

Mapping Time in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* Tables 表

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Abstract: This essay considers the achievements, contrasts, and puzzles that bind the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* Tables to one another, and to their respective authors' historical views. Meanwhile, this essay queries the common wisdom that would reduce the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables to "mere sequence," as opposed to creative historical writing, while deriding the tables as either "primitive" or "derivative."

I begin with a puzzle: Why did Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104-62), a highly respected authority on classical learning in middle-period China, say of Sima Qian's 司馬遷 masterwork, the *Shiji* 史記 or *Archivists' Records*, that it was the *Shiji* Tables that were that historian's main contribution: *gong zai biao* 功在表 ("the achievement lies in the Tables")?¹ After all, most modern scholars regard the biographical section (*liezhuan* 列傳) as the most impressive part of Sima Qian's five-section history, with the Basic Annals (*benji* 本記), likewise in narrative form, in second place. Based on my review of the secondary literature, very few modern scholars trouble to consult these tables of the *Shiji* or *Hanshu* 漢書. Most modern scholars seem to believe that the tables no longer serve any useful function, except as a sort of "crib sheet" to consult for ready reference for long lists of names and dates. But this disdain is longstanding: already in Tang and Song, only a handful of

¹ Elsewhere Zheng Qiao (1995), p. 1825, wrote, "Tu 圖 (tables, charts, pictures) are the *jing* 經 (warp), and *shu* 書 (writings, but often narrative accounts) are the weft 緯." Zhao Yi, *Ershier shi zha ji*, chap.1, p. 3, asserts that basically Sima Qian invented the form we know. NB: After finishing this essay in 2011, I was sent a then-unpublished manuscript entitled "On *Shiji* 史記 22, Table Ten," authored by Wu Shu-hui (2014). I do not see that I have borrowed from that, although some of our conclusions agree.

scholars took the time to assess the special features and functions of the Tables section.²

Two unwarranted assumptions underlie our modern disparagement of Tables that incorporate chronologies: first, the misbegotten idea that the art of history-writing itself followed a single evolutionary path reducible to a timeline, from its origins in annals (enumerated but not yet narrated) to date lists (sometimes equipped with appended notes) to chronicles (fuller accounts) to full-blown narrative forms of history, whose late emergence heralds the dawn of modernity itself; and second, the concomitant idea that in “good [respectable] history” “the events must be... revealed as possessing a structure, an order of meaning, ... [and] not mere sequence.”³ Admittedly, with one exception, all early civilizations seem to have begun their historiographical traditions with due attention to chronological lists, many in the form of “king lists.”⁴ However, this essay disputes the common wisdom that casts the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables as “mere sequence,” an equation that rests upon the modern conflation of chronological or genealogical lists with tables. It further questions the notion that lists and tables are either “primitive” or “derivative” forms of history best divorced from the more “creative” activity of writing biographical narratives.

Many thinkers in the early empires would have been very shocked by any characterization of the *Shiji* or *Hanshu* tables as a “primitive” form of history. For instance, the Han thinker Huan Tan 桓譚 (d. c. AD 32), while distinguishing the pre-imperial genealogical lists (*pu* 譜) compiled during Zhou from the early tables (*biao* 表) found in *Shiji*, held that the less antique tables were “equally effective” in their own way, precisely because they presented events in time not merely in a single list or series of lists, but in graphically complex visual forms (*wen* 文).⁵ Writing in a similar vein, Ying Shao 應劭 (d. c. AD 204) said, “A table records events [just as lists do], but it lets us survey them visually.” On the other hand, Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661-721), writing in *Shitong* 史通, might as well be Mansvelt-Beck writing in *T'oung pao* a few decades ago,⁶ for Liu, like Mansvelt-Beck, dismisses the

² Wei Liaoweng 魏了翁 (1178-1237), Lin Jiong 林駟 (Song), and Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137-1181) are three who did attend to the Tables in their writings. That so few did may be due to the disparaging comments by Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 about the Tables: see *infra*. For studies of the praise Lin and Lü meted out, see Yu Zhanghua (2005), pp. 416-435.

³ White (1987).

⁴ Wang Haicheng (2007), *passim*. The exception is the Incas, who apparently ran a vast empire without any writing at all.

⁵ Huan Tan, as cited in Liu Zhiji, *Shitong*, chap. 3; *pian* 7, (Western 3.53). Cf. *Critias*.

⁶ Mansvelt-Beck (1990).

visual dimensions of the historical tables, which he then condemns them as both uninteresting and superfluous.⁷ Never mind that the tables present new evidence, not to mention old evidence in new garb. Crucial, then, is this distinction between tables and lists (typically ignored in English translations)—and not only because the *Shiji* tables have no real precedents in earlier calendars, chronologies, and genealogical lists.⁸ Tables alone allow the compiler to alter or omit key headings, and to radically expand or collapse columns,⁹ and tables alone permit a variety of formats, horizontal and

⁷ Liu Zhiji assumes that there is very little material in the *Shiji* tables that cannot be found elsewhere in the narrative chapters of the same text. Itō Tokuo (1993), Part II, p. 88, points out that how wrong this is, since the Tables frequently furnish material that does not appear elsewhere in the *Shiji* text. He follows one story cycle where five out of seven pieces of information relating a certain story appear only in the Tables section. Cf. Mansvelt-Beck (1990), p. 1.

⁸ *Shiji* Table 1 (chap. 13) registers frustration at finding no consistent records or theoretical views in the family registers (*die* 諫). Loewe's "The Tables of the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*: forms and contents," Loewe (2004), p. 208, suggests that genealogical lists (*shi pu* 世譜) and chronologies (*nian pu* 年譜) "may have been documents or lists of the type" seen in *Shiji* and *Hanshu*. As the books listed in *Hanshu* 30.1765-655 are no longer extant, we cannot say, but I do not conflate lists and registers with Tables (see below). One might also refer to the Yinwan documents YM6D10 recto and YM6D7 recto. Loewe (2004), p. 213, mentions that the Han writers were aware of one precedent in the writing of Anxi (Arsacid Persia), whose writing was "side-ways moving," and "skewed upwards," and so capable of forming horizontal rows and vertical columns. Loewe, *ibid*, interprets the Tables as "imitating" the Zhou genealogical registers, whereas I take *xiao* 效 in a second sense, "effective," based on Liu Zhiji's understanding of Huan Tan's passage. On alteration of the key headings: *Shiji* 14-17 (Tables 2-5), to take one example, shift one's sense of legitimate power from the Eastern Zhou kings and Lu, to Qin, to Chu, and finally to Han. Depending on how one punctuates, Table 3 can be read as more or less favorable to Qin, but the fact that after King Nan's death in 247 BC, Ying Zheng (i.e., the future Qin Shihuang) takes the uppermost row is surely a significant assertion of his legitimacy, as the Six Kingdoms had yet to be conquered at that point in time. Note, too, that the weak Han founder is shown sharing power in Table 4 with three other polities, those of Yong 雍, Sai 塞, and Di 翟, still in late 206 BC, Di located in Shaanbei, north of Yan'an. I believe this is not coincidental, but I cannot prove it. To take another example, Table 4 does not collapse Xiang Yu or Liu Bang with Chu 楚, as modern historians are wont to do. No key headings are given in *Hanshu* Table 1 for Liu Bang, for his reign.

⁹ To give two examples, in one Table (*Shiji* 16.774-75), an original eight rows explodes to nineteen, and in Table 5, an original eleven rows must grow to 27 rows to accommodate the number of kingdoms. Few tables in the *Shiji* do not shift gears in this way; moreover, to compare the content of the tables also requires shifting frames of reference, as when one moves from the Tables pertaining to antiquity, to the Six Kingdoms, the Qin-Han transition, and early to mid-Western Han.

vertical, each with its own capacities. Inevitably, reading a table is a far more challenging and rewarding process of correlating disparate types of information than reading straight columns of items arranged in a list.¹⁰ Bamboo bundles and especially silk scrolls, by their very formats, would have facilitated this correlation process, however, unlike modern print editions in codex forms, which make lengthy comparisons across many pages difficult to sustain.¹¹

Sima Qian explicitly proclaimed that compiling the tables required him to go far beyond the earlier lists kept in archives to which a Senior Archivist had access, those lists giving far too little sense of the overall sweep and shape of history.¹² Sima Qian, constructing a rhetorical move akin to that made when classifying types of expertise,¹³ explained why tables are ultimately superior, in being more comprehensive than lists:

太史公曰。儒者斷其義。馳說者騁其辭。不務綜其終始。曆人取其年月。數家隆於神運。譜牒獨記世諡。其辭略。欲一觀諸要難。於是譜十二諸侯。自共和訖

¹⁰ Loewe's division into vertical and horizontal does not bring out the moral dimension expressed in the phrase *jingwei bianhua* 經緯變化. Pan Yongji (1833), passim, already noted a real change taking place between four tables (*Gaozu gong chen hou zhe nianbiao* 高祖功臣侯者年表; *Hui Jing jian hou zhe nian biao* 惠景間侯者年表; *Jianyuan yi lai hou zhe nianbiao* 建元以來侯者年表; *Jianyuan yi lai wang zi hou zhe nianbiao* 建元已來王子侯者年表) [i.e., *Shiji* chapters 18-21] versus the other six *Shiji* tables. In the four tables, the year is the *jing* 經 and the fiefs (*guo* 國) constitute the *wei* 緯, whereas in the other six tables, the *guo* are the main threads, and time the supporting threads or *wei*. Pan tried to justify this change, saying that it would have been hard to devise another format, given that there was only so much room for the grids/boxes, but countless numbers of *guo*.

¹¹ To give an example, the Bona edition uses an entire *ce* (subsection) of 74 double pages (a-b) for a single Table 6.

¹² *Shiji* 14.511. If we follow Xu Guang's notation (n. 5), this is an even more trenchant remark, for the insertion of the phrase found in one edition (*zhi guo wen zhe* 治國聞者) creates the sentence, "Those who would hear of ruling the realm will take a knife to it." As the text now stands, it says that Sima Qian has created this table by "extracting the key points" from earlier writings, just like Kongzi's supposed "clearing away the rank growth" (*shan* 刪) when culling 300 odes for the *Odes* classic. *Shiji* 14.686 speaks of lost records, but even the "Record of Qin" (*Qin ji* 秦記) does not record days and months, and the text has many lacunae. Vankeerberghen (2007), pp. 298-299, conflates lists with tables.

¹³ Almost all sources, with the exception of Yang Xiong's *Fayan*, identify Sima Tan as author of the section of *Shiji* 130 that lists various types of expertise, all superseded or combined with adherents of the Dao. Note, however, that *Fayan* claims this classification was made by Sima Qian. What interests me here is the parallel move that Sima Qian makes in the ten tables, insofar as he claims his Tables combine the best aspects of several other types of writing.

孔子表見。春秋國語學者所譏盛衰大指著于篇。為成學治古文者要刪焉。

The Senior Archivist(s?) said, “The classicists only want to break off an idea [from the original context to prove a point].¹⁴ The abstract theorists¹⁵ merely want to run on with their rhetoric. Neither works hard at pulling together the various cycles.¹⁶ The calendar-makers are merely looking to borrow the precise dates for the months and days of major events.¹⁷ The numerologists are thrilled¹⁸ simply by the cycles ordained by the gods. And the compilers of genealogical lists and family registers merely want to record the successive generations and posthumous sobriquets. Their phrasing is too sketchy.

[Ideally] one would have something that allows you to see at a glance all of the key conjunction points and obstacles or calamities. Therefore, I have taken material from the genealogies of the twelve local lords,¹⁹ from Gonghe²⁰ down to Kongzi, putting the information in a table. In these chapters are revealed what students of the *Annals* and *Stratagems of the States* identify as the main points accounting for the waxing and waning powers in historical periods.²¹ For the benefit of the most accom-

¹⁴ This refers, almost certainly, to the practice whereby odes-singers or reciters “break off a stanza” – usually the first or the last – from the ode “to offer up” its message for consideration by those present.

¹⁵ Or, “fast talkers(?)” Assuming that *chi shuo* 馳說 has a meaning somewhat like *jia shuo* 駕說 in *Fayan* 1.3. *Shiji* uses the term six times: *Shiji* 14.511 (this instance); 65.2168, 79.2423, 87.2557, 126.3206, 130.3206. *Hou Hanshu* 60B.1982 defines this binome as *bian zhe* 辯者 (“debaters”).

¹⁶ Note that *zhongshi* consistently means “[repetitive] cycles,” not “beginnings and ends” (*shi zhong* 始終).

¹⁷ It may be relevant that the early tables seldom mention months and days.

¹⁸ Tentative translation for *long* 隆.

¹⁹ The twelve local lords of Lu are the organizing principle of the *Annals* (*Chunqiu*) supposedly compiled by Kongzi.

²⁰ Table 2 starts with 841 BC. Sima Qian mentions King Li of Zhou 周厲王 (d. 828 BC?). The term “Gonghe” or Gong He is explained variously, but here it almost certainly refers to the “joint rule” of the Zhou government by a Zhougong 周公 and a Shaogong 召公. Some, however, insist that it refers to the time when Gong Bo He 共伯和 ran the government, as stated in the *Bamboo Annals*. For further information, see Li Jixiang (2011); Zhuang Yuqing (2011).

²¹ Here I follow Takigawa Kametarō (1932-), which takes *zhu yu pian* 著於篇 as “incorporated into this very *pian* in question” (i.e., Table 2). However, Loewe (pri-

plished students of classical learning, I have identified the essential points that they may then extract them from it [the first table in particular, as microcosm of the entire section devoted to tables].”²²

Here Sima Qian explicitly announces that his tables (*biao*) are more than of string of people, dates, or events. Clearly, Sima Qian intends readers to see the larger patterns making for the growth or failure of kingly rule.²³ Put another way, the *Shiji* Tables seek to impose a measure of significant order on the messy realities of the past. Readers are to hold in their minds’ eyes both the inherent complexity of time’s passage, with individual people entering and exiting the historical stage with their own characters and motivations, and the underlying larger historical patterns that shape the fate of nations. If names and dates of events can be analogized to the numbers 0-9, the good historian needs to know more than the identity of these ten numbers; she needs to wield the fundamental operations designed to manipulate the data comprehensively, so as to discover the significant patterns. A modern historian of early India dubbed lists and tables not *primitive efforts* to write history, but *graphically dense* ways of describing and *interpreting* the past (italics mine).²⁴ This seems right.

A tentative “solution” for the aforementioned puzzle would propose that (1) No little genius was required to organize historical data into the visually arresting tables, especially after the transition from vassal states to unified empire; (2) Since the courts of the early empires in China regarded time, timing, and timely opportunity as central problems, they utilized tables not as “lists” whose contents could be memorized easily, but rather as graphically dense representations of their pet theories concerning those conjunctions of events they called “encounters” (*yu* 遇), “timing” (*shi* 時), or “decrees” (*ming* 命); (3) Tables were potentially the single most flexible and

vate communication, dated 9/25/2013) reads this as “I have incorporated the states of the *Chunqiu* and *Guoyu* in other *pian*, where relevant,” following the *Shiji suoyin*, n. 6. However, the *Shiji suoyin*, p. 512n6, seems to refer only to this *pian* or chapter, Table 2. Wu Xiangshu (2005), 75-77, argues that the very title of Table 2 gives the nod to the *Annals*, as it refers to twelve lords also. I accept this.

²² *Shiji* 14.511. Note the slightly different reading offered by Itō Tokuo (1993), pp. 65-66. He says “the important points have been selectively recorded, for the benefit of those who are practiced in *guwen*.”

²³ One of these alternate patterns identified in *Shiji* Table 4 is ease vs. difficulty (*yi/nan* 易難), another legitimate/illegitimate (*zheng/fan* 正反). See Zhang Dake (1986), p. 291. Certain tables emphasize “strategic position” (*xing shi* 形勢), according to *ibid*, p. 292; and others not.

²⁴ Romila Thapar, summarized in Rosenberg and Grafton (2011), p. 12; cf. Thapar (2007); also *Time MAPS: collective memory and the social shape of the past* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), esp. pp. 12-13.

dynamic format available to the early story-tellers, their format making them significantly more flexible than narrative history;²⁵ and (4) Modern scholars, Western or Chinese, ignore the tables at their peril, for their frameworks lodge the rhetorical equivalents to the “subtle words” (*wei yan* 微言) allegedly imbedded into history by Kongzi 孔子, the premier historian. To illustrate the foregoing claims, most of this essay zeroes in on the *Shiji* tables, which brilliantly exploit all the foregoing features, whereas a few of the *Hanshu* tables look like hybrid works, somewhere between tables and treatises, as is the case with the “Table on Imperial Officials” or *Baiguan gongqing biao* 百官公卿表). My last point about “subtle words” is demonstrated best, not only by several comparisons of different early tables for the same or overlapping sets of events, but also by reference to the peculiar “Table of Figures, Past and Present” (*Gujin ren biao* 古今人表) found in the *Hanshu*.

Finally, I speculate, pure and simply, that the court-commissioned standard histories in the post-Han period did not employ the tables until the mid-tenth century—for nearly a millennium after the *Hanshu* (c. 100),²⁶ in other words—because the tables tended to inspire complex historical reflections of the sort the power-holders of the day did not particularly welcome, insofar as the tables facilitated the identification of broader patterns punctuated by evident anomalies, without mandating strict adherence to chronology. As the *Shiji suoyin* 史記索隱 for Table 1 devoted to the Three Dynasties remarks: “When events are hard to parse or unclear, their [patterns] must be laid out bright as day, and hence the name ‘table,’ meaning, ‘to lay out clearly’” (事微而不著。須表明。古言表也。). Whether this speculation is correct or not, it should be evident that the tables composed for the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* form an integral part of the message that Sima Qian and the Bans intended to communicate, and so cannot be dismissed as “superfluous,” even were it true that “all the dates [in the

²⁵ I suspect that the decline of tables in history (which Zheng Qiao laments) correlates with the reduction of historical factors to one factor, that of morality, as it does with the commentaries to the *Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書) classic that I have reviewed. But I am not conversant enough with the specifics of Tang-Song history to assert this with confidence.

²⁶ For the revival of the tables, see *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書, chap. 24. I make this statement after looking through the *Siku quanshu* entries citing the “Table of Figures.” Lü Zuqian 呂祖謙 (1137-1181) also refers to it repeatedly in his *Da Shiji* 大事記, as noted by the Qing scholar Ma Su 騶 (1621-73). Ma Duanlin’s 馬端臨 (c. 1254-c. 1323) *Wenxian tongkao* 文獻通考, chap. 67B/37B criticizes Ban Gu for not giving the basis of his judgments, for which Ban would have risked death, in all probability. Zhu Yizun’s 朱彝尊 (1629-1709) *Jing yi kao* 經義考, in several chapters registers other criticisms of the Table (e.g., that it lists too few disciples of Kongzi).

Tables] ... of [the major] appointments, enfeoffments, and other acts of state... can also be found in the preceding three parts."²⁷

(a) Preliminary Considerations: the History of Lists and Tables, East and West

Some parts of the foregoing have drawn the attention of scholars investigating the Mediterranean classical civilizations within the last decade. Anyone interested in the early history of tables in relation to early history writing will profit from reading two interesting books: Denis Feeney's *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (2007) and *Cartographies of Time, a History of the Timeline*, edited by Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton (2011).²⁸ In particular, Feeney's *Calendar* explains the enormous investment of labor required for unified empires to devise a single framework for all historical time, in the firm belief that time is "irreducibly social" and "political." Feeney's insight applies to the case of early China, since many of the Simas' efforts must have gone into aligning the dates offered in different pre-Qin calendars to which they, as Senior Archivists, had privileged access.²⁹ In prefatory remarks to the Tables, Sima Qian certainly comments on the contradictions in the records he sees in front of him.³⁰ (Several of the early Western Han excavated manuscripts

²⁷ Mansvelt-Beck 1990, p. 1. Loewe has found numerous instances where the Tables include information that are not found elsewhere or that, even more curiously, are contradicted within the same text. See Loewe 2004. Vankeerberghen's 2007 comparison of the Tables with the *Annals* seems forced, however, as the formats are so different, with the *Annals* being in narrative form (however brief) and incapable of being read not in sequence; perhaps the main point is that both the Tables and the *Annals* are equally hard to read. See Griet Vankeerberghen (2007), pp. 295-312, esp. p. 296.

²⁸ Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Rosenberg and Grafton (2011).

²⁹ NB: Whereas we are told that the Qin empire destroyed many "histories of the states" (*Shiji* 6.255: 臣請史官非秦記皆燒之), we are also told that Sima Qian consulted many registers, chronologies, and narrative histories (*Shiji* 13:487), which tells us that only the registers and chronologies from "Yin [=late Shang] and before" did not exist (自殷以前諸侯不可得而譜); cf. *Shiji* 130.3033, which tells us that the lists and registers are "too sketchy" for Sima Qian's taste, but they did exist. Itō Tokuo (1993), pp. 81-83, registers the point that since Sima Tan and Sima Qian had access to the archives and the *Shiji* compilation was stored in the imperial archives after Sima Qian's death, we should not think of it as a "private history," but this misses the point.

³⁰ Itō Tokuo (1993), p. 58, draws our attention to this.

offer glimpses of the different calendars of the vassal states still being used before 221 BC.) Nearly as useful to the beginning student of tables is the edited volume entitled *Graphics and Text in the Production of Technical Knowledge in China: the Warp and the Weft* (2007),³¹ although the essays devoted to early China contain some errors. Let me therefore summarize the main points made by Feeney, Rosenberg, and Grafton, before developing the special case of early China.

Rosenberg and Grafton boldly assert that,

we today generally grant relatively low status to chronology. Though we use chronologies all the time, ... we typically see them only as distillations of complex historical narratives and ideas or as "tools" that allow us to do the real work of making history. [However,] from the classical period to the Renaissance in Europe, chronology was among the most revered of scholarly pursuits. Indeed, in some respects, it held a status higher than the study of history itself. While history dealt in stories, chronology dealt in facts.³²

Curious, however, is these experts' persistent conflation of chronological lists with tables. This is an important distinction, to my mind, for chronological lists simply give dates with one piece of information attached to the dates (perhaps the names of kings or dates of battles), whereas the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables correlate much more complex sets of information. In addition, the observation that "history dealt in stories, chronology dealt in facts" makes pre-modern compilers far more credulous and naïve creatures than they actually were (consider the *Critias*); it also strongly implies that those same historians were unaware of the need to convey much more complex stories. In surveying the history of histories, Paul Veyne wisely alerts us to the dangers of dichotomizing "story" vs. fact, while urging historians to develop multifaceted stories to replace the rather simplistic narratives positing a string of what appear to be facts. As one memorable passage of his says,

History has long been defined as an *explanatory account, a narrative featuring causes*. To explain [something] used to pass for being the sublime part of the historian's craft. Indeed, it was considered that *explanation consisted in finding a reason, garbed as a cause*—that is, a scheme (the rise of the bourgeoisie, the forces of production, the revolt of the masses) that brought great and exciting ideas into

³¹ Edited by Francesca Bray, Vera Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, and Georges Métailié for Brill (Leiden).

³² Rosenberg and Grafton (2011), pp. 10-11.

play. But let us suppose that explanation is reduced to envisaging a polygon of minor causes that do not remain constant from one set of circumstances to the next and that do not fill the specific places that a pattern would assign to them in advance. ... [Then] another task no less interesting emerges: to reveal the unpredictable contours of this polygon, and to restore their original silhouettes to events, which has been concealed under borrowed garments.³³

Certainly the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables, attesting history's proliferation of unique events, represent such polygonic visions. Unlike narrative history, the tables, when read with a modicum of care, no longer mandate that readers slavishly follow the straight timeline that predisposes us to look for mechanical cause-and-effect tying before to after. With tables, the eye easily wanders in any direction, querying the relation between above and below, between space cells side by side, and those placed along diagonals. Early tables, in other words, echo the invitations found in the prefaces and post-faces (both *xu* 序 in Chinese) to consider how units may be combined and recombined to form significant patterns. In stark contrast to the Bildungsromans presented in some narrative histories, the tables contain multiple simultaneous references to the deep structures shaping human lives in society, which tend to be interlocking, but the tables are very sparing with their pronouncements.³⁴ As a result, the tables foster synoptic views requiring complex perspectives, while obviating redundancies "when many persons have a share in the same achievement or same type of achievements." Recall that Sima Qian, in talking of the tables, named his goal: that later generations would be able "with one glance" to peruse a range of factors that led to the final historical outcomes.³⁵ He also said "he wanted [others] to survey the ideas behind the entire age, before and later..."³⁶ "to examine the cycles," "to bundle together the cycles," in order to "to cause them to exert due caution about the cycles."³⁷ Moreover, the tables can and do direct the reader's focus to a particular set of narratives in ways surpassing the usual narratives.³⁸ Thus, at the very least, the tables urge the reader to reconsider the possibly significant, if unspecified relations between groups of contiguous events. While no history, however fine, can fully portray the

³³ Veyne (1988), p. 33 (with minor modifications).

³⁴ *Shiji* Table 4, for example, is only 287 characters long, yet it manages to sketch the major events of the Qin-Chu transition.

³⁵ *Shiji* 14.505.

³⁶ *Shiji* 18.878, talking of the entire age of Zhou for that table.

³⁷ *Shiji* uses the verbs *cha* 察, *zong* 綜, and *jin* 謹, in Tables 3, 5, and 6; see *Shiji* 15.868, *Shiji* 18.878.

³⁸ *Wenxin dialong*, chap. 4, *pian* 18; cf. Shih (1959), pp. 91-92.

bewildering messiness celebrated by Michel de Certeau in his influential *Practice of Everyday Life*,³⁹ the well-designed historical table, due to its capacity to foster multiple simultaneous reconstructions, amply repays the alert reader.

Raleigh, in his *History of the World* (1653), already observed this noteworthy feature of tables when speaking of the simpler chronological lists:

History, indeed, is the Body, but Chronologie the Soul of Historical Knowledge; for History without Chronologie, or a Relation of things past, without mentioning the Times in which they were Acted, is like a Lump or Embryo without articulation, or a Carcass without life.

Raleigh's observation can be updated for our times: whereas a great many forms of lists register specific moments in time, they do not invariably prompt readers to raise larger questions about the *Zeitgeist* in which exemplary people, good and bad, operated.⁴⁰ Instead, they may work to flatten time, making it drearily continuous and inevitable rather than a space opening out in several dimensions simultaneously (that polygon of Veyne's imagining).

Then, too, modern historiography generally fails to incorporate the basic insight that early historians "not only saw things differently, but saw different things."⁴¹ To capture something of the texture of early thinking means accepting the notion that the ancients noticed and grouped things differently, believing that resonances between microcosm and macrocosm constitute the most profound facts of existence. So while we readily appreciate the biographical accounts and Basic Annals, which most closely approximate modern novels and modern textbooks, the favorite classification schemes and organizing structures used by the early compilers of histories should rightly be the objects of equal interest to us today. Readers will doubtless recall Borges' gentle send-up when describing the "Chinese encyclopedia" supposedly discovered by a translator of his acquaintance. In Borge's fictional account, this *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*—aka the "Chinese encyclopedia"—supplies a bizarre fictitious taxonomy that divides all animals into fourteen categories, including "embalmed ones," those that belong to the emperor; suckling pigs; those that tremble as if mad; those drawn with a very fine brush whose tip uses camel hairs; those that have just broken the flower vase; those that, at a distance,

³⁹ De Certeau (1984).

⁴⁰ A PRC scholar prefers to distinguish the two concepts *shi* 世 and *dai* 代, with the first signifying "eras" as well the "generations," in contrast to the latter, referring to reigns or even smaller units. See Han Zhaoqi (2006).

⁴¹ The phrase occurs in Lehoux (2012), a fine treatment of Roman science.

resemble flies, and so forth.⁴² I love to laugh with Borges, but Borges' lesson has long been forgotten: Borges did not intend to single out the Chinese for their crazy Orientalist curiosities; he delighted rather in the equal arbitrariness besetting all human attempts to categorize the world and its things, noting (contra Durkheim) that elaborate classification schemes are so culturally specific as to make all of them seem sheer lunacy to observers outside the culture.

Hayden White decades ago insisted that the medieval chronicles breathe with the very life of the period, a world of scarcity and violence, a world where "things happen to people rather than one in which people do things."⁴³ (One thinks immediately of the "conjunctions" of time and fate that fascinated the Chinese thinkers.) In other words, a format reveals quite a bit about the visions of its initial makers and users, even if the medium is not the entire message (pace Marshall McLuhan). Ruminating on the format of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables leads us to consider a closely allied meaning of *biao*, that of "external manifestation of internal structure," as in the binomial expression *biaoli* 表裏. Liu Xie's 劉勰 (d. c. 522) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 repeatedly insists upon the mutual dependence of inner and outer orders (*biao li zhi yi ti zhe* 表裏之異體者), whose formal structures are apt to differ nonetheless.⁴⁴ This binome *biaoli* does not appear in the early Classics, but instead in conversations connected with the all-important topics of desire, motivation, and appearance, as in the *Shiji* phrase 文貌情欲相為內外表裏, or in the *Hanshu* discussions of calamity and good fortune (individual and dynastic).⁴⁵ How the visible relates to the hidden is the subject of this type of discourse.

⁴² For this, see Borges' "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (1942). Wilkins, a seventeenth-century philosopher, had proposed a universal language that would reflect a classification system encoding the description of the thing in the word itself. Hence *Zi* would identify the genus "beasts;" *Zit*, the "rapacious beasts of the dog kind;" and *Zita*, would specify "dog."

⁴³ Rosenberg and Grafton (2011), pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴ Liu Xie, *Wenxin diaolong*, chap. 4, *pian* 18.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., *Shiji* 12.486; 23.1173; *Hanshu* 27A.1316; 48.2227; 63.2758. The implication is that inner and outer structures should be "one," ideally. See Zhang Shoujie, *Shiji*, p. 28, commenting on posthumous names. Another meaning for *biao li* appears in the *Zuozhuan*, Lord Xi, Year 28, where it refers to the "cover and lining for the domain" (a state's natural strategic defenses); cf. similar uses in the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策. The number of non-strategic usages of *biaoli*, where the binome refers to "inner and outer" aspects of the exemplary person, increases in the Six Dynasties apparently, as in the *Weishu* usage: *biaoli wu chen* 表裏無塵 (*Weishu* 99.2205), possibly because of that usage in Yang Xiong's *Fayan*.

(b) The Tables in *Shiji* and *Hanshu*

Chronologies, lists, registers, calendars, and genealogies have a long history in early China. Famous excavated examples include the Shuihudi 睡虎地 *Gen shan tu* 良山圖 (no later than 217 BC), the Fuyang 阜陽 Year List (before 164 BC), and *Xingde* 刑德 and *Wuxing zhan* 五星占 from Mawangdui, also the several Kongjiapo 孔家坡 charts.⁴⁶ These charts and lists were frequently employed in divination asking how a specific time will summon a specific event or set of events. At the same time, most scholars of early China presume that the family registers and genealogical lists were kept for non-mantic reasons: for commemorative purposes, for instance, or to resolve inheritance disputes or attest a family's prominence. When it came time for Sima Qian (and possibly Sima Tan 司馬談) to compile their universal history,⁴⁷ formidable obstacles had to be confronted, when trying to unify time in the set of ten tables, for the *Shiji* aligns the different calendars favored by different polities in the pre-imperial and immediately post-imperial periods, which alignment could not but prove nettlesome.⁴⁸ Comparisons of the *Shiji* with other extant Western Han texts, including Liu Xin's 劉歆 "Passage of the Generations" (*Shijing* 世經) or the Han fragments from various "Basics of the Generations" (*Shi ben* 世本) annotated by the scholar Song Zhong 宋衷 (fl. 192),⁴⁹ convey the complexities – complexities whose implications were so great that the solutions proposed by Emperor Wudi's Senior Archivists could not dampen the disputes raging over the

⁴⁶ See the site report, *Suizhou Kongjiapo Hanmu jiandu*; for Mawangdui, see *Kaogu* 1975.3, Plates 2-3, *Wenwu* 1974.11, 37-39 (the planetary chart concerns the rise and fall of planets from 246-177 BC), and Harper (1988); for the *Gen shan tu*, see *Shuihudi Qinmu zhujian*, in Bray, et al., pp. 169-89, also Marc Kalinowski (2007), pp. 150, 53; Vankeerberghen (2007) gives a good account of the Year List from Fuyang (pp. 297-301), summarizing Hu Pingsheng (1989). As is typical, Harper analyzes nearly all *tu* in their "magico-religious uses," not distinguishing these from mundane administrative and other uses of the drawings, by his own account (p. 185).

⁴⁷ I am less and less certain that Sima Tan had written much of the *Shiji* at the time of his death. I explain my reasoning in "Friendship and Other Tropes in the Letter to Ren An," in Durrant et al. (2016).

⁴⁸ For these comments, see *Shiji* 14.511; 15.675-87; cf. Takigawa Kametarō 14/9, 15/2-6. I write "immediately post-imperial period" because it seems that the kingdoms in early Western Han kept their own local calendars.

⁴⁹ See the ICS Concordance Series *Shiben sizhong zhuzi suoyin* (1997). For example, Song Zhong 宋衷 notes, in annotating the "Taishi gong shu" 太史公書 (an early version of the *Shiji*) such discrepancies: 元王仁生貞王介。與世本不相應。不知誰是。

proper dating of key events and reigns.⁵⁰ In the case of the local lords of Lu during the Chunqiu period, discrepancies between *Shiji* and Liu's "Passage" astonish, because these particular lords of Lu are among the best attested historical figures of the pre-unification period, given how many members of the governing elite had to routinely refer to the *Annals* classic in the course of fulfilling their duties as administrators and judges. That said, questions of dating for the Chunqiu lords remained unsettled for two centuries after unification in 221 BC, when the imperial court purportedly promulgated the first unified calendar⁵¹ (See Fig. 1).⁵² According to the German Sinologist Robert Gassmann, in late Zhanguo only the chronology of the Zhou kings themselves "presented no problems" to the advisers shortly before unification; that statement, mostly right, does not preclude debates over dating, for the problems inevitably multiply exponentially as soon as one devising would posit a basic framework to house rulers' chronologies alongside hundreds, if not thousands of other people and events. And, judging from Gu Jiegang's annotated 1936 edition of the *Shiji*, even Gassmann's modest assertion is over-optimistic.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ouyang Xiu's "Preface to the Generational Table of Emperors and Kings" mocked Sima Qian, making four generations intervene between Yao and Shun, and also between Shun and Yu. For Ouyang Xiu, the numbers don't add up, if one counts the numbers of generations between Hou Ji and King Wen.

⁵¹ Gassmann (2013) argues that few dates relating to Mencius 孟子 are "stable" and fixed, even in the mid- to late Zhanguo period. Gassmann speaks of the "major mistakes" in chronological reconstructions accepted in such authoritative works as *The Cambridge History of Ancient China*, though this author (unlike Gassmann) thinks it doubtful that a rectified chronology can be readily established, given discrepancies among the relevant texts in the received tradition. Another scholar, Han Zhaoqi (2006), takes up the same problem of the early chronologies, noting discrepancies.

⁵² *Shiji* 6.240. Table also constructed on the basis of Gao Jiyi (2009).

⁵³ See *Shiji* (1936) p. 122 (red annotation placed at the end of *Shiji's Shi er zhuhou nianbiao*).

Figure 1. Debates on Chronology

《世經》、《史記》魯公在位年數之異同表

魯公	"魯世家"	"十二諸侯年表"	Liu Xin's 《世經》
伯禽	缺		46
考公	4		4
煬公	6		60 (54 more ??)
幽公	14		14
微公	50		50
厲公	37		37
獻公	32		50 (18 more ??)
慎公	30		30
武公	9	10 (no match ??)	2 (7 less ??)
懿公	9		9
柏御	11		11
孝公	27	38 (no match ??)	27

NOTE: As can be seen from this comparison of three authoritative works, Han experts in classical learning frequently debated matters of chronology. This chart shows surprising variants in dating the ducal reigns in Lu mentioned in the *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Annals*) ascribed to Kongzi the Sage.

Still, most of the sources available in Han times are now irretrievably lost, which means modern historians cannot evaluate many variables; happily those textual losses do not preclude attempts to situate events and leading figures within larger swaths of time. Hence Michael Loewe's seminal study of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables⁵⁴ in his *Men Who Governed Han China* (2004). In two chapters there Loewe introduces the crucial distinction between horizontal and vertical tables, arguing that each format came with distinct advantages and disadvantages.⁵⁵ For instance, the vertical allows

⁵⁴ See n. 6 above; esp. Loewe (2004), chap. 7 (pp. 208-50).

⁵⁵ By "horizontal" Tables, Loewe refers to those Tables where one can follow what happened over time by reference to the units indicated at the extreme right side of the Table. By contrast, "vertical" Tables list the relevant emperors' reigns or reign periods on the right, whereas the activities of various noble houses are given by unit at top; vertical Tables allow one to correlate the events over imperial reigns by moving the eye from top to down. Lin Jiong's (Song) *Gujin yuanliu zhi lun, xu ji*, cited in e-Siku quanshu, focuses instead on the division between tables that

for ready expansion by inserting a new strip, whereas the horizontal is more easily reconstituted, should the strip bindings fail, so long as the running heads take the form of successive divisions of time or other “forms of enumeration.” Loewe pushes the evidence, asking why one *Shiji* table chooses to employ the vertical when a similar tale in the *Hanshu* has a horizontal format, regardless of a substantial overlap in information.⁵⁶ Perhaps the choices of format indicate the contrasting visions and goals that informed these two books that are all too often conflated in the current historiography (see below). Equally worth our consideration is a related query: why does the *Shiji*, contrary to the *Hanshu*, put in a single table the kings from the Liu imperial clan and from non-imperial clans? Is it to show that the murderous proclivities of the early Western Han rulers hardly stopped with those outside their own ruling family? For surely the *Shiji* format is more likely to engender impertinent calculations about the speed with which the Han ruling house dispatched *all* its major allies, whether of the Liu clan or not. The single table requires the reader to ponder the dangers that increase exponentially in proportion to the size of the large estates, as well as the striking lack of deep family feeling within the Han ruling house itself, where no “kin is treated as [especially] close” (*qin qin* 親親), in utter defiance of the memorable *Annals* injunction.⁵⁷

On the other hand, the *Hanshu* tables manage well to forestall this sort of uncomfortable comparison, and hence they are apt to be taken more as catalogues of rebels and malefactors, which was presumably the Bans’ intention all along. Indeed, the *Hanshu* “Table of Kings and Nobles” (*Zhuhou wang biao* 諸侯王表) defends Liu Bang from the charges arising from the *Shiji* table devoted to Gaozu’s reign, disingenuously arguing that Gaozu’s fault lay not in his mistreatment of his relatives and allies, but rather in his overly generous treatment of the aristocrats, which led all but a few of his

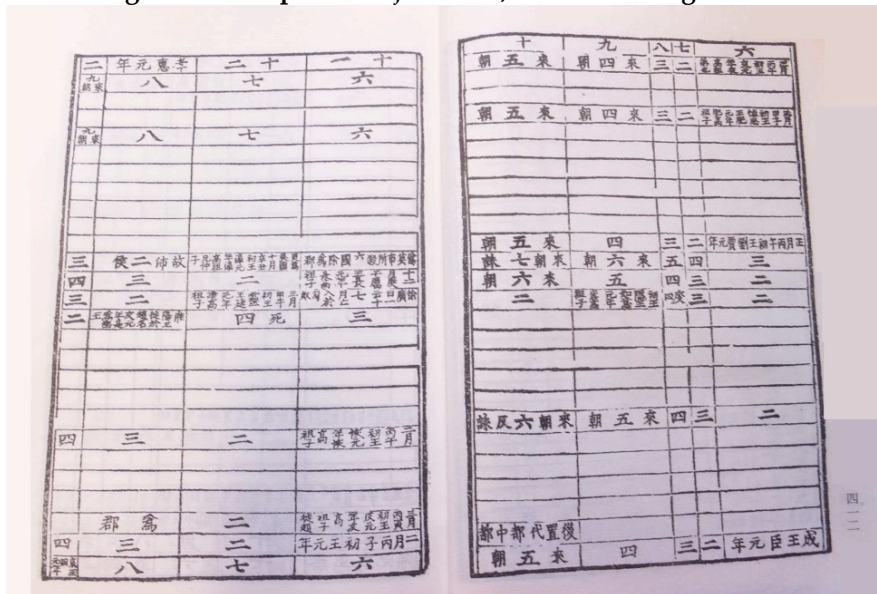
organize by lands vs. those that organize by time, seeing this as the crucial distinction.

⁵⁶ Contrast *Shiji* 17 (Table 5) and *Hanshu* 14 (Table 2).

⁵⁷ The *Shiji* Table 5 lists, as readers will recall, the dates of the accession of the kings, their prior rank at the time of their accessions, the complete count for the years of their reigns, their capital cities, the dates of their death, the dates and circumstances of the closure of the kingdom, and occasions, from 198 BC on, when kings paid their statutory visits to the Han imperial court. That no distinction is made between smaller and larger kingdoms, I would argue (contra Qian Daxin) is an intentional feature, as it allows Sima Qian to overwhelm the reader with the sheer number of criminal proceedings aimed against the kings and the multiple closures of kingdoms in waves. Interestingly enough, the *Shiji* also fails to make a great deal of Han vs. “barbarian” groups in its Tables, and its Tables reveal the conferments of noble titles on leaders of non-Han people. See Loewe (2004), pp. 230, 235.

subordinates to deem themselves his equals. The preference in the *Shiji* tables for Western Han to focus on the durations of reigns in terms of years, is anything but from innocent, then,⁵⁸ as the decision leaves more space cells unfilled. Those blanks magnify the effect of the *Shiji*'s reliance on format, horizontal or vertical, thereby foregrounding the abrupt entrances and sudden absences in the individual lives of the Western Han historical players themselves.⁵⁹ These blank space cells are particularly noticeable in *Shiji* Table 6 (*juan* 18), where the relentless drum of the same phrase "the country was extinguished" (*guo chu* 國除), punctuated by the staccato blanks, graphically signals what Michael Loewe calls the "purge of almost all surviving holders of Kao-ti's [i.e., Liu Bang's] marquisates ... carried out in 112 BC" (See Fig. 2a and b). Frankly, the *Hanshu*'s table regarding this same catastrophic event lacks the visual punch of its predecessor's

Figure 2a. Sample of *Shiji* Tables, Southern Song Edition



⁵⁸ Nor is the *Shiji* choice in several tables to list the years of tenure. See immediately below.

⁵⁹ Loewe (2004), p. 226, notes that the introductory remarks that Table 6 itself emphasizes "that in Han times the nobilities survived for comparatively short periods."

Figure 2b. Sample of *Shiji* Tables, Southern Song Edition

The image shows two pages of a *Shiji* table from the Southern Song edition. The tables are arranged in columns, with numbers and names written vertically. The left page has columns numbered 34 through 41, and the right page has columns numbered 27 through 33. Each cell contains a number and a name, often with smaller text below it. The right page has a vertical number '三七〇' on the far right edge.

NOTE: The earliest printed edition of the *Shiji* dates to 994, but the Southern Song (Shaoxing 1) purports to be based on it. Here are two pages from that edition's Tables section, which give readers a better idea of how early editions looked, as distinct from today's Zhonghua shuju edition and that of Zhang Dake.

repetitions.⁶⁰ Similarly, when the *Shiji* supplies the year counts for the tenures of those in high office, it virtually compels readers to chart the rapid changes in upward and downward mobility experienced by some of the most capable men in the land; notably, the *Hanshu* remains silent on this topic.⁶¹ That Sima Qian was adept at utilizing his tables to say the unsayable is neatly shown by his clever handling of the sticky fact that Gaozu

⁶⁰ *Hanshu* 6.187 (Dubs, *HFHD*, Vol. II, pp. 80f.; Dubs, *HFHD*, Vol. II, 80-81, n. 6f.). Cf. *Shiji* 19.1017. As Loewe (2004), p. 294, carefully recounts, 106 nobilities were extinguished, on what seems to have been a single trumped-up charge related to their all-important statutory visits to court, bringing to an end 17 or 18 of the original nobilities from Gaozu's reign, and others from subsequent reigns. The tone in the essay of Vankeerberghen (2007) differs substantially from Loewe (2004) on this matter; she talks of "the inability of the kings and nobles to hold onto their lands" (p. 300), telling a story that contradicts Sima Qian's own; again, on p. 305, V. speaks vaguely of the "forces of history," whereas Sima Qian's work, like Kongzi's *Annals*, wants to assign blame.

⁶¹ For a different view, Loewe (2004), p. 234, who assumes the Bans were simply seeking something more practical, "in view of the longer time span that the table of the *Hanshu* covers."

once had to share power with three rival kings reigning over his base of power in the Guanzhong basin,⁶² with that power-sharing occurring at the very moment in time to which the Han ruling house wished to date its founding. Relegating Gaozu to sixth place among the nine main contenders for power in this Table says a great deal, without further ado. Predictably, the *Hanshu* Tables section finds a way to skirt the issue entirely.

Aside from *Shiji* 61 and 129, the two chapters forming the bookends for the biographical section in his five-part history,⁶³ Sima Qian displays little inclination to depart from the standard narratives about larger-than-life characters, even if his definition of “hero” is more ample than most. Consequently, it is mainly in the Tables and Hereditary Houses sections that the Senior Archivist invites readers to seek out larger trends, such as the gradual transition from the idyllic vassal system ascribed to early Western Zhou to ever-increasing direct control by the center of the commandery-county system, propelled by internal weaknesses and intentional acts of sabotage.⁶⁴ After all, only those two sections trace the rocky trajectories of entire noble families, subordinating individual persons or groups of people to the larger line. In this way, the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables illustrate just how much their respective compilers were willing to tie larger trends in relation to court actions. *Shiji* Table 9 (*juan* 21), for example, opens with the text of Wudi’s decree “granting” to the kings the special “privilege” of parceling out their lands among their sons and younger brothers, in return for noble titles. As this decree is presented without overt interpretation, the reader is bound to wonder about the power dynamics it implies.

Michael Loewe presumed that, given the expense of preparing bamboo and silk for manuscripts, a primary concern to the early compiler was necessarily “wasted” or “vacant” space.⁶⁵ Though Loewe’s knowledge of Han history is unrivalled, I beg to demur, even as I grant the high cost of

⁶² *Shiji* 17. Hence the title of the Table covered by the crucial years 206-202 is “Table, by Months, of the Transition from Qin to Chu,” an ambiguous title that never resolves the question whether Xiang Yu or his rival Liu Bang represents “Chu.” Crucially the identity of the “great sage” to succeed Qin is not revealed. What the Table makes perfectly obvious, however, is how many obstacles lay in Gaozu’s path to power, how often he suffered defeat in the battlefield, and how much Gaozu was forced to share his original power base in 206 with three others (*Shiji* 16.775).

⁶³ I have looked at these two “bookends” in “Assets Accumulating: Sima Qian’s perspective on moneymaking, virtue, and history,” in a volume entitled *Views from Within, Views from Beyond: Approaches to the Shiji as an Early Work of Historiography*, eds. Olga Lomova and Hans van Ess (2015), pp. 131-169.

⁶⁴ Miyazaki Ichisada (1979), chap. 5, emphasizes the close relation between the Hereditary Houses and Tables sections in the *Shiji*.

⁶⁵ Loewe (2004), pp. 212-213, 234 especially.

producing manuscripts in Western and Eastern Han.⁶⁶ In my view, the empty space cells in the modern Zhonghua shuju editions of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, albeit deeply rooted in factual events, are calculated beautifully to tell a memorable tale “without using words” (*wu yan zhi wen* 無言之文), though the blank spaces are fewer (and hence all the more startling) in the earliest extant editions (review Fig. 2; cf. Fig. 3a and b), with some being filled with numbers.⁶⁷ Recall the ominous cast of discontinuities, portending serious malfunctions at the court led by those very Han emperors.

⁶⁶ See *Song ke shisi hang ben Shiji*, said to be based on the AD 994 edition (no longer extant). For early editions, see also Xu Shu (2004); Long Liangdong (1994), pp. 903-925; Zhang Yuchun (2001). Zhang says that the earliest extant printed edition of the *Shiji* is AD 1004 (Jingde 1, under Zhenzong), and the second, the Jingyou edition dated to 1035 (under Song Renzong, Jingyou 2); the third dates to 1061.

⁶⁷ Regarding “deeply rooted:” some omissions are hard to account for, however, including Ni Kuan’s long tenure as Imperial Counsellor (Loewe, private conversation, Oct. 19, 2013). Many early editions routinely fill the space cells with the numbers signifying the specific year in a given reign, which only highlights the remaining blank spaces. The *Shiji suoyin* for Table 1 remarks on the utility of the tables “laying out” obscure patterns in history. See Niu Yunzheng’s formulation in *Shiji ping zhu*, regarding this, publicized by Yang Yanqi (1983) and others. Likewise Wang Yue’s *Du Shiji shi biao* emphasized that the important thing is not what Sima Qian wrote in the tables, but what he did not write. See below.

Figure 3b. *Shiji* Tables, Zhang Dake Format

高祖功臣侯者年表第六 529

国名 〔注一〕	侯 功	高祖十二	孝惠七	高后八	孝文二 十三	孝景十六	建元至元封 六年三十 六，太初元 年尽后元二 年十八。	侯 第 〔注二〕	
平 阳	以中涓〔注 三〕从起沛， 至霸上，以 侯。以将军 入汉，以左 丞相出征 齐、魏，以 右丞相为平 阳侯万六百 户。	七 六年十二 月甲申， 懿侯曹参 元年。	五 其二 六年十 月，靖侯 相国。密 元年。	二 六年十 月，靖侯 相国。密 元年。	八 十九 后四年， 简侯奇元 年。	四 后四年， 夷侯时元 年。	三 十四 年，恭侯 襄元年。	十 十六 元元 光鼎 五年三 年，今 恭侯宗 襄元年 年。	二
信 武	以中涓从起 宛、胸，入 汉，以骑都 尉定三秦， 击项	七 六年十二 月甲申， 肃侯靳歙 元年。	七 六年十 月，夷侯 亭元年。	五 六年十 月，夷侯 亭元年。	三 十八 后三年， 侯亭坐事			十 一	

〔注一〕国名：汉封功臣，大者王，小者侯。此栏国名皆侯国。

〔注二〕侯第：高祖平定天下后从八年至十二年分批封侯，共一百四十三侯。首批封侯十八人，次第为：萧何第一，曹参二，张敖三，周勃四，樊噲五，酈商六，奚涓七，夏侯婴八，灌婴九，傅宽十，靳歙十一，王陵十二，陈武十三，王吸十四，薛欧十五，周昌十六，丁复十七，晁遂十八。高后二年诏丞相陈平写定一百四十三侯次第功勋，藏诸宗庙，副在有司，司马迁据此作表。侯第栏先后顺序与侯第并不吻合。如曹参功第二，而表在首，萧何功第一，而表在十三，因表按受封先后顺序，排列故也。《索隐》曰：“封参在六年十二月，封何在六年正月，高祖十月因秦改元，故十二月在正月前也。”按，张敖在高祖九年四月封宣平侯，而侯第在三，疑为吕后所改。又，高祖八年所封深泽侯夜，桐侯温疥，磨侯程黑，

NOTE: This shows the variant formats employed to render the Tables section in the standard citation text of the *Shiji* (Zhonghua shuju) and that in Zhang Dake's edition.

Examples of this principle will suffice to see where I am going with this. *Hanshu* Table 7b (*juan* 19b) ought to verify the Han throne's good treatment of its highest court officers, but the enormous numbers of blank space cells raises questions about the One Man's ability "to know [how to employ] men" in successive courts, even if the *Hanshu* table muddies impressions by tracking the histories of no fewer than fourteen ministerial posts, rather than just the three highest officers of the realm.⁶⁸ Admittedly, in a few cases the noble lines came to a "natural end," because of the deaths of male heirs, but further investigation shows time and time again that the line was forcibly extinguished, after allegations of treason or sexual misconduct. Small wonder that few allies of the Han imperial house showed great loyalty to it. As the *Shiji* table's postface [now preface] shows, only the King of Changsha, the most land-poor of the kings, had his line last much beyond two generations of forty years. The Han moralizers could build a strong case that inadequate moral instruction emanating from the highest in the land was the likely cause.⁶⁹ So when the *xu* 序 blandly states that the table will demonstrate (*zhu* 著) the different eras' inclinations towards benevolence and duty, as well as their achievements and merits, this condemns the ruling line as much or more than the ruling lines that once owed the rulers allegiance.⁷⁰

Similarly *Shiji* Table 10 (*juan* 22) purportedly illustrates not only the links between past and present, but also the Han throne's willingness to "renew the old" (*wen gu* 溫故)⁷¹ via the adoption of new offices. It supplies fourteen horizontal rows listing the chief officers at the imperial capital, from Chancellor, Imperial Counsellor, and Supreme Commander, to the Nine Ministers, and so on. At a glance, readers see how extraordinarily high a percentage of those holding the highest offices in the land under Wudi were executed, committed suicide, or "died in prison;" after 91 BC, virtually all of his top officers were tried or committed suicide, many due to their sympathies for the heir apparent.⁷² While advertising how brief the

⁶⁸ *Documents*, "The Counsels of Gao Yao" (*Gao Yao mo* 皋陶謨), chap. 4, par. 1, makes this the chief business of government.

⁶⁹ *Shiji* 14.686 makes it clear that Sima Qian thinks one should "imitate the later kings" (in Xunzi's memorable phrase), but one cannot for two reasons: (1) either the records are not clear enough to allow imitation, not to mention emulation; or (2) they have not provided worthy examples.

⁷⁰ *Shiji* 19.977.

⁷¹ This phrase comes from *Analects* 2/11.

⁷² Loewe (2004), p. 246, gives the tally: of the 56 entries dated between 203 and 20 BC, 24 concerned the death of senior officials; 15 their dismissals; 5 their suicides; and two their executions. As Loewe notes, not all these matters are acknowledged or discussed elsewhere in the *Shiji*. For the second fact, see the entries under 91 BC

tenure of the high court officers, the table alludes to other worrisome trends at Wudi's court as well: the brief tenures of those high officials contracted over time,⁷³ the overturning of longstanding precedents by which the Imperial Counsellor (*yushi dafu* 御史大夫) was routinely promoted to the Chancellor's office,⁷⁴ a growing imbalance between the posts doled out to generals as compared to the heads of the civil administration, with generals often appointed wholesale in batches during certain reigns,⁷⁵ and the court's departure from the defensive wars associated with Wendi to Wudi's wars of foreign aggression.⁷⁶ These trends together helped Wudi curtail the power of his chancellors, whose position had been very strong in the earlier reigns during Western Han. Meanwhile, from 87 BC through 20 BC, the posts of Marshal-of-State and Commander-in-chief were always filled (in utter violation of earlier precedents), except for a short interval of four years between 53 and 49 BC. The deaths of the holders of this post, as it happens, are recorded in inverted texts (also called "raised row" or *ti lan* 提欄 units),⁷⁷ as if to reflect upon the strength this post increasingly enjoys within the imperial bureaucracy, turning it upside down (but more on this below).⁷⁸

(*Hanshu* 19B.789). Zhang Dake (1986) 張大可, pp. 116-17, also notes that the great events become few and far and between.

⁷³ A good illustration of this comes from *Shiji* 10.1141, where three Imperial Censors are appointed in four succeeding years; cf. *Shiji* 10.1146.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., the events of 103 BC, where the Imperial Coachman is promoted to Chancellor (*Shiji* 22.1141).

⁷⁵ Esp. those of Jingdi, Wudi, and Zhaodi.

⁷⁶ Gaozu and Jingdi were nearly as murderous as Wudi, even if they were fully preoccupied with killing those outside their own courts. Ding Bo's assessment casts this table as a battle between the emperor and his administration, rather than an internal balance within that administration. Wu Shu-hui (2014), by contrast, would like to emphasize how many high official posts were filled by military men from the time of Zhang Cang. Of the 143 nobilities established in Gaozu's reign, during Gaozu's and Gaohou's reigns 16 were extinguished (those with the biggest lands); during Wendi's another 19; during Jingdi's another 36, and during Wudi's early period 65 (until the end of the Yuanfeng reign period) and 7 more afterwards.

⁷⁷ This binome refers to the fact that each case of inverted writing is lifted one row above the grid of where the incumbent to whom it refers is recorded and a few columns to the left. It is possible that this feature is used in recensions where no red ink appears. The use of red ink to comment upon texts can be found in the excavated Fuyang strips of c. 165 BC; an entire text in red ink is found in one version of the "Xingde" manuscript (called "Xingde C" in Kalinowski's essay).

⁷⁸ This trend is underscored by the fact that the evidence relating the personal histories of these generals begins to outweigh that appended to the names of chancellors. Cf. Wu Shu-hui (2014) (See note 1.) Wu speculates that more than one

Simply by correlating the tenures in the high offices with the empires' "great affairs" (*da shi* 大事), the same *Shiji* table asks us to decide which of the throne's activities now go well beyond the "great affairs of state" of war and sacrifice prescribed in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳.⁷⁹ For not a few "great affairs" identified in the Simas' day concerned economic policies, e.g., those in 175 BC (changes to laws on coinage) and in 167 BC (changes to land tax and corvée duties), not to mention some weird (portentous?) coincidences, for instance, that Emperor Wen's visit to Dai would be followed by a major earthquake, in 169 BC.⁸⁰ Readers pursuing this line of thought quickly apprehend how brilliantly *Shiji* Table 10 communicates the signal lack of achievements under Wudi from 112 BC until the fateful year of 91 BC, when the heir apparent revolts, for the table lists no great events whatsoever for that long span of time.⁸¹ Zhaodi's reign likewise comes off as an equally great mediocrity. Even Xuandi (r. 73-49 BC), the much celebrated emperor credited with a "mid-dynastic restoration," has remarkably few "great affairs" to boast of. Yes, in 70 BC, after the untimely death of his first empress, Xuandi takes Huo Guang's 霍光 daughter as empress, and the marriage is duly recorded, but this marriage just encouraged a dangerous concentration of political power in the hands of the Huo family, which the court soon countered by accusing the Huos en masse of fomenting rebellion. Xuandi names an heir; he conducts a few worship ceremonies and shortly before his death, he gives silk, wine, or oxen to a few disadvantaged groups. It matters little that Sima Qian did not live long enough to write the entries on Zhaodi and Xuandi, so Chu Shaosun 褚少孫 or another

author can be discerned in the Tables inclusion or omission of events. This is plausible, but mere speculation.

⁷⁹ *Zuozhuan*, Lord Cheng, Year 13: 國之大事在祀與戎。

⁸⁰ *Shiji* 22.1127, for the earthquake. Other earthquakes are also reported, as for 143 BC (*Shiji* 22.1132) and 131 (ibid 1135). For a typical entry on the "great affair" of war, see the Xiongnu 匈奴 invasion reported in SJ 22.1129, SJ 22.1138, both of which report Xiongnu incursions deep into the Han empire (and close to the capital).

⁸¹ Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫 (1883-1955) rejects the possibility of Liu Xiang or an associate compiling Table 10, since it lists no "great affairs of state" after 50 BC, but since we do not understand the Han idea of a "great affair," we can hardly say with confidence whether any such affairs were purposely omitted after 50 BC to convey a lesson. See Yu Jiaxi (1997), p. 29. Indeed, the row for Major Events of State in the latter half of the Table remains empty, not because of compiler's omission, I suspect, but rather because power has shifted to the Marshal-of-State-and-General-in-Chief (*da sima da jiangjun* 大司馬大將軍), whose power exceeds that of the Chancellor of the regular bureaucracy in policy-making. That blank spaces are meaningful assertions in themselves about power shifts within the court is also the opinion of Wu Shu-hui (2014).

classical scholar like him continued “in the style of” the Simas.⁸² Meanwhile, the stunning lack of any preface or postface for Table 10 suggests that Sima Qian and his “continuator” wanted readers to seek clues for interpreting the text based on the set of facts presented via the table, which yield a fairly unambiguous picture of inept, disinterested, or immature Western Han rulers.

That the tables are meant to deliver “praise and blame” goes without saying, given Sima Qian’s continual claim that his *Taishi gong shu* 太史公書 is a latter-day extension of the *Annals* classic.⁸³ As Mao Kun 茅坤 (1512-1601) put it, “Kongzi compiled the *Annals* and Sima Qian was able to cleave to his example, making the tables the traces of the basic and secondary principles, florescence and decline.”⁸⁴ The foregoing mentions but a few obvious examples of the special messages which the tables could be made to deliver by the clever compilers.⁸⁵ Certainly, Sima Qian (and the Bans who came after him) drew attention to the impact and import of compiling the tables, carefully delineating those compilations from mere acts of transcription.⁸⁶ Heaven’s decrees, Sima Qian pointedly warns, are “hard to narrate, and it takes sages to discern them!”⁸⁷ The sheer ambition of Sima Qian’s implicit claim to sagehood here bespeaks the huge investment he made to fashion his tables as the interpretive key to the operations of Heaven’s decrees within human society. Presumably, the Bans cherished similar ambitions to establish a grand tradition, if the Bans’ “Table of Figures, Past and Present” is any guide. Many scholars hasten to assert that Sima Qian introduced

⁸² See *Shiji* 22.1147, 1148, 1150. Of course, Sima Qian did not live long enough to write these entries; they were presumably written by Chu Shaosun. On Chu, see Hans van Ess (2015).

⁸³ *Shiji* 130.3304.

⁸⁴ Mao’s *Shiji pinglun* 史記平論 (Critique of *Shiji*), cited in Zhang Dake (2002), p. 288.

⁸⁵ In the row corresponding to the Chancellor’s position, the part of the Table 10 before 112 BC records the Chancellor’s position in a manner that differs from the way used after 112 BC; as ennoblement was only automatic for the Chancellor after 112 BC, again we see a subtle arrangement signifying profound structural changes in the administration of the realm. Similarly, that fuller information is provided for the *yushi dafu* after 44 BC signals a change in the relative status of that position vis-à-vis the Chancellor. I posit the idea, therefore, that the Table maps shifting power relations among the highest administrative posts at court, rather than focusing merely on the Chancellor.

⁸⁶ See *Shiji* 13.488, 15.687, 17.803, for example, where Sima Qian insists upon his authorship in such matters.

⁸⁷ *Shiji* 14.505. In this same preface, Sima Qian comes very close to articulating some of the ideas found in Ban Biao’s “On the Destiny of Kings” (*Wang ming lun* 王命論). See *ibid.*, pp. 505-506, for details.

innovations when he periodized the history of the Central Plains powers, but given how few genuine materials are extant from early China, it is hard to ascertain now what was truly innovative then.⁸⁸ Still, there can be no doubt that the Tables highlight the main effects of royal or imperial court policies on those below, the kings, nobles, and commoners throughout the realm,⁸⁹ tracing the real-life impact of the lauded “divine rule” emanating out from the imperial court.

Above I have stressed the visual impact of the tables. Therefore, let me briefly compare the discussion in Gu Yong’s 谷永 memorial warning of the imminent convergence of three disastrous cosmic cycles, contrasting the text of that memorial with the visual impact of a modern table illustrating Gu Yong’s point. I cite first the relevant part of Gu’s memorial:

Your Majesty inherits the meritorious legacy of eight previous reigns. [As you are the ninth Han ruler], you confront the Yang’s last phase. You have passed the chronological conjunction of Three Times Seven,⁹⁰ and are now confronting that stage in the cycle corresponding to Hexagram 25, “No Hope” (*Wuwang* 无妄), and moreover Your reign has hit the “Disasters in the 106th Year.” Now these Three Troubles,⁹¹ though of disparate types, are due to converge in time.⁹² The twenty-year interval since Your ascent to the throne in the first year of the reign period “Establish the Beginning” (33 BC) has witnessed multiple

⁸⁸ See Zheng Qiao’s *Tongzhi*, passim, on innovations he finds in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* versions.

⁸⁹ Itō Tokuo (1994), pp. 255-90, emphasizes this point. As Fujita Katsuhisa (1995), 63-65, shows, Sima Qian feels little compunction about criticizing Jingdi and Wudi, if the extant *Shiji* reproduces his text, but the Tables render judgments with devastating effect, insofar as they keep forcing us to consider others besides the Zhou kings and the Qin and Han emperors. For the possibility that the chapters where Sima Qian most trenchantly criticized Jingdi and Wudi went “missing,” and so were later “replaced” after Sima Qian’s death by other historians, see the entire controversy regarding the “ten missing chapters,” as recounted by Lü Shihao (2009).

⁹⁰ Meaning, people thought the Han was approaching the time when 210 years (3 x 7, multiplied by 10) would be over, and its dynastic rule would elapse. This comment may simultaneously refer to the fact that Chengdi himself had been on the throne a total of twenty-one years when the memorial was sent. This would double the predictors for misfortune, since waning Nine is inauspicious as well.

⁹¹ As Wang Xianqian (1900) says, the three most dangerous points in the cycles of Three Times Seven, in the Hexagram-*qi* cycle, and in the dynastic cycle (it being the 106th year).

⁹² This may refer to the fact that some are due to the times being at the critical junctures in the cosmic cycles, and some, to misconduct by those in power.

disasters and great prodigies that overlap and are sharply increasing—more, even, than those recorded in the *Annals* classic. During the eight previous generations [of Han rule], such matters as these were clearly recorded, and no effort was made to keep them a secret. To make matters worse, this year, in the first month, on the *jihai* day [the first day of the month], there was a solar eclipse—all the more ominous for occurring on the very day when the year, month, and day all began their counts. Then, in the fourth month, on the *dingyou* day, the various meteorites in all directions in broad daylight rained down from the sky,⁹³ and in the seventh month, on the *xinwei* day, comets crossed the sky. As it is now the time of the Three Troubles converging, disasters and prodigies are proliferating. Therefore there have been famines and years of dearth, one following after another, so that there are no stores of grain left [in the imperial granaries or in private hands].⁹⁴

Now comets represent the very worst sort of inauspicious anomaly, as they are generated from the concentrated essential spirit of Earth. The response, which had stars falling to earth, will first emerge after the famines, which will spawn, in turn, civil wars. In other words, Your Majesty has little time to lose,⁹⁵ before even a sterling character accumulating good deeds [such as Your Majesty], will not be able to staunch the tide, I fear!⁹⁶

How much clearer and more convincing is the same convergence presented via two charts, whose coinciding cycles confirm one another, locating the triply dangerous stretch of years to the imminent future after 12 BC (Fig. 4).⁹⁷

⁹³ This passage is the *locus classicus* for the phrase *liu yun* 流隕. Usually these are identified as meteorites, but they could conceivably be asteroids. See Needham (1959), Vol. III, 433.

⁹⁴ This material in brackets comes from assertions made below in the memorial.

⁹⁵ Literally, “the period will not last long,” but the particle *jue* 厥, as in *Documents* usage, signifies “his” in reference to a superior (signifying here the emperor).

⁹⁶ Literally, be able to rescue the state or the ruling line or the people (or all of the above).

⁹⁷ Griet Vankeerberghen is owed thanks for compiling the colorful Table in Nylan and Vankeerberghen (2015), which illustrates Gu Yong’s memorial’s contentions about timing. I translated the memorial with the help of Michael Loewe.

Figure 4. These two tables help readers interpret the obscure prose found in Gu Yong's memorial, which speaks of several cosmic trends coming together at precise points during chronological cycles. The full text of that memorial is translated in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen (eds.) (2013), *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Four Beginnings 四始 and Five Junctures¹

(Colors match those in the Table of Seven Times Three. Note that the danger periods in both tables coincide. Yellow = 天門; Grey = "transfer in Mandate 革命; Orange = transfer in governance 革政.

Branch	Four Beginnings Poems	Season	Yin/yang cycle	Five Junctures Odes	Yin/yang nodal point
zi 子					
chou 丑					
yin 寅	"Four Steeds" (Si mu 四牡)	Start of summer	?		
mao 卯				"Heaven Protects" (Tian bao 天保)	?
chen 辰					
si 巳	"Barbel Fish" ([Nan you] Jia yu 嘉魚)	Start of autumn	?		
wu 午				"Gathering White Millet" (Cai qi 采芑)	apex of Yang qi, which gave birth to Yin
wei 未					
shen 申	"Wild Geese" (Hong yan 鴻雁)	Start of winter	?		
you 酉				"Minister of War" (Qi fu 祈父)	?
xu 戌				"Tenth Month Conjunction" (Shi yue zhi jiao 十月之交)	?
hai 亥	"Great Brightness" (Da ming 大明)	Start of spring	?	"Great Brightness" (Da ming 大明)	apex of Yin, which gave birth to Yang

¹ The five "nodal points" marking junctures or transitions and named after the five Earthly Branches *Mao, You, Wu, Xu, and Hai*), which were then tied to the following five *Odes* poems: "Heaven Protects" (*Tian bao*), "Minister of War" (*Qi fu*), "Gathering White Millet" (*Cai qi*), "Tenth Month Conjunction" (*Shi yue zhi jiao*), and "Great Brightness." Mao Odes nos. 166, 185, 178, 193, 236; Legge trans., 255, 284, 236, 320, 427.

	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	131-140		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	141-150		
<i>si</i> 巳	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	151-160		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	161-170		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	171-180	174=Han 195	12 BCE (Gu Yong)
<i>wu</i> 午	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	181-190		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	191-200	191=Han 210	9 CE (Xin dynasty)
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	201-210		
<i>wei</i> 未	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	211-220		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	221-230		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	231-240		
<i>shen</i> 申	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	241-250		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	251-260		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	261-270		
<i>you</i> 酉	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	271-280		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	281-290		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	291-300		
<i>xu</i> 戌	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	301-310		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	311-320	314=Han 333; 320=Han 339	127 CE (Yang Hou) 133 CE (Lang Yi)
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	321-330		
<i>hai</i> 亥	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	331-340		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	341-350	342=Han 360 346= Han 364	159CE: Li Yun
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	351-360		
<i>zi</i> 子	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	1-10		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	11-20		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	21-30		
<i>chou</i> 丑	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	31-40		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	41-50		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	51-60		
<i>yin</i> 寅	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	61-70		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	71-80		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	81-90		
<i>mao</i> 卯	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	91-100		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	101-110		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	111-120		
<i>chen</i> 辰	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	121-130		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	131-140		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	141-150		
<i>si</i> 巳	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	151-160		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	161-170		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	171-180		
<i>wu</i> 午	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	181-190		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	191-200		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	201-210		
<i>wei</i> 未	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	211-220		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	221-230		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	231-240		
<i>shen</i> 申	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	241-250		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	251-260		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	261-270		
<i>you</i> 酉	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	271-280		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	281-290		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	291-300		
<i>xu</i> 戌	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	301-310		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	311-320		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	321-330		
<i>hai</i> 亥	first period (<i>meng</i> 孟)	331-340		
	second period (<i>zhong</i> 仲)	341-350		
	third period (<i>ji</i> 季)	351-360		

Yellow = 天門

Grey = "transfer in Mandate 革命"

Orange = "transfer in governance 革政"

(c) Problems Posed by One Table, “Table of Figures, Past and Present”

Before Liu Zhiji, no early authors, so far as I know, queried the inclusion in the *Hanshu* of what strikes moderns as an utterly bizarre chapter: the *Hanshu* “Table of Figures, Past and Present” or *Gujin ren biao*, compiled either by Ban Gu 班固, or by Ban Gu and Ban Zhao 班昭.⁹⁸ The table is unusual in several respects, and one of the rare innovations to the established forms of history-writing to be found in the *Hanshu* compilation. Most obviously, this table in this Han history fails to mention any people in Western or Eastern Han, since a few Qin notables plus rebels against the Qin (e.g., Chen She 陳涉) are the last figures to turn up in this table. As a result, the term “present” must refer to the time “prior to the last three centuries or so.” Probably, the *Hanshu* compiler(s) reckoned discretion as the better part of valor, being mindful of the risks that could be incurred by disparaging the living descendants of Western Han ministerial families, not to mention those of the Western Han emperors. We must recall that around AD 62 Ban Gu was accused of “privately changing the history of the realm,” and his family library was confiscated. After he was exonerated, he submitted drafts of his historical writings to the imperial court for its approval.⁹⁹

As modern academics face fewer risks in reconstructing history, they consider a more pressing problem to be this: what criterion or set of criteria was originally used by the table’s compiler(s) to rate people from ranks 1-9? Rank 1 is reserved for a few sages, the usual lot; rank 2, for “humane” worthies, where heredity often correlates with “worth.” By rank 3, reserved for “wise men,” the proper definitions to be attached to such lofty abstractions embodied by exemplary figures becomes ever more elusive, the

⁹⁸ The identity of the compiler(s) is uncertain. Liu Zhiji’s *Shitong* (*waipian* 3) says that the *Hanshu* was unfinished when Ban Gu died in prison and that his erudite sister received an imperial order to complete the unfinished work and teach it to others. Moreover, no fewer than ten persons, including Ma Rong 馬融, student of Ban Zhao, were selected to receive a reading (*shou du* 受讀) from her. The eight tables, as well as the *Tianwen zhi* 天文志, were not yet finished and much of this was done by Ma Xu 馬續. But the *Gujin ren biao* does not much resemble the other materials, original to Ban Gu and not. Clearly, Liu’s remarks are based on *Hou Hanshu* 84.2784, but the problem remains. That text says only that Ban Gu had not yet arrived at a final completion (*wei ji jing* 未及竟) of the eight tables and the *Tianwen zhi* when he died, and that Hedi ordered Ban Zhao to complete them. I thank Hans van Ess (personal communication, May 2015) for confirming my own impressions that authorship of the tables cannot be established at this remove.

⁹⁹ *Hou Hanshu* 40A.1334.

frustration increasing as one proceeds on down to the lowest ranks, with the bottom rank allotted to the outright stupid or morally benighted persons.¹⁰⁰ Judging from the various collectanea, Song through Ming, that preserve fragmentary citations from this table, the Zhonghua shuju version of this Table of exemplars reproduces occasional misprints or intentional alterations designed to upgrade or downgrade historical figures according to a single moralistic view of history.¹⁰¹ That said, certain assignments to rank still intrigue. The “Table of Figures,” for instance, rates the First Emperor of Qin much more highly than would later moralizers.¹⁰² And why, pray tell, were more than 2,000 “people” needed to populate a table to transmit the relatively easy-to-understand point that gross misdoing summons misfortune, toppling dynasties and all who serve them? And why also employ such a peculiar method to register this point? For if this *Hanshu* table purports to rate people, a not insubstantial proportion of those alleged “people” come from fables and fictions, one unambiguous example being Chaos or Huntun 渾沌, borrowed from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.¹⁰³ The inclusion of so many mythical, semi-legendary, or fabulous characters within a single table sits ill with the Bans’ general air of cautious, even plodding rationality.

Wang Liqi 王利器 is one of the few scholars in any era to have made a study of the “Table of Figures, Past and Present.” Wang compiled a lengthy book where he locates the earliest source or sources for each and every one of the “people” mentioned in the *Hanshu* table.¹⁰⁴ According to his former student, Wang Zijin 王子今, Wang Liqi himself confessed to having no firm convictions about the table’s original aims. Certainly the brief preface that opens Wang Liqi’s marvel of erudition gives no clue as to Wang’s thinking on the matter. However, Wang Liqi remarked to his student that he tended to think of the table as a kind of early dictionary. When I first heard that, I thought the senior Wang’s offhand comment made little sense. The early lexicons and primers that we have are wholly or partly rhymed¹⁰⁵—just

¹⁰⁰ See *Hanshu* 20.863.

¹⁰¹ Some instances of tampering can be catalogued, thanks to the fragments preserved in collectanea from Ming and Qing. By comparing the rankings given important figures, correlating different editions of the same text, we can see that certain figures were upgraded or downgraded.

¹⁰² In this, Ban Gu follows Sima Qian, who praised Qin unification, especially in Table 3. See Zhang Dake (2002), p. 289.

¹⁰³ See the last anecdote in *Zhuangzi*, chap. 7 (*Ying di wang* 應帝王).

¹⁰⁴ See Wang Liqi (1988). For a short review of Wang Liqi’s book, see Zhang Handong (2000).

¹⁰⁵ E.g., Shi You’s 史游 *Ji jiu pian* 急救篇 (comp. c. 33 BC), *Cang jie pian* 倉頡篇, *Shi Zhou pian* 史籀篇, or the *Sanzi jing* 三字經. On these, see, e.g., Roger Greatrex (1994); Françoise Bottéro (2011), Nylan (2011), Part IV.

what we would expect in a manuscript culture heavily dependent upon mnemonic devices. After mulling over Wang Liqi's idea, its plausibility strikes me forcefully. Many early mnemonic devices, East and West, utilized the device of slotting people, things, events, or ideas in specific visual units corresponding to slices of time and space.¹⁰⁶ (Recall Matteo Ricci's "memory palace," made famous by Jonathan Spence's book.) If this chart of 2000+ figures functioned as a repository for the court rhetorician of all the historical exempla that would be needed in his profession, then it would make sense to locate each exemplary figure in a particular site whose relative position would aid the rhetorician whose job required him not only to memorize their collective names, but also the court-approved value to be attached to each figure.

Increasing the plausibility of Wang Liqi's hypothesis is the classical-era thinkers' belief that the heart functioned as a storehouse of sensory perceptions, with hearing and seeing setting off complex reactions consisting of one part recognition and one part assessment. An apple perceived as red was simultaneously dubbed good, at least by the woman whose memory and experience predisposed her to like red apples. But judging the inherent properties of human beings is so much more complex than judging the right qualities to assign familiar tastes or sights.¹⁰⁷ While there can be visceral responses to a given person, where, by habit or experience, one senses that a person with whom one has had sustained contact should be liked or disliked, sought out or shunned, either the trappings of power or the appearance of affability can deceive most people most of the time. Time alone facilitates correct judgment, in that close observation of a person's interactions and responses to disparate people, situations, and events will, sooner or later, reveal the true mettle of that person's character—or so the early thinkers insisted. Interestingly enough, by Eastern Han all the "people" rated in the "Table of Figures, Past and Present" had had their deeds debated over time, so their utility as rhetorical precedents referring to effective action in the real world was duly assured. In the words of Paul Veyne, this collection of figures had thereby gained the authority of the Vulgate.¹⁰⁸

A second idea presents itself, the two hypotheses being by no means mutually exclusive: that the compiler(s) shaped this "Table of Figures" as a way of responding to an important series of debates bandied about in Qin through Han times regarding the advisability or futility of using "history as

¹⁰⁶ That Chinese thinking continually conflates these two is significant, in and of itself. For examples, one may go to Yang Xiong's 揚雄 *Taixuan jing* 太玄經 or, in the early twentieth century, to chapter 14, in George Kates (1953), *passim*.

¹⁰⁷ On this, see Nylan (2008).

¹⁰⁸ For this, see Veyne (1988), esp. p. 8.

a mirror." Sima Qian himself explicitly pronounces history to be a mirror, as does the compiler of the *Hanshu* tables.¹⁰⁹ As for the compilers of the *Hanshu*, both He Chuo 何焯 (1661-1722) and Qian Daxin 錢大昕 (1728-1804) believed that Ban also "wanted to use antiquity to know the present," but lamented that "mirrors themselves have no fixed knowledge" (*jing wu ding shi* 鑒無定識).¹¹⁰ Again, these two sets of tables suggest a wide range of thinking on such complex matters. Whereas Sima Qian boasted that his history "thoroughly comprehended the changes that had occurred in the past and present" (*tong gu jin zhi bian* 通古今之變).¹¹¹ Ban Gu professed to be more interested in the "constants" than with the "changes." Hence his ambition to "everywhere pierce the five cardinal duties, comprehending and correlating above and below" (*pang guan wujing, shang xia qia tong* 旁貫五經, 上下洽通).¹¹² The implications for the "Table of Figures, Past and Present," should be obvious: Ban here claims the correct interpretation of historical developments does not arise naturally from the sources; it must be wrested by the good historian, who will focus on such constants as the social hierarchy.

Liu Zhiji is surely the harshest critic when it comes to assessments of the "Table of Figures, Past and Present," for Liu argues that "there was no need to rely on tables" when categorizing people. That the Ban table inserts into a standard history a table that purports to rank people of "recent" times but includes no Han figures merely adds insult to injury, in Liu Zhiji's view.¹¹³ Liu Zhiji utterly fails to consider how neatly the tables constructed in the early histories deliver "praise and blame," without elaborate interpretation, and so function in a way analogous to the *Annals* of Confucius in Han readings. Besides, none of the *Hanshu* treatises confine their wide-ranging discussions to Western Han, the Bans' subject, so the "Table of Figures" does not stand out in this respect. In any case, less moralistic modern historians have begun to map the contrasts between the treatments of leading pre-Qin, Qin and early Western Han figures in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*.¹¹⁴ Ban Gu's greater tolerance for cruel officials and famous Legalists deserves further attention, for example,¹¹⁵ prompting the suspicion that the table may chart levels of political efficacy rather than of ethical "virtue"

¹⁰⁹ *Shiji* 18.878; *Hanshu* 14.396.

¹¹⁰ Citing *Shitong*, ch. *Jian shi*.

¹¹¹ *Hanshu* 62.2735, with Ban quoting Sima Qian supposedly.

¹¹² *Hanshu* 100B.4235. *Wujing* 五經 signifies both the Five Classics and the five cardinal duties (and here, almost certainly, it refers to the latter).

¹¹³ *Shitong* 3.54.

¹¹⁴ Beatrice L'Haridon (2012), in an unpublished paper, begins to undertake a systematic comparison of a few key figures.

¹¹⁵ Wang Jilu (1996) mentions this.

strictly defined. That would explain why the First Emperor of Qin is given a much higher rating than the moralizers would assign him, while the hapless Second Emperor is harshly condemned.¹¹⁶

(d) How History was Compiled in Early China: Preliminary Thoughts

The anachronistic rendering of the term *Taishi ling* 太史令 (Senior Archivist) fosters the identification of Sima Qian and his father as “Grand Historians,” rather than the subordinates to the *Taichang* 太常 (Commissioner of Rituals) whose main job was to determine which days were lucky and unlucky for performances of imperial rituals, including weddings, funerals, and sacrifices; to keep track of portents auspicious and inauspicious, and to correct the calendar when the lunar and solar calendars got badly out of whack.¹¹⁷ As late as Chengdi’s reign (r. 33-7 BC) the incumbent *Taishi ling* was asked to gather materials for the imperial library relating to “calendrical calculations and divination techniques,”¹¹⁸ there being no such imperial office charged with compiling official histories until 623, long centuries after Han. Nor was there a central library or set of libraries (as opposed to archive depositories) before the very end of Western Han. Therefore, while Sima Tan and his son Qian had at least four major archives to consult, the records at their disposal may well have been limited in scope and kind.¹¹⁹ Otherwise, why claim, as Sima Qian so frequently did, that he had troubled to consult numerous people at different locations to compile his family’s masterwork?¹²⁰ So when the mid-fifth-century *Hou Hanshu* states that Sima Qian had at his disposal the *Zuozhuan*, the *Guoyu* 國語, the *Shiben* 世本,

¹¹⁶ I register this point in Nylan (2013), which reviews the Han views on Qin.

¹¹⁷ The *Hou Hanshu* “Baiguan shu” corroborates this point.

¹¹⁸ See *Hanshu* 30.1701, and Yan Shigu’s commentary to that passage. Cf. *Hanshu* 99B.4170, 4179, where the *Taishi ling* is set to watching the *qi* and determining lucky and unlucky days; also *Hou Hanshu zhi* 25.2572 (“Tian guan shu”).

¹¹⁹ *Shiji* 130.3296. “History of the Realm” (*guoshi* 國史) is said to the *Chunqiu* in *Shiji* 130.3181, 3286. The *Shiji* is not, strictly speaking, either a “private” or an “official history.” See footnote 29 and, e.g., the introduction to Stephen Durrant et al. (2016).

¹²⁰ The *Sanfu huangtu* 三輔黃圖 tells us that Xiao He 蕭何, at the time of the Han founder, set up three archives: the Shiqu Pavilion 石渠閣, the Tianlu Pavilion 天祿閣, and the Qilin Pavilion 麒麟閣 near or in the palaces; mention is also made of the Lantai Pavilion 蘭臺閣, under the Imperial Counsellor, to which Sima Tan and Qian had access. Cf. *Shiji* 58.2089; 130.3297, 3299.

Zhangguo ce 戰國策,¹²¹ at least two serious anachronisms call the statement into question: first, Liu Xiang 劉向 (d. 7 BC), who lived a century after Sima Qian, was compiler of the *Zhangguo ce*, so that text could not have been in existence in Sima Qian's time; and second, the *Zuozhuan* was unknown until late Western Han, when Liu Xin and Yang Xiong 揚雄 began to champion it as the product of Kongzi's inner circle superior to the "Gongyang" 公羊 and "Guliang" 穀梁 editions. However careless the *Hou Hanshu* statement, it seems likely that Sima Qian had access to some of the same stories that eventually made their way into all these sources – precisely the kind of sources that excavated tombs and the Hong Kong markets have recently yielded in such texts as the Mawangdui 馬王堆 *Chunqiu shi yu* 春秋事語 and the so-called *Zhangguo zongheng jia shu* 戰國縱橫家書.¹²²

Most scholars know that the *lie zhuan* narratives (often called "biographies") in *Shiji* and *Hanshu* derive in part or in toto from "private sources," including autobiographies, commemorative pieces of all types, temple records, and family registers. Yang Xiong's lengthy two-juan biography in the *Hanshu*, for instance, draws mainly on Yang's own rhapsodies (*fu* 賦) and his autobiography. The *Hanshu* chapter devoted to the "Hereditary Houses of the Three Kings," as recently analyzed by Hans van Ess, provides another illuminating glimpse of early compilation methods, insofar as this account (*Shiji* 60) is largely composed of the three enfeoffment charges ("letters of investiture") issued by the Wudi's court to three of Wudi's sons. Both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* compilers claim to frequently consult with elders who "enjoyed rehashing policy decisions" (*hao shi zhe* 好事者),¹²³ some of whom provided them with government documents to which the compilers had not had access.¹²⁴ In connection with the tables under examination here Michael Loewe offers the plausible hypothesis that the tables for the Han emperors and their officials were derived from the "accounts," letters of investiture, and other records kept in the capital archives, to facilitate the court's supervision over the local kings and nobles and the high-ranking members of its administration. In sum, materials very disparate in origin eventually made their way into the compilers' hands.

Scholars in late imperial and modern times have been exercised by the basic conundrum of why major discrepancies and omissions exist in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables, when those tables are read against other chapters

¹²¹ *Hou Hanshu* 40A.1325 (presented to the throne 445).

¹²² See Mawangdui Hanmu boshu, vol. 3.

¹²³ The expressions *haoshi zhe* is open to several interpretations, among them "busybodies." But in this context (and usually) it certainly refers to members of the court (past and present) who are discussing policy matters.

¹²⁴ E.g., *Shiji* 20.1059. Cf. *Shiji* 126, 130. For further information on the Three Kings' treatment, see Hans van Ess (2015).

in the same works.¹²⁵ For example, the *Shiji* tables omit the names of four important holders of the post of *yushi dafu*, and some theorize that this omission represents a case of oblique criticism, because each of these officials met their deaths during the so-called “great political events” that rocked the dynasty.¹²⁶ Likewise, the *Hanshu* tables devoted to the Han nobilities (the *Wangzi hou biao* 王子侯表) curiously fail to demarcate some noble fiefs in the Western Han period, while some demarcations contradict information contained in the *Hanshu* “Treatise on the Earth’s Configurations” (*Dili zhi* 地理志).

Historical geographers have begun to focus on such discrepancies,¹²⁷ but the list of major discrepancies and omissions leads us inexorably back to the fundamental question of whether these discrepancies should be cast as mistakes, interpolations, or alterations introduced during the transmission processes or whether such discrepancies inadvertently reveal an important feature of the early compilation processes for historical materials. Zhou Zhenhe’s 周振鶴 work, for example, persuades us that the main source for the *Hanshu Dili zhi* was a document compiled under Chengdi’s reign, to which the Bans appended passages without revising the basic document.¹²⁸ Zhou’s reconstruction relies on a profound understanding of the typical compositional practices celebrated in Han called *zhuwen* 屬文 (“putting together related passages”) or *zhuiwen* 綴文 (“compiling a text from pre-existing units”). Far from being that “scissors-and-paste” style of composition that is the object of derision in so many Western assessments of Chinese philosophical and historical traditions—a style that anachronistically implies ready access to the major public or semi-public libraries that had not yet come into existence during Han¹²⁹—the terms *zhuwen* and *zhuiwen* allude to compositions on a given theme strung together from other, earlier passages that the compilers deemed somehow related, either because they were devoted to the same topic, contained the same vocabulary items or, more rarely, featured the same grammatical patterns. Thus the abundant evidence for contradictions spewed forth by our electronic databases and voluminous libraries may not have troubled the early compilers whose conceptions of good history did not tally with our own.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ For the *Hanshu*, see Chen Lingling (2010), p. 22.

¹²⁶ The four are Gongsun Hong and Cai Yi under Wudi and his successor, and Xue Xuan 薛宣, and Wang Jun 王駿, both in 20 BC, under Han Chengdi.

¹²⁷ I think here of Zhou Zhenhe’s work.

¹²⁸ See Zhou Zhenhe (1987).

¹²⁹ On this, the classic source is Jean-Pierre Drège (1991).

¹³⁰ The repetition of particles by design conveyed to the reader/listener similarities in story lines, conclusions, and so forth. Three examples of such artful repetition, each found in Section 5, were too obvious to miss even upon first reading of

Given the compositional styles widely admired in Han times, we would ideally ascertain which passages of the standard histories should be ascribed to which authors or compilers, before venturing to establish one or more plausible hypotheses linking the early tables to the narrative portions in the standard histories. Unfortunately, current attempts to sort out the problems of authorship border on the ludicrous. Meanwhile two additional puzzles cry out for resolution: first, how many of the Zhanguo, Qin, or Han state archives were available to Sima Qian to consult, and how often did Sima Qian or the Bans resort, out of habit or necessity, to “extrapolating from the evidence where it was skimpy” (*lüe tui* 略推)?¹³¹ The first question cannot be answered, for contradictory stories are told within the same standard histories. The *Shiji* tells us, for instance, that the First Emperor of Qin destroyed all the records belonging to the rival kingdoms; however, inexplicably his own chancellor gathered up the same sorts of texts when preparing his *Lüshi chungqiu* 呂氏春秋,¹³² which does indeed contain records that presumably reflect local histories, genealogies, and temple records.¹³³ At the same time, history in the pre-Qin, Qin, and Han periods is overwhelmingly local history told from the point of view of the local courts,¹³⁴ further compounding the difficulties of gathering and assessing materials. What was required, then, to compose histories on a much broader scale with far grander ambitions? And how are we to glean insights into the

the chapter: the repetition of the same pattern *yi...yi* (亦...矣) to tie together three stories; the repetition of the single formula *nai...ye* (乃...也) somewhat later to emphasize the similar conclusions to be drawn between four stories; and, the repetition of the pattern *kuang...hu/yi* (況...呼/矣) that successfully establishes the parallels between two longish narratives.

¹³¹ See *Shiji* 130.3303, 3319, for this phrase used in connection with Sima Qian’s compiling efforts.

¹³² *Shiji* 14.510 (集六國時事。以為八覽。六論。十二紀。為呂氏春秋。) vs. *Shiji* 6.255, 285.

¹³³ The anonymous Reader 1 points out that it was perhaps because it was private and local possession of these records which was considered as dangerous by the First Emperor (as Han historians assume). It is said (when Xiang Yu destroyed the Qin capital) that the imperial library contained a lot of records, maps, and items of strategic use. For further information, see Nylan (2013). Fujita Katsuhisa (1997) reminds us that all of the sources for the Zhanguo period were profoundly “local,” including the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu jinian* 竹書紀年, centered on Wei), the Mawangdui manuscript that goes by the name of the *Zhanguo zongheng jia shu* (ed. 1978), and the Qin, Shuihudi text entitled *Bian nian ji* 編年記. Sima Qian says that while there were no nobles genealogies and registers for the period before Yu, such compilations are somewhat plentiful (*po zhu* 頗著) for the period from the Zhou on.

¹³⁴ Consider the *Bamboo Annals*, the *Chunqiu*, or the various annals of the Six Kingdoms in the pre-unification period.

social practices of that relatively small group of “new” men who decided to produce such sweeping histories? One sound methodology would be to correlate the ubiquitous “daybooks” in these men’s tombs, their calling cards and legal casebooks, their board games detailing the typical moves in capital careers, and the standard histories. After all, Michael Loewe and Li Ling have both proposed that modern historians assign to the same discursive space the tables from the standard histories and related materials such as the “diary” excavated from Yinwan and the Fuyang “Year Table”),¹³⁵ since the same members of the Han governing elite, those with access to high cultural literacy, perform the dual roles of subject and object in each genre. It is worth asking, in other words, how the continual tabulation of the daily movements in the life of an official (his visits to friends, official appointments, location and time of departure and arrival) leads to the sort of micro-histories that ultimately contributed to the macro-histories sketched in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables? One striking area of overlap is that each sort of text geared to each level of complexity focuses on the conjunctions that tie the individual to larger patterns of fortune and disaster, to “timeliness” vs. “fate,” if you will.

As the philosopher Li Zehou 李澤厚 stresses, the terms translated as “fate” (*ming* 命) and “cycles” (*yun* 運) do not refer in early China to what is predestined (as the word “fate” seems to do with the Mediterranean religions). Instead, such terms signify the nodal points in time marked by conjunctions of events, in discussions centered on “timely opportunity” and “proper timing” (*shi* 時).¹³⁶ This tallies with the nearly ubiquitous conflation of *ming* and *shi* in the pre-Han and Han sources, all of which register their hyper-preoccupation with the notions of time and timely action.¹³⁷ Powerholders at court needed to figure out, if possible, how to distinguish synchronicity or coincidence from true cause-and-effect relations, also what kinds of events constituted “canonical” events of lasting importance. And if these tables are about timely action in the context of the larger overlapping cycles, as Sima Qian’s and Ban Gu’s own prose would lead us to believe, they function like the *Shiji* Hereditary Houses section, tying cosmic trends to human justice and human virtues, while directing readers to conceive

¹³⁵ The Fuyang Year Table was buried in the tomb of Xiahou Zhao, who died in 164 BC; it therefore predates the *Shiji* Tables. Vankeerberghen (2007), like other earlier essays, sees little difference between a “year table” (a chronological list) and the more complicated tables; she mentions only that the tables contain more information (“short explanatory phrases”) while ignoring the aggregate visual aspect of the tables (see her p. 298).

¹³⁶ Li Zehou (1998), *passim*.

¹³⁷ See Nylan (2013b), Introduction, pp. xxi-xxii, 6.14, 10.7, 10.9, for example, which compares with many passages in Yang Xiong’s *Taixuan jing*.

different types of pasts operating on competing principles.¹³⁸ That they were intended to pose such questions is suggested by the preface of one *Shiji* table, as well as the last *Hanshu* table.¹³⁹ Thus we may properly ask, for instance, whether *Shiji* Table 2 has been rigged so as to accentuate Kongzi's rule in a New Dispensation starting in year 477? After all, that same year, 477 BC, was also the *jiazi* 甲子 year of the Zhou calendar, by Sima Qian's reckoning.¹⁴⁰

(e) Supposed Errors in the Tables or the Literature on the Tables

Much effort has gone into compiling extensive lists of perceived "errors" in works dating to early China. Unfortunately, quite a few perceived errors may not be real errors, for the reasons suggested above, and such lists to date have shed little light on the ongoing conundrum of how and when to distinguish graphic from semantic variations. Busy modern academics are apt to forget what historians of the text have told us for decades: that the likelihood of transmitting verbatim copies of texts in the pre-printing era is virtually nil, as is the likelihood of finding an Ur-text above or below ground. Textual variations exist in abundance, certainly. The hard part is deciding which variants are significant. This section alludes to some of the more important debates raging over presumed "errors" found in the extant *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables.

First in prominence are the endless debates over the origins of and possible rationale for the phenomenon dubbed "inverted" script (*dao shu* 倒書) or "raised row" (*ti lan*) writing that is found in but one *Shiji* table, the final Table 10 devoted to the "Ministers and Chancellors since the Founding of the Han." The earliest extant printed edition from the Song, the Jingyou 景佑 (1034-37) edition, exhibits this feature.¹⁴¹ A full millennium earlier, Huan

¹³⁸ Dennis Feeney (2007) suggests that one needs to have the synchronisms laid out side by side, before one can develop a sense of different pasts (p. 27). This makes sense to me.

¹³⁹ *Shiji* 17.803; *Hanshu* "Table of Figures, Past and Present," assigns *ren* 仁 to rank 2 of 9, the second highest rank.

¹⁴⁰ In 477 BC, the Table shows the death of all the major reigning princes and kings, making the inauguration of Kongzi's New Dispensation seem inevitable (*Shiji* 14.628). See Ma Chiying (1979), for the relevant year and further explications regarding it.

¹⁴¹ It is important to know that the earliest printed edition dates to 994, but the Southern Song (Shaoxing 1) purports to be based on it. That would mean the

Tan (c. 40 BC-AD 32) seems to designate this as an especially valuable aspect of the *Shiji* text that makes it superior to the Zhou chronologies (*Zhou pu* 周譜); in Huan's view, this graphic twist means that Table 10 is more capable of generating explanatory theories about developmental changes, on an analogy to the Line Texts (*guaci* 卦辭) of the *Yijing* 易經.¹⁴² That said, the occasional assertion that the "inverted writing" was invented by Sima Qian, as seen, for example, in Wang Yue's 汪越 *Du Shiji shi biao* 讀史記十表,¹⁴³ does not hold water for two reasons: the table includes an obviously late interpolation from Zhang Yan regarding the "ten missing chapters" of the *Shiji*, and the last third or so of Table 10 refers to events occurring as much as 70 or 80 years after Sima Qian's death.¹⁴⁴ No instance of inverted writing can be ascribed to Sima Qian with confidence, then, even if it is not hard to prove that this inverted script appeared within a century or so after the *Shiji* started circulating in the capital.

Might the inverted writing serve a rhetorical function, even if it was added after Sima Qian's time? Fu Sinian 傅斯年 reckoned that this unique style of entry occupying thirty-four space cells simply originated in successive mistakes in copying or printing.¹⁴⁵ Judging from the volume of essays devoted to inverted writing, not many scholars concur. The modern scholar Ding Bo 丁波 believes that the inverted writing was intended to show that

Jingyou edition (now in the Fu Sinian Library, Academia Sinica) is not necessarily the earliest or best edition; it is just the earliest extant edition.

¹⁴² *Shitong* 3.53. By contrast, Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* hints that the tables surpass chronological lists (*bian nian* 編年), which are liable to stretch on for too long; Liu Xie is looking for greater expressiveness, logical clarity, and a synoptic or panoptic view of chronology and events (*zong hui* 總會); see Vincent Shih, pp. 87, 124 ("Historical Writings").

¹⁴³ For Wang Yue, *Du Shiji shi biao*, p. 22. One of the better pieces on inverted writing is Zhao Guoxi (2004), as this essay, like Lü Shihao (2009), begins with the premise that the authoritative edition of the *Shiji* that we see today does not precisely match Sima Qian's *Taishi gong shu*.

¹⁴⁴ Wu Shu-hui (2014) curiously argues, if I understand her correctly, that these *ti lan* entries are part of the "original compilation"; that seems impossible, in my view, even if the type of information recorded is consistent with the information present in the main body of the Table. After all, Sima Qian could hardly have recorded events after his death, and it seems unlikely that an initial compiler chose this method to footnote his own text. But see Loewe (2004), pp. 242-48. Similarly Table 8 has been extended, presumably by Chu Shaosun and others during late Western Han. Some modern scholars, such as Wang Shumin and Zhao Shengqun, speculate that Feng Shang 馮商 (c. 53-18 BC), a student of Liu Xiang (79-8 BC), is most likely the person who "continued" Table Ten, based on *Hanshu* 59.2657, n.1. See Wang Shumin (2007), p. 979; Zhao Shengqun (2000).

¹⁴⁵ See Fu Sinian, cited in Wang Shumin (2007), p. 980. Cf. Liu Xianxi 劉咸焄, cited in Yang Yanqi (2005), p. 345.

imperial power is always won at the expense of the bureaucracy;¹⁴⁶ Zhang Dake argues a similar line.¹⁴⁷ By Ding's account, the vigor of the Han ruling line directly corresponds with the strength of its chancellors, with determined Imperial Counselors to help them. So when an emperor either kept those two posts vacant or filled all three highest posts, allowing one or more generals to offset the chancellor, that constituted an inappropriate and self-defeating power play by the emperor. Similarly, when an emperor appointed a weak chancellor, so as to arrogate the chancellor's powers to himself, this presaged dynastic weakness, as did the promotion of a Defender-in-chief (*taiwei* 太尉) to the chancellor's post, since commanders were generally drawn from the most powerful *waiqi* 外戚 consort clans.¹⁴⁸ And since these inverted script entries invariably list events calculated to give the dynasty a black name (mainly the deaths or dismissals of the chancellors),¹⁴⁹ the entries were most likely penned by the group of *haogu* 好古 reformers at Chengdi's court, who were one in their disdain for autocratic rule. The Qing scholar Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩, in *Shiji zhi yi* 史記志疑, came to the same conclusion, since the post of "Minister of Education" (*situ* 司徒) mentioned therein was first established in 8 BC (i.e., during

¹⁴⁶ Ding Bo (2002).

¹⁴⁷ Zhang Dake (1984), pp. 320, 327, argues that there are different reasons for inverted writing, depending on the office. For example, references to the *taiwei* in inverted writing supposedly draw attention to the growth of centralized power of the court, where the emperor and his officials were locked in a struggle. The inverted writing for the chancellor's position is to emphasize the change in circumstances for the early chancellors (all of whom were ennobled and all of whom died peacefully), in stark contrast to the chancellors of the period under Han Wudi, so many of whom suffered. Yet Zhang argues that the inverted writing when it appears in the space allotted to the *yushi dafu* has no intrinsic meaning. Zhang Lie 張烈 (1998) emphasizes the notion that inverted writing highlights the importance of some content, in a way that otherwise would be impossible to do. Zhang Lie is cited, without reference to a paper. See Wang Liqi, et al. (1998), no page given.

¹⁴⁸ Ding Bo (2002), p. 58.

¹⁴⁹ As both Loewe (2004) and Vankeerberghen (2007) remind us, the inverted script appears only in the three rows, but the text refers to someone in a position one text grid below (i.e., in rows 2-4), and "overwhelmingly the messages in inverted script record negative events" (deaths, dismissals, indictments that may bring death, and so on). See Vankeerberghen (2007), p. 303. Chen Zhi (1979) divides the information presented in the inverted writing into eight categories: (1) appointment to office; (2) dismissal from office; (3) death 死 of great officers; (4) death of nobles 薨 (in high office, presumably not by suicide here); (5) 卒 (abrupt end?) of the great officials; (6) great officers being charged with crimes; (7) suicides of the great officers; (8) dismissal of the chancellors. See Chen, p. 63.

Chengdi's reign), as one of the Three Lords of the new Executive Council.¹⁵⁰ Not coincidentally, Chengdi's reign was the time when several of the famous "continuators" and promoters of the *Shiji* were active.¹⁵¹ Such men claimed to identify and treat significant events (e.g., the death of Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 in 36 BC) "in the spirit of" Sima Qian's historiography.¹⁵² Still, we cannot hope to resolve the knotty problem of the accuracy or scope of Zhang Yan's 張晏 (third century) comment identifying Table 10 is one of the "ten missing chapters" in his day, nor the discrepancy between Zhang Yan's comment and that by Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. 737 CE) centuries later, absent a lucky find among the new excavated materials.¹⁵³

A second debated point concerns *Shiji* Table 2, which covers the period from Gonghe or Gong He, down to Kongzi,¹⁵⁴ in a "Table of Twelve Nobilities, by Year." Unhappily Table 2 treats a total of thirteen states besides the Zhou realm of the overlord: Lu, Qi, Jin, Qin, Chu, Song, Wei, Chen, Cai, Cao, Zheng, Yan, and Wu. Does Sima Qian mean anything, then, by his title? To what does the title draw attention? The Tang scholar Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (d. 720) in his *Shiji suoyin* speculates that Wu was a "barbarian state," so it simply doesn't figure in the "count."¹⁵⁵ Su Xun 蘇洵 (1009-1066) at one point says he concurs with Sima Zhen's theory, but elsewhere he offers a second explanation: that Wu later became hegemon of all the states, and so

¹⁵⁰ Qian Daxin, *Shiji zhi yi*, p. 749. A modern scholar's clever objection that many records suggest that a *situ* post was in place in Western Han long before Chengdi is really beside the point, as the *Shiji* Table is only interested in the *situ* who is chief advisors to the emperor. But see Li Nianqun (2005).

¹⁵¹ See Nylan (2011), esp. Part IV.

¹⁵² In the early eighteenth century, Wang Yue noted that much data about the chancellors happens not in the space rows allotted to that official, but rather in the "events" row. That said, only of five of all the chancellors in Han is the dignified word *hong* used when they die, though nearly all these thirty-eight chancellors qualified for noble titles late in life. (The automatic conferral of noble titles upon chancellors dates to Wudi's reign.)

Regarding Wei Xuancheng's death, which is recorded in inverted writing: Wu Shu-hui (2014) badly underestimates the significance of Wei Xuancheng, deeming his father Wei Xuan more important. It is Xuancheng, however, who spurred ritual reforms under Yuandi and Chengdi, reforms of enormous importance to the throne. See Tian Tian (2015).

¹⁵³ *Shiji* 128.3223. Zhang Shoujie curiously claims that the missing chapters were missing during the reigns of Yuandi and Chengdi, in late Western Han, implying that they were "restored" or "reconstituted" later. For information regarding this, see Wu Shu-hui's (2014), and Hans van Ess (2015).

¹⁵⁴ *Shiji* 14.511. I believe Gonghe is correct, but that point remains controversial. For further information, see Lee Chi-hsiang (2011).

¹⁵⁵ See *Shiji* 14.509.

Sima Qian decided not to mention it.¹⁵⁶ The first analysis blithely ignores the fact that elsewhere in the *Shiji* Sima Qian names several other states as “barbarians” that Sima Zhen and Su Xun do not exclude from their orthodox “count;” the *Shiji* “Treatise on the Heavenly Offices” says, for instance, that “Qin, Chu, Wu, and Yue are all non-Central States polities” (*Qin, Chu, Wu, Yue, yi di ye* 秦楚吳越。夷狄也。).¹⁵⁷ Moreover, the Wu rulers traced their line back to the sage Taibo 太伯, whose biography begins Sima Qian’s Hereditary Houses section, so in which aspects is Wu excluded from the club of Central States powers?¹⁵⁸ (It may or may not be significant that Table 1, the “Three Dynasties Generational Table,” the *Sandai shibiao* 三代世表, mentions eleven of the thirteen states that appear in Table 2, the exclusions being Zheng and Wu, which legend says were founded long before the Gonghe regency.)

Other moralizers prefer a different tack: that Lu is not included in Sima Qian’s “count” of twelve. By their reasoning, Zhou is the main actor whose decline the first two tables lay out, and Lu, as its closest vassal state, shares its misfortunes, functioning virtually as a simulacrum and extension of Zhou rule while the rulers of the other states seize royal prerogatives and titles, whether powerful or puny. Yet another theory argues that Lu should not be included in Sima Qian’s total count, for Lu is the site associated with the later dispensation of Kongzi that sanctions Han legitimacy supposedly.¹⁵⁹ The possibilities seem endless, but, sooner or later, they prompt the

¹⁵⁶ One essay in Su Xun’s 蘇洵 (1009–1066) “Shilun” 史論 (Discourses on the Histories) contains the following: 遷表十二諸侯。首魯訖吳。實十三國而越不與焉。夫以十二名篇而載國十三。何也。不數吳也。皆諸侯耳。獨不數吳。何也。用夷禮也。不數而載之者。何也。周裔而霸盟上國也。春秋書哀七年。公會吳於郟。書十二年。公會吳於橐皋。書十三年。公會晉侯及吳子於黃池。此其所以雖不數而猶獲載也。

¹⁵⁷ *Shiji* 27.1344. Cf. *Shiji* 31.475, where the *Shiji* talks of several outlying groups as “foreign.” Qian Daxin’s *Shiji zhi yi*, p. 1, n. 4, points out this problem.

¹⁵⁸ That Taibo, as ancestor of Wu, figures so prominently in the Hereditary Houses section makes it hard to credit the ideas of Liu Cheng 劉城 and Xu Kefan 徐克范, who, in a variation on the theories of Sima Zhen and Su Xun, think either that Sima Qian added Wu as an “afterthought,” or that some of the space units in Table 2 did not come from Sima Qian’s hand, but were inserted into Table 2 by Chu Shaosun, who is known to have played a role in “supplementing” certain tables (*Shiji* 60.2114). Unfortunately for this theory, it’s unlikely that Wu was added by Chu Shaosun, because the *Shiji* editions nearly always or always alert us to the fact of Chu’s additions to the *Shiji*. See Liu Cheng (Qing), chap. 8.374; Xu Kefan (1983), p. 58.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Itō Tokuo (1993), Part I, p. 28, exempts Lu as one of the twelve states, as Lu supposedly succeeded to good Zhou rule, and also served as the founding state from which the new dispensation comes, as Lu is Kongzi’s

question why do Table 1 and 2 track the fortunes of relatively powerless states like Cai, Cao, and Song, if Lu *must* appear, if only to set up Kongzi's receipt of Heaven's new dispensation in 477 BC?¹⁶⁰ Perhaps Lu fulfills two entirely different functions in the tables, initially as a dependent and defender of the Zhou center and later as equal foe to both the Zhou kings and Kongzi, recipient of Heaven's new decree.¹⁶¹ Or perhaps Sima Qian just rounded off thirteen to twelve, given the sublime propitiousness of the number twelve in calendrical cycles, with their twelve months, twelve divisions of the earth and of the sky, and so on.¹⁶² Alternately, Sima Qian may have rounded the number off for rhetorical convenience, since eleven polities exist at the table's start and thirteen at the end. While this hardly exhausts the hypotheses proffered by scholars down through the ages, the rest of the theories provide even less plausible justifications for the tables' titles.¹⁶³

That Sima Qian's basic concept of legitimacy eludes moderns becomes painfully obvious when we turn to the presumptions grounding the debates over the phrase *san shan* 三嬗, literally, "three times changed," as in the famous phrase, "Within the space of five years, there were three changes."¹⁶⁴ Pei Yin's 裴駟 (fl. 438) commentary identifies the "three changes" as the transfers of power from Chen She (rebel against Qin), Xiang Yu (taking over power after Chen She's death), and Liu Bang, as founder of the Han,¹⁶⁵ but as "five years" are mentioned, one would have decide if that span of time under discussion is the years 210-206 BC or 206-202. Chen She is alive in the first period, but long dead by 206 BC. Predictably, later moralizers, ignoring Sima Qian's steady admiration for upstarts, insist that transfers of

"home state." Qin is considered one of the Seven States (*qi guo* 七國) elsewhere in the *Shiji*.

¹⁶⁰ However, Lu, Cai, Wu, Yue were client states of Chu in *Shiji* Table 3, while Song was a client state of Qi.

¹⁶¹ Liu Xianxin, cited in Yang Yanqi (2005), p. 379, says this, as does Takigawa Kametarō (1993), p. 892. Shi Peilei (2010), esp. p. 58, n. 1. The traditional dates given for the starts of Zheng and Wu are during the reigns of Kings Xuan and King Jian (585-571 BC).

¹⁶² *Shiji* 27.1342, 1346.

¹⁶³ For example, the Niu Yunzhen's (Qing) *Shiji ping zhu*, chap. 3, p. 376, cites Li Jingxing 李景星, in support of his own view that Sima Qian wants to assert the illegitimacy of the Qin dynasty, and so excludes Qin from the count. Since Sima Qian does not hesitate to dub Qin rule legitimate, in his own *Liu guo nianbiao*, this theory seems unfounded. Notably, Sima Qian routinely uses the term "Seven Kingdoms" (six plus Qin). See, e.g., *Shiji* 5.213, 214; *Shiji* 6. 232, 279, etc.

¹⁶⁴ *Shiji* 15.759. Cf. *Shiji* 130.3033.

¹⁶⁵ Pei Yin (act. 438), cited in Sima Zhen's *Shiji suoyin*, says, 謂陳涉項氏漢高祖也。Pei continues, 自生民以來。未始有受命若斯之亟。

power do not concern anyone but duly authorized heads of state, making it harder still to locate who among the contending candidates could qualify as “kings” besides Xiang Yu and Liu Bang. By some theories, the so-called Righteous Emperor, a relative non-entity who never enjoyed power, must count among the three.¹⁶⁶

All such debates center on the observation that sometimes the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables foreground specific times, sometimes specific locations, and sometimes specific people in specific posts. Why? While it is hard to believe that two such erudite historians did not have in mind the “Gongyang” “rules” or “principles” of interpretation attached to the mention or omission of certain names, it is equally hard, given Han dynasty compositional styles, to credit the early historians either with memories equal to that of modern-day electronic databases or with temperaments inclined to be as hot and bothered about discrepancies as we. More fundamentally, the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables are in a few senses fundamentally incommensurate, despite the conventional treatment of the tables as “overlapping” in content. For even when the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables “cover” the same years, their approaches to history differ dramatically.

Two examples should suffice. The *Shiji* does not distinguish those families who acquired nobilities as “meritorious officials” (*gong chen* 功臣) in the early reigns (none of whom had the Liu clan name) from “descendants of the ruling line” (*wangzi hou* 王子侯) without particular merit.¹⁶⁷ By contrast, the *Hanshu* tables clearly separate nobilities into three types: those won by merit (the *gong chen*), those acquired via hereditary descent from the imperial or royal lines; and nobilities acquired through a *waiqi* consort clan connection. The *Shiji* evinces less interest in the source of a nobility than in its duration, for the *Shiji* tables devoted to the Han empire keep a year-by-year tally, unlike the *Hanshu* tables, organized by reigns (a method that can hide certain trends). Moreover, the *Shiji* tables enumerate the range of reasons why nobilities are discontinued, split, or otherwise changed; in Sima Qian’s own words dripping with sarcasm, “this allows those of later generations to survey the fact that, no matter how strong a line’s [original] strategic position, the key factor [in its survival] is whether it bases itself in humaneness and duty” (令後世得覽。形勢雖疆。要之以以

¹⁶⁶ *Shiji* 16.759; cf. 130.3303. That said, Sima Qian seems to treat the Righteous Emperor as the overlord of the empire, since after his death the top row of Table 4 devoted to the Qin-Chu transition is left empty. There is also the possibility that Xiang Ji is treated as king, since Sima Qian identifies him as the primary mandateholder (*wei tian xia zhu ming* 為天下主命) [= kingmaker?] of the realm at the date when he established eighteen kings.

¹⁶⁷ Zhao Yi (1727-1814) commends the *Shiji* tables for showing, on the one hand, officials of great merit, and, on the other, those “without merit but without error” (*wu gong wu guo zhe* 無功無過者). See his *Ershier shi zha ji*, chap. 1.

仁義為本。)¹⁶⁸ (The sarcasm drips because the table charts the dynasty's propensity for strategic Realpolitik.) As if this were not enough, the *Shiji* tables support the "Hereditary Houses" section of the *Shiji* (a section omitted from the *Hanshu*), continually raising the question of what actually constitutes "merit." Sima Qian explains his own notions of what constitutes "meritorious service," virtually begging readers to compare the types of nobilities awarded with his explicit standard:

太史公曰。古者人臣功有五品。以德立宗廟定社稷曰勳。以言曰勞。用力曰功。明其等曰伐。積日曰閱。

The Senior Archivist said: In the past, there were five types of merit for officials: *xun* "achievement" (*xun* 勳) is used of those who by their virtue and character established an ancestral temple and settled the altars of grain and soil; "exhortation" (*lao* 勞) is used of those whose speech was meritorious; "merit" (*gong* 功) is used of those whose physical deeds won them accolades; "attack" (*fa* 伐) is use of those who made clear [=? enforced] the prevailing sociopolitical ranks; and "oversight" (*yue* 閱) of those of long service to the throne.¹⁶⁹

Odd, then, that forty-eight out of ninety-three nobles in the table devoted to Huidi's through Jingdi's, for example, were established as consort clan members, though mere relation to the royal house is hardly a measure of "merit," while the other forty-five inherited their possessions, rather than earning them in service to the throne.¹⁷⁰ Under Wudi, an even smaller proportion of the total (thirty-five or thirty-six men at most) could be said to have performed meritorious service.¹⁷¹ Moreover, Sima Qian's definitions for the five kinds of merits have "merit" consisting of far more than prosecuting wars of aggression, although Wudi overwhelmingly conferred nobilities on his generals, effecting a strong break with earlier emperors, if

¹⁶⁸ *Shiji* 17.803. *Shiji* 130.3291 explicitly condemns over-reliance on law (不殊貴賤。一斷於法。則親親尊尊之恩絕。), making it obvious how Sima Qian regards the *tui en ling* 推恩令 of Wudi.

¹⁶⁹ *Shiji* 18.877. The last category is especially puzzling, but Yan Shigu's gloss for *Hanshu* 56.2512 seems to equate *ji ri* 積日 with *lei jiu ye* 隸久也.

¹⁷⁰ Zhang Dake, fn 4.

¹⁷¹ We know that the *Shiji* table referred to *gong chen* ("meritorious officials") because early sources, including *Shui jingzhu*, chap. 21, mention it explicitly. Zhang Dake (1990), pp. 581-82, and Itō Tokuo (1993), Part IV, p. 106, disagree on the precise number of Wudi's officials who actually qualify as men of merit.

we trust Sima Qian's own verdict.¹⁷² And while Sima Qian concedes the Han founder's propensity to seek legal pretexts to destroy his erstwhile allies, adopting a "very tight net of the law" (*wang yi shao* 罔亦少) and thereby setting a horrible precedent for the dynasty, the historian never conceals the much harsher rule under Jingdi and Wudi,¹⁷³ in whose reigns the pace of destruction accelerated wildly. In Wudi's reign from 130 to 101 BC, nearly one-half of the nobilities (96 out of 229 kings and nobles) had been destroyed by 104 BC, due to "crimes," many of them unspecified.¹⁷⁴ Some 59% of nobilities created under Wudi end up being destroyed during his own reign,¹⁷⁵ a flagrant violation of Sima Qian's talk equating humane rule with legitimate and long-lasting dynastic lines.

太史公曰。盛哉。天子之德。一人有慶。天下賴之。

The Senior Archivist says: "How glorious is the Son of Heaven's virtue! When he, the One Man, has a quality worth celebrating all the subjects depend upon his good graces."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Gaozu's meritorious officials were *fuchen gugong* 輔臣股肱; those under Huidi, Wendi, and Jingdi, were mainly those who "extended [i.e. continued] their patrimony" (*shen gongchen zongshu jueyi* 申功臣宗屬爵邑); whereas those under Wudi "went north to punish the strong Hu and south to kill the agile Yue; launching punitive campaigns against the Man and Yi, their military merits were all ranked/all made glorious" (*lie* 列 or *lie* 烈). See *Shiji* 130.3304.

¹⁷³ 72 out of the 93 nobilities established before Wudi lasted less than 40 years. But, as Itō Tokuo (1993), Part IV, p. 114, shows, under the early Han emperors from Huidi to the early part of Wudi's reign (when he was mainly under regents), 44 out of 93 nobilities were extinguished in less than twenty years, essentially within a lifetime. See also fn. 170.

¹⁷⁴ Five such nobilities are extinguished for "reasons not clear" in Table 6; 4 in Table 7, and 9 in Table 9.

¹⁷⁵ See Itō Tokuo (1993), Part IV, p. 123, which shows a huge jump in the numbers of those who lost noble or royal status under Jingdi and Wudi (to 33 and 59% respectively). Cf. the chart in *ibid.*, p. 130, that shows the very low rate during Wudi's reign for "continued enfeoffments" (*shao feng* 紹封) [this referring to appointments of close male relatives when no male heir is available] or "returned fiefs" (*fu feng* 復封) to the original holders, after being taken away.

¹⁷⁶ Citing the *Documents* chapter entitled *Lü xing* 呂刑 (sometimes *Fu xing* 甫刑), par. 13; in Legge's translation, p. 600: "Then shall I, the One Man, enjoy felicity, the people looking to you as their sure dependence." The *Shiji* omits the phrase, "the repose of the state will be perpetual."

By stark contrast, the *Hanshu* tables, by virtue of their structure, can often “not make clear” (*bu ming* 不明) why or when certain nobilities end.¹⁷⁷ It countenances the murderous rate of destruction of the noble lines, leaving readers of *Hanshu* Table 3A-B with the misleading impression that the kings’ territories by Han Wudi’s reign (141-87 BC) had grown well beyond the mandates found in the canonical prescriptions. It further alleges that a great many of the kings’ relatives (those very sons and brothers mentioned in the *Shiji* decree) were living in straightened circumstances as poor commoners, ignoring the fact that many king’s territories had been steadily reduced by the court’s actions from the time of Wendi, two reigns before Wudi. Thus, when a citation from the *Odes* compares Wudi’s reign to that of the exemplary King Wen, it blandly implies that Wudi’s famous *tui en ling* 推恩令 policy designed to replace the earlier case-by-case imposition of central control with universal imposition was crafted solely to insure the stability and longevity of the Liu clan royal lines of the Han dynasty in concert with the throne. Of course, this congenial picture hides Wudi’s harsh treatment of no less than 106 of those nobles, who were at one swipe reduced to commoners in 112 BC,¹⁷⁸ consistent with the high rate of attrition among Wudi’s other “right-hand men.”

Conclusions

Certain indisputable facts that are often ignored in analysis of the Han standard histories can be asserted with relative confidence, thanks to this study of the tables:

- (1) The *Shiji* and *Hanshu* tables cannot have been generated purely on the basis of other parts of the *Shiji* or *Hanshu* since they contain information not found elsewhere, as Loewe clearly showed.
- (2) The tables serve to underscore information found elsewhere but not emphasized, most famously the *zhoujin* 酎金 affair of 112 BC, when 106 nobles were cashiered.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Wang Liqi (1988), p. 2759, cited in Itō Tokuo (1993), Part III, p. 14, notes that the strongest nobilities were the first to bite the dust, and one can only gauge the strength of a nobility by seeing how long it stayed intact. Contrast the statement 不能有所錄記, in *Du Shiji shibiao*, chapter 7 (*Zong lun* 總論), which claims that the genealogical tables of the Han royal and noble lines were not all kept well, which, in turn, points towards untoward events.

¹⁷⁸ The quotation comes from Mao no. 235 (“Wen wang”). The “extending generosity” (*tui'en* 推恩) edict, designed to quickly reduce the territories of the kingdoms, was proposed by Zhufu Yan 主父偃 (fl. 126 BC).

¹⁷⁹ Note, too, the date in 64 BC, when many nobilities are resuscitated en masse.

(3) When comparing the tables with the *liezhuan* in the standard histories, we can more fully appreciate Sima Qian's unusual independence when treating a host of figures. We can see from the tables, more than from Chen Ping's biography, for example, that Chen Ping is an unmitigated opportunist.

(4) What is noteworthy, in the end, is that the single flexible form of the table can be adjusted to take into account the special patterns endemic to each era.

(5) While Sima Qian says that his tables are to be used by power-holders, so that they "can hold a mirror up for themselves" (*zi jing* 自鏡), unquestionably this encouragement to scrutinize massive amounts of data translates into one of the harshest forms of blame.¹⁸⁰

(6) After the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* Tables, imperial courts did not see fit to commission the production of any comparable historical tables, until the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 of Liu Xu 劉煦 (completed 945).

In retrospect it seems that Liu Zhiji may have played a role in persuading people that "historians need not have tables" and that "it was no loss to omit them [tables],"¹⁸¹ though Liu may have been representing the general view, since no historian in Tang favored them when writing the standard histories for earlier periods.¹⁸² But as we began with a puzzle about Zheng Qiao, let us conclude with yet another puzzle by the same Song author. Zheng makes the curious argument that charts are more fundamental, indeed logically prior to writing, since Heaven first produced the Yellow River Chart in the image of the cosmic order and next the Luo Writing to explain that cosmic order.¹⁸³ That sages need to rely upon both sorts of texts is therefore self-evident to Zheng, so he noisily complains that "later scholars" (since the Tang reigns?) have out of some bias abandoned them. Charts are the constants needed to ground people, things, and events, while writings are the secondary supports that motivate people. Both are needed for appropriate changes, for to hear words but not see forms hampers understanding, as does having some key points revealed absent their explications. Even the Qin, says Zheng, were not so stupid as to burn the charts, maps, and registers, for they realized that affairs could not be conducted properly without reference to them. "Without charts that make

¹⁸⁰ *Shiji* 18.878; cf. *Hanshu* 85.3477.

¹⁸¹ It is significant that, in Liu Zhiji's view, tables were appropriate to use only when describing periods of disunity.

¹⁸² *Shitong* 3.54.

¹⁸³ The entire summary comes from Zheng's *Tupu lüe* 圖譜略 essay entitled "Suo xiang" 索象, in *Tongzhi*, chap. 20 of the *lüe* section, p. 1825.

it possible to grasp the essential points, one would be hard put to understand easily the central codes by which a dynasty ruled."¹⁸⁴ Precisely.

¹⁸⁴ Curiously, Zheng Qiao blames Liu Xin (and secondarily Ban Gu himself) for not including in his "Seven Summaries" *Qilüe* 七略 bibliographical catalogue a special category for *tu*, charts, maps, registers, and illustrations. He says those two, and not Liu Zhiji, are responsible for the recent neglect of this most important source. Sima Qian's critique of his contemporaries who preferred to simply extract (literally "cut out," *duan* 斷) fragments of text to support their own arguments could constitute a direct attack on the vast majority of Han historians today, who express remarkably little interest in the tables.

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