶² Ban Gu also makes reference to the text of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* by its full name in three places in the *Han shu*: one in the main body text of the “Wuxing zhi,” and two in the *Zhuan* 傳 (“Traditions”) section of the *Han shu*.⁶³ Parallel to the divergent and inaccurate views that had arisen about Spring and Autumn period history by the time of Liu Xin, Ban Gu observes that there were also by that time significantly different views on the meaning of the *Wuxing zhuan*, so that it and the “Hong fan” that it explicated had come to be misunderstood. (3) (Ban Gu evidently believed that he had insight into the original, true meaning of the *Wuxing zhuan* and the “Hong fan.”)

Confronted with diverging interpretive traditions regarding both the *Chunqiu* and the “Hong fan” (the latter being what Ban Gu views as a cardinal guide to interpret the *Chunqiu*, since the language of his preface suggests a belief that the *Chunqiu* was written as an expression of the principles of the “Hong fan”), Ban Gu says that he “embraces” (*lan* 摯) Dong Zhongshu’s views on the *Chunqiu* and “makes a distinction between” (*bie* 別) Liu Xiang and Liu Xin. (4) Ban Gu’s stress on the inaccuracies that proliferated in Liu Xin’s time (3) hints that Ban Gu had greater confidence in Liu Xiang’s views on the historical record as compared to those of Liu Xin.

In addition to recording the views of Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin in the main text of the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu also tells that he includes the views of other Western Han scholars who, like Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, lived in the Western Han in the late second and first

⁶² See Chapter 1, Section III.B.

⁶³ See *HS* 1459; *HS* 1950; and *HS*, 3154.

centuries B.C.E., either as members of the generation of scholars that preceded Liu Xiang or as contemporaries of either Liu Xiang or his son Liu Xin. (4) These are Sui Meng 眭孟 (d. 78 B.C.E.), Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 (fl. ca. 74 B.C.E.), Jing Fang 京房 (77-37 B.C.E.), Gu Yong 谷永 (d. 8 B.C.E.), and Li Xun 李尋 (fl. late 1st century B.C.E.). (4) Ban Gu communicates their views by recounting, as he tells, their “actions and affairs” (*xing shi* 行事) as related by their “disciples” (*tu* 徒). (4) Indeed, in the main text of the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu includes accounts of speeches given by these figures on the occasion of events that he narrates as having occurred in the first century B.C.E. He also includes excerpts from works of scholarship ascribed to them, such as Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan* 易傳 (“Tradition of the Changes”).

In his concluding lines to this recollection of the origin, transmission, and traditions of learning, text creation, and scholarship centered on or informed by knowledge derived from the *he tu* and the *Luo shu*, Ban Gu provides a clear statement of his purpose in compiling the “Wuxing zhi.” He says he “proffers” (*ju* 舉) the scholarship of the twelve generations that preceded the time of Wang Mang 王莽 (ca. 45 B.C.E.-23 C.E.) for the purpose of “transmitting” (*chuan* 傳) the *Chunqiu*. (4) Ban Gu uses the phrase “twelve generations” (*shi er shi* 十二世) elsewhere in the “Wuxing zhi” as being equivalent to the Western Han period, from its establishment in ca. 202 B.C.E. up until the beginning of the interregnum period presided over by Wang Mang beginning in 9 C.E.⁶⁴ Ban Gu thus claims that in the “Wuxing zhi” he marshals a vast amount of material that was studied or produced in the Western Han period and is relevant to the exegesis of the *Chunqiu*. This primarily comprises scholarship focused on the *Chunqiu* by

⁶⁴ See *HS*, 1506.

Dong Zhongshu, Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin (with particular emphasis on Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang), and the materials that they used, which he names as the three works of commentary on the *Chunqiu* (the *Gongyang zhuan*, the *Guliang zhuan*, and the *Zuo zhuan*), the *Wuxing zhuan* commentary to the “Hong fan,” and the works and views of other Western Han scholars active in the first century B.C.E. These he amasses for the purpose of restoring the *Chunqiu*. (4) Within the context of the “Wuxing zhi,” this is to provide, on the basis of an exegesis of the *Chunqiu*, an accurate rendering of the anomalous events that occurred during the Spring and Autumn period and the corrupt human behavior that caused them; and also an extension of the same mode of analysis to Western Han history. That his mapping of Western Han scholarship in the “Wuxing zhi” is to serve the purpose of an authoritative exegesis of the *Chunqiu* reflects Ban Gu’s view that the Western Han tradition of anomaly-based political philosophy was at its core organized around and grounded in the study of *Chunqiu* history.

The texts featured in Ban Gu’s exegesis of *Chunqiu*, Qin, and Han history include items not explicitly mentioned in his preface. Perhaps the most salient of these is a source (or what rather appears to be a collection of sources) that Ban Gu refers to generically as *Shi ji* 史記 (“Historical Accounts”). At least some of the content attributed to this source appears to be excerpted from the *Guo yu* 國語 (“Discourse of the States”), the Warring States account of Spring and Autumn history.⁶⁵ He also quotes from Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan*, a commentary to the *Yi*

⁶⁵ See for example, an episode that Ban Gu lists under the *Wuxing zhuan* passage about corruption in demeanor (*mao* 貌) and attributes to *Shi ji* (“Historical Accounts”). In Ban Gu’s account of the episode, Zhou official Lord Shan Xiang 單襄公 (fl. early 6th cent. B.C.E.) visits the state of Jin and remarks on the arrogant bearing of the head of the Jin state, Lord Li 厲公. See *HS*, 1354. A version of the account appears in the *Guo yu*. See Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 ed., *Guo yu jijie* 國語集解 (“Discourses of the States: Collected Explanations”), (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019), 82-4. Much of Ban Gu’s language duplicates the diction and phrasings of the *Guo yu* version.

jing.⁶⁶ To explicate the language of the *Wuxing zhuan*, the “Wuxing zhi” quotes a source labelled as the *Shuo* 說 (“Discussions”). As discussed in Chapter 1, it has been posited that this text referred collectively to the works of a group of Western Han scholars that included Ouyang Sheng 歐陽生 (fl. c. early 2nd cent. B.C.E.), Ouyang Gao 歐陽高 (fl. c. late 2nd cent. B.C.E.), Xiahou Shichang 夏侯始昌 (fl. ca. 144-87 B.C.E.), and Xiahou Sheng.⁶⁷ With the exception of Xiaohou Sheng, none of these figures is mentioned in Ban Gu’s preface. (Others have proposed that the contents of the *Shuo* were authored by Liu Xiang.⁶⁸) Western Han scholar Yang Xiong 楊雄 (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.) whose remarks are recorded in the “Wuxing zhi” is also not mentioned in the preface. The “Wuxing zhi” also includes quotations from the *Lun yu*, from contents of the *Shang shu* other than the “Hong fan,” and from the *Shi jing* 詩經 (“Classic of Poetry”), which are used as sources of Spring and Autumn history or as formulations of eternal principles underlying the events of history. There are also the sources that Ban Gu used to recount events in Western Han history. He does not indicate these by name or make any sign that he is in fact using sources in his recounting of Western Han history. He narrates many events of these as if he were relying on personal memory, though likely his sources were records held in the imperial library at the Eastern Han capital and whatever records were available to him in non-court collections.

⁶⁶ While *Yi zhuan* does not directly relate either to the *Chunqiu* or the “Hong fan,” Ban Gu’s citing the *Yi zhuan* is consistent with his thinking on the relationship between the creation of the *Yi jing* and the *Chunqiu*, since in his view the *Yi jing* was conceived with the same principles—or complementary principles that were part of the same conceptual structure—as the concepts by which the *Chunqiu* was written. The *He tu* / *ba gua* / *qian kun* / *yin yang* concepts that he claims underlie the *Yi jing* were in his view complementary to the *Luo shu* / “Hong fan” / *jiu chou* / *jiu zhang* concepts that inform the *Chunqiu*.

⁶⁷ See Ch. 1 of the present dissertation, Section III.C.

⁶⁸ See Michael Nylan, “On *Hanshu* ‘Wuxing zhi’ 五行志 and Ban Gu’s Project,” 239.

III.B. Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 1: Events First Entered into a Catalogue of Anomalies by Ban Gu

In the “Wuxing zhi,” there are approximately 372 incidents of anomaly cited from historical sources. The sources from which these incidents of anomaly are culled are the *Chunqiu* (CQ), the *Zuo zhuan* (ZZ), the *Guliang zhuan* (GLZ), the *Gongyang zhuan* (GYZ), the *Shu xu* 書序 (“Preface to the Documents,” i.e. preface to the *Shang shu*: SS), a source referred to as *Shi ji* (SJ) that (as discussed above) seems to be a generic term for a number of historical sources that originated in the late Warring States period, and sources of Qin and Western Han history (QHH) that Ban Gu does not name. A very small number of incidents listed in the “Wuxing zhi” were recorded in the *Chunqiu* but appear to require some combination of the commentaries of the *Zuo zhuan*, the *Guliang zhuan*, or the *Gongyang zhuan* to render even a basic understanding of the account of anomaly that Ban Gu imputes to the *Chunqiu*.

The great majority (334, or 89.8%) of the anomalies listed in the “Wuxing zhi” are cited from either the *Chunqiu* or unnamed sources of Qin and Western Han history. The remainder (38, or 10.2%) are taken from those other sources listed above. The breakdown is as follows:

Table 4.2.: No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” (Tabulated by Source)

Source	Number of Anomalous Incidents Cited
CQ	120
CQ/ZZ	1
CQ/GLZ/GYZ	1
ZZ	18
SS	2
SJ	15
QHH	214
Total	372

Of these 372 accounts of anomalies, for 146 (or 39.2%), Ban Gu cites remarks made by Liu Xiang about each of these incidents or phenomena as they are described in the historical source from which Ban Gu cites them:

Table 4.3.: No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” for which Comments by Liu Xiang are Appended (Tabulated by Source)

Period of Occurrence (as Based on Information Given in the Recorded Account)	Source	Number of Anomalous Incidents Cited
<i>Chunqiu</i> Period (722-468 B.C.E.) (including also events prior to the <i>Chunqiu</i> period)	SS	2
	CQ	93
	ZZ	9
	SJ	5
Qin Hegemony / Imperial Period (ca. 350-202 B.C.E.) and Western Han (202 B.C.E.-8 C.E.)	SJ	4
	QHH	33
	Total	146

For 78 (or 21%) of the 372 accounts of anomalies in the “Wuxing zhi,” Dong Zhongshu’s comments are appended:

Table 4.4.: No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” for which Comments by Dong Zhongshu are Appended (Tabulated by Source)

Source	Number of Anomalous Incidents Cited
CQ	77
QHH	1
Total	78

77 of the incidents for which Ban Gu quotes Dong Zhongshu’s remarks are from the *Chunqiu*, and only 1 (a fire recorded as having occurred in the reign of Thearch Wu) is from unnamed sources of the Qin-Han period. There is considerable overlap in the incidents to which the comments of Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang are attached. Of the 78 incidents to which Dong Zhongshu’s comments are appended, Liu Xiang’s comments are given for 69 of them, and all 69 of these accounts are taken from the *Chunqiu*. This suggests that Liu Xiang was basing his own

comments about the historical record on some work that contained a record of Dong Zhongshu's comments on anomalous incidents in the *Chunqiu*.

The number of events for which the comments of Liu Xiang are cited are almost twice the number of incidents for which Ban Gu cites comments attributed to Dong Zhongshu. While one might interpret this as meaning that Ban Gu placed a greater emphasis on Liu Xiang's comments over those of Dong Zhongshu, considering how highly Ban Gu esteems Dong Zhongshu in the preface, the greater factor causing the difference is more likely that Liu Xiang's birth and death came some one hundred years after those of Dong Zhongshu. In whatever historical records Liu Xiang had available to him, there was an additional century of Western Han history to draw from, which was added to the Spring and Autumn record and early Western Han records that Dong Zhongshu had available to him in his own time. There is also evidence of suppression of politically critical interpretation of anomalous events during the reign of Thearch Wu (this point is discussed briefly in Section VI. Conclusion of the present chapter). Moreover, the *Zuo zhuan* accounts of history as recorded in the *Chunqiu* that were available to Liu Xiang were not in wide circulation as of Dong Zhongshu's time. Finally, since Liu Xiang (likely) had Dong Zhongshu's comments on *Chunqiu* history to draw upon as a base, he was well-positioned to comment even more intensively on the *Chunqiu* record. Likely, Liu Xiang produced recorded comments about a greater number of anomalous events for these reasons, and this is reflected in the "Wuxing zhi."

In addition to the accounts of anomaly to which the comments of Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu are attached (either together or separately), there are some 148 incidents of anomaly (or 39.8% of all the anomalies listed) that either do not contain comments or contain comments that are not attributed to Liu Xiang, Dong Zhongshu, or any other figure indicated by name.

Among these, there are 54 accounts that do not have any specific comments attached to them, and 94 that are accompanied by comments for which no ascription is indicated, as if it were the voice of Ban Gu himself commenting on the account directly. These are tabulated in Table 4 according to the source texts of the accounts listed in these entries.

Table 4.5.: No. of Anomalous Incidents Cited in the “Wuxing zhi” That Contain Either No Comments or Only Comments Without Attribution (Tabulated by Source)

Period of Occurrence (as based on information given in the recorded account)	Source	Number of Anomalous Incidents Cited
<i>Chunqiu</i> Period (722-468 B.C.E.)	CQ	19
	ZZ	6
	SJ	2
Qin Hegemony / Imperial Period (ca. 350-202 B.C.E.) and Western Han (202 B.C.E.-8 C.E.)	SJ	2
	QHH	119
	Total	148
	(Of total, uncommented)	54
	(Of total, with only unattributed comments)	94

An example of an incident of anomaly that does not contain any comments is an account of an extraordinary sequence of events having to do with the birth of a baby that Ban Gu records as having occurred in 3 B.C.E.:

哀帝建平四年四月，山陽方與女子田無嗇生子。先未生二月，兒嘯腹中，及生，不舉，葬之陌上。三日，人過聞嘯聲，母掘收養。⁶⁹

In the fourth month of the fourth year [3 B.C.E.] of the Jianping 建平 era [6-3 B.C.E.] of Thearch Ai's reign [r. 7-1 B.C.E.], Tian Wuse, a young woman of Fangyu [County] in Shanyang [Commandery], gave birth to a child. Two months before she gave birth, the baby had cried out from within her belly. And then, when it was born, the baby did not stir to life. It was buried on a small road among the fields. Three days later, a person passed by and heard the sound of something crying out. The mother dug the baby up, took it in, and raised it.

⁶⁹ HS, 1473.

Ban Gu lists this account of a stillborn child that awakened to life days after having been buried under the section of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* that describes the consequences of a ruler's having failed to achieve royal/august perfection (*huang ji* 皇極). An apparently dead newborn buried in the earth coming to life again in its basic logical structure (a child placed below the ground being lifted up again to the world of the living) follows the structure of "infections in which humans who are below attack those who are above" 有下人伐上之病 occurring when the value of royal/august perfection is not achieved by the head of the state.⁷⁰ However, Ban Gu makes no statements explicitly interpreting the event. Its significance is to be inferred from its place in the structure of the "Wuxing zhi." Also, there is no information indicating that the miraculous revival of the stillborn child was an event that was viewed as having any omenological significance at the time it is reported to have happened. It appears to have come into the historical record as a report of a wondrous event that was circulating in Shanyang 山陽 Commandery in 3 B.C.E. But there is no evidence that it was interpreted at the time as having any omenological significance. Nor does Ban Gu make any statements specifically addressing the omenological meaning of this particular event or attach any interpretive statements by other figures. It is primarily an account of an anomalous incident without comment.

An example of unattributively commented events in the "Wuxing zhi" is an account of the absence of ice formation in the winter of 117 B.C.E.:

武帝元狩六年冬，亡冰。先是，比年遣大將軍衛青、霍去病攻祁連，絕大幕，窮追單于，斬首十餘萬級，還，大行慶賞。乃閔海內勤勞，是歲遣博士褚大等六人持節巡行天下，存賜鰥寡，假與乏困，舉遺逸獨行君子詣行在所。郡國有以為便宜者，上丞相、御史以聞。天下咸喜。⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Ch. 1, Table 1.1., C1 of the present dissertation.

⁷¹ *HS*, 1409.

In the winter of the sixth year [117 B.C.E.] of the Yuanshou era [122-117 B.C.E.] of the reign of Thearch Wu, there was no ice. Prior to this, the Great Generals Wei Qing and Huo Qubing year after year had been dispatched to attack [the] Qilian [Mountains]. They reached the ends of the Great Deserts, relentlessly pursued Chanyu, and cut off 100,000 heads, plus some tens of thousands more. When they returned, celebrations and commendations were conferred in great profusion. At the same time, out of concern that the realms within the seas had become exhausted with laborious toiling, that year the academician Chu Da and others (six people in all) were dispatched to carry the [Thearch's] credentials and make a circuit around the realms under heaven. They granted succoring relief to widowers and widows, provided aid and gave to the indigent and the impoverished, and lifted up those places to which noble masters of distinguished comportment had come, having been abandoned and scattered. In the commanderies and kingdoms, there were those who took these as constructive and appropriate acts and sent reports up to the Chief Minister and Chief Prosecutor to inform them about it. There was universal rejoicing in the realms under heaven.

The description of the anomalous event itself (an absence of the formation of ice in the winter of 117 B.C.E.) is accompanied by a long, unattributed comment that describes the surrounding historical circumstances. For several years prior to that winter, Thearch Wu had sent two of his most capable generals, Wei Qing 衛青 (d. 106 B.C.E.) and Huo Qubing 霍去病 (140-117 B.C.E.) to conduct raids against the Xiongnu 匈奴 in the frontiers of the empire around the Qilian 祁連 mountain range and beyond. According to the comment, during these raids, Wei Qing and Huo Qubing pursued the supreme Xiongnu leader (referred to in this passage by his surname Chanyu 單于) and brutally executed more than 100,000 Xiongnu individuals. When they returned to Chang'an, they were celebrated and honored as heroes. The comment juxtaposes the brutality carried out against the Xiongnu by Thearch Wu's lauded generals with the generous treatment that the emperor's relief mission, led by the scholar Chu Da and five other deputies, afford to needy and disaffected subjects of the empire who resided in the territorial spaces that

were the object of its control (i.e., “the realms within the seas” [*hai nei* 海内] and “the realms under heaven” [*tian xia* 天下]).

This entry’s placement in the structure of the “Wuxing zhi” insinuates that the cause of the absence of ice was the radical difference in attitudes towards humanistic values among the deputies of Thearch Wu’s regime and off-kilter patterns in the rewarding of high-ranking state officers. Wei Qing and Huo Qubing’s brutal campaign was celebrated in the Han capital, but Chu Da’s highly beneficial tour of the empire received only a modest commendation originating from local officials. This entry in the “Wuxing zhi” is listed under the section of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* that describes anomalies that occur when there is the condition of “seeing not being clear” 視之不明, which includes “constant heat” 恆奧.⁷² In the unattributed comment in the “Wuxing zhi” explicating the *Wuxing zhuan* passage, the issues that grow out of “seeing not being clear” are “not being able to perceive what is benevolent and what is malicious” 不知善惡, which leads to a practical consequence of “those who are without merit receive commendations, those who transgress are not executed, and the hundred officers fall into abandonment and recklessness” 亡功者受賞有罪者不殺百官廢亂.⁷³ Huo Qubing in particular is the rough embodiment of this formulation, especially considering Ban Gu’s critical attitude (expressed elsewhere in the *Han shu*) towards Huo Qubing’s neglect and mistreatment of the soldiers under his command combined with the brutality of his actions in warfare described here in the “Wuxing zhi.”⁷⁴ The unattributed commentary to this passage of the *Wuxing zhuan* includes an

⁷² See Chapter I, Table 1, B3.

⁷³ *HS*, 1405.

⁷⁴ See *HS*, 2478-93. While Ban Gu’s account of Huo Qubing’s life and actions in the “Wei Qing Huo Qubing Zhuan” 衛青霍去病傳 (“Traditions of Wei Qing and Huo Qubing”) chapter of the *Han shu* notes that Huo Qubing is recognized by the retainers of the Han empire who presided over territories in the northern frontier regions as having

analysis at the material level in which the physical effect of failure in seeing is disruption of “fire vapors” 火氣: “all injuries done to seeing bring illness to five vapors” 凡視傷者病火氣.⁷⁵ This effect causes cycles of heat to become unbalanced, resulting in harm to human society: “heat consequently warms in the winter, spring and summer become disharmonious, and this injures and brings illness to the commonfolk” 奧則冬溫春夏不和傷病民人.⁷⁶ The analytical voice points out that this effect has a moral valence. Failures in seeing are brought about by a lack of diligence in applying oneself to the accurate and discriminating perception of reality, and warmth is the material embodiment of laxness: “the remissness is in indolence and dilatoriness, and so its unfavorable state is indolence” 失在舒緩故其咎舒也.⁷⁷ It is thus apparent that the gist of the comments about the absence of ice in this entry points to a failure in Thearch Wu’s powers of perception in his appointment and commendation of state officers.

This entry is thus a brief commentary describing the absence of ice in the winter of 117 B.C.E. followed by a long unattributed comment that gives an account of historical events happening around the same time. Both Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang in theory could have been the author of the comment, but there is no indication of that. The critical view toward Thearch Wu suggested in the comment is completely consistent with Ban Gu’s views in the “Wei Qing Huo Qubing Zhuan.” (Even the language of the accounts is similar, with Ban Gu praising Chu Da’s ability to bring “rejoicing” [xi 喜] to the realms under heaven is the same as that of Ban

achieved merit (*gong* 功) and that Huo Qubing is lauded in the Han capital when he returned from his campaigns, Ban Gu’s comments inserted into his narration of the death of Huo Qubing focus on Huo Qubing’s intense disregard for the well-being of his troops during his campaigns. Ban Gu contrasts Huo Qubing’s brutality and negligence with the conscientious nature of his peer general, Wei Qing. Huo Qubing’s brutality in waging war against the Xiongnu conferred on him an aura of martial achievement, and Wei Qing’s officers abandoned him to serve Huo Qubing.

⁷⁵ *HS*, 1406.

⁷⁶ *HS*, 1405.

⁷⁷ *HS*, 1405.

Gu's laudatory remarks about the ability of Huo Qubing's peer and foil, Wei Qing, to "bring joy to the soldiers" [喜士].⁷⁸)

Likewise, for many of these 148 accounts for which there are no comments appended or the appended comments are not attributed to anyone, it is not possible to positively ascertain if they had previously come to the attention of either Dong Zhongshu or Liu Xiang (or any other figure in the Western Han tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy). From all appearances, Ban Gu took these from general historical records that functioned to record the events themselves without comments or interpretation. Where Dong Zhongshu is concerned, a certain proportion of these (about half) would have occurred after his death, and the same would have been true of a smaller proportion (those that were recorded as happening after 6 B.C.E.) in the case of Liu Xiang, so that it is impossible that a certain set of the 148 had previously come to the attention of either one or both of them. For those events that were recorded as having occurred before the deaths of Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu, Ban Gu's interest in the history of the tradition of anomaly-centered political philosophy would likely have prompted him to include the remarks of Dong Zhongshu or Liu Xiang (or any other figure) if there had been a record that they had made any comments about those events. It is possible that certain events included in the "Wuxing zhi" may have been listed in works compiled by Dong Zhongshu or Liu Xiang but were simply not commented on in those works. However, there is no evidence to demonstrate this. For those incidents in which there are only unattributed comments attached to accounts of anomalies, the absence of attribution suggests that Ban Gu himself in compiling "Wuxing zhi" had appended his own comments to these anomalous events that had previously

⁷⁸ *HS*, 2488.

not been commented on (as far as the records that Ban Gu was using showed) or else had been commented on in a way he viewed as inaccurate, and that in such cases he removed any previous comments before attaching his own. Judging from his remarks in the preface to the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu was wary of the views of certain sources (such as Liu Xin and the figures of Liu Xin’s generation and thereafter) on anomalies in the historic record, so that Ban Gu likely would have indicated the origin of views and comments that he included in the “Wuxing zhi” but that did not originate from him directly.

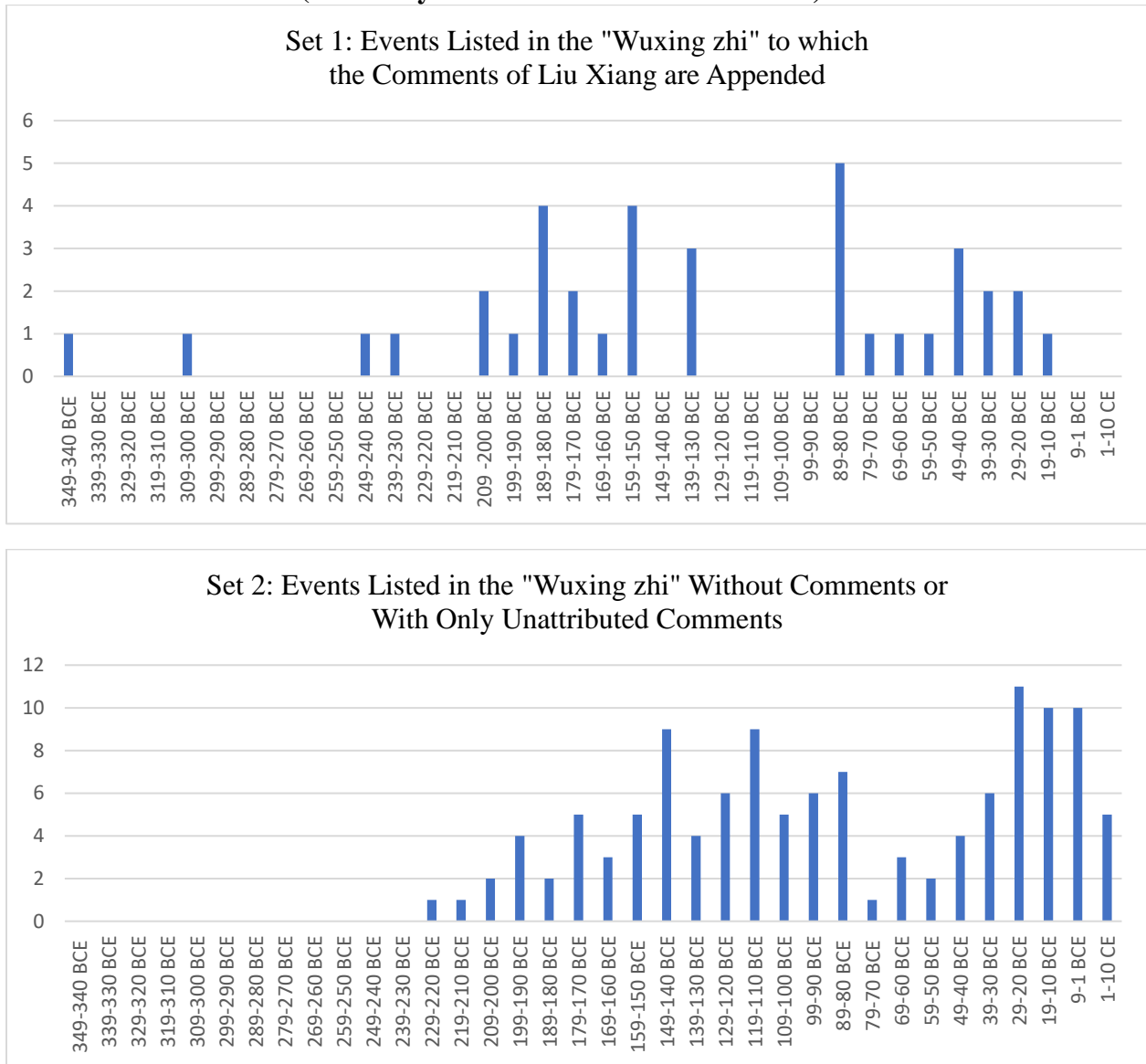
Quantitative analysis of this set of incidents (uncommented and un-attributively commented accounts) compared to those to which the comments of Dong Zhongshu or Liu Xiang are attached leads one to believe that these sets of accounts arose from different principles of selection. Dong Zhongshu, judging from the incidents to which his comments were attached, was almost purely (98.7%) focused on anomalies in *Chunqiu* history. Liu Xiang, in turn, had a majority focus (74.7%) on *Chunqiu*-era history with a much smaller secondary interest (25.3%) in anomalies in Qin and Western Han history. This is consistent with Ban Gu’s remark in the preface that Liu Xiang’s scholarship on anomalies in history was focused on *Chunqiu* history (i.e., *Chunqiu* history as presented in the *Guliang zhuan*).⁷⁹ In contrast, the majority (121 accounts of 148, or 81.8%) of the set of uncommented and un-attributively commented accounts are devoted to anomalies in Qin and Western Han history, while reflecting only a minor secondary interest (27 of 148, or 18.2%) in *Chunqiu*-era history.

Comparing the time distribution of accounts Qin and Western Han anomalies to which the comments of Liu Xiang are appended (Set 1) with those accounts of Qin and Western Han

⁷⁹ See the text of the “Wuxing zhi” preface (section 2, line 2) cited above, in section III.A.2 of the present chapter.

anomalies that consist of un-commented or un-attributively commented accounts (Set 2) reveals obvious differences between the group of historical anomalies to which the comments of Liu Xiang are attached and the group of un-commented and un-attributively commented accounts:

Figure 4.3.: Comparison of Time Distribution of Defined Sets of Anomalous Events Listed in the “Wuxing zhi” as Having Occurred in the Qin-Western Han Period* (Shown by Recorded Year of Occurrence)**



*Qin-Western Han period defined as Qin Hegemony / Imperial Period (ca. 350-202 B.C.E.) and Western Han (202 B.C.E.-8 C.E.)

**x-axes: recorded time of occurrence, shown in ten-year intervals; y-axes: number of anomalous occurrences recorded

As can be seen from the above charts, events from Set 1 are clustered around two periods: a period (from 209-130 B.C.E) between the establishment of the Han dynasty up until the beginning of the reign of Thearch Wu (141-87 B.C.E.), and a period (84-10 B.C.E.) that roughly corresponds to the lifetime of Liu Xiang himself (79-6 B.C.E.). The latest of the events on which Lu Xiang appears to have commented was a comet sighting recorded as having occurred in 12 B.C.E.⁸⁰ For the Qin-Western Han period, Liu Xiang shows some interest in anomalies happening in the period in which Qin rose to hegemonic status (starting ca. 350 B.C.E.) prior to the establishment of the Han dynasty in 202 B.C.E. There is also a long period that corresponds to the reign of Thearch Wu (141-87 B.C.E.) for which Liu Xiang is listed as having made comments on only three anomalies that are recorded as having occurred in this period. Based on the set of events for which it can be positively affirmed that Liu Xiang commented on, there is no evidence that Liu Xiang made a comprehensive catalogue of anomalies that were recorded as occurring in the whole of Western Han history.

In contrast to Set 1, Set 2 demonstrates a continuous, relatively even interest in anomalous events throughout the Western Han that does not feature the pronounced clustering that is present in Set 1. Set 2 also demonstrates observation of anomalies occurring in the last decades of the Western Han period, and even what might be interpreted as a somewhat pronounced interest in those last decades. This is a feature absent from Set 1, which tapers off after 25 B.C.E. and terminates altogether as of 12 B.C.E. Set 2 was clearly compiled by someone who had a knowledge of the last years of the Han. Within Set 2, there is also a continuous recording of anomalies in the period of time corresponding to the reign of Thearch Wu, another

⁸⁰ See *HS*, 1518.

feature that makes Set 2 distinct from Set 1. (Another distinguishing feature is that Set 2 shows scant interest in cataloguing anomalies occurring in the period of Qin hegemony that came after ca. 350 B.C.E. or in the Qin imperial period.) Set 2 reflects a compiler who had a view of the entirety of the Western Han period through its last years and looked on it with an apparent desire for exhaustive and comprehensive inclusion of accounts of events recorded as occurring in that period—as opposed to omitting for whatever reason particular periods of the Western Han. All of these features point to Ban Gu as the compiler of Set 2.

On this basis, I would like to propose that Set 2 belongs to the latest layer (i.e., the stratigraphically “shallowest” layer) of textual production contained in the “Wuxing zhi,” which can be referred to as Layer 1. This Layer 1 was an accretion that was added by Ban Gu in the Eastern Han when he amalgamated the “Wuxing zhi” from previously existing texts produced in the Western Han. Layer 1 includes the entries in the “Wuxing zhi” that contain accounts of anomalous events that are accompanied either by no comments (being bare accounts without commentary) or only by unattributed comments, with these unattributed comments being most plausibly the comments of Ban Gu himself. Accounts of the events addressed in Layer 1 are taken from the *Chunqiu*, the *Zuo zhuan*, the sources referred to as the *Shi ji* (“Historical Accounts”), and the unnamed sources of Qin and Han history that Ban Gu drew upon. This layer also includes Ban Gu’s comments on other events listed in the “Wuxing zhi” that are accompanied by attributed commentary by other figures. Conceiving of the “Wuxing zhi” as being comprised of layers added at different points in time is necessary as part of a stratigraphic method for establishing what events had been either taken note of or taken note of and presented as having omenological significance at what times and by whom, and thereby to use the

“Wuxing zhi” as a source for the diachronic study of Western Han intellectual history and its documentation in the Eastern Han.

Layer 1 is composed of content of three distinct types: (1) entries consisting of uncommented accounts of anomalies; (2) entries consisting of accounts of anomalies accompanied only by Ban Gu’s direct comments (as observed above, these two types together make up 148, or 39.8%, of the accounts listed in the “Wuxing zhi”); and (3) Ban Gu’s comments on accounts of anomalies that had already been commented on prior to Ban Gu’s compilation of the “Wuxing zhi.”

There are 54 uncommented accounts of anomaly in the “Wuxing zhi.” The majority of these are accounts of solar eclipses (38) and reports of fallen meteorites (9) listed in the “Wuxing zhi” in the category of corruption or failure in royal/august perfection (*huang ji* 皇極). An example of uncommented solar eclipse entries is one that is listed as having occurred in 198 B.C.E. (i.e., the ninth year of the reign of Thearch Gao 高帝 [r. 206-195 BCE]):

九年六月乙未晦. 日有食之. 既, 在張十三度.⁸¹

In the sixth month of the ninth year [of Thearch Gao], on the *yi-wei*₃₂ day, which was the last day of that month, the sun was consumed. At the peak, it was in [the] Extension [lunar lodging], at 13 degrees.

As can be seen, this account contains only the bare details of the eclipse: the year, month, and day that it happened, and its location in the sky. There is no attempt to connect this event to human action or interpret any significance that it had in relation to human society. It may have been understood as holding such significance at the time of its recording in 198 B.C.E., but there

⁸¹ *HS*, 1500. Dubs notes that this is a correctly recorded eclipse. See *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 547.

is no evidence of that. As it appears in the “Wuxing zhi,” it was an event that was documented as a natural phenomenon at the time of its occurrence without any apparent omenological significance having been imputed to it at the time. There is also no evidence that it was noted retrospectively as having omenological significance prior to the time of the composition of the “Wuxing zhi.” As far as Han anomaly discourse goes, it can only be shown that it was placed in a catalogue of anomalous events that are interpreted as having omenological significance when Ban Gu composed the “Wuxing zhi.”

Returning to Ban Gu’s time frame, his placing the record of this event in the list of anomalies under failures in royal/august perfection implies that Ban Gu understood this event as being a sign of human corruption or disorder according to the system of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*. However, that Ban Gu does not comment on the event himself makes it difficult to understand what he thought the significance of this eclipse was specifically and why he included it in the “Wuxing zhi” catalogue beyond its corresponding to the description in the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* that “at times the sun and moon will...depart from their normal paths of motion” 時...有日月亂行 when there is corruption in royal/august perfection.

A brief comment that Ban Gu makes about the record of fallen meteorites suggests that his catalogue of meteorites (9 incidents of which similarly go without comment) was for the purpose of creating a comprehensive record of what anomalies happened and when for the historical appraisal of each reign:

自惠盡平, 隕石凡十一. 皆有光耀雷聲. 成、哀尤屢.⁸²

⁸² *HS*, 1522.

From Hui all the way to Ping, all in all there were eleven incidents of fallen stones. In all of these, there were bursts of light and the sound of thunder. They were especially frequent in the reigns of Cheng and Ai.

Ban Gu found that the record of meteorites in its totality revealed that the reigns of Thearch Cheng and Thearch Ai ranked particularly high in terms of the frequency of meteorite incidents. Oddly, however, Ban Gu does not extend this to conclude explicitly that Cheng and Ai were on the whole more corrupt or troubled than any of the other emperors of the Western Han. Moreover, he does not even mention any individual rulers when he appraises the record of eclipses in its totality:

凡漢著紀十二世. 二百一十二年. 日食五十三. 朔十四. 晦三十六. 先晦一日三.⁸³

For all of the records and annals of the Han, which consist of 12 generations and cover 212 years, there were 53 incidents of the sun being consumed. 14 were on the first day of the month. 36 were on the last day of the month. 3 were on the day prior to the last day of the month.⁸⁴

Ban Gu does not seem to have been interested in tabulating the number of eclipses for each reign, but rather in emphasizing that eclipses tended to occur on either the first or last day of the lunar month.

For some of the Western Han eclipses (13 of the 54 listed in the “Wuxing zhi”), Ban Gu appended comments by others, made at the time of these eclipses or retrospectively, that diagnose them as having significance related to human society. There is a cluster of these interpretive comments for four different eclipses that occurred during the reign of Thearch Cheng. All of these interpret the eclipses as signifying corruption in the reign of Thearch Cheng

⁸³ *HS*, 1506.

⁸⁴ Ban Gu’s count is apparently slightly incorrect, as there are 54 eclipses listed in the “Wuxing zhi” as occurring in the Western Han.

or harm to come to his inheritors, as in the following example of Gu Yong's comments on an eclipse that is recorded as having occurred in 16 B.C.E.:

永始元年九月丁巳晦，日有食之。谷永以京房易占對曰：「元年九月日蝕，酒亡節之所致也。獨使京師知之，四國不見者，若曰，湛湎于酒，君臣不別，禍在內也。」⁸⁵

In ninth month of the first year of the Yongshi era, on the *ding-si*₅₄ day, which was the last day of that month, the sun was consumed. Gu Yong used Jing Fang's *Yi* to prognosticate and responded, stating, "A solar eclipse in the ninth month of the first year is brought on by the loss of moderation in the drinking of wine. That it was only permitted that the capital city perceive it, and it was not seen in the four countries, was as to state that there is soaking in and besottedness with wine, and there is no distinguishing between the ruler and the vassals, so the calamity is from within the court."

Four of the ten entries documenting eclipses in the reign of Thearch Cheng are in this way accompanied by interpretive comments. This proportionally high concentration (in contrast, only three of the thirteen eclipses recorded as occurring in Thearch Wu's reign contain any such comments), combined with Ban Gu's overview of comets, suggests a particular preoccupation with eclipses in the reign of Thearch Cheng and a view of problematic corruption during the reign of Thearch Cheng as a reason for the coming lapse in Han rulership and the rise of Wang Mang 王莽.

However, here Ban Gu would have faced a logical problem. He doubtless would have noticed (from his perspective that benefitted from reasonably reliable records yielded by hundreds of years of eclipse observation) that eclipses were occurring with a kind of rhythmic regularity all through the Western Han. Indeed, his evaluation that eclipses tended to happen on the first day or the last day of the month (though not consistent with modern scientific principles

⁸⁵ *HS*, 1505. Dubs notes that this is a correctly recorded eclipse. See *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 550.

of observing eclipses) leans in the direction of beginning to view eclipses as a phenomenon governed by regular patterns. If he had considered in a way similar to that in which he had considered meteors that the reign in which the most recorded eclipses had occurred, he would have found that this would have been the reign of Thearch Wu, in which there were 13 eclipses recorded as having occurred. But, given that he had noticed that there appeared to be a rough rhythmic regularity to the occurring of all eclipses, he would have had to concede that this was a function of the fact that Thearch Wu's reign was timewise the longest reign of an emperor in the Western Han. This would have produced a tension with the conceptual view of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*. If eclipses were occurring with roughly the same level of frequency in the reigns of all emperors in the Western Han, didn't that show a consistent failure in royal/august perfection during the Western Han? And, if so, why did this most serious infraction in values laid out by the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* not effect a collapse of political power earlier than the last years of the Western Han?

This tension is one plausible reason that Ban Gu was reticent to comment on historical eclipses that occurred in the Western Han. There is evidence that he attempted to reduce this problem at times by diverting the import of eclipses that happened in the Western Han to figures who embodied royalty other than the emperor and his household, such as rulers of Han vassal states. This can be seen in a direct comment of his own that accompanies his cataloguing of an account of an eclipse that is recorded as happening in 204 B.C.E., during the reign of Thearch Gao:

高帝三年十月甲戌晦，日有食之，在斗二十度，燕地也。後二年，燕王藏荼反，誅，立盧綰為燕王，後又反，敗。⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *HS*, 1500. This eclipse is absent from Dubs' schedule of mathematically verifiable eclipses. See *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 3, 547.

In tenth month of the third year of Thearch Gao, on the *jia-xu*₁₁ day, which was the last day of that month, the sun was consumed. It was in the Dipper [lunar lodging], at 20 degrees. This was the territory of the Yan. Two years later, King Cangcha of the Yan rebelled and was executed. Lu Wan was installed as king of the Yan. Later he also rebelled and was defeated.

Apparently, for Ban Gu, this eclipse was caused by disloyalty on the part of the Yan kings (or perhaps disorder in the ruler-vassal relationship between Thearch Gao and the Yan kings), rather than it being triggered by any critical failing on the part of Thearch Gao himself. Among the comments that he appends to accounts of eclipses (16 in all, including 4 of Ban Gu's own direct comments; the other twelve are comments by figures such as Liu Xiang or Gu Yong, like in the example cited above that is accompanied by Gu Yong's comments), a number divert blame away from the Han emperor himself in this way. However, all four of the comments that are appended to the eclipses in the reign of Thearch Cheng interpret the eclipses as being caused by some aspect of Thearch Cheng or his household. This difference points to the idea that Ban Gu's analytical position was that the total record of eclipses revealed critical errors in the last rulers of the Western Han.

That so many of the accounts of eclipses (38 of the recorded 54) in the Western Han appeared to lack any prior interpretation by historical figures at the time that they happened or at least at some time after they happened prior to Ban Gu's compiling of the "Wuxing zhi" leads to methodological questions about the attitude of Western Han anomaly-centered political philosophy towards eclipses that are recorded as happening in the Western Han. Judging from the record of his comments in the "Wuxing zhi," Dong Zhongshu had no interest in eclipses that happened in his own lifetime, and Liu Xiang comments only occasionally on eclipses that are recorded as happening in the Western Han. This is in contrast to Dong Zhongshu's and Liu

Xiang's enthusiasm for interpreting eclipses in the historical record for the period covered by the *Chunqiu*. One might then conclude that analysis of contemporaneous eclipses was actually a very marginal concern in Western Han anomalies discourse (in contrast to the apparent hermeneutic urgency of interpreting the meaning of eclipses in the *Chunqiu*), a nonchalance that Ban Gu seems to have had little interest in reversing in the "Wuxing zhi." As Ban Gu states in his preface, he compiled the "Wuxing zhi" primarily for the purpose of explicating the *Chunqiu* (as opposed to passing judgment on the merits of rulers in the Western Han).

It could also be argued that the explicit contemporaneous interpretation of eclipses during the Western Han was dangerous because it meant a severe critique of the emperor's rule or of his household, and so only in bold moments did observers occasionally offer an interpretation. Ban Gu would then have had very little material to go upon to understand the views of the tradition in this regard. Alternately, the possibility might also be raised that Ban Gu in his history of Western Han anomalies was following the format pattern of the *Chunqiu* itself, in which eclipses were noted without explication of the reason. But these are only possibilities, as is the idea that Ban Gu sensed the tension with the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* caused by the apparent regularity of eclipses. What reason Ban Gu had for carefully noting Western Han eclipses in the "Wuxing zhi" but, more often than not, refraining from providing any statements (either of his own or of other authorities who came before him) to interpret their significance is a question for which only likely possibilities can be raised. Regardless, the wide absence of contemporaneous or retrospective interpretive comments for so many of the Western Han eclipses catalogued in the "Wuxing zhi" is a serious obstacle to the assumption that the interpretation of eclipses was a significant aspect of Western Han anomalies discourse and that their recording necessarily indicated political critique in that period.

The other two types of contents in Layer 1 are entries consisting of accounts of anomalies accompanied only by Ban Gu's direct comments (type 2) and Ban Gu's comments on accounts of anomalies that had already been commented on prior to his compilation of the "Wuxing zhi" (type 3). Type 2 comprises 94 entries in the "Wuxing zhi" in which Ban Gu lists an account of an anomalous event that contains no evidence of having been previously interpreted as an omen prior to Ban Gu's treatment of it and then comments on it. The entry describing the eclipse that is recorded as having occurred in 204 B.C.E. followed by Ban Gu's comments linking the eclipse to the rebellions of the Yan kings is an example. While the account of this eclipse may have come to the attention of previous observers of the historical record prior to Ban Gu, there is no evidence of this. Moreover, the fact that it never occurred, and is therefore either an incorrectly recorded / transmitted eclipse or (less likely) that it was an intentionally falsified eclipse, means that it would likely not have been subject to any contemporaneous interpretation in 204 B.C.E. that Ban Gu would have been able to look up in the historical record. As an account of an anomalous event, it may have existed in the historical record throughout the Western Han, but as an event with an omenological meaning, there is no evidence that it came to be linked at all to human circumstances prior to Ban Gu's proposal that it was connected with the rebellion of the Yan kings. Therefore, it can only be understood as a material for Ban Gu's own attempts to interpret it omenologically and cannot be used as a firsthand material for understanding Western Han omenological interpretation of anomalous events.

Another example of these entries in which Ban Gu provides what appears to be his own, original interpretation of an odd phenomenon from the historical record is his listing of a curious folk rhyme that he describes as having emerged in the years of the reign of Western Han emperor Thearch Cheng (32-7 B.C.E.):

成帝時歌謠...曰:「邪徑敗良田, 讒口亂善人. 桂樹華不實, 黃爵巢其顛. 故為人所羨, 今為人所憐。」桂, 赤色, 漢家象. 華不實, 無繼嗣也. 王莽自謂黃象, 黃爵巢其顛也.⁸⁷

In the time of Thearch Cheng, there was a sung ditty that stated: “The slanted path ruins the good field. The slanderous mouth throws the benevolent person into disarray. The blossoms of the cinnabar tree do not yield fruit, and the yellow sparrow nests at its top. In ages past, it was the envy of all people. Nowadays, it is pitied by all people.” Cinnabar is red in color. It is the image of the house of Han. Blossoms not yielding fruit means not having successors to continue one’s line. Wang Mang called himself the image of yellow. He is the yellow sparrow nesting at its top.

Ban Gu lists this entry under the passage of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* that names “distress of the mind” (*you* 憂), “usurpation” (*jian* 僭), and “eerie occurrences in poetry” (*shi yao* 詩妖) as the consequences and outgrowths of “speech not according with reason” (*yan zhi bu cong* 言之不從). Here, Ban Gu extends the conceptual apparatus of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* to analyze this strange folk rhyme that was reported to have circulated in the years of Thearch Cheng’s reign. By its placement under the “speech not according with reason” passage of the *Wuxing zhuan*, Ban Gu understands the folk rhyme as being an “eerie occurrence in poetry” (*shi yao* 詩妖) brought on by Wang Mang’s increasing influence in the Han political community at the time (an influence that Ban Gu viewed as harmful and tending to the arrogation of power by Wang Mang). Ban Gu combines the *Wuxing zhuan* schema with the concept of *xiang* 象 (“image”) taken from the *Yi jing* to analyze the poem as having been an echo of the political landscape of the age, in which the “house of Han” 漢家, which claimed red as its imagistic color, is emblemized by the red cinnabar tree, and its usurpation by Wang Mang, who claimed yellow

⁸⁷ HS, 1396.

as his imagistic color, is represented by the yellow sparrow (*huang que* 黄雀) nesting in the upper branches of the tree. Ban Gu's treatment is thus a combination of the *Wuxing zhuan* and *Yi jing* conceptual views and terminology. Since Ban Gu believed this rhyme circulated during the reign of Thearch Cheng (before Thearch Cheng's death in 7 B.C.E.), at least half a decade before years before Wang Mang's appointment as regent in 2 B.C.E., and at least 15 years before Wang Mang's declaration of a new dynasty in 9 C.E., he clearly found its tight metaphoric resemblance to the structure of Wang Mang's usurpation to be uncanny.⁸⁸

It is unclear what evidence Ban Gu took to believe that this rhyme was in fact in circulation in the days of Thearch Cheng. This idea might have been a product of the social imagination of certain communities in the Han political body as their members reflected retrospectively on the events leading up to Wang Mang's usurpation from a perspective in the Eastern Han. It would have certainly been tantalizing for members of the early Eastern Han body politic to think that folk rhymes anticipating Wang Mang's rise had been eerily circulating during Thearch Cheng's reign. But Ban Gu at least believed it was current in Han society as of the reign of Thearch Cheng. The rhyme could thus potentially be used as a material for folk verse in the late Western Han. But there is no evidence that the rhyme was interpreted omenologically prior to the early Eastern Han. In fact, its eerie quality only exists because it was being observed with the benefit of retrospective knowledge of the rise of Wang Mang, and this would have been knowledge that came only after the end of the Western Han. Accordingly, Ban Gu's comments on it must again be treated as an example of Eastern Han omenological interpretation of historical accounts of anomaly.

⁸⁸ For details of Wang Mang's rise to power, see Hans Bielenstein, "Wang Mang, the Restoration of the Han Dynasty, and Later Han" in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, 223-31.

One final example of Ban Gu's original omenological interpretation makes clear that his contribution to the view—manifested in the “Wuxing zhi”—of Western Han history observed from the perspective of anomaly-centered political philosophy pulled from a wide time range across the Western Han. In the same section under results of violations in “speech” (*yan* 言), Ban Gu lists an account of a famine that is recorded as having occurred in 190 B.C.E. during the reign of Thearch Hui 惠 (r. 194-188 B.C.E.):

惠帝五年夏，大旱，江河水少，溪谷絕。先是發民男女十四萬六千人城長安，是歲城乃成。

In the summer of the fifth year of Thearch Hui, there was a great drought. In the rivers and streams, water was low. The rivulets in the gullies dried up. Prior to this, 146,000 commoners, including both men and women, had been dispatched to fortify Chang'an. That year, the fortifications were completed.

Ban Gu's comments on the *Wuxing zhuan* passage about corruption in “speech” (*yan* 言) read the *Wuxing zhuan* passage as referring to circumstances in which the ruler's commands (issued through speech) are “disagreeable to hearts of the commoners” 不順民心.⁸⁹ Since the *Wuxing zhuan* names “constant *yang*” 恆陽 as the result of corruption in speech, Ban Gu interprets the drought in 190 B.C.E. as having been caused by the burdensome labor to which Thearch Hui had ordered tens of thousands of his subjects. There is no indication that the drought in 190 B.C.E. had ever been interpreted as being the result of Thearch Hui's actions prior to Ban Gu's proposing this connection in the Eastern Han.

Entries like these in the “Wuxing zhi” in which a plain account of an anomaly is listed and accompanied only by a direct comment by Ban Gu complicate the idea that the recording of

⁸⁹ *HS*, 1376.

such events in the Western Han (those that actually happened) can be read as an act of political critique. Other than relying on the assumption that the reporting and recording of anomalous events categorically was an expression of political discontent, that there is no record that such the events in these entries were, at the time they occurred, understood as being anomalies signifying political corruption or that there were voices at the time arguing that such a connection was present means that it is not possible to exclude the very plausible possibility that these entries were in fact the results of a method used by Ban Gu in which he examined how theories of analysis (such as that laid out in the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*) were applied by figures like Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang, searched through Western Han records for anomalous events that fit the description of the theory laid out in the *Wuxing zhuan*, and then found events that had occurred at approximately the same time that could be found to be causes according to the theory. That such entries, along with entries consisting of just a bare description of an anomalous event without any comment, make up such a sizable portion of all of the entries in the “Wuxing zhi” (148 of 372, or 39.8%), means that this significant portion of omenological interpretation that occurs in the “Wuxing zhi” cannot be shown as having occurred earlier than the time of Ban Gu’s compiling it.

This is not to discount the relevance of these entries to the study of the history of anomaly-centered political philosophy. These entries provide a useful body for understanding how Ban Gu extended to the study of Western Han history the *Wuxing zhuan* conceptual schema that was applied by Western Han scholars to the study of the historical record of the *Chunqiu* period. However, for understanding the tradition of Western Han anomaly-centered political philosophy as it is embodied in the “Wuxing zhi,” it is necessary to exclude the entries that belong to Layer 1 from the materials that can speak for Western Han scholarship. These can only

be used as far as they stand for anomalies that were recorded in the Western Han, but they there is no way of knowing if they were interpreted as having omenological significance prior to Ban Gu's time.

The third type of content belonging to Layer 1 is (3) Ban Gu's comments on accounts of anomalies that had already been commented on prior to Ban Gu's compilation of the "Wuxing zhi." These are present in many of the entries listed in the "Wuxing zhi."

IV. Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 2: Engaging an Elaborated Material Philosophy of Anomaly for the Interpretation of Historical Events (Liu Xiang's Analysis of *Chunqiu* History Using the *Wuxing zhuan* as an Analytical Tool)

As noted above, for the 372 entries containing accounts of anomalous incidents in the "Wuxing zhi" catalogue, Ban Gu appends the comments of Liu Xiang to 146 (or 39.2%) of these entries. Consistent with his prominent listing of Liu Xiang in the preface as one of the progenitors of the "Wuxing zhi" system of historical analysis, the density of citations from Liu Xiang shows that Ban Gu saw Liu Xiang as an important figure in the tradition of interpreting the text of the *Chunqiu* (and other sources of pre-Western Han history) via a theoretical view that made claims about the underlying material dynamics of anomalous occurrences. Liu Xiang's comments taken as a whole demonstrate a majority focus (74.7%) on *Chunqiu*-era history with a much smaller secondary interest (25.3%) in anomalies in Qin and Western Han history.

IV.A. Liu Xiang's Thought and Method as Seen in the "Wuxing zhi"

It is possible to make observations about Liu Xiang's thought and method from his comments cited in the "Wuxing zhi." Compared to Dong Zhongshu, the most obvious feature of Liu Xiang's analysis of historical events is his use of the taxonomy of abnormal events set out in the *Wuxing zhuan*. An example of Liu Xiang's applying this taxonomy to the historical record is Liu Xiang's remarks about a series of related events recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*:

左氏傳魯襄公時。宋有生女子赤而毛。棄之隄下。宋平公母共姬之御者見而受之。因名曰棄。長而美好。納之平公。生子曰佐。后宋臣伊戾讒太子痤而殺之...劉向以爲時則火災赤眚之明應也。⁹⁰

In *Tradition of the One Named Zuo*, in the time of Lord Xiang 襄 of Lu, there was born in the state of Song 宋 a female child who was ruddy and hairy. She was abandoned beneath an embankment. A servant of Gong Ji 共姬, the mother of Lord Ping 平 of Song, saw her and adopted her. Accordingly, her name was Qi 棄. She grew and was beautiful and pleasing. She was installed in the household of Lord Ping. She gave birth to a child named Zuo 佐. Thereafter, Song vassal Yi Li 伊戾 slandered the grand heir Cuo 痤 and murdered him...Liu Xiang held that this was [a case of the principle that] at times there will thus be manifestly evident responses 明應 in the form of fire disasters 火災 and red aberrant generations 赤眚.

The narration of this series of events is taken from the *Zuo zhuan* commentary to *Chunqiu* content for the 26th year (547 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Xiang 襄 of Lu (r. 572-542 B.C.E.). In connection with this episode, the *Chunqiu* records only that “in the autumn, the Lord of Song put to death his heir apparent, Cuo” 秋宋公殺其世子痤.⁹¹ The *Zuo zhuan* commentary for this year provides a more detailed account of events immediately connected to the framing and execution of Cuo 痤 that took place in the Song court that year.⁹²

As Ban Gu’s summary of the *Zuo zhuan* account tells, the *Zuo zhuan* (somewhat curiously) begins its explanation of Cuo’s death by describing details about the birth of Cuo’s younger half-brother, Zuo 佐, and about the unusual physical features at birth and childhood experience of Zuo’s mother, Qi 棄 (whose name, meaning “abandoned,” echoes the circumstances in which she was found). The fuller *Zuo zhuan* account explains that Qi was the daughter of Situ Rui 司徒

⁹⁰ *HS*, 1419-20.

⁹¹ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (“Springs and Autumns Tradition of the One Named Zuo: Annotations”) [abbreviated hereafter as YBJZZ], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981 [21st printing: 2020]), 1225. I have referred to the English translation in *DLS*, 1159.

⁹² For the *Zuo zhuan* account of the Cuo’s death, see YBJZZ, 1233-4. I have referred to the English translation in *DLS*, 1173.

芮, a “grand counselor” (*dafu* 大夫) in the Song court. Ban Gu’s account copies the phrase “ruddy and hairy” (*chi er mao* 赤而毛) from the *Zuo zhuan* description of Qi’s physical appearance at birth. Her son Zuo, who comes to be designated as the ducal heir of Song, was born after she was installed as a concubine to Lord Ping 平 (d. 575-532 B.C.E.).

According to the *Zuo zhuan*, the demise of Cuo, Lord Ping’s eldest son and heir to the Song dukedom, grows out of his troubled relationship with members of the Song court. The Song vassal Yi Li 伊戾 (d. 547 B.C.E.), “serves as the Heir’s Court Preceptor” 為大子內師 but “does not enjoy any favor” 無寵, and therefore resents Cuo. Another Song courtier, He 合, who serves at court as the Preceptor of the Left 左師, also fears and resents the ducal heir for his severe demeanor. Yi Li fabricates evidence to support a false charge that Cuo is conspiring to overthrow Lord Ping. Lord Ping is taken in by Yi Li’s ploy and imprisons his son. Cuo sends for his brother Zuo to exonerate him, but He Zuoshi intentionally delays Zuo. Cuo despairs and hangs himself. Lord Ping gradually realizes that he has been deceived and has Yi Li boiled alive.

Liu Xiang’s remarks on the *Zuo zhuan* account, featuring the terms “manifestly evident responses” (*ming ying* 明應) and “red aberrant generations” (*chi sheng* 赤眚) understands this series of events through the lens of the *Wuxing zhuan*, which observes that “at times there will thus be red aberrant generations” 時則有赤眚 when the “seeing” (*shi* 視) of the head of state is “not clear” (*bu ming* 不明).⁹³ To construct Liu Xiang’s view based on the conceptual framework of the *Wuxing zhuan*, Liu Xiang’s understanding is that Lord Ping’s clouded perception that

⁹³ The red coloration indicated in the *Wuxing zhuan* is apparently an outcome of the material effects of uncleanness of seeing, which causes “water to disrupt fire” 水沴火. See the text of the *Wuxing zhuan* in Table 1.1.

renders him to view the actions of his son through the false aspersions of a scheming vassal was already exerting an influence at the time of Qi’s birth. Her “red and hairy” 赤而毛 physical features had been generated from the young Lord Ping’s faltering powers of perception.

While the *Zuo zhuan* provides an extensive description of the circumstances surrounding the execution/suicide of Cuo, neither the *Gongyang zhuan* or the *Guliang zhuan* provide any commentary to the *Chunqiu* record of Cuo’s death.⁹⁴ It is unique to the *Zuo zhuan*. While in the preface to the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu stresses Liu Xiang’s interest in the *Guliang zhuan*, observing that Liu Xiang “mastered” 治 it, clearly Liu Xiang was reading the *Zuo zhuan* as well, and used it as a source for understanding the *Chunqiu*.

Liu Xiang’s use of *Wuxing zhuan* terms and logic in his remarks connecting Qi’s rubicund physical features to the death of Cuo is a pattern that runs through comments attributed to Liu Xiang in the “Wuxing zhi.” For the 146 anomalous incidents from historical records to which the comments of Liu Xiang are attached, Liu Xiang’s comments to 32 (or 21.9%) of these feature the distinct terminology of the *Wuxing zhuan*. They are as follows:

Table 4.6.: *Wuxing zhuan* Terms Used by Liu Xiang

Term(s)	Citation
“eerie occurrence in plants” 草妖	<i>HS</i> , 1409.
“eerie occurrence in clothing” 服妖 (x2)	<i>HS</i> , 1366; 1366.
“sounded eerie occurrence” 鼓妖	<i>HS</i> , 1428.
“eerie occurrence in darts” 射妖	<i>HS</i> , 1463.
“eerie occurrence in darts” 射妖 / “black salient deviation” 黑祥	<i>HS</i> , 1463
“abnormality in fish” 魚孽	<i>HS</i> , 1430.

⁹⁴ For the contents of the *Guliang zhuan* for the 26th year of Lord Xiang of Lu, see Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed., *Chong kan Song ben Guliang zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本穀梁注疏附校勘記 (Nanchang: Nanchang fu xue 南昌府學, Jiaqing ershi nian 嘉慶二十年 [1815]), 21.3a-4b: rpt. in *Ruan ke Chunqiu Guliang zhuan zhushu* 阮元刻春秋穀梁傳注疏 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2020), 1027-30. [Cited hereafter as *GLZZS*.]

Table 4.6. (continued):

Term(s)	Citation
“abnormality in dragons and snakes” 龍蛇孽	<i>HS</i> , 1465.
“abnormality in creatures that have a hard shell” 介蟲之孽	<i>HS</i> , 1431.
“abnormality in dragons” 龍孽	<i>HS</i> , 1466.
“abnormality in snakes” 蛇孽 (x2)	<i>HS</i> , 1467; 1468.
“startling malady in horses” 馬禍(旤)	<i>HS</i> , 1469.
“startling malady in chickens” 鷄禍(旤)	<i>HS</i> , 1369.
“startling malady in pigs” 豕禍(旤)	<i>HS</i> , 1436.
“startling malady in cows” 牛禍(旤) (x3)	<i>HS</i> , 1447; 1447; 1448.
“startling malady in cows” 牛禍(旤) / “green salient deviation” 青祥	<i>HS</i> , 1373.
“green aberrant generation” 青眚	<i>HS</i> , 1431-32.
“green aberrant generation” 赤眚 (x2)	<i>HS</i> , 1420; 1420.
“startling malady” 眚 / “salient deviation” 祥	<i>HS</i> , 1414.
“white salient deviation” 白祥	<i>HS</i> , 1340.
“green salient deviation” 青祥 (x2)	<i>HS</i> , 1396; 1417.
“white and black salient deviation” 白黑祥	<i>HS</i> , 1415.
“metal disrupting wood” 金沴木	<i>HS</i> , 1375.
“fire disrupting water” 火沴水 (x2)	<i>HS</i> , 1437; 1438.
“water disrupting earth” 水沴土	<i>HS</i> , 1457.
“metal, wood, water, and fire disrupting earth” 金木水火沴土	<i>HS</i> , 1451.

Liu Xiang’s use of the *Wuxing zhuan* as a material theory to classify and delineate the cause of anomalies listed in the historical record is consistent with Ban Gu’s observation in his preface to the “Wuxing zhi” that Liu Xiang made use of the “Hong fan” (a phrase that in the “Wuxing zhi” refers to both the “Hong fan” and its commentary, the *Wuxing zhuan*) to explicate and transmit the history outlined in the *Chunqiu*. As Liu Xiang was reviewing the historical record, he was looking at it from a perspective heavily influenced by the political-material philosophy embodied in the *Wuxing zhuan*.

IV.B. Liu Xiang's Thought as Portrayed in the “Chu Yuan wang zhuan” 楚元王傳 (“Traditions of King Yuan of Chu”): Liu Xiang's Memorial to Thearch Yuan 元

The chapter of the *Han shu* that contains an account of the life of Liu Xiang is the “Chu Yuan wang zhuan” 楚元王傳 (“Traditions of King Yuan of Chu”).⁹⁵ In the “Chu Yuan wang zhuan,” Ban Gu describes how Liu Xiang (born in 79 B.C.E., 25 years after the death of Dong Zhongshu) first arrived to the Han court in an official capacity by being selected to fill the position of Gentleman of the Conveyance (*nian lang* 輦郎) at the age of 12.⁹⁶ This appointment had been secured by Liu Xiang's father, Liu De 劉德 (d. 56 B.C.E.), who during his lifetime served himself in several high-ranking positions close to the emperor, including that of Lineage Administrator (*zong zheng* 宗正).⁹⁷

Liu Xiang came to court in 67 B.C.E., in the early years of the reign of Thearch Xuan (r. 73-49 B.C.E.). He distinguished himself by being “orderly” (*chi* 飭) in his “conduct and discipline” (*xing xiu* 行修), and rose to the position of Advisory Counselor (*jian dafu* 諫大夫).⁹⁸ Early in his career, Liu Xiang took an interest in alchemy, and in 63 B.C.E. (about four years after he began serving at court, when Liu Xiang would have been about 16), he was condemned for having

⁹⁵ According to the “Chu Yuan wang zhuan” chapter, Liu Xiang was the direct descendant of King Yuan 元 (birth name: Liu Jiao 劉交; d. 178 B.C.E.) of Chu, the younger brother of Han dynasty founder Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202-195 B.C.E.). Liu Ban installed King Yuan as the leader of the Chu state after establishing the Han dynasty. Liu Xiang was the direct patrilineal descendant of King Yuan, through a connection that passed through four generations before Liu Xiang was born. For Ban Gu's account of the life of Liu Jiao 劉交 and his descendants prior to Liu Xiang, see *HS* 1921-8. The patrilineal connection between Liu Jiao and Liu Xiang was: 1. father: Jiao 交 – son: Fu 富; 2. father: Fu 富 – son: 辟疆; 3. father: 辟疆 – son: 少卿; 4. father: 少卿 – son: 德; 5. father: 德 – son: 向. The rulership of Chu had passed from Liu Jiao 劉交 to Liu Fu's 劉富 brothers—first to Liu Yingke 劉郢客 and then to Liu Li 劉禮. The rule of Chu was then passed down to Li's son and did not come to any of Liu Fu's direct descendants (who included Liu Xiang).

⁹⁶ For Ban Gu's account of the life and thought of Liu Xiang, see *HS* 1928-66.

⁹⁷ *HS*, 1927.

⁹⁸ *HS*, 1928.

“forged fake gold” (*zhu wei huangjin* 鑄僞黃金).⁹⁹ It was an offense punishable by death, but Liu Xiang was absolved as a result of the intervention of his older brother, Liu Anmin 劉安民 (fl. ca. 63 B.C.E.), who was then serving as the Marquis 侯 of Yangcheng 陽城.¹⁰⁰ Recognition of Liu Xiang’s extraordinary abilities as a scholar also played a part in the leniency he was granted.¹⁰¹ Despite this episode, he continued to consolidate his influence at court, eventually serving in a number of roles that included Supervisor of the Yellow Gate (*ji shi huang men* 給事黃門) and Supervisor of the Court (*ji shi zhong* 給事中).¹⁰² By the last year of Thearch Xuan’s reign in 49 B.C.E. (the year that Liu Xiang turned 30), Liu Xiang appears to have risen to a position of considerable status in the Han court.

In Ban Gu’s summary of Liu Xiang’s scholarship, he emphasizes Liu Xiang’s devotion to the *Chunqiu*. While Dong Zhongshu is associated with the *Gongyang Chunqiu* (in Ban Gu’s preface to the “Wuxing zhi”), Ban Gu notes that Liu Xiang shored up the status of the *Guliang Chunqiu*, “establishing” (*li* 立) it as an authoritative commentary on the *Chunqiu* “at an opportune moment, early on” (*hui chu* 會初) in his career.¹⁰³ This association of Liu Xiang with the *Guliang* commentary to the *Chunqiu* aligns with Ban Gu’s identification of Liu Xiang with the *Guliang Chunqiu* in the preface to the “Wuxing zhi.”

After introducing Liu Xiang with a basic description of his unique aptitudes as a scholar and his career at the Han court, Ban Gu presents anomalous events and their relationship to political

⁹⁹ *HS*, 1929.

¹⁰⁰ *HS*, 1929.

¹⁰¹ *HS*, 1929.

¹⁰² *HS*, 1929.

¹⁰³ *HS*, 1929.

power as being central to Liu Xiang's thinking by quoting the contents of three memorials written by Liu Xiang to Han emperors over the course of his career. One of these was addressed to Thearch Yuan (r. 48-33 B.C.E.), and the other two were presented to Yuan's successor, Thearch Cheng 成 (32-8 B.C.E.).¹⁰⁴ Liu Xiang's memorials claim that anomalies arise from corruption among the leaders of human society. Since these memorials constitute the great majority of the contents of Ban Gu's account of Liu Xiang, one gets the impression that at the core of Liu Xiang's thinking as a scholar of the historical record was the idea that errancy in political leadership that causes society-level disorder and political collapse also gives rise to anomalous occurrences in nature.

While all three of Liu Xiang's memorials emphasize anomalies and their connection to human corruption, Liu Xiang's memorial to Thearch Yuan is especially laden with lists of anomalies and analyses of their causes. Liu Xiang presents his view as being derived from a study of history. He begins with a description of high antiquity. He describes how mythic king Shun 舜 created "nine offices" 九官, fostered an environment in which the officials of his court "succored and aided, yielding to one another" 濟濟相讓, and this atmosphere allowed for "the advent of harmony" 和之至 to Shun's court.¹⁰⁵ Liu Xiang observes that this state of harmony among the rulers of human society caused a similar state of harmony in nature: "a multitude of worthy ones were brought to harmony at court, and thereby ten thousand objects were brought to harmony in the wilderness" 眾賢和於朝則萬物和於野.¹⁰⁶ Tranquility in human society and

¹⁰⁴ Liu Xiang's letter to Thearch Yuan is in *HS*, 1930-47. His two letters to Thearch Cheng are in *HS*, 1950-57 and *HS*, 1958-66, respectively.

¹⁰⁵ *HS*, 1933.

¹⁰⁶ *HS*, 1933.

nature, delivered by prudent political rule, characterized the early days of the Zhou dynasty during the reigns of King Wen and King Wu and the supervision of the Lord of Zhou 周公 (fl. 11 cent. B.C.E.).¹⁰⁷

According to Liu Xiang, this state of harmony fell apart toward the end of the Western Zhou. Liu Xiang recalls that “when it came down to the time of King Li 厲 (r. 857-ca. 842 B.C.E.) and King You 幽 (r. 781-771 B.C.E.), the court was not in harmony, and successions of ministers engaged in gainsaying and harbored resentment” 下至幽厲之際朝廷不和轉相非怨。¹⁰⁸ Liu Xiang observes that in this time of political discord, natural anomalies frequently occurred in the form of solar and lunar eclipses: “waters and fountains seethed and surged” 水泉沸騰, and “mountains and valleys changed locations” 山谷易處。¹⁰⁹ Liu Xiang’s source for these points is the poem *Shi yue zhi jiao* 十月之交 (“Conjunction of the Ten Month”) in the *Xiao ya* 小雅 (“Lesser Elegantiae”) section of the *Shi jing* 詩經 (“Classic of Poetry”).¹¹⁰ (The *Shi yue zhi jiao* was traditionally understood as being a polemic against Zhou King You.¹¹¹) Liu Xiang also observes that immoderate levels of unseasonable “frost descended” 霜降 during this period, citing the contents of the poem *Zheng yue* 正月 (“Principal Month”), also from the *Xiao ya* section of the *Shi jing*.¹¹² (The *Zheng yue* was also traditionally understood as being a criticism of the rule of King You.¹¹³) Interestingly, Liu Xiang points out that the *Zheng yue* also bemoaned

¹⁰⁷ *HS*, 1933.

¹⁰⁸ *HS*, 1934. For the history of the reigns of Zhou kings Li (r. 857-ca. 842 B.C.E.) and You (r. 781-771 B.C.E.), see Edward L. Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou History” in Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy eds., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 348 and 342-43.

¹⁰⁹ *HS*, 1935.

¹¹⁰ *HS*, 1935.

¹¹¹ This is the opinion, for example, of Sui and Tang dynasty scholar Yan Shigu. See *HS*, 1935 (n. 5).

¹¹² *HS*, 1935.

¹¹³ See Yan Shigu’s comments in *HS*, 1936 (n. 11).

“mendacious words of commonfolk” 民之訛言 in widespread circulation, which presumably referred to false rumors circulating in the body politic.¹¹⁴ Liu Xiang interprets this phrase in the *Zheng yue* as meaning “the commonfolk took as wrong what was right” 民以是為非, believing slanderous accusations against the morally blameless.¹¹⁵ As though he were making an observation of sociology or political science (in which phenomena in human society are viewed as according with certain latent patterns and principles), among a list of natural anomalies, Liu Xiang includes the circulation of slanderous rumors as a mechanical consequence and symptom of poor political leadership.

Liu Xiang describes how in the wake of the exile of King Li and the murder of King You, Zhou power fell into serious decline.¹¹⁶ The rise to power of usurpers in the Zhou court, whom Liu Xiang refers to as “hereditary grandees of the Yin clan” 尹氏世卿 during the last years of the reign of King You’s successor, King Ping 平 (r. 770-720 B.C.E.), is another milestone that Liu Xiang points to in his tracking of the erosion of order in the Zhou domain.¹¹⁷ King Ping’s final years ushered in a long period in which “the numerous vassals turned their backs, rebelled, and did not come to court, and the house of Zhou declined and became faint” 諸侯背畔而不朝 周室卑微.¹¹⁸ During this period, “there was massive disorder under heaven” 天下大亂.¹¹⁹

Just as he uses the *Shi jing* as a source for anomalies during the reign of King You, Liu Xiang uses the *Chunqiu* (a record for events that covers a span of time from 722-468 B.C.E.) as a

¹¹⁴ *HS*, 1935.

¹¹⁵ *HS*, 1935.

¹¹⁶ *HS*, 1936. King Li was exiled in 842 B.C.E. See Shaughnessy, 546. King You was killed 771 B.C.E. by Quan Rong 犬戎 invaders who sacked the Zhou capital. See Shaughnessy, 545.

¹¹⁷ *HS*, 1936.

¹¹⁸ *HS*, 1936.

¹¹⁹ *HS*, 1936.

source for abnormal occurrences in the historic record for the centuries after the end of the reign of King Ping. In his memorial to Thearch Yuan, Liu Xiang provides a detailed inventory of natural anomalies for this period:

二百四十二年之間。日食三十六。地震五。山陵崩阨二。彗星三見。夜常星不見。夜中星隕如雨一。火災十四。長狄入三國。五石隕墜。六鷓退飛。多麋。有蜮蜚鸚鵡來巢者皆一見。書冥晦。雨木冰。李梅冬實。七月霜降草木不死。八月殺菽。大雨雹。雨雪蠹霆失序相乘。水旱饑螻螻蜂午并起。¹²⁰

In the span of 242 years: Eclipses, 36. Earthquakes, 5. Mountains and knolls collapsing and crumbling, 2. Broom-stars [i.e., comets], 3 appeared. At night, frequently stars did not appear. During the night, stars falling from the sky like rain, 1. Fire disasters, 14. The Long Di entered three states. 5 rocks fell from the sky and crashed into the earth. 6 waterbirds flew backwards. There were many deer. There were sand-spitters [i.e., a mythic invertebrate creature], *baih* bugs, and crested mynae that came and nested: each of these appeared once. It is written that it was dark [*ming* 冥] and dim [*hui* 晦]. It rained wooden ice. Plums and prunuses came to fruition in the winter. [One year,] in the seventh month frost descended, but plants and trees did not die. [One year,] in the eighth month, [frost descended] and it killed the legume plants. Hail rained down in great profusion. Rain and snow and thunder and lightning lost their order and were borne on one another. Floods, droughts, famines, locust larvae, locusts, wood-boring larvae, and swarms of hornets came, one after the other.

Most of the incidents or phenomena that Liu Xiang lists are recorded in all three versions of the *Chunqiu* attached to those traditions of its commentary that have been passed down to the present.¹²¹ Most likely because there did not exist a similar year-by-year record containing mentions of anomalous occurrences for those years of the Western Zhou period marked by virtuous political rule, Liu Xiang provides no basis for comparison. But judging from Liu Xiang's characterization of the golden age of the Western Zhou as an era in which "ten thousand

¹²⁰ *HS*, 1936-37.

¹²¹ See Yan Shigu's concordance to Liu Xiang's list in *HS*, 1937-41. Yan Shigu attributes the naming of the three states that the Long Di 长狄 entered to the *Gongyang zhuan* (in a passage that comments on a mention of the *Di* in the *Chunqiu* record). *HS*, 1938-39. Yan Shigu attributes Liu Xiang's mention of deer to the record of the seventh year (687 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Zhuang 莊 of Lu (693-662 B.C.E.), which reads, "in the winter, there were many deer" 冬多麋 (i.e., an unusually large number of deer). *HS*, 1939.

objects were brought to harmony in the wilderness,” the implication is that anomalies simply did not occur then.

Liu Xiang’s inventory is distinct from Dong Zhongshu’s discussion of anomalies (Dong Zhongshu’s views will be discussed in detail below) because of its specifying particular incidents and its creation of well-defined categories by which it numbers the occurrences. While Dong Zhongshu seems to have been more interested in general principles, Liu Xiang’s thinking is marked by a degree of specificity that bears a resemblance to the taxonomic system of the *Wuxing zhuan*. Also, unlike Dong Zhongshu, who seems to separate destructive abnormal events from those that are simply bizarre, Liu Xiang’s inventory of anomalies that putatively occurred in the Eastern Zhou period mingles benign events, such as waterfowl flying backwards, with widely destructive phenomena like floods and famines.

Despite Liu Xiang’s points of difference with Dong Zhongshu in terms of the details of their taxonomie, his thinking about the mechanics underling anomalies is similar to Dong Zhongshu, being informed by a material philosophy featuring the concept of “vapors” (*qi* 氣). After rounding off his portrait of the tranquil days of the Western Zhou and his inventory of anomalies recorded in Spring and Autumn period history, he concludes:

由此可觀和氣致祥. 乖氣致異. 祥多者其國安. 異眾者其國危.¹²²

From this, it can be observed that the vapors of harmony cause conspicuous, portentous anomalies. The vapors of discord cause intensely irregular occurrences. In times when conspicuous, portentous anomalies are many, the country in which they occur is stable. In times when intensely irregular occurrences are in great multitudes, the country in which they occur is in peril.

¹²² *HS*, 1941.

Order in human society fosters “vapors of harmony” (*he qi* 和氣), which bring about “conspicuous, portentous anomalies” (*xiang* 祥). Dysfunction stimulates “vapors of discord” (*guai qi* 乖氣), and these cause “intensely irregular occurrences” (*yi* 異). Here, Liu Xiang uses the term *xiang* 祥 to categorically denote anomalies that signify salutary conditions in human society and resulting future prosperity and stability. However, while examples of the opposite category of “intensely irregular occurrences” (*yi* 異) are in abundance in his letter, he does not provide examples of *xiang* 祥 beyond mentioning good grain harvests that characterized the early days of Zhou rule.¹²³

The circumstances in which Liu Xiang presented his memorial to Thearch Yuan are significant. Liu Xiang’s memorial was sent to Thearch Yuan as a petition to the emperor to counter an immediate threat, which Ban Gu portrays as the pernicious influence of self-interested and backbiting counselors in the Western Han court. Ban Gu presents the years after the accession of Thearch Yuan in 48 B.C.E. as being marked by a bitter rivalry between two factions. One of these was a group of capable, learned scholar-officials who had risen to high rank because of their intellectual aptitudes and attainments in letters, consisting of four members: Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (d. ca. 45 B.C.E.), Zhou Kan 周堪 (fl. mid-1st cent. B.C.E.), Jin Chang 金敞 (fl. mid-1st cent. B.C.E.), and Liu Xiang himself.¹²⁴ The other faction was made up of members of the “outer kin” (*wai qi* 外戚: i.e., the families of the emperor’s consorts) and “servant officials” (*huan guan* 宦官: i.e., servants of the royal family who had been appointed to

¹²³ *HS*, 1933-34.

¹²⁴ *HS*, 1929.

official positions). Ban Gu identifies four individuals who belonged to this faction: two members of the outer kin whom he names as Xu 許 (fl. mid-1st cent. B.C.E.) and Shi 史 (fl. mid-1st cent. B.C.E.), and two servant officials, Hong Gong 弘恭 (fl. mid-1st cent. B.C.E.) and Shi Xian 石顯 (fl. mid-1st cent. B.C.E.), who presided over the “documents of the inner court” (*zhong shu* 中書).¹²⁵ According to Ban Gu, this second faction acted “in their positions with abandon and recklessly” (*zai wei fang zong* 在位放縱) and “manipulated [the balance of] authority” (*nong quan* 弄權).¹²⁶ When Liu Xiang and the other factioneers of his group planned to remove the offending rival faction from power, their plans were leaked, and members of the rival faction slandered Liu Xiang and his compeers.¹²⁷ Hong Gong and Shi Xian submitted a memorial to the emperor making a number of false accusations against Xiao Wangzhi, Zhou Kan, and Liu Xiang, which included “denigrating and defaming senior courtiers, derogating and casting away kith and kin, and desiring by this means to concentrate and arrogate the power of authority” 數讒訴大臣毀離親戚欲以專擅權勢.¹²⁸ Perhaps most damning, the memorial accused Liu Xiang and the others of attempting to hoodwink the emperor: “as courtiers, they are disloyal; in deluding the one above, [they] depart from the way” 為臣不忠誣上不道.¹²⁹ Thearch Yuan was swayed by their aspersions. Liu Xiang and Zhou Kan were imprisoned, and Xiao Wangzhi was ejected from his official position.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ *HS*, 1929-30.

¹²⁶ *HS*, 1929-30.

¹²⁷ *HS*, 1930.

¹²⁸ Hong Gong and Shi Xian’s letter to Thearch Yuan is cited in the chapter of the *Han shu* titled “Xiao Wangzhi zhuan” 蕭望之傳 (“Xiao Wangzhi Traditions”), which recounts the life of Xiao Wangzhi. *HS*, 3286.

¹²⁹ *HS*, 3286.

¹³⁰ *HS*, 1930.

The “Chu Yuan wang zhuan” chapter recounts that after Liu Xiang and his clique were toppled, a series of anomalies occurred. There was an earthquake in the spring of that year, and in the summer, a “stranger star” (*ke xing* 客星: i.e., a nova) appeared in the “rolled tongues” (*juan she* 卷舌) section of the *mao* 昴 lunar lodging.¹³¹ Yan Shigu’s commentary to the *Han shu* points out that abnormal activity in the “rolled tongues” section of the *mao* lodging was understood as signifying a situation in which “counsel [was] false” (*yi fei* 議非).¹³² On the basis of these anomalies, Thearch Yuan feared that the accusations against Liu Xiang and his faction were untrue, and he restored all of them to high office.¹³³ Hong Gong and Shi Xian continued to hold status at court in the position of “gentleman of the inner court” (*zhong lang* 中郎).¹³⁴ In the wake of this restoration, there was another earthquake in the winter.¹³⁵ With both factions still in positions of influence, the second earthquake, likely interpreted as indicating that something was still amiss, renewed tension in the court. Liu Xiang observed that Hong Gong and Shi Xian’s faction still had their sights aimed at him and his group.¹³⁶ Concerned that the rival faction were going to renew their assault against him and his compeers, and wanting to communicate with Thearch Yuan about the recent anomalies (expressed in Ban Gu’s narration as “incidents of mutation” 變事), Liu Xiang dispatched a member of his own “outer family” (*wai qin* 外親, i.e., kin by ties of marriage) to deliver a memorial to Thearch Yuan. The memorial that he sent is the

¹³¹ *HS*, 1930.

¹³² *HS*, 1931.

¹³³ *HS*, 1930.

¹³⁴ *HS*, 1930.

¹³⁵ *HS*, 1930.

¹³⁶ *HS*, 1930.

one discussed above, the first of Liu Xiang's three memorials cited in the "Chu Yuan wang zhuan" chapter.¹³⁷

While Ban Gu does not specify in what year of Thearch Yuan's reign it was that this scandal occurred, a decree from Thearch Yuan contained in the chapter of the *Han shu* containing an account of Xiao Wangzhi's life, entitled "Xiao Wangzhi zhuan" 蕭望之傳 ("Xiao Wangzhi Traditions"), contains a clue. The decree, listed in the chapter after a description of Liu Xiang and Zhou Kan being ordered to prison, refers to Xiao Wangzhi and mentions "forgetting his transgressive wrongdoing" (*wang ta zui guo* 亡它罪過).¹³⁸ It officially absolves Xiao Wangzhi and restores his title, but orders that Liu Xiang and Zhou Kan be stripped of their positions.¹³⁹ It is thus likely that the decree was made sometime before all members of Liu Xiang's faction were restored, and that there was a period in which Xiao Wangzhi was given leniency and able to resume his official position, but Liu Xiang and Zhou Kan were still placed in punitive circumstances. The decree notes that Xiao Wangzhi has "instructed me, the sovereign, for eight years" 傅朕八年.¹⁴⁰ This suggests that Liu Xiang's imprisonment was sometime around the eighth year of Thearch Yuan's reign (ca. 41 B.C.E.). While it is possible that Xiao Wangzhi had begun to tutor Thearch Yuan in affairs of the state prior to his accession to the emperorship, other details in the "Xiao Wangzhi zhuan" detail that Xiao Wangzhi (alongside Zhou Kan) had officially begun instructing Thearch Yuan soon after he came to power: "previously, Wangzhi and Kan were received with great respect as preceptor mentors.

¹³⁷ *HS*, 1930.

¹³⁸ *HS*, 3287.

¹³⁹ *HS*, 3287.

¹⁴⁰ *HS*, 3287.

When the one above acceded to his position, he frequently received them at banquets, and they spoke about the controlling of disorder and laid out matters of kingship” 望之基本以師傅見尊重上即位數宴見言治亂陳王事.¹⁴¹ However, strictly speaking, this description does not preclude the possibility that Xiao Wangzhi had begun mentoring Thearch Yuan in some capacity prior to his accession. It is thus unclear at what point in the eight years after the beginning of Thearch Yuan’s reign the scandal erupted, but it was at least no later than 41 B.C.E.

The circumstances in which Liu Xiang submitted his memorial detailing the causes of anomalies in human corruption (through the material medium of vapors 氣) for the immediate purposes of resisting the threatening influence of corrupt competitors at court and self-preservation are significant. Liu Xiang, recently restored from his bout of punitive confinement but still under threat, writes about anomalies to keep himself out of prison and in a place of power. Moreover, while Liu Xiang’s memorial draws deeply from the history of Western and Eastern Zhou dynasties to make its claims, the anomalies that Liu Xiang’s memorial immediately addresses are described as having taken place in recent months, with the suggestion that Liu Xiang had been a direct witness to them. There is thus an immediacy to Liu Xiang’s memorial. Liu Xiang wrote a history of anomalies to convince Thearch Yuan that something very wrong at his court; the implication was that Thearch Yuan’s kinsman at court and the servant officials with their “abandon and recklessness” (*fang zong* 放縱) had contaminated Han rule, and that their continued presence risked further disruption.

According to Ban Gu’s account of the power struggles in Thearch Yuan’s court, Liu Xiang’s deployment of knowledge of anomalies had mixed results. Despite continued attempts

¹⁴¹ *HS*, 3283.

by the rival faction to slander Liu Xiang and his compeers, certain members like Liu Xiang and Zhou Kan were not positively punished.¹⁴² However, their influence was greatly diminished.¹⁴³ Over the course of the struggle for power, the rival faction contrived to have Xiao Wangzhi put back in prison, where he despaired and committed suicide.¹⁴⁴ Hong Gong, Shi Xian, and their fellow factioneers emerged from the struggle with renewed power, with members of their clique holding all of the five positions in the office of the Magister of Documents 尚書.¹⁴⁵ Zhou Kan, who was no longer able to gain an audience with the emperor, fell ill and died.¹⁴⁶ Liu Xiang laid low—in a state that Ban Gu’s describes as *fei* 廢 (“discarded”)—for more than a decade.¹⁴⁷ Hong Gong, Shi Xian, and their faction were eventually punished for their misdeeds after Thearch Cheng acceded to power in 32 B.C.E., at which point Liu Xiang was also restored to service, but Ban Gu does not explicitly connect this turn of events to any action on the part of Liu Xiang.¹⁴⁸ Liu Xiang continued to serve at Thearch Cheng’s court as a kind of advisor, attempting to instruct the emperor through lengthy memorials informed by anomaly cases culled from history, like the one he had sent to Thearch Yuan.¹⁴⁹ While Thearch Cheng deeply admired the depth of Liu Xiang’s learning, he did not adopt Liu Xiang’s policy recommendations.¹⁵⁰ Amidst a court atmosphere described by Ban Gu as being one in which the emperor distanced himself from

¹⁴² *HS*, 1948-49.

¹⁴³ *HS*, 1949.

¹⁴⁴ *HS*, 3288.

¹⁴⁵ *HS*, 1948.

¹⁴⁶ *HS*, 1948.

¹⁴⁷ *HS*, 1948.

¹⁴⁸ *HS*, 1949.

¹⁴⁹ His two letters to Thearch Cheng are in *HS*, 1950-57 and *HS*, 1958-66, respectively.

¹⁵⁰ *HS*, 1957.

other members of the Liu paternal line descended from the founders of the Han dynasty, Liu Xiang retired and passed away.¹⁵¹

IV.C. The Dating of the *Wuxing zhuan*

That Liu Xiang's views on the *Chunqiu* and its commentaries were so deeply informed by the *Wuxing zhuan* (as is apparent from analysis of Liu Xiang's comments cited in the "Wuxing zhi")—in contrast to Dong Zhongshu's comments on the *Chunqiu* that do not mention the distinct terminology of the *Wuxing zhuan* at all—raises questions about the status of the *Wuxing zhuan* in Western Han scholarship and provides a reference point for considering its origins. As of the lifetime of Liu Xiang, which spanned the middle decades of the first century B.C.E., the *Wuxing zhuan* had apparently gained credence in Western Han scholarly circles.

Ban Gu recalls that the influence of *Wuxing zhuan* (together with the "Hong fan" that it explicates) was a feature of Liu Xiang's intellectual life after his restoration following the accession of Thearch Cheng. At some point during Thearch Cheng's reign, a slew of anomalies occurred. In Ban Gu's words, "at the time, there were several great, intensely irregular occurrences" (*shi shu you da yi* 時數有大異).¹⁵² Liu Xiang claimed that Thearch Cheng's improper favoritism towards a faction led by Thearch Cheng's maternal uncle, Wang Feng 王鳳 (fl. ca. mid-late 1st cent. B.C.E.), was the fault stimulating the strange events.¹⁵³ Making use of his access to the innermost reaches of the imperial library, granted to him by an order from the emperor to "collate the inner five canonical imperial books" (*jiao zhong wu jing mi shu* 校中五經祕書), Liu Xiang engaged in a study of the "Hong fan," producing a book titled the *Hong fan*

¹⁵¹ *HS*, 1966.

¹⁵² *HS*, 1951.

¹⁵³ *HS*, 1951.

Wuxing zhuan lun 洪範五行傳論 (“A Critical Assessment of the Five Elements Tradition of the Great Plan”), as Ban Gu recalls:

向見尚書洪範. 箕子為武王陳五行陰陽休咎之應. 向乃集合上古以來歷春秋六國至秦漢符瑞災異之記. 推迹行事. 連傳禍福. 著其占驗. 比類相從. 各有條目. 凡十一篇. 號曰洪範五行傳論. 奏之.¹⁵⁴

Liu Xiang saw the “Great Plan” [chapter] of the *Exalted Documents*. For King Wu, Jizi arranged into an organized structure the favorable and unfavorable responses of the five elements and the *yin* and *yang*. Liu Xiang thereupon gathered together the record of tokens of propitiousness and disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences from high antiquity down through the Spring and Autumn and Six Kingdoms period and into the Qin and Han periods. He followed the trail in actions and events. He related in connection calamities and good fortune. He recorded the outcomes of the prognostications performed about them. He aligned [events] with categories according to [the one to which they] corresponded. Each [category] had its sectional rubric. In total, it was eleven chapters. It was called *A Critical Assessment of the Five Elements Tradition of the Great Plan*. He presented it.

The “Hong fan” does not mention *yin* and *yang* as basic forces informing matter, so the *Shang shu* “Hong fan” in the imperial library appears to have had the *Wuxing zhuan* tradition attached to it. The *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan lun*, a concordance of anomalous events recorded in the historical record from high antiquity down through the Han arranged according to the “Hong fan” and its *Wuxing zhuan*, sounds much like what is seen in the remarks of Liu Xiang cited in the “Wuxing zhi” (and indeed in the overall structure of the “Wuxing zhi”). Curiously, there is no mention of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan lun* in the preface to the “Wuxing zhi”; this appears to be its only mention in the entire *Han shu*. However, Ban Gu’s description in his preface to the “Wuxing zhi” of Liu Xiang’s having “mastered the *Guliang Springs and Autumns*, counting its incidents of calamity and good fortune, and relating these by means of the ‘Great Plan’” 治穀梁春秋數其福禍傳以洪範 is similar to his description in the “Chu Yuan wang zhuan” of Liu

¹⁵⁴ *HS*, 1950.

Xiang's scholarly activities in the imperial library that produced *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan lun*.

This may have very well been the moment in Liu Xiang's career in which he adopted the language and taxonomy of the "Hong fan" and its *Wuxing zhuan* in his analysis of history.

One might wonder if Liu Xiang had some part in the composition of the *Wuxing zhuan*.¹⁵⁵ However, statements by Ban Gu in the body text of the "Wuxing zhi" suggest that the *Wuxing zhuan* predated Liu Xiang by at least a generation. An example of these can be found in one of Ban Gu's unattributed recollections from Western Han history, in the section of the "Wuxing zhi" arranged under its citation of the passage of the *Wuxing zhuan* about royal/august perfection.¹⁵⁶

In this section, Ban Gu narrates an episode from the Yuanping 元平 period (74 B.C.E.) of the reign of Han Thearch Zhao 昭 (r. 86-74 B.C.E.) in which the scholar Xiahou Sheng submitted a version of this *Wuxing zhuan* passage about royal perfection to officials in the Han court.¹⁵⁷ According to Ban Gu, Xiahou Sheng submitted the passage in order to explain a claim he had made following the death of Thearch Zhao and the installment of King He 賀 of Changyi 昌邑 as his successor. During a prolonged spell in which the sky was constantly "dark" (*yin* 陰)

¹⁵⁵ Chen Kanli discusses the history of the view that Liu Xiang had authored the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* as being the result of mislabeling of Liu Xiang's annotated edition of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan lun* named and described in the *Han shu*) that circulated in the Sui and Tang dynasties. See *Ruxue shuxue yu zhengzhi—Zaiyi de zhengzhi wenhua shi*, 70.

¹⁵⁶ The passage of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* quoted as the beginning of the section of the "Wuxing zhi" devoted to anomalies arising from failures in royal perfection reads, "The sovereign does not reach the highest point of excellence: this means that establishment has not been achieved. Its unfavorable state is disarray. Its punishment is constant *yin*. Its extreme evil is weakness. At times there will thus be eerie occurrences in darts. At times there will thus be abnormalities of dragons and snakes. At times there will thus be startling maladies in horses. At times there will thus be infections in which humans who are below attack those who are above. At times the sun and moon will thus depart from their normal paths of motion. At times stars and celestial bodies will thus move against their normal paths of motion." 皇之不極，是謂不建，厥咎眊，厥罰恆陰，厥極弱。時則有射妖，時則有龍蛇之孽，時則有馬禍(馱)，時則有下人伐上之痾，時則有日月亂行，星辰逆行。 See Chapter 1, Table 1.1., Section C1.

¹⁵⁷ For Ban Gu's account of this episode, see *HS*, 1459-60.

so that the sun and moon were not visible, Xiahou Sheng accosted King He and, pointing out the recent strange weather, warned that there were mutineers at court plotting to overturn his reign.¹⁵⁸ King He was enraged at this accusation of disorder in his court and had Xiahou Sheng taken to officers of the court for questioning.¹⁵⁹

The officer of the court who was charged with interrogating Xiahou Sheng was White Great General 白大將軍 Huo Guang 霍光 (fl. ca. 74 B.C.E), who as it happened was just then plotting with another court officer, Chariot Cavalier General 車騎 Zhang Anshi 張安世 (fl. ca. 74 B.C.E), to overturn King He. Huo Guang and Zhang Anshi feared that Xiahou Sheng had discovered their conspiracy. They summoned him for interrogation, and Xiahou Sheng submitted to them the passage from the *Wuxing zhuan* about violations in royal perfection to explain his statements to King He. The version of the passage that Xiahou Sheng submitted read, “the sovereign does not reach the highest point of excellence; its punishment is constant *yin*; at times thus humans who are below attack those who are above” 皇之不極厥罰恆陰時則有下人伐上.¹⁶⁰ Xiahou explained that he was merely interpreting the anomalous weather conditions according to the schema of the *Wuxing zhuan*, based on the logic that King He “does not dare inspect well-inspected speech” 不敢察察言 (evidence of King He's imperfection by the standards of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*), and therefore Xiahou had “said that among the courtiers below there is conspiring” 云臣下有謀. Huo Guang and Zhang Anshi were astounded at the accuracy of Xiahou Sheng's claim, but realized that he was making a generic evaluation of the times as prescribed by the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* based on astronomical/meteorological

¹⁵⁸ *HS*, 1459.

¹⁵⁹ *HS*, 1459.

¹⁶⁰ *HS*, 1459.

conditions and the actions of King He, rather than specifically intending to expose them as the conspirators who indeed were plotting against King He.

This episode is purported to have occurred in 74 B.C.E. At the time, Liu Xiang (b. 79 B.C.E.) would have been a young child. Since Xiahou Sheng is recorded as having quoted a substantial portion of the royal perfection passage of the *Wuxing zhuan*, it is evident from Ban Gu's account that the *Wuxing zhuan* existed in some form prior to Liu Xiang.

Because the passage quoted by Xiahou Sheng is only a partial version of the full *Wuxing zhuan* passage that appears in the “Wuxing zhi,” with the term *ke* 痾 noticeably absent, it raises the question of whether or not the six terms for strange incidents outlined in the version of the *Wuxing zhuan* cited in the “Wuxing zhi” were added after Xiahou Sheng's time, and perhaps by Liu Xiang himself.

However, elsewhere in the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu makes statements suggesting that the *Wuxing zhuan* that Xiahou Sheng read was actually identical to the version that Liu Xiang studied:

孝武時. 夏侯始昌通五經. 善推五行傳. 以傳族子夏侯勝. 下及許商. 皆以教所賢弟子. 其傳與劉向同. 唯劉歆傳獨異.¹⁶¹

In the time of Xiao Wu, Xiahou Shichang thoroughly comprehended the five classics and was skilled at promoting the *Five Elements Tradition*. He transmitted it to a child of his kin-group, Xiahou Sheng. It went down to Xu Shang. They all used it to instruct the disciples whom they deemed worthy. Their *Tradition* was the same as Liu Xiang's. Only the *Tradition* of Liu Xin alone was different.

The “Yiwen zhi” of the *Han shu* includes the names of two texts that contained versions of the *Wuxing zhuan*. One was associated with Liu Xiang and is titled the *Liu Xiang Wuxing zhuan ji* 劉

¹⁶¹ *HS*, 1353.

向五行傳記 (“Liu Xiang’s Record of the Five Elements Tradition”).¹⁶² It was a relatively long book (11 scrolls [*juan* 卷]), and presumably this contained a copy of the text of the *Wuxing zhuan* that Liu Xiang used and Liu Xiang’s remarks on historical sources (like the *Chunqiu* and the *Zuo zhuan*) that he interprets using the *Wuxing zhuan* and that are cited in the “Wuxing zhi.” The other version of the *Wuxing zhuan* listed in the “Yiwen zhi” is identified with the name of the figure Xu Shang 許商 (who seems to have been active in the years of Thearch Cheng, which would have made him a contemporary of Liu Xiang), and is titled the *Xu Shang Wuxing zhuan ji* 許商五行傳記 (“Xu Shang’s Record of the Five Elements Tradition”).¹⁶³ It is a shorter book consisting of just one tablet or chapter (*pian* 篇). These two texts are doubtlessly the ones that Ban Gu compared to Liu Xin’s version of the *Wuxing zhuan* and that he took as reflecting accurately the version of the *Wuxing zhuan* that Xiahou Shichang had available to him.

Despite this, it is of course possible that a transmitter of the *Wuxing zhuan* after Xiahou Sheng added content to the *Wuxing zhuan* (such as the terms for the six strange anomalies), and that this version was the version that eventually made it to Xu Shang and Liu Xiang. However, Ban Gu makes no statements about this possibility and thus appears firm in his belief that the version of the *Wuxing zhuan* that Xiahou Shichang passed down was identical to the version that eventually made it down to Xu Shang and Liu Xiang. If this understanding is credited, the lifetime of Xiahou Shichang (ca. 144-87 B.C.E.) then becomes the *terminus ante quem* for the composition of the *Wuxing zhuan* as it had been handed down to the Eastern Han. In the passage above describing the transmission history of the *Wuxing zhuan*, Ban Gu describes Xiahou Sheng

¹⁶² *HS*, 1705.

¹⁶³ *HS*, 1705.

as “a child of the kin-group” 族子 of Xiahou Shichang, which means that Xiahou Shichang would have been in his prime at least a generation prior to Xiahou Sheng, so that the time range of the *terminus ante quem* for the *Wuxing zhuan* can be adjusted to the period ca. 144-ca. 100 B.C.E.

While the *Wuxing zhuan* has been traditionally understood as being a chapter of the *Shang shu da zhuan* 尚書大傳 (“Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents”) attributed to Fu Sheng 伏生 (fl. ca. 221-178 B.C.E.), there is no mention of an association between Fu Sheng and the *Wuxing zhuan* in the passages of the *Han shu* that give an account of Fu Sheng’s life and scholarship.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, no references to the *Wuxing zhuan* in the *Han shu* mention Fu Sheng at

¹⁶⁴ Chen Shouqi’s 陳壽祺 (1771-1834) edition of the *Shang shu Da zhuan* 尚書大傳 includes the text of the *Hong fan wuxing zhuan* as the corresponding commentary to the “Hong fan” chapter of the *Shang shu*. See Chen Shouqi ed., *Shang shu Da zhuan* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, Zhonghua Minguo 26 nian [1937]), 2.59-81. In the same edition, Chen Shouqi’s history of the *Shang shu Da zhuan* in the *Ding ben xu* 定本序 (“Preface to the Definitive Edition”) cites Eastern Han scholar Zheng Xuan’s *Shang shu Da zhuan xu* 尚書大傳序 (“Preface to the Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents”), where Zheng Xuan discusses the origins of the *Shang shu Da zhuan*. Cheng Shouqi’s summary of Zheng Xuan’s opinion is stated as “Zheng Kangcheng’s preface states that it emerged from Fu Sheng” 鄭康成序謂出自伏生. (See p. 1 of the *Ding ben xu* section of Chen Shouqi’s *Da zhuan*.) This seems to be a statement that Fu Sheng was the author of the *Da zhuan*. (Curiously, Chen Shouqi does not appear to have included in his edition of the *Shang shu* the text of Zheng Xuan’s *Shang shu Da zhuan xu*.) However, Zheng Xuan’s language in the *Shang shu Da zhuan xu* is ambiguous: “The *Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents*. It likely was from Fu Sheng” 尚書大傳蓋自伏生也. See Wang Kaiyun, *Shang shu Da zhuan bu zhu* 尚書大傳補註 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), *Xu* 叙 (“Preface”) section, 1. The graph *zi* 自 (“from”) in Zheng Xuan’s diction could be understood as indicating either authorship or earliest known transmitter and is not a definitive statement of authorship, as would be the case had the verb used in Zheng Xuan’s statement been terms more conventionally used to indicate authorship, such as *zuo* 作 or *zhu* 著. For content of the *Han Shu* dealing with Fu Sheng, see the *Ru lin zhuan* 儒林傳 (“Ruist Grove Traditions”) chapter in *HS*, 3603.

Michael Nylan discredits the views of certain modern scholars that Fu Sheng was the author of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*. See Michael Nylan, “On *Hanshu* ‘Wuxing zhi’ 五行志 and Ban Gu’s Project,” 238-39.

Chen Kanli discusses how while certain recent scholars, including Li Xueqin 李學勤 (1933-2019) and Feng Haofei 馮浩菲 accepted the traditional view, Qing scholar Zhao Yi 趙翼 proposed that it was actually Xiahou Shichang who authored the *Wuxing zhuan*, and twentieth century scholars including Mou Fenglin 繆鳳林 (1895-1955) and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 also have cited evidence in favor of this view. Jiang Shanguo 蔣善國 (1898-1986), Xu Xingwu, and You Ziyong 游自勇 also favor the idea that Xiahou Shichang authored the *Wuxing zhuan*. See *Dong Zhongshu de ‘Chunqiu’ zaiyi lun*, 70. The idea that Xiahou Shichang authored the *Wuxing zhuan* appears to rest on the statements in the *Han shu* that note that Xiahou Shichang was the earliest possessor and transmitter of the *Wuxing zhuan*. However, there are no statements in the *Han shu* that definitively indicate that Xiahou Shichang was its author.

all. The earliest point of reference given by the *Han shu* is that Xiahou Shichang passed the *Wuxing zhuan* on to Xiahou Sheng.

V. Stratigraphic Analysis, Layer 3: Dong Zhongshu's Grounding of Anomaly-Centered Political Philosophy in the *Chunqiu* Historical Record

For 78 (or 21%) of the 372 accounts of anomalous events listed in the “Wuxing zhi,” Ban Gu quotes remarks made by Dong Zhongshu about each of these incidents or phenomena as they are described in the historical source from which Ban Gu cites it. The overwhelming majority (77) of the incidents for which Ban Gu quotes Dong Zhongshu's remarks are brief passages from the *Chunqiu*, with only 1 (an account of a “conflagration” 災 in the ancestral temple of Thearch Gao 高 recorded as having occurred in 135 B.C.E., during the reign of Thearch Wu) corresponding to the unnamed sources of Qin and Han history that Ban Gu used.¹⁶⁵

V.A. Dong Zhongshu's Use of the *Gongyang Chunqiu* Version of History

Ban Gu's association of Dong Zhongshu with the *Gongyang Chunqiu* in the preface of the “Wuxing zhi” suggests that Ban Gu was using some record of Dong Zhongshu's comments on the version of the *Chunqiu* transmitted in the *Gongyang Chunqiu* tradition. Indeed, evidence that Dong Zhongshu's commentary on the *Chunqiu* was directed at the account of history given in the *Gongyang Chunqiu* is seen, for example, in Ban Gu's citation of Dong Zhongshu's commentary on an event that is recorded in the winter of the tenth year (650 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Xi 僖 of Lu (r. 659-627 B.C.E.) in the *Chunqiu* of the *Gongyang* tradition as “a great shower of hail” 大雨雹.¹⁶⁶ A similar event is described in the *Chunqiu* of the *Zuo zhuan* and

¹⁶⁵ *HS*, 1331.

¹⁶⁶ *HS*, 1423. For this passage as it appears in the *Gongyang* version of the *Chunqiu*, see Ruan Yuan ed., *Chong kan Song ben Gongyang zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本公羊注疏附校勘記 (Nanchang: Nanchang fu xue 南昌府學,

Guliang traditions as “a great shower of snow” 大雨雪.¹⁶⁷ These two different descriptions presumably refer to the same event.

Ban Gu cites Dong Zhongshu’s comments on the hail shower recorded in the *Gongyang*’s version of the *Chunqiu*:

董仲舒以爲公脅於齊桓公. 立妾爲夫人不敢進群妾. 故專壹之象見諸雹. 皆爲有所漸脅也. 行專壹之政云.¹⁶⁸

Dong Zhongshu held that the Lord was coerced by Lord Huan of Qi. He installed a concubine as his wife and did not dare to install a harem of concubines. Therefore, the image of preferential treatment of one [individual] appeared in the form of hail. It means that all deeds have been saturated with coercion. That is to say that governing marked by preferential treatment of one [individual] was being done.

Dong Zhongshu’s observation that Lord Xi had installed a concubine as his wife is a reference to the *Gongyang* commentary to the *Chunqiu* record for the eighth year (652 B.C.E.) of Lord Xi’s reign. The *Chunqiu* records that Lord Xi had that year “performed large-scale sacrifices in the great ancestral temple, and used [the occasion] to present [his] wife” 禘于大廟. 用致夫人.¹⁶⁹ The *Gongyang* commentary proposes that the language of the *Chunqiu*’s record of this event indicates the impropriety of Lord Xi’s using the occasion of the large-scale sacrifices 禘 to announce his wife, Sheng Jiang 聲姜,¹⁷⁰ to the ancestral spirits: “What does ‘use’ 用 mean? ‘Use’ 用 means that it should not have been used [in this way]. What does ‘present’ 致 mean?

Jiaqing ershi nian 嘉慶二十年 [1815]), 11.8a: rpt. in *Ruan ke Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 阮元刻春秋公羊傳注疏 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2020), 531. [Cited hereafter as *GYZZS*.]

¹⁶⁷ Ban Gu cites both versions of the *Chunqiu* record. See *HS*, 1423. For the *Zuo zhuan* version of this entry in the *Chunqiu*, see *YBJZZ*, 363. For the *Guliang zhuan* version of this entry in the *Chunqiu*, see *GLZZS*, 8.8b; 308.

¹⁶⁸ *HS*, 1423.

¹⁶⁹ *GYZZS*, 11.1b: 518.

¹⁷⁰ The *Zuo zhuan* commentary for the seventeenth year (643 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Xi of Lu mentions Sheng Jiang by name. See *YBJZZ*, 408. Yang Bojun identifies her as the wife of Lord Xi.

‘Present’ 致 means that [a wife] should not have been presented [in this way]. Using the large-scale sacrifices to present one’s wife is not ritually proper” 用者何用者不宜用也致者何致者不宜致也禘用致夫人非禮也。¹⁷¹

In addition to signaling ritual impropriety, according to the *Gongyang* commentary for this passage of the *Chunqiu*, that the language of the *Chunqiu* record here does not refer to Sheng Jiang by the conventional construction that would be used for her as the wife of a duke, Jiang shi 姜氏 (“the one of the surname Jiang”)—which would have referred to her by her surname, Jiang 姜—was an intentional omission.¹⁷² According to the *Gongyang* commentary, this omission shows that the compiler of the *Chunqiu* (Kongzi was presumably understood as the compiler of the *Chunqiu* by the *Gongyang* author) did not believe that Sheng Jiang should be given the full status and treatment that otherwise redounded to the wife of the Lu monarch. The *Gongyang* position is that by this omission, the *Chunqiu* compiler in fact derided Lord Xi for installing a mere concubine as his wife: “It ridicules [him] for taking a concubine as [his] wife” 譏以妾為妻。¹⁷³ The *Gongyang* surmises that Lord Xi been coerced into installing Sheng Jiang as his wife: “Most likely [he] had been coerced by [the circumstance that] the Qi maid[s] accompanying the bride arrived first” 蓋脅于齊媵女之先至者也。¹⁷⁴ The insinuation here appears to be that the monarch of Qi at the time, Lord Huan 桓 (d. 643 B.C.E.), had for political reasons wanted Sheng Jiang, a woman of Qi, to become Lord Xi’s wife, and had forced Lord Xi to install Sheng Jiang

¹⁷¹ GYZS, 11.1b: 518.

¹⁷² GYZS, 11.2a: 519.

¹⁷³ GYZS, 11.2a: 519.

¹⁷⁴ GYZS, 11.2a: 519.

as his wife by sending members of her bridal party to Lu before Lord Xi could initiate wedding rituals with the woman he intended to be his bride.¹⁷⁵

According to Dong Zhongshu, the large amount of hail recorded two years after Lord Xi's presentation of Jiang Sheng at the large-scale sacrifices was the "image" (*xiang* 象) of the improperly preferential treatment Lord Xi gave to his wife, Sheng Jiang, whom he had been forced to marry by coercion. By Dong Zhongshu's account, Lord Xi was partial to Sheng Jiang to the point that he did not install concubines in his harem. The hail was thus a manifestation of the imbalance that had been introduced into the Lu court by the harmful influence of the Qi monarch.

It is clear that Dong Zhongshu was working with the *Gongyang Chunqiu* version of history in his analysis of this episode. Neither the *Chunqiu* version of the *Guliang zhuan* nor that of the *Zuo zhuan* mention hail. (Both describe the unusual weather in Lu in the winter of that year, the tenth year of Lord Xi's reign, as "a great shower of snow" 大雨雪.) Moreover, the language of Dong Zhongshu's explanation of the cause of the hail follows the diction of the *Gongyang*'s interpretation of Lord Xi's act in the ancestral temple. For example, the phrase *gong xie yu Qi Huan gong* 公脅於齊桓公 in Dong Zhongshu's explanation mirrors the phrase *gai xie yu Qi yingnü zhi xian zhi zhe ye* 蓋脅于齊媵女之先至者也 of the *Gongyang* commentary. In contrast to this, there is nothing about coercion on the part of Qi in either the *Zuo zhuan* or the

¹⁷⁵ Sheng Jiang is believed to have probably been the sister of Lord Huan of Qi. See DLS, 2115. According to Western Han scholar He Xiu's 何休 (129-183) commentary to this passage of the *Gongyang zhuan*, Lord Xi had originally intended to marry a woman from the state of Chu 楚. See GYZZS, 11.2a: 519. He Xiu reads the phrase *Qi ying nü* 齊媵女 ("the Qi maid[s] accompanying the bride") that appears in the *Gongyang* commentary as referring to Jiang Sheng herself as a woman from who was intended to be part of the bridal party for Lord Xi's desired bride, but whose premature arrival to Lu was part of Lord Huan's coercion of Lord Xi's marriage; this is an explanation of the reason that the *Gongyang* commentary refers to Jiang Sheng as a concubine.

Guliang commentaries to the *Chunqiu* record of the rites Lord Xi carried out in the ancestral temple in the eighth year of his reign.¹⁷⁶ In fact, according to the *Zuo zhuan* account of the large-scale sacrifices 禘 performed that year by Lord Xi, the *fu ren* 夫人 referred to in the *Chunqiu* record was in fact not Sheng Jiang, but Ai Jiang 哀姜, the dead wife of Lord Xi's father, Lord Zhuang 莊 (r. 694-662 B.C.E).¹⁷⁷ The version of the *Chunqiu* that Dong Zhongshu studied was that of the *Gongyang* tradition.

V.B. Dong Zhongshu's Concepts of Historical Analysis

This example of Dong Zhongshu's analysis of Spring and Autumn period history is consistent with Ban Gu's preface not only because Dong Zhongshu's understanding of anomalies in history is based on the *Gongyang Chunqiu*, but also because Dong Zhongshu makes use of a logic centered on the idea that the natural world presents images (*xiang* 象) that correspond to the moral conditions and ongoings of human society. In his preface to the "Wuxing zhi," Ban Gu quotes remarks from the "Shang xi" chapter of the *Yi jing* observing that "heaven" (*tian* 天) presents "images" (*xiang* 象) that must be inspected (presumably because they contain information about the movements of forces undergirding the universe). Dong Zhongshu's analysis of the hail as an "image" (*xiang* 象) of Lord Xi's favoritism toward Sheng Jiang thus engages *Yi jing* diction and logic as Ban Gu understood the *Yi jing*.

¹⁷⁶ Lord Zhuang's wife, Ai Jiang, was not, however, the mother of Lord Xi, who was born to one of Lord Zhuang's concubines. For the commentary of *Guliang zhuan* to the rites Lord Xi performed, see *GLZZS*, 8.3a-b: 297-8. For the commentary of the *Zuo zhuan*, see *YBJZZ*, 352-3.

¹⁷⁷ See *YBJZZ*, 352. Yang Bojun understands the *Zuo zhuan* commentary as meaning that Lord Xi was enshrining the spirit of his father's dead wife in the ancestral temple.

In addition to the concept of “image” (*xiang* 象), Dong Zhongshu in his analysis of *Chunqiu* anomalies also makes use of the concept of *qi* 氣 (“vapors”) as a material medium that connects human behavior to anomalies. An example of this is his remarks on the comet recorded in the *Chunqiu* record for the fourteenth year (614 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Wen 文 of Lu (r. 626-609 B.C.E.). The *Chunqiu* record reads, “The autumn. The seventh month. There was star exuberance that entered the North Dipper” 秋七月有星孛入于北斗.¹⁷⁸ Dong Zhongshu’s analysis is that “noxious vapors” (*e qi* 惡氣) arising from various conspiracies to assassinate the respective rulers of five of the most powerful states of the Zhou realm had generated the comet.¹⁷⁹ Dong Zhongshu’s interpretation proceeds again from the idea of image (*xiang* 象) manifestation, with Dong Zhongshu noting that the North Dipper (i.e., the Big Dipper) is “the image of great countries” (*da guo xiang* 大國象), and that within a short time of the appearance of the comet, the dukes of the states of Qi 齊, Song 宋, Lu 魯, Ying 營, and Jin 晉 had all been assassinated.

Another example of Dong Zhongshu’s use of the concept of *qi* 氣 is his remarks on what he understands as a record in the *Chunqiu* of a massive flood that damages the cereal harvest in the twenty-eighth year (666 B.C.E.) of the reign of Lord Yan 嚴 (i.e., Zhuang 莊) of Lu (r. 694-662 B.C.E.).¹⁸⁰ Dong Zhongshu reasons that “profligate and disorderly” (*yin luan* 淫亂) behavior on the part of Lord Yan’s wife, Ai Jiang, had “gone against *yin* vapors” (*ni yin qi* 逆陰氣), and

¹⁷⁸ GYZS, 14.8b: 696.

¹⁷⁹ See *HS*, 1511-2.

¹⁸⁰ GYZS, 9.2a: 423. The *Chunqiu* record for this year reads, “Winter...large destruction of wheat grains” 冬...無麥禾. Dong Zhongshu understands the event as “a great flood” (*da shui* 大水). For Dong Zhongshu’s comments, see *HS*, 1339.

this disruption to *yin* vapors triggered the flood.¹⁸¹ From this second example, it can be seen that in addition to the concept of vapors, Dong Zhongshu also used a *yin yang* schema to analyze the *Chunqiu*'s record of anomalies.

A notable feature of Dong Zhongshu's commentary on anomalies recorded in the *Chunqiu* is that he does not make any reference to two fundamental concepts of the *Wuxing zhuan*: the "five elements" (*wuxing* 五行) and the six categories of anomalies (*yao* 妖 ["eerie occurrences"], *nie* 孽 ["abnormalities"], *huo* 疢 ["startling maladies"], *ke* 痲 ["infections"], *sheng* 眚 ["aberrant generations"], and *xiang* 祥 ["salient deviations"]). This sets him apart from Liu Xiang (and Liu Xin), whose comments on incidents recorded in the *Chunqiu* and the *Chunqiu* commentaries frequently make use of the *Wuxing zhuan* taxonomy. This suggests a number of possibilities. Dong Zhongshu may have been unaware of the existence of the *Wuxing zhuan*. Alternately, he might have known about it, but did not think that it was relevant to the interpretation of Spring and Autumn history. It is also possible that the *Wuxing zhuan* had not come into existence by the point in time when Dong Zhongshu was writing his commentary to the *Gongyang Chunqiu*, which was likely during the peak of his scholarly activities during the reign of Thearch Jing 景 (157-141 B.C.E.) and the first decades of the reign of Thearch Wu.

V.C. The Centrality of Anomaly Theory to Dong Zhongshu's Historically Based Political Philosophy: Dong Zhongshu's Response to Han Thearch Wu Cited in the "Dong Zhongshu zhuan" 董仲舒傳 ("Traditions of Dong Zhongshu")

The account of Dong Zhongshu's life and thought that Ban Gu provides elsewhere in the *Han shu* is wholly consistent with the impression given in the "Wuxing zhi" of Dong Zhongshu: that he was extremely devoted to the interpretation of anomalies in history as a prominent aspect

¹⁸¹ *HS*, 1339.

of how one should understand the past. Judging from the other materials of Dong Zhongshu's life and thought that are documented in the *Han shu*, Dong Zhongshu viewed the observation and interpretation of anomalies as key to an understanding of human history.

In the “Dong Zhongshu zhuan” 董仲舒傳 (“Traditions of Dong Zhongshu”) chapter of the *Han shu*, Ban Gu summarizes Dong Zhongshu's scholarship with a repeat of the observation that Dong Zhongshu had “mastered” (*zhi* 治) the *Chunqiu* in his youth (though Ban Gu does not mention Dong Zhongshu's particular interest in the *Gongyang Chunqiu* as he does in the “Wuxing zhi”), and explains that during the reign of Han Thearch Xiaojing 孝景 (r. 157-141 B.C.E.), Dong Zhongshu had reached the status of *boshi* 博士 (“academician”).¹⁸² After other brief statements about Dong Zhongshu's habits of scholarly discipline and his abilities as a teacher,¹⁸³ Ban Gu moves to the centerpiece of the “Dong Zhongshu zhuan” chapter: an exchange of rescripts and memorial responses between Han Thearch Wu 武 (r. 141-87 B.C.E.) and Dong Zhongshu that took place shortly after Thearch Wu came to power.¹⁸⁴ (Dong Zhongshu would have been about fifty-five years old at the time.) In this exchange, anomalies and their causes are portrayed not only as one of the central preoccupations of Dong Zhongshu's philosophical view of human history, but also as one of Thearch Wu's primary concerns in the practical arena of further consolidating his power and ruling the Han state.

¹⁸² *HS*, 2495.

¹⁸³ *HS*, 2495.

¹⁸⁴ Michael Loewe provides an English translation and discussion of the three rescripts and responses that make up the contents of this exchange. See *Dong Zhongshu: A 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*, 88-100. Sarah Queen shows that the exchange between Thearch Wu and Dong Zhongshu was part of an imperial inquiry carried out by Thearch Wu. See Sarah Queen, “The Rhetoric of Dong Zhongshu's Imperial Communications” in Garret P.S. Olberding ed., *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, 2013), 166-202 [imperial inquiry is mentioned in 167].

According to the “Dong Zhongshu zhuan” account, Thearch Wu issued an official rescript sometime after coming to power to request counsel from reputed scholars of the Han realm. Dong Zhongshu was one of the recipients of this rescript. In it, Thearch Wu affirms Dong Zhongshu as someone of vast learning and insight and asked for his guidance in shoring up and extending Han political power.¹⁸⁵ Thearch Wu then presents a puzzling paradox in which he portrayed policy measures as being ultimately meaningless for ensuring the longevity of the state, but nevertheless asks Dong Zhongshu for the knowledge that would allow him to consolidate and extend his own rule.

Thearch Wu expresses profound fatalism about the ability of human agency in the form of statecraft to extend the duration of a dynastic state entity when arbitrary and inscrutable changes in the “compulsory force” (*ming* 命) of “heaven” (*tian* 天) are what determine the rise and fall of dynastic fortunes.¹⁸⁶ This is a view that he derives from his observation of human history all the way back to the early days of high antiquity. Thearch Wu admits that in the primal era of the “five emperors and three sovereigns” (*wu di san wang* 五帝三王), sage kings “improved measures, created music, and thereby the realms under heaven were brought into universal harmony” 改制作樂而天下洽和.¹⁸⁷ However, eventually the sage-kings disappeared, and by the last days of the Xia and Shang dynasties, the “way of kings thoroughly collapsed” 王道大衰.¹⁸⁸ Still, for “a period of five hundred years” (*wu bai nian zhi jian* 五百年之間), among the “monarchs who safeguarded and transferred” (*shou jiao zhi jun* 守交之君) and the “scholars

¹⁸⁵ *HS*, 2495.

¹⁸⁶ *HS*, 2496.

¹⁸⁷ *HS*, 2496.

¹⁸⁸ *HS*, 2496.

who took responsibility for the road” (*dang tu zhi shi* 當塗之士)—this appears to refer to the wielders of power and their counselors during the (approximately) five centuries following the establishment of the Eastern Zhou dynasty in 771 B.C.E. until the rise of the Qin hegemony around 300 B.C.E.—there were so many who tried to uphold the ways of the sage kings of high antiquity: “extremely numerous were those who desired to take as their model the practices of the kings who came before them, so as to fit their successors with wings” 欲則先王之法以戴翼其世者甚眾.¹⁸⁹

Yet all of these attempts at preservation and extension of political power using the old ways were in vain, and eventually the lines of rulers who held power in the days of Zhou control found that their authority had come to an end: “day by day, they fell and were extinguished” (*ri yi pu mie* 日以仆滅).¹⁹⁰ (Thearch Wu’s letter does not explicitly mention the rise of the Qin empire, but no doubt the growth of the independent power of Qin and the establishment of the Qin empire was understood as being the ultimate terminus of Zhou rule.) Since so many of the Zhou rulers had continued to observe the practices of the sage-kings, and yet their political power eventually frayed and disappeared, Thearch Wu asks, how can the demise of the lines of these rulers be blamed on their failure to enact the right policies?¹⁹¹ He concludes that the fortunes of dynasties are determined ultimately not by political actors, but by the operations of a distant and inscrutable heaven: “therefore, heaven sends down its compulsory force [alt.,

¹⁸⁹ *HS*, 2496.

¹⁹⁰ *HS*, 2496.

¹⁹¹ *HS*, 2496. The phrasing of Thearch Wu’s rescript is: “How can it be that that which they upheld and maintained was perhaps contrawise [to the right direction] and went astray, and so their ruling power was lost?” 豈其所持操或諄繆而失其統與. His meaning is that the policies of the kings of the past were in accordance with the Way (*dao* 道), so that their downfall could not have been the result of their failing to enact the correct policies and apply the correct methods to statecraft. Thearch Wu implies that the Way must have lost its efficacy or not have been efficacious in the first place.

mandate], it is not possible to go back again, one is bound to relinquish it [i.e., one's volition or power] in a great collapse, and subsequently there is cessation” 固天降命不可復反必推之於大衰而後息。¹⁹² Thearch Wu's position is here virtually identical to the position Wang Chong takes on this topic in the *Lun heng*, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Despite this fatalistic overture, Thearch Wu gestures at the possibility that some useful kernels of wisdom could still be recovered from the past by means of historical knowledge of the classical period of antiquity. Referring to days of the mythic Xia, the Shang, and the Zhou dynasties, Thearch Wu asks, “In the Three Eras, when the compulsory force of heaven was received, in what place were its tokens [i.e., signs of propitiousness]? As for the mutations of disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences, by connection to what cause do they arise?” 三代受命其符安在災異之變何緣而起。¹⁹³ Thearch Wu's idea appears to be that if the fortunes of state entities are determined not by the practices of rulers but by the motions of heaven, and the motions of heaven cannot in any way be controlled, at least it might be useful to know the signs by which the tides of heaven can predicted and measured and the mechanisms by which the “disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences” 災異 that betoken the motions of the forces of heaven appear. If one could determine that seismic changes in the motions of heaven were underway, one could be able to plan for either good fortune or inevitable disruption and breakdown (whatever the case might be). Also, Thearch Wu's question about how anomalies connect to ultimate causes (*he yuan* 何緣) hints that if not by the practices of the past (the “way”

¹⁹² *HS*, 2496.

¹⁹³ *HS*, 2496.

[*dao* 道] that was used in the golden age of political stability, but which has apparently lost its potency), then perhaps the motions of heaven could be influenced by some other mechanism.

Judging from his rescript, it is clear that Thearch Wu viewed anomalies as an indispensable aspect of statecraft thinking. His letter understands anomalies were reflections of fundamental, constantly changing cosmic forces. Thearch Wu especially stresses anomalies that cause some level of noticeable harm, expressed in the phrase *zai yi* 災異 (a term that Ban Gu applies to events such as damaging snowstorms in the “Wuxing zhi”). If there is anything that might be salvaged from classical knowledge, Thearch Wu positions learning about anomalies as being the key to a conceptual understanding of nature that could potentially prove useful in governing the state and perpetuating his dynastic line.

In contrast to Thearch Wu’s fatalism, Dong Zhongshu’s response to Thearch Wu affirms that human action can uphold and protect political power. Mirroring Thearch Wu’s language, he insists that the fortunes of state entities have in the past depended on the decisions and policies enacted and carried out by individuals, rather than on random, inexorable changes in the tides of the cosmic order: “order and chaos, decay and rising exist in one’s self; it is not that heaven sends down its compulsory force, and there can be no reversal” 治亂廢興在於己非天降命不得反。¹⁹⁴ It was because of errors in the policy and actions of state actors that political entities that had existed in the past weakened and were overturned: “that which they upheld and maintained was contrariwise [to the right direction] and went astray, and so their ruling power was lost” 其所操持諄謬失其統也。¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ *HS*, 2500.

¹⁹⁵ *HS*, 2500.

While affirming the efficacy of right action in human outcomes, Dong Zhongshu states outright that he has no insight into the underlying mechanisms informing the motions of heaven (or, alternately, that he has no power to tamper with those underlying mechanisms): “Your Majesty has issued the sound of innate power, sending down a perspicacious edict; you seek the compulsory power of heaven and the nature of [fundamental] circumstances; neither of these are what I, your ignorant minister, am able to deliver” 陛下發德音下明詔求天命與情性皆非愚臣之所能及也。¹⁹⁶

Despite admitting his limitations, Dong Zhongshu does offer insights based on his observations from history. Dong Zhongshu shares with Thearch Wu the view that knowledge of anomalies should be given a high level of priority in understanding human history and the relationship between human political communities and nature. After his initial statement of limitation, Dong Zhongshu moves quickly to describe the relationship between moral malpractice leading to poor government (expressed as *shi dao* 失道 [“losing the way”]) and the occurrence of anomalies:

臣謹案春秋之中. 視前世已行之事. 以觀天人相與之際. 甚可畏也. 國家將有失道之敗. 而天乃先出災害以譴告之. 不知自省. 又出怪異以警懼之. 尚不知變. 而傷敗乃至. 以此見天心之仁愛人君而欲止其亂也。¹⁹⁷

I, your minister, have carefully made notations to the contents of the *Springs and Autumns*. I have seen what events have already transpired in ages past. I have also observed the interactions between heaven and humans. They are very much to be held in awe. When a state is going to fail because of losing the way, then heaven will thereupon first put forth disastrous harm [*zai hai* 災害] in order to denounce and inform it [i.e., the erring state and its leaders]. If it does not know to examine itself critically, [heaven] will next put forth prodigious, intensely irregular occurrences [*guai yi* 怪異] so as to alarm and frighten it. If it still does not know to

¹⁹⁶ *HS*, 2498.

¹⁹⁷ *HS*, 2498.

change, then injury and failure thereupon arrive. By this, one can see that the mind of heaven benevolently loves the rulers of humans and wishes to put an end to their disorder.

There are a few things going on in this passage. First, Dong Zhongshu provides an answer to Thearch Wu's request for an explanation of the "mutations of disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences" (*zai yi zhi bian* 災異之變). The sequence in which Dong Zhongshu claims anomalies occur when a state will soon fail because of errancy is first "disastrous harm" (*zai hai* 災害), followed by "prodigious, intensely irregular occurrences" (*guai yi* 怪異). This is to divide anomalies that Thearch Wu expresses collectively as "disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences" (*zai yi* 災異) into two clearly discrete categories. State leaders have the opportunity to reform following the occurrence of either of these categories of anomalies, but if they do not, then their state collapses.

Second, Dong Zhongshu claims that his observations about the circumstances in which heaven sends out anomalies and the sequence in which they come are conclusions based on his extensive study of the events recorded in the *Chunqiu*. He does not claim that he has personally witnessed any instances of the anomalies that he schematizes. He is drawing conclusions by noting the anomalous and destructive events recorded in the *Chunqiu* and its commentaries (most likely, the commentary of the *Gongyang* tradition) and comparing these to the human events happening at the time, delineating correlations between the two. His theory of anomalies is thus an historical view, grounded in the evidence of the canonical text of the *Chunqiu*.

Third, Dong Zhongshu affords a considerable amount of agency to "heaven" (*tian* 天). Heaven in Dong Zhongshu's account appears to be acting out of sentient volition. This contrasts

somewhat with Ban Gu's conception of heaven in which divine force is a distant presence without apparent volition resembling Aristotle's "unmoved mover."

Fourth, while he emphasizes that heaven has volition, Dong Zhongshu also attributes the relation between human corruption and anomalies to fundamental, regular forces governing the material world. Dong Zhongshu first describes these regular material forces when discussing the corruption of generations that came after the founders of the Zhou dynasty:

及至後世. 淫佚衰微. 不能統理群生. 諸侯背畔. 殘賊良民以爭壤土. 廢德教而任刑罰. 刑罰不中. 則生邪氣. 邪氣積於下. 怨惡畜於上. 上下不和. 則陰陽繆盪而妖孽生矣. 此災異所緣而起也.¹⁹⁸

Coming to the successive generations: In profligacy and abandon, they began to collapse and decline. They were unable to govern and bring order to the hosts of generated life. The many vassal lords became treacherous. They brutalized and robbed good subjects and fought over land. Teaching in innate potency fell to ruin, while penal measures and punishments were carried out at will. If penal measures and punishments do not strike the right balance, then foul vapors [*xie qi* 邪氣] are generated. Foul vapors collect down below. Resentment and disgust accumulate up above. If those below and those above are not in harmony, then *yin* and *yang* interpenetrate and antagonize one another, and ominously eerie and abnormal occurrences [*yao nie* 妖孽] are generated. This is the connecting cause by which disastrous and intensely irregular occurrences [*zai yi* 災異] arise.

Dong Zhongshu's view of the material forces underlying the occurrence of anomalies resembles both the comments attributed to Dong Zhongshu in the "Wuxing zhi" and the overall conceptual view that Ban Gu articulates in that treatise. Excessive and arbitrary penal measures cause "foul vapors" (*xie qi* 邪氣) to arise and create disharmony in human society. Such disharmony in human society causes *yin* and *yang* to become at odds, and this disorder in *yin* and *yang* gives rise to "ominously eerie and abnormal occurrences" (*yao nie* 妖孽) and the "disastrous and

¹⁹⁸ HS, 2500.

intensely irregular occurrences” (*zai yi* 災異), with the second of these noun phrases mirroring the diction of Thearch Wu’s rescript. While Dong Zhongshu names *yin* and *yang* as the immediate material cause of anomalous occurrences, this passage could be read as implying that “foul vapors” (*xie qi* 邪氣) generated by human iniquity have some part in society going awry, causing “resentment and disgust [to] accumulate up above” (*yuan e chu yu shang* 怨惡畜於上), rather than in directly triggering anomalies. However, his comments on the record of a comet in the *Chunqiu* in which he states that the comet was generated by “noxious vapors” (*e qi* 惡氣) (discussed above) are evidence that Dong Zhongshu believed such vapors could also directly trigger anomalous events. Regardless of its finer nuances, in his letter to Thearch Wu, Dong Zhongshu presents a thoroughly material view of the causes of anomalous events recorded in history (integrated as it is into a perspective featuring cosmic forces that are presented as operating with a certain level of sentience to human moral values and action).

Fifth, consistent with Dong Zhongshu’s remarks recorded in the main body text of the “Wuxing zhi,” Dong Zhongshu in his response explaining the occurrence of anomalies and their relationship to human action (and, indeed, in all of his three responses to Thearch Wu quoted in the “Dong Zhongshu zhuan”) makes no reference to the “Hong fan” text or its commentaries, does not use any of the six terms for strange anomalies in the formulaic sense in which they appear in the *Wuxing zhuan*, and makes no reference to the five elements. As with his comments on *Chunqiu* history cited in the “Wuxing zhi,” Dong Zhongshu’s scholarship as it is presented in his responses is completely devoid of terms distinct to the “Hong fan” and *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*, as if he had no knowledge of these.

V.D. The Origins of Dong Zhongshu's Conceptual View

The key material concepts that appear in Dong Zhong's letter to explain anomalies are *yin yang* and "foul vapors" (*xie qi* 邪氣). This is consistent with Ban Gu's description of Dong Zhongshu's scholarship in the preface to the "Wuxing zhi," where Ban Gu associates Dong Zhongshu with the promotion of *yin yang* learning. Dong Zhongshu in his letter to Thearch Wu does not make any statements about the origin of either *yin yang* knowledge or knowledge pertaining to "vapors" (*qi* 氣). He discusses these concepts as though they were common knowledge. This echoes Ban Gu's position that this material philosophy was already in existence by Dong Zhongshu's time. While in his preface to the "Wuxing zhi," Ban Gu takes the position that Dong Zhongshu was the first scholar in the Han period to seriously adopt *yin yang* knowledge as a principal component of cosmology and a key tool for interpreting the historical record, observing that it was Dong Zhongshu who "began to promote *yin* and *yang*" 始推陰陽, Ban Gu does not describe Dong Zhongshu as the originator of this material philosophy. Indeed, parallelism in the logical structure of Ban Gu's preface strongly suggests that Ban Gu associated the *yin yang* with the *Yi jing*, and thus viewed *yin yang* knowledge as having emerged in the primal era in which the *he tu* putatively appeared and were refined into the *ba gua*, long before the time of Dong Zhongshu.

For Ban Gu, the authors of the canon had been infused already with the core ideas of Dong Zhongshu's thought. Ban Gu in his preface to the "Wuxing zhi" describes the *Chunqiu* as being informed by the principles outlined in the "Hong fan," which acknowledge extreme weather as a consequence of poor government. Indeed, the *Chunqiu*'s frequent mention of anomalies like unseasonable weather and solar and lunar eclipses would have appeared entirely consistent with

“Hong fan” ideas. Ban Gu’s preface also evinces the view that the principles of *yin yang* knowledge are expressed in the *Yi jing*, knowledge that he likely thought would have been accessible to the author/editor of the *Chunqiu* (understood by Ban Gu as being Kongzi). While Ban Gu viewed Dong Zhongshu as a perceptive and insightful scholar of history and interpreter of the *Chunqiu*, the *Han shu* presents the study of anomalies in history and the application of a philosophy of matter to explain them as practices that long pre-dated Dong Zhongshu.

VI. Conclusion

Stratigraphic analysis of the “Wuxing zhi” allows one to isolate the content of the “Wuxing zhi” that can reliably be used to reconstruct a few key moments in the tradition of Western Han anomaly-based political philosophy that is documented in the “Wuxing zhi.” For a substantial portion of the accounts of anomalous events catalogued in the “Wuxing zhi” (which I have labelled as belonging to stratigraphic Layer 1), there is no evidence that these had been previously arranged into such a catalogue or interpreted as omens prior to the compilation of the “Wuxing zhi” (as it exists in its present form) in the Eastern Han. Accordingly, this content should be excluded from use as evidence for evaluating the Western Han tradition that posited anomalies as having been instigated by human corruption and deviation from correct political practices.

This leaves those accounts of anomalies in history that are in the “Wuxing zhi” labelled as having been reviewed and interpreted by authors prior to Ban Gu. I have focused on two categories of these: those that are labelled as having been commented on and interpreted by Liu Xiang (Layer 2) and those that are labelled as having been commented on and interpreted by Dong Zhongshu (Layer 3). As I have shown, reviewed *in toto*, entries in these layers correspond

to the details of the lives, careers, and scholarship of Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu as they are recounted in the preface to the “Wuxing zhi” and elsewhere in the *Han shu*.

Analysis of these layers (combined with review of statements made by Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu in their official communications at court) reveals differences in the interests, approaches, and concepts of analysis characteristic of Ban Gu, Liu Xiang, and Dong Zhongshu. While the entries of Layer 1, which can only be convincingly attributed to Ban Gu, show an even, comprehensive interest in documenting and interpreting anomalies in the Western Han, Liu Xiang’s entries show a minor interest in Western Han anomalies with a major interest in anomalies documented in the *Chunqiu*, while Dong Zhongshu’s are almost exclusively focused on the *Chunqiu* period. Western Han anomaly-centered political philosophy as pursued by Dong Zhongshu arranged itself primarily around the study of *Chunqiu* history (at least as far as it manifested itself in the textual record). Dong Zhongshu appears to have been more interested in evaluating anomalies in *Chunqiu* history in order to deduce principles of right government (such as moderation in penal measures) rather than in interpreting contemporaneous anomalies. In fact, Ban Gu’s account in the biographical information on Dong Zhongshu tells that because Dong Zhongshu was severely censured by Thearch Wu for having drafted a memorial to the emperor that interpreted a fire in the ancestral shrine of Thearch Gao in 135 B.C.E. as indicating heaven’s signal to Thearch Wu that the Han regime was wrongly perpetuating the “rot” [*bi 敝*] of the Qin rulers, Dong Zhongshu never again officially offered any interpretations of anomalous events that happened in his lifetime.¹⁹⁹ This indicates that suppression of official acts of anomaly

¹⁹⁹ See *HS*, 2524 for an account of the events surrounding Dong Zhongshu’s drafting of the memorial. See *HS*, 1331-33 for the text of the memorial itself.

interpretation in Thearch Wu's reign served as a strong impediment to such activity on the part of scholars during Thearch Wu's reign—which included Dong Zhongshu.

As I have pointed out, judging from the distribution of his comments on accounts of anomalous events as catalogued in the “Wuxing zhi,” Liu Xiang was relatively more interested in interpreting anomalous events that occurred in the Western Han than was Dong Zhongshu. This is consistent with accounts of his repeated attempts to interpret anomalies in his memorials to the emperor during the reigns of Thearch Yuan and Thearch Cheng. However, Liu Xiang's comments in the “Wuxing zhi” nevertheless show a majority interest in interpreting the anomalous events recording in the *Chunqiu*, not in those that happened in the Western Han. Both Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang were primarily interested in explaining the *Chunqiu*'s record of anomalous events and in developing patterns that demonstrated right and wrong political action. For Liu Xiang, while the final goal of his efforts appears to have been achieving a rhetorical advantage in interpreting contemporaneous anomalies, in that process most of his attention was devoted to demonstrating principles by interpretation of the past with an emphasis on the *Chunqiu*.

A more substantial point of difference between Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang is Liu Xiang's integration of the elaborated material theory of the *Wuxing zhuan* that draws connections between human action and the material world as analyzed by a *wuxing* schema and includes the six-part taxonomy of bizarre events. Dong Zhongshu's material theory features a simpler system consisting of *qi*, *yin* and *yang*, and the concept of *xiang*, but no mention of the *wuxing* or the six-part taxonomy. That Liu Xiang faced pressure from political rivals who also adopted the interpretation of anomalies to target him and his allies at court makes it likely that Liu Xiang's apparent alacrity in incorporating the *Wuxing zhuan* (as recounted by Ban Gu in his account of

Liu Xiang's encounter with the *Wuxing zhuan* in the imperial library during the reign of emperor Cheng) was in part due to his desire to give more rhetorical power to his arguments based on contemporary anomalies. Regardless, his comments were directed primarily at anomalous events in the *Chunqiu* record, suggesting that his adoption of the system was intended primarily for the hermeneutic task of deciphering the textual record of *Chunqiu* history, so as to uncover and describe the nature of wrong human political action. The interpretation of the *Chunqiu* was seen apparently by him as providing the master key for taking correct positions in political philosophy (and yielding winning rhetoric for political critique).

Another important point of difference between Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang is that Liu Xiang comments on accounts from the *Zuo zhuan* in his remarks on events from *Chunqiu*-era history, whereas Dong Zhongshu's comments are all in relation to the *Chunqiu* as it appears in the *Gongyang* version. The *Zuo zhuan* and the many accounts of anomalies it contains that are unique to it appear not to have been a part of Dong Zhongshu's hermeneutical analysis of the *Chunqiu*.

That Dong Zhongshu's analysis of *Chunqiu* history was completely devoid of reference to the *Wuxing zhuan*, combined with the fact that the earliest point of reference for the existence of the *Wuxing zhuan* in the *Han shu* (and indeed the textual record of the Han period) is the lifetime of Xiahou Shichang, invites further investigation of the tradition that produced the *Wuxing zhuan* and the history of that tradition. The *Wuxing zhuan* presents itself as a commentary to the *Hong fan*, but Dong Zhongshu, while having thoroughly studied the canon, showed no specific interest in the *Hong fan*, in contrast to the high level of interest he showed in the *Chunqiu* and the *Yi jing* (with his application of the concept of *xiang* 象). It might be the case that interest in anomaly-

centered political philosophy influenced by his interpretation of the record of anomalies in the *Chunqiu* had spurred an interest in the material mechanics of anomalies that cohered to the “Hong fan” and produced the *Wuxing zhuan*, but the fact that the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan* is not interested in anomalies in history, and rather in the underlying material mechanics of human-stimulated anomalies for any point in time, suggests that it was part of an entirely separate current of anomaly-centered philosophy and text production in the second century BCE. Further examination of this is necessary.

This chapter has neglected to analyze the sets of entries in the “Wuxing zhi” to which the comments of Liu Xin and Jing Fang are appended. It is primarily aimed at presenting a method for using the texts contained in the “Wuxing zhi” in a relatively precise way for the reconstruction of Western Han intellectual history, and in demonstrating the usefulness of this method for parsing what distinct contributions were made by three figures (Ban Gu, Liu Xiang, and Dong Zhongshu) whose contributions are more central to the “Wuxing zhi.” However, this method can be extended to the full analysis of all entries of the “Wuxing zhi” to develop an even fuller picture.

It should also be pointed out that the “Wuxing zhi” is not a stand-in for the full corpus of anomaly-centered political philosophy in the Western Han. It does not represent all figures and texts in that tradition. Nor does it give a full sense of the significance of that tradition within the broader context of Western Han intellectual life and scholarship. Accounts from the *Han shu* provide glimpses of the part this tradition played in the Han court and in Han politics, but since the “Wuxing zhi” is admittedly devoted to the comments of a relatively small number of figures (perhaps some two dozen in total), while the views and scholarship of this collection of individuals and how they relate and contrast can be deduced via a diachronic study using the

“Wuxing zhi” and related texts in the *Han shu*, synchronic study using the *Han shu* combined with other available sources of Western Han intellectual history is necessary to provide a perspective on the significance of the tradition within Western Han society.

CHAPTER 5, The Antecedents of Western Han Anomaly Discourse in Pre-Han Textual Traditions

I. Introduction

The previous chapter has shown that both Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu made arguments that identified (1) corrupt practices that led to the collapse of political power and turmoil in human society and (2) anomalies that such corruption triggered and that signaled coming disruption. Their arguments were primarily expressed as comments on the historical record. Both Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu availed themselves of the record of anomalies in the *Chunqiu* and in its commentarial traditions. Dong Zhongshu appears to have relied entirely on the version of the *Chunqiu* and the commentary to it transmitted in the *Gongyang zhuan*, whereas Liu Xiang made use of the *Gongyang zhuan* as well as the *Zuo zhuan* and the *Guliang zhuan*. This chapter will show how Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu engaged the *Chunqiu* and its commentarial traditions, focusing on Liu Xiang's use of the *Zuo zhuan* and Dong Zhongshu's use of the *Gongyang zhuan*.

II. Liu Xiang and the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (“Zuo Tradition”)

The *Zuo zhuan* provides historical background and explanation of events logged in the bare record of the *Chunqiu*. It contains a wealth of narrative accounts, among which are numerous stories focused on or involving anomalous events, which made it ripe for Liu Xiang's use of it as a source for a tallying of the anomalies that occurred in *Chunqiu* history. Of the some 109 accounts of events from *Chunqiu* and pre-*Chunqiu* period history for which “Wuxing zhi” documents Liu Xiang's comments, 9 (or 8.3%) of these are taken from the *Zuo zhuan*.

The modern study of the history of the *Zuo zhuan*'s compilation has yielded tensions with traditional accounts. The account of the *Zuo zhuan*'s compilation provided in Sima Qian's *Shi ji*

explains that it was produced by the figure Zuo Qiuming 左丘明 (trad. fl. ca. late 6th cent. – ca. early 5th cent. B.C.E) as a commentary to the *Chunqiu*, in order to counter a proliferation of false interpretations of the *Chunqiu* (which the *Shi ji* ascribes to Kongzi).¹ In contrast to the traditional account of the compilation of the *Zuo zhuan*, modern scholars have posited that the *Zuo zhuan* was compiled sometime in the fourth century B.C.E.² Regardless of recent views on the compilation *Zuo zhuan*, likely Liu Xiang in the late Western Han subscribed to the view expressed by Sima Qian that the *Zuo zhuan* had been composed by Zuo Qiuming.

Among the nine accounts of anomalous events recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* on which Liu Xiang commented is an event that is presented as having occurred during the reign of Lord Zhuang 莊公 (r. 693-662 B.C.E.) of the state of Lu 魯. In the “Wuxing zhi,” the entry describing the incident, with Liu Xiang’s comments appended, reads as follows:

1 左氏傳魯嚴公時有內蛇與外蛇鬪鄭南門中，內蛇死。

In the *Tradition of the One Named Zuo*, during the time of Lord Yan of Lu, there was an incident in which snakes from within fought with snakes from without in the middle of the south gate of Zheng, and the snakes from within died.

2 劉向以爲近蛇孽也。

Liu Xiang held that this was close to abnormalities in snakes.

¹ See *HS*, 509-10.

² For example, Swedish sinologist Bernhard Karlgren’s (1889-1978) early 20th century study, “On the authenticity and nature of the Tso chuan,” concludes that, based on linguistic analysis, the contents of the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 (“Zuo Tradition”) were written down in the fourth century B.C.E. See Bernhard Karlgren, “On the authenticity and nature of the Tso chuan,” *Göteborgs högskolas årsskrift* 32, no. 3 (1926). While it has been proposed that such content was composed using a combination of pre-existing written records and oral traditions, the circumstances of the creation of the *Zuo zhuan* are subject to scholarly debate. For a treatment of issues in the dating and composition of the *Zuo zhuan*, see David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 315-324; and Anne Cheng 程艾藍, “Ch’un ch’iu 春秋, Kung yang 公羊, Ku liang 穀梁 and Tso chuan 左傳” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 69-73.

3 先是鄭厲公劫相祭仲而逐兄昭公代立。後厲公出奔，昭公復入。死，弟子儀代立。厲公自外劫大夫傅瑕，使僇子儀。

Prior to this, Lord Li of Zheng ensnared the minister Zhai Zhong and drove his older brother, Lord Zhao [of Zheng] into exile, acceding to power as the successor. Thereafter, Lord Li departed and fled, and Lord Zhao was installed again. He died, and his younger brother Ziyi acceded to power as a successor. Lord Li came from abroad, ensnared the grand marquis Fu Xia, and made him slay Ziyi.

4 此外蛇殺內蛇之象也。蛇死六年，而厲公立。

This is [what was represented] by the image of the snakes from without killing the snakes from within. Six year after the snakes died, Lord Li acceded to power.

5 嚴公聞之，問申繻曰：「猶有妖乎？」對曰：「人之所忌，其氣炎以取之，妖由人興也。人亡釁焉，妖不自作。人棄常，則妖興，故有妖。」

Lord Yan learned of this, and asked Shen Xu about it, stating, “Can it be that there was an ominously eerie occurrence?” He responded, stating, “When a human resents something, their vapors flare up and seize upon it. Ominous eeriness arises from humans. When there are no rifts among humans [*alt.*, imperfection within humans], ominous eeriness will not arise on its own. When humans abandon constancy, then ominous eeriness arises. And that is why there was an ominous, eerie occurrence.”

6 京房易傳曰：「立嗣子疑，厥妖蛇居國門鬪。」³

Jing Fang’s *Tradition of the Changes* states: “There is suspicion about the successor child that is installed. Its ominously eerie occurrence is snakes occupying the gate of the capital city and fighting.”⁴

This entry in the “Wuxing zhi” that catalogues unusual fighting between snakes consists of a few parts. The description of the anomaly itself as cited from the *Zuo zhuan* (1), a description of Liu Xiang’s view on the anomaly (2), a description of the events recorded in the *Zuo zhuan* as happening before and after the anomaly, which Ban Gu presents as being related to

³ *HS*, 1476.

⁴ I have referred to the English translation of DLS for the sections of this passage that are taken from the *Zuo zhuan*. See DLS, 173. I have also referred to Donald Harper trans., Unpublished English translation of Li Ling, 11-12.

it (3), a comment by Ban Gu that relates the anomaly to the surrounding events by means of the concept of “image” (*xiang* 象) (4), an account of a conversation between Lord Zhuang of Lu and his minister, Shen Xu, that is presented as having been contemporary to the occurrence of the anomaly (5), and a citation from Jing Fang’s *Yi zhuan* that deduces a rule from the episode as it is presented in the *Zuo zhuan* (6).

Ban Gu’s description of the surrounding events is mostly a summary of the record of the *Zuo zhuan*. The *Zuo zhuan* describes how Lord Li of Zheng 鄭厲公 (also referred to as Tu, Liege of Zheng 鄭伯突), the son of Lord Zhuang of Zheng 鄭公莊 (d. 701 B.C.E.), wrested power from his older brother Lord Zhao of Zheng 鄭昭公 (also referred to as Hu, Son of Succession 世子忽) 701 B.C.E by entrapping Zheng minister Zhai Zhong 祭仲 and forcing Lord Zhao into exile after the death of Lord Zhuang that year.⁵ Lord Li ruled until 697 B.C.E., when Zhai Zhong forced him into exile in turn and restored Lord Zhao to power.⁶ Lord Zhao was assassinated in 695 B.C.E., and his younger brother, Prince Wei 公子亶 (d. 694 B.C.E.), was placed into power that year.⁷ Prince Wei was assassinated in 694 B.C.E.⁸ The *Zuo zhuan* records that after Prince Wei’s assassination, Zhai Zhong installed a figure referred to as the Master of Zheng 鄭子 (d. 680 B.C.E.) as Prince Wei’s successor.⁹ After seventeen years in exile, Lord Li returned to

⁵ See DLS, 110-15; and YBJ, 139-43.

⁶ See DLS, 122-26; and YBJ, 152-56.

⁷ See DLS, 128-32; and YBJ, 161-63. According to Sima Qian’s *Shi ji*, Lord Zhuang of Zheng had three sons that were collectively referred to as the “Three Princes” 三公子: Hu, the Great Son 太子忽, Tu 突, and Ziwei 子亶 (i.e., Prince Wei 公子亶). Of the three, Hu was the eldest, Tu was the second eldest, and Ziwei was the youngest. See *Shi ji*, 1761.

⁸ See DLS, 132-35; and YBJ, 163-67.

⁹ See DLS, 132-35; and YBJ, 163-67. Sima Qian notes that among the sons of Lord Zhuang of Zheng, there was a fourth brother, Ziying 子嬰, who was referred to as the Master of Zheng 鄭子, was younger than Ziwei, and took power after Ziwei was assassinated. See *Shi ji*, 1763. Ban Gu identifies the Master of Zheng as a figure named Ziyi 子儀. (Section 3 of the “Wuxing zhi” passage quoted above.) Du Yu’s 杜預 commentary on the *Zuo zhuan* also

Zheng in 680 B.C.E., capturing Zheng retainer Fu Xia 傅瑕 and coercing him to assassinate the Master of Zheng and his two sons.¹⁰ After ruling for several more years, Lord Li died in 673 B.C.E.¹¹

Ban Gu does not provide an extensive description of Liu Xiang's views on the fighting of the snakes and its relation to the political situation in Zheng at the time. What description he does provide shows that Liu Xiang analyzed the incident using the taxonomy of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*. Ban Gu notes that Liu Xiang labeled the incident as an instance of “abnormalities in snakes” (*she nie* 蛇孽), which is what the *Wuxing zhuan* indicates is a consequence of “the sovereign not reaching the highest point of excellence” 皇之不極.¹² The implication is that inveterate infighting in the Zheng royal household had stimulate the snakes to fight. The *Wuxing zhuan* does not provide an explanation of the immediate material connection between the errancy on the part of the sons of Lord Zhuang of Zheng (and the other members of the Zheng court who spurred on their feuding), but judging from Liu Xiang's comments in his memorials and in his other comments in the “Wuxing zhi,” most likely he understood the mechanism of *qi* 氣 to have been the connecting medium.

An interesting feature of the entry in the “Wuxing zhi” is Ban Gu's inclusion of an account of a dialogue between Lord Zhuang 莊公 of Lu (r. 694-662 B.C.E) and his minister, Shen Xu 申繻 (fl. ca. 680 B.C.E.), that is recorded in the extant *Zuo zhuan* as having occurred in

identifies the Master of Zheng as Ziyi 子儀, and describes him as the younger brother of Lord Zhao of Zheng. See Du Yu 杜預 (222-285 C.E.), *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan jijie* 春秋左傳集解 (“Springs and Autumns Zuo Tradition Collected Explanations”), (Nanjing: Fenghuang, 2020), 66-67.

¹⁰ See DLS, 170-75; and YBJ, 212-17.

¹¹ See DLS, 190-91; and YBJ, 235-38.

¹² See Table 1.1., Section C1 in Ch. 1.

680 B.C.E., the year that Lord Li of Zheng returned to Zheng and assassinated the Master of Zheng and seized power again. The account in the *Zuo zhuan* is appended to a record of Lord Li's return and a recounting of the incident of the fighting snakes, which is recorded as having happened six years prior to Lord Li's return:

六月甲子，傅瑕殺鄭子及其二子，而納厲公。

On the *jia zi*₁ day, Fu Xia killed the Master of Zheng and his two sons, and then installed Lord Li.

初，內蛇與外蛇鬪於鄭南門之中，內蛇死。六年而厲公入。

Prior to this, snakes from within and snakes from without fought in the middle of the south gate of Zheng, and the snakes from within died. Six years later, Lord Li entered [Zheng again].

公聞之，問於申繻曰：「猶有妖乎？」對曰：「人之所忌，其氣燄以取之。妖由人興也。人無釁焉，妖不自作。人棄常，則妖興，故有妖。」¹³

The Lord learned of this, and asked Shen Xu about it, stating, “Can it be that there was an ominously eerie occurrence?” He responded, stating, “When a human resents something, their vapors flare up and seize upon it. Ominous eeriness arises from humans. When there are no rifts among humans [*xin* 釁: *alt.*, imperfection within humans], ominous eeriness will not arise on its own. When humans abandon constancy, then ominous eeriness arises. And that is why there was an ominously eerie occurrence.”

Evidently, Lord Zhuang had heard reports of the incident of the fighting snakes in Zheng that had taken place six years before and was struck by its resemblance to Lord Li's coup from exile abroad (analogically related to the snakes from “without” 外) that had toppled the Master of Zheng from power in Zheng (analogically related to the snakes from “within” 內, who had died).

¹³ DLS, 170-75; and YBJ, 212-17.

Shen Xu's response to Lord Zhuang's question contains a detailed explanation connecting the occurrence of strange events that seem to be related to events in human society (like the fighting snakes) to "resentment" (*ji* 忌) and "rifts" (or, alternately, "flaws") (*xin* 釁) among humans. Shen Xu's analysis also contains reference to the concept of "vapors" (*qi* 氣) that "flare" (*yan* 燄) when an individual feels "resentment" (*ji* 忌), triggering "ominous eeriness" (*yao* 妖) to arise. While Ban Gu, Liu Xiang, and Dong Zhongshu in statements that can be attributed to them do not speak about "ominous eeriness" (*yao* 妖) in this way as a discrete force that functions similar to *yin* 陰, *yang* 陽, and *qi* 氣, they frequently make use of the concept of *qi* 氣. Shen Xu's comments are right in line with the pattern of connecting anomalous occurrences to human disorder by material reasoning seen in the statements of those three figures.

Given that, it is remarkable that Ban Gu's description of Liu Xiang's analysis does not contain any evidence that Liu Xiang had given attention to Shen Xu's statements featuring the concept of *qi* 氣. Assuming that the version of the *Zuo zhuan* that Liu Xiang had commented on included this account of the dialogue between Lord Zhuang and Shen Xu, Liu Xiang appears to have been more interested in the bare account of anomaly itself and in placing it into the *Wuxing zhuan* taxonomy. Shen Xu's concept of an "ominous, eerie occurrence" (*yao* 妖) is wider and more encompassing than the more specific use of the term in the *Wuxing zhuan*, where it is one term among six for categorizing anomalies. If Liu Xiang had seen Shen Xu's statements, he would have had to reconcile the contradiction in these different uses of the terms. Judging from Ban Gu's account of Liu Xiang's experience in the imperial library during the reign of Lord Cheng, Liu Xiang was taken with the complex taxonomizing quality of the *Wuxing zhuan* and saw it as a tool to analyze the account of anomalies in history. Liu Xiang's memorial to Thearch

Yuan demonstrates that this impulse to taxonomize was present in his thinking about historical anomalies even prior to the earliest time for which there is evidence that Liu Xiang had contact with the *Wuxing zhuan*. It would have been natural for him to have afforded priority to the *Wuxing zhuan*'s more elaborated system over the more basic description delineated by Shen Xu.

Alternately, it is possible that the account of the conversation between Lord Zhuang and Shen Xu was not contained in the version of the *Zuo zhuan* that Liu Xiang saw. However, Ban Gu who lived just a few generations after Liu Xiang makes no indication that the dialogue was added to the *Zuo zhuan* at any point between the reign of Thearch Cheng and Ban Gu's compilation of the "Wuxing zhi." Indeed, that Jing Fang's 京房 (77-37 B.C.E.) *Yi zhuan* contains a passage that describes incidents with snakes in a way that closely resembles the language of the *Zuo zhuan*'s description of the fighting snakes of Zheng and applied the general category of *yao* 妖 to the incident (as part of Jing Fang's use of the term *yao* 妖 to refer to a broad category of anomalies) suggest that Jing Fang in the middle part of the 1st century B.C.E. had read the account of Lord Li's return to Zheng as it is presented in the extant version of the *Zuo zhuan*, and had been exposed to (and perhaps even significantly influenced by) the account of Lord Zhuang's conversation with Shen Xu with its general category of *yao* 妖. This would mean that, rather than Liu Xiang having read a version of the *Zuo zhuan* that did not include the dialogue between Lord Zhuang and Shen Xu, it is more likely that Liu Xiang had simply been more interested in applying the *Wuxing zhuan* taxonomy to the tallying and analysis of anomalies in history than in Shen Xu's more basic conceptual framework. In any event, the *Zuo zhuan* for Liu Xiang was thus a historical source for accounts of incidents of anomaly themselves, rather than as a source of conceptual explanation of the underlying mechanics of anomalies.

The idea that *qi* 氣 was a material medium that had a part in the occurrence of anomalies appears to have already been established by Dong Zhongshu's time. From all appearances, Dong Zhongshu had never read the *Zuo zhuan*, yet refers frequently to *qi* 氣, so he had come to his understanding of *qi* 氣 through some other means, suggesting that the notion of *qi* 氣 as a material force was already in common currency as of Dong Zhongshu's time. Considering this, Liu Xiang likely would not have thought there was anything new or innovative in Shen Xu's statements. However, assuming that this account of Shen Xu's statements was contained in versions of the *Zuo zhuan* that were already in circulation in the Warring States period, it can be used as material for Warring States intellectual history. Indeed, excavated sources that can be dated with confidence to the Warring States period, such as texts contained in the Zidanku 子彈庫 silk manuscript, demonstrate thinking and terminology that closely resemble Shen Xu's statements. The thinking embodied in such texts and present in the Warring States period likely had an influence on the evolution of anomaly theory of the early Western Han that featured the term *yao* 妖, such as was embodied in the *Hong fan Wuxing zhuan*, but did not exert any substantial direct influence on Liu Xiang.

III. Dong Zhongshu, the *Zhou yi* 周易 (“Changes of Zhou”), and the *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 (“Gongyang Tradition”)

As discussed in Ch. 4, a central feature of Dong Zhongshu's scholarship was the application of anomaly theory to the historical record. The terms of his analysis of history from the perspective of anomaly theory can be found to resemble key terms present in texts that he studied and that were in circulation in the early Western Han. For example, the concept of *xiang* 象 (“image”) that appears in his comments on *Chunqiu* history can be traced back to reference to

that term as it appears in the *Zhou yi*, and primarily in the “Xi ci” 繫辭 (“Appended Remarks”) chapter, where it denotes the idea of imagistic representation in the material world of analogous objects, relations, or forces.¹⁴ The commentarial chapters of the *Zhou yi* (which include the “Xi ci” chapter) are thought to have been composed during the mid-third century to the early second century B.C.E., just before the lifetime of Dong Zhongshu.¹⁵ Indeed, Dong Zhongshu quotes briefly from the “Xi ci” chapter in one of his memorials to Thearch Wu.¹⁶ Most likely, the concept of *xiang* 象 that Dong Zhongshu applied to *Chunqiu* history was derived from his study of the *Zhou yi* and its commentarial chapters.

Similarly, there is evidence that Dong Zhongshu’s use of certain other analytical terms that he applied to the study of anomalies in history, such as *guai yi* 怪異 (“prodigious, intensely irregular occurrences”) and *zai nan* 災難 (“disastrous harm”), was done under the influence of his study of the *Gongyang zhuan* commentary to the text of the *Chunqiu*. The *Gongyang* commentary, which is thought to have emerged sometime before the end of the Warring States period in 221 B.C.E., demonstrates a pattern of classifying events recorded in the *Chunqiu* with a taxonomy that features the terms “intensely irregular occurrences” (*yi* 異) and “disaster” (*zai* 災).¹⁷

¹⁴ For a discussion of this concept as expressed in the *Zhou yi* 周易, see Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 252-262.

¹⁵ See Edward Shaughnessy, “*I ching* 易經 (*Chou I*)” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 216-228.

¹⁶ See *HS*, 2521.

¹⁷ Anne Cheng 程艾藍 observes that “[a]ccording to modern scholarship...the *Kung yang* already existed in written form by the end of the Warring States period.” Quoted from Anne Cheng, “Ch’un ch’iu 春秋, Kung yang 公羊, Ku liang 穀梁 and Tso chuan 左傳” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 68.

For *yi* 異, there are some 32 entries in the *Chunqiu* for which the *Gongyang* commentary remarks that the entry was for the purpose of “recording an intensely irregular occurrence” (*ji yi* 記異). For example, the *Gongyang* commentary to the *Chunqiu* record for 720 B.C.E., the third year of the reign of Lord Yin 隱公 of Lu (r. 722-712 B.C.E.), points out that an eclipse noted in the *Chunqiu* annals that year was documented for the purpose of “recording an intensely irregular occurrence” (*ji yi* 記異):

三年春, 王二月己巳, 日有食之。

In the spring of the third year, on the *ji si*₆ day of the king’s second month, there was a consuming of the sun.

何以書. 記異也.¹⁸

In what mode was this written? It was that of recording an intensely irregular occurrence.¹⁹

The *Gongyang* commentary’s use of the term “recording an intensely irregular occurrence” (*ji yi* 記異) is applied to a wide array of incidents and events documented in the *Chunqiu*. These include heavy rainfall, earth-shaking lightning, heavy snowfall, heavy snowfall out of season, the absence of the formation of ice in the winter, an abnormal abundance of deer, the apparition of legendary sand-spitter creatures, an infestation of crop-eating *beih* bugs, a long period without rainfall, an intense hail storm, the sinking of a town borough into the earth, a lightning strike on a sacred building, an incident of fallen meteorites, birds flying backwards, seasonal frost not killing grass as it normally did, a shower of locusts, an earthquake, comets, the collapse of a

¹⁸ GYZS, 101-102.

¹⁹ I have referred to Göran Malmqvist’s English translation of this passage of the *Gongyang zhuan* in Göran Malmqvist, “Studies on the *Gongyang* and *Guuliang* Commentaries, part 1,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 43 (1971): 67-222 [English translation of this passage is on 75]. For other citations from the *Gongyang zhuan*, I have also referred to Malmqvist’s translation.

mountain, wood freezing after rainfall, strange spells of darkness, a cluster of coinciding disasters in other states, the nesting of bird species that the *Gongyang* commentary observes were not normally seen in the “central states” (*zhong guo* 中國) region, unseasonable frost killing grass, a locust infestation, and the capture of a unicorn, among others.

The *Gongyang* commentary also uses the phrase “recording a disaster” (*ji zai* 記災) to label the *Chunqiu*’s documenting of certain harmful events recorded in the *Chunqiu*. For example, the *Gongyang* commentary to the *Chunqiu* record for 683 B.C.E., the eleventh year of the reign of Lord Zhuang 莊公 of Lu (r. 693-662 B.C.E.), remarks that the *Chunqiu*’s documenting of a fire in the state of Song that year was an act of “recording a disaster” (*ji zai* 記災):

秋，宋大水。

In the autumn, there was a great flood in Song.

何以書。記災也。²⁰

In what mode was this logged? It was that of recording a disaster.

There are some 13 entries in the *Chunqiu* for which the *Gongyang* commentary remarks that the entry was for the purpose of “recording a disaster” (*ji zai* 記災).

Remarks within the *Gongyang* commentary suggest that the difference between its labelling of an event as either an “intensely irregular occurrence” (*yi* 異) or a “disaster” (*zai* 災) in the *Gongyang zhuan* hinged on whether or not the event was destructive, whether or not it shared the typical features of disaster events, and the nature of its destructiveness. If an abnormal

²⁰ GYZS, 352.

event was not destructive or harmful, then the *Gongyang zhuan* labelled it as an “intensely irregular occurrence” (*yi* 異), as the *Gongyang* commentary points out in its comments to a lack of rainfall documented in the *Chunqiu* record for 625 B.C.E., the second year of the reign of Lord Wen 文公 of Lu (r. 626-609 B.C.E.):

自十有二月不雨，至于秋七月。

From the twelfth month, it did not rain. This lasted until the seventh month, in autumn.

何以書。記異也。

In what mode was this logged? It was that of recording an intensely irregular occurrence.

大旱以災書。此亦旱也。曷為以異書。大旱之日短而云災。故以災書。此不雨之日長而無災。故以異書也。²¹

Severe droughts were logged in the mode of disasters. This was also a drought. Why was it logged in the mode of intensely irregular occurrences? The length in days for which severe droughts last are short, and they are called disasters. Therefore, they were logged in the mode of disasters. The length in days for which this spell in which it did not rain lasted was long, and there was no disaster. Therefore, it was logged in the mode of an intensely irregular occurrence.

Here, the *Gongyang zhuan* analyzes the *Chunqiu*'s format of documenting of the dry spell in the state of Lu in 625 B.C.E. as that of “recording an intensely irregular occurrence” (*ji yi* 記異), rather than the mode of recording a “disaster” (*zai* 災)—which would have been to refer to describe it using the term *han* 旱 (“drought”), to denote its damaging and harmful effects. The mode of “recording an intensely irregular occurrence” as applied here was to describe the event using the neutral terminology of “it did not rain” (*bu yu* 不雨). The *Gongyang zhuan* explains the

²¹ GYZS, 643-44.

Chunqiu's choice of mode by reference to the features of the absence of rainfall that distinguished it from a drought: it lasted a long period, as opposed to the short periods that the *Gongyang* claims severe droughts last, and there was no “disaster” (*zai* 災)—i.e., destructive or harmful effects. This was a strange absence of rainfall that was not the “usual” drought. Thus, the *Gongyang zhuan* claims that the *Chunqiu* distinguished between “disaster” (*zai* 災) events and “intensely irregular occurrence” (*yi* 異) events that resemble disaster events according to whether or not the latter were destructive and whether or not they had other conventional features of “typical” disaster events.

The *Gongyang zhuan* also claims that certain destructive events, by dint of the exceedingly severe or serious nature of their destructiveness, were documented in the *Chunqiu* not as “disasters” (*zai* 災) but as “intensely irregular occurrences” (*yi* 異). The *Gongyang* commentary to the *Chunqiu* record for 509 B.C.E., the first year of the reign of Lord Ding 定公 of Lu (r. 509-495 B.C.E.), observes that a frost that is documented in the *Chunqiu* as having killed legumes in the winter of that year was recorded in the mode of “intensely irregular occurrences” (*yi* 異):

冬, 十月, 隕霜殺菽.

In the winter, in the tenth month, frost descended and killed the legumes.

何以書. 記異也.

In what mode was this logged? It was that of recording an intensely irregular occurrence.

此災菽也. 曷為以異書. 異大乎災也.²²

²²GYZZS, 1237-38.

This was a disaster of the legumes. Why was it logged in the mode of intensely irregular occurrences? It was because intensely irregular occurrences are larger than disasters.

The language of the *Gongyang* commentary is somewhat ambiguous. When it makes its claim that the *Chunqiu* documented the frost of 509 B.C.E. in the mode of “recording an intensely irregular occurrence” (*ji yi* 記異), it explains that this choice was made by the *Chunqiu* compiler on the basis of the consideration that “intensely irregular occurrences are larger than disasters” 異大乎災. It is unclear if the *Gongyang* commentator meant “large” (*da* 大) in terms of severity of physical destruction (the severity of the damage to legume plants by the frost) or the seriousness of the event in terms its urgency in corresponding to severe human error and imminent disruption, but use of the term “large” (*da* 大) in connection with “intensely irregular occurrences” (*ji yi* 記異) elsewhere in the *Gongyang* commentary suggests it was the latter.

For example, in the language of the *Gongyang* commentary to the *Chunqiu* record for 645 B.C.E., the fifteenth year of the reign of Lord Xi 僖公 of Lu (r. 659-627 B.C.E.), the graph “large” (*da* 大) is used in a statement purporting that the *Chunqiu* compiler intentionally used certain honorifically elevating monikers to refer to a historical figure who was involved in an incident in which “heaven warned” (*tian jie* 天戒), so as to highlight the importance of the incident:

九月...己卯,晦,震夷伯之廟.

The ninth month...On the *ji mao*₁₆ day, the last day of the moon, the ancestral shrine of Yi, the Liege was shaken.

晦者何。冥也。震之者何。雷電擊夷伯之廟也。夷伯者，曷為者也。季氏之孚也。季氏之孚則微者，其稱夷伯何。大之也。曷為大之。天戒之，故大之也。何以書。記異也。²³

What is this about “the last day of the moon”? It means dark. What is this about being “shaken”? It means that thunderous lightning struck the ancestral shrine of Yi, the Liege. As for this about “Yi, the Liege,” why is it expressed like this? It means the confidant of the Ji clan. Since the confidant of the Ji clan was a low position, for what reason was he called “Yi, the Liege”? For the purpose of enlarging him. Why did it [i.e., the *Chunqiu* record] enlarge him? Heaven warned him, therefore it [i.e., the *Chunqiu* record] enlarged him. In what mode was this logged? It was that of recording an intensely irregular occurrence.

According to the *Gongyang* commentary, the *Chunqiu*'s record of lightning striking the ancestral temple of a counselor to the Ji clan 季氏 of Lu refers to the counselor by the moniker “Yi, the Liege” 夷伯 in order to afford him a level of importance commensurate with the status of one who receives a “warning” (*jie* 戒) from heaven.²⁴ This act of amplifying a figure in the record and the event in which that figure was involved that the *Gongyang* commentary imputes to the *Chunqiu* compiler is referred to in the *Gongyang* commentary as an act of “enlargement” (*da* 大). Thus, the *Gongyang* commentary uses the term “largeness” to denote an elevated level of importance and urgency in relation to divine will. Thus, the *Gongyang*'s observation that “intensely irregular occurrences are larger than disasters” 異大乎災 in its comments on damage to legumes by the frost was to say that “intensely irregular occurrences” 異 are at a higher level of urgency than “disasters” (*zai* 災) in terms of their omenological significance. The *Gongyang*

²³ GYZS, 539-40.

²⁴ According to the record of Dong Zhongshu's remarks in the “Wuxing zhi,” Dong Zhongshu had read this passage of the *Gongyang* commentary. See HS, 1445. Dong Zhongshu followed the reading of the *Gongyang* commentary, and believed that since Yi, the Liege was a “confidant of the Ji clan,” it was inappropriate for him to maintain an ancestral shrine. Dong Zhongshu viewed Yi, the Liege as participating in the Ji clan's arrogation of political authority in Lu, and saw the lightning strike as a divine warning against this insubordination of symbolized in Yi's maintenance of an ancestral temple. See notes to Ch. 1, Section IV.B. for a discussion of the history of the Ji clan in Lu and critical appraisal of the Ji clan in the *Zuo zhuan* and *Han shu*.

commentator appears to have believed that the *Chunqiu* compiler in recording the frost and the death of legumes that it caused had intentionally avoided any terms that denoted the harm to human society (such as *huang* 荒 or *ji* 飢) in order to define the incident as an extremely abnormal event that was therefore more urgent in its meaning than a disaster-type event.

Undoubtedly, the *Gongyang zhuan*'s commentary to the *Chunqiu* had a strong influence on (or, if not, precipitated outright) Dong Zhongshu's sense that one of the primary aims of history was the logging of anomalous and destructive events. The structure of the *Gongyang* commentary's systematic labelling of the *Chunqiu*'s documenting of certain events as acts of "recording an intensely irregular occurrence" (*ji yi* 記異) or, alternately, "recording a disaster" (*ji zai* 記災) is reflected in Dong Zhongshu's statements in his memorials to Thearch Wu in which he presents a dichotomy of "prodigious and intensely irregular occurrences" (*guai yi* 怪異) and *zai nan* 災難 ("disastrous harm") to categorize anomalies that he claimed were material resonances of human errancy and, simultaneously, expressions of divine will. Dong Zhongshu's curious sequencing of the urgency of the two kinds of events, in which *zai nan* 災難 events indicate a lesser level of intensity and urgency, and *guai yi* 怪異 events represent a high magnitude of error and imminent collapse is another point shared with the system of the *Gongyang zhuan*, suggesting the extent to which Dong Zhongshu's thinking was influenced by the *Gongyang* commentary.

This is not to say that Dong Zhongshu's thinking on anomalies and their significance in political philosophy was completely derived from the *Zhou yi* and the *Gongyang zhuan*. As discussed in Chapter 4, the material philosophy featuring concepts such as *qi* 氣, *yin* 陰, and

yang 陽 that Dong Zhongshu adduced to explain the material connection between human corruption and anomalous events was apparently part of general scholastic knowledge by Dong Zhongshu's time. Moreover, the term "ominously eerie abnormalities" (*yao nie* 妖孽) that features prominently in his memorials to Thearch Wu is not found in either the *Zhou yi* or the *Gongyang zhuan*.

The use of the graph *yao* 妖 ("eerie, ominous occurrence") in combination with the graph *zai* 菑 ("disaster") in a passage of the *Tai zu xun* 泰族訓 ("On the Great Reunion") chapter of the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 ("Masters of Huainan") (a work that is dated to the mid-2nd B.C.E.²⁵) that integrates anomaly-centered political philosophy into the chapter's arguments about the nature of effective political rule suggests that around the time that Dong Zhongshu was composing his memorials to Thearch Wu, there was a form of anomaly-centered discourse in circulation that posited that the actions of political leaders could be linked to the occurrence of anomalous and/or destructive incidents via the material concept of *qi* 氣:

...人主有伐國之志，邑犬群嗥，雄鷄夜鳴，庫兵動而戎馬驚。今日解怨偃兵，家老甘臥，巷無聚人，妖菑不生，非法之應也，精氣之動也。²⁶

...when the rulers of humans have a will to attack states, village dogs howl together in packs, roosters cry out in the night, the weapons of armories stir about, and war horses are startled. Today, loathing has dissipated and weapons are put to rest. Household elders repose in ease. In the alleyways, there are not gatherings of humans. Ominously eerie and disastrous occurrences are not generated. These are not because of the effects of laws. These are because of the motions of the vapors of vital essences.

²⁵ Charles Le Blanc observes that the *Huainanzi* was presented to the Han court in 139 B.C.E. See Charles Le Blanc, "*Huai nan tzu* 淮南子" in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, 189-95 [discussion of the dating of the *Huainanzi* is in 190].

²⁶ *Huainanzi ji shi*, 1400.

This observation informed by anomaly-centered political philosophy is a brief, isolated moment in the *Huainanzi*, but its logic resembles that of Dong Zhongshu's memorial, and it features terms that are close permutations of those that Dong Zhongshu used. Put alongside Dong Zhongshu's statements in his memorials, and combined with the apparent fact that the concept of *yao nie* 妖孽 cannot be found to derive from the canonical sources from which Dong Zhongshu drew other features of his anomaly-centered thinking, this passage can be understood as a reflection of a form of anomaly-based political philosophy featuring the term *yao* 妖 that had an existence of its own in the early Western Han. This type of discourse took the form of positing a formula by which anomalies and disasters occurred when political rule was awry, but conversely did not occur when political rule was on the mark. It featured a material explanation of the connection between human political action and anomalous incidents based on the concept of *qi* 氣. It seems to have been a form of anomaly discourse that circulated independently of or adjacent to canonical scholarship. It does not make its claims based in a rigorous inspection of history, as Dong Zhongshu and Liu Xiang after him did, but expresses itself as a description of a state of affairs (existing in the past or present) that is premised on an assumption about the effects of correct and, alternately, errant political rule as governed by eternal natural principles. The presence of this type of discourse featuring the term *yao* 妖 in the *Huainanzi*, which was contemporary to Dong Zhongshu but apparently completely separate from his scholarship, also increases the likelihood that the *Wuxing zhuan*, which likewise featured the term *yao* 妖 and did not attempt to root its claims in a rigorous inspection of history, was influenced by a type of anomaly discourse that was distinct from Dong Zhongshu's scholarship. Judging from his

diction, Dong Zhongshu also had exposure to this type of anomaly discourse and integrated it into his scholarship (though not through the medium of the *Wuxing zhuan*).

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has studied the influences of pre-imperial textual traditions on the anomaly-centered scholarship of Liu Xiang and Dong Zhongshu. Surprisingly, despite its many accounts of bizarre events and its passages theorizing the connection between anomalous events and human activity, the *Zuo zhuan* appears to have had little fundamental influence on Liu Xiang's scholarship on anomalies in history and was used primarily to supplement the *Chunqiu*'s record of anomalous events. While Liu Xiang introduced the innovation of applying the *Wuxing zhuan* framework and taxonomy to the study of anomalous events in history, judging from his comments documented in the “Wuxing zhi,” he appears to have been heavily influenced by Dong Zhongshu's thinking. This inheritance is consistent with Ban Gu's preface to the “Wuxing zhi” and statements made by Liu Xiang in his memorials that are recorded in the *Han shu*.

Going back to the early Western Han, Dong Zhongshu's move to base the demonstration of a connection between errant human action and anomalies in *Chunqiu* history found recourse in the hermeneutical system expressed in the *Gongyang zhuan*. In that system, anomalous events were taxonomized into the related categories of *zai* 災 and *yi* 異, and so the *Gongyang zhuan* provided a ready-made catalogue of anomalous events in history. The *Gongyang zhuan* provided an explanation of how it distinguished between the two types of anomalous events, made statements explaining the cause of anomalous events as being the action of heaven engaging in “warning” (*jie* 戒), and delineated an ordinal relationship between the two types of events, such that *yi* 異 events were construed as being of a greater magnitude of urgency than *zai* 災 events.

Dong Zhongshu's thinking on anomalous events in history, with its structured categories of *zai nan* 災難 and *guai yi* 怪異 placed in the same order of magnitude, and his emphasis on the role of heaven in causing anomalies as a signal to human political actors, doubtlessly drew from the hermeneutical system of the *Gongyang*. While the term *zai yi* 災異 as a phrase denoting anomalous events associated with disruption and political collapse pre-dated Dong Zhongshu, as can be seen in Thearch Wu's use of the term in his rescript to which Dong Zhongshu memorials replied, Thearch Wu's statements show that the emperor was not using the term to indicate concepts in anything that attempted to be a precisely articulated system of thought. Dong Zhongshu's response to Thearch Wu's inquiry, on the other hand, imbued the phrase with relatively well-defined meanings and situated it into a logic that showed the mark of the *Gongyang zhuan*.

In addition to the knowledge derived from the *Gongyang zhuan* that Dong Zhongshu employed, there were also features of his scholarship that cannot be readily traced to those texts that were considered canonical in the early Western Han. While it can be argued that the material philosophy based in the concepts of *qi* 氣, *yin* 陰, and *yang* 陽 that he used to construct a material connection between errant human action and anomalous events was derived in part from references to those concepts in the *Zhou yi*, the phrase *yao nie* 妖孽 that appears in his memorials is apparently not from the canon as Dong Zhongshu knew it. It appears to have been part of a discourse that was separate from (but likely adjacent to) those canonical texts, made explicit statements that emphatically connected human error to the occurrence of anomalous events, and featured the term *yao* 妖. The passage of the *Huainanzi* cited above that demonstrates these features suggests that in Dong Zhongshu's time this discourse was in circulation. If a Warring

States dating is accepted for the *Zuo zhuan* passage (also cited above) in which Shen Xu similarly associates the occurrence of *yao* 妖 with dysfunction in human society—as appears to be possible, given excavated texts inscribed on the Zidanku manuscript that is dated to the late 4th century B.C.E. that shows similar diction and logic—it seems clear that *yao* 妖 discourse was also a pre-Han inheritance.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has given an account of the tradition of Han dynasty anomaly discourse as it was expressed in political philosophy and historical analysis. For the Eastern Han period, the “Wuxing zhi” chapter of the *Han shu* was compared with the *Lun heng* to show shared, fundamental patterns in Eastern Han anomaly discourse by which historical accounts of extraordinary occurrences that were purported to have happened in the past were accepted as reliable and as betokening the movements of deeper forces at work, forces that were understood as being critically relevant to human society and the stability of political entities. Similarities and differences in terminology were delineated, as were points of difference in ideas about the responsiveness on the part of physical and divine forces to human moral action. Analysis of the “Wuxing zhi” and *Lun heng* demonstrates that points of difference expressed in the two texts were articulated within a shared paradigm featuring common fundamental assumptions about anomalous events and their nature as manifestations of alterations in underlying physical and cosmic forces and as signals of future disruption that would (according to these shared fundamental assumptions) have immediate effects on human society.

Having analyzed anomaly discourse as expressed in the Eastern Han, this dissertation then constructed a chronological account of the tradition as it developed and evolved in the Western Han period. Stratigraphic analysis of the contents of the “Wuxing zhi,” with its documentation of texts, commentaries, and records produced in the Western Han, alongside other historical accounts and materials for the Western Han recorded elsewhere in the *Han shu*, was used to identify two critical moments in the development of the tradition. The first of these was Liu Xiang’s application of the complex taxonomical system of the *Hong fan Wuxing zhi* to

the analysis of anomalous events recorded (in the text of the *Chunqiu* and in what records of Western Han were available to Liu Xiang) as having occurred in the *Chunqiu* period and in the Western Han. The second of these moments was the occasion of Dong Zhongshu's memorial responses to an imperial inquiry of Han Thearch Wu conducted soon after his accession to power. In his responses, Dong Zhongshu adduced the *Gongyang* commentary version of the *Chunqiu* as evidence to argue for the ability of well-balanced human governance to ensure the perpetuation of political rule and for the idea that when governance goes awry, different types of anomalies occur in a particular sequence as the manifestation of what he considered to be simultaneous disruption in physical matter and the controverting response on the part of a sentient divinity. In his exchanges with Thearch Wu, Dong Zhongshu laid the groundwork for Western Han anomaly discourse that developed in the context of Han scholasticism based in and centered around the Han court. Dong Zhongshu's move to ground the claims of anomaly discourse as it pertained to political philosophy in the *Chunqiu* record of history initiated the core trend in Western Han anomaly discourse, which was to locate its claims in rigorous analysis of historical events, an approach that Ban Gu inherited and took up in his own analysis of Western Han history in the "Wuxing zhi."

Given that Dong Zhongshu was such a seminal figure in Western Han anomaly discourse, this dissertation goes on to study the immediate influences that informed his thinking. It identified the *Gongyang* commentary as the source of his reading the *Chunqiu* record as a chronicle of anomalies in history and as the likely origin of key terms and concepts of his analytical position. It also identifies a component of his thinking that does not appear to have derived from the canon: the term *yao* 妖 ("ominously eerie occurrence")—appearing in the

phrase *yao nie* 妖孽—used as a descriptor of anomalous events in a context in which it is claimed that anomalies are caused by errant human action. Since similar formulations featuring the term *yao* 妖 are present in texts already in circulation at the time of Dong Zhongshu’s composition of his memorials to Thearch Wu, it appears that this aspect of Dong Zhongshu’s thought was not original to him and reflects wider trends in early Western Han anomaly discourse. Although I was not able to pursue this line of inquiry given the limited scope of the present dissertation, there is textual evidence in excavated materials to trace such formulations back to earlier antecedents in Warring States texts.

One important consequence of the stratigraphic method this dissertation applies to the analysis of the “Wuxing zhi” for the purpose of constructing a chronology of Western Han anomaly discourse as documented in the “Wuxing zhi” is the observation that a significant amount of the contents of the “Wuxing zhi” were the result of Ban Gu’s own extension of the theoretical frameworks applied by Western Han anomaly discourse to the analysis of Western Han history itself. For about a third of the anomalous events catalogued in the “Wuxing zhi,” there is no evidence that these had been interpreted as having omenological significance prior to Ban Gu’s listing them in the “Wuxing zhi” and studying them by the tenets of Western Han anomaly discourse. This observation deeply complicates a view in currency that Liu Xiang together with his son, Liu Xin, likely authored most of the contents of the “Wuxing zhi.” While certain contents appearing in the “Wuxing zhi” can certainly be attributed to Liu Xiang, and the *Wuxing zhuan* system that preceded Liu Xiang was by all accounts first applied by him to the study of the historical record of anomalies (and is retained in the “Wuxing zhi” as its organizing framework), a study of the “Wuxing zhi” that takes into account its patchwork nature brings into

high relief the extent to which it was the result of acts of accretion and textual synthesis that occurred at a number of moments over a long period of time. In this process, Ban Gu's act of compilation in the Eastern Han played a significant role—or at the very least, for the portion of the contents of the “Wuxing zhi” that most plausibly can be attributed to Ban Gu, these contents cannot be used with any assurance as a firsthand to material for Western Han anomaly discourse.

This dissertation also reveals the limits of the *Han shu* as a source for Western Han anomaly discourse. Since Ban Gu's account of the Western Han intellectual history is largely based on documents circulating at the Han court or held in its archives, it naturally presents Han court scholasticism as being the central crucible of Han anomaly discourse insofar as it was tied to political philosophy. However, clues present in other transmitted texts that originated from outside the Han court (such as the *Huainanzi*) and texts in the Han excavated record (as, for example, early Western Han textual materials excavated at Yinqueshan 銀雀山 and Zhangjiashan 張家山) suggest that Han anomaly discourse as an expression of political philosophy was a wider trend in Western Han intellectual life. There are also significant gaps in the *Han shu* account of Western Han anomaly discourse. Perhaps the largest of these gaps is the obscurity surrounding the origins of the *Hongfan Wuxing zhuan*, a fundamental component of the structure of the “Wuxing zhi” for which it can only be affirmed from Ban Gu's account that a version of the text was in Xiahou Shichang's possession as of around 100 B.C.E. While the *Hongfan Wuxing zhuan* reflects an important current in Western Han anomaly discourse, there is as yet no way to provide a satisfying picture of its origins and of how the scholastic activities surrounding its compilation related to Dong Zhongshu, if at all—though judging from the internal features of the *Wuxing zhuan*, it seems to have emerged from a current of activity that

was entirely independent of Dong Zhongshu's scholarship. It will be the work of future investigation of these points to create a fuller picture of Western Han anomaly discourse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Traditional Sources (Including Translations)

- Alfred Forke, trans. *Lun-hêng (Part I. Philosophical Essays of Wang Chung.)* Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1907.
- Ban Gu 班固 et al. *Han shu* 漢書 (“Documents of the Han”). Zhonghua shuju: Beijing, 1962 [rpt.: 2019].
- Bielenstein, Hans. “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-Shu.” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 22 (1950): 127-43.
- Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, annot. *Han Fei zi jishi* 韓非子集釋 (“Master Han Fei: Collected Interpretations”). Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1974.
- Chen Shouqi 陳壽祺, annot. *Shang shu da zhuan* 尚書大傳 (“Great Tradition on the Exalted Documents”). Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan 商務印書館, Zhonghua Minguo 26 nian [1937].
- Cheng Shude 程樹德, annot. *Lun yu jishi* 論語集釋 (“Arguments and Discourses: Collected Interpretations”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990 [rpt.: 1997].
- Duan Yucai 段玉裁, annot. *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (“Explaining Patterns and Interpreting Graphs”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju [reproduction of the Waseda University 稻田大学 1847 edition prefaced by Obata Kōkan 小畑行簡], 2020.
- Durrant, Stephen, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg, trans. and annot. *Zuo Tradition*. 3 Vols. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016.
- Liu An 劉安 et al. *Huainanzi ji shi* 淮南子 (“Masters of Huainan”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998 [rpt.: 2019].
- Huang Hui 黃暉, annot. *Lun heng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 (“Arguments in the Balance: Collation and Interpretation”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990 [rpt.: 2017].
- Legge, James, trans. *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*. 5 Vols. Hong Kong: At the Author’s; London: Trübner & Co., 1861-72.
- Malmqvist, Göran. “Studies on the *Gongyang* and *Guuliang* Commentaries, part 1.” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*. Vol. 43 (1971): 67-222.

Ruan Yuan 阮元, ed. *Chong kan Song ben Gongyang zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本公羊注疏附校勘記. Nanchang: Nanchang fu xue 南昌府學, Jiaqing ershi nian 嘉慶二十年 [1815]. Rpt. in *Ruan ke Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 阮元刻春秋公羊傳注疏. Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2020.

_____, ed. *Chong kan Song ben Guliang zhushu fu jiaokan ji* 重刊宋本穀梁注疏附校勘記. Nanchang: Nanchang fu xue 南昌府學, Jiaqing ershi nian 嘉慶二十年 [1815]. Rpt. in *Ruan ke Chunqiu Guliang zhuan zhushu* 阮元刻春秋穀梁傳注疏. Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2020.

Sima Qian 司馬遷. *Shi ji* 史記 (“Records of the Historian”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959 [rpt.: 2021].

Wang Kaiyun 王闓運, annot. *Shang shu Da zhuan bu zhu* 尚書大傳補註 (“Supplementary Commentary to the Great Tradition on the Exalted Books”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991.

Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (“Springs and Autumns Tradition of the One Named Zuo: Annotations”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981 [rpt.: 2020].

Excavated Sources (Including Translations)

Harper, Donald, trans. Unpublished English Translation of Li Ling 李零, ed. and annot. *Zidanku boshu* 子彈庫帛書 (“Zidanku Silk Document”). Vol. 2. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2017.

Modern and Contemporary Scholarship

Arbuckle, Gary. “Restoring Dong Zhongshu (BCE 195-115): An Experiment in Historical and Philosophical Reconstruction.” Ph.D. dissertation (1991). University of British Columbia.

Bernhard Karlgren. “On the authenticity and nature of the Tso chuan.” *Göteborgs högskolas årsskrift*. Vol. 32, No. 3 (1926).

Bujard, Marianne. “La Vie de Dong Zhongshu: Enigmes et Hypothèses.” *Journal Asiatique*. Vol. 280. Nos. 1-2 (1992): 145-217.

Cai, Liang. “The Hermeneutics of Omens: The Bankruptcy of Moral Cosmology in Western Han China (206 BCE-8 CE).” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. Vol. 25, No. 3 (Jul. 2015): 439-459.

- Chen Kanli 陳侃理. *Dong Zhongshu de 'Chunqiu' zaiyi lun* 董仲舒的春秋災異論 (“Dong Zhongshu’s Arguments about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences Derived from the *Springs and Autumns*”). *Wenshi* 文史. No. 2 (2010): 65-90.
- _____. *Ruxue shuxue yu zhengzhi—Zaiyi de zhengzhi wenhua shi* 儒学數術與政治—災異的政治文化史 (“Ruism, Numerology, and Politics: A History of the Political Culture of Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences”). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2015.
- Clark, Anthony E. *Ban Gu’s History of Early China*. Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2008.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mark and Michael Nylan, eds. *Technical Arts in the Han Histories: Tables and Treatises in the Shiji and Hanshu*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021.
- De Groot, Jan Jakob Maria. *The Religious System of China*. 6 Vols. (1892-1912; rpt.: Taipei: Chengwen, 1967).
- Durkheim, Emile and Marcell Mauss. “De quelques forms primitives de classification: contribution à l’étude des représentations collectives” (“On Some Primitive Forms of Classification: A Contribution to the Study of Collective Representations”). *L’Année sociologique*. Vol. 6 (1901-02): 1-72.
- Eberhard, Wolfram. *Beiträge zur kosmologischen Spekulation der Chinesen der Han-Zeit* (“Contributions to Chinese Cosmological Speculation in the Han Period”). Ph.D. dissertation (1933). University of Berlin.
- _____. “Beiträge zur Astronomie der Han-Zeit II” (“Contributions to the Astronomy of the Han Period II”). *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse* (“Proceedings of the Prussian Academy of Science, Philosophy-History Category”), (1933).
- Eberhard, Wolfram. “Neuere Chinesische und Japanische Arbeiten zur altchinesischen Astronomie” (“Recent Chinese and Japanese Works on Ancient Chinese Astronomy”). *Asia Major* (1933).
- Fairbank, John K., Robert Redfield, and Milton B. Singer, eds. *Chinese Thought and Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
- Graham, A.C. *Disputers of the Tao*. Chicago and Lasalle, Illinois: Open Court Press, 2003.
- Granet, Marcel. *La pensée chinoise* (“Chinese Thought”). N.p.: 2012, Kindle Edition.

- Ikeda Tomohisa. “Kodae chungkuk ei cheon’in sangkuan ron ei guan han yeongu—Dong Chungseo leul chungshim eu ro” 고대중국의 天人相關論에 관한 연구—董仲舒를 중심으로 (“A Study of Ancient Chinese Arguments about the Interrelatedness of Heaven and Humans: With a Focus on Dong Zhongshu”). Lee Sung Ryule 李承律 [이승율], trans. *Inmun yeongu nonjip* 인문연구논집 (“Humanities Studies Essay Collection”). Vol. 3, No. 2 (1998): 183-259.
- Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.
- Kern, Martin. “Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi 漢武帝 (141-87 B.C.)” *Studies in Chinese History*, No. 10 (Dec. 2000): 1-31.
- Kim Dongmin 金東民 [김동민]. “Dong Jhungseo Chunchu hak ei cheon’in kam’eung ron ei dehan kochar—sangseo jae’i seor eul jungshim eu ro” 董仲舒 春秋學의 天人感應論에 대한 고찰—祥瑞災異說을 중심으로 (“A Study of Arguments about Sentient Responsiveness Between Heaven and Humans in Dong Zhongshu’s Scholarship of the *Springs and Autumns*—With a Focus on Discourse About Portentous Anomalies Indicating Propitiousness and Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences”). *Dongang cheorhak yeongu* 東洋哲學研究. Vol. 36 (2004): 313-48.
- Lewis, Mark Edward. *Writing and Authority in Early China*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Loewe, Michael, ed. *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*. New Haven, Conn.: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993.
- _____. *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- _____. *Dong Zhongshu: A ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011.
- Loewe, Michael and Edward L. Shaughnessy, eds. *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Ma Nan 马楠. “Hong fan wuxing zhuan zuozhe buzheng” 洪範五行傳作者補證 (“Supplementary Proof Regarding the Author of the Great Plan Five Elements Tradition”). *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 中国史研究 (2013.1): 144.

- Mizoguchi Yūsō 沟口雄三, Hamashita Takeshi 濱下武志, Hiraishi Naoaki 平石直昭, and Hiroshi Miyajima 宮嶋博史, eds. *Ajia kara kangaueru sekaizō no keisei* アジアから考える世界像の形成 (“The Formation of Worldviews as Considered from the Perspective of Asia”). Tokyo: Tōkyo daigaku shuppanshya, 1994.
- Mizoguchi Yūsō and Kojima Tsuyoshi 小島毅, eds. *Zhongguo de siwei shijie* 中國的思維世界. Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 2006.
- Nylan, Michael. “A Modest Proposal, Illustrated by the Original ‘Great Plan’ and Han Readings.” *Cina*. Vol. 21 (1988): 251-264.
- Nylan, Michael. *The Shifting Center: The Original “Great Plan” and Later Readings*. Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica; Steyler Verlag: Nettetal, 1992.
- Nylan, Michael and Greit Vankeerberghen, eds. *Chang’an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2015.
- Olberding, Garret P.S., ed. *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 2013.
- Puett, Michael. “Violent Misreadings: The Hermeneutics of Cosmology in the *Huainanzi*.” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 72 (2000): 29-47.
- Queen, Sarah A. *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Ren Milin 任蜜林. “*Hong fan wuxing zhuan xin lun*” 洪範五行傳新論. *Hebei shifan daxue xuebao* 河北師範大學學報 (2020.5): 87-93.
- Saussy, Haun. “Correlative Cosmology and Its Histories.” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*. Vol. 72 (2000): 13-28.
- Schaberg, David. *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001.
- Schuessler, Axel. *Minimal Old Chinese and Later Han Chinese: A Companion to Grammata Serica Recensa*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009.
- Sivin, Nathan. “Cosmos and Computation in Early Chinese Mathematical Astronomy.” *T’oung Pao*. Vol. 55 (1969): 1-73.

- Tanaka Masami 田中麻紗巳. “Ryu Kyo no sai’i setsu ni tsuite—zenkan sai’i shisō” 劉向の災異說について—前漢災異思想 (“On Liu Xiang’s Discourses about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences: Former Han Thought Regarding Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences”). *Shūkan Tōyōgaku* 集刊東洋學. Vol. 24 (1970): 29-42.
- Tseng, Lillian Lan-ying. *Picturing Heaven in Early China*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2011.
- Twitchett, Denis and Michael Loewe, eds. *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1986.
- Wang Aihe 王愛和. *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Wang Gaoxin 汪高鑫. *Liu Xiang zaiyi lun zhiqu tan wei* 劉向災異論旨趣探微—兼論劉向、劉歆災異論旨趣的不同及其成因 (“Probing the Core Concepts of Liu Xiang’s Arguments about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences: A Discussion of the Differences Between Liu Xiang and Liu Xin’s Arguments about Disastrous and Intensely Irregular Occurrences and their Origins”). *Anhui daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 安徽大學學報(哲學社會科學版). Vol. 27, No. 2 (2003): 104-110.
- Wang Yongxiang 王永祥. *Dong Zhongzhu ping zhuan* 董仲舒評傳 (“Dong Zhongshu: A Critical Biography”). Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1995.
- Xu Fuguan 徐復觀. *Liang Han sixiang shi* 兩漢思想史 (“Intellectual History of the Former and Latter Han Periods”). 3 Vols. Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2014 [rpt.: 2020].
- Xu Xingwu 徐興無. *Liu Xiang ping zhuan* 劉向評傳 (“Liu Xiang: A Critical Biography”). Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2005 [rpt.: 2009].
- Xu Yuangao 徐元誥, ed. *Guo yu jijie* 國語集解 (“Discourses of the States: Collected Explanations”). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2019.