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Inventories of the Past: Rethinking the “School” Affiliation of the *Huainanzi*

INTRODUCTION

During the last several decades, our understanding of the text of the important Western Han work known as *Huainanzi* 淮南子 has advanced markedly. This has come about with the publication of several noteworthy translations and studies that have brought new and compelling insights. For example, Roger Ames and Paul Goldin have raised for consideration the political message contained in *Huainanzi*, chapter 9; Charles Le Blanc has clarified the concept of resonance (*ganying* 感應) in chapter 6; John Major has decoded the complex cosmology of chapters 3, 4, and 5; Michael Puett has drawn our attention to the themes of self-divinization and theomorphic rulership in chapters 1, 6, and 7; Harold Roth has published a textual history and explored the text’s “inner-cultivation” practices; and Griet Vankeerberghen has examined the moral philosophy in connection with the political annihilation of Liu An’s 劉安 kingdom.¹ With a complete English translation on the horizon, *Huainanzi* studies have come of age.² No longer is it tenable

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¹ See Roger T. Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Political Thought* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1983; rpt. Albany: State U. of New York P., 1993); Paul R. Goldin, “Insidious Syncretism in the Political Philosophy of *Huai-nan-tzu*,” *Asian Philosophy* 9.3 (1999), pp. 165–91; Charles Le Blanc, *Huai-nan Tzu: Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1985); John Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought: Chapters Three, Four and Five of the Huainanzi* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1993); Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 2002), pp. 259–86; Harold D. Roth, “Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought,” *HJAS* 51.2 (1991), pp. 599–650; Harold D. Roth, *The Textual History of the Huai-nan Tzu* (Ann Arbor: The Association of Asian Studies, 1992); and Griet Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 2001).

² See the forthcoming *Huainanzi* translation by John Major, Andrew Meyer, Michael Puett, Sarah Queen, Harold Roth, and Jay Sailey.

to dismiss the work as an unoriginal collection of pre-Han materials. Scholars now recognize the text's novelty, though clearly it draws heavily on ideas that predate the Han.³ Having turned this important hermeneutical corner, scholars are increasingly mining the rich resources contained in *Huainanzi* to address questions in Han intellectual history and are currently engaged in a number of debates concerning the nature of the text and the motives of its patron Liu An, king of Huainan. This article is concerned with one such debate.

There are moves afoot to categorize *Huainanzi* according to one of two prominent Han inventories. One group of scholars, drawing upon Sima Tan's 司馬談 (d. 110 BC) "Essential Tenets of Six 'Jia'" (*liujia zhi yaozhi* 六家之要指) maintains that *Huainanzi* is best understood as an exemplar of Han-dynasty Daoism or Huang-Lao 黃老 thought.⁴ A second group prefers the "Eclectic" rubric, following Liu Xiang's 劉向 (79–8 BC) "Treatise on Arts and Literature" (*Yiwenzhi* 藝文志) in Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92 AD) *Han History* (*Hanshu* 漢書).⁵ In contrast to both positions, this article argues that *Huainanzi* was not written to defend a "Daoist," "Huang-Lao" or "Eclectic" perspective. Its authors never aligned themselves with any one tradition. If they never identified themselves as "Daoists" or "Eclectics," why label them as such?⁶ Moreover, categorizing the text in terms of Sima Tan's or Liu Xiang's inventories is

³ For the most persuasive arguments detailing the originality of the text, see Ames, *Art of Rulership*, pp. 22–27; 53–64; 94–107; 132–41; 145–52; 153–64; and Puett, *To Become a God*, pp. 259–86.

⁴ Representatives of the first group include Hsiao Kung-ch'üan (Xiao Gongquan), Charles Le Blanc, John Major, and Harold Roth. They argue further that the particular type of Daoism that the text expounds and Sima Tan describes is not "Lao-Zhuang" Daoism but that known as "Huang-Lao," after the teachings of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi mentioned on numerous occasions in *Shiji* and *Hanshu*. See Hsiao Kung-ch'üan, *A History of Chinese Political Thought*, trans. F. W. Mote (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979), pp. 570–82; Le Blanc, *Huai-nan Tzu*, pp. 4–8; Major, *Heaven and Earth*, pp. 8–14; Roth, *Textual History*, pp. 13–19; and Roth's preface in Ames, *Art of Rulership*, pp. ix–xiii. A recent Japanese article emphasizes the distinctly Daoist philosophical tendencies in *Huainanzi*: Ikeda Shüzō 池田秀三, "Kandai no Enangaku" 漢代の淮南學, *Chūgoku shisōshi kenkyū* 中國思想史研究 22 (1988). Those who have questioned scholars' attempts to categorize *Huainanzi* as a "Huang-Lao" text based on evidence that differs from what is outlined below, include Michael Loewe, "Huang Lao Thought and the *Huainanzi*," *JRAS* ser. 3, 4-3 (1994), pp. 377–95; Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2001), pp. 260–61, n. 72; and Puett, *To Become a God*, p. 269.

⁵ Chinese scholars mainly constitute this group. See, e.g., Chen Yiping 陳一平, *Huainanzi xiaozhuyi* 淮南子校注譯 (Guangdong: Renmin Press, 1994), pp. 5–7; and Hou Wailu 侯外廬, *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* 中國思想通史 (Beijing: Renmin Press 1957), vol. 2, pp. 78–83.

⁶ Here it would be helpful to distinguish the etic from emic usages of such terms. This is particularly important with regard to the disparate ways in which the term "Daoist" has been employed in historical studies. It may also help resolve the confusion concerning the inception of Daoist history, since one important dividing line appears to coincide with that distinction. H. G. Creel, Arthur Wright, and others have identified the origins of Daoism with Zhuangzi, yet

not particularly revealing.⁷ In this respect, employing one or two of the many Han inventories as maps of the Han intellectual world is bound to breed misunderstanding.⁸ Reading Sima Tan and Liu Xiang in dialogue with one another and with the authors of the *Huainanzi* postface, this article will suggest that approaching their inventories as accurate descriptions of the prominent traditions of the Han era is to misread them and miss their polemical nuances.

The two Han inventories, just mentioned, are part and parcel of a long-standing genre of polemical essays meant to compete in a market for court and teaching prominence and which stretch back to such Warring States exemplars as the “Feiru” 非儒 (“Contra the Confucians”) section of *Mozi* 墨子, the “Xianxue” 顯學 (“Eminent Learning”) section of *Hanfeizi* 韓非子, “Tianxia” 天下 (“All-under-Heaven”) as found in *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and two sections in *Xunzi* 荀子 (“Fei shier zi” 非十二子, “Contra Twelve Masters,” and “Jiebi” 解蔽, “Dispelling Blindness”). None was value neutral; each was meant to persuade its audience of a

others argue that it began much later, with the Celestial Masters, since this is the first group to self-consciously identify themselves as Daoists. For their respective arguments, see H. G. Creel, *What is Taoism?* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1970), pp. 1–24; Arthur Wright, “A Historian’s Reflections on the Taoist Tradition,” *History of Religions* 9 (1969–70), pp. 248–55; and Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1997), pp. 10–15. For the landmark article on the problematic usages of the term “Daoism,” see Nathan Sivin, “On the Word ‘Taoist’ as a Source of Perplexity: With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China,” *History of Religions* 17.3–4 (1978), pp. 303–30.

⁷ Referring to the “Treatise on Arts and Literature,” Michael Loewe long ago cautioned: “The distinctions that the list drew among various philosophical schools were partly based on, and partly extended, the discrimination made by Ssu-ma T’an (d. 110 B.C.) among the six schools of *yin-yang*, *ju-chia* (Confucianists), *Mo-chia* (Mohists), *ming-chia* (Nominalists), *fa-chia* (Legalists), and *Tao-te* (Taoists). However, it is of some importance to note that these distinctions were by no means rigorous at the time, as it is doubtful how far Ch’in and Han thinkers could be classed, or would have allowed themselves to be classed, within any single school of philosophy. It is therefore by no means correct to delineate schools of, say, Confucianism, Taoism, or Legalism at a time when there was a certain amount of overlap among the views of writers assigned by Liu Hsiang or Liu Hsin to any one of these categories”; Loewe, “The Religious and Intellectual Background,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires 221 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1986), pp. 651–52. Most recently, Roger Ames and Paul Goldin have also argued against a “school” affiliation for the *Huainanzi*, though based on different reasons than my own. See D. C. Lau and Roger Ames, *Yuan Dao: Tracing the Dao to Its Source* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), pp. 9–12; and Goldin, “Insidious Syncretism,” pp. 181–82.

⁸ Recently, some have questioned the field’s tendency to essentialize Han intellectual traditions; see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Traditional Taxonomies and Revealed Texts in the Han,” in Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth, eds., *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual* (Honolulu: U. of Hawaii P., 2002), pp. 81–101; Martin Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), pp. 155–96; and Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson, eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), pp. 17–56.

particular viewpoint, be it “the superiority of a novel system of government (*Hanfeizi*), a natural innateness (*Zhuangzi*), or a particular strain of Confucian fundamentalism (*Xunzi*),” as Mark Csikszentmihalyi has recently argued.⁹ Moreover, such forerunners already had developed a rich storehouse of metaphors (root–branch, part–whole, bent–straight) and distinctive arguments with which to disarm the intellectual opposition and promote the author’s particular perspective.¹⁰

During the Han, this genre continued to develop. Like their Warring States predecessors, the Han exemplars of such writing were anything but dispassionate. They too were meant to persuade their audience to adopt a particular viewpoint. Yet new themes and arguments, shaped by the different concerns of their authors and the realities of their day, came to dominate. They say much about their authors’ visions of imperial rule, particularly how the relationship between political power and cultural authority was to be negotiated within the new circumstances of empire. They reveal their desires to negotiate with the Han emperors for a degree of political power as custodians of culture. But they tell us much less about the objective historical realities of the day.

The following examination of Sima Tan’s and Liu Xiang’s inventories will also demonstrate that during the Han the term *jia* as in “*Daojia* 道家,” or “Daoist,” was a new and contested concept. The large disparity between their usages of it, suggests its polemical nature and the lack of shared meaning. No author’s usage could be definitive. The question is not what *was* Daoism but rather, *whose* Daoism? Not what history, but whose historiography?

Finally, a close reading of *Huainanzi*, chapter 21, “A Summary of the Essentials” (“Yaolue” 要略) will reveal the limits of Sima Tan’s and Liu Xiang’s inventories as tools for identifying books with a specific tradition of learning. Chapter 21 summarizes the text and delineates its aims. It demonstrates beyond question that its authors did not ally themselves with any particular tradition. To impose such an identification would negate all that its authors sought to achieve.¹¹

⁹ See Csikszentmihalyi, “Traditional Taxonomies,” p. 88.

¹⁰ For an in-depth analysis of the metaphors employed to describe the diversity of ideas that marked Pre-Han and Han thought, see Ken Brashier’s unpublished manuscript entitled “The Ancestral Cults in Early Imperial China.”

¹¹ The *Huainanzi* is quite deliberately a work of multiple authors. Ban Gu and the Eastern Han commentator Gao You 高誘 (ca. 160–220 AD) describe it as such, and the content and style of the text confirms their claims. See Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962) 44, p. 2145; and Liu Wendian 劉文典, *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), Gao You’s preface, p. 2. For the debates concerning the authorship of the *Huainanzi*, see Le Blanc, *Huai-nan Tzu*, pp. 21–41; and Roth, *Textual History*, pp. 18–23.

SIMA TAN'S "ESSENTIAL TENETS OF SIX 'JIA'"

Sima Tan's "Essential Tenets of Six 'Jia'" is preserved in one of two surviving documents in which his son, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC), describes his life and aspirations in detail.¹² Unlike the earlier prototypes found in *Hanfeizi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Xunzi*, Sima Tan's schema is situated in a larger narrative context not of his own devising. The rhetorical aims of his son shape it. Leaving aside the interesting question of the broader ends toward which Sima Qian employs his father's message,¹³ his brief preface to Sima Tan's inventory shapes our understanding of the circumstances that inspired its inception and conception in several important ways. He explains:

The Grand Historian studied astronomy from Tang Du; received instruction in the *Changes* from Yang He, and was habituated to discussions of the Way (*daolun*) by Master Huang. The Grand Historian held office from the Jianyuan to the Yuanfeng periods (140–110 BC). Grieved that scholars did not fully comprehend their meaning and that teachers were confused about them, he discussed the essential tenets of six "jia."¹⁴

¹² I have translated the Chinese characters to emphasize that it is "six *jia*" rather than the typical "Six Schools." This is for two reasons. I hope to avoid the confusing tendency to render 家 as "school" and to draw attention to the selective nature of Sima Tan's roster. Though it typically has been assumed that Sima Tan's characterization represents a complete account of the traditions that existed in his day, comparisons with other Han writings, as I demonstrate, below, readily indicate that his list was neither comprehensive nor congruent with the realities of his day but shaped to fit the rhetorical aims of his argument. Sima Tan's distinctive usage of the term "jia" will be taken up in greater detail, below.

¹³ Steven Durrant addresses this issue in his recent study of Sima Qian's autobiographical writings. However, Durrant frames his inquiry in terms of the murky category "schools" and assumes that they are most relevant in working through the divergent voices in Sima Qian's writings. Thus he asks: "How do we explain the apparent discrepancy between Sim Tan, the Taoist author of 'The Essential Meaning of the Six Schools' and Sima Tan, the stern voice of Confucian responsibility speaking to his son in the 'Self-Narration'?" Durrant resolves the apparent contradiction by arguing that the first is an authentic source by Sima Tan while the latter is necessarily a recollection of Sima Tan's words seen through the distorted memory of his son. Such an approach assumes that "schools" required of their followers a kind of totalistic and exclusionary commitment more characteristic of Western religions than those of Han China. It also assumes that "school" distinctions were most relevant in understanding Sima Qian's thought. If, however, Sima Qian does not identify the former voice as "Daoist" or the latter as "Confucian," why should we impose such classifications on the material? By framing the inquiry in this manner, Durrant seeks to explain the tensions and conflicts in the historian's writings in terms of classification schemes in a manner perhaps not altogether consistent with Sima Qian's view. See Steven Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tensions and Conflicts in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1995), p. 8. For a discussion of the problematic manner in which understandings of Western monotheistic religions are applied to early Chinese thought, see Sarah A. Queen, review of Martin Kern's *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation*, in *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29 (2002), pp. 275–78.

¹⁴ Many scholars have misleadingly translated and continue to translate 家 as "school." The term literally means family, household, or lineage and possesses strong genealogical con-

Presumably Sima Qian felt that this particular roster of intellectual mentors, the period in which Sima Tan held office, and his motivations for writing provided important clues to unlock the meaning of Sima Tan's message. Unfortunately the significance of these clues has faded with the passage of time. For example, little is known of the shadowy figure Master Huang. The content of his "discussions of the Way" remains unclear, though this reference is often taken as unequivocal evidence that Sima Tan learned his "Daoism" from Master Huang.¹⁵ These ambiguities aside, what seems beyond equivocation is the more general point that Sima Qian presumably meant to suggest that his learning traversed many fields of knowledge.

Finally, Sima Qian, when he claims that his father was troubled that people misunderstood the teachings of his day, points to a polemic. It was a lack of scholarly consensus that had motivated Sima Tan to clarify his ideas. Sima Tan sought to convince the ruler of the superiority of the ideas and practices he identified with "Daoism (*Daojia*)" to win imperial patronage for those who would rally around his vision. His inventory, like those that came before, was a form of persuasion. Yet, since the time of the writing of *Lüshi chunqiu*, polemic as a genre began to address not the interstate competition that marked the late Warring States, but the need for political and intellectual unity neces-

notations. But Sima Tan does not use the term to denote such meanings. He employs it in a highly idiosyncratic, and new, way to designate intellectual tendencies and political practices that are not associated, with the exception of the Mohists, with any particular master or text, as is the case with, for example, Liu Xiang's usage of the term. In this sense, as Kidder Smith and Nathan Sivin have recently argued, Sima Tan invents new groupings of ideas with his usage which do not correspond, with the exception of the Confucians, to a single social entity of any kind in late Warring States and Han. For Xunzi's use of the term, see Xiong Gongzhi 熊公哲, *Xunzi jinzhu jinyi* 荀子今註今譯 (Taipei: Shangwu, 1975), pp. 430-31. For the insightful discussions of Sima Tan's treatment of the term, see Kidder Smith, "Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, 'Legalism,' *et cetera*," *JAS* 62.1 (2003); and Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin, *The Way and the Word: Science and Medicine in Early Greece and China*. (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2002), pp. 52-55.

¹⁵ For example, translators like Burton Watson have read Master Huang's association with 道論 as theories germane to only Daoism. This is perhaps due to the fact that the commentator Xu Guang glosses the reference to Master Huang with a note that the "Biography of the Confucians" states: "Master Huang was fond of Huang-Lao techniques." However, in that same chapter Master Huang reappears in a heated debate with the *Odes* scholiast Yuan Gu wherein he espouses ideas quite alien to Sima Tan's 道家. Thus, it is quite possible that this reference to 道論 refers to the shared vocabulary of those engaged in theorizing about the Way. Insofar as Sima Qian goes on to claim in the introduction that his father felt that such theories were misunderstood by his contemporaries and as Sima Tan himself proceeds to describe how a number of 家 captured a particular aspect of the Way, the broader translation better fits the phrase's immediate literary context. The point is important because it colors our understanding of Master Huang's and Sima Tan's relation to the 道家 the Grand Historian describes. See Burton Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty II* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1961), p. 393; Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959) 130, p. 3288; and 121, pp. 3122-23.

sary to the survival and flourishing of a centralized empire. Sima Tan's inventory-as-polemic aimed not to describe but to circumscribe how various traditions could, and should, coexist within that empire.

This ideal of unity, and various programmatic visions that sought to harmonize the disparate cultural traditions into a coherent and comprehensive whole, distinguished the Han inventories from their predecessors. Sima Tan gives voice to such a vision of unity in his opening comments:

According to the "Great Commentary" to the *Changes*: "All-under-Heaven are of one goal, though they deliberate on it in many ways; they return to the same destination, though their paths differ. The Cosmologists (*yinyang* 陰陽), Confucians (*ru* 儒), Mohists (*Mo* 墨), Terminologists (*ming* 名), Legalists (*fa* 法), and The Way and its Virtue (*daode* 道德) all strive to carry out good governance. It is merely that the different routes one takes in following their teachings differ in their reflectiveness.¹⁶

With this reference to the *Changes*, which later Han writings would echo time and again, Sima Tan neutralizes the contentious differences and debates that divided the pre-Han masters, a clever strategy for promoting unity and cohesion in the newly created empire. Not only are their goals identical, but, as Sima Tan argues, they all strengthen the state. In reflecting a particular aspect of the Way, however, each had developed that aspect to excess: the Cosmologists' magnification of models and taboos drawn from Heaven and Earth unnecessarily confined human beings; the Confucians' pedantic erudition of the Six Arts led to a loss of the essentials; the Mohists' frugality was difficult to implement in times of grief; the Legalists' harshness lost sight of compassion; and the Terminologists' strict attention to words detracted from the truth. Yet each possessed strengths that cannot be dismissed: the Cosmologists organized the grand compliances of the four seasons; the Confucians ordered the rituals between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, elder and younger; the Mohists strengthened the agricultural basis of society and economized expenditure; the Legalists rectified the distinctions between ruler and minister, superior and subordinate, and distinguished official duties so that they did not overstep one another; and the Terminologists rectified names and their realities, evaluating performance in accordance with official title and utilizing the Three-Five System of Standards. Sima Tan singled out "Daoism (*Daojia*)" for its comprehensiveness; it alone combined the strengths

¹⁶ *Shiji* 130, pp. 3288–89.

of all the other bodies of knowledge.¹⁷ Sima Tan explains that, cutting across their limited domains,

The Daoists cause the essence and spirit of human beings to concentrate and unify so when active they unite with the formless and when tranquil¹⁸ they find contentment in the myriad things. In devising techniques, they follow the grand compliances of the Cosmologists, select the best of the Confucians and Mohists, and extract the essentials of the Terminologists and Legalists. They shift and move with the times, transform and change in response to things. When establishing practices and carrying out affairs, they do nothing unsuitable. Their tenets are concise and easy to grasp; their affairs are few but their achievements are many.¹⁹

In the appended auto-commentary, Sima Tan further describes the Daoists as doing nothing purposive, and thereby leaving nothing undone; rooting themselves in emptiness and nothingness; employing adaptation and compliance; possessing no preconceived limits or unchanging actions, and thereby fully comprehending the true character of the myriad things. Neither leading things nor following behind them, they consequently possess the ability to become master over the myriad things.²⁰ With this panoply of techniques at his disposal, the ruler's efficacy is guaranteed. Sima Tan concludes with one last swat at the Confucians:

As for the essentials of the Great Way, namely discarding ardent desires and diminishing intelligence, they have relinquished these, relying instead on techniques [to govern]. They use their spirit so excessively that it dissipates, and exhaust their body so excessively that it declines. But I have never heard of a case where someone who has agitated and disturbed his body and spirit has succeeded in enduring as long as Heaven and Earth.²¹

¹⁷ *Shiji* 130, pp. 3289–91. The structure of Sima Tan's argument bears striking resemblance to Xunzi's "Dispelling Blindness" 解蔽. In that chapter Xunzi describes the strengths of Mozi, Songzi, Shenzi, Huizi, and Zhuangzi. He then argues that each pursued his specialty to excess and thereby became obsessed with one "corner" of the Way. Only the Confucians achieved comprehensiveness. Sima Tan's Daoists stand in analogous position to Xunzi's Confucians, but his "jia" denote intellectual tendencies and political practices not famed masters, as in Xunzi's case. See Xiong, *Xunzi jinzhu jinyi*, pp. 430–31. For an illuminating discussion of Xunzi's essay, see Paul R. Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), pp. 101–3.

¹⁸ I follow the *Hanshu* version of this passage that renders the *Shiji* graph 瞻 meaning "to provide for" as 澹 meaning "quiet" or "tranquil"; *Shiji* 130, p. 3290, n. 8; and *Hanshu* 62, p. 2710.

¹⁹ *Shiji* 130, p. 3289.

²⁰ *Shiji* 30, p. 3292.

²¹ *Shiji* 30, p. 3289.

Rulers who would follow Sima Tan's recommendations could look forward to success not only in the public realm, but in their personal lives, achieving nothing short of immortality. Clearly Sima Tan's "Essential Tenets" is anything but detached: he fervently seeks to persuade the emperor to share his vision that the one who holds sway over the empire might harmonize the vast and varied cultural heritage at his disposal to rule successfully. In Sima Tan's rendering, Daoism comprises the strengths of the more limited traditions.

Why lavish such honor upon Daoism? Sima Qian's introduction suggests that his father's essay originated during the early years of emperor Wu's reign, a time marked by intense political and intellectual competition in which scholars and practitioners drew upon different texts, bodies of knowledge, and esoteric lore, as diverse as the regions over which the Han rulers claimed sovereignty, to articulate both broad visions of governance and specific policies with which to win the emperor's favor. In those first years of emperor Wu's reign it was anything but clear whose policy recommendations would prevail. The tenor of the ruler's dominion was anything but settled as the young emperor struggled to build a coalition of support with which to challenge the influence of his mother, empress-dowager Dou, who served as regent from 141 to 135 BC. According to Sima Qian, imperial patronage swung back and forth like a pendulum depending on who momentarily enjoyed the upper hand, empress-dowager Dou or emperor Wu. When the emperor's mother prevailed, she followed the well-worn path of imperial patronage fostered by the earlier emperors Wen and Jing and wielded her influence by supporting scholars associated with "Daoist" or "Huang-Lao" techniques.²² When the emperor gained the upper hand, he tended to support certain classical scholars.²³ It is likely that Sima Tan sought to persuade emperor Wu of the superiority of Daoism while it was not clear whether emperor Wu would emerge from his mother's shadow, or whether his support for the classicists would exclude other voices at the court. The power and influence of the empress-dowager, and the precedents for patronizing scholar-officials versed in the techniques of the Yellow Emperor

²² Sima Qian and Ban Gu often use the terms 道家 and 黃老 interchangeably though that does not necessarily mean that they were synonymous. See Sarah A. Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn according to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 15–22.

²³ For example, shortly after assuming the throne, Emperor Wu promoted to high office the four scholars Dou Ying, Tian Fen, Zhao Wan, and Wang Cang. All were versed in the Lu interpretation of the *Odes*; Queen, *Chronicle to Canon*, p. 21.

and Laozi, must have convinced Sima Tan that he might carry his vision to fruition.²⁴

Does Sima Tan's Daoism represent anything more than the idealistic aspirations of one particular official? As he and other officials conformed to the new demands for unity, they drew their categories from history, yet they also reshaped that reality. Too few sources that have survived demarcate where description leaves off and prescription begins. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to conclude that Sima Tan's version of Daoism was a polemical, dynamic, and evolving interpretation that reveals more about the author who wielded the term than the reality it purports to describe.

Those who have labeled the *Huainanzi's* point of view as Daoist undoubtedly see a correspondence between Sima Tan's discussion of Daoism and the text's content. They argue that such a correspondence supports a descriptive rather than prescriptive reading of Sima Tan, providing historical evidence that such a strain of Daoism did in fact exist in the Western Han. Given that certain concepts and techniques described by Sima Tan also appear in *Huainanzi*, such a conclusion upon first consideration seems neither problematic nor radical. There are references in *Huainanzi* to some of the concepts and techniques mentioned by Sima Tan. On cultivating the essence and spirit to promote longevity, consult chapter 7, "Jingshen" 精神 ("On The Essence and Spirit"); on the Three-Five System of Standards, read chapter 9, "Zhushu" 主術 ("On the Art of Rulership").

Yet even if one were to assume the validity of a descriptive reading, and despite the echoes of Sima Tan in *Huainanzi*, such convergence does not make the text Daoist, for several additional reasons. First, Sima Tan's inventory includes only a few of the concepts and techniques mentioned in *Huainanzi*.²⁵ Second, it does not account for the fact that

²⁴ Although Sima Qian tends to depict the struggle in such unequivocal terms, the circumstances were much more complex. For a discussion of the intellectual diversity and competition to win imperial patronage during the early years of emperor Wu's reign, see Queen, *Chronicle to Canon*, pp. 2-3, 15-25; and Vankeerberghen, *Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim*, pp. 9-27.

²⁵ E.g., Sima Tan does not mention humaneness and righteousness (*renyi*) but *Huainanzi* discusses them as paired concepts in 14 of its 21 chapters (2, 6, 8-16, 18, 20, 21). See D. C. Lau 劉殿爵 and Chen Fong Ching 陳方正, eds., *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 淮南子逐字索引: A Concordance to the *Huainanzi*, ICS Ancient Chinese Text Concordance Series (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1992), e.g., *j.* 2, p. 11, ll. 18-21, 28, p. 12, ll. 1-6, p. 14, ll. 7-11; *j.* 9, p. 82, l. 5; *j.* 10, p. 8, ll. 25-27; *j.* 12, p. 113, l. 13; *j.* 16, no. 109, p. 164, l. 8; and *j.* 21, p. 224, l. 8. In fact, the earliest commentator, Gao You, characterized *Huainanzi* as harmonizing the Way and its Virtue 道德 with Humaneness and Righteousness 仁義. See Liu, *Huainan honglie jijie*, Gao You preface, p. 2. Another intriguing example is the striking lack of reference to the military arts in Sima Tan's "Essential Tenets," whereas *Huainanzi* devotes an entire chapter to the subject; *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin*, *j.* 15, p. 142, l. 21, p. 153, l. 29.

the authors of *Huainanzi* draw more heavily upon *Zhuangzi* and *Lüshi chungiu*, than upon *Laozi*.²⁶ Moreover *Huainanzi* most often discusses the *Laozi* in conjunction with the *Zhuangzi*, not with ideas linked to the Yellow Emperor.²⁷ Third, unlike Sima Tan, the *Huainanzi* authors did not privilege the Daoist tradition or represent themselves as champions of a Daoist viewpoint. As I demonstrate below, the *Huainanzi* authors refused to support any viewpoint *a priori*, whether Daoist, Confucian, Mohist or otherwise. When we turn, finally, to Chapter 21, “A Summary of the Essentials,” in which its authors articulate the broad aims of their literary endeavor, we see a very different sort of vision.

But in order to round out the discourse among the three works chosen for examination, we should look at the other inventory that is often drawn upon to situate *Huainanzi* in the Han intellectual world – Liu Xiang’s “Treatise on Arts and Literature.”

LIU XIANG’S “TREATISE ON ARTS AND LITERATURE”

Liu’s treatise functioned in one respect as a catalogue of the imperial collection. Liu, who initiated and composed much of it, was an erudite and influential scholar-official and imperial clansman, writing under the auspices of emperor Cheng (reigned 33–7 BC). Liu Xiang’s son, Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BC–23 AD), completed the work after his father’s death at the bequest of emperor Ai (reigned 7–1 BC) and Ban Gu left his final imprint on the text when redacting it into the present form in which it appears in the *Han History*.²⁸ It is both similar to and indebted to Sima Tan’s classification in several important respects. It too draws upon the *Changes* trope to argue for the unified aims of the various intellectual perspectives and political practices it describes. It delineates both their strengths and weaknesses, supports a syncretic approach that draws upon their various contributions to governance, and envisions the state as a prominent concern.

Despite these similarities, however, the inventory contained in the Treatise departs from its predecessor in several significant ways.

²⁶ See Le Blanc, *Huai-nan Tzu*, pp. 81–83.

²⁷ E.g., discussions of the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* appear throughout the text but most prominently in chapters 1, 2, and 12. In fact, the postface asserts that chapter 12 aims “to investigate and verify the techniques of Lao-Zhuang”; *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 21, p. 225, l. 19.

²⁸ Though recognizing the multiple hands that shaped this treatise, I refer to Liu Xiang as the author since he composed the bulk of the work and a discussion of the debates concerning who wrote what specific portions of the received version would detract from the point of the arguments presented here. For Ban Gu’s description of its composition, see *Hanshu* 30, p. 1701.

Liu Xiang uses the category “jia” to classify books as well as the ideas and methods that characterized the various branches of a putative ancient government. His inventory also differs in its organization and complexity. Whereas Sima Tan spoke of six “jia,” Liu Xiang describes: Confucians (*rujia*), Daoists (*Daojia*), Cosmologists (*yinyangjia*), Legalists (*fajia*), Terminologists (*mingjia*), Mohists (*Mojia*), Vertical and Horizontal Coalitionists (*zonghengjia* 縱橫家), Eclectics (*zajia* 雜家), and Agriculturalists (*nongjia* 農家). Referred to collectively as “The Masters,” they constitute only one of six broad categories that Liu arranges in descending order of importance:

1. works and commentaries on the Six Arts;
2. precepts and writings of the Masters;
3. poetry and rhyme;
4. military strategy and tactics;
5. numerology and technical arts; and
6. recipes and prescriptions.²⁹

Composed after the Confucian classics had come to dominate the Han intellectual world, it is no accident that Liu Xiang gave pride of place to these works and their various commentaries. Thus, as Mark Lewis has correctly pointed out, “it builds its textual universe around the assumptions that the officially canonized *ru* texts were both the exemplary models of proper writing and the origin of all other categories of text.”³⁰

Liu Xiang’s specific departures from Sima Tan’s Daoism, however, are most relevant to the debates concerning the affiliation of *Huainanzi*. Here the differences are striking. Liu Xiang writes:

The current of the Daoists 道家者流 emanated from the Office of the Historian, which in successive generations recorded the various roads leading to success or failure, survival or destruction, and ill or good fortune from antiquity down to the present. By and by they came to understand how grasping the essentials maintains the root, how purity and emptiness preserves oneself, and how humility and pliancy sustains oneself. These became the techniques of the ruler who faces south. They accord with Yao’s

²⁹ My renderings of these terms follow Loewe, “Religious and Intellectual Background,” p. 651. Loewe and others have recognized the increasing complexity of Liu Xiang’s list compared to that of Sima Tan, but the expansion has typically been read as historical evidence for the proliferation of scholarship towards the end of the Western Han. This position warrants reconsideration since such a reading incorrectly assumes that Sima Tan’s list was a complete and accurate reflection of the social and intellectual realities of his day.

³⁰ Mark Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 1999), p. 325.

capacity to yield and the *Changes* hexagram “Modesty and Humility,” wherein one instance of humility brings forth four benefits.³¹ These are its strengths. Nonetheless, if taken too liberally, one will desire to disregard ritual education and abandon humaneness and righteousness, claiming that one need only employ purity and emptiness to govern.³²

Though Sima Tan was ambiguous enough to suggest the possibility that the various “*jia*” enjoyed some independence from the state, Liu Xiang constructs them as mere appendages, evolving from its specific offices. Liu Xiang’s positing a bureaucratic origin domesticates Daoism even further than Sima Tan had envisioned.³³ Moreover, though Sima Tan argued that the Daoists combined the strong points of many traditions, Liu asserts the opposite. In fact, he faults them for the potential damage they bring to Ruist rituals and the ethical values of humaneness and righteousness. In the minds of these Daoists, there is no match for purity, emptiness, acquiescence and humility—the cardinal techniques of Daoist governance. The subordinate role of Daoism in this treatise compared to its privileged status in Sima Tan’s “Essentials” is further borne out by the fact that Liu Xiang needs additional sources of intellectual authority to enhance Daoism’s legitimacy. He claims that Daoist techniques are congruent with the *Changes*, a text belonging to the Six Arts, the first and most privileged category in his schema. Finally, Liu associates the Daoists with a list of texts that do not fit into Sima Tan’s inventory. These include writings attributed to such people as Taigong, Laozi, Sunzi, Liezi, the Yellow Emperor, and Zhuangzi, but not to Liu An.³⁴

In Liu Xiang’s schema, *Huainanzi* belongs to a category lower on the list and of lesser importance—that of the Eclectics. Liu Xiang describes them as follows:

The current of the Eclectics 雜家者流 emanated from the Office of Consultation. They link the Confucians and Mohists with the Terminologists and Legalists, so that the substance of governing the state includes them all. In their considerations of kingly rule

³¹ The commentary explains the “four benefits” as follows: “The Way of Heaven decreases what is abundant and increases what is modest; the Way of Earth alters what is abundant and makes flow what is modest; the Way of Ghosts and Spirits harms what is abundant and brings benefit to what is modest; the Way of Humanity despises what is abundant and cherishes what is modest”; *Hanshu* 30, p. 1732, n. 2.

³² *Hanshu* 30, p. 1732.

³³ In fact, this treatise maintains that all the categories belonging to “Literature 文” in contrast to those belonging to “Arts 藝” derived from different offices of an imagined ancient state.

³⁴ *Hanshu* 30, p. 1729.

there is nothing they fail to relate. These are their strengths. Nonetheless, if taken too liberally, then diffuse and excessive, one will lack a particular allegiance for the heart.³⁵

Like the other Masters, the Eclectics emerged from the bureaucracy that the Han read back into ancient times, but their project was different. They were seen as concerned with promoting the “kingly way” (see below) by drawing from the Confucians, Mohists, Terminologists, and Legalists, but not from the Daoists or Cosmologists. Although their scope was made to be broader than that of the Daoists, the Eclectics too were still not comprehensive. In Liu’s schema, comprehensiveness rests in the person of the emperor rather than in any scholarly tradition. Nor are the contributions of the Eclectics persuasive to Liu, since they lack a clear basis for the policies they promote. Apparently, in the mind of Liu Xiang, they were the most politically pragmatic and ambitious of all the Masters.

Finally, and most importantly, Liu relates the Masters to a narrative of their birth:

Of the ten lineages of the Masters 諸子十家, only nine can be observed. All arose when the kingly way was already in decline, the feudal lords used force to govern, the rulers of the age held sway for only a single generation, and followed different methods based on their likes and dislikes. This is why the techniques of these nine proliferated and were created simultaneously. Each drew upon a single thread [of the Way], promoting a particular strength. Relying on these particular strengths, they rushed about with their persuasions to unite with the feudal lords. Though their teachings differed, like water and fire, they both destroyed and engendered one another. [Like] humaneness and righteousness, respect and harmony, they opposed and also complemented one another. As the *Changes* states: “All-under-Heaven return to the same destination, though their paths differ; they are of one goal, though they deliberate on it in many ways.” Now the different lineages promote their respective strengths. They spend their knowledge and exhaust their deliberations to clarify their precepts. Though they possess blindnesses and shortcomings, they are united in their essentials and goals, since they all branch out or flow forth from the Six Classics. If their adherents should encounter an enlightened king or sagely ruler who can strike a middle course among them, they all have the capacity to serve as his legs and arms.³⁶

³⁵ *Hanshu* 30, p. 1742.

³⁶ *Hanshu* 30, p. 1746.

This account reveals some important assumptions shaping Liu Xiang's schema. It is devolutionary in spirit. The lineages of the various masters are, in a sense, the product of decline, coming to the forefront only when the Way had collapsed. This fragmentation of the Way, Liu insists, persisted to the Western Han. Recovery and reintegration are possible, but only the emperor can accomplish this Herculean task. Liu concludes: "If you can cultivate the techniques of the Six Arts and observe the teachings of the Nine Lineages, discarding their shortcomings and appropriating their strengths, then you can thoroughly comprehend the countless techniques contained within these summaries."³⁷

Whereas Sima Tan argued that the Daoists alone could provide the comprehensiveness necessary for the ruler to succeed, Liu Xiang argues that only the ruler can attain such breadth out of the residue of ancient learning. All knowledge flows forth from the Six Arts, reflecting the dominance of the Confucian canon as a source for efficacious techniques of governance. Sima Tan implies that scholar-officials like himself, as custodians of culture, can administer the empire. Liu Xiang reserves that power for the "enlightened king or sagely ruler." Liu's schema justifies the cultural hegemony of the center, by this time the uncontested reality of Han rulership.

HUAINANZI, CHAPTER 21: "A SUMMARY OF THE ESSENTIALS"

Huainanzi was written and edited by a group of scholars working under the auspices of the well-known patron of scholarship and uncle of the emperor, Liu An, king of Huainan. He presented it to emperor Wu in 139 BC. Griet Vankeerberghen has correctly noted that: "Offering the *Huainanzi* was an invitation to Emperor Wu to join Liu An along the Way that it sketched out. The gesture thus includes both an element of submissiveness (it signals Liu An's acceptance of the authority of the emperor) and an element of self-assertion (it asserts Liu An as the one who possesses the Way)."³⁸ Like Sima Tan, Liu An sought to win the attention of the young emperor with an efficacious vision of governance at a moment when intellectual diversity marked the day. However, the status of this royal messenger greatly outweighed that of the Grand Historian. Thus, he set out his own very different sort of message at the end of the work for which he acted as sponsor.

The opening lines of chapter 21 explain that *Huainanzi* possesses all the knowledge the ruler needs to govern his empire successfully:

³⁷ *Hanshu* 30, p. 1746.

³⁸ Vankeerberghen, *Huainanzi and Liu An's Claim*, p. 12.

“We composed these writings and discourses to draw together and connect the virtues of the Way and align and orient the affairs of humanity. Reflecting upon Heaven above and considering Earth below, they (namely, these writings) thoroughly penetrate all principles in their midst.”³⁹ A series of discrete claims concerning the text support this most general claim. First, *Huainanzi* is an eminently practical text, chiefly concerned with elucidating the interconnections between the Way as an abstract entity and its manifestations in the concrete affairs of the world: “If we spoke of the Way but did not relate it to affairs, you would lack the means to rise and fall in concert with the times. If we spoke about affairs but did not relate them to the Way, you would lack the means to move and rest in concert with change.”⁴⁰ The authors insist repeatedly that one should not discuss the abstract qualities of the Way without elucidating their functions in the world, and they criticize their contemporaries who make this error.

Second, *Huainanzi* offers its reader the wisdom to choose the most efficacious course of action under all circumstances, whether looking outward and relating to the world at large or focusing inward on the self. The authors write:

In general, these linked compositions are the means by which you will perceive the Way and open up obstructions so that all later generations understand when it is fitting and suitable to promote or abandon and accept or reject things. Outwardly you will avoid confusion when coming into contact with things while inwardly you will possess the means to provide a dwelling for the spirit and nourish the *qi* 氣. Resting and fusing in utter harmony, you will find joy in all that you have received from Heaven and Earth.⁴¹

To do so, the reader must proceed from the beginning of the work to its end, reaping the benefits of each chapter. Thus, the authors claim, third, that *Huainanzi* constitutes a coherent work, following an arrangement and organization that is anything but random or felicitous. The vision of the text articulated here is one of interlinked and overarching coherence built upon a cumulative reading of its individual chapters.

The type of benefit each chapter brings is explained in great detail. For example, the authors describe the first nine chapters in the following way:

Had we spoken of the Way and not clarified its cycles of change and transmutation, you would not know the models to follow. Had

³⁹ *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 21, p. 223, ll. 21–22.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 223, ll. 23–24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226, ll. 23–24.

we spoken of its cycles of change and transmutation, and not illuminated Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons, you would not know the taboos to avoid. Had we spoken of Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons and not provided illustrations in accordance with their respective categories, you would not understand the subtleties of the essence. Had we discussed the most perfect essence and not traced to its source the spirit of human beings, you would not know the fulcrum around which to nourish your vitality.⁴² Had we traced to its source the disposition of human beings and not discussed the virtues of the great sages, you would not know how to distinguish the five forms of virtuous conduct.⁴³ Had we discussed the ways of the emperors and not discussed the affairs of the lords, you would not know the proper sequence distinguishing the small from the great.⁴⁴

These chapters move quite deliberately from cosmogony, to cosmology, to ontology; from the meta-phenomenal Way as utter non-differentiation to the phenomenal world of differentiated things that it generates; from the Way's macrocosmic aspects visible in Heaven, Earth, and the Four Seasons to its microcosmic manifestations in human beings; from cosmogony to human genesis; from the motions of the celestial bodies to the movements of human history; from the regulation of one's physical and spiritual self to the governance of the world.⁴⁵ The manner in

⁴² Essence 精 and spirit 神, both aspects of *qi*, are important terms throughout most *Huainanzi* chapters, especially chap. 6, "Peering Into the Mysterious" 覽冥, and 7, "Essence and Spirit" 精神. E.g., 7 describes the two terms as follows: "Essence and spirit are what one acquires from Heaven. Form and frame are what one receives from Earth"; *ibid.* 7, p. 55, l. 7. Chapter 21 further describes its discussion of essence and spirit as involving "what vitalizes human beings" and "what brings understanding and awareness to what lies within the form, frame and nine orifices"; *ibid.* 21, p. 224, l. 27. The most perfect essence 至精 is the most pure and subtle type of essence that exists within the grades of essential *qi*. For the fullest description of essence and spirit as the medium through which humans and Heaven achieve mutual resonance, see *ibid.* 6, p. 49, l. 27, p. 54, l. 21.

⁴³ The "Five Conducts" manuscripts from Mawangdui and Guodian enumerate the five forms of virtuous conduct 五行 as humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and sagacity 仁義禮智聖. See respectively, *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu* 馬王堆漢墓帛書 (Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1980), vol. 1, strips 170-351, pp. 17-28; and *Guodian chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu Press, 1998), pp. 29-35, 147-54. For two pathbreaking transcriptions and studies of these respective manuscripts, see Pang Pu, *Boshu Wuxing pian yanjiu* 帛書五行篇研究 (Qi-Lu Press, 1980) and Ikeda Tomohisa 池田知久, *Maō tai Kanbo hakusho gogyō hen kenkyū* 馬王堆漢墓帛書五行篇研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1993). See also Jeffrey K. Riegel, "Eros, Introversión, and the Beginnings of *Shijing* Commentary," *HJAS* 57.1 (1997), pp. 143-77; and Scott Cook, "Consummate Artistry and Moral Virtuosity: The 'Wu xing 五行' Essay and Its Aesthetic Implications," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* 22 (2000), pp. 113-46.

⁴⁴ *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 21, p. 226, ll. 24-27.

⁴⁵ It is beyond the scope of this essay to delineate these architectonic features, based upon, but departing from, the cosmology of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, which delineated many of the macrocosmic and microcosmic correlations typical of Han thought. I suspect that these ele-

which the authors relate the Way to all that follows in this description immediately suggests the limitations of confining the text to a particular affiliation. In the view being propounded, *Huainanzi* encompasses unity and diversity as it generates differentiation and yet is undifferentiated with respect to its ultimate referent, the Way. The authors quite self-consciously and purposefully draw upon *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* to exploit their rich imagery of the Dao as the cosmogonic source of the universe. The Dao, as a symbol with which to mediate the one and the many, unity and diversity, was a useful metaphor around which to organize the text.

Fourth, as the following passage makes clear, the text provides its reader with comprehensive knowledge of the world unseen and seen, past and present, cosmic and human, ruler and ruled:

Therefore in these twenty treatises, the patterns of Heaven and Earth are examined, the affairs of the human realm are discussed, and the ways of emperors and kings are conveyed. Our discussions are sometimes detailed and sometimes general, sometimes subtle and sometimes obvious. The tenets advanced in each chapter are different and each possesses its distinctive arguments. Now if we spoke solely of the Way, even though it is found in everything and everywhere, only the sage could grasp its root and thereby understand its branches.⁴⁶

Thus, the text describes “the root and branches of the Way” through a variety of essays that mirror the multiplicity of viewpoints populating the Han intellectual landscape and the rich array of genres—persuasion, debate, commentary, historical anecdote, verse, and parallel prose—with which to articulate them.

Finally, the last section of Chapter 21 deepens the authors’ claim for comprehensiveness by situating *Huainanzi* within a legendary evolu-

ments provide the text with an underlying coherence and unity not readily evident at the conceptual level wherein the authors discuss a number of disparate notions, such as softness and weakness 柔弱, political purchase 勢, learning 學, humaneness 仁, righteousness 義, selflessness 不得已, virtue, or power 德. The structural and conceptual aspects of the text are linked by means of a number of techniques recommended to the ruler such as non-action 無為, following behind 後, timeliness 時, availing oneself of others 乘, making use of the capable 使能, and utilizing the people 用眾. To grasp the coherence of the *Huainanzi* and its unified message one must understand the relationship among these three distinct levels of the text: structural, conceptual, and technical. For two different readings of its cosmology compared to that of *Zhuangzi*, see Charles Le Blanc, “From Ontology to Cosmogony: Notes on *Chuang Tzu* and *Huai-nan Tzu*,” in Charles Le Blanc and Susan Blader, eds., *Chinese Ideas About Nature and Society: Studies in Honour of Derk Bodde* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U.P., 1987), pp. 117–29; and Michael Puett, “Violent Misreadings: The Hermeneutics of Cosmology in the *Huainanzi*,” *BMFEA* 72 (2000), pp. 29–47.

⁴⁶ *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 21, p. 227, ll. 1–3.

tion of practices and texts stretching from king Wen of the Zhou through the Liu clan of the Han. Unlike Sima Tan or Liu Xiang, *Huainanzi* moves through a number of historical eras in which various techniques and texts appear as different figures come forth to advise their rulers, promulgating different policies to meet the needs of the times. Thus, for example, aided by the would-be fisherman recluse cum advisor Taigong 太公, king Wen of Zhou was able to employ humility and weakness to restrain the powerful and violent king Zhou of the Shang, thereby establishing the kingly way. *The Strategies of Taigong* 太公之謀 (*Taigong zhi mou*) arose out of these circumstances.⁴⁷ King Cheng avoided war and usurpation by adopting the pacifist policies of his advisor and regent the Duke of Zhou: "He released his war-horses to Mount Hua and his war-oxen to Peach Grove. He destroyed his war drum and snapped its drumsticks."⁴⁸ Thus Confucian Learning 儒者之學 arose out of the policies of the Duke of Zhou and king Cheng. And when duke Jing of Qi's reckless behavior endangered his state, his ministers Liangqiu Ju 梁丘據 and Zijia Kuai 子家囈 stepped forward to criticize him, inspiring the creation of *The Admonitions of Yanzi* (*Yanzi zhi jian* 晏子之諫).

In every age, the authors argue, rulers achieved their goals because they made use of those who assisted them by recommending appropriate policies. They depict the Zhou in idyllic terms, and the Qin more critically. The point is not so much that times have grown worse, though clearly they have, but that times change. Having demonstrated how the techniques generated by historical figures were useful and efficacious at the time, the authors describe the genesis of the *Huainanzi* in a completely different fashion. Unlike the policies and writings of the past, whose efficacy was limited temporally and bounded spatially by the circumstances in which they were generated, *Huainanzi* is all-inclusive in its scope and timeless in its relevance:

If you conform to the book of the Liu clan you will observe the images of Heaven and Earth; fully comprehend discussions of past and present ages; weigh affairs and establish regulations appropriately; measure forms and apply what is suitable; trace to its source the heart of the Way and its Virtue; and combine the customs of the Three Kings thereby endowing you with far-reaching

⁴⁷ *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 21, p. 227, ll. 20–23. *Hanshu* 30, p. 1729, lists a text entitled *Taigong Mou* 太公謀 consisting of 81 chapters; for a discussion of this important figure and a translation of the work traditionally attributed to him, see Ralph D. Sawyer, *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 21–105.

⁴⁸ *Huainanzi zhuzi suoyin* 21, p. 227, l. 30.

allure. From within the mysterious and subtle your essence will move without perception, leaving behind all borders and boundaries, penetrating the pure and tranquil thereby bringing under your control All-under-Heaven, setting in order the myriad things in the world, responding to their transformations and alterations, and fully comprehending their distinctive categories.⁴⁹

Moreover, the text neither follows the tenets of any one particular tradition nor holds one particular viewpoint above all others:

It does not follow the path made by a solitary footprint nor does it preserve the tenets of only one viewpoint. It is inextricably bound to and engaged with things, and yet it will not be deposed nor modified with the passage of time. Thus establish this book as a routine standard and you will not be hindered; disseminate it throughout the world and you will not be considered frivolous.⁵⁰

Elsewhere in *Huainanzi*, the utility and efficacy of multiple perspectives is echoed in numerous ways. Most often the cosmos provides the favored pattern: "Heaven does not possess only one season; earth does not possess only one benefit; and people do not possess only one thing that they do. Therefore undertakings must have many aspects to them; the direction one follows is always multidirectional."⁵¹ The comprehensiveness advocated is not simply a matter of diversity; it recognizes that the efficacy of policies depends on their use:

Heaven and Earth do not embrace just one thing; yin and yang do not generate just one kind. The sea does not reject rainwater in generating its vastness; the mountains do not reject dirt and stones in generating its height. If you hold to just one corner and disregard the others, if you cleave to just one thing and abandon the rest, your achievements will be limited and your control will be superficial.⁵²

In the eyes of its authors, by bringing together the strengths of the various traditions, *Huainanzi* transcends them all. By limiting their claims yet drawing upon them all, the authors argue, it is eternally relevant to the emerging present. With such potential resources, the ruler can confront the exigencies of his age.

If we take seriously the claims of this whole chapter of *Huainanzi*, claims that are supported throughout the book, we can only conclude that the text is beyond affiliation. Its authors argue that *Huainanzi*

⁴⁹ Ibid. 21, p. 228, ll. 28–30.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 21, p. 228, ll. 30–31.

⁵¹ Ibid. 20, p. 214, ll. 2–3.

⁵² Ibid. 20, p. 214, l. 26–p. 215, l. 2.

alone has achieved a timelessness and comprehensiveness not seen in the works of the earlier masters. Though each was efficacious, that efficacy was time-bound. Neither allying itself with a single perspective nor privileging a single intellectual persuasion or corpus of texts, *Huainanzi* articulates the interrelationship among their claims. This is not to suggest that the book does not favor certain practices or ideas, but it does not do so *a priori*. The privileging of one concept over another grows organically from the circumstances, determined by reading the times correctly and responding appropriately to change.

Though the five colors may be bright, with time they dull. Though trees and grasses may flourish, with time they decay. Things prosper and decline. They cannot remain as they were. Therefore, sages change their actions when an affair is finished; they change their regulations when laws grow corrupt. It is not that they delight in changing the ancient precedents or altering the constant norms. They do so to save the age from peril and ward off decline.⁵³

In this sense, change is the normative course of the sage-ruler who would model the socio-political order upon the Way.

CONCLUSION

When we compare the voices of Sima Tan, Liu Xiang, and Liu An we begin to appreciate the polemical nature of all three writings, whether historical or bibliographical, unofficial or official. Their claims to comprehensiveness were not mere conventions. What I would call their various “strategies of recovery” were shaped by the common conviction that over the centuries the Way had become fragmented and that its original unity must be restored.⁵⁴ As these scholars articulated different approaches to achieve comprehensiveness and restore unity to the Way, they revealed much about their intellectual proclivities and political views. Sima Tan privileged “Daoism”; Liu Xiang valued the “Six Arts and the Nine Lineages”; and Liu An offered everything a ruler wanted in the text produced under his auspices, arguing that all sources of wisdom could be used to restore the Way. For each, too, the arbiter of comprehensiveness differed. Sima Tan associated that task with scholar-officials like himself serving the central government; Liu

⁵³ Ibid. 20, p. 213, ll. 22–25.

⁵⁴ Although *Huainanzi*, chap. 21, does not speak explicitly about the fragmentation of the Way, several chapters describe the historical decline from such unitive utopian states as Grand Unity 太一 and Grand Purity 太清. See, e.g., ibid. 14, p. 132, ll. 10–16; and 12, p. 61, ll. 6–27.

Xiang linked the honor to the emperor alone as “sagely-ruler and enlightened king”; while Liu An reserved that role for imperial relatives like himself in the capacity of sagely-advisor. The *Huainanzi* postface envisioned them as patrons whose scholarly clients would compile comprehensive digests of wisdom. As advisors to the emperor, such kings could serve as bridges to local cultures across the empire.

Liu An was writing with the threat of annihilation hanging over his kingdom. He implies that only if local kingdoms were allowed to survive and contribute to the unity and omniscience of the center, could the ruler access the wisdom needed to respond to the needs of a vast empire.⁵⁵ Thus, in contrast to Liu Xiang’s central role for the bureaucracy, Liu An supported the looser arrangements of bygone days. The *Huainanzi* postface was a veiled argument for Liu An’s concerns, from the survival of his kingdom to toleration for local voices articulating diverse notions of moral authority emanating from the Way.

In short, Sima Tan, Liu Xiang, and Liu An deployed their writings to further both specific concerns and broader aims. What shaped them were the circumstances of their authors and the great debates of their time: on the nature of imperial patronage, on the relationship between imperial power and cultural authority, and on whether the autocratic model of the Qin or the diffuse power of the Three Dynasties was the most appropriate ideal for the Han. In this respect, they promise to tell us much more about the embattled terrain of the past upon which Han intellectuals constructed their views of the present than any reified notion of a “school” ever could.

⁵⁵ In is in this context that one should read the text’s repeated insistence that one who relies on his own intelligence will not rule successfully. See, e. g., *ibid.* 6, p. 51, ll. 8–12; 9, p. 70, ll. 1–11; and 14, p. 137, ll. 13–18.