2 The Author as Cultural Hero: The Yellow Emperor, the Symbolic Author

A cultural hero is a legendary or mythical inventor of the culture of an ethnic or religious group. In a Warring States ritual text, cultural heroes are identified as ancient sage-kings who have been commemorated in ritual for their devotion to and invention of governance for the public good. As the extant early textual records demonstrate, by the late Warring States period (475–221 BC), the legends associated with the Yellow Emperor and his cultural creations occupied such a significant place in Chinese history that veneration of his cultural inventions continues to influence modern Chinese culture. Despite his many contributions to the culture of the Warring States, the Yellow Emperor did not invent writing, according to reconstructed versions of the Shiben (Origins of Descent Lines), a source documenting various cultural inventions and their inventors. Rather, the inventors of writing were Cang Jie and Ju Song, alleged ministers of the Yellow Emperor. Indeed, myths related to the Yellow Emperor portray him as a recipient of texts rather than as a writer. Yet this did not prevent nearly two dozen early Chinese texts from being attributed to him in the earliest extant Chinese bibliography, the “Yiwen zhi” (Treatise on Literature) chapter of the Hanshu.

1 Liji zhengyi 46.1307; Chang Kwang-chih 1983b: 41–43.
2 Huangdi is also rendered as the Yellow Thearch, an effort to differentiate the usage of di here from the translation of huangdi, the title of an imperial ruler. Nevertheless, here I follow the conventional translation to avoid unnecessary confusion since Yellow Emperor has been widely known as the standard rendering of 黄帝.
3 Qi Sihe 1941.
5 The text allegedly given to the Yellow Emperor by a mysterious female, Xuannü or Yunü, is a military treatise. In another version of the same story, it says that the mysterious female gave him a tally instead of a treatise. See quotations in the Taiping yulan 15.140, 79.677. For examples of sayings portraying the Yellow Emperor as a receiver of other texts, see Taiping yulan 15.138, 79.677, 79.680.
6 Hanshu 30.1730–1731, 30.1733, 30.1744, 30.1759, 30.1761, 30.1763, 30.1765, 30.1767, 30.1771, 30.1776–1779. This statistic does not include the Yellow Emperor’s ministers’ writings, which are usually categorized as “the Yellow Emperor’s writings” by scholars not only because of their authors’ close relationship with the Yellow Emperor, but also because of their similar style with “the Yellow Emperor’s writings.” See Li Ling 1998b: 278–290, especially 278–284; Lin Jingmo 2008: 116–118.
Attributing a text to a cultural hero is not unusual; what is unusual is that the number of texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor vastly outnumbers those attributed to other cultural heroes. This is even more remarkable when considering that the Yellow Emperor is not classified as one of the Confucian sage-kings. For example, Shennong 神農, or the Divine Farmer, a sage-king who allegedly predates the Yellow Emperor according to some accounts,⁷ is considered as the author of six texts (including one “co-authored” with the Yellow Emperor).⁸ Another sage-king, Fuxi 伏羲,⁹ the inventor of the bagua 八卦 (eight trigrams), has only two works ascribed to him, if the Yi 易, or Book of Changes, is included.¹⁰ Attributions to the famous Confucian sage-kings Yao 堯, Shun, and Yu 禹 are even fewer: Yao and Shun are associated with only a single inner-chamber (fangzhong 房中) text allegedly co-authored by the two.¹¹ Yu is considered as the author of merely one text, but a note following this text’s entry in the “Yiwen zhi” indicates that even this single attribution could have been a false one.¹² Although the sage-king Ku 禿 outshines the Yellow Emperor as an inventor in the Shanhaijing 山海經 (Guideways through Mountains and Seas), the “Yiwen zhi” does not attribute a single text to his name.¹³ By comparison, the “Yiwen zhi” credits the Yellow Emperor with twenty-three texts.¹⁴

Of these texts, however, the editorial notes are careful to point out “false attributions,” the Chinese expression tuo 托 (or 託) or yituo 依托 (or 依託). This keyword, however, connotes much more about the nature of the “Yellow Emperor’s writings” than it does about authorship.¹⁵ In a bianwei discourse the term tuo or yituo is used to distinguish forgeries of presumably authentic ancient Chinese texts. For instance, since the forty-pian long Huangdi shuo 黃帝說 (Sayings of the Yellow Emperor) is noted as “unrealistic, bizarre, and falsely attributed [to the

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9 Written as “宓戲” in the “Yiwen zhi” chapter of the Hanshu. See Hanshu 30.1779.
10 Hanshu 30.1704, 30.1779. The Book of Changes is a result of a longtime development and Fu Xi seems only to be the initiator; Allegedly King Wen of Zhou 周文王, the Duke of Zhou 周公, and Confucius all had a hand in the formation of this text. Though indisputably the initiator, Fu Xi can only claim partial authorship of this text.
11 Hanshu 30.1778.
12 Hanshu 30.1740.
13 The information is scattered in the “Dahuang dongjing” 大荒東經, “Dahuang nanjing” 大荒南經, “Dahuang xijing” 大荒西經, and “Haineijing” 海內經 of the Shanhaijing; for a list of those passages about Zhuan Xu, see Xu Bingchang 徐炳昶 1946: 56–58.
14 For the list of these attributions according to their categories and sub-categories, see the form that will be discussed in detail in next section.
15 Hanshu 30.1731, 30.1744, 30.1759.
Yellow Emperor]” (yu dan yituo 迂誕依托), it must be a forgery of an authentic work written by the Yellow Emperor. The assumption of the possible existence of an authentic text creates a standard that undermines the acceptance of the existing text, beyond the issue of authorship. Since such a presumed authentic work may have never existed, a classification as a forgery is especially detrimental: not only is the Yellow Emperor dismissed as author, but the value of such texts as historical sources is undermined.

In considering the vague and often conflicting representations of the Yellow Emperor and many other cultural heroes in early writings, few today still accept the authenticity of texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor in the “Yiwen zhi.” The Han scholars who left the notes stating that those texts were “unrealistic, bizarre, and falsely attributed [to the Yellow Emperor],” however, must have thought that some of these texts were authentic, since they made the effort to single out other texts as being “falsely” attributed to the Yellow Emperor. Accepting the sincerity of the bibliographic notes suggests that Han and pre-Han scholars acknowledged the validity of at least some of the attributions to the Yellow Emperor. Indeed, in his writings on the Five Emperors (wu di 五帝), Sima Qian traces the descent of the Han people and the origin of the Han civilization to the Yellow Emperor. In the Shiji, Sima Qian selects available materials that he considers reliably portray the Yellow Emperor as a historical figure, although he notes the strangeness of some of the Huangdi materials he encountered in the writings of the One Hundred Scholarly Lineages (baijia 百家).

These issues of authorship raise another question deserving attention: Why did the Yellow Emperor receive so many more attributions than other cultural heroes? To answer this question, this chapter will first examine the types of texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor and his ministers in the “Yiwen zhi.” I will then examine the Huangdi myth by discussing how the Yellow Emperor is portrayed in various sources and the relevant Han-dynasty scholarship on these sources, aiming to explore what led to the popularity of attributing authorship to the Yellow Emperor through a consideration of the types of writings attributed to him. This exploration will reveal how Eastern Zhou religious, ritual, and cosmological thinking influenced those attributions to the Yellow Emperor.

16 It is true that, when they left those “false attribution” notes, perhaps the Han scholars had no evidence to support their perceived inconsistency between these texts and those they considered to have been from the authentic Huangdi textual tradition, but what enabled them to do so was none other than the authority they presumed came from the Yellow Emperor, whom they conceived as the originator of that tradition.

17 Shiji 1.46.
2.1 The Yellow Emperor as an Author in the “Yiwen zhi”

In his widely cited classical work on the format of early Chinese writings, Yu Jiaxi argued that later readers gave titles to most early Chinese texts. Moreover, when texts—originally circulating in the form of brief pian 篇 (bound wood or bamboo strips)—were combined with other pian textual units into a larger text, the compiler would attribute the new composite text to the supposed initiator of the text’s school of thought, even though this ascribed initiator may not have actually written anything therein contained. As a result, the name of an individual, especially one regarded as the wellspring of a textual lineage, is simultaneously used to identify author and title. For this reason, Li Ling considers the dual author-title of early Chinese writings as an indication of the categorical principles behind the compiler’s amalgamation of short pian chapters. This assertion also explains why Li Ling treats the Yellow Emperor’s “Yiwen zhi” writings as texts associated with each other in a larger category called the “Huangdi shu” 黃帝書 (writings of the Yellow Emperor). The titles attributed not only to the Yellow Emperor but also to his ministers and later followers form a compendium of writings loosely grouped around the character of the Yellow Emperor.

Although there are uses for broadly grouping the writings associated with the Yellow Emperor and his ministers, such categorization oversimplifies the issue of textual authorship. Due to the sparsity of these writings, it is impossible to compare those attributed to the Yellow Emperor with those of his ministers. Nevertheless, the specific attributions may reflect different textual traditions, each with texts of distinct form and content, now unified under the heading of “Huangdi shu.” Fortunately, the very act of ascribing different texts to different figures offers clues to how Han scholars regarded the authors of the texts they organized. In this light, it is reasonable to consider that all the attributions posited in the “Yiwen zhi” chapter highlight features of the texts, otherwise the Han scholars would not have endeavored to differentiate one text from another by ascribing them to different authors. The attributions made by the Han scholars, then, were not groundless, no matter how unconvincing they seem to modern scholars.

Evidence assembled through archaeologically recovered texts is increasingly confirming Yu Jiaxi’s assertion that the majority of early Chinese texts lacked both the titles and author attributions that were later attached to them. Late
Western Han scholars, led by Liu Xiang 劉向 (ca. 77–6 BC), Liu Xin 劉歆 (ca. 50 BC–23 AD), and others, in their rearrangement of the imperial collection of texts confronted this problem when charged to identify and categorize the brief pian or juan 卷 (rolled silk) textual units and combine them into the much longer texts enumerated in the “Yiwen zhi.” The “Yiwen zhi” chapter does not directly describe how the Han scholars achieved this, but related information indicates that the Western Han scholars working with the imperial collection may have had means to ascertain the authorship, oral or written, of the collected texts. It is less clear how information pertaining to authorship had been passed on, but it seems not to have been a completely insurmountable problem for the Han scholars to overcome.

I suggest that the connections among various scholarly groups engaged in textual production and transmission, including the Han scholars who participated in the project of arranging the texts in the imperial library collection, may have played a significant role in distinguishing and categorizing the authorial attributions of the imperial collection. In fact, some of those who presented their texts to the imperial courts were themselves fond of collecting and making texts. For instance, Liu An and Liu De 劉德 (?–130 BC), two famous Western Han princes and bibliophiles, are recorded as having presented texts to the imperial court. Both are well-known for drawing scholars to their local courts and forming their own scholarly circles engaged in the collection and production of texts. Of course, the texts produced in such circles contained attributions when presented to the imperial court. Similarly, the scholars of the imperial court also belonged to circles of their own. For example, in the postfaces, which record information about the edited texts, Liu Xiang usually notes that the final version of a text was the result of the consideration of a number of versions, only some of which were indexed in the imperial collection at the time, while others were held elsewhere. Those different versions consulted by Liu Xiang and his team not only helped in collating the final version presented to the emperor, but they would have also provided hints for grouping texts together and for determining their authorship.

Since both the imperial and local intellectual circles consisted of individuals associated with specific traditions of textual learning, the authorship of the texts presented to the imperial court may have not confused Han scholars. In the remaining postfaces composed and presented by Liu Xiang to the emperor, Liu does not express difficulty in identifying and ascribing texts to specific individuals. Nevertheless, this does not mean that attributions were easily made or that titles were

22 *Hanshu* 53.2410; 44.2145.
fixed. One scenario is as follows: although some works lacked titles altogether and other works were not necessarily known by the same titles to the imperial scholars, Han scholars were able to find enough information to reach a consensus.

Attributions to texts associated with the Yellow Emperor were also very carefully given, as Han scholars attempted to expose texts “falsely” ascribed to him. Some of the “Yiwen zhi” notes unambiguously claim that texts entitled with the Yellow Emperor’s name should rather be attributed to Warring States individual(s). In consideration of this, using the general “Huangdi shu” category to denote texts attributed both to the Yellow Emperor and to his ministers, though taxonomically convenient, ignores the nuances of early Chinese text formation and transmission at its critical stages.

In addition, using the term “Huangdi shu” so broadly may cause confusion, as this term is also used to denote other texts in different contexts. For example, the terms “Huangdi shu” or “Huangdi zhi shu” in the Liezi were likely associated with the specific type of Huangdi writing that embodies the same thought and style as that of the Laozi. Some scholars also use the term “Huangdi shu” in their discussion of the four manuscripts found in Mawangdui Tomb 3.

It is for all these reasons that I mark those texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor’s ministers in the following table and will not consider them as belonging to the more general “Huangdi shu” category, even though they might be associated with the Yellow Emperor in terms of their narrative scheme, as Li Ling suggests. Li Ling has reason to coin the term ‘Huangdi shu’ to facilitate his discussion of those texts that he considers share some common features. My discussion in this chapter, however, does not embrace the broader "Huangdi shu" categorization. I intentionally separate the titles attributed to the Yellow Emperor from that attributed to the ministers to avoid the kind of confusion mentioned above. Also, in doing so, this chapter avoids the insurmountable task of comparing the titles attributed to the Yellow Emperor and that to his ministers since those texts had long been lost.

Except where noted, the following table was compiled on the basis of the texts listed in the “Yiwen zhi.”

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24 For an example, see Hanshu 30.1733.
27 Li Ling 1998b: 278.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Texts and their <em>pian</em> or <em>juan</em> numbers</th>
<th>Notes given in the “Yiwen zhi”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zhuzi lüe</td>
<td>Daojia</td>
<td><em>Huangdi sijing</em> 黄帝四經 4 pian</td>
<td>Appear in the time of the Six States, the text resembles the <em>Laozi</em> (起六國時, 價老子相似也).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6/9)**</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Huangdi ming</em> 黃帝銘 6 pian</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Huangdi junchen</em> 黃帝君臣 10 pian</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Za Huangdi</em> 雜黃帝 58 pian</td>
<td>Composed by a worthy man during the time of the Six States (六國時賢者所作).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>**Li Mu 力牧 22 pian</td>
<td>Composed during the time of the Six States, this text is attributed to Li Mu. Li Mu was the Yellow Emperor’s minister (六國時所作，託之力牧。力牧，黃帝相).</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Zajia 杂家 (0/1)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Kong Jia pan yu</em> 孔甲盤盂 26 pian</td>
<td>[Composed by] the Yellow Emperor’s scribe. Some say by the Xia Thearch Kong Jia. It seems that both attributions are not true (黃帝之史，或曰夏帝孔甲，似皆非).</td>
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<td><strong>Xiaoshuojia 小說家 (1/1)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Huangdi shuo</em> 黃帝說 40 pian</td>
<td>Unrealistic, bizarre, and falsely attributed [to the Yellow Emperor] (迂誕依托).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Bing xingshi 兵形勢 (0/1)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chiyou 蚩尤 2 pian</strong></td>
<td>See the <em>Lü xing</em> (見呂刑).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bing Lüe</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Huangdi</em> 黃帝 (16 pian)</td>
<td>Including charts 3 <em>juan</em> (圖三卷).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2/9)**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Categories | Subcategories | Texts and their pian or juan numbers | Notes given in the “Yiwen zhi”
--- | --- | --- | ---
Bing yinyang | *Feng Hu 封胡 (5 pian) | [Feng Hu was] the Yellow Emperor’s minister; false attribution (黃帝臣, 依託也).
*Feng Hou 風后 (13 pian) | Including charts 2 juan. [Feng Hou was] the Yellow Emperor’s minister; false attribution (圖二卷。黃帝臣，依託也).
*Li Mu 力牧 (15 pian) | [Li Mu was] the Yellow Emperor’s minister; false attribution (黃帝臣，依託也).
*Jia Yezi 鶉冶子 (1 pian) | Including charts 1 juan (圖一卷).
*Gui Rongqu 鬼容區 (3 pian) | Including charts 1 juan. [Gui Rongqu was] the Yellow Emperor’s minister; false attribution (圖一卷。黃帝臣，依託).

*Di Dian 地典 (6 pian) | *Cuju 蹴鞠 (25 pian)²⁸ |  
Bing jiqiao | *Shushu lüe 數術略 (1/1)** |  
Tianwen | Huangdi zazi qi 黃帝雜子氣 (33 pian) |  
(Huangdi) taijia liufu 黃帝泰階六符 (1 juan) |  
Lipu | Huangdi wujia li 黃帝五家曆 (33 juan) |  
Wuxing | Huangdi yinyang 黃帝陰陽 (25 juan) |  
(Huangdi) zhuzi lun yinyang 黃帝諸子論陰陽 (25 juan) |  
*Feng Hou guxu 風后孤虛 (20 juan) |
Zazhan | Huangdi Changliu zhanmeng 黃帝長柳占夢 (11 juan) |  
(Li Mu) |  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Texts and their <em>pian</em> or <em>juan</em> numbers</th>
<th>Notes given in the “Yiwen zhi”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fangji lüe</td>
<td>Yijing</td>
<td><em>Huangdi neiijing</em> 黄帝內經 (18 juan)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Waijing</em> 外經 (39 or 37 juan)</td>
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<td><em>Bian Que neiijing</em> 扁鵲內經 (9 juan)</td>
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<td>Jingfang</td>
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<td><em>Taishi Huangdi Bian Que Fu Yu fang</em></td>
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<td>秦始黃帝扁鵲俞拊方 (23 juan)</td>
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<td><em>Shengnong Huangdi shijin</em> 神農</td>
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<td>黃帝食禁 (7 juan)</td>
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<td>Fangzhong</td>
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<td><em>Huangdi sanwang yangyang fang</em></td>
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<td>黃帝三王養陽方 (20 juan)</td>
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<td><em>Rong Cheng yindao</em> 容成陰道</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(20 juan)</td>
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<td><em>Tian Lao zazi yindao</em> 天老雜子陰道</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(25 juan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shenxian</td>
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<td><em>Huangdi zazi buyin</em> 黃帝雜子步引</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(12 juan)</td>
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<td><em>Huangdi Qi Bo anmo</em> 黃帝岐伯按摩</td>
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<td>(10 juan)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Huangdi zazi zhijun</em> 黃帝雜子芝菌</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(18 juan)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Huangdi zazi shijiufang</em> 黃帝</td>
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<td></td>
<td>雜子十九家方 (21 juan)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>212/319** (pian); 263/337** (juan)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*texts allegedly written by the Yellow Emperor’s ministers.

**a/b: “a” denotes the number of text(s) or *pian* or *juan* attributed to the Yellow Emperor and “b,” the number of text(s) or *pian* or *juan* attributed to both the Yellow Emperor and his ministers.

We may make a few observations based on the information included in this table. First, if entitling a work with the name of a certain figure also suggested its authorship to the Han scholars, the texts clearly attributed to the Yellow Emperor are only placed in four of the six main categories under which all the texts available to them were organized. Indeed, none of the twenty-three texts ascribed to the Yellow

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Emperor are included in the Confucian *liuyi* 六藝 (six arts) or the *shifu* 詩賦 (poetry and *fu* rhapsody) category.

Also, the table indicates that the majority (15 out of 23) of the texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor belong to the *shushu* 術數 (methods and calculation) and *fangji* 方技 (recipes and techniques) categories, with the exact statistics of attributions as follows: of the 23 attributions, 6 are classified as *zhuzi* 諸子 (various masters), 2 are designated as *bingshu* 兵書 (military writings), 6 are grouped into the *shushu* category, and 9 are labeled as *fangji*. Another factor to consider when interpreting the distribution of the Huangdi writings is the total number of *pian* or *juan* in each category. Although there is no standard length for a *pian* or a *juan* as a textual unit, the *juan* is generally longer than the *pian*. One *juan* can contain multiple *pian* writings. The *shushu* and *fangji* texts contain 263 *juan* and 33 *pian* in total, suggesting that the amount of writing in these two categories could have been significantly longer than that of the 179 *pian* categorized into the *zhuzi* and *bingshu* groups.

Finally, if the measure words *pian* and *juan* indeed indicate the writing medium—bamboo strips and silk, respectively—then the *shushu* and *fangji* texts can be further differentiated from the rest by their medium, silk. Ying Shao 應劭 points out in his *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Habits) that when Liu Xiang undertook to rearrange the Han imperial text collection, he “first wrote the rearranged texts on bamboo strips” (*xian shu zhu* 先書竹). It has been recognized that making corrections on bamboo strips through scraping characters from the surface of the strips or by rearranging strips is accomplished much more easily than on silk or cloth. Only when the form of a specific text was finalized could Liu Xiang order that the text “be written on plain silk or cloth” (*shang su* 上素). Liu Xiang’s practice became a convention that continued through the Eastern Han. Consequently, Ying Shao observed that even in his time the texts in the Eastern Pavilion (Dongguan 東觀) “had both their bamboo strip and silk copies” (*zhu su ye* 竹素也).

If the *Fengsu tongyi*’s depiction of textual collocation and editing is accurate, it seems that most of the *shushu* and *fangji* texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor were not preserved on bamboo strips. This implies that most of the *shushu* and *fangji* texts did not undergo as much editing as the other texts did. Significant editing could have taken place before relatively stable texts were presented to the imperial court. It is also possible that the content of the texts presented certain

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30 Sun Deqian 1972: 34.
33 Wang Liqi 2010: 494.
formatting challenges—such as extensive use of charts, graphs, and diagrams—that were most easily resolved by using silk or cloth rather than bamboo strips. Or, the expensive medium of silk might suggest that the *shushu* and *fangji* texts were produced by and circulated among more affluent circles. In this case, owning or consulting such texts itself was a marker of wealth and prestige. Unfortunately, the total loss of those *shushu* and *fangji* texts makes it difficult to determine precisely why those writings were predominantly preserved on silk or cloth.

This leads us to question why the Yellow Emperor texts were excluded from the Confucian Classics, and why the majority of the Yellow Emperor’s writings address *shushu* and *fangji* contents. Additionally, these questions help us understand why so many more works were attributed to the Yellow Emperor than to the other cultural heroes. Although the contents of the texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor appear alien to the Confucian texts, the Yellow Emperor sometimes appears in anecdotes collected in such texts as the *Zuo Zhuan* (Zuo Commentary) and *Liji* (Records of Rites). Reading between the lines, these anecdotal passages interestingly betray an attempt to rationalize the figure of the Yellow Emperor, and such rationalization suggests an effort to portray this figure in a manner radically different from its previous forms.

In the following section, I address the virtual exclusion of the Yellow Emperor from the Confucian Classics and examine what the anecdotes suggest regarding how the rationalization occurred.

### 2.2 The Yellow Emperor with Four Faces

As a legendary figure, the Yellow Emperor is portrayed as a strange looking man. For example, a number of sources describe him as a man with four faces. According to the *Shizi* (Master Shi), Confucius’s disciple Zigong 一旦 asked the Master, “Is it true that in the past the Yellow Emperor had four faces?” Confucius dismissed the question by indicating that Zigong misunderstood the term *si mian* (four faces). The Master suggested a different, rational reading of this expression:

黃帝取合己者四人，使治四方，不謀而親，不約而成，大有成功，此之謂四面也。

The Yellow Emperor summoned four persons who agreed with him and dispatched them to govern the four quarters. They did not confer with but remained close to one another, did

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not arrange to do anything but accomplished all the goals, and achieved great success and merits. This is what the term “simian” means.\textsuperscript{35}

However bizarre Zigong’s question may sound, the notion that the Yellow Emperor had four faces does not seem to have materialized from nothing. There is no transmitted narrative about a four-faced mythical Yellow Emperor, but the Zigong anecdote forces one to believe that such a narrative was circulating at the time. Confucius’s answer reflects not only the Master’s wit, but also highlights the central role of rationalization in discourse during the time this anecdote formed. Through the rationalization, a mythical figure is transformed into a realistic sage-king documented in an historical account. In other words, once such historicization has been accomplished, the mythical figure becomes an historical fact, which would continuously influence people’s understanding this mythical figure in a historical context accordingly.\textsuperscript{36}

The rationalization at work in the transmission of Huangdi stories makes understanding a coherent depiction of the Yellow Emperor difficult. Such a depiction requires not only the rationalization of all Huangdi myths, but also the eradication of all pre-rationalized myths so that incompatible accounts may be removed. Moreover, the reinterpretation of the Huangdi stories that resulted from such rationalizations made by different groups in different circumstances further complicates the consistency of the Huangdi lore.\textsuperscript{37} The diversity of sources seems to have confronted the Grand Historian when he compiled the Yellow Emperor’s biography.

In terms of structural organization, the Shiji account of the Yellow Emperor begins with the protagonist’s genealogy and his extraordinariness as a youth. It then sketches an account of his achievements, before closing with information regarding the Yellow Emperor’s death and progeny. Although the narrative is included in the “Benji” 本紀 (“Basic Annals”) section of the Shiji, the structure of the Yellow Emperor narrative is typical of Shiji biographical accounts. The Shiji uses this biographical structure to present the first comprehensive image of the

\textsuperscript{35} Li Shoukui and Li Yi 2003: 67.
\textsuperscript{36} Compared with their Greek counterparts, who, as William Boltz points out, “have mythologized their history, Chinese historicized their mythology.” Therefore, to restore Chinese myths means a process of “reverse euhemerization,” that is “to peel away, so to speak, the Juist [Confucian] overlay.” Boltz 1981: 141–142.
\textsuperscript{37} Nakajima Toshio 中島敏夫 mentions 39 Han and pre-Han texts in which the Yellow Emperor’s name appears at least once. Liu Baocai 劉寶才 also lists 39 major texts (dated from pre-Qin to the Qing dynasty) including information pertaining to the Yellow Emperor in a conference paper. See Nakajima 2001: 2–5; Jiang Linchang 2001: 83.
Yellow Emperor, depicting him as the founding father of the Chinese culture surviving through the Han Dynasty, a depicted continuous culture that had flourished during the time of the Shiji compilation. Sima Qian recounts the Yellow Emperor’s military accomplishments, i.e., his defeat of the Yandi 炎帝 (Flame Emperor) and Chi You 蚩尤, as actions responsible for saving a large domain from the chaotic rule of his predecessor, the Divine Farmer. To the grand Historian, these events carry great significance for the making of a well-ordered society. This is why the defeat of Chi You becomes the starting point for human history as explored by the Grand Historian.\(^{38}\)

The Grand Historian’s comments after this chapter, however, indicate that the historiced Yellow Emperor represents only one perspective. The Yellow Emperor indeed had other “faces” preserved in those materials that the Grand Historian intentionally excluded from his writing. The Grand Historian’s reasoning for this editorial choice is as follows:

Men of learning frequently mention the Five Emperors and consider them ancient. Nevertheless, the Documents merely records what had occurred since Yao. As for what the Hundred Lineages have said about the Yellow Emperor, their writings are neither elegant nor refined, and thus are difficult for gentlemen to talk about. As for what Confucius transmitted in replying to Zai Yu’s question on the virtues of the Five Emperors as well as the “Descent Lines of the Ancient Sage Rulers,” they have not been transmitted among some Confucians. I once reached Kongtong to the west, visited Zhuolu to the north, approached the sea in the east, and floated along the Yangzi and the Huai rivers in the south, arriving at those places often mentioned by the seniors and elders as where the Yellow Emperor, Yao, and Shun lived. The customs and teachings of those places are surely different, but in general what does not deviate from the ancient texts is close to the truth. I have observed that the Spring Autumn Annals and Discourses of the States have noticeably elucidated the “Power of the Five Emperors” as well as the “Descent Lines of the Ancient Sage Rulers,” even though I have not examined them in depth; what they present is not empty at all. The Documents has remained incomplete for some time, yet what is not included in the Documents frequently appears in other sayings. Unless one is fond of learning, thinks deeply, and understands the meanings of the sayings with his heart, it is indeed difficult to talk about

\(^{38}\) Shiji 1.1–10. For the Grand Historian’s own voice revealing his ambition of “exploring the edge between humans and heaven” (jiu tian ren zhi ji 究天人之際), see the letter to Ren An preserved in Sima Qian’s biography in the Hanshu; see Hanshu 62.2735.
them with those who lack experience and knowledge. I have discussed them all in order. Choosing those with words that are fine and elegant, I place them in the beginning of my writings as the Basic Annals. 39

This passage reveals how the Grand Historian selected data to present in his Yellow Emperor writings. From this passage, we learn that the Grand Historian had access to both “elegant” and “inelegant” materials, but he left out the “inelegant” materials for lacking the canonicity of the more “elegant” Confucian Classics. We learn that the inelegant passages consisted of sources related to the teachings of the Hundred Lineages, as well as legends and myths circulated orally by elders. Bizarre details, such as the belief that the Yellow Emperor had four faces, may have been found in the “inelegant” sources at the Grand Historian’s disposal. Moreover, the heterogeneity of the sources must have resulted in inconsistent descriptions of the Yellow Emperor. The Grand Historian unambiguously chooses texts featuring “words that are fine and elegant” to portray his version of the Yellow Emperor.

The second principle applied to the selection of sources is closely associated with the first, and requires the Grand Historian to offer further explanation. The Grand Historian’s decision to base the Yellow Emperor’s biographical account on the “Wudide” 五帝德 and the “Dixixing” 帝繫姓—the authoritative teachings supposed to have been passed down from Confucius through his disciples—requires the additional support of related information regarding an historical Yellow Emperor from other Confucian Classics, especially the Documents, in which several chapters were considered the most reliable collection of materials documenting ancient rulers and their ministers. 40 There, we need to take heed of the fact that the Yellow Emperor is not mentioned in the transmitted Documents at all. Instead, this collection of speeches and documents ascribes the beginning of civilization to the innovations of ancient sage-kings, rather than to the Yellow Emperor. In contrast to the Shiji’s attribution of the Yellow Emperor as the founder of civilization, the Documents attributes such activities to Yao, another sage ruler who greatly postdates the Yellow Emperor according to the genealogy described in the “Wudide.” This puts the Grand Historian’s historicization of the Yellow Emperor on unstable ground: his painstaking effort to exclude “inelegant” sayings is rendered moot due to contradictory genealogy in the Documents, regardless of his having consulted “ancient texts” (guwen 古文) to identify words that were neither “fine”

39 Shiji 1.46.
40 For example, see Shaughnessy 1999, especially 292–299; David Schaberg argues that these texts should not be treated as historical sources, but rather as mysterious sorts of artifacts without clearly identified historical information; see Schaberg 2001b: 477–481, 487–490.
The dilemma inevitably compromises the Grand Historian’s methods for evaluating and selecting materials to present an historical account of the Yellow Emperor.

Aware of the above-mentioned dilemma, the Grand Historian offers a two-fold rationale: “The Documents has remained incomplete for a while.” This confirms the Grand Historian’s trust in the “Wudide,” and his belief that the Yellow Emperor is indeed the starting point of Chinese history despite the lack of evidence in the Documents. In this way, the Yellow Emperor’s absence in the Documents is conjectured to be due to the lack or the loss of written records.

Alternatively, the Grand Historian also found that “what is not included in the Documents frequently appears in other sayings” of reliable texts such as the Spring and Autumn Annals and the Discourses of the States, which “have noticeably elucidated the ‘Power of the Five Emperors’ as well as the ‘Descent Lines of the Ancient Sage Rulers.’” In linking the “Wudide” to historical sources like the Chunqiu and the Guoyu, the Grand Historian manages to justify his historicization of the Yellow Emperor without the support from the more authoritative (according to this passage) Documents.

The Grand Historian’s historicization of the Yellow Emperor has not only influenced the interpretation of the Yellow Emperor stories, but has also shaped the conception of the origin of Chinese ethnicity and civilization. The Yellow Emperor is the root of almost all ancestral lineage trees upon which the whole system of ancient Chinese history is reconstructed. Those texts used by the Grand Historian—the “Wudide,” the “Dixixing,” and the Guoyu, among others—are still accepted as historical evidence and are fundamental in structuring, depicting, and interpreting an historically undocumented past.

Furthermore, it is also observable that although historians of the “doubting antiquity” persuasion have pointed out that the Yellow Emperor is a legendary or mythological figure, his stories are still referenced to interpret archaeological finds. Surely, today the Yellow Emperor’s existence as an historical individual seems less credible to many scholars of ancient Chinese history, who tend to conceive of the Yellow Emperor as a collective term denoting a group of people, a society, or a culture that may be archaeologically traceable. The basic premise

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41 According the commentaries, the term guwen denotes to the “Wudide” and the “Dixixing.” Nevertheless, if the word gu, or archaic, does play a role in this context, the writings collected in the Documents certainly look more archaic than the former two. For the Shiji commentaries on the term guwen, see Shiji 1.46.
of this view, however, undoubtedly still rests upon the historicization of the Yellow Emperor initiated in the *Shiji*.\(^ {42} \)

Despite its lasting influence, the Grand Historian’s approach to documenting the Yellow Emperor has a noticeable limit. His method for omitting the “inelegant” sources when trying to historicize the Yellow Emperor results in an incomplete image of this figure. This inevitably affects the search for an explanation of the Yellow Emperor’s sudden cultural proliferation, which had been ongoing since the Eastern Zhou period. Furthermore, the Grand Historian failed to reconcile competing images of the Yellow Emperor. One of the sources, the “Wudide,” at times betrays the historicized Huangdi image presented in the *Shiji*. For example, we find a problematic description of the Yellow Emperor initiated in this text, contained in a passage where Zaiwo 宰我 questions Confucius on the Yellow Emperor’s abnormal lifespan:

昔者予聞諸寰伊言黃帝三百年。請問黃帝者人邪？亦非人邪？何以至於三百年乎？

*In the past, I heard from Rong Yi that the Yellow Emperor lived for three hundred years. May I ask whether the Yellow Emperor was a human being or not? How could he have lived for three hundred years [if he was indeed a human]?*\(^ {43} \)

Zaiwo’s question is comparable to Zigong’s question regarding the Yellow Emperor’s four faces, as both figures questioned the superhuman characteristics of the Yellow Emperor. Here, once again, Confucius interprets his disciple’s question within an ethical framework. Confucius explains:

生而民得其利百年，死而民畏其神百年，亡而民用其教百年，故曰三百年。

*When [the Yellow Emperor] was alive, people benefited from him for a hundred years; after he died, people stood in awe of his spirit for a hundred years; when [his spirit] disappeared, people applied his teachings for a hundred hears. For this reason, people say that [the Yellow Emperor lived] for three hundred years.*\(^ {44} \)

In answering his disciples’ questions, Confucius uses the same tactics to rationalize the lore referenced by his disciples; that is, he transforms the literal strangeness of the sayings into a figure of political wisdom that comments on the Yellow Emperor’s governance and merits. It is also worth noting the persuasive power of Confucius’s

\(^ {42} \) Many works approach both related textual and archaeological data in this similar vein, however different some of details might look. Cf. Xu Shunzhan 許順湛 2005; Liu Qiyu 劉起釪 1991: 1–73; Yin Shengping 尹盛平 2005: 115–118.
\(^ {43} \) Fang Xiangdong 方向東 2008: 689.
\(^ {44} \) Fang Xiangdong 2008: 690.
rationalizations for historicizing and moralizing the old sayings. For instance, in de-mythicizing the lore that the Yellow Emperor had four faces, Confucius interprets the Yellow Emperor’s four faces into “four persons who agreed with him.” Such rhetoric links the strangeness of the Yellow Emperor with his governing skills and his virtue of being willing to share power with others. Similarly, in explaining how the Yellow Emperor could have lived for three hundred years, Confucius reinterprets a person’s life span into the lasting influence of his contributions to society, which further facilitates the euhemerization of the Yellow Emperor. In both cases, the rhetoric privileges the figurative over the literal.

But it is undeniable that, beyond this rationalized image of the Yellow Emperor, there was indeed the widespread notion of a four-faced Yellow Emperor. Not only did Zigong reference it, but the Yellow Emperor is depicted as having four faces in a text preceding one of the versions of the Laozi 老子 discovered on one of the silk manuscripts found at Mawangdui Tomb 3. According to this account, these four faces enabled the Yellow Emperor to observe the four quarters of the Earth and to collect information more efficiently than normal people, thereby allowing him to make more informed policies and to conduct the affairs of state with greater understanding of the conditions of the people. “For this reason, he was able to act as the model of all under heaven.”

Similarly, it is not surprising that, in various sources, the Yellow Emperor appears as a god-like figure associated with the command of dragons, monsters, beasts, ghosts and spirits, or wind- and rain-gods either in ritual occasions or in battles. Even the Shiji 世家 preserves this image of a divine Yellow Emperor in the “Fengshan shu” 封禪書 (Writings on Ceremonies of Presenting Sacrifices to Heaven on Mt Tai). In that chapter, Gongsun Qing 公孫卿, a fangshi 方士 (master of prescription), describes to Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 BC) how the Yellow Emperor ascended to heaven as an immortal. This account also reflects different images of the Yellow Emperor proliferated in different circles of learning.

45 陳鼓應 2011: 196.
46 Scattered information pertaining to different images of the Yellow Emperor is still available in a number of sources, especially in the Shanhaijing 山海經, the weishu 緯書 writings, and the zhuzi 诸子 writings considered inelegant by the Grand Historian. For examples on how the Shanhaijing depicts the Yellow Emperor, see Mori Yasutarō 森安太郎 1970: 149–174; for a summary of information in the zhuzi texts, see Xu Shunzhan 2005: 69–78; for the depictions of the Yellow Emperor arrange according to different categories, see Huangdiling Jijinhui 黃帝陵基金會 2008: 1–220; for related information text by text, see Nakajima Toshio 2001; for the analysis of the Yellow Emperor’s appearing in different sources as the god of rain, storm, and fog, see Lewis 1990: 179–183.
In fact, Yang Kuan 楊寬 asserts that the name “Yellow Emperor” (Huangdi 黃帝), was derived from the general term huangdi 皇帝 (august god), due to the similar Old Chinese pronunciations of “yellow” 黃 *wâŋ and “awe-inspiring” or “august” 皇 *(g) wâŋ; therefore, the stories surrounding the Yellow Emperor and other sage kings all evolved out of the myth of an “august god.”

The image of a mythical Yellow Emperor, therefore, must be included in considerations of this figure as the author of many texts. In fact, the mythical side of the Yellow Emperor is closely related to the nature of the texts attributed to him. The supernatural powers that the Yellow Emperor displayed as a god would certainly lend authority and credibility to the texts under his name, since his divine powers are directly relevant to the contents of the texts attributed to him: the majority of the Huangdi writings are categorized as recipes and techniques. Connecting such texts with a supernatural figure not only enhances credibility, but is also necessary. One who does not have divine connections cannot write a text elucidating principal numbers, patterns, and issues of divinity and immortality. In this sense, it is mostly the mythical aspects of the Yellow Emperor that qualifies him as the author of the fangji and shushu writings.

Alternatively, the historicization of the Yellow Emperor contributed to both the credibility and the reception of the Huangdi writings. To be sure, a god possesses secret knowledge, but such knowledge can only circulate in the human domain once it has been revealed to a human being. Furthermore, it is only likely to survive if the knowledge proves efficacious. In the few surviving texts associated with the Yellow Emperor, such as the Huangdi neijing 黃帝內經 (The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine) and texts dealing with sexual intercourse and immortality, the Yellow Emperor is depicted as an interlocutor with those who have secret knowledge or access to the supernatural world. On one occasion, he is even the recipient of a sacred text from a goddess. The presence of the Yellow Emperor as a human being in these texts is not only associated with the revelation of secret words, but also attests to their practicability in order to increase their authority and credibility. The texts’ need for a simultaneously divine and human Yellow Emperor is noticeable.

Since the historicization of the Yellow Emperor played a role in the attributions of texts to him, it becomes necessary to explore the occurrence of this phenomenon in a larger context. This context can only be provided by examining the various sources related to the Yellow Emperor and by considering the dating of such

49 Taiping yulan 15.140, 79.677.
Although providing a dating for a text, or for a passage within a text, often amounts to an estimation, close analysis usually benefits our understanding of both the text and its contents. Thus, the following section analyzes the most oft-cited passages regarding the Yellow Emperor.

2.3 The Yellow Emperor in Persuasion

One frequently cited passage regarding the Yellow Emperor appears in the *Discourses of the States*. The passage states that on the eve of the Jin Prince Chong’er’s return to power, he and his entourage were in the state of Qin seeking military and political aid. The king of Qin attempted to form an alliance with the Jin by having Chong’er marry his daughter, Huaiying, who had some time earlier been married to, but abandoned by, Chong’er’s nephew, the current Jin ruler (Lord Huai), whom Chong’er was planning to overthrow. Learning that Chong’er intended to refuse the King of Qin’s offer, Sikong Jizi, one of Chong’er’s followers, persuaded him not to do so. Sikong Jizi suggested that a marital tie between Jin and Qin would not only help the exiled Jin prince return to power, but that marrying a woman from a non-Jin clan would also yield many offspring. Taking the Yellow Emperor as an example, Sikong Jizi says:

昔少典娶于有蟜氏，生黃帝、炎帝。黃帝以姬水成，炎帝以姜水成。成而異德，故黃帝為姬，炎帝為姜，二帝用師以相濟也，異德之故也。異姓則異德，異德則異類。異類雖近，男女相及，以生民也。

In the past Shao Dian married the daughter of the You Qiao clan and she gave birth to the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor. The Yellow Emperor succeeded by the Ji River, and the Flame Emperor succeeded by the Jiang River. They both succeeded, yet their virtues differed. Therefore, the Yellow Emperor was surnamed Ji, and the Flame Emperor was surnamed Jiang. That the two Emperors used their armies to conquer each other resulted from

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50 The earliest extant textual source on the Yellow Emperor is the *Guoyu*, in which the Yellow Emperor is mentioned in different occasions. In the “Zhouyu” it is said that Gun, Yu, Gonggong, Si Yue, and the rulers of a number of states “were all the descendants of the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor” (皆黄炎之後也); in the “Jinyu” it says that the Yellow Emperor had twenty-five sons but only two of them inherited his surname Ji; and in the “Luyu” the Yellow Emperor is mentioned as the sacrificial receiver of several states. The Yellow Emperor’s name is also found on a Warring States bronze vessel named “Chenhou Yinqi dui” which will be discussed later. The story of the Yellow Emperor’s battling Chi You is also mentioned on the back of an Eastern Han bronze mirror, see Zhang Jinyi 張金儀 1981: 75–83, 144.
their differing virtues. Those who are surnamed differently differ in virtue; those different in virtue are different in kind. Those that differ in kind, even though they live close, will successfully generate offspring when their men and women match each other.\footnote{Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 2002: 336–337.}

This passage, likely one instance of the euhemerization of the Yellow Emperor, names both the Yellow Emperor’s posited biological parents and the location where he actively governed. The identities of Shao Dian and You Qiao are difficult to trace, but they are generally regarded as two different ancient tribes located in the western highland region of modern-day China. This inference is derived from the belief that the Ji and Jiang rivers, which were close to the bases of the Shao Dian and You Qiao tribes, were in western China. Scholars have confidently located the Jiang River, but the location of the Ji River has long been debated.\footnote{Liu Qiyu 1991: 1–73, 161–197; Yin Shengping 2005; Xu Bingchang 1946: 26–36; Zou Heng 鄒衡 1980: 297–356; Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎 1997: 13–44.} Since the Zhou 周 later rose to power in the west with the help of its major ally, the Jiang clan, the location of the Ji River is closely related to the origin of the Ji Zhou 姬周 tribe. A long-held idea considers that the Zhou culture originated from the Jing 涇 and Wei 渭 River valley. Following Qian Mu 錢穆 (1895–1990 AD), however, many scholars are now inclined to believe that the Zhou had lived in present-day Shanxi 山西 province, at least from the time of Hou Ji 后稷.\footnote{Han Jianye 韓建業 and Yang Xin’gai 楊新改 2006: 53–54. Hou Ji was the alleged ancestor of the Zhou according to the song “Shengmin” 生民. See Maoshi zhengyi 17.1055–1078.} Later this Ji tribe migrated from Shanxi to Bin 嵩 and then to a place called “Zhouyuan” 周原 (Plain of Zhou) in modern-day Shaanxi province. This became Ji’s new base from which it threatened the western border of the Shang 商 (ca. 1600–1046 BC) domain as it grew in power.\footnote{Maoshi zhengyi 17.109–1123; Maoshi zhengyi 16.979–995; Han Jianye and Yang Xin’gai 2006: 53–54.}

Many other sources are consistent with, and expand on, the Guoyu passage.\footnote{Cf. Wang Hui 2009: 9–11; Guo Moruo 2002a: 16–22; Guo Moruo 2002b: 114; Yang Xiangkui 1992: 21–23; Zou Heng 1980: 297–356.} For example, both the Shiji and “Wudide” suggest that the Yellow Emperor was also called Xuanyuan 軒轅. Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215–282 AD) explains that he was named such because he was born on Mt. Xuanyuan.\footnote{Fang Xiangdong 2008: 689; Shiji 1.5.} Based on phonological similarities between the Chinese terms gui 龜 *kwrə and ji 姬 *kja, xuanyuan 軒轅 *hŋan wan and tianyuan 天鼋 *θîn ŋwan, as well as on the provenance of some of the bronzes marked with the symbol tianyuan 天鼋, which is interpreted as the family emblem of the Yellow Emperor, some modern scholars (for instance,
Guo Moruo 郭沫若 and Yang Xiangkui 杨向奎 have proposed that the Huangdi tribe originally lived northeast of the Luo River (Luoshui 洛水) of Shaanxi before moving to northern Shaanxi and finally migrating south to the Zhouyuan area.\(^{57}\)

The Guoyu passage cited above also references the conflict between the Ji and Jiang tribes, which seems to denote the battle between the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor\(^ {58}\) referred to as the Battle of Banquan (Banquan zhizhan 阪泉之戰) in both the “Wudide” and the Shiji. According to the “Wudide,” the Yellow Emperor “taught his army of bears, leopards, and tigers to fight against the Flame Emperor in the field of Banquan and was able to carry out his aim after three battles.”\(^ {59}\)

The animal troops are interpreted as the names of the Yellow Emperor’s armies, possibly distinguished by different banners emblazoned with bears, leopards, and tigers. Such an interpretation is influenced by the tendency to historicize the Yellow Emperor as an ancient sage-king.\(^ {60}\) In the narrative describing the Battle of Zhuolu, Chi You, often depicted as a beast-like war hero in several sources, was captured and killed in the field of Zhuolu for his disobeying the Yellow Emperor.\(^ {61}\)

The Yellow Emperor’s two adversaries, the Flame Emperor and Chi You, who are confronted separately according to the Shiji, are united into a single narrative preserved in the “Changmai”嘗麥—a piece related to the writing of punishments (xingshu 刑書)—in the Yi Zhoushu 逸周書 (Scattered Zhou Documents). The story, which forms part of the Zhou king’s speech to his Grand Corrector, the official in charge of punishment, is recounted as follows:

\(^{57}\) Wang Hui 2009: 11–13; Zou Heng 2001: 310–312. For the discussion of the connection between the Huangdi clan and the “tianyuan” emblem, see Guo Moruo 2002a: 16–22; Guo Moruo 2002b: 114; Yang Xiangkui 1997: 21–23. Another scholar, Chen Ping 陳平, inspired by Su Bingqi 蘇秉琦 and others, traces the origin of the Huangdi tribe even further to the east. He considers that the Yellow Emperor is associated with the Hongshan 紅山 culture in northeastern China. He suggests that it was from the Hongshan cultural base that the Huangdi tribe expanded and gradually moved to the west highland, becoming one of the groups later known as the Ji Zhou 姬周 of Zhouyuan. He also argues that the legendary “Battle of Zhuolu” (Zhuolu zhi zhan 涿鹿之戰) occurring in present northern Hebei 河北 province was caused by the westward migration of the Ji tribe out of the Hongshan culture base rather than by the expansion of the Huaxia 華夏 ethnic groups from the west highland. Chen Ping 2003: 352–360.

\(^{58}\) Sometimes also referred to as Chidi 赤帝, the Red Emperor, as seen in the cited sentence that follows.

\(^{59}\) 教熊貔貅豹虎, 以與赤帝戰於阪泉之野, 三戰然後得行其志. Fang Xiangdong 2008: 689.

\(^{60}\) It is also possible, however, that in the legend the Yellow Emperor indeed commanded animals in battle. The Shiji account about the Battle of Banquan accords with the “Wudide” passage, but narrates the details of another battle—the Battle of Zhuolu—immediately following its account of the Battle of Banquan. See Shiji 1.5.

\(^{61}\) Shiji 1.5.
昔天之初，X作二后，乃設建典，命赤帝分正二卿，命蚩尤宇于少昊，以臨四方，司XX上天未成之慶。蚩尤乃逐帝，爭于涿鹿之河，九隅無遺。赤帝大懾，乃說于黃帝，執蚩尤殺之于中冀，以甲兵釋怒。用大正，順天思序，紀于大帝，用名之曰絕轡之野。乃命少昊請司馬鳥師，以正五帝之官，故名曰質。天用大成，至于今不亂。

In the past at the beginning of heaven, two rulers were established by X; as a result, norms were also set up and laid out. The Red Emperor was ordered to assign the governing duties to two ministers; Chi You was ordered to live with Shao Hao, in charge of the four quarters and the work that had not been accomplished by heaven above. Chi You then expelled the Emperor and the two competed by the Zhuolu River, leaving nowhere within the nine corners unaffected. The Red Emperor was greatly frightened and thus persuaded the Yellow Emperor to capture Chi You and kill him in Central Ji. The Yellow Emperor unleashed his wrath [toward Chi You] with armor and weapons, therefore he achieved his governance greatly. He followed the order of Heaven and Heaven recorded his achievements. For this reason Central Ji was also called the Field without War Horse Bridles. Then Shao Hao, i.e., Qing, was appointed as Minister of War and Master of Birds to command the officials of the five elements; therefore he was also called Zhi. Heaven thus greatly accomplished [its work], lasting till nowadays without being disturbed.

Despite its vague wording and poor organization, this passage clearly attests that the Battle of Zhuolu was initiated by the dispute between the Red Emperor and Chi You. Initially defeated by Chi You, the Red Emperor had to seek assistance from the Yellow Emperor, who was able to capture and kill Chi You in Central Ji. Contrary to the Shiji account, in the Yi Zhoushu it is not the Yellow Emperor but the Flame Emperor—which usually equated with the Red Emperor as commentators suggest—who plays the major role in the Battle of Zhuolu against Chi You. The above passage indeed states that the Red Emperor and Chi You were the two rulers. The reason that scholars now identify the erhou 二后 as the Red Emperor and the Yellow Emperor has to do with the modern synthetization of a Huangdi lore, which elevated the Yellow Emperor to the role of the central protagonist in Chinese legendary history. No doubt, in assisting the Red Emperor to punish Chi You, the Yellow Emperor accomplished what Heaven had commanded the erhou

62 Character missing.
63 Two characters missing.
65 Most commentators tend to consider “請” as “清,” name of Shao Hao. See Huang Huaixin et al 2007: 734–736.
66 The term “五帝” is interpreted as the five elements with the reference from Shanzi’s 剣子 speech recorded in the Zuozhuan. See Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu 春秋左傳注 Zhao 17.1386–1388.
68 Huang Huaixin et al 2007: 731.
to undertake. Violence, be it punishment or even war, was henceforth legitimized as a means to establish the “norms” of good government and to achieve peace. This theme—that violence is necessary for the restoration of peace from chaos—remains consistent with the ideology of Shang and Zhou statecraft. The founding fathers of both the Shang and Zhou dynasties established their rule by overthrowing the final king of the preceding dynasty. This principle of statecraft is evoked in the Zhou king’s reference to the Yellow Emperor’s defeat of Chi You in the “Changmai” (Sacrifice of Tasting the Wheat) *pian* of the *Yi Zhoushu*.

The “Changmai” version of the Yellow Emperor’s story is considered to be of early origin. Li Xueqin observes that the wording of the “Changmai” greatly resembles early Zhou bronze inscriptions. This prompts him to suggest that the “Changmai” could have taken its written form by King Mu’s 穆王 reign (r. 956–918 BC), if not quite as early as King Cheng’s 成王 time (r. 1042/35–1006 BC), as suggested in the postface of the *Yi Zhoushu*. Li’s article aims to place the “Changmai” among Western Zhou legal writings, particularly those mentioned in the *Zuo zhuan* as the Nine Punishments (*jiu xing* 九刑). Yet, unfortunately, Li’s article does not provide substantial evidence; his dating of the “Changmai” to King Mu of Zhou is especially doubtful as there is not enough detail in the “Changmai” linking it to the early Western Zhou King Zhao’s 周昭王 (r. 995–977 BC) southern campaign, which is held by Li as an important piece of evidence to date this piece of writing. Li acknowledges those expressions anachronistic to Western Zhou writing conventions, but this undermines his early dating of the passage.

A final blow to Li’s dating is delivered by the *Zuo zhuan* passages indicating the later creation date of legal writings. The strong disagreement uttered in Shu Xiang’s 叔向 letter to Zichan 子產 for the latter’s drafting of legal writings seems to suggest that at that time the making of legal writings was rather innovative. Those earlier legal writings mentioned by Shu Xiang in his letter, such as the *Yu xing* 禹刑 (Punishments of Yu), the *Tang xing* 唐刑 (Punishments of Tang), and the *Jiu xing* 九刑 (Nine Punishments) that Li Xueqin tends to believe as the Western Zhou legal writings, make more sense to the overall debate in the *Zuo zhuan* context if we understand them as rhetorical devices rather than historical documents. The use of the phrase “rectifying writings of punishments” (*zheng xingshu*...
在“Changmai”中“zhong”字的使用表明其可能是东周时期的产物，其日期与李学勤对《左传》中更少文言文的章节的年代划分相一致，他认为这些是东周时期的插叙。我认为《左传》中的叙述表明那些更少文言文的表达不是后来的插叙，而是表明“Changmai”篇的后世性质。

证实了 Sikong Jizi 关于黄帝在《国语》中的陈述的可靠性，王晖 王晖 接受了李学勤的观点。他在研究《国语》中“zhong”字的使用时，将其与出土的甲骨文以及清华大学收藏的《保训》中“zhong”字的使用进行比较，从而得出结论：《保训》和《Changmai》都是西周时期的记录。此外，通过将“Changmai”中的“官员五数”与《左传》中夏商时期官员名字的鸟名命名法联系起来，王晖 进一步将“官员五数”系统追溯至商代以前，建议不仅“Changmai”文本是早写的，而且其中所描述的内容也是非常早的历史可靠的。

尽管王晖的论点非常坚定，但其论点是有缺陷的。根据《礼记》和《仪礼》等较晚的文献，将“zhong”字解释为祭祀时使用的旗帜是不恰当的。此外，王晖自己也意识到“zhong”字的解释存在问题。而且，《保训》中“zhong”字的使用方式表明，这个问题的复杂性使得“Changmai”作为早期文献的证据效力受到影响。最后，王晖的论点强调了“di”祔祭祀只能由霸主进行。王晖利用这一论点来解释《左传》中黄帝的叙述。
why the Chen 陳 rulers had not offered the *di* sacrifice to the Yellow Emperor before they usurped the Jiang Qi family.\textsuperscript{73} The *Zuozhuan* suggests otherwise. The *di* sacrifice consisted of two seasonal and ancestral offerings, and the right to present the *di* sacrifice to one’s ancestor was not strictly limited to hegemonic rulers of the time.\textsuperscript{74} For example, the state of Lu had never achieved hegemonic status, but its rulers presented *di* sacrifices to its deceased lords.\textsuperscript{75}

Rather than comparing versions of the Huangdi story from conflicting sources and emphasizing their historical value, I prefer to read them in their proper context. Historical authenticity may not have been prioritized in some contexts, such as the two Yellow Emperor stories related in speeches attributed to Sikong Jizi and the King of Zhou in the *Guoyu* and the *Yi Zhoushu*. Sikong Jizi’s speech states that the Yellow Emperor and the Flame Emperor developed different virtues because they grew up in different places, despite being brothers. Because of these different virtues, they were led to use force against each other. When related to the Battle of Banquan, a decisive battle won by the Yellow Emperor, it tells us that the defeated Jiang clan submitted itself to the Ji clan. Certainly, the “Shengmin” describes the Ji Zhou and the Jiang as longtime allies and praises the Jiang for supporting the ascendancy of the Zhou,\textsuperscript{76} but no sources recount how submissive the Jiang clan was, nor do they detail how dominant the Ji clan was, especially in its early stage when establishing a base in Jiang clan’s traditional territory of Zhouyuan.

If we interpret Sikong Jizi’s story within the context of the situation prompting his speech, his purpose is to liken the relationship between the Ji and Jiang to that between the Jin and Qin. The following table illustrates the parallel relationships:

| Tab. 2-2: Parallel Relationships of the Ji-Jin and Jiang-Qin Pairs: |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Parallel 1** | **Parallel 2** |
| Polities/Groups | Ji (姬) | Jin (晋) | Jiang (姜) | Qin (秦) |
| Protagonists | Huangdi | Chong’er | Yandi | King of Qin |
| Living Places | Ji River | Jin | Jiang River | Qin |

\textsuperscript{73} Wang Hui 2009: 8–9. Here Wang Hui refers to the contents of the bronze inscriptions on the “Chenhou Yin Qi dui,” which is to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{74} *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* Zhao 15.1369; see both the main text of the *Zuo Commentary* and the notes by Yang Bojun.

\textsuperscript{75} *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* Min 2; Zhao 15; Zhao 25; Ding 8.

\textsuperscript{76} *Maoshi zhengyi* 17.1055–1078.
As shown, every point in the myth corresponds to a parallel relationship between the states of Jin and Qin. Moreover, this correspondence highlights the thrust of Sikong Jizi’s speech for his intended audience: Sikong Jizi argued that the advantages of obtaining Qin’s support through marriage to the king’s daughter should trump any concerns about clan differences and occasional conflicts between the states. And his account of the Ji and Jiang clans underscores his point: Ji and Jiang lived in different areas, had different virtues, and fought against each other, but when the two groups established marriage ties, their descendants prospered. As with many Zuozhuan speeches, the function of relating the success of the Yellow Emperor in dealing with the Flame Emperor anticipates the Jin prince’s success should he follow Sikong Jizi’s advice.

Myths regarding the Yellow Emperor were never meant to convey factual, historical truth, however. When relaying information regarding the Yellow Emperor, Sikong Jizi was concerned about the persuasive effect of relating the Yellow Emperor to the situation facing Chong’er, regardless of historical accuracy. Some scholars insist Sikong Jizi’s statements on the Yellow Emperor constitute historically accurate oral transmission extending back to a distant past. It is impossible to determine, however, how far into the past this chain extends. Furthermore, it is unclear whether Sikong Jizi’s narrative would have had much in common with such a narrative. Lacking explicit connections explains the multiplicity of attempts to locate the Yellow Emperor’s domain and the difficulty in pinpointing the area of the Ji River where the Yellow Emperor supposedly resided. Such difficulty is largely due to flawed assumptions that all sources record historical facts—in this case, about the Yellow Emperor—and that these facts can be pieced together without regard for their textual contexts to create a unified and accurate historical image of the Yellow Emperor.

The conflicting information presented in these different sources, however, leads us to question the validity of such assumptions. If we try to extract historical or geographical information on the Yellow Emperor from Sikong Jizi’s telling of the story, the location of the Ji River must be in the State of Jin, since Sikong Jizi
has equated the territory of the Yellow Emperor near the Ji River within the territory of Jin. In other words, the precise location of the Ji River plays no part in Sikong Jizi’s persuasion.

As with Sikong Jizi’s story, the narratives recounting the Yellow Emperor’s battles against Chi You and the Flame Emperor present a labyrinth of nominally concrete information on the battles of Banquan and Zhuolu. For example, both the “Wudide” and the Shiji reference the Yellow Emperor’s fight against the Flame Emperor, but unlike the latter, the “Wudide” is silent on the Battle of Zhuolu. The Shiji describes the “Battle of Banquan” and the “Battle of Zhuolu” as separate events, with the Yellow Emperor appearing as the initiator and the eventual victor of both. In the “Changmai” pian of the Yi Zhoushu, however, the Flame Emperor and Chi You, i.e., the two rulers appointed by Heaven, are the central characters. The Yellow Emperor is portrayed merely as an assistant of the Flame Emperor, and there is no indication that the two engaged in a major battle with one another at Banquan. Nevertheless, another chapter in the Yi Zhoushu, the “Shi ji jie” (Explanations to the Scribe’s Records), suggest it was Chi You, rather than the Flame Emperor, who fought the Yellow Emperor at the Battle of Banquan. This would explain why the chapter refers to Chi You as a “man of Banquan” (Banquan shi 阪泉氏). Moreover, the Shuijing zhu (Commentaries on the Water Classic) cites an earlier text to confirm this notion that Banquan was closely related to Chi You. Other geographical sources suggest that Banquan was also called Huangdi Quan 黃帝泉 (Spring of the Yellow Emperor), while Zhuolu was the Yellow Emperor’s capital city. In synthesizing all the information, some scholars conclude that Banquan was located in the same area as Zhuolu, and that the Battle of Banquan is another name for the Battle of Zhuolu. Indeed, what all these sources preserve is simply a narrative framework for ancient sage rulers, war heroes, and battles in which the line between the memory of events real and imagined is nearly impossible to draw.

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79 Shiji 1.5.
81 Some scholars attempt to solve this problem with the support of archaeological data. For example, Han Jianye and Yang Xin’gai believe that the Miaodigou 庙底溝 and Hougang 後崗 archaeological cultures in modern Zhuolu area correspond with the Huangdi and Chi You groups, respectively. The conflicts between the Huangdi and Yandi clans are archaeologically reflected in the interaction between the Zaoyuan 稷園 culture in Shanxi and the Banpo 半坡 culture at Guanzhong 關中 area. This kind of match accepts the interpretation on the locations of the three ancient groups provided by textual information as pre-knowledge. Archaeological cultures do
If, however, we read the myth of Chi You, the Red/Flame Emperor and the Yellow Emperor as a rhetorical strategy, all the elements that seemingly conflict with each other when trying to reconstruct the history of the Yellow Emperor suit the import of the speech, especially given that the “Changmai” is a work devoted to the establishment of a series of legal punishment. Since the true aim of the King’s speech is to issue the “nine pian writings on punishment” (xingshu jiupian 刑書九篇), it is not surprising he advocates for the legitimacy of violence as a means to achieve good governance. Subsequently, the story is set in the time of an imperfect world waiting to be brought to perfection by two heavenly-appointed rulers, the Red Emperor and Chi You. Unfortunately, shared rule soon leads to a chaotic situation: Chi You breaks the balance of power by exiling the Red Emperor. To end the chaos and restore peace, the Red Emperor seeks the aid of the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor uses military force to eliminate Chi You’s threat, and then establishes the rule of law. Only through violence is Heaven’s work perfected and peace restored.

Viewed from this perspective, the Zhou king’s telling of these particular events is not done to recount historical facts, but to justify the king’s own promulgation of new laws. Citing the Yellow Emperor’s use of punishment to pacify the world, the king evokes a connection between his current actions and those of the legendary sage-kings.

As has been illustrated, anecdotes regarding the Yellow Emperor should be read as persuasive devices rather than as statements of historical fact. Even the Yellow Emperor’s biographical account in the Shiji fails to reach the level of “history”, as it is a rearrangement of scattered, historicized information within a fixed narrative framework. As K. C. Chang infers, the primary approach to the Shang and Zhou myths should be to view them as myths created to fill the needs of their own times. Contrary to their claims, these myths do not reflect the life of earlier societies. In the case of the Shiji, we see a reflection of the Western Han scribes’ view in their portrayal of the Yellow Emperor. Likewise, the sources upon which the Han Grand Historian relied are more a record of how Eastern Zhou people viewed the Yellow Emperor than they are a portrait of Yellow Emperor himself. Rather than studying an “historical” Yellow Emperor, we are better off examining how such a figure was received during

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not explain specific historical events or heroical biographies. For this reason, K. C. Chang laments that most of the pre-Shang legendary history cannot be proved by archaeological data. Chang 1983: 287; for Han’s and Yang’s idea, see Han Jianye and Yang Xin’gai 2006: 154–156.

82 Chang Kwang-chih 1983a: 288. A similar approach is held to the analysis of the Eastern Han construction of teaching and learning lineages by Michael Nylan and Marc Csikszentmihalyi; see Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003.
the Eastern Zhou and early imperial periods. The remaining sections of this study attempt to clarify the connection between the texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor and the historical context of the Eastern Zhou invention of this figure, particularly focusing on the Eastern Zhou’s changing socio-political environment, religious mentality, and way of thinking.

2.4 The Yellow Emperor, Violence, and Statecraft

One of the earliest mentions of the Yellow Emperor appears on a dui 鼎 bronze vessel made by King Wei of Qi (Qi Weiwang 齊威王) (r. 357—320 BC) for his deceased father. In the inscriptions on this bronze, King Wei of Qi is referred to as “Chenhou Yinqi” 陳侯因齊 (Marquis Yinqi of Chen), the donor of the vessel. These inscriptions, which have been intensively studied since the 1920s, are still frequently cited as one of the most important sources for the study of the Yellow Emperor.83

This vessel is dated to the mid-fourth century BC by Xu Zhongshu 徐仲舒, who first recognized the reference to Huangdi in the inscriptions.84 What the inscriptions reveal, according to the most widely accepted interpretation, is the Tian Qi 田齊 ruling family’s intention to identify themselves as the Yellow Emperor’s descendants in order to legitimize their usurpation of the Jiang Qi 姜齊 ruling house. The Tian Qi family were the descendants of the former Chen 陳 ruling house, which saw itself as descendants of Shun, who is connected to the Huangdi lineage according to the “Dixi” of the Da Dai liji 大戴禮記 (Records of Rites Adapted by the Elder Dai).85 Therefore, by claiming to be the progeny of the Yellow Emperor, the newly enthroned Tian Qi family aimed to evoke the legend of the Yellow Emperor’s subduing the Flame Emperor, allegedly the ancestor of the Jiang lineage. Accordingly, the Battle of Banquan as narrated in the Shiji insinuates the Tian Qi ruling house’s inevitable succession to power.

A connection between the emergence of the Huangdi myth and the Jixia 稷下 scholars under the patronage of Tian Qi family is also suggested; the Huangdi myth

84 Xu Zhongshu 1998: 412–431, 438. We need to be aware of the typo appearing in the Zhonghua shuju version of this article, erroneously stating that the Yinqi dui was commissioned in 375 BC (p. 434). In consulting with what Xu says in its previous section, the Yinqi dui should be dated in the year of 357 BC. See Xu Zhongshu 1998: 425, 427.
85 Fang Xiangdong 2008: 737; Shiji 46.1879–1904.
may have been invented by the Jixia scholars to legitimize Tian Qi’s usurpation.\textsuperscript{86} According to this view, the Huangdi myth, although claimed to be ancient, was not very old at all. People’s memory of the past, in this case, became a myth itself: no more than the byproduct of the political propaganda planned by the Tian Qi ruling family and carried out by the Jixia scholars. However sophisticated this manipulation of memory and myth may seem, the cornerstone of the argument is Yinqi’s identification of the Yellow Emperor as his high ancestor:

今惟因齊揚皇考，紹統高祖黃帝，弭嗣桓文，朝問諸侯，合揚厥德。

Now may I, Yinqi, praise my august deceased father, continue the line originating from my high ancestor the Yellow Emperor, closely follow Lords Huan and Wen, have the various lords visit the Qi court, and conform to and praise our virtues.\textsuperscript{87}

The assertion of the Yellow Emperor as the ruling house’s progenitor is obvious in this inscription, but there remains difficulty in accounting for the sudden need for the Tian Qi ruling house to make such a claim. According to the extant sources, none except for this dui vessel connects the Gui-surnamed (嬪) Chen to the Ji-surnamed Yellow Emperor if we agree with Xu Zhongshu’s interpretation. The Zuozhuan only traces the Chen family to Zhuan Xu 嬪頊, who was a grandson of the Yellow Emperor according to the “Dixi.”\textsuperscript{88} In the Shiji, the ancestral origin of the Chen only begins with Shun.\textsuperscript{89} Considering that even the Zhou royal family, which shared the Yellow Emperor’s surname, did not recognize the Yellow Emperor as its progenitor—its ancestry was only traced to Ji 稷,


\textsuperscript{87} This translation is mainly based on Xu Zhongshu’s transcription, punctuation, and interpretation, see Xu Zhongshu 1998: 409–412. The Chinese characters are standardized by the author.

\textsuperscript{88} Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 8.1304–1305; Fang Xiangdong 2008: 737.

\textsuperscript{89} Shiji 36.1575–1587. Wang Hui tries to explain why the Yellow Emperor suddenly appeared in the Chen ritual by arguing that the Chen could have gained the right to present sacrifice to the Yellow Emperor only after the Chen ruling family seized power. He attempts to prove that the Tian Qi ruling family’s identification of themselves as the descendants of the Yellow Emperor was in accordance with the change of their status: the Tian Qi, in Wang Hui’s view, had achieved actual hegemonic status among the Warring States polities, and had to present the di禘 sacrifice to the Yellow Emperor, otherwise the Tian Qi would encounter disaster. However, if, as he argues, only the king had the right to present di禘 sacrifice, any enfeoffed state, including one that had achieved hegemonic status, would violate the sacrificial rule by performing the di禘 sacrifice. Moreover, Wang’s argument rests upon the shaky presupposition that the Zhou ritual stipulations were consistently enforced over seven hundred years of eroding Zhou power. For Wang’s argument, see Wang Hui 2009: 7–9.
the God of Millet—we must weigh carefully when considering why the “Dixi” and the Shiji exalt the Yellow Emperor as the ancestor of almost all the Eastern Zhou states. Even given the notion that the Yellow Emperor was the forefather of all states, formed long ago, the available evidence suggests that each state preferred to trace its own ancestry back to a unique progenitor. The Yellow Emperor additionally had his own descendants who sacrificed to him. A number of sources confirm that after conquest of the Shang, King Wu of Zhou 周武王 (r. ca. 1046—1043 BC) enfeoffed the offspring of the Yellow Emperor in Zhu 鉤 (or 祝) or Ji 蘅 to maintain their ancestral sacrifices, just as he had also done for the descendants of Shennong, Yao, and other sage-kings, to preserve their sacrifices by awarding their descendants lands for ancestral temples.90 One must wonder what effect evoking the Yellow Emperor would really have, when any other clan could rightfully claim the Yellow Emperor its ancestor. Since all extant textual sources lack evidence for a direct link between the Chen ruling house and the Yellow Emperor, the reading of “gaozu Huangdi” as Yinqi’s means to legitimize the Tian Qi ruling family’s usurpation of the Jiang Qi is compromised.

Additionally, the above rendering of the passage regarding the Yellow Emperor in the Yinqi dui inscriptions merely reflects one reading. Guo Moruo offers a different reading by challenging the interpretation of the term gaozu 高祖 as “high ancestor.” Instead, he considers the phrase gao zu Huangdi 高祖黃帝 to be parallel to mi si Huan Wen 弇嗣桓文.91 This entails that the character zu is a verb meaning “to follow;” and gao, an adverb modifying the verb zu, denoting “highly” or “distantly.” The phrases gao zu Huangdi and mi si Huan Wen thus denote that Yinqi strives to follow the ancient model of the Yellow Emperor and the more recent exemplars, Lord Huan of Qi 齊桓公 (685–643 BC) and Lord Wen of Jin 晉文公 (636–628 BC).92 In short, this reading indicates that Yinqi is not claiming to be a direct descendant of the Yellow Emperor but is instead expressing his political ambition to accomplish as much as the legendary Yellow Emperor. Guo’s interpretation better fits the context and, thus, is more convincing than Xu Zhongshu’s reading. The following translation of the whole inscription thus reflects this alternative interpretation:

91 Elsewhere Guo transcribes that character as “邇” instead of “弭,” but there is no significant change of meaning between these two renderings; see Guo Moruo 1996: 156.
唯正六月癸未，陳侯因齊曰：皇考孝武桓公恭哉，大慕克成。其惟因齊，揚皇考昭統，高祖黃帝，弭嗣桓文，朝問諸侯，合揚厥德。諸侯寅薦吉金，用作孝武桓公祭器敦，以蒸以嘗，保有齊邦，世世萬子孫，永為典尚。

It is exactly on the guiwei day in the sixth month that the Chen Marquis Yinqi announces: My august deceased father, the filial Lord Wuhuan, was reverent and had accomplished greatly. Now may I, Yinqi, praise the bright tradition that my august deceased father had established, from the remote past I follow the [model of] the Yellow Emperor, from the recent past I inherit [the merits of] Lords Huan and Wen, so that I can have the various lords visit the court to conform to and praise the sage rulers’ virtues. The various lords are respectfully presented the auspicious metal, I thus made for the filial Lord Wuhuan this dui sacrificial vessel to carry out the zheng and chang sacrifices and to protect and preserve the State of Qi. May the ten thousand sons and grandsons from one generation to another forever regard this as their canon and guide.

In comparison with Xu Zhongshu’s interpretation of the line referencing the Yellow Emperor, Guo’s rendering deemphasizes the blood relationship between the Tian lineage and the Yellow Emperor. The Yellow Emperor becomes, like the former hegemons Lord Huan of Qi and Lord Wen of Jin, emblematic of the virtue needed to consolidate various groups under a unified power. Furthermore, Guo’s interpretation emphasizes the political basis of power rather than the ethnic basis. Indeed, Yinqi dedicated the vessel not to claim a birthright, but rather to declare his political ambition by invoking the Yellow Emperor and other powerful lords as his exemplars. This is especially poignant if we consider that the term “Huan Wen” 桓文 refers to the Jiang-surnamed Lord Huan of Qi and the Ji-surnamed Lord Wen of Jin.

The inscriptions provide additional evidence supporting Guo’s reading when Yinqi asserts that the metal used to make the bronze vessel was presented by various lords. This flamboyant declaration directly alludes to the great sage-king Yu, founding father of the Xia dynasty, who was said to have cast the legendary

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93 Similar expression appears in the “Tangong xia” chapter of the Liji, which explains the bronze inscription “up 世 low 立.” Liji zhengyi 10.294.
94 The rendering basically follows Guo Moruo’s interpretation; however, changes are made when necessary. The characters are standardized by the author. For Guo’s transcriptions and interpretation, see Guo Moruo 2002c: 464–466. For a different translation opposing Guo’s reading “高祖黃帝，弭嗣恒文” as parallels, see Doty 1982: 617.
95 Tang Yuhui 湯余惠 suggests that the term “桓文” denotes “the cultured Huan [of Qi],” i.e., Yinqi’s father Wu 午. However, as Gao Xinhua 高新華 points out, Tang’s reading of this term is rather a forced one, for it is not in accordance with the convention. See Tang Yuhui 1993: 13–14; Gao Xinhua 2008.
nine *ding* 鼎 tripods with metal offered by tributary states. Similar expressions also appear on three other bronze vessels commissioned by Chen Marquis Wu 午 (374–357 BC), Yinqi’s father. It is difficult to ascertain to whom the expression “various lords” refers, not to mention the question of whether or not they truthfully offered bronze metal to the Tian Qi rulers as tribute, but this recurring claim reveals the Tian Qi rulers’ political ambition. If the legend of the nine *ding* tripods was indeed a constitutive part of Warring States political philosophy, as K. C. Chang and Wu Hung have suggested, the claim of casting commemorative bronze vessels with tributary metal becomes politically symbolic, highlighting the entrance of the Yellow Emperor’s exemplary rule into the Warring States political rhetoric of those pursuing hegemonic power over the various states.

If we understand the import of the Yellow Emperor in the Warring States context, it becomes clear that the invocation of the Yellow Emperor is a rhetorical device conveying Yinqi’s political aim.

Despite the problems with Xu Zhongshu’s argument, which asserts that the Tian Qi ruler Yinqi attempted to claim the Yellow Emperor as his ancestor, Xu is nevertheless correct in stating that the Yinqi *dui* is the earliest datable evidence illustrating the Yellow Emperor’s significant role in the political culture of the 4th century BC. References to the Yellow Emperor are absent in both transmitted literature and excavated materials predating the mid-Warring States period, so it is worth exploring the reasons for the Yellow Emperor’s seemingly sudden emergence and popularity during this period.

Guo Moruo, like Xu Zhongshu, considers the Yellow Emperor an invention of the Tian Qi rulers and the Jixia scholars they patronized: the historicization of the Yellow Emperor lies in the Tian Qi intention to adopt the *Huang Lao zhi shu* 黃老之術 (Techniques of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi). This argument is of interest when considering why there are so many more texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor than to other sage rulers.

In Guo Moruo’s opinion, the Yellow Emperor’s status as an invention supporting the Tian Qi rulers’ political rhetoric is largely based on an interpretation of the *Guanzi* 管子. According to this argument, the texts included in the *Guanzi* were created by the Jixia scholars, who were patronized and controlled by the

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96 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Xuan 3.669–672.
97 These three bronze vessels, a *gui* 篼 and two *dui*, and the *dui* commissioned by the Chen Marquis Yinqi are discussed by Xu Zhongshu as the “four vessels by the Chen Marquises.” For the inscriptions on three vessels, see Xu Zhongshu 1998: 406–409.
Tian Qi rulers. Thus, the *Guanzi*’s advocacy of the Yellow Emperor as an exemplary ruler is political propaganda supporting the ambitions of the Tian Qi ruling family. While it is true that the Yellow Emperor is mentioned as a sage-king in a number of *pian* included in the *Guanzi*, a careful reading of these chapters reveals that the Yellow Emperor is generally listed among other sage kings without any specific connection to the Tian Qi rulers.\(^ {100}\) Moreover, the Yellow Emperor’s appearance at this time is not exclusive to the *Guanzi*; we see various aspects of the Yellow Emperor in different texts.\(^ {101}\) Even though the argument that the *Guanzi* is a text pertaining to the Tian Qi rulers’ political ambition is convincing, the evidence does not support the claim that the Yellow Emperor was solely an invention of the Tian Qi ruling family. Michael Puett has suggested that the presence of the Yellow Emperor in a variety of Warring States texts shows that this figure was shared among different groups as an embodiment of teachings on the connection between violence and statecraft.\(^ {102}\) We should doubt Guo Moruo’s conclusion connecting the Yellow Emperor and the *Guanzi*, understanding that the *Guanzi* does not exclusively promote the Yellow Emperor, nor is the development of the image of the Yellow Emperor exclusive to the *Guanzi*. The Yellow Emperor was not an invention by the Jixia scholars to support the Tian Qi rulers’ desire for hegemonic status.

Even if the Yellow Emperor was an invention of Jixia scholars, he was not exclusively manipulated by the Tian Qi ruling family. An explanation is needed to determine how the Yellow Emperor became a common motif shared by a variety of Warring States period writings, especially when considering those texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor in the “Yiwen zhi”, which have been largely neglected in studies. A review of how scholars have handled the myths presented in Warring States texts is foundational to our understanding of the Yellow Emperor as an author.

There are two scholarly approaches for interpreting the emergence of the Huangdi myth. One tends to view the Huangdi myth as a historical development, while the other, dubbed as the structuralist approach, prefers to explore the symbolic meanings of the Huangdi myth by analyzing its structural elements while avoiding entanglement in debates on the putative oral transmission upon which

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100 Gao Xinhua 2008.

101 The Yellow Emperor appears in a whole range of transmitted sources in addition to the *Guanzi*, for example, in various *pian* of the *Shangjun shu* 商君書, the *Wei Liaozi* 尉繚子, the *Liutao* 六韜, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the *Wenzi* 文子, the *Liezi* 列子, the *Lushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, and the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策. Michael Puett also offers a good summary of the Huangdi narratives in the Warring States writings. See Puett 2001.

the historical approach relies. The historical approach consists of two main arguments: one, represented by Yang Kuan, suggests that the myth of the Yellow Emperor as presented in Warring States writings was primarily the product of a tradition of oral transmission extending back to a distant past, when belief in the Supreme Being (shangdi 上帝) first appeared. According to Yang Kuan, this supreme being was called the August Emperor (huangdi 皇帝), which became a general term shared by many regionally-worshiped gods during the Eastern Zhou period. Since the character huang 皇 is phonetically identical to the character huang 黃, the term August Emperor was thus rendered later as the Yellow Emperor. Because of this, the myths of other god-like figures—Yao, Shun, and Yu, for instance—also contain hints of the later historicization of the Yellow Emperor. Following Yang Kuan, Mark Lewis examines the Warring States myths regarding Huangdi and Chi You against the ancient tradition in which those myths were rooted, reconstructed, and interpreted to argue that they are closely associated with the philosophy of Warring States warfare and statecraft.

The second school of the historical approach, represented by Michael Puett, accepts that the emergence of the Huangdi myth concerns Warring States history, but disagrees with the contention that the Huangdi myth was connected to any earlier tradition. For Puett, connecting the Warring States Huangdi myth with an early mythical tradition not only takes the already scattered information on the Huangdi myth out of context and leads to the reconstruction of an early tradition that is historically meaningless, but it also fails to explicate diverse and even conflicting narratives.

Puett also takes issue with the structuralist approach to the Huangdi myth: while the approach avoids the pitfalls associated with the reconstruction of a purported mythological tradition, it cannot account for the differences among the various Yellow Emperor narratives. Puett feels that, by pursuing the “ultimate symbolism” in the structure of the Huangdi narratives, the structuralist approach fails to provide a contextual reading. Puett also suggests that, in order to avoid decontextualizing the myth, one must abandon reconstructing a composite Huangdi myth based on materials scattered in different texts. On the contrary, we must situate the Huangdi myth only in the Warring States debates pertaining to the use of warfare in the creation of statecraft.

104 Yang Kuan 1941: 189–99. For related arguments identifying the Yellow Emperor as Yao or Yu, also see Sun Zuoyun 孫作雲 2003, Chen Mengjia 1936.
Partly inspired by Lewis’s study of the Huangdi myth, which focuses on how social violence was sanctioned when such violence related to the emergence of the early Chinese state, Puett examines how Warring States intellectuals conceived of statecraft. With the creation of a state as a cue, Puett first divides the relevant texts, transmitted and excavated, into two temporal strata—the fourth-century-BC and the third-century-BC—that reflect the major concerns regarding the relationships between rebel and sage, or nature and state, expressed by the individual authors of those texts. Puett understands the two layers as the direct product of the writers’ response to their contemporary sociopolitical “tensions and concerns,” and these writings as historically reliable sources for reconstructing a long-lasting debate that had taken place during that time. In examining those exemplary passages from the selected texts, Puett finds that only those falling in his second stratum (dated to the third century BC) refer to the Yellow Emperor and his adversaries. When comparing the nature of the debates taking place in both strata, Puett finds that the second stratum increasingly emphasizes the emergence of violence in the creation of statecraft. Authors of the second-stratum texts deliberately introduce the Yellow Emperor into the debate due to his association with the use of force, including violent usurpation, and not because he was considered an historical figure connected to the emergence of the state. Therefore, the appearance of the Yellow Emperor in fourth-century references, such as the Chenhou Yinqi Dui inscriptions and the Zuozhuan, is largely irrelevant to the third century BC intellectual debate: the Yellow Emperor’s appearance in fourth century works is merely referential. What these debates reflect, in Puett’s view, is that Warring States thinkers were concerned about the relationship between nature and culture.

While I agree with Puett’s suggestion that one should examine the Huangdi myth in its due context, I question his approach to Warring States texts. Puett’s method for dating and dividing the texts he examines into two temporal layers is underdeveloped. Since he stresses the authors’ response to the actual tensions and concerns of the Warring States intellectual world, the dates of composition for these texts should be central to his categorization, and to our understanding

107 Texts categorized in Puett’s first stratum include the “Lüxing” pian of the Shangshu 尚書, the Mozi 墨子, and the Mengzi 孟子, those in his second stratum consist of the Shangjun shu 商君書, the “Jingfa” 經法 and the “Shiliujing” 十六經—two of the four manuscripts attached to the Laozi excavated from Mawangdui Tomb 3, the Lushi chunqiu, the Da Dai Liji, and the Guanzi 管子. See Puett 2001: 101–133.
of the actual debates that Puett endeavors to reconstruct. Unfortunately, Puett offers little evidence justifying the dates of the texts categorized in those two strata. Nor does he provide a benchmark based on datable texts with which the differently grouped texts are comparable. His sophisticated argument is undermined, then, by the lack of a more detailed discussion of his methods for dating. In most cases, Puett avoids the perplexing dating issues, and assumes an acceptance of the dates commonly ascribed to the texts by traditional scholarship. Nevertheless, the traditional way of dating an early Chinese text, mostly based on the author to whom the text is attributed, is untenable. In consideration of this complexity, categorizing texts into the two strata Puett constructs is very challenging, if not impossible.

Moreover, Puett’s reconstruction of the Warring States debates pertaining to the creation of state is not convincing. Without more precise dating of the texts he refers to, it is impossible to trace the history of such putative debates. Furthermore, there is little evidence that the debates described in Puett’s argument indeed occurred. Puett assumes that the passages he examines exist in response to concerns about the creation of state. Nevertheless, what we know about the formation of early Chinese texts contradicts this evidence. Most early writings were transmitted as discrete, anonymous, and rather brief *pian* units, only later being reassembled, edited, and grouped into the larger texts that we now use; it is therefore an arduous and difficult task to sort through and restore the authors’ original inputs when merely relying on the reassembled texts under discussion. Even though the Han scholars managed to find clues to help categorize these texts, their labels for different textual traditions were more the result of retrospective grouping. This observation also presents problems for understanding scholarly traditions during the Warring States.

Additionally, the making and transmission of an early Chinese text is far more complicated than is assumed in traditional dating methods. The differences between Warring States textual traditions are not as distinct as their Han labels suggest: early extant texts reveal that different scholarly circles were influenced by each other. Also, the teachings associated with what are labeled as distinct Warring States textual traditions were not fixed. When teachings were written down, they could not verify with certainty the dates when those ideas originated and circulated. Accordingly, the discrepancy among the various Huangdi narratives that Puett painstakingly explains through classification into putative debates is more likely the result of variation arising during transmission or later editing work, if not both. In short, Puett’s reconstruction of the two-century-

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111 For example, the most famous event of rearranging the Western Han imperial collection of texts led by Liu Xiang, later his son Liu Xin, and many others. *Hanshu* 30.1701–1776.
long debates situates Warring States intellectual framework upon an unverifiable textual foundation.

Finally, in following Lewis’s emphasis on the Yellow Emperor as an exemplary figure symbolizing the use of force in the making of statecraft, Puett seems to have overstated this aspect of what the Yellow Emperor represented in the Warring States intellectual world. If we consider how the Yellow Emperor is portrayed in Warring States and early imperial writings as a whole, he is a much more colorful figure than depicted in those putative debates. He was the creator of many things, including weapons, ritual objects, and daily utensils. Additionally, he was portrayed not only as a sage of governance and warfare, but also as a sage making contributions to astrology, cosmology, calendar making, divination, medicine, sexual arts, and recipes and techniques for pursuing immortality. Regardless of how scattered information on the Yellow Emperor appears in those early texts, there is no doubt that the body of lore is far richer than that represented in his portrayal as the inventor of warfare and statecraft. Overemphasizing this side of the Yellow Emperor inevitably limits our view of both the Huangdi figure and the context that produced him. This is especially pertinent if we consider that the texts on military art attributed to the Yellow Emperor make up less than one tenth of the overall texts attributed to him, while nearly two thirds are regarding recipes and techniques related to cosmology, longevity, and immortality. A more holistic context is needed to understand the Yellow Emperor’s popularity.

2.5 The Yellow Emperor and Ritual, Religious, and Cosmological Thinking

In addition to the aspect of state-making emphasized by Lewis’s and Puett’s works, there are two other perspectives often taken on the Huangdi narratives. The first pertains to ritual and religious context, especially the change in people’s ritual and religious thinking during the Eastern Zhou. Such change is observable, for example, in people’s understanding of the Mandate of Heaven. Once considered a supreme power granting awards to the good and issuing punishments to the bad, Eastern Zhou heaven morphed into an impersonal entity represented with abstract patterns of numbers or the forms of constellations. Behind this change was an increased role of humanity in the workings of the cosmos: heaven now responded to the

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112 Qi Sihe 1941.
113 *Hanshu* “Yiwen zhi,” as listed in Table 1 of this chapter.
human manipulation of those patterns and forms in which the Mandate of Heaven was believed to manifest itself. Under such mentality, people still presented sacrifices to all spirits, deities, and constellations to avoid disasters and seek blessings, but the causality between the heaven and human realms now became explicable and predictable according to those forms and patterns.

Numerous passages in the Zuozhuan strikingly demonstrate this trend. For example, from the ninth to the eighteenth year in the reign of Duke Zhao of Lu (r. 542–510 BC), a series of predictions were made on the basis of the predictors’ astrological and cosmological knowledge. In the ninth year of Duke Zhao, the Zheng official Pi Zao not only predicted when the state of Chen was to be relocated and how long it would last thereafter, but also explained how his knowledge of astrology as well as the Theory of the Five Elements (wuxing 五行) allowed him to make such a prognostication. In the next year, Pi Zao predicted and explained the exact date when the Jin lord would die. In the eleventh year, Chang Hong 蒋弘 predicted the assassination of Marquis of Cai. In the seventeenth year, Pi Zao of Zheng, along with two Lu officials—Shen Xu 申须 and Zi Shen 梓慎—foresaw the coming fires that would occur in the fifth month of the following year. Pi Zao urged Zi Chan, the Zheng prime minister, that the disaster could be avoided if Zi Chan would grant him the right to use certain vessels in ritual. In the next year, the fires occurred in those four states exactly as predicted.

Certainly, not all predictions in the Zuozhuan are confirmed. For instance, among Pi Zao’s failed prophecies is a warning in the eighteenth year that Zheng would suffer from another conflagration if Zi Chan would not heed his warning. It is also true that we cannot consider Zuozhuan narratives to be exact historical records. But these narratives reflect a change in the way of thinking, which is illustrated by the attention devoted to explaining the type of knowledge that rationalizes predictions. Zi Chan resists this change in thinking when he expresses doubt that Pi Zao could penetrate the Way of Heaven (tiandao 天道), for, according to Zi Chan, the Way of Heaven is too distant for men to approach. When we compare

115 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 9.1310–1311.
116 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 10.1314–1315.
117 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 11.1322.
118 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 17.1390–1392.
119 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 18.1394–1395.
120 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 18.1395.
121 Zi Chan explains his not granting Pi Zao the ritual vessels to avoid the fire by arguing that “The Way of Heaven is distant, the Way of Man is close. Since the former is not what the latter can reach, how could the latter know the former? How could Zao know the Way of Heaven?” 之道遠，人道邇，非所及也，何以知之，竈焉知天道? Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Zhao 18.1395.
Zi Chan’s words with his response to the fire, however, his actions reflect the changing perspective on religion and ritual. His actions contradict his previous rejection of Pi Zao’s suggestion to use certain ritual vessels. Ritual, as employed by Zi Chan in this context, no longer conveyed a petition to avert evil or to seek blessings, but to perform practical routine that had been widely accepted as a means to restore order in the wake of the disaster. This illustrates the aspect of the Eastern Zhou way of thinking more and more emphasizing the modern sense of instrumental rationality, as documented in the Zuozhuan.

Both ways of thinking represented by Zi Chan and the examples above existed in parallel according to the Zuo Commentary. In some cases, the Zuozhuan narrator deliberately presents these different lines of thinking side by side, suggesting that truth could be approached through different directions, and valid predictions could be made based on various bodies of knowledge. Take, for example, the two clusters of predictions regarding the Battle of Pingyin 平陰 and the attack on Zheng launched by the Chu army recorded in the eighteenth year of Duke Xiang of Lu 魯襄公 (r. 573–542 BC). In the Battle of Pingyin, the Jin generals successfully frightened the Qi lord at night by tricking him into believing that the Qi army was overwhelmingly outnumbered by the Jin troops. The next morning, three Jin officials used different bodies of knowledge to declare the withdrawal of the Qi army:

師曠告晉侯曰:鳥鳥之聲樂,齊師其遁。邢伯告中行伯曰:有班馬之聲,齊師其遁。叔向告晉侯曰:城上有烏,齊師其遁。

Shi Kuang reported to Marquis of Jin, “The chirps of birds and crows sound happy, indicating that the Qi army had fled.” Earl of Xing reported to Earl of Zhongxing, “It sounds like the horses were torn away [referring to what says in the Changes], indicating that the Qi army had fled.” Shu Xiang reported to Marquis of Jin, “On the city walls there stop crows, indicating that the Qi army had fled.”

The second occasion eliciting predictions occurred when the Chu army marched north after being solicited by the Zheng prime minister Zi Kong 子孔, who sought its help to break Zheng’s alliance with the state of Jin by removing the Zheng leaders who supported such an alliance. Upon hearing of this news, three Jin officials,
again including Shi Kuang and Shu Xiang, pronounced their judgments on the Chu military action:

晉人聞有楚師。師曠曰：不害。吾驟歌北風，又歌南風，南風不競，多死聲，楚必無功。誰叔曰：天道多在西北，南師不時，必無功。叔向曰：在其君之德也。

The Jin people had heard that the Chu army was approaching. Shi Kuang said, “They will not do any harm. I have on various occasions sung the northern tunes, and then the southern tunes; the southern tunes were not strong and included considerable sounds of death. The Chu will certainly not achieve any merits.” Dong Shu said, “The Way of Heaven is largely located in the northwest. The southern army came in an inappropriate time and certainly will not achieve any merits.” Shu Xiang said, “[Whether the army will win or not] depends on their ruler’s virtue.”

As with the predictions before the Battle of Pingyin, the judgments of all three officials were correct: having suffered considerable losses due to bad weather, the Chu army failed to move further north to confront the Jin army. On both occasions the narrative confirms each prediction. Although the predictions rely on different forms of knowledge and observation—Shi Kuang, on sounds; Earl of Xing, on divination; Dong Shu, on astrology; and Shu Xiang, on his observation of natural phenomena in the first occasion and on his understanding of appropriate rulership in the second. Although it is unclear whether these different bodies of knowledge competed with one another in claiming the validity and accuracy of predictions, the Zuozhuan narratives demonstrate how people of the Eastern Zhou understood the Mandate of Heaven to have readable and rational associations with the human realm.

These interpretations of the world are associated with the early Chinese cosmology generally labeled as correlative thinking. Although various sources present differences on the intricacies of correlative thought, such thought relies on a basic recognition that correlations exist between all facets of the cosmos—heaven, earth, man, one’s state, and the myriad things—and that these correlations can be known by using techniques such as the manipulation of the hexagrams and the arrangement of the Five Elements. In this context, heaven is no longer a mysterious commander and supreme judge issuing mandates according to the virtues of the living, but rather a spatial and temporal complexity consisting of

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125 According to Yang Bojun, the “way of heaven” here denotes the orbit of Jupiter. Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Xiang 18.1043.
126 Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu Xiang 18.1043.
both celestial bodies, as well as the markers of the passages of time. This understanding of heaven not only characterized Eastern Zhou correlative thinking, but also shaped Eastern Zhou ritual and religious conventions.

Our understanding of the Yellow Emperor narratives exists in such a context. Indeed, one of the earliest sources explaining the naming of the Yellow Emperor relates it to wuxing cosmology:

凡帝王者之將興也，天必先見祥乎下民。黃帝之時，天先見大螾大螻。黃帝曰：土氣勝。土氣勝，故其色尚黃，其事則土。及禹之時，天先見草木秋冬不殺。禹曰：木氣勝。木氣勝，故其色尚青，其事則木。及湯之時，天先見金刃生於水。湯曰：金氣勝。金氣勝，故其色尚白，其事則金。及文王之時，天先見火，赤烏銜丹書集於周社。文王曰：火氣勝。火氣勝，故其色尚赤，其事則火。代火者必將水，天且先見水氣勝，水氣勝，故其色尚黑，其事則水。水氣至而不知，數備，將徙於土。

In general, when a thearch or a king will rise, Heaven must reveal prior to his arrival the omens for the people below. In the time of the Yellow Emperor, Heaven had revealed enormous mole crickets and worms before he rose. The Yellow Emperor said, “The Force of Earth will prevail.” The Force of Earth indeed prevailed, therefore the color of Yellow was revered and what he did was related to Earth. At the time of Yu, Heaven had revealed grass and woods that in autumns and winters did not wither. Yu said, “The Force of Wood will prevail.” The Force of Wood indeed prevailed, therefore the color of Blue was revered and what he did was related to Wood. At the time of Tang, Heaven had revealed metal blades produced in water. Tang said, “The Force of Metal will prevail.” The Force of Metal indeed prevailed, therefore the color of White was revered in his time and what he did was related to Metal. At the time of King Wen, Heaven had revealed fire and the vermilion birds had gathered around the Zhou altar, carrying cinnabar writings. King Wen said, “The Force of Fire will prevail.” The Force of Fire indeed prevailed, therefore, the color of Red was revered in his time and what he did was related to Fire. That which will replace Fire must be Water. Heaven will first reveal [omens telling] that the Force of Water will prevail. When the Force of Water indeed prevails, the color of that time will thus be Dark and what is to be done will be related to Water. If the Force of Water arrives but is not recognized, once the number [of five] is fulfilled, the Force will move to Earth.128

This passage links the Yellow Emperor to the color Yellow and the Force of Earth, both as manifestations of the Theory of the Five Elements. In this theory, the Elements of Earth, Wood, Metal, Fire, and Water are each overcome by the ensuing Element to form an unending circular system.129 The formation and employment of the Theory of the Five Elements in explaining the world facing the Eastern Zhou

129 What the Lűshì chunqiu describes is a specifically Qin religious cult to the emperors of the Four/Five Directions, in which Huangdi was included, even though Huangdi may also have had a separate existence outside this cult (and perhaps before its rise).
people crystalized the change of their thinking from the previous periods. In this system, season rotation, ruling legitimacy, and political change were all put in a controllable pattern. The Yellow Emperor plays his due role assigned to him in this pattern of thinking. In the “Zuo Luo” 作雒 pian of the Yi Zhoushu, the Five Elements are arranged according to a spatial scheme, in which the color Yellow is positioned in the center. The “Guiyi” 貴義 (Cherishing Rightness) pian of the Mozi 墨子 provides a schematic correlation between time, colors, and directions, indicating that the di 帝 (the arch or emperor) is correlated with the Yellow Dragon (Huanglong 黃龍) on the wuji 戊己 days in the center. The “Jixia ji” 季夏紀 of the Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 (Mr. Lü’s Spring and Autumn Annals) and the “Shize xun” 時則訓 of the Huainanzi 也可以 also include several identical passages addressing correlative thinking. This suggests that by late Warring States period the Five Elements theory had developed into a system in which all elements, along with time, space, numbers, musical scales, smells, flavors, sacrifices, and so forth, were integrated as guides for governing according to correlative theories.

Although most literature closely associates the Yellow Emperor with this form of Eastern Zhou cosmological thinking, some scholars maintain that the key to understanding the Yellow Emperor in his social and historical context is exploring the Yellow Emperor as he existed in earlier myths, which are considered as the sources later being incorporated into Eastern Zhou wuxing thinking. Hsu Chin-hsiung’s 許進雄 argument serves as a good example in this regard. He argues that the Yellow Emperor greatly predates the formation of the Theory of the Five Elements based on the following: the character huang in the name Huangdi means either yellow or jade decoration huang 璜. By disproving that yellow could have been the most revered color during the Yellow Emperor’s actual reign, he posits that the character huang in the name of Huangdi must be associated with jade decoration and the invention of clothes. He then continues to link the invention of clothes to the creation of social institutions; hence, he categorizes the Yellow Emperor as a legendary ruler who created institutions, beginning the second stage of Chinese civilization, a stage symbolized by sage-kings’ creating utensils and tools in the first stage, and the third stage is characterized by the documentation of history.

131 Wu Yujian 吳毓江 2006: 674.
133 Hsu Chin-hsiung (James Hsu) 1981.
Although Hsu advances the discourse, his argument leaves several questions unanswered. First, when analyzing textual information from various sources to prove that the term Huangdi appeared earlier than the formation of the wuxing system, Hsu, like Puett, relies on the traditional method of dating texts on the basis of attributed authorship. This method, however, lacks sufficient evidence. Second, Hsu does not provide an explanation for how the Yellow Emperor as an institution-creator relates to the central sage-king associated with Warring States wuxing thinking, or an immortal especially popular in late Warring States and early imperial periods. Although Hsu attempts to reconstruct a perspective on the Yellow Emperor that existed prior to the Warring States, his argument does not explain the necessity of linking the Warring States Yellow Emperor to an unknown earlier legend. Finally, the weakest point of Hsu’s argument is its disregard of the context of Eastern Zhou cosmological thinking. Since the construction of an “earlier” Yellow Emperor relies primarily upon Warring States writings, removing the Yellow Emperor from a Warring States context is counterproductive to our understanding of what the Huangdi narratives really convey. We might conclude, therefore, the Huangdi story should be viewed as an Eastern Zhou myth.

The preference for antiquity is not just a phenomenon of modern scholarship. When considering the context of the Yellow Emperor myth, it is also necessary to understand the Eastern Zhou and early imperial trend of emphasizing antiquity in one’s argumentation. As has been previously discussed, the Yellow Emperor, along with other sage-kings such as Fuxi and Shennong, becomes a component of the teachings of various Warring States textual traditions, as seen in texts such

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134 For example, Ding Shan and others suggest that the Yellow Emperor can be identified in oracle bone inscriptions. In his article on the “Chenhou Yin Qi dui,” after comparing the “Chenhou Yin Qi dui” inscriptions with relevant passages scattered in a number of transmitted texts, Ding Shan confidently infers that the preserved myths of Huangdi and other legendary thearchs, as we see in those texts, should be considered as reliable historical sources. He then confronts Yang Kuan’s argument that the Yellow Emperor derived from god—the “august thearch”—and argues for the opposite: originally a human king, the Yellow Emperor was later deified as one of the gods included in the wuxing system. See Ding Shan 2005: 154–178. In an article discussing the deceased Shang kings and ruling lineages preserved in oracle bone inscriptions, Ding identifies the term di huang 帝黃 in oracle inscriptions as Huangdi, so named after the ecliptic, a surmise remaining yet to be substantiated. See Ding Shan 2005: 93. For more discussions on the identification of the Yellow Emperor in oracle bone inscriptions, also see Li Yuanxing 2010: 26–29, 36–44. The problem with these suggestions is their assumption that the graphic meaning of the character huang contains or reflects considerable historical and social information; therefore, deciphering the meaning of the graphic to some extent equals detecting traces of ancient social life. In fact, the graphic form itself does not transmit any specific information regarding ancient social life, especially if we consider that the moment of the invention of a specific graph may never be recovered.
as the *Guanzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Han Feizi*, *Liushi chunqiu*. This inclusion of the sage-kings was recognized early as a rhetorical device to enhance the power of persuasion, as we see in the *Huainanzi*:

世俗之人多尊古而賤今，故為道者必托之于神農黃帝而後能入說。亂世暗主，高遠其所從來，因而貴之。為學者蔽于論而尊其所聞，相與危坐而稱之，正領而誦之。此見是非之分不明。

Common people mostly revere antiquity and despise the current; therefore, those who forge doctrines must attribute them to the Divine Farmer and the Yellow Emperor; only then can they present their teachings. Muddle-headed rulers of chaotic eras, in considering that those teachings originated from the ancient past, thus esteem them. Those who study them are deceived by such argumentation and venerate what they have heard, sitting reverently with each other to praise the doctrines, and straightening their necks to recite them. This reveals that one does not understand the distinction between the right and the wrong.135

This passage clearly illustrates that, by the time these comments were made, revering antiquity and despising the contemporary had become popular. Catering to such convention, a thinker intentionally presented his arguments in the name of the ancient sages, even when promoting something contemporary. By claiming the antiquity of his argument, the thinker was not only able to solicit the patronage of those who held power, but he was also able to attract the attention of the audience that would learn and disseminate his doctrines. The *Huainanzi* passage depicts the veneration of an ancient past as a widely accepted practice not limited to a particular group of people or social strata, as both the ruling and the ruled and both the masters and the disciples all followed these conventions. The exaltation of antiquity became a necessary component in the creation of state ideology. However contemporary a teaching might be, it needed to be coated with the patina of antiquity to be accepted, patronized, and transmitted.

Although this passage does not specifically ascribe these comments to a particular era, it hints that this trend was prevalent in contemporary literature, such as that attributed to the Divine Farmer and the Yellow Emperor. The extant Shang and Western Zhou literature (for instance, the *Odes* and the oracle bone inscriptions) reveres the ancestors of the Shang and Zhou ruling families. Such purported ancient figures as the Divine Farmer and the Yellow Emperor carry significant persuasive force only in writings associated with the Eastern Zhou and thereafter.

The *Huainanzi* passage states that venerating antiquity had become a widely embraced social convention, but does not describe how antiquity became a major concern of the Eastern Zhou. Although there is little information on what led to

135 He Ning 1998: 1355.
the veneration of antiquity in Eastern Zhou society, recently excavated materials have finally shed light on this question. Following David Keightley’s description of Shang ancestral beliefs based on Shang oracle inscriptions and Lothar von Falkenhausen’s observations on the restructuring of Middle Spring and Autumn ritual practice based on Eastern Zhou burial remains, I contend that the phenomenon of venerating antiquity was connected with early Chinese ritual practice and religious thinking, which created the foundation on which the emphasis of antiquity in Eastern Zhou literary discourse was built.

According to Keightley, Shang ancestral veneration constitutes the core of the Shang religious conceptions that “were the conceptions of Shang life as a whole.” Ancestral veneration was not a religious practice divorced from social realities, but it permeated all aspects of Shang life politically, economically, and ideologically, and it facilitated a “pragmatism that drew power from the past, legitimized the current state of affairs (including all the inequities in rights and privileges), and charted a course for the future.” A deceased king did not obtain his ancestorship by default, as it was only assigned to the deceased through a gradually perfected sacrificial ritual system, but once assigned that role, the ancestor was able to continue to exercise his authority through the changing depth of time, albeit in a different domain. Archaeological evidence suggests that Shang ancestor veneration is grounded in the Neolithic Chinese burial ritual, which can be traced to the fifth millennium BC, but the structure of the Shang pantheon reflected in its sacrificial ritual system, as seen in Shang oracle inscriptions, sheds specific light on how antiquity played its role in ancestral veneration.

Keightley classifies those who could receive sacrifices in the Shang pantheon into six groups: (1) *di* or *shangdi*, or the Supreme God; (2) Nature Powers, such as the River or Mountain Powers; (3) Former Lords, like Nao and Wang Hai, specific demigod figures associated with the Shang dynasty; (4) pre-dynastic ancestors; (5) dynastic ancestors; and (6) the dynastic ancestresses, mainly the consorts of Shang kings.

Keightley considers the members of groups (2), (3), and (4)—namely, Nature Powers, Former Lords, and pre-dynastic ancestors—“the High Powers” and differentiates them from the dynastic ancestors and ancestresses in terms of the ritual treatment they received and the functions assigned to them. Functioning as mediators, the High Powers “presumably occupied a middle ground, between *Di* [or the Supreme God], on the one hand, and the ancestors on the other, unable to emulate *Di* by commanding (*ling*) natural phenomena, but still having large impact on the

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weather and crops.” The di Supreme God, lofty and distant, issued commands that none of the other groups could; the ancestors and ancestresses, however, were placed closest to the living and were most associated with their descendants’ personal welfare.

The arrangement of the Shang pantheon in the sacrificial system displays both temporal and relational depth to the living. According to this scheme, the closer the Powers were to the living, the more bargaining power the living might possess when negotiating for their benefit; on the contrary, the more distant the Powers, the less influence the living would have on them. At the farthest end of the pantheon, the command of the Supreme God was almost unchangeable. In short, as Keightley summarizes, “the Shang conceived of the Nature and the Ancestral Powers as occupying a hierarchy of negotiability, with the close ancestors and ancestresses of the pantheon being most open to this kind of pledging, and the higher Powers, both ancestral and natural, being less approachable in this way.”

Although the more distant Powers in the Shang pantheon were less malleable, the Shang ritual system enabled the living to reach them through a chain of “ancestralization.” Among the six groups of Powers classified by Keightley, the di and the Nature Powers were the least ancestral. Yet we see in the Shang oracle inscriptions that the Nature Powers were ancestralized occasionally by being entitled as the “ancestor” (zu 祖) of the Shang kings. As for the di, although few or no cults directly worshipped him, he was nevertheless approachable through the ancestralized Nature Powers. Such ancestralization ran throughout the pantheon: the Nature Powers were connected to the Former Lords by the same token; the Former Lords to the pre-dynastic ancestors; and at last, the pre-dynastic ancestors to the dynastic ancestors and ancestresses. Although the degree of ancestralization dwindled along this chain extending from the lower ancestors and ancestresses to the Supreme God, the nexus between the two ends—the living and the Supreme God—was established. Since the most powerful end was drawn into this unified religious system by connection to the most remote of ancestors and ancestralized powers, we begin to see how antiquity achieved veneration. In the Shang ritual system, antiquity not only aided the living in approaching the distant Supreme God, but the concept of antiquity itself also obtained deep authority due to its association with the most powerful echelon in the Shang pantheon.

Ancestral veneration continued in the Western Zhou, but textual and archaeological evidence presents a more complicated picture of the Western Zhou

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139 Keightley 2004: 11.
140 Keightley 2004: 8.
ancestral cult and its associated religious beliefs and practices. A commonly held view maintains that Western Zhou rulers diminished the importance of the Shang ancestral cult and strategically privileged Heaven by emphasizing Heaven’s Mandate in order to legitimize the Zhou’s overthrow of the Shang.\footnote{For example, Hsu and Linduff 1988; Tao Lei 2008.} While this might be the case from a propagandistic perspective, extant Zhou material culture, on the contrary, highlights continuity in the Shang-Zhou transition. The Zhouyuan 周原 corpus of oracle inscriptions convincingly demonstrates the close connection between early Western Zhou and Shang ritual and religion. Rather than an abrupt departure from Shang traditions, the inscriptions indicate that, after the conquest of the Shang, Zhou traditions gradually evolved during a period when the Shang and Zhou cultures coexisted and shared a range of similarities.\footnote{Eno 2009: 96–102; Keightley 2004: 43; Wang Hui 1998: 5–20; Zhang Maorong 張懋鎔 2005: 1–25.}

The Zhou religious and ritual framework for organizing the ancestral cult was known as the \textit{zhao-mu} 昭穆 system. Although this system’s method for arranging lineages by alternating generations differs from the arrangement of the Shang ancestral pantheon,\footnote{Eno 2009: 98; Keightley 2004: 20–26.} the Shang and Zhou ancestral cults nevertheless share the basic characteristic of venerating ancestors through a broad range of material manifestations: ancestral temples, bronze vessels and objects, blood sacrifices, music, dance, chants, and so on.

Another feature the Western Zhou ancestral cult shares with that of the Shang is that power and authority were the focus of the sacrificial system. As Lothar von Falkenhausen states:\footnote{Falkenhausen 2006: 71.}

Continuity of descent from as prestigious as possible an ancestral figure in the distant past—and seniority among those descended from that ancestor—entailed access to privilege and power. The ancestral cult provided a platform for the iterative reconstruction of the lineage and its self-representation both to the human and to the supernatural realm. It enabled living lineage members to reaffirm their ties with one another, to reaffirm their own position in the history of their lineage, and thereby to create and shape collective memory.

Such “collective memory” was both the result of and the means for the negotiation of power among the living. The power tied with more ancient ancestors hints at the religious mentality of the Shang: it was the closeness, both temporal and relational, to the Supreme Power—\textit{di} in the Shang and \textit{tian} 天 (heaven) in the Zhou—that enabled one’s distant ancestor to occupy a powerful position. As later Zhou literature elucidates, the \textit{tianming} 天命 (Heaven’s Mandate) bestowed to a
certain lineage was largely determined by the *de* 德 (virtues) of the lineage ancestors. In other words, the descendants continued to enjoy the Heaven’s Mandate initially obtained by their distant ancestors as it was passed on through the generations. What differentiated the Zhou ancestral cult from the Shang was the Zhou’s simplified way of organizing lineages, which, according to Falkenhausen’s observation, may have been related to their enlarged population.

After the Zhou royal court was forced to move eastward, the Eastern Zhou period witnessed a change in its prominent political position. The rapid downgrade of the royal court was accompanied by diminishing control over the local vassal polities, some of which seized the opportunity to claim hegemonic status by force. The internecine wars among the numerous vassal polities, originally established by the Zhou founding fathers to support the royal court, inevitably further degraded Zhou royal power as the larger and stronger polities annexed the smaller and weaker ones and multiple political centers arose to contend for dominance. As a result, the distinct Western Zhou ritual system finalized through the Late Western Zhou Ritual Reform could no longer provide the means for the Zhou royal family to hold all its vassal states enmeshed in the net of Zhou power. Accordingly, the traditional ancestral cult was attenuated, powers ascribed to ancestors diminished, and the tiered aristocratic ranking system, once the backbone of ritual and religious practice, came to its historic end. The old religious thinking that regarded death and connections with the afterlife as its core was transformed to a practice focusing on individual grandeur. Such profound change is visible archaeologically in the development of tomb structure and the universal utilization of *mingqi* 明器 items exclusively for burial purpose throughout the Zhou cultural sphere.

The Warring States writings, such as the *Laozi*, the “Neiye” 内業 chapter of the *Guanzi*, and the excavated *Taiyi shengshui* 太一生水 (The Great Oneness Produces Water), also reflect this fundamental change in Eastern Zhou religious beliefs. According to Michael Puett’s observation, this change was the outgrowth of a lasting debate between ritual specialists and cosmologists, the latter finally gaining the upper hand in courts by the fourth century BC. He suggests that these cosmologists, the writers of the above-mentioned texts, proposed “the One, the ultimate ancestor from which everything—all spirits, all natural phenomena, and all human—were generated,” as a self-generating model against the traditional sacrificial models

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145 For example, see Wangsun Man’s explanation of the Mandate of Heaven; *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhu* Xuan 3.669–672.
146 Falkenhausen 2006: 64–70.
147 Falkenhausen 2006: 293–325.
that “operated by working from the recently deceased and less powerful local spirits toward more distant and more powerful deities,” as evidenced in the Shang pantheon.\textsuperscript{148} According to this new model, the living could become gods by “returning to and holding fast to the One” that “generated them and continue[s] to underlie them” or by “rearranging the pantheon of the day into a series of lineal descendants from the One” that allowed them to “claim that they alone understood the workings of the cosmos.”\textsuperscript{149} Puett also argues that this self-divinization model as the alternative to the traditional sacrificial model resulted from the age-old tension caused by discontinuity between man and God.\textsuperscript{150} Setting aside the concept of tension between man and God, Puett’s model indeed accords with the changed religious \textit{geist} centering on individual grandeur.

This ritual and religious transformation, however, was by no means accomplished in a single swoop, but gradually developed over centuries. It is observable in Spring and Autumn burials and is evident in almost all areas of the Zhou during the Warring States period. Moreover, the new system’s incorporation of at least part of the old system is also a noticeable factor in its development. For example, in the middle Spring and Autumn period, around 600 BC, a ritual restructuring occurred that quickly expanded throughout the Zhou cultural sphere to harmonize the previous ritual system with new social realities.

This ritual restructuring is seen in the funerary goods in tombs of social elites. Examples of such goods appear in the “Special Assemblages” of spectacular objects and in “Ordinary Assemblages” to signify the tomb occupant’s social rank. By augmenting the privilege of the top echelons of the social hierarchy, this ritual restructuring “would have reduced the ritual prerogatives of the lower elite, prefiguring the even more drastic reductions that were to occur during the Warring States period” and downplayed the social importance of the ancestral cult.\textsuperscript{151} From this perspective, the Middle Spring and Autumn Ritual Restructuring was both an updated version of the Later Western Zhou Ritual Reform and a response to the changed social realities.

Yellow Emperor narratives can be understood in the same context, yet their lack of homogeneity remains a source of intrigue. Even those remaining fragmentary passages in transmitted and excavated sources provide a variety of depictions of the Yellow Emperor. The \textit{Guoyu}, the \textit{Shiji} and the \textit{Da Dai liji} all consider him the founder of both lineage and state; questions raised by Confucius’s disciples, Zigong and Zaiwo, in the \textit{Shizi} and the \textit{Da Dai liji}, indicate that he was a mysterious figure.

\textsuperscript{148} Puett 2002: 318.
\textsuperscript{149} Puett 2002: 318.
\textsuperscript{150} Puett 2002: 122–200.
\textsuperscript{151} Falkenhausen 2006: 326–369.
with an abnormal appearance who achieved an incredible lifespan; and he is also portrayed as a great warrior battling Chi You and the Flame Emperor as well as the inventor of weapons, utensils, ritual apparatuses, and statecraft. The texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor in the “Yiwen zhi” also correspond to his various characteristics. He appears in four large categories—zhuzi (writings of various masters), bingshu (military writings), shushu (writings on methods and counting), and fangji (writings on recipes and techniques)—each further consisting of a number of subcategories that variously present him as head of a scholarly lineage, a military master, and a master of esoteric methods, recipes, and techniques.

The diversity of images associated with the figure of the Yellow Emperor not only suggests his reception by different textual traditions, but also indicates the complex ritual and religious background in which he was situated. The complex figure as it appears in Warring States and Han texts was forged by both the legacy of ancestral veneration dating back to the Neolithic period, as well as the evolving Eastern Zhou ritual and religious thoughts which developed alongside the period’s social needs.

From one perspective, the creation of the Yellow Emperor seems closely associated with Eastern Zhou cosmological thinking. The image of a sage-king or god seated in the prominent cosmological position—the cosmic axis featured as a yellow center—convincingly links the Huangdi narratives with such thinking. The name and characteristics of the Yellow Emperor are so compelling in respect to this point that the vestiges of earlier Huangdi myths, if they existed at all, were almost completely supplanted by the Warring States versions. This explains why the attributions in the “Yiwen zhi” to the Yellow Emperor primarily feature him as a master associated with knowledge of astronomy, the calendar, divination, wuxing theory, and the secrets to achieving immortality.

From an alternate perspective, I argue that the description of the Yellow Emperor as an ancient sage-king in Warring States myths was grounded in conventions associated with ancestral veneration, rather than a surviving component of transmitted ancient myth. Claiming great antiquity conforms to the Eastern Zhou thinking manifested in the cosmological self-divinization model proposed by Puett. According to this model, the Yellow Emperor was the ultimate link to the One and was the ancestor of the body of esoteric knowledge through which the living could commune with the One and become an immortal. Connecting oneself to the ultimate power through remote ancestors is reminiscent of ancestral veneration seen in Zhou ritual and religious practice, only the Yellow Emperor had displaced the dominance of the ancestors of the Zhou royal family as its power declined throughout the Eastern Zhou period. The increasingly prevalent practice of constructing genealogies in the Eastern Zhou period may reflect the ritual reality associated with a weakened royal family.
Nevertheless, none of the constructed ancestors of other Eastern Zhou polities were able to fill the void left by the deterioration of the Zhou royal family, even though a super-powerful figure was desperately needed to connect the living to the One. It must have been against such backdrop that the Yellow Emperor, interpreted as a figure occupying the *axis mundi*, rose as the ancestor of all powerful Eastern Zhou families. This is what we see in extant genealogical literature such as the *Da Dai liji*, the reconstructed *Shiben*, and the *Shiji*.

The discussion above may also be helpful in explaining why the Yellow Emperor is nearly absent in the lists of sages in Confucian writings. Like the Huangdi narratives, the writings later canonized as the Confucian classics were produced against the backdrop of Eastern Zhou cosmological thought. Whereas the Huangdi myth focuses on a self-divinization model, Confucian writings stress those aspects of ancestral veneration allegedly reflecting Western Zhou ritual practice. Archaeological findings reveal that what Confucian writings attempted to convey accords with the ritual system reflected in the Middle Spring and Autumn Ritual Restructuring, which was an effort to restore the early Western Zhou ritual.\textsuperscript{152} In comparison with the Huangdi myth, Confucian writings value ritual over self-divinization; accordingly, the sages promoted as models in Confucian writings are those who represented the appropriate rituals, especially the Western Zhou sage-king King Wen and sage-minister the Duke of Zhou. From this perspective, although both the Huangdi narratives and the Confucian writings were grounded in the Eastern Zhou social and religious need of restructuring its contemporary ritual system, their emphases differed. While the Huangdi narratives represented a model deposing the ancestors of the Zhou royal house in favor of a more powerful sage-god with the ability to help individuals become gods, the Confucian writings proposed to restore the early Western Zhou rituals. Such a fundamental difference inevitably led to the exclusion of the Yellow Emperor as an exemplary figure in Confucian writings. This we can also clearly see in the attributions to the Yellow Emperor listed in the “Yiwen zhi” chapter of the *Hanshu*. None of the texts, either attributed to the Yellow Emperor or to his ministers, can be found in the category of Confucian writings.

These points also provide an explanation as to why the Huangdi narratives and the Laozi textual tradition were sometimes juxtaposed and called the *Huang Lao zhi shu* 黃老之術 (Techniques of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi), especially in the late Warring States and early Western Han discourses.\textsuperscript{153} Li Ling astutely asserts that the

\textsuperscript{152} For concrete examples regarding the Middle Spring and Autumn Ritual Restructuring, see Falkenhausen 2008.

\textsuperscript{153} *Shiji* 63.2784, 74.3132, 12.456, and passim.
The juxtaposition of the two indicates that the bodies of knowledge generating from both writings were akin to each other, and both rooted in the categories of *shushu*, methods and calculation, and *fangji*, recipes and techniques, to which the majority of the Huangdi attributions belong. Nevertheless, to say that these two traditions arose from the same background does not answer why Confucian writings also shared a similar background with the other two traditions. The explanation lies in a radical, transcendent approach to Heaven, gods, immortality, and longevity taken by the Huang and Lao strands of thinking, which are opposed to the age-old ritual system upheld by Confucian propaganda. Here, we may consider that both the Laozi and a number of Huangdi attributions are closely related to cultivating life, pursuing longevity, and achieving immortality. Accordingly, the textual traditions labeled as Huangdi and Laozi stemmed from the understanding that texts attributed to these two figures both advocate the Eastern Zhou self-divinization model as well as the early imperial political theory—*xingming* focusing on punishment and law—associated with this model.

### 2.6 The Yellow Emperor’s Four Classics

Here, we must consider the four manuscripts preceding one of the two versions of the Laozi discovered in Mawangdui Tomb 3. In this manuscript, the Dao *pian* is preceded by the De *pian*, reflecting the opposite of the order organized in the transmitted text. The four manuscripts preceding the Mawangdui Laozi include the Jingfa 經法, the Shidajing 十大經 (or Shiliujing 十六經), the Cheng 稱, and the Daoyuan 道原. The coincidence between the number of these manuscripts and the *pian* number listed after the text Huangdi sijing 黃帝四經 (*The Yellow Emperor’s Four Classics*) in the “Yi-wen zhi” chapter of the Hanshu 唐蘭 (1901–1979 AD) inspired Tang Lan 唐蘭 (1901–1979 AD) to conclude that these four Mawangdui manuscripts are indeed the long-lost Huangdi sijing. Tang’s argument rests on three pieces of evidence: the cohesive message that the four manuscripts convey, the dating of the manuscripts, and the circulation of these four manuscripts over time, but his conclusion is mainly supported by a passage from the “Jingji zhi” 經籍志 (Treatise on Confucian Classics and Other Texts) chapter of the Suishu 隋書. It documents the following:

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154 Li Ling 1998b: 288.
155 Li Ling 1998b: 288–289.
157 There are numerous works on the connection of the *xingming* thought with the “Huang Lao zhi shu;” for examples, see Li Ling 1998b: 284–286; Tang Lan 唐蘭 1975; Guo Moruo 1996: 156–191.
In the Han time under the category of *zhuzi*, the trends of Daoist writings amounted to thirty-seven textual traditions, the essence of which was all related to the abandonment of strength and surplus in order to live a humble and plain life, and there were no such things as the above-mentioned Heavenly Officials or tallies. Among the Daoist texts, the four *pian* of the Yellow Emperor and the two *pian* of Laozi most obtained the essence in depth.\(^{159}\)

This passage encourages Tang Lan to equate the four Mawangdui manuscripts with the *Huangdi sijing* due to the astonishing coincidence between the total number of mentioned *pian*—the four *pian* by the Yellow Emperor (i.e. the *Huangdi sijing*, according to Tang) and the two *pian* by Laozi—and the layout of the six Mawangdui manuscripts (four manuscripts preceding the two-*pian* Laozi). While Tang bases his argument upon the number of *pian*, the content of the manuscripts as described in the “Jingji zhi” passage above is omitted from Tang’s citation.

Qiu Xigui believes that the “Jingji zhi” commentary on the Han Daoist writings, which are omitted from Tang Lan’s quotation, retracts from Tang’s argument. As Qiu points out, these comments on Han writings contradict the message conveyed by the four Mawangdui manuscripts. The *xingming* governmental philosophy reflected in the four Mawangdui manuscripts is, according to Qiu, far more aggressive than the *Suishu* commentary on the essence of Daoism being found in “the abandonment of strength and surplus in order to live a humble and plain life.” This interpretation of Daoist thinking gained currency only after the Han dynasty. Qiu also highlights the widely divergent lengths of the four Mawangdui manuscripts, as well as the lack of presence of the Yellow Emperor in three of them, to suggest that the four manuscripts could not have formed an integrated text such as the *Huangdi sijing*. Moreover, the fact that none of the Huangdi quotations in extant texts can be found in the four Mawangdui manuscripts also lends credence to Qiu’s contention. Therefore, Qiu argues, the four *pian* writings attributed to the Yellow Emperor in the *Suishu* passage cannot be the *Huangdi sijing*.\(^{160}\)

There are also other opinions on the attribution of the four manuscripts, but Tang’s argument and Qiu’s rebuttal represent the two major positions that

\(^{159}\) *Suishu* 隋書 35.1093.

\(^{160}\) Qiu Xigui 1993.
continue to exert influence. Since most of the texts attributed to the Yellow Emperor in the “Yiwen zhi” chapter have been lost, Tang’s and Qiu’s arguments rely greatly on secondary sources. The Suishu passage, for instance, is the key source for both scholars, however biased it may be. Additionally, its comments on Han Daoist writings do not fully reflect the nature of the thirty-seven textual traditions, as Qiu Xigui insightfully notes. Nevertheless, even though those comments are more applicable to post-Han Daoism, the information regarding the Yellow Emperor’s four pian and the Laozi’s two pian may still indicate the form of a text suggested by Tang Lan.

However, an evaluation of the merits of both arguments is difficult based on current evidence, since neither is verifiable. The flaw of Qiu’s argument is its insistence that the different lengths of these four manuscripts prevent them from being incorporated into the single text, The Yellow Emperor’s Four Classics, as it is not unusual to see textual units of different lengths within a text. For example, the last chapter of the Lunyu is well known for its glaring brevity in comparison with other chapters, but its position in the Lunyu is fixed regardless of how much doubt has been cast on its authenticity. The assumption that all textual units should match each other in terms of length should be considered an anachronistic projection.

Qiu also problematically suggests that if the four manuscripts under discussion were indeed the Huangdi sijing, passages or paraphrases of them should be found among the dozen extant quotations available in the handful of transmitted texts. The “Yiwen zhi” lists several dozen texts associated with the Yellow Emperor, including more than three hundred pian and almost four hundred juan, so why must passages from the relatively short Huangdi sijing be among those to survive in the dozen quotations pertaining to the Yellow Emperor that could have been drawn from hundreds of juan and pian?


162 Li Ling notes that the Huangdi neijing 黃帝內經 and other fragmentary textual portions may be related to those listed in the “Yiwen zhi” chapter, but the information is too limited to amount to any substantial conclusion. As for the Huangdi neijing, although we have a text with the same title edited by Wang Bing 王冰 in the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907 AD), whether or not there are any parts, with or without variation, from the text mentioned in the “Yiwen zhi” is hard to tell. Even if some earlier portions may have been preserved in the version edited by Wang Bing, the hope to identify them remains dim. See Li Ling 1998b: 280; Leo 2011: 22–36.

163 Qiu Xigui 1993: 253. Li Ling thinks that the Daoist writings in the “Yiwen zhi” chapter can be grouped in four categories: writings on strategies, the pre-Qin Daoist canons, the Huangdi writings, and the Western Han Daoist writings. The Suishu comments on the thirty-seven Daoist textual traditions may merely work for the category of the pre-Qin Daoist canons. See Li Ling 1998b: 284–285.
Questioning Qiu’s argument, however, does not amount to upholding Tang’s perspective. The three pieces of evidence supporting Tang Lan’s equation of the four Mawangdui manuscripts with the *Huangdi sijing* are not tenable. Tang’s dating of the manuscripts and his assignment of their authorship is also flawed.¹⁶⁴

This debate has been outlined to highlight some of its questionable assumptions and flawed methodologies. It is surprising that, throughout this debate, few have questioned whether the four-*pian* *Huangdi sijing* could be completely different from the four Mawangdui manuscripts. It is possible that the title *Huangdi sijing* may not have been in use prior to the completion of the imperial text collection efforts led by Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and others. The discoveries of early Chinese texts written on bamboo or wood strips and silk inform us that titles were not necessarily provided in early Chinese writings.¹⁶⁵ To group multiple *pian* or *juan* textual units under one title was the result of later editing work. So far as early Chinese writings are concerned, their titles must refer to the first Chinese bibliographic work completed under Liu Xiang’s direction and preserved with likely editing by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 BC) in the “Yiwen zhi.” Although it is possible that some of the titles appearing in the bibliographical work compiled by Liu Xiang and Liu Xin might have circulated orally, and although some of the titles might have become available slightly earlier than 26 BC, the first year of the imperial project, extant evidence suggests that it was through Liu Xiang and his editors that most of the texts listed in the “Yiwen zhi” obtained their multi-*pian* or *juan* forms, complete with titles and identified authors.

Indeed, the purpose of rearranging the Han imperial text collection was to provide authoritative editions that, under the painstaking efforts of the editing group, would include the most complete writings on any given topic, teaching, author, and tradition. To accomplish this goal, the imperial editors collected all the writings relevant to these topics, omitting duplicate versions and preserving those that had not been previously included in the imperial collection. As for the Confucian Classics, even those duplicates were preserved side by side with other versions of the same text.¹⁶⁶

In short, the *Huangdi sijing* listed in the “Yiwen zhi” could have been the synthesis of a number of Daoist writings attributed to the Yellow Emperor, with or without the inclusion of the four Mawangdui manuscripts. Even if the Mawangdui manuscripts were included, it is possible that they had been reassembled in

¹⁶⁵ Pian Yuqian and Duan Shu’an 2006: 87–146.
consultation with similar writings. The assumption that the *Huangdi sijing* in the “Yiwen zhi” list must correspond to a four-*pian* text (such as the four Mawangdui manuscripts) that existed prior to the rearrangement of the Han imperial text collection certainly ignores the typical process of making, circulating, collecting, and remaking of early Chinese writings. To equate any early Chinese text with one listed in the “Yiwen zhi” merely on the coincidence of their number of *pian*, therefore, is methodologically misleading and practically irrelevant to the exploration of the nature of a text.

Qiu Xigui also doubts Tang Lan’s conclusion because only one of the four manuscripts, the *Shidajing*, mentions the Yellow Emperor. Building upon Qiu Xigui’s differentiation of the *Shidajing* from the other three manuscripts, Li Ling divides all the “Yiwen zhi” attributions to the Yellow Emperor and his ministers into two types: those that were allegedly written by the Yellow Emperor and those that consisted of dialogues between the Yellow Emperor and his ministers. Those writings directly attributed to the Yellow Emperor, according to Li Ling, are essays rather than dialogue. Essays and dialogues were not likely included within a single text, according to Li Ling. Therefore, to uphold the principle of consistency within a text, the *Shidajing* must be separated from the other three manuscripts.

Both Qiu’s and Li’s observations are helpful in exploring the different layouts of the four Mawangdui manuscripts, but the feature of consistency in early Chinese writings derives from the editing process. Consistency would not be as controversial as it is now if texts were transmitted in the form of brief, single *pian* units. The grouping of a number of writings, as in the case of the rearrangement of the Han imperial book collection, served the purpose of providing an inclusive body of knowledge related to a certain theme, topic, or textual tradition. To make the body of knowledge more inclusive was a primary working principle. While conceding that, in the “Yiwen zhi,” there are traces suggesting that some texts were grouped into categories on the basis of style, I argue that the consistency of genre and writing style were not a determinative factor when multiple *pian* texts were created. For example, if we follow Li Ling’s theory, the *Huangdi junchen* 黃帝君臣 (*Ruler Huangdi and his Ministers*) listed in the “Yiwen zhi” as a text including ten *pian* would at the first glance appear to be a collection of the Yellow

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168 Li Ling 1998b: 280.
169 For example, in the “Zhuzi lüe” of the “Yiwen zhi,” “Xiaoshuo jia” 小說家 as a subcategory seems to differentiate itself as a textual tradition by its specific contents: hearsay, gossip, and rumors. *Hanshu* 30.1744–1745.
Emperor’s dialogues with his ministers. Yet it was most probably a text resembling the Laozi, as the notes following this title indicate.\textsuperscript{170} To rebut Qiu’s rebuttal of Tang Lan’s argument, we may also use the Laozi as an example: the Laozi does not mention Laozi in the main text at all, but this did not prevent the text’s being attributed to him. In sum, whether or not the main text mentions the figure to whom the text is attributed has little to do with the authorial attribution.

### 2.7 Summary

In explaining what might have resulted in the incomparable number of authorial attributions to a “prolific” Yellow Emperor, I have navigated various aspects of the Huangdi myth, including its euhemerization, historicization, and its connection to Eastern Zhou ritual, religious, and cosmological thinking. The Yellow Emperor is portrayed as the most “prolific” author by the “Yiwen zhi” due to his significance to the changed socio-political structure, ritual context, and religious mentality. The concept of Yellow Emperor as a proto-Daoist figure, who knew techniques for achieving immortality (as indicated by the majority attributions to him) probably have led to the exclusion of him as an author of any Confucian text, as reflected in the two different approaches to the changed Eastern Zhou world. Accompanying this change was the flourishing of a text culture spreading to, and deeply impacting, Eastern Zhou societal perspectives on governing patterns and religious thinking. It is in this trend that the Yellow Emperor was invoked.

Nevertheless, we cannot accept the “Yiwen zhi” attributions as reality, due to our understanding of the actual text-making process of the Eastern Zhou and early imperial periods. After all, the “Yiwen zhi” attributions resulted largely from the late Western Han project of rearranging the imperial text collection, and we have found that text culture during the Eastern Zhou and early imperial times was more complex than that which previous scholarship has contended. Thus, as our review of the newly excavated texts labeled The Yellow Emperor’s Four Classics has shown, we cannot simply identify an undocumented piece of early writing based only on the bibliographical information preserved in the “Yiwen zhi” or “Jingji zhi”.

\textsuperscript{170} Hanshu 30.1731.