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To Become Confucius: The Apocryphal Texts and Eastern Han Emperor Ming's Political Legitimacy

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Chinese history, it was common for emperors to compare themselves to ancient sage kings. However, it was rare, especially in early-imperial China, that an emperor would compare himself to Confucius, because the question of a ruler's being a sage was frequently a tendentious one, and in addition Confucius, though a sage, was never a ruler or even a successful statesman.¹ This paper investigates how the second emperor of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD), emperor Ming 明 (Liu Yang 劉陽, 28–75 AD; r. 58–75 AD), appealed to a certain image of Confucius to legitimize his rule, and the intellectual background that prompted his choice. I will focus on how the emperor's perception of himself and his rule based on notions of Confucius actually worked. I argue that a type of anonymous moral-political writing that has been termed "apocryphal texts" (*chen* 讖, *wei* 緯, or *chenwei* 讖緯) depicted Confucius as possessing a divine origin, his semi-divinity granted by Heaven, and in these texts Confucius seems to have used the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* to convey both information and the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命) – a ruler's right to rule – to the new

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¹ As Hsing I-tien insightfully points out, Han emperors were reluctant to compare themselves to sages, for whether the Han dynasty had had a sage ruler was a sensitive issue among the literati. See Hsing I-tien 邢義田, "Qin Han huangdi yu 'shengren'" 秦漢皇帝與“聖人,” rev. version, in his *Tianxia yijia: Huangdi, guanliao yu shehui* 天下一家, 皇帝·官僚與社會 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), pp. 73–82.

Han emperors. Also, the apocrypha showed the major disciples of Confucius, correspondingly, as his subjects in an “ideal kingdom,” defined by a set of ideal relationships treating Confucius (as king) hierarchically above them. Emperor Ming, by comparing himself to Confucius and his officials to Zixia 子夏, one of Confucius’ major disciples, he subtly claimed that he grasped the Way of sagely rulership and Heaven’s Mandate (as originally prophesied by Confucius), defending himself against a contemporaneous concern that there was not currently a sage on the Han throne, but accepting the principle that only sages could bring about a so-called Great Peace (*taiping* 太平), which may be understood as meaning an ideal state of governance.

In exploring how emperor Ming thus presented himself to his contemporaries, I do not intend to attribute to him a fixed belief that stemmed from systematic ritual forms or emerged from an external intellectual discourse, nor a cultural or fashionable “way of thinking.” I intend to explore him as a person who actively absorbed ideas and tools from his own intellectual experiences. In order to do so, I use a corpus of texts that many have considered “vulgar” or “superstitious”: namely, the so-called apocryphal texts, which were particularly important in the political-intellectual world of the Eastern Han.

I look at uses of apocryphal texts as a way to explore how emperor Ming and his court scholars and advisors thought about specific issues, and how they used these texts as a common ground for argumentation. In this article, we will start with a conversation between emperor Ming and a certain favorite scholar, Huan Yu 桓郁 (?–93 AD). In it, the emperor alluded to the *Analects* in order to compare himself to Confucius. Further, we will unpack the image of Confucius that writers at the time (the Eastern Han dynasty) seem to have considered relevant. Subsequently, we turn to the contemporary intellectual-political background to examine why emperor Ming needed a comparison of this nature.

Before proceeding, it will of course be necessary to characterize and give context for the moral-political writings called “apocrypha”: what were they, and what drove their circulation and acceptance?² They began to be noticed and repeated beginning in the first decades of the first century AD; authorship was always unknown, and their themes often concerned teleological history, political cycles, and prognostic

² For a brief summary of the early history of apocrypha as well as their reliability as historical sources, see the appendix of Howard L. Goodman, *Is’ao P’i Transcendent: The Political Culture of Dynasty-Founding in China at the End of the Han* (Seattle: Scripta Serica, 1998), pp. 228–34.

practice. Edited subsequently by various Han literati, they took shape beginning in 56 AD as a corpus containing small, sometimes versified texts that purported to elaborate, and in some instances reveal, the Five Classics. Their prophecies and anecdotes about the ancient sages served to legitimate the Han dynasty.³ Modern scholarship on this topic has been rather limited, but with defining breakthroughs. Beginning in the 1940s, Chen Pan 陳槃 looked at textual formation; in the 1950s, Hans Bielenstein analyzed the prophetic functions of apocrypha in the context of the psychological maneuvers behind the political success of the founder of the Eastern Han. Next, Jack Dull usefully surveyed the texts under the analytic gaze of their relationship with New Text (*jin wen* 今文) Han classicism and discussed the apocrypha's popularity during Eastern Han; and subsequently, Anna Seidel traced the impact of apocrypha on certain early-medieval Daoist concepts, such as the use of tallies and the clerical framework based on the Han bureaucracy. More recently, Lu Zongli's several works relate apocryphal texts' influence on literary writing and transmission in early-medieval China, and Hans van Ess has reflected on the relationship between apocrypha and Han classicism, especially the New Text trend.⁴ Some modern historians, just as earlier scholars did, have found opportunities to denigrate the apocrypha's political ideas and accounts of supernatural events as low-brow and superstitious.⁵

By taking other directions, I intend to reason out how a particular set of powerful people (in this case, emperor Ming and those indirectly

³ Lü Simian saw apocrypha as a genre that pursued arguments concerning legitimacy; he argued that they were used to “cater to contemporary [fashions] and smooth over [the claims] of common men 媚世諧俗”; see Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2005), pp. 741–42. Yasui Kōzan (in his chapter of Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八 and Yasui Kōzan 安居香山, *Isho no kisoteki kenkyū* 緯書の基礎的研究 [Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1976], pp. 79–80) also emphasized their function as tools of political legitimacy by coining the term *kakumei shisō* 革命思想, or “revolutionary thinking.”

⁴ See Chen Pan, *Gu Chenwei yantao ji qi shulu jieti* 古讖緯研討及其書錄解題 (Shanghai: Guji, 2009); Jack L. Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch’an-wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Washington, 1967); Hans Bielenstein, *The Restoration of the Han Dynasty, vol. IV, The Government* (Stockholm: Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, 1979), pp. 163–83; Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha,” in Michel Strickmann, ed., *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of R.A. Stein, Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques 21* (Brussels: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1983–85), pp. 291–371; Lu Zongli, “Apocrypha in Early Medieval Chinese Literature,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Review* 30 (2008), pp. 93–101; and Hans van Ess, “The Apocryphal Texts of the Han Dynasty and the Old Text/New Text Controversy,” *TP* 85.1–3 (1999), pp. 29–64. For a more detailed discussion of my reflections on the previous scholarship and my understanding of apocrypha in the context of Han classicism, see Zhao Lu, “In Pursuit of the Great Peace: Han Dynasty Classicism and the Making of Early Medieval Literati Culture,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 2013), pp. 38–43, 118–60.

⁵ Goodman, *Is'ao P'i Transcendent*, pp. 230–31, discusses this point.

and directly in his advisorial circles) used apocrypha to shape answers to certain political challenges. My approach is to examine the texts' political aspects, but instead of perceiving them as one-sided political propaganda, I give them a wider berth, showing them to be a product of intellectual and political discourses of the time, the function of which depended on who was quoting and using them and for what reason. Finally, I would be cautious about attributing apocrypha texts to any specific groups, such as *fangshi* 方士,⁶ or the New Text-leaning scholars during Eastern Han.

PRELUDE: A CONVERSATION AT BIYONG HALL

During one particular winter, emperor Ming went to Biyong Hall, a place of imperial instruction, to give an exposition of his own work, *Chapter and Verse of the Five Phases*:

In the winter,⁷ after lecturing on his own *Chapter and Verse of the Five Phases* in the Biyong Hall, the Emperor [Ming] asked Huan Yu to explain one chapter. [Afterwards,] Emperor [Ming] said to Huan Yu, "I am Confucius, and you are Zixia. The person who raises me up is Shang (that is, the given name of Zixia)." 其冬, 上親於辟雍自講所制五行章句已, 復令郁說一篇。上謂郁曰: "我爲孔子, 卿爲子夏, 起予者商也。"⁸

By quoting an anecdote from the *Analects*,⁹ the emperor compares himself to Confucius, and Huan Yu to one of Confucius' most famous disciples, Zixia. The emperor uses the master-disciple relationship of Confucius, in the position as master, and Zixia his supporter and student, as a historical analogy to the present. As Hsing I-tien 邢義田 mentions, comparisons to Confucius were a common locution and device among classicists throughout the Han era.¹⁰ But we must take

⁶ Goodman earlier warned about making this type of generalization; *ibid.*, p. 233.

⁷ The specific year, which is signaled by the pronoun *qi* 其, is unclear here.

⁸ *Dongguan Han ji* 東觀漢記, preserved in Li Xian's 李賢 commentary to Fan Ye 范曄 (398–446 AD), *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965; hereafter, *HHS*) 37, p. 1255.

⁹ The original story from the *Analects* goes as follows: "Zixia asked, 'Her entrancing smile dimpling, her beautiful eyes glancing, and patterns of color upon plain silk.' What is the meaning of these lines [from the *Book of Poetry*]." Confucius said, 'The plain silk is there first. The colors come afterwards.' 'Does the practice of the rites likewise come afterwards?' Confucius said, 'The person who raises me up is, you, Zixia. Only now can I discuss the *Poetry* with you.'" 子夏問曰: 巧笑倩兮, 美目盼兮, 素以爲絢兮。何謂也? 曰: 繪事後素。曰: 禮後乎? 子曰: 起予者商也! 始可與言詩已矣。 See *Lunyu*, sect. "Bayi" 八佾, in Zhu Xi 朱熹, annot., *Lunyu jizhu* 論語集注, *idem*, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983; hereafter, *SSZJJZ*) 2, p. 63. The English translation is adapted from D. C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 2000), p. 21.

¹⁰ Hsing, "Qin Han huangdi yu 'shengren,'" p. 78.

the device further: I wish to ask why, as emperor, did emperor Ming conform to the practice of classicist scholars, and how such rhetoric in practice could benefit himself. Before we elaborate on the use of this particular historical, even mythical, analogy, we need to explore the more-or-less broadly understood images of Confucius and Zixia at that time, specifically in about the first century AD.

OBSURE IMAGES OF CONFUCIUS AND ZIXIA: AN INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Confucius was a compelling figure in China among people of all walks of life. However, the image of Confucius was not a stable thing, and people of different periods imagined the sage-philosopher in different ways. From the last century BC to the second century AD, quite a few scholars thought of Confucius not as an extraordinary human who exerted moral philosophy, but as a semi-divine being. In their writings, Confucius was a “dark sage” (*xuan sheng* 玄聖), or an “uncrowned king” (*su wang* 素王).¹¹ This was particularly true also in the texts of the apocrypha. Although the latter’s authors and exact dates are unclear, based on content, most were written and compiled in the first decades of the first century AD with the aim of legitimating the rule of the founder of the Eastern Han, emperor Guangwu 光武 (named Liu Xiu 劉秀, 5 BC–57 AD; r. 25–57). After emperor Guangwu, most Eastern Han emperors promoted the scholarly use and study of these texts.

¹¹ In Classical Chinese, *xuan* carries a sense (among other meanings) of the innate mystery and inner truth of nature and human beings. Three scholars have made great contributions to the understanding of the image of Confucius as *xuan sheng* and *su wang* in apocryphal texts: Dull (“A Historical Introduction,” pp. 516–27) points out Confucius’ semi-divine nature and that Confucius was depicted as the uncrowned king to announce the rise of the Han dynasty and the creation of an ideal institution for the Han dynasty. Nakamura and Yasui (*Isho no kisoteki kenkyū*, pp. 152–70, esp. 160, 166) greatly emphasize apocryphal texts as the product of the New Text trend in scholarship and the Gongyang tradition of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. They are extremely cautious about Confucius himself as the uncrowned king. Instead, adopting Pi Xirui’s 皮錫瑞 theory, they argue that in apocryphal texts Confucius merely narrates the principles of the uncrowned king for the new dynasty. Xu Xingwu 徐興無, “Zuowei pifu de xuansheng suwang: Chenwei wenxian zhong de Kongzi xingxiang yu sixiang” 作為匹夫的玄聖素王，讖緯文獻中的孔子形象與思想, *Gudian wenxian yanjiu* 古典文獻研究 11 (2008), pp. 21–42, also emphasizes Confucius’ divine nature and argues that the idea of Confucius as representative of the phase of water comes from the cycle consisting of *tian tong* 天統, *di tong* 地統, and *ren tong* 人統 stated in *Chunqiu fanlu*. For this observation, see, e.g., Mark Csik-szentmihályi, “Confucius and the *Analects* in the Hân,” in Bryan W. Van Norden, ed., *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2002), pp. 142–44. Also see Lionel M. Jensen, “Wise Man of the Wilds: Fatherlessness, Fertility, and the Mythic Exemplar, Kongzi,” *EC* 20 (1995), pp. 497–37.

Xuan sheng: *The Dark Sage*

Han apocryphal texts did not coin the terms “dark sage” and “uncrowned king” for Confucius, but adopted them from elsewhere. In the so-called outer chapters of *Zhuangzi* (written approximately at the beginning of the second century BC),¹² for example, there is a passage describing the relationship between the way of Heaven, the way of the emperor, and the way of the sage:¹³

Emptiness, stillness, placidity, mildness, quietude, indifference, non-action – these are the root of the myriad things. Understanding this as the south-facing ruler, Yao was lord; understanding this as the north-facing minister, Shun was his subject. Occupying a superior position with this understanding is the virtue of emperors, kings, and the son of heaven; occupying an inferior position with this understanding is the way of dark sages and plain kings (that is, uncrowned kings). 夫虛靜恬淡，寂寞無爲者，萬物之本也。明此以南鄉，堯之爲君也；明此以北面，舜之爲臣也。以此處上，帝王天子之德也；以此處下，玄聖素王之道也。¹⁴

The above passage focuses on what human beings will become after they achieve “emptiness, stillness, placidity, mildness, quietude, indifference, non-action,” these being Zhuangzi’s characteristics of the Way. Upholders of the Way surely will become supreme persons.¹⁵ However, since their supremacy based on the Way does not affect distinctions in the social realm, they may occupy unequal social positions, as shown in the case of the mythic dynastic-founders Yao 堯 and Shun 舜. The passage does not complain that people are treated differently in society even when they possess equal virtues; it rather says that with a grasp

¹² For dating the outer chapters, see A. C. Graham, “How much of *Chuang tzu* Did Chuang Tzu Write?” in his *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), pp. 283–93; H. D. Roth, “*Chuang tzu* 莊子,” in Michael Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 56; and Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), pp. xxvii–xxx.

¹³ I understand the *Way* to be a metaphysical concept defined as the generator of the world, but also that force which keeps everything moving in its own particular pattern. Here, it is also a normative concept – the ideal *way* a sage or emperor should behave. Different social roles have different ideal behaviors.

¹⁴ Chap. “Tian dao” 天道, in Chen Guying 陳鼓應, annot., *Zhuangzi jinzhū jinyi* 莊子今注今譯 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), p. 337; trans. Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), p. 120.

¹⁵ By saying “supreme,” especially in this context, I mean that one achieves the state of *zhi ren* 至人, or the “ultimate man,” whose mind “functions like a mirror. It neither sends off nor welcomes; it responds but does not retain. Therefore, he can triumph over things without injury” 至人之用心若鏡，不將不迎，應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷。 See chap. “Ying diwang” 應帝王, in Chen, *Zhuangzi jinzhū jinyi*, p. 227. I quote the translation of Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, p. 71.

of the Way, no matter what position a person is in, he will become a supreme person.¹⁶ Even if he is just a commoner, his understanding of the Way will still make him a sage, perhaps a sage king, but he will not ever hold an official position. In this context, the “plain king” can actually refer to the plain color of the person’s dress, indicating low rank. “Dark” in “dark sage” can mean “obscure,” implying that his position is a low one: he is a sage whom no one knows.¹⁷

Based in this sort of context, “dark sage” and “uncrowned king” carried several connotations in Han times. Firstly, they indicated people who had achieved spiritual power. Later on in the Han, spiritual power was not only linked to the Way as it was in the *Zhuangzi*, but it could also include moral authority and ultimate political principles. Secondly, this spiritual power was unaccompanied by political authority. Thirdly, since Shun in the example became a king after having been a vassal, a “dark sage” or “uncrowned king” had virtues that made a person a candidate for kingship. When writers of this time described Confucius with these names, they did so with extended meanings that solved the following contradiction: if Shun became a king, why not Confucius?

Let us survey how the use of these two terms in Han apocryphal texts resolved that contradiction. In “Chunqiu yan Kong tu” 春秋演孔圖 (“Confucius’ Diagrams of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*”),¹⁸ Confucius is called *xuan sheng* 玄聖, or the “dark sage:”

Confucius’ mother Zhengzai (literally, “the proof is present”) dreamed of being stimulated by the Black Emperor, and then gave birth to [Confucius]. Therefore he is called the “dark sage.” 孔子母徵在，夢感黑帝而生，故曰玄聖。¹⁹

¹⁶ In *Zhuangzi*, people who understand the Way and are of relatively low social status might work as cooks, fishermen, woodcutters, and so on. See Alan J. Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2000), pp. 27–29, who terms this kind of person the “wise rustic.”

¹⁷ “Dark” can also be an epithet for the Way. Accordingly, *su* can also indicate a characteristic of the Way, as in *pu su* 樸素, or “raw and plain.” See sect. “Tian dao,” in Chen, *Zhuangzi jinzhū jinyi*, p. 337. According to the context, the *Zhuangzi*’s intention seems to be to make multiple correspondences, therefore, we should keep as many layers of meaning as possible.

¹⁸ I suspect that a problem arose in the word order of the title during transmission of the text. The alternative form of the title is “Chunqiu Kong yan tu,” which makes more sense, since according to an entry in the text, the title alludes to the legend about Fu Xi’s 伏羲 making the eight trigrams (*ba gua* 八卦) and Confucius’s elaborating (*yan* 演) them. Therefore, I translate the title as “The diagrams of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* deduced by Confucius,” though I keep the word order of the title as given in Yasui Kōzan’s and Nakamura Shōhachi’s major compilation, *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成 [orig. title *Isho shūsei*] (rev. trans. Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 1994; hereafter cited as *WSJC*), p. 573.

¹⁹ “Chunqiu yan Kong tu,” in *WSJC*, p. 576. The fragment is preserved in the commentary to *HHS* 40B, p. 1377.

In view of the obvious fabrication of Confucius' mother's name "Zhengzai," the passage was intended to be prophetic. It explains why Confucius is a "dark sage" by claiming that his mother conceived him by dreaming of being moved, or stimulated, by the Black Emperor. Therefore, following the logic of the passage, Confucius represents the color black and conceivably "water," those being parallel in terms of the Five Phases (black=water). The passage depicts Confucius as half-human, half-deity; it assigns him a place in the cycle of the Five Phases. In the ideological system concerning the succession of dynasties, as found in apocryphal texts, founders of dynasties, such as Yao, Shun, Tang, king Wen, and king Wu, share two characteristics: they are conceived through a supernatural process in which a human father is not involved, and they belong to one of the Five Phases.²⁰ By fulfilling these criteria, the prophetic passage tries to depict Confucius as a potential founding emperor.

If Confucius was qualified, why did he not become an emperor? Apocryphal texts use the cycle of the Five Phases to in fact rule him out. They claimed that the reason for this was not because a former king did not recommend him;²¹ it was because as a representative of the force of water in the Five Phases cycle, he was not in the right sequence. From the late Warring States period to the Han dynasty, there were two metaphysically possible cycles that could determine a next ruler in actual historical time: one was political succession, in which each phase conquers the preceding one (*xiang shèng* 相勝), and the second possibility was that each phase came about generatively (*xiang shēng* 相生).²² In the latter, we have the material force of each phase, namely wood, fire, earth, metal, and water generating the next force (see table 1). Moreover, generative succession highlights the spontaneous continuity of Heaven's Mandate, and the condition by which the next ruler in the sequence must not only be a representative of the correct force in the Five Phases cycle, but also a virtuous person.²³

²⁰ See Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, *Zhongguo shanggu shi yanjiu jiangyi* 中國上古史研究講義 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1988), pp. 238–41. For a handy chart of the summary of the mysterious births of the founders of dynasties, see Xu, "Zuowei pifu de xuansheng suwang," pp. 27–28.

²¹ As Mencius mentioned; see *SSZZZ*, p. 309.

²² The *xiang shēng* theory gives earth, wood, metal, fire and water, each phase being conquered by the one after it; it emphasizes victory of one over the other by force.

²³ For a summary of the use of the Five Phases and its evolution during the Han dynasty, see Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.), 1995, pp. 55–60.

Table 1. Generative Succession 相生 Cycles of Dynasty-Founding: Primeval Past to Han

PHASE	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3
	CHRONOLOGICAL (DESCENDING)	CHRONOLOGICAL (DESCENDING)	CHRONOLOGICAL (DESCENDING)
Wood (Water)	Fu Xi 伏羲 Gong Gong 共工	Di Ku 帝嚳	Wu 武王 > Zhou Qin 秦
Fire	Shen Nong 神農	Yao 堯	Liu Bang 劉邦 > Han
Earth	Yellow Emperor	Shun 舜	
Metal	Shao Hao 少昊	Yu 禹 > Xia	
Water	Zhuan Xu 顓頊	Tang 湯 > Shang	

> indicates founder of the named dynasty.

Based on Ban Gu, “Lü li zhi” 律曆志 (“Treatise on Harmonics and Calendro-Astronomy”), *Han shu* 21B, pp. 1011–13.

The table shows the chronological progression of dynastic changes since the beginning, and how each change reflected the corresponding phase of the cycle. The starting point is Wood (Cycle 1), and then the cycle proceeds to Fire, Earth, and so on. The Water force in brackets, between Wood and Fire, corresponds to historical persons and dynasties that were interruptions in the correct order of the cyclical phases. After Cycle 1’s Water force in its normative phase represented by Zhuan Xu, the progression returns to Wood in Cycle 2.

The theory of generative succession became dominant only at the end of the Western Han dynasty, that is around 50 BC to 5 AD, when powerful court officials, such as Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 77–6 BC) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 BC–23 AD), began to employ it.²⁴ It had the advantage of implying that the Qin dynasty (221–207 BC) had not been a legitimate one: a moral ruler did not found it, nor did it come by means of the correct order of successions. Once excluded, it could be understood that only virtuous rulers with moral power had founded dynasties in the natural order of succession.

This succession order assumes that Heaven had already planned the order of dynastic changes. Military conquests, such as the Qin victory, might temporarily change the order, but one could not maintain a dynasty for long simply by force. Similarly, virtues alone could not

²⁴ Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*, pp. 57, 94. A person’s personal phase was usually decided by ancestry. For example, Confucius claimed to be descended from the Shang, and thus his phase was water, the same as that of Tang, the founder of the Shang dynasty. See table 1.

change the order. For example, Confucius could not use his unique virtue to unify China. Nevertheless, in this theory, virtue was more relevant than physical force; among the people who represented the right phase of the next dynasty, only the most virtuous one was likely to receive Heaven's favor. Thus, the theory retrospectively attributed good virtues to founders of dynasties, even though that was not always the case, especially that concerning the Han dynasty.

What is interesting, as well, is that the succession theory throws light on the correlation between Heaven and Man. Although it indicates how dynasties *ought* to succeed one another, a perfect succession was not always the case in reality.²⁵ The theory allows for the existence of dynasties that did not follow the right sequence, or that lacked virtue. In the famous historiographic work titled *History of the Han* (written in the first century AD), for example, both the Qin dynasty and Gong Gong 共工, representatives of water (table 1, second row), are considered "deviations from the correct sequence 非其序."²⁶ But the theory does not explain why succession sometimes fails. Since the *History of Han's* explanation is based on generative succession, it is hard to see why a theory so fundamental would sometimes fail to explain what actually had occurred in history. However, one of the main aims of the discussion was to legitimize the Han dynasty. That is to say, the theory's proponents were not so much forming a philosophically or metaphysically rigorous theory, as we tend to think of such things in relatively modern times, than identifying the Han dynasty as the legitimate successor of the Zhou dynasty, with Qin's status as a moral and true dynasty seen as denied by Heaven.

At the same time, the notion of legitimate succession creates leeway that reconciles the problem of why Confucius, a great sage, did not actually become a king of some sort. As a sage of divine origin, he ought to have been quite capable of establishing a new dynasty. However, as a Shang descendant he represented the water force (since that dynasty was correlated to it), and the next founder needed to represent the wood force. Because of the succession order (the repeating Five Phases cycles), Confucius could not gain the throne, but he did have a unique function in it that was peculiar to the much later Han dynasty,

²⁵ For the notion of "correlative thinking," see e.g., A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989), p. 355. For a full, historical assessment of Graham's analysis, see Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-divinization in Early China* (Harvard U.P., 2002), pp. 5–21.

²⁶ See the *Han shu* citation given in table 1.

and which can be seen in the apocryphal texts, where he is called “the lord of standard making 制法之主”:

Confucius was the lord of standard making. Black-green did not replace green-brown. 邱爲制法之主, 黑綠不代蒼黃.²⁷

The sage was not born in vain. He had to institute something to show the heart of Heaven. Confucius was the wooden mallet. He made standards for all under Heaven. 聖人不空生, 必有所制, 以顯天心. 邱爲木鐸, 制法天下.²⁸

The black dragon was born for the red. It had to show the portents and make [people] know the mandate. 黑龍生爲赤, 必告示象, 使知命.²⁹

In the first quotation, Confucius, represented by the color black-green, could not replace the color of green-brown, the Zhou dynasty. However, he was responsible for forming standards, or *fa* 法, which were the templates and guides for later generations to use in correcting laws, rituals, and governing procedures. The second quotation conveys the notion that the birth of Confucius was not an accident, but a necessity. He existed to show the intentions of Heaven via the standards he would make. A metaphor from the *Analects*, “wooden mallet,” also emphasizes Confucius’ role as the agent of Heaven who admonishes people.³⁰ The third quotation further indicates Confucius’ specific mission: he came to the world to reveal the real successor of the Zhou dynasty, namely, the Liu 劉 family of the Han dynasty. Therefore, Confucius had two functions determined by the sequence of the Five Phases: to make standards and to reveal the true successor of the Zhou. These two functions have a corollary: because Confucius was responsible for making human standards that showed Heaven’s Mandate, thus the successor of the Zhou dynasty whom he selected would not only possess, but also keep, the standards.

²⁷ “Xiao jing gou ming jue” 孝經鉤命決 (“Tally of the Key to the Mandate in the *Classic of Filial Piety*”), in *WSJC*, p. 1011, which punctuates the sentence as 邱爲制法之, 主黑綠不代蒼黃 to correspond to a similar sentence: 邱爲制法, 主黑綠不代蒼黃. However, if we parse *zhu* 主 as the verb of the second clause in the former sentence, then it is difficult to understand the function of *zhi* in the first clause. If we assume that *zhi* is not redundant or caused by any textual corruption, it is better to parse *zhu* to the first part of the sentence as a noun. Also see *ibid.*, p. 988. The source of the fragment is a commentary to “Qu li, xia” 曲禮下; see *Liji zhengyi* (SSJZS edn. [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980]), *j.* 4, p. 1257.

²⁸ “Chunqiu yan Kong tu,” in *WSJC*, p. 580. The source of the fragment is a commentary to “Zhongyong” 中庸; see *Liji zhengyi* 52, p. 1628.

²⁹ “Chunqiu yan Kong tu,” in *WSJC*, p. 579. The source is preserved in a commentary to *Chunqiu* (Yin gong 1); see *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu* 春秋公羊傳注疏 (SSJZS edn.), *j.* 1, p. 2195.

³⁰ Sect. “Ba yi”; see *Lunyu jizhu*, *SSZJJZ* 2, p. 68.

Given these types of events described in the apocryphal texts, another question remains unanswered: in what way did Confucius receive his mission to be the maker of standards? For many literati at the time, Confucius had not independently designed the standards, but followed those set by Heaven. In apocryphal texts, the revelation of standards from Heaven is linked back to the self-same texts, as well as to certain classics, especially the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*:

Confucius perused historical records and cited old diagrams. He deduced and compiled the changes of Heaven. He made principles for the Han emperor, and set in order the diagrams and records. 邱攬史記。援引古圖。推集天變。爲漢帝制法，陳敘圖錄。³¹

When Confucius talked about the classics, there was a bird transforming into a book. Confucius took it to announce Heaven; red sparrows gathered on the book and transformed into a piece of jade. The inscription on it said, “Kong, take up the mandate; make the corresponding principles for the red.” 孔子論經，有鳥化爲書。孔子奉以告天。赤爵集書上，化爲玉。刻曰：孔提命，作應法，爲赤制。³²

The *qilin* appeared and the Zhou died out. Therefore, [Confucius] established the uncrowned king’s *Annals of Spring and Autumn* to give it to whoever would arise. 麟出周亡。故立春秋，制素王授當興也。³³

In the first quotation, Confucius uses ancient documents and the apparent changes in the heavens (for example, celestial bodies, seasons) to make standards for the Han emperor. His citations of these documents and his astronomical calculations point to the Han dynasty as the successor of Zhou. Confucius is seen as the sage who possesses the correct guides and is able to understand the movements of Heaven; he uses his intelligence to determine the successor of the Zhou dynasty. In other words, quotation one emphasizes the crucial role Confucius plays in revealing Heaven’s Mandate. In the second quotation, through a series of preternatural transformations, the will of Heaven responds to Confucius and announces itself. In this context, Confucius is the messenger of Heaven. This quotation emphasizes the idea that the emergence of the Han dynasty, represented by the color red (=Fire; see table 1), follows the Mandate of Heaven, which appears at the moment when

³¹ “Chunqiu yan Kong tu,” in *WSJC*, p. 579. The fragment is preserved in a commentary to *Chunqiu* (Yin gong 1), *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhushu*, p. 2195.

³² “Chunqiu yan Kong tu,” in *WSJC*, p. 578.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 580. The source is preserved in a commentary to Ban Gu 班固, “You tong fu” 幽通賦, in Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531 AD), comp., *Wen xuan* 文選 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1977) 14, p. 212b.

Confucius is discussing the classics. This implies a connection between the classics and the will of Heaven. Later on we will see more examples of the Mandate of Heaven, Confucius, and the classics as a triad that guarantees the legitimacy of Han rule.

The third quotation is another example of how the triad works. The untimely appearance of the mysterious *qilin* (an ancient mythic animal whose appearance was often considered auspicious) indicates that Heaven no longer favored the Zhou. Receiving this heavenly sign, Confucius composed the *Annals* in order to reveal to the future that the Han is the real successor of the Zhou. The author strings Heaven, Confucius, and the *Annals* together to show the legitimacy of Han rule. In order to understand the function of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* and Confucius' role in this context, we now take up the references to Confucius as author of the *Annals* and as “uncrowned king.”

Su wang: *The “Uncrowned King”*

As *Zhuangzi* states, the “uncrowned king” refers to a person who possesses virtues equal to a sage king but has no official position.³⁴ In the case of Confucius, his status as an “uncrowned king” was based on his purported authorship of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. During roughly the 3rd century BC, people began attributing the authorship of the *Annals* to Confucius. This remained a dominant opinion throughout imperial China up to the early-twentieth century,³⁵ particularly as it had been adapted by Mencius 孟子 in a famous statement, as follows:³⁶

[Mencius said:] “Again the world fell into decay, and principles faded away. Perverse speakings and oppressive deeds waxed rife again. There were instances of ministers who murdered their sovereigns, and of sons who murdered their fathers. Confucius was afraid, and made the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. What the *Spring and Autumn* contains are matters proper to the sovereign. On this account Confucius had said, ‘Yes! It is the *Spring and Autumn* which will make men know me, and it is the *Spring and Autumn* which will make men condemn me.’”³⁷ [孟子曰] 世衰道微，邪說暴行有作，臣弑

³⁴ For a discussion of the scholarly literature on *su wang*, see n. 11, above.

³⁵ For example, Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 supported this argument; Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞, *Jingxue tonglun* 經學通論 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1954), preface, p. 1; chap. 4 “*Chunqiu*,” p. 1.

³⁶ For an explanation of the context of Mencius' statement and a discussion of the meaning of *zuo* 作, which is translated as “made” here, see Joachim Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlingsund Herbstannalen (Chunqiu)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001), pp. 36–40.

³⁷ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics with a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes*. Vol. 1: *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean* (London: Trübner, 1961), pp. 281–82.

其君者有之，子弑其父者有之。孔子懼，作春秋。春秋，天子之事也。是故孔子曰：“知我者其惟春秋乎！罪我者其惟春秋乎！”³⁸

In this passage, Confucius' motivation in composing the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* was to criticize the wrongdoings of contemporaries. In the *Grand Historian's Records* (*Shiji* 史記), Sima Qian 司馬遷 (146–86 BC) elaborates the so-called praise-and-blame theory and claims that Confucius aimed to “make the affairs of the true king comprehensible 以達王事.”³⁹ The Han scholars who studied and transmitted the *Gongyang* commentary on the *Annals* followed this reading, tending to find subtle praise and blame in every entry.⁴⁰ As Yuri Pines correctly points out, they shared the idea that Confucius was a supreme sage, and associated him with the *Gongyang* commentary.⁴¹

The famous text attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC) titled *Chunqiu fan lu* 春秋繁露 (*The Luxuriant Dew of the Annals of Spring and Autumn*), further illuminates Confucius' relationship with the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*.⁴² Despite controversies over the dating and authenticity of certain chapters, much of this work reflects the *Gongyang* view of it that developed in the Western Han dynasty.⁴³ In the text, Confucius is the person who outlined the way of the new king.⁴⁴ However, the connotations of this so-called Way are complex, and

³⁸ “Teng Wengong, B” 滕文公下, *Mengzi zhang ju* 孟子章句, *SSZJJZ*, p. 272.

³⁹ Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959) 129, pp. 3297–98.

⁴⁰ For more information about the subtlety of the praise and blame method in the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, see Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian Classics”* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2001), pp. 263–65. While I follow the argument held by many scholars that the apocrypha related to the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* are connected to the *Gongyang* tradition of the *Annals*, I am hesitant to treat as a single, unified tradition the following: the *Gongyang* commentary on the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, *Chunqiu fan lu* 春秋繁露 (traditionally attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒), the apocryphal texts, and He Xiu's 何休 subcommentary based on the *Gongyang* commentary. On this issue, especially concerning Japanese scholarship, see Nakamura and Yasui, *Isho no kisoteki kenkyū*, pp. 79–82. For a comprehensive study on the *Gongyang* tradition in a Western language, see Joachim Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan: Auslegung und Kanonisierung der Frühlings- und Herbstannalen (Chunqiu)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001).

⁴¹ Yuri Pines, “Chinese History Writing between the Sacred and the Secular,” in John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 327. For how Confucius, as a supreme sage, affects the exegesis of the *Gongyang* commentary, and how this is related to *weisheitlichen Sinn* (the sense of wisdom) via *dunkle Sprache* (hidden speech), see Gentz, *Das Gongyang zhuan*, pp. 72–75.

⁴² Sarah Queen has briefly alluded to this in *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996), pp. 118–19.

⁴³ For a systematic dating and the authorship of every chapter of *Chunqiu fan lu*, see Michael Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu: A ‘Confucian’ Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), esp. pp. 335–41.

⁴⁴ “New king,” here, indicates the successor of the Zhou. See Su Yu 蘇輿, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), j. 1, p. 28.

need to be unpacked. According to *Chunqiu fan lu*, there is an alternation between *wen* 文 (pattern) and *zhi* 質 (substance) that occurs in the succession of dynasties through history. When the Zhou dynasty, a *wen* dynasty, declined, the *Annals* provided a solution for a new king to save the world: turn *wen* to *zhi*.⁴⁵ Therefore, the way of the new king in this context is the way that rectifies Zhou's mistakes and wrongs. However, the extant fragments of apocryphal texts do not emphasize the cleaning up, or reforming, of the Zhou dynasty's mistakes, and they do not refer to a *wen/zhi* alternating cycle.

Instead, apocryphal texts hold that the *Annals* reflects the moral authority and ultimate political principles formed by Confucius.⁴⁶ Confucius' composition of the *Annals* indicates his conception of an ideal kingdom ruled by virtue. Since he was born in a chaotic time, Heaven did not grant him the opportunity to practice his ideas. The theory also implies that every ruler must turn to Confucius' hidden teachings in the *Annals* to achieve an ideal state.⁴⁷ The image of Confucius as the uncrowned king was well received throughout the Han dynasty,⁴⁸ as Liu Xiang aptly wrote in his *The Garden of Persuasion* (Shuiyuan 說苑):

[Confucius] was not being appreciated in the end, so he wept when he saw the *qilin*. He lamented the Way's not being practiced, and that virtue's luster did not flow evenly. Therefore he retreated to compose the *Annals* and illuminate the way of the uncrowned king in order to show it to later generations. [孔子]卒不遇, 故睹麟而泣, 哀道不行, 德澤不洽, 於是退作春秋, 明素王之道, 以示後人.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Su, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, vol. 4, p. 123; 5, p. 145. Chen Suzhen 陳蘇鎮 reconstructs a delicate system of the succession of dynasties. I am cautious in treating *Chunqiu Fanlu*, Dong Zhongshu's memorials in *Han shu*, and the Gongyang commentary to the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* as simply Dong Zhongshu's work. Therefore, I only use the theory of alternating *wen* and *zhi* in dynastic succession which can be found in *Chunqiu fan lu*. See Chen Suzhen, "Han dao, wangdao, tiandao: Dong Zhongshu Chunqiu gongyang shuo xintan" 漢道·王道·天道, 董仲舒春秋公羊說新探, *Guoxue yanjiu* 國學研究 2 (1994), pp. 313-37; and idem, "Chunqiu yu 'Han dao': Dong Zhongshu 'yi de hua min' shuo zaitan" 春秋與漢道, 董仲舒 "以德化民" 說再探, *Guoxue yanjiu* 4 (1997), pp. 39-62.

⁴⁶ For detailed information, see Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon*, pp. 119-26, and Pines, "Chinese History Writing," p. 332.

⁴⁷ Dong Zhongshu tried to convince emperor Wu by using this argument. See Ban Gu 班固, *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987) 56, p. 2509.

⁴⁸ For examples from the early Western Han, the end of the Western Han, and the middle of the Eastern Han, respectively, see *Huainanzi* 淮南子, sect. "Zhushu xun" 主術訓 ("Discourse on Focusing on the Methods") (He Ning 何寧, annot., *Huainanzi jishi* 淮南子集釋 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998] 9, p. 697); *Shuiyuan* 說苑, sect. "Gui de" 貴德 ("Valuing Virtue") (Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯, annot., *Shuiyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校證 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987] 5, p. 95); and *Shi Ming* 釋名, sect. "Shi dian yi" 釋典藝 ("Explaining the Classics") (Bi Yuan 畢沅, *Shi Ming shuzheng bu* 釋名疏證補 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 2008] 6, p. 210).

⁴⁹ Sect. "Gui de," *Shuiyuan jiaozheng* 5, p. 95.

However, does the appellation “uncrowned king” merely indicate Confucius’ fulfillment of his political ideas through the composition of the *Annals*?⁵⁰ The answer is no. In *Huainanzi*, the term “uncrowned king” has several connotations that are worth discussing:

The capacity of Confucius was such that his intelligence surpassed that of Chang Hong; his courage exceeded that of Meng Ben; his feet were faster than a nimble rabbit; his strength was such that he could hold up a portcullis. His abilities were indeed numerous. But he is not known to the world for his courage or his dexterity. Solely through practicing the way of teaching⁵¹ he became an uncrowned king. This would indicate that his affairs were indeed few. The 242 years of the Spring and Autumn period saw fifty-two states destroyed and thirty-six cases of regicide. By collecting the good and condemning the bad he established the Kingly Way. This would indicate that his discussions were indeed broad.⁵²

孔子之通，智過於萇弘，勇服于孟賁，足躡效菟，力招城關，能亦多矣。然而勇力不聞，伎巧不知，專行教道，以成素王，事亦鮮矣。春秋二百四十二年，亡國五十二，弑君三十六，采善鉅醜，以成王道，論亦博矣。⁵³

The phrase “he established the Kingly Way (*yi cheng wang dao* 以成王道)” echoes the grammar of the aforementioned phrase “make the affairs of the true king comprehensible” (*yi da wang shi* 以達王事), which Sima Qian used to reveal Confucius’ goals. But teaching, or *jiao* 教, is the main theme. Confucius, as versatile as he was, focused on transmitting his teachings, and in the process became an uncrowned king. The parallelism between “*shi yi xian yi* 事亦鮮矣” (“his affairs were indeed few”) and “*lun yi bo yi* 論亦博矣” (“his discussions were indeed broad”) links Confucius’ teachings to the *Annals*. While teaching is not usually considered a grand undertaking, in this case, it was Confucius’ greatest achievement. Confucius refers to various historical events, pointing out

⁵⁰ Jack L. Dull argued that Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 connected the term “uncrowned king” to Confucius. By doing so, he further emphasizes the connection between New Text scholarship and the concept of Confucius as the “uncrowned king.” However, as the quotation from *Huainanzi* shows, the idea of the “uncrowned king” was not exclusive to New Text thinkers; See Dull, “A Historical Introduction,” p. 28.

⁵¹ Due to textual variation, Roger T. Ames adopts *xiao dao* 孝道 (the Way of filial piety) instead of *jiao dao* 教道 (Way of teaching). However, according to the context, the term used here has less to do with filial piety than with showing people what is right and wrong according to the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*. See Ames, *The Art of Rulership: A Study of Ancient Chinese Political Thought* (Albany: State U. New York P., 1994), p. 205.

⁵² Adapted from *ibid.*, p. 205.

⁵³ “Zhu shu xun,” *Huainanzi jish*, 9, p. 697.

the good ones and bad ones in order to clarify the Kingly Way. Since the word *jiao* has the connotation of teaching and the cultivation of a large audience, it implies the spread of Confucius' doctrines, hidden in the *Annals*, throughout the human realm.

Up to now in our discussion, we have learned that in the apocryphal texts and in Western Han texts generally, when Confucius is described with the epithets the “uncrowned king” and the “dark sage,” he has several characteristics:

1. he is chosen by Heaven as a potential candidate to replace the Zhou dynasty, and is of divine origin;
2. based on the Five Phases generative succession, his life did not come at the right point of Five Phases cycling in order to succeed the Zhou;
3. instead, he is in charge of forming standards for the Zhou's actual successor;
4. he hides his messages in the *Annals*; and
5. through teaching and spreading the *Annals*, he completes the way of the uncrowned king.

In line with the above characteristics, in apocryphal texts the title “king” as in “uncrowned king” is not merely a measure of moral worth or a rhetorical device, in fact Confucius occasionally is shown forming a lord-minister relationship:

Confucius was the uncrowned king; Yan Yuan was the Minister of the Masses, and Zilu was the Minister of Works. 仲尼爲素王，顏淵爲司徒，子路爲司空。⁵⁴

Zuo Qiuming was the untitled minister. 左丘明爲素臣。⁵⁵

In the first quotation, when Confucius takes the title of the uncrowned king, his disciples become his subjects. The master-disciple relationship turns into a lord-minister relationship. In the second quotation, Zuo Qiuming (ca. 556–451 BC), the supposed author of the Zuo commentarial tradition on the *Annals*, becomes a rank-and-file minister. While his relationship to Confucius is historically unclear, he is linked to Confucius because of his commentary on the *Annals*. Presumably, his explication of the text contributes to completing the undertaking of the uncrowned king, so that in the domain of the text as well as in

⁵⁴ “*Lunyu zhai fuxiang*” 論語摘輔象 (“Picked Images of Assistants in the *Analects*”), in *WSJC*, p. 1072.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1073. This is not exclusive to apocryphal texts. Du Yu's 杜預 (222–285 AD) preface to *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 mentions and also criticizes the theory that Confucius is the uncrowned king and Zuo Qiuming the plain minister (*Zuo Zhuan zhushu* 左傳注疏 [SSJZS edn.], p. 1708). One may infer that these correlations were popular during Du's time to the extent that he needed to clarify the matter.

the ideal kingdom he is the minister of Confucius. In other words, this lord-minister relationship is not exclusive to Confucius and the disciples whom he taught directly. It extends to others later along the transmission lineages of Confucius' work.

Wang Chong 王充 (27 AD-ca. 97) describes this lord-minister relationship in transmission more explicitly:

Confucius composed the *Annals* to illustrate the intention of the kings. However, Confucius' *Annals* is the undertaking of the uncrowned king; the masters' transmission of the text is the undertaking of untitled ministers. [Therefore,] one observes the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* to see the intention of the king; one reads [the work of] those masters to see the ministers' points. 孔子作春秋以示王意, 然則孔子之春秋, 素王之業也, 諸子之傳書, 素相之事也。觀春秋以見王意, 讀諸子以睹相指。⁵⁶

The undertaking of the uncrowned king is to explicate the project of the sage king. Correspondingly, the transmission of his work is the undertaking of the rank-and-file ministers. It is clear that outside the embodied social relationships between Confucius and his disciples, a lord-minister relationship emerges in the domain of writing between Confucius and transmitters of his teachings, in which Confucius is a true king with a kingdom of texts, and his ministers perpetuate it. Notice that although he lived in the early Eastern Han and was a skeptic of many contemporary literati beliefs, Wang does not doubt that the lord-minister relationship became formed in the transmission process. From this, we may infer that the theory that the social master-disciple relationship corresponded to the textual lord-minister relationship was popular during the reigns of emperor Ming and the subsequent emperor Zhang 章帝 (75-88 AD).

If we accept these inferences, we might ask what the blending of officialdom and the master-disciple relationship implies. Han apocryphal texts in particular have been interpreted as possessing a strong political orientation.⁵⁷ More specifically, which political concerns were the reasons for the blending of these two relationships? In supporting the legitimacy of Han rule, the apocrypha seek to spread their agenda while avoiding blunt assertions, such as "Han is the successor of the Zhou dynasty." In the next section, I will analyze their indirect approach by

⁵⁶ Wang Chong 王充, sect. "Chao qi" 超奇 ("Supreme and Unique"), *Lun heng* 論衡 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1974) 13, p. 213.

⁵⁷ Tian and An argue that apocryphal texts serve political conflicts. See Tian Changwu 田昌五 and An Zuozhang 安作璋, eds., *Qin Han shi* 秦漢史 (Beijing: Renmin, 2008), p. 647.

studying how emperor Ming proposed a certain type of political image of Confucius and Zixia 子夏, one of Confucius' major disciples.

Zixia and Confucius: A Political Analogy

Who was Zixia? Based on *Shiji*, his surname was Bu 卜, his first name Shang 商, and his style name Zixia 子夏. Born in 507 BC, he was forty-four years younger than Confucius (551–479 BC). After Confucius' death, he went to Xihe 西河 to teach, and became a mentor of marquis Wen of Wei 魏文侯.⁵⁸ Since Sima Qian thought highly of Confucius and his disciples, his *Shiji* no doubt contains both believable facts about the historical Zixia as well as some biased reflections on Sima's part. More certain is Zixia's name and his status as Confucius' disciple, because there is corroboration in the *Analects* and elsewhere, before the composition of *Shiji*. For our purposes, however, historical facts are less important than how people during the Han perceived Zixia and the bases on which they regarded him as a paragon of Confucianism.

Another crucial record in the *Analects* shaped the Han-dynasty image of Zixia. In the *Analects*, Confucius sees the “study of culture” (*wenxue* 文學) as Zixia's specialty.⁵⁹ What the “study of culture” denoted in Confucius' time is not clear, but many Han literati considered it to be knowledge of documents and classics that stemmed from the ancient sage kings.⁶⁰ To these literati, Zixia was a competent transmitter of the classics, making Zixia unique among Confucius' disciples. For instance, as opposed to Zigong 子貢, who was characterized as “good at political affairs,”⁶¹ Zixia was the transmitter of the canon. As opposed to Zisi 子思, who putatively led a school of Confucianism,⁶² Zixia's transmission lineage was distinguished by the faithful teaching and transmission of the classics.

⁵⁸ *Shiji* 67, pp. 2202–3.

⁵⁹ Cheng Shude 程樹德, *Lunyu jishi* 論語集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), p. 742.

⁶⁰ For example, Fan Ning 范甯, an Eastern Jin 東晉 commentator on the *Analects*, commented on *wenxue* as follows: “By saying *wenxue*, it means he [Zixia] was good at the documents and works of the ancient kings”; see Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, p. 744. Also, the term in the Western Han text *Yan tie lun* 鹽鐵論 indicates people who were known to have studied the classics relatively seriously. See Wang Liqi 王利器, annot., sect. “Qian yan” 前言, *Yan tie lun jiao zhu* 鹽鐵論校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1992), pp. 6–7. Wang specifically points out that the people described as *wenxue* were actually the intellectual descendants of Zixia's lineage. I would not go so far as that, since it is still unclear who belonged to the group of *wenxue* in *Yan tie lun*. It seems a stretch, to me, to make that connection. However, I do agree to the extent that in the Han dynasty the term *wenxue* was already used to indicate the study of the classics from the ancient sages and kings.

⁶¹ Cheng, *Lunyu jishi*, p. 742.

⁶² Sect. “Wu du” 五蠹 (“Five Vermin”), Wang Xianshen 王先慎, annot., *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998) 19, p. 456.

A typical anecdote emphasizing Zixia's ability to preserve the original meaning of the classics can be found in *Lüshi chungiu* 呂氏春秋, compiled during the Qin dynasty (221–207 BC):

Zixia went to Jin. When he passed through Wei, there was a person reading the records of history in this way: “three swine of the Jin troops crossed the Yangtze river.” Zixia said, “This is wrong. It should be the *ji hai* day. The character *ji* 己 looks like *san* 三; the characters *shi* 豕 and *hai* 亥 are similar.” When [the Wei person] arrived in Jin and asked about it, he thus [found out that it] was being read [there] as “On a *ji hai* day, the troops of Jin crossed the Yangtze river.” 子夏之晉，過衛，有讀史記者曰：“晉師三豕涉河。”子夏曰：“非也，是己亥也。夫己與三相近，豕與亥相似。”至於晉而問之，則曰“晉師己亥涉河”也。⁶³

This anecdote of *Lüshi chungiu* shows why people should critically examine what is written in texts. The narrator does not depict Zixia as an outstanding transmitter of the classics. Rather, the latter part of the story, in which the Jin people's version of the historical record agrees with Zixia's reading, does provide an example of Zixia's competence in editing corrupt ancient texts. However, the later Han version of the story in *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語, compiled by Wang Su 王肅 (195–256 AD), considers Zixia's talent in reading ancient texts even more valuable: “From then on, [the people of] Wei considered Zixia a sage 於是衛以子夏爲聖.”⁶⁴ Here the comment shifts the focus from praising prudence in the editing of ancient texts to lauding Zixia as a sagely transmitter of them.

Xu Fang 徐防, who served as the Minister of Works during Eastern Han emperor He's 和帝 reign (r. 89–105 AD), even considered Zixia the initiator of the genre of textual study called “chapter and verse” (*zhang ju* 章句). In a memorial to emperor He, Xu Fang wrote:

I have heard that the *Book of Odes*, the *Book of Documents*, *Rites*, and *Music* were given definitive form by Confucius. The explanation and clarification of chapter and verse was started by Zixia. Then the various traditions split and have maintained different explanations. 臣聞詩書禮樂，定自孔子；發明章句，始於子夏。其後諸家分析，各有異說。⁶⁵

⁶³ Sect. “Cha chuan” 察傳 (“Examination of Transmission”), in Wang Liqi 王利器, annot., *Lüshi chungiu zhushu* 呂氏春秋注疏 (Chengdu: Bashu, 2002) 22, pp. 2780–1.

⁶⁴ Yang Zhaoming 楊朝明, annot., *Kongzi jiayu tongjie: fu chutu ziliao yu xiangguan yanjiu* 孔子家語通解，附出土資料與相關研究 (Taipei: Wanjuan lou, 2005), p. 433.

⁶⁵ *HHS* 44, p. 1500.

In this memorial, by identifying Zixia as the person who invented the study of chapter and verse (*zhangju*) – a great scholarly fashion of the Eastern Han – Xu Fang implies, first of all, that Zixia initiated a certain technique to explain the classics that Confucius had selected, and that later scholars adopted the tools of Zixia in devising their own numerous interpretations. Xu Fang was inclined to preserve the study of chapter and verse passed down from Zixia in order to retain the direct lineage of transmission from Confucius. He makes Zixia crucial in linking Confucius’ teaching to Han scholarship. By transmitting the classics and inventing a technique for reading them that Han scholars widely accepted, Zixia was given a unique historical role among Confucius’ disciples.

After discussing who Zixia was, it is helpful to briefly examine who Zixia was not. We need a sense of the limitations of Zixia’s role and image to fully understand the roles and functions that he represented in the Han dynasty. Most importantly, Zixia was not Confucius, or more specifically, Zixia’s image was different from that of Confucius. This deceptively simple point produces a crucial inference: Zixia was not considered the successor of Confucius philosophically and socially, especially in the context of the Han dynasty. We can find evidence of this as early as *Mencius* (third century BC):

[Gongsun Chou said,] “Previously I have heard that Zixia, Ziyou and Zizhang each had a facet of the sage. Ran Niu, Minzi and Yan Yuan had all the facets but in a small way. I venture to ask where you are at.” [Mencius] said, “Let’s skip this for now.” 昔者竊聞之：子夏、子游、子張皆有聖人之一體，冉牛、閔子、顏淵則具體而微。敢問所安。”曰：“姑舍是。”⁶⁶

Although Mencius did not answer his disciple Gongsun Chou’s 公孫丑 (ca. fourth century BC) question, the question nevertheless provides an interesting understanding of Zixia. He depicts Zixia with certain, but not all, attributes of the sage, in contrast with Yan Yuan, who had all the qualities of Confucius, but all underdeveloped. This language suggests that there was a barrier to anyone’s becoming a full and complete new version of Confucius. In the apocryphal texts, Confucius’ miraculous birth creates another sort of barrier between him and Zixia, and finally, unlike Yan Yuan, who is said to represent the force of water, Zixia is not paired with any of the Five Phases.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Mengzi *jizhu*, *SSZJJZ* 3, pp. 233-34.

⁶⁷ Although in apocryphal texts, Confucius’ major disciples’ abnormal appearance is also a sign of their superiority compared to ordinary people, Yan Yuan is the only person to whom one of the Five Phases is matched; *WSJC*, p. 106g.

During the Han, to deny that Zixia could achieve the sagehood of Confucius was to exclude the possibility of his becoming an “uncrowned king.” By emulating Zixia, one might achieve an excellent understanding of the classics and thus of Confucius’ philosophy, but one could never become an “uncrowned king.”

THE POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF EMPEROR MING’S RHETORICAL MOVE

So far, we have examined certain notional images of Confucius and Zixia up to emperor Ming’s time. In this section, we will examine why the emperor wanted to project to his court and the populace an analogy of himself to Confucius. In order to pursue this, we need to find out how Eastern Han literati thought about what constituted a ruler, what expectations they had of their emperors, and what Han emperors, especially emperor Ming, demanded of themselves as good emperors.

Michael Loewe provides three major factors that made up the supremacy and legitimacy of a Han emperor, and by extension the whole monarchical system: 1. the emperor’s divine origin granted by spiritual powers; 2. his status as a moral authority; and 3. his image as the preserver of a value system.⁶⁸ In the Han dynasty, the theory of the Five Phases, as already discussed, was used to construct the divine origin of the Han rulers. As for the status of moral authority, the perception was that if the emperor lived up to this role, auspicious omens would appear accordingly, otherwise calamities and inauspicious omens would come instead.⁶⁹ I would argue that omens were used as a standard by which the fulfillment, or proof, of the three factors was established. Because of this, the appearance of omens, whether good or bad, usually had strong political motivations.⁷⁰ Also, embodying moral values

⁶⁸ Michael Loewe, “The Concept of Sovereignty,” in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China. Vol. 1, The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1987), pp. 143–44. Elsewhere, Loewe has provided a more comprehensive study of the political gestures used to claim legitimacy, especially at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty and the Wei dynasty; see Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*, pp. 88–108. Moreover, quite a few Eastern Han emperors died young, some as children, and it would have been difficult for them to articulate political legitimacy through gestures and rhetoric requiring exegesis and reaction.

⁶⁹ For a summary of the cases of auspicious omens in the Han dynasty, see Tiziana Lipiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China: Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties* (Sankt Augustin, Germany: 2001), pp. 40–51.

⁷⁰ A guiding study of omens in this context is that of Chang Chia-feng [Zhang Jiafeng] 張嘉鳳 and Huang I-nung [Huang Yinong] 黃一農, “Zhongguo gudai tianwen xue dui zhengzhi de yingxiang: Yi Han xiang Zhai Fangjin zisha weili” 中國古代天文對政治的影響，以漢相翟方

and preserving ancient traditions were constant obligations for the Han emperors.⁷¹ Given the conversation between emperor Ming and Huan Yu, we might believe that the parallelism between Confucius and the emperor allowed emperor Ming to claim legitimacy for his reign. However, before taking this for granted, we ought to ask whether emperor Ming fulfilled Loewe's generalization of the three factors of imperial legitimacy, and whether the emperor used apocryphal texts to achieve this political purpose.

The founder of the Eastern Han, Liu Xiu, set the tone for the use of apocrypha in Eastern Han politics. Competing with his rivals, he claimed the throne by relying on a prophecy called the Red Hidden Tally (*chifu fu* 赤伏符), a text remnant of which was included later in the apocryphal corpus.⁷² Liu Xiu's leading scholars in fact were compiling apocrypha, and in 56 AD he announced the corpus to the world.⁷³ The new compilation played a large role in the *fengshan* 禪封 sacrifices of 56 AD, these being very serious and ritually difficult ceremonies that were meant to respond to Heaven's Mandate as well as to inform Heaven of an emperor's achievements.⁷⁴ Tightly linked to Xiu's emperorship, the apocryphal texts became the cornerstone of Eastern Han political legitimacy. Interest in the apocrypha continued into emperor Ming's time and beyond. His successor, emperor Zhang (17–88 AD) summoned scholars to the White Tiger Hall (Baihu Guan 白虎觀) in 79 AD, a famous event in which scholars collated the Five Classics using apocryphal texts as a framework.⁷⁵ Emperor Ming distinguished himself from

進自殺爲例, *Qinghua xuebao* 清華學報 20.2 (1990), pp. 361–78. Also see Wolfram Eberhard, "The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 1957), pp. 33–70, and Martin Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi Period (141–87 B.C.)," *Studies in Chinese History* 10 (2000), pp. 1–31.

⁷¹ The most obvious examples would be the *Analects* 12.7–9; 13.9; see *Lunyu jizhu*, *SSZJJZ* 6, pp. 137–38; 7, p. 143.

⁷² *HHS* 1A, p. 21.

⁷³ *HHS* 1B, p. 84.

⁷⁴ *HHS*, *zhi* 7A ("Jisi," *shang*), pp. 3162–65. For the most comprehensive study of Liu Xiu's *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, see Hsing I-tien, "Donghan Guangwu di yu feng shan" 東漢光武帝與封禪, in his *Tianxia yi jia: Huandi, Guanliao yu shehui* 天下一家: 皇帝·官僚與社會 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2011), pp. 177–201. For an English-language introduction to *feng* and *shan* sacrifices, see Tiziana Lippiello, "On the Secret Texts of the Feng and Shan Sacrifices," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 35.3 (1996), pp. 399–406, and Bielenstein, *Restoration of the Han Dynasty*, IV, pp. 163–83. For a translation of a record of emperor Guangwu's *feng* and *shan* sacrifices (*Feng shan yi ji* 封禪儀記, or *Records of the Ceremonies of the Feng and Shan Sacrifices*, by Ma Dibo 馬第伯 [ca. 1st c. AD] preserved in a commentary to Sima Biao's "Jisi zhi" 祭祀志 [Treatise on Sacrifices]), see Stephen Bokenkamp, "Record of the Feng and Shan Sacrifices," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), pp. 251–60.

⁷⁵ *HHS* 3, p. 138.

other emperors by his use of apocrypha in order to present himself as a worthy inheritor, and sage ruler, in defense of his own legitimacy against attacks from his brothers.

In modern scholarship, Liu Xiu's fourth son Liu Yang (emperor Ming), has been characterized as "narrow-minded with a penchant for revealing confidential information."⁷⁶ Several records show that he was highly aware of a need to affirm his legitimacy as a ruler, and was as enthusiastic about apocryphal writings as his father was.⁷⁷ In the eighth month of 60 AD, emperor Ming changed the office of Grand Musician (Tai Yue 大樂), to Grand Yu Musician (Tai Yu Yue 大予樂), because the apocryphal text named "Shangshu xuan ji qian" 尚書旋機鈐 ("The Big Dipper Keys to the *Book of Documents*") stated that "a Han emperor who has harmonious virtues composed music named Yu 予."⁷⁸ Emperor Ming thus could fulfill a prophecy to become that "virtuous ruler."

Moreover, in the tenth month of 65 AD, emperor Ming issued an edict concerning a solar eclipse. Based on one of the apocryphal texts of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*, namely, "Chunqiu tu chen" 春秋圖讖 ("Diagrams and Prophecies of the *Annals of Spring and Autumn*"), the edict considered the eclipse as reflecting a huge calamity, and linked it to the emperor's own lack of moral authority.⁷⁹ Aside from this inauspicious omen, many auspicious ones appeared during emperor Ming's reign, such as those signaling sweet dew, divine fungus, and divine birds.⁸⁰ Wang Chong's written works remarked that more auspicious omens appeared during emperor Ming's reign than in most other reigns.⁸¹ If we assume that observing, categorizing, and reporting auspicious omens formed a tendentious process, and may have been a type of propaganda, then we might conclude that anxiety over the legitimacy of his rule caused both the emperor and his subjects to seek such signs.

⁷⁶ Michael Loewe, "The Conduct of Government and the Issues at Stake A.D. 57-167," in Twitchett and Loewe, eds., *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1*, p. 293. Before Loewe, Qian Mu 錢穆 gave a similar description of emperor Ming, and argued that he was "fond of bureaucratic business 好吏事"; see Qian Mu, *Guo shi dagang* 國史大綱 (Beijing: Shangwu, 1996), vol. 1, p. 177.

⁷⁷ Liu Xiu is famous for having believed in and used apocrypha to legitimize his rule. Before he took the throne himself, the war between Liu Xiu and Gongsun Shu was waged not only on the battlefield, but both contenders were aware of the information apocrypha conveyed, and they competed over their interpretations of apocryphal texts. See Lü, *Qin Han shi*, p. 739.

⁷⁸ *HHS* 2, p. 106.

⁷⁹ *HHS* 2, p. 111. For a detailed analysis of the political function of omens, see Loewe, *Divination, Mythology and Monarchy in Han China*, pp. 94-97. For apocrypha used as a way to claim political legitimacy in general, see Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, pp. 56-65.

⁸⁰ *HHS* 2, p. 83. Divine fungus is the translation of *zhi cao* 芝草; these were various kinds of mushrooms connected to immortality.

⁸¹ Wang Chong, sect. "Qi shi" 齊世 ("Considering [different] eras the same"), *Lun heng* 18,

But why was emperor Ming anxious about his own legitimacy? Why did he make the political gestures I have mentioned? To answer this question, it is worth exploring, first, if there were any competing political camps during emperor Ming's time, and, second, if there existed then any notions about political legitimacy that did not subscribe to the same criteria.

Emperor Ming had good reasons to worry about his throne. He had become the heir-apparent in 43 AD,⁸² and in contrast to his elder brother Liu Qiang 劉彊 (25-58 AD), who became the heir-apparent at the young age of one, emperor Ming was recognized as being on a lower tier for succession.⁸³ He might have been anxious about his credentials, particularly because his appointment as heir resulted from his mother Yin Lihua's 陰麗華 (4-64 AD) victory in harem politics and her promotion to the position of empress in 41 AD.⁸⁴ These issues were more than just irrational fears in emperor Ming's mind; his opponents could use them to sabotage his rule.

His brothers had coveted the throne ever since the disinheritance of Liu Qiang. In the capital, they cajoled the literati cliques. In 44 AD the resultant public competitions over the type of theorizing we have examined and the politics of succession caused an uprising; as a result, the brothers were sent to their own fiefs and were supervised by the imperial government. After emperor Ming's accession, he frequently met them to closely monitor their actions.⁸⁵ This did not, however, stop their plotting. For example, right after emperor Guangwu's death in 57 AD, emperor Ming's full brother Liu Jing 劉荆 (?-69 AD) wrote to Liu Qiang to conspire to take over the throne by military force. Even after their conspiracy failed, Jing kept seeking the means to overthrow the emperor, such as performing cursing rituals, which eventually cost him his life in 67 AD.⁸⁶

As a type of intellectual foundation for claims of legitimacy for the Eastern Han, the apocrypha became a focus of this political competition. In 70 AD, emperor Ming's half-brother Liu Ying 劉英 was accused

p. 294. Wang Chong did not believe in a connection between auspicious omens and good governance. However, he did not dispute the statement that there were indeed a large number of auspicious omens either. For Wang Chong's intent to praise the Han dynasty, see Reinhard Emmerich, "Wang Chong's Praises for the Han Dynasty," *MS* 56 (2008), pp. 117-48.

⁸² *HHS* 2, p. 95.

⁸³ *HHS* 42, pp. 1423-24.

⁸⁴ *HHS* 10A, p. 405.

⁸⁵ *HHS* 2, pp. 102, 109-10, 113-14; 42, p. 1427.

⁸⁶ *HHS* 42, pp. 1446-48.

of plotting rebellion. One of the points of the accusation was that his partisans forged diagrams and prophecies 圖讖 (*tuchen*).⁸⁷ In 73 AD, another half-brother, Liu Yan 劉延 (?–89 AD), was accused of forging *tuchen* as well, and also of having made a cursing ritual and of seeking to form a retinue.⁸⁸ In yet another incident, one involving the case of the half-brother Liu Kang 劉康 (?–97 AD) and his clique, their referring to apocrypha was considered a crime.⁸⁹ Emperor Ming was thus apparently aware of the multiple ways to claim political legitimacy, including references to apocrypha. The actions of Ying, Yan, and Kang were considered subversive because they could be construed as attempting to claim legitimacy for themselves, especially when they forged apocrypha and formed cliques.

In the third month of 72 AD, the emperor turned to other links with the notion of Confucius and his disciples in order to promote his legitimacy. He was highly involved with the dissemination and transmission of the classics, and thus went to Confucius' residence to make sacrifices to the Sage and his seventy-two disciples. Upon returning, he made the princes give explanations of the classics,⁹⁰ and in 66 AD he created positions for tutors to teach the minor nobles.⁹¹ By making connections to Confucius and Zixia in the passage discussed, above, he had already presented Confucius and the disciples in a particularly high position.⁹²

In light of the *Huainanzi* passage and the apocryphal texts, emperor Ming's promoting the transmission of the classics proves that he aimed to fulfill the "way of teaching" (*jiao dao* 教道) that was mentioned in *Huainanzi*. This qualified him to be an "uncrowned king" and to comprehend true kingship. Unlike Confucius, however, he was a real emperor. By comparing himself to Confucius, he claimed that he ruled in two domains. As a moral authority, and transmitter of the Kingly Way in the world, he was a ruler in the sense that Confucius was—a ruler of

⁸⁷ *HHS* 42, p. 1429.

⁸⁸ *HHS* 2, p. 120; 42, p. 1444.

⁸⁹ *HHS* 42, p. 1431.

⁹⁰ *HHS* 2, p. 118.

⁹¹ *HHS* 2, p. 113.

⁹² So far this is the earliest record of sacrifices to Confucius and his disciples. Iconographies of Confucius and his seventy-two disciples were found in Eastern Han dynasty tombs. See Huang Jinxing 黃進興, "Shengxian' yu 'shengtu': ru jiao cong sizhi yu jidu jiao fengsheng zhi de bijiao" 聖賢與聖徒, 儒教從祀制與基督教封聖制的比較, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiu suo jikan* 71.3 (2000), pp. 509–62, 727–29. Huang also provides an insightful description of the system of sacrificing to Confucius (esp. to his disciples) from the Tang dynasty to the Qing (see esp. 534–35).

a moral domain. However, unlike Confucius, he was also able to apply those teachings to a physical kingdom.

The implication of the title “uncrowned king” is that Confucius had the virtues of a king, but never held that position. Virtues in this context are not apolitical: they legitimize the ruler’s right to rule. Moreover, having already drawn the parallel between the Confucius–Zixia relationship and his relationships with his own ministers, emperor Ming established the right to rule. In comparing Huan Yu with Zixia, emperor Ming also imagined an ideal classicist – one who can transmit the lord’s words and sometimes enlighten the lord. At the same time, his conception of Zixia’s role, the preserver of Confucius’ words and undertakings, presented an image of Zixia that was seen in apocryphal texts. Emperor Ming’s words created a parallelism by which the emperor, or lord, not only dominated in the lord-minister relationship, but also took the position of master in the master-disciple relationship.

In pursuing the idea of various notions of political legitimacy at this time, we must examine more closely how Han intellectuals used the term *taiping*, or “Great Peace,” to describe an ideal society under the rule of a sage king.⁹³ *Chunqiu fanlu*, in explaining the significance of the words of the *Annals*, says:

Confucius clarified gain and loss, differentiated the noble from the petty, and returned to the root of the way of the sage king. He criticized the kings of Heaven in order to attain the Great Peace. 孔子明得失，差貴賤，反王道之本。譏天王以致太平。⁹⁴

Confucius, thus, had encoded into the text of the *Annals* the Way of the sage king and the means to achieve the Great Peace. Here, *Chunqiu fanlu* does not say how to achieve the state of the Great Peace. Nevertheless, it does imply that the *Annals* contains a means for it.

Compared to *Chunqiu fanlu*, somewhat later Yang Xiong’s 揚雄 (53 BC–18 AD) ideas about the Great Peace are more explicit:

The words of the sages are [from] Heaven. Is Heaven reckless? The dynasties that succeeded the Zhou dynasty did not want to achieve the Great Peace. If they did want to achieve the Great Peace, [but still] abandon [the words of the sages] and employ

⁹³ For a detailed description of *taiping* by writers of the Western Han period, see *Han shi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳 in Xu Weiyu 許維遹, annot., *Han shi waizhuan jishi* 韓詩外傳集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1980) 3, p. 102. For issues of dating, authorship, and authenticity of *Han shi wai zhuan*, see the entry on *Han shih wai chuan* 韓詩外傳 by James R. Hightower, in Loewe ed., *Early Chinese Texts*, pp. 125–28.

⁹⁴ Sect. “Wang dao” 王道 (“The Way of the Sage King”), Su, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 4, p. 109. “The kings of Heaven” here refers to the Zhou kings.

some other way, there would be no means that would achieve it. 聖人之言，天也，天妄乎？繼周者未欲太平也。如欲太平也，舍之而用它道，亦無由至矣。⁹⁵

Although Yang does not specifically mention the *Annals*, the words of the sages include all the ancient sage kings and Confucius' teaching. Yang's statement implies two things: it is possible for someone to bring the Great Peace to the world as long as he is willing to follow the words of the sages. The dynasties after the Zhou, meaning Qin and Western Han, did not do so, and thus did not achieve the Great Peace. This dissatisfaction with the Han's failure to bring the latter about continued during the Eastern Han dynasty. Wang Chong described certain ideas in his time this way:

[Some] Confucians argue that the Five Emperors and Three Kings brought Great Peace to All under Heaven. Since Han arose, there has been no Great Peace. [The reason why] they argue that the Five Emperors and Three Kings brought Great Peace to All under Heaven, and that since Han rose, there has been no Great Peace, is [because] they see that the Five Emperors and Three Kings were sages. The virtue of the sages can bring the Great Peace. [The reason why] they argue that Han is not in a state of Great Peace is [because] Han has no sage-emperor. The cultivation of the [merely] worthy [by itself] cannot enable Great Peace. 儒者稱五帝、三王致天下太平。漢興以來，未有太平。彼稱五帝、三王致天下太平；漢興以來，未有太平者，見五帝、三王聖人也。聖人之德，能致太平。謂漢不太平者，漢無聖帝也。賢者之化，不能太平。⁹⁶

Wang Chong has represented certain understandings of how to achieve Great Peace and attitudes toward Han rule, as well. He claims that people asserted a natural, definite distinction between the worthy and the sage: worthies are not able to bring about Great Peace. Such a notion would seem to us to be more rigid than Yang Xiong's idea of following the words of sages. But here, regardless of whether the worthy follow the words of the sages, those who are merely worthy can never achieve ideal rule. Furthermore, people who suggest this notion considered Han emperors worthy, at best. Therefore, they argue that the Han dynasty has never achieved the Great Peace, and will never achieve it unless a sage, as opposed to a worthy, appears on the throne.

⁹⁵ Yang Xiong 揚雄, sect. "Wubai" 五百 ("Five Hundred Years"), *Fa yan* 法言, in Wang Rongbao 汪榮寶, annot., *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1987) 8, p. 261.

⁹⁶ Wang Chong, sect. "Xuan Han" 宣漢 ("Exclaiming Han"), *Lun heng* 17, p. 295.

In emperor Ming's responses to a certain dissatisfaction behind this trend of thought, it was no longer sufficient merely to enforce good policies or transmit the words of sages, or more specifically the classics. In this case, it was necessary for the emperor to claim to be a sage. Confucius, the sage who encoded the way to achieve the Great Peace in the *Annals* and predicted the emergence of the Han dynasty; this, then, was the most esteemed of the sages. It was necessary for emperor Ming to lay claim to and legitimize his sagehood by comparing himself to Confucius in order to fight prevalent doubt regarding his Confucian goals, which would have included the achieving of Great Peace.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have addressed the issue of how the apocryphal texts, and intellectual trends generally, in the Han-dynasty period interacted with political concerns. In the case of emperor Ming, we have seen an emperor who tried to live up to the standard of a sage king by teaching and explicating the classics as Confucius did. The genre of anonymous political tracts, qua tools of legitimation, that we call the apocryphal texts became one of the main resources used by the emperor. Meanwhile, his rivals also used apocryphal texts to claim their own legitimacy, which prompted emperor Ming's need to respond, and thus to emphasize further the bases of his claims of authority.

Viewed in their political context, apocryphal texts seem to depict Confucius not so much as a moral philosopher but more as a prophet. He became a figure of half-divine origin who possessed foreknowledge of Heaven, and his mission was to bring standards to the world, standards that revealed the Mandate of Heaven. All these attributes made him a mediator between Heaven and human society, and they carried basically one message: the Han dynasty was destined to rule. Like Confucius, emperor Ming claimed that he possessed the standards as well the Mandate of Heaven, but unlike Confucius he was a sage who possessed a throne.

At emperor Ming's court, the political rhetoric rarely presented the theory of the Five Phases in any abstract form; instead it displayed the theory as embodied in historical figures and events. Political motivations and intellectual considerations drove historical interpretations: because it was Heaven that chose representatives of the Five Phases, it was understood that they should be virtuous; the Qin was a ruthless dynasty, so it should not be legitimate; Confucius was greatly virtuous, so his failure to become a ruler should have a reason. The theory of

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the Five Phases did not function as an algorithm, which mechanically assigned the phases to various things. It rather served as an intellectual tool, by which the literati as well the emperors could reconcile different, and even contradictory concerns and needs.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| <i>HHS</i> | Fan Ye 范曄, <i>Hou Han shu</i> 後漢書 |
| <i>SSZJJZ</i> | Zhu Xi 朱熹, annot., <i>Sishu zhangju jizhu</i> 四書章句集注 |
| <i>WSJC</i> | Yasui Kōzan 安居香山 and Nakamura Shōhachi 中村璋八, <i>Weishu jicheng</i> 緯書集成 |