

STATECRAFT AND CLASSICAL LEARNING: THE *RITUALS OF*
ZHOU IN EAST ASIAN HISTORY

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CHAPTER TWO

OFFICES OF WRITING AND READING IN THE *RITUALS OF ZHOU*

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The Rituals of Zhou in the Context of Formulaic Technical Writing

Of all known early Chinese texts, the *Rituals of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮)—in Han times initially called the *Offices of Zhou* (*Zhouguan* 周官)—comes closest to a survey of bureaucratic order. Other texts offer meticulous accounts of specific formalized activities (e.g., divination records) or stage-scripts for ritual performances (e.g., the *Ceremonial Ritual* [*Yili* 儀禮]). But none rivals the encyclopedic scope of the *Rituals of Zhou* as it lays out a vast and systematic hierarchy of governmental functions, no matter how historically accurate or idealized we may assume them to be. As such, the *Rituals of Zhou* is the perfect textual reflection of the bureaucratic idea itself, an idea that in early China resounded with strong religious overtones and manifested itself in administrative documents as well as in political rhetoric and religious communication.¹

The master tool of bureaucratic rule is formulaic writing; when in Han times the *Rituals of Zhou* rose from obscurity, such writing had continuously existed for at least a millennium, from late Shang (ca. 1200–ca. 1046 BCE) oracle records through Western (ca. 1046–771 BCE) and Eastern Zhou (770–256 BCE) bronze inscriptions and writing on stone, bamboo, and wood.² Furthermore, for the fourth and

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¹ The literature on the nexus of Chinese religion and bureaucracy, ancient and modern, is extensive; see, e.g., Keightley 1978; Xu Zhongshu 1936; Vandermeersch 1977–1980; Falkenhausen 1993, 152–167; C. Cook 1995; Venture 2002; Kern 2007; Lewis 1999b, 13–51; Schipper 1974; Seidel 1985; Weld 1990; Harper 1994, 2004; Li Ling 2000; Ahern 1981. Lewis (1999b, 42–48) has argued the point explicitly for the *Rituals of Zhou*.

² In addition to the works listed in n. 1, see Bagley 2004; Xu Fuchang 1993; Barbieri-Low 2007; Xi Hanjing 1983; Chen Hanping 1986. Ledderose (2000) discusses

third centuries BCE in particular, numerous excavated manuscripts display formulaic writing for a variety of bureaucratic purposes, and regularly in close association with religious ones: administrative records, tax records, calendars, archival records, judicial records and legal statutes (including contracts for the netherworld), economic records, divination records, sacrificial records, etc. Among writings found in tombs, by far the most common type is the inventory of funerary items, that is, a simple list that occasionally was accompanied by a letter to the netherworld bureaucracy.³

While the hallowed texts of the literary and philosophical tradition existed in both writing and—primarily—in the learned elite’s oral memory, the texts truly dependent on the technology of writing were pragmatic ones that recorded, stored, or circulated information or provided the blueprint for specific bureaucratic or religious tasks.⁴ Certain types of administrative writing were based on fixed forms where one only had to fill in the specific information (e.g., dates and names), and where the actual demands on the scribe were quite limited.⁵ Altogether, formulaic writing served the required uniformity of administrative, legal, and economic records that could be produced and reproduced in large numbers. Given its occasion-specific function, most of this writing was not preserved by the tradition. Written on wood and bamboo stationery, it has perished from view, yet circumstantial evidence still proves its existence already for late Shang and early Western Zhou times.⁶

Writing clearly reached a fundamentally new status with the early empire, but this status pertained not so much to bureaucratic records (which just multiplied with the needs of the imperial state) as to the developing commitment to enshrine the hallowed tradition—especially the Five Classics (*wu jing* 五經) and the various genres of commentaries and essays arranged around it—in a fixed written form.⁷ To write and read these texts properly required a profound education not only in the Classics themselves but also in the forms of political, ritual, philosophical, and historical discourse that were seen as direct extensions of the canon. Especially in the archaic Classics of *Poetry* (*Shi* 詩), *Documents* (*Shu* 書), and *Changes* (*Yi* 易), the frequent use

“modular mass production” across a broad range of artifacts, including texts, through the Chinese tradition.

³ For a survey of such writings, see Giele 2001.

⁴ See the discussion in Assmann 2000, 131–138.

⁵ Xing Yitian 1998; Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 16.

⁶ Bagley 2004; Falkenhausen 1993, 163–164; Li Feng 2006.

⁷ Kern 2001.

of “loan characters” (*jiajie zi* 假借字) to write homophonous but different words necessitated more than the knowledge of the script: in order to read and understand the text, and to identify the correct words behind the ever-changing ways of writing them, one had to know it already. By contrast, pragmatic texts could be readily written and comprehended in this script for the simple fact that blueprinted administrative records were largely unambiguous in a way archaic poetry and speech were not; their straightforward diction did not require any hermeneutic approach or particular cultural competence. A subordinate scribe merely trained in the writing system was well equipped to produce and read such records but would have felt disoriented in the archaic language of the classical tradition.

The *Rituals of Zhou* does not fit neatly into the category of either pragmatic writing or the Classics. In Han times, it became associated with the Duke of Zhou 周公 (r. 1042–1036 BCE) and gained much in stature through Zheng Xuan’s 鄭玄 (127–200) commentary, which connected the text with the established Classics. While not yet included in the inscription of the Classics on stone stelae that were erected outside the Imperial Academy in 175 CE,⁸ it was a prominent text by late Six Dynasties times, received another major commentary by Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (fl. 627–656), and became part of the nine (later twelve and finally thirteen) Classics during the Tang.

Yet, its later career as a Classic notwithstanding, the text seems far closer to the recently excavated bureaucratic texts than to the high tradition of literary, historical, and philosophical works that in late Warring States and early imperial times formed the traditional canon. By virtue of its own structure as a vast and highly systematic (and, one may say, rather dull) survey, its existence outside the neat columns of a bundle of knotted bamboo slips is hard to imagine. As a material artifact, the *Rituals of Zhou* embodied the very nature and pervasive function of bureaucratic writing that it consistently asserted for its universe of governmental offices.

Unlike the transmitted poetic, historical, and philosophical literature of Warring States and Han times, the *Rituals of Zhou* nowhere advances an explicit argument. It poses no hermeneutical challenge, contains no direct historical references or textual citations—even though certain parts of the text may have been composed with information gained from archaic texts such as the *Classic of Poetry* (*Shijing* 詩經) or the *Classic of Documents* (*Shangshu* 尚書)—and makes

⁸ Wilkinson 1998, 464; Boltz 1993, 30.

no claim as to its authorship or circumstances of composition. It also is not invoked by other texts before late Western Han times. As a result, scholars have variously assigned the text to the Duke of Zhou, to anonymous compilers of late Warring States or Qin-Han times, or, finally, to Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE-23 CE), allegedly to serve the political purposes of the “usurper” Wang Mang 王莽 (r. 9–23).⁹ I do not agree that the *Rituals of Zhou* depicts “a governing system which, in all essentials, prevailed in middle and late feudal Chou in the various states and has its roots in the system pertaining to late Yin and early Chou,” from which time it “continued to exist in a more or less modified form up to 221 B.C.”¹⁰ To my mind, the *Rituals of Zhou* fits well with late Warring States or imperial Qin textual culture (the latter being argued in Jin Chunfeng’s 金春峰 superb study of 1993) on three grounds: linguistically, philosophically, and as an exemplar of formulaic writing.¹¹ Yet its idealized image of perfect administrative order meets the intellectual needs of the dawning (Warring States) or just established (Qin-early Han) empire just as well as those of an imperial rule in collapse (late Western Han). Within this range of some three hundred years, it seems difficult—pending the next archaeological sensation—to put a precise date on its composition or editorship. With the present essay, I will, however, suggest that the *Rituals of Zhou* is a text of at least two very distinct layers: composed in Warring States/early imperial language, it conforms to early imperial ideals of universal order¹² and matches accounts of scribal culture of that time, but the text also reveals a profound knowledge of far older—indeed, Western Zhou—administrative units and their titles that by Warring States times had long been discontinued and replaced.¹³ As such, the

⁹ For a survey of these opinions, see Boltz 1993, 24–29; see also the discussions in Karlgren 1931; Jin Chunfeng 1993; Zhou Shifu and Zhou Wenxiang 1981; Qian Xuan 1996, 21–33; among others.

¹⁰ Broman 1961, 73–74.

¹¹ See also David Schaberg’s superior discussion of the possible date of composition in chapter 1 of this volume.

¹² Lewis (1999b, 48) understands the *Rituals of Zhou* as a comprehensive vision of “the state as a replica or image of the cosmos.” While any numerologically driven order, one might argue, is inherently cosmological, I am reluctant to see the text in these terms. It is not how it was discussed during its early reception.

¹³ As Broman (1961, 66–74) has argued, the offices in the *Rituals of Zhou* coincide to a very substantial extent with those known from other early texts. Yet more to the point, recent Chinese scholarship on Western Zhou administration has pointed out numerous correspondences between the *Rituals of Zhou* and Western Zhou bronze inscriptions; see Xi Hanjing 1983; Lai Changyang and Liu Xiang 1985; Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu 1986.

text systematizes and seemingly unifies two disparate and diachronic sets of administrative data.

The Low-Ranking Scribes in the Rituals of Zhou

Among the offices listed in the *Rituals of Zhou*, one would expect many to be devoted to the composition, circulation, and reception of formulaic written documents as key to bureaucratic rule. The actual number of office descriptions that explicitly mention the reading, writing, and handling of written documents—42 out of 366 offices—might therefore appear low. However, it was not only these 42 offices that produced and kept writings. The vast majority did. This fact is not expressed in the actual office descriptions but in the general “outlines of offices” (*xu guan* 敍官) that form the introductions to the six major sections of the text. In these outlines, all the positions within each office are listed in hierarchical order, beginning with the head of the office and ending with those in charge of the lowest duties. A comprehensive example is the outline for the prime minister (*taizai* 大宰), head of the Ministry of State (*tianguan* 天官). This highest office of the state, placed at the outset of the *Rituals of Zhou*, contains the following positions and ranks:

Prime minister (*taizai*), one man in the rank of one of the six ministers (*qing*); vice prime ministers (*xiaozai*), two men in the rank of ordinary grand master (*zhongdafu*); assistant ministers of state (*zaifu*), four men in the rank of junior grand master (*xiadafu*); senior servicemen (*shangshi*), eight men; ordinary servicemen (*zhongshi*), sixteen men; numerous junior servicemen (*luxiashi*), thirty-six men; storehouse keepers (*fu*), six men; scribes (*shi*), twelve men; aides (*xu*), twelve men; runners (*tu*), one hundred and twenty men.

大宰卿一人。小宰中大夫二人。宰夫下大夫四人。上士八人。中士十有六人。旅下士三十有二人。府六人。史十有二人。胥十有二人。徒百有二十人。

The second office listed under the Ministry of State, that of the commandants of the palace (*gongzheng* 宮正), contains the following positions: two senior servicemen, four ordinary servicemen, eight junior servicemen, two storehouse keepers, four scribes, four aides, and forty runners. The third office, master of the palace guard (*gongbo* 宮伯), is staffed with two ordinary servicemen, four junior servicemen, one storehouse keeper, two scribes, two aides, and twenty runners. The fourth office, food supervisor (*shanfu* 膳夫), has two senior servicemen, four ordinary servicemen, eight junior servicemen, two store-

house keepers, four scribes, twelve aides, and one hundred and twenty runners.

These examples from the beginning of the text show the overall, largely unified pattern representative of much of the *Rituals of Zhou*: while the office of the prime minister contained at its top the three high-ranking positions of one minister (*qing*, Rank 1) as prime minister, two ordinary grand masters (*zhongdafu*, Rank 3) as vice prime ministers, and four junior grand masters (*xiadafu*, Rank 4) as assistant ministers, the lower offices were merely staffed with personnel of the rank of senior servicemen (*shangshi*) and below. The sequence of positions in these offices is consistent and reflects their rank: the three levels of servicemen (*shi*) were still part of the nobility, but the four ranks—in this order—of storehouse keepers, scribes, aides, and runners were not; they were recruited from commoners. Serving as messengers, the runners were the lowest level of the personnel, and their members were usually the most numerous. According to Zheng Xuan's commentary, the aides above them are characterized as men possessing "talent and knowledge" (*you cai zhi* 有才智).¹⁴ In a few cases, other groups are listed between the scribes and the aides, such as artisans (*gong* 工) and merchants (*gu* 賈), as in the offices of the storehouse keeper of jades (*yufu* 玉府), of the manager of female works (*dianfugong* 典婦功),¹⁵ and of a few others. In this outline, the storehouse keepers are primarily in charge of storing official documents and contracts;¹⁶ the scribes, usually double the number of storehouse keepers, were their subordinates who created these writings. Zheng Xuan notes that both groups were appointed by the respective ministers, suggesting their relatively low status. In his explanation of the phrase "commoners in office" (*shuren zai guan* 庶人在官) in the "Royal Regulations" ("Wang zhi" 王制) chapter of the *Records of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記), Zheng refers to the four *Rituals of Zhou* categories of storehouse keepers, scribes, aides, and runners, noting again that they were appointed by the ministers and adding that they did not receive orders (or writs of appointment?) directly from the Son of Heaven or the ruler of the state (*bu ming yu tianzi, guojun* 不命於天子國君).¹⁷

¹⁴ *Zhouli zhengyi* 1.21.

¹⁵ *Zhouli zhengyi* 1.40, 54.

¹⁶ See the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 definition of *fu* as *wenshu zang* 文書藏 (storage of writings) as quoted by Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (1848–1908) in *Zhouli zhengyi* 1.20.

¹⁷ See *Zhouli zhengyi* 1.20; *Liji zhengyi* 11.94c. The later commentarial tradition has repeatedly applied Zheng's *Records of Ritual* commentary to the *Rituals of Zhou*.

Altogether, the outlines to the five original chapters of the *Rituals of Zhou* (no scribes are mentioned in the “Artificer’s Record” [“Kaogong ji” 考工記], a chapter that was included with the text only in Han times) list for the regular offices of the central government 442 storehouse keepers and 994 scribes, all of whom are practically invisible in the actual office descriptions. For both groups, additional numbers are given for administrative units beyond the central government (in the case of the scribes, an additional 101).¹⁸ While the outlines seem too schematic to reflect the actual administrative needs and practices of any particular period, the large number of officials charged with the production and storage of documents still points to an extensive amount and broad variety of pragmatic writing. This finding accords well with the archaeological evidence. Already for Warring States times, the reality of extensive pragmatic writing—implying large numbers of scribes—is well supported by excavated manuscripts. For earlier periods, the evidence is indirect yet not to be dismissed: the archives that underlay the bronze inscriptions required dedicated scribes who were most likely separate from the specialists who carved the inscription texts into the clay molds used for bronze casting. Considering just the social, technological, and economic implications of the production of thousands—likely tens of thousands—of bronze artifacts, one can easily imagine a substantial group of scribes in charge of records, even though the actual number may not have reached the dimensions noted in the outline sections of the *Rituals of Zhou*.

This is not to suggest a particularly early date for the composition of the *Rituals of Zhou* or for its temporal frame of reference. Leaving aside such considerations of dating, direct archaeological evidence for the status of governmental scribes comes from the Qin statutes, written on bamboo, that were excavated in 1975 from Shuihudi 睡虎地 (Yunmeng 雲夢, Hubei) tomb 11, which was sealed in 217 BCE. The tomb occupant, a man named Xi 喜 who lived from 262 to 217 BCE, began his governmental career as a local scribe (*shi* 史) at the age of eighteen or nineteen (244 BCE) and was promoted to the position of a prefectural scribe (*lingshi* 令史) three years later. He was appointed to the same position in a different district in the following year. As a prefectural scribe—still a rather low and junior position¹⁹—he had more extended responsibilities, including the investigation of criminal

¹⁸ All numbers follow Sun Yirang’s (1987) calculations at the end of each outline.

¹⁹ Xu Fuchang 1993, 378–382.

cases.²⁰ In 235 BCE, he was promoted to be in charge of criminal suits.²¹ From this career, it becomes clear that the position of the scribe, although hereditary in Qin, was an entry position and could be attained at a young age immediately after being trained in an office that the Qin statutes identify as “study room” (*xueshi* 學室).²² The principal prerequisite was the ability to read and recite a text of a certain length—a skill particularly important in legal matters.

There is further evidence, now from the Han, concerning the competence of governmental scribes. According to Xu Shen’s 許慎 (ca. 55–ca. 149) postface to the *Shuowen jiezi*, his dictionary contained a total of 9,353 characters, plus 1,163 variant forms.²³ He also informs us that the character glossary *Cang Jie* 蒼頡, attributed to the Qin chancellor Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 BCE) and further elaborated upon by Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE), included 5,340 characters.²⁴ According to Qiu Xigui, Shang oracle bone inscriptions include fewer than 5,000 different characters, and the Thirteen Classics contain a total of 6,544 individual characters.²⁵ As Qiu points out, the Thirteen Classics developed over a long period of time and accordingly include characters that were in use at different periods. Thus, “if it were possible to calculate the statistics of a period limited to one or two hundred years of the Zhou dynasty, the number of characters in general use during that period would probably fall short of the total number used in the *Thirteen Classics*.”²⁶ By way of comparison, Qiu further notes that the modern dictionary *Xiandai Hanyu cidian* 現代漢語辭典 includes about 4,900 different characters.

This broader perspective is relevant to a passage in the *Shuowen jiezi* postface—with an earlier version already included in the *Hanshu* “Monograph on Arts and Writings” (“Yiwen zhi” 藝文志)—that is often read as saying that a Han scribe had to memorize 9,000 different characters.²⁷ The passage in the *Shuowen jiezi* reads as follows: “at the age of seventeen or above, the young students are first examined, and

²⁰ Hulsewé 1985, 39n4; see also the various entries on *lingshi* as keyed in Hulsewé’s index.

²¹ See Xu Fuchang 1993, 8–14; Hulsewé 1985, 1.

²² Xu Fuchang 1993, 358–360; Hulsewé 1985, 87.

²³ *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 15B.1a. As noted by Qiu Xigui (2000, 48n10) and others before him, the actual total number of characters (including variants) is slightly higher, namely, more than 10,700. This is probably to be explained by later additions.

²⁴ *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 15A.14b. Yang Xiong’s *Cang Jie xunzuan* 蒼頡訓纂 was apparently a glossary to complement the earlier dictionary; see *Hanshu* 30.1720–1721.

²⁵ Qiu 2000, 49–50.

²⁶ Qiu 2000, 50.

²⁷ See, e.g., Winter 1998, 566; Wilkinson 1998, 48n29.

those who can recite and write nine thousand characters can serve as scribes” (學僮十七以上始試，諷籀書九千字乃得為史). Here, the Qing commentator Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815) glosses *zhou* 籀 as “to read out loud a written text” (*dushu* 讀書). Earlier commentators have understood *zhou* as referring to an early Zhou dictionary, still listed in the *Hanshu* “Monograph on Arts and Writings”: the *Scribe Zhou* (*Shi Zhou pian* 史籀篇) in fifteen bundles.²⁸ The parallel version of the *Shuowen* passage in the *Hanshu* does not include the character *zhou*: “the grand scribe examines the young students, and those who can recite and write more than nine thousand characters can serve as scribes” (太史試學僮，能諷書九千字以上乃得為史).²⁹ A third version of the passage, showing it in its original legal context, is now available in the “Statute on Scribes” (“Shilü” 史律) in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* (*Ernian lüling* 二年律令, likely referring to the year 186 BCE), a bamboo manuscript from tomb 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 (Jingzhou 荊州, Hubei). This text reads: “[One examines] the young students for scribal office by using fifteen bundles of bamboo slips [of text], and those who can recite and write more than five thousand characters can serve as scribes” ([試] 史學僮以十五篇，能諷書五千字以上乃得為史). Here, the modern manuscript editors explain *shiwu pian* 十五篇 (fifteen bundles of bamboo slips) as a reference to the *Shi Zhou pian* 史籀篇, which in the *Hanshu* happens to be listed as of just that size.³⁰ Like the *Shuowen*, the Zhangjiashan manuscript includes a reference to the students’ age of seventeen *sui* 歲 before they are examined for the position of a scribe; thus, it places the examination about two years before the age at which the Shuihudi tomb occupant was appointed to his position, strongly suggesting that the two manuscripts from Zhangjiashan and Shuihudi both refer to roughly the same entry-level function of a local governmental scribe.

Considering (a) the total numbers of characters included in the *Shuowen*, in the Qin-Han dictionary *Cang Jie*, or in the entire Thirteen Classics and (b) the rather simple formulaic tasks of an entry-level governmental scribe, it seems extremely unlikely that he had to master

²⁸ For the *Shuowen* passage and its commentaries, see *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 15A.11b–12a; for the *Hanshu* mention of the *Shi Zhou pian*, see *Hanshu* 30.1719.

²⁹ *Hanshu* 30.1721.

³⁰ Zhangjiashan ersiqi hao Han mu zhujian zhengli xiaozu 2001, 203. I find this conclusion too tenuous to support.

9,000 (or 5,000, as in the Zhangjiashan manuscript)³¹ individual characters. As Michael Loewe has noted with respect to the Han administrative wooden slips from Juyan (Edsen-gol; Inner Mongolia/Gansu), “the majority of the inscriptions were probably made by low-grade clerks or officials, whose education had been scanty, and whose practice at writing may have been somewhat limited.”³² Anthony Hulsewé, writing almost fifty years ago, doubted the number of 9,000 individual characters as well, noting that even all Western Han dictionaries combined would not have reached such a number. Hulsewé therefore proposed to read the *Shuowen* and *Hanshu* accounts as referring to the memorization of writings that were altogether 9,000 characters long.³³ Depending on the text, this understanding would reduce the number of individual characters drastically. If it were a group of primers, perhaps including texts like the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*Xiaojing* 孝經, ca. 1,800 characters) or parts of the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語, ca. 12,000 characters),³⁴ the number of different graphs would come down to fewer than 2,000.

However, Hulsewé draws attention to a fragment of the *Han System of Offices* (*Han guan yi* 漢官儀, attributed to Ying Shao 應劭 [ca. 140–before 204]), preserved only in the *Comprehensive Statutes* (*Tongdian* 通典) of 801, that states that, in Han times, a *lingshi* 令史 mastering both the *Cang Jie pian* and the *Shi Zhou pian* could be appointed to the Magnolia (or Thoroughwort) Terrace (*lantai* 蘭臺), the imperial palace depository for charts and writings.³⁵ Hulsewé therefore concludes that the reference to 9,000 characters may have meant different things at different times: a text of a certain length, the entire contents of the two dictionaries, or certain other works.³⁶ However, the *Han System of Offices* discussion may not pertain to governmental scribes in general, and certainly not to the entry-level position of an ordinary local *shi* (as opposed to a curator of imperial documents) in particular. According to the very limited information available, Mag-

³¹ The textual difference between 5,000 and 9,000 remains difficult to explain. The numbers “five” and “nine” were clearly distinct not only in sound (ruling out an oral misunderstanding) but also in character shape (precluding a simple copyist’s error).

³² Loewe 1967, vol. 1, 16.

³³ Hulsewé 1959, 246–247. This understanding seems also implied by Thern (1966, 13), who translates the passage as “When male students of seventeen *sui* and older are tested for the first time, they must recite and write 9000 words before they can be appointed officials.” It is unclear what Thern means by “words.”

³⁴ Numbers from Wilkinson 1998, 465.

³⁵ See *Hanshu buzhu* 30.25a.

³⁶ Hulsewé 1959, 248.

nolia/Thoroughwort Terrace was the office where historical and other important records of the textual tradition were stored.³⁷ It was an imperial institution in charge of forming and preserving historical and cultural memory, not an agency that generated day-to-day administrative documents for the local bureaucracy. This impression is well supported by the fact that in the first century CE, Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), son of the eminent official Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54) and soon to be the most accomplished scholar and writer of his time, was appointed to the Magnolia/Thoroughwort Terrace for the express purpose of completing his history of the Western Han.³⁸

I therefore agree with Kenneth Brashier's interpretation of the Zhangjiashan passage as indicating that a text of a certain length had to be read, recited, and written.³⁹ Whether or not this text was the *Shi Zhou pian* remains undecided. In the same Zhangjiashan "Statute on Scribes," it is noted that diviners (*bu* 卜) had to master writings of 3,000 characters, but that some of them could recite more than 30,000; and an invocator (*zhu* 祝) was expected to recite 7,000. While the knowledge of 7,000 different characters would have been a highly unlikely demand for a low government position, the number of 30,000 characters cannot possibly be understood in this way, simply because there were not 30,000 different characters. This number can only refer to the length of a text, and given that the passage on the invocator is exactly parallel and directly related to those on the scribe and the diviner, its understanding should be extended to those as well.

The words *feng* 諷 and *zhou*, both meaning "to read out loud," point to a particular technical competence expected from a scribe. Why would a scribe be asked to recite a text? For a low-level government scribe, who was certainly not a member of the learned elite (as opposed to the scholars and high officials who memorized and recited the Classics), recitation was important because it demanded control of the phonetic correlation between graphs and the words they were writing. With the writing system not yet standardized and the use of loan characters for homophonous characters widespread, the scribe had to be able to resort to a phonetic use of the writing system as necessary, especially when encountering some less common words or in situations where a text was dictated to him. Such phonetic use of a limited number of loan characters for a much larger number of homophonous

³⁷ See *Hanshu* 19A.725.

³⁸ See *Hou Hanshu* 40A.1334.

³⁹ Brashier 2003.

words was far more economical and easier to master than a large repertoire of different characters specific to particular words.

As noted above, the low-level scribe in charge of administrative and other bureaucratic writing, while directly visible only in Warring States and later writings, was most likely already part of the Western Zhou royal court, even though probably in far lesser numbers. Indeed, the origins of the very word *shi* may be found in the kinds of administrative scribal activities mentioned in the *Rituals of Zhou* as well as in the Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan manuscripts. Morphologically, the word *shi* seems to have originally indicated someone who “marked” or “scratched” things and belongs to a group of early terms that according to Wolfgang Behr also includes *shi* 使 (to employ, send), *li* 吏 (clerk, official), *li* 理 (to divide, regulate, mark), *shi* 事 (to serve for), *shi* 仕 (to be a clerk, to serve as), and *shi* 士 (servant, retainer).⁴⁰ As Behr points out, whether any of this was still on Xu Shen’s mind when glossing *shi* 史 as *ji shi zhe* 記事者 (one who notes down affairs) is doubtful;⁴¹ in typical Eastern Han fashion, Xu may have simply produced a pun. Be this as it may, it appears that the basic acts of marking (including calculating) were at the original root of scribal identity.⁴² Furthermore, the clerical functions of day-to-day bureaucratic recording match well with the low status of the scribes in the *Rituals of Zhou*, where they are grouped with other unranked officials, among them artisans (*gong*).

Of all transmitted texts from the Warring States and early imperial periods, it is the *Rituals of Zhou*—the very representation of bureaucratic order—that alone registers the rather pedestrian dimension of scribal activity for virtually all governmental offices, real or imagined. Records of simple administrative duties, abundant as they must have been, were discarded by the literary tradition. Apart from the *Rituals of Zhou*, only late Warring States and early imperial manuscripts like

⁴⁰ See Behr 2005, 15–18. It should be noted that the morphological analysis of the *word* takes primacy over the paleographic interpretation of the *graph*, despite the latter’s prominence in scholarship since Wang Guowei’s seminal essay “Shi shi,” in Wang Guowei 1975, 6.1a–6b. Altogether, the literature on *shi* is vast; see the bibliographic information in Behr 2005, 15nn7–8; C. Cook 1995, 250–254; Gentz 2001, 9. A good range of graphic interpretations is included in Matsumaru and Takashima 1994, nos. 0004, 0024, 3371, 3425, 5881. For the fallacies involved in the interpretation of *graphs* to “decipher” the meaning of the *words* they are writing, see Boltz 1994; Takashima 2000.

⁴¹ Behr 2005, 18.

⁴² Kominami (1999), while arguing from the problematic vantage point of graphic analysis, arrives at much the same conclusion, namely, that the origin of the scribe should be seen in duties of calculation.

those from Shuihudi or Zhangjiashan speak explicitly of such low-level writing. That this kind of administrative writing derived from an originally religious framework, as has been repeatedly proposed,⁴³ strikes me as problematic in two ways: First, it might neglect the obvious bias of the archaeological and received textual record as well as all indirect evidence for an early, concomitant use of writing in several distinct cultural spheres and on several distinct social levels. Second, it has the potential to exaggerate the status and power of writing in early Chinese culture by wrongly generalizing its most exalted instances⁴⁴ and to overburden the low-level clerical work with vast assumptions of cultural competence and meaning. (Likewise, it would also be anachronistic to project the particular characteristics of Warring States menial writing, and of low-level clerks, wholesale into much earlier periods.) Such confusion is apparent, for example, in the assumption that an ordinary Han scribe had to master 9,000 different characters. It creates the danger of overlooking differences in the functions and levels of literacy and of blinding us to the particularities of writing for diverse purposes. The 1,095 low-level clerks listed in the *Rituals of Zhou* were producers of mundane records, and probably so were their counterparts in the early Zhou archives. However, scribal officers in the *Rituals of Zhou* are not limited to the menial positions and purposes implied in the outlines.

The High-Ranking Scribes in the Rituals of Zhou

Since at least Eastern Zhou times, the Chinese tradition has privileged the representation of the scribe from the perspective of high rank, religious duty, historical knowledge, moral judgment, and political influence. The *Rituals of Zhou* account corresponds partially with this image. The forty-two offices that mention the writing, reading, or storing of texts are largely devoted to fiscal, legal, administrative, military, ritual, and astrological matters. However, it is the Ministry of Ritual (*chunguan* 春官) that includes all but one of the actual offices of scribes: the grand scribe (*taishi* 大史), the minor scribe (*xiaoshi* 小史), the scribe of interior affairs (*neishi* 內史), the scribe of exterior affairs

⁴³ See, e.g., Lewis 1999b, 28. Shirakawa (1974) has suggested that the early graph 史 seems to depict the offering of a basket of inscribed slips upward, namely, to the ancestral spirits. From this perspective, the function of the *shi*—if not the function of writing altogether—has often been seen as having originated in a religious context. I myself have changed my mind on the issue.

⁴⁴ See Nylan 2000; Kern 2000a.

(*waishi* 外史), and the scribe in royal attendance (*yushi* 御史). In addition, only the Ministry of State (*tianguan*) includes the office of the scribe of female affairs (*nüshi* 女史) in the service of the queen. In other words, the offices of the *shi* belong largely to the ritual and religious administration, while the offices of writing in the Ministries of State, Education (*diguan* 地官), War (*xiaguan* 夏官), and Justice (*qiguan* 秋官) bear different titles and are mostly concerned with administrative, legal, and economic purposes. As will be seen below, the ritual dimension of the *shi* office is also the one that overwhelmingly dominates its appearance in both bronze inscriptions and early transmitted texts. For the purposes of the present chapter, I relegate the offices of writing in the Ministries of State, Education, War, and Justice to the appendix while focusing on those in the Ministry of Ritual.

In the Ministry of Ritual, the following offices of writing and of the proclamation of texts are listed:⁴⁵

- The great invocator (*dazhu* 大祝) is responsible for the prayer words for the six kinds of invocations. He tells the officer in charge of the public fields (*dianren* 甸人) to read out loud the prayer text. Staff: two junior grand masters, four senior servicemen; at the same time, the office is directly superior to that of the minor invocator (*xiao zhu* 小祝), which has a staff of eight ordinary servicemen, sixteen junior servicemen, two storehouse keepers, four scribes, four aides, and forty runners.

- The grand scribe (*taishi* 大史) is in charge of the six codices of the state. During the fasting periods before the major sacrifices, he, together with other ritual officers, reads out loud the ritual writings (*lishu* 禮書). On the day of the sacrifice, those in charge of the ritual writings take their positions according to the appropriate sequence. On grand assemblies and audiences, the grand scribe uses the ritual writings to harmonize the ritual affairs. On the day of granting silk, he takes the writings to report to the king. At a grand funeral, on the day of sending off the dead to his place in the ancestral temple, he reads out loud the dirge (*lei* 誄). Staff: two junior grand masters, four senior servicemen. The office is directly superior to that of the minor scribe.

- The minor scribe (*xiaoshi* 小史) is in charge of the records of the state, of establishing genealogies, and of defining the alternating *zhao* 昭 and *mu* 穆 order in the ancestral line. At a grand sacrifice, when reading out loud the ritual regulations (*lifa* 禮法), the scribe uses

⁴⁵ The following list contains direct translations from the *Rituals of Zhou* while also summarizing and/or further elaborating on the text for the individual offices.

his writings to put the sacrificial stands into the correct sequence. At a grand funeral, when the posthumous name is bestowed, he reads out loud the dirge. Staff: eight ordinary servicemen, sixteen junior servicemen, four storehouse keepers, eight scribes, four aides, forty runners.

- The royal astrologer (*baozhangshi* 保章氏) is in charge of observing the astral bodies. He records the movements of the stars, constellations, sun, and moon in order to observe the changes under Heaven, so as to discriminate auspicious and inauspicious events. Staff: two ordinary servicemen, four junior servicemen, two storehouse keepers, four scribes, eight runners.

- The scribe of the interior (*neishi* 內史) is in charge of the laws of the king's "eight handles" of government and of proclaiming the king's ordinances. He reads out loud the writings that record the affairs from the four quarters. He is further in charge of writing down the king's commands and of storing them in the archive. Staff: one ordinary grand master, two junior grand masters, four senior servicemen, eight ordinary servicemen, sixteen junior servicemen, four storehouse keepers, eight scribes, four aides, forty runners.

- The scribe of the exterior (*waishi* 外史) is in charge of writing down the commands issued to the realm beyond the capital. He also is in charge of the records of the four quarters. Staff: four senior servicemen, eight ordinary servicemen, sixteen junior servicemen, two aides, twenty runners.

- The scribe in royal attendance (*yushi* 御史) is in charge of royal edicts and commands issued to the state, the capital, and the general population. All those in governing positions receive their laws and ordinances from him. Staff: eight ordinary servicemen, sixteen junior servicemen, one hundred and twenty scribes, four storehouse keepers, four aides, forty runners.

From this list and the staff members as listed in the "outlines of offices," it is clear that the various scribes are of very different ranks and in charge of very different duties. The office of the grand scribe, for example, does not have its own menial scribes; these are included only in the lower-ranking office of the minor scribe with its far more extensive staff. Apparently, the office of the grand scribe is in charge not of producing documents but of presenting them on important occasions. The highest-ranking scribal office is that of the scribe of the interior, headed by an ordinary grand master; on the other hand, the office of the scribe in royal attendance is headed by eight ordinary service-

men—that is, members of the lowest stratum of the ranked nobility—yet commands no fewer than one hundred and twenty menial scribes.

The symmetrical account of offices and their staff is a utopian ideal of bureaucratic order, and subsequent commentaries have further added to the idealization. But the *Rituals of Zhou* is not entirely fictional. It comprises the knowledge of a wide range of ritual and administrative practices that at least in part can be traced back to middle and late Western Zhou times; its fiction is to synthesize and recast this diachronic and fragmentary knowledge as a synchronic and comprehensive blueprint of government. The scribal offices of the Ministry of Ritual exemplify this development. Three other types of sources (two transmitted, one excavated) provide the bulk of references to these offices: Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, the ritual canons of the *Ceremonial Ritual* (ten passages) and *Records of Ritual* (twenty-six), and the anecdotal historiographies of the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳; sixty-six) and the *Discourses of the States* (*Guoyu* 國語; twenty-seven).⁴⁶ By comparison—considering just the remaining texts of the Thirteen Classics—the *Documents* mention the *shi* in four passages, the *Poetry* in two, the *Gongyang Tradition* (*Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳) in two, the *Guliang Tradition* (*Guliang zhuan* 穀亮) in three, the *Analects* in three, the *Approaching Elegance* (*Erya* 爾雅) in one, and the *Mengzi* in two. While these numbers do not constitute a complete account, they show an overall tendency of the received tradition to regard the high-level scribes, on the one hand, as ritual specialists and, on the other hand, as political advisors to, and speakers for, their rulers. In fact, these functions are related because the advisors (e.g., the remonstrators in the *Zuo Tradition* and the *Discourses of the States*) are men profoundly learned in the past as well as in the operations of the moral cosmos. Their knowledge comprises, among other branches of learning, the command of historical precedents and their applicability to the present, the interpretation of portents, the calculation of the calendar, and the correct order of ritual, especially sacrificial, activity. Much of their competence thus overlaps with that of the ritual specialists noted in the *Ceremonial Ritual* and the *Records of Ritual*.

However, the *Zuo Tradition*, the *Discourses of the States*, the *Ceremonial Ritual*, and the *Records of Ritual* mention scribes not only as officers of general competence in ritual matters but in two distinctly religious functions, namely, as diviners and invocators. Only once

⁴⁶ My count of “passages” is the result of an electronic search of the Academia Sinica database.

does the *Rituals of Zhou* mention a scribe as a participant in the actual practice of divination (in the discussion of the diviners [zhanren 占人] in the Ministry of Ritual); by contrast, the *Records of Rites* and the *Discourses of the States* contain three such passages each, and the *Zuo Tradition* contains seven.⁴⁷ Likewise, the *Rituals of Zhou* contains not a single reference to the officials that in the other sources are named invocator scribe (zhushi 祝史), spirit medium scribe (wushi 巫史), sacrificial scribe (jishi 祭史), divination scribe (bushi 卜史), or milfoil diviner scribe (shishi 筮史)—all of them religious specialists who seem to have been in direct contact with their rulers. While the *Rituals of Zhou*, like the *Zhangjiashan Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year*, mentions the high-ranking scribes directly next to the invocators and other religious specialists, it never conflates the two. On the other hand, the *Ceremonial Ritual*, *Records of Ritual*, *Discourses of the States*, and *Zuo Tradition* clearly speak of these officials not as menial clerks but as men of considerable status; they are decidedly not the low-ranking scribes that are, as a matter of course, found in the offices of the minor invocator and virtually all other religious officials of the *Rituals of the Zhou*.

Remarkably, these terms also do not appear in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, and they are equally absent from the early layers of the Five Classics that mention scribes and may, in one version or another, possibly date from late Western Zhou times.⁴⁸ In the *Poetry*, scribes are mentioned only in two of the “minor elegantiae” (xiaoya 小雅): In Ode 193, “At the sun-moon conjunction in the tenth month” (*Shi yue zhi jiao* 十月之交), the scribe of the interior is mentioned among the highest dignitaries of the royal court. In Ode 220, “When the guests first take their places on their mats” (*Bin zhi chu yan* 賓之初筵), a scribe—possibly of relatively low status—assists an inspector who records those who are drunk at a lavish court banquet.⁴⁹ In the

⁴⁷ *Zhouli zhengyi* 48.1960; *Liji zhengyi* 17.153a (“Yueling” 月令), 29.247a (“Yuzao” 玉藻), 40.323a (“Zaji” 雜記); *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*, Zhuang 22, Xi 15, Cheng 16, Xiang 25, Zhao 7, Zhao 31, Ai 9; *Guoyu*, “Jin yu” 1–2, 4; *Yili zhushu* 47.252a–c (“Shaolao kuishi” 少牢饋食).

⁴⁸ See Xi Hanjing 1983; Lai Changyang and Liu Xiang 1985; Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu 1986. In my following account of the *Poetry*, *Documents*, and Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, I draw on Kern 2007, where I extensively discuss writing as performance and representation of writing during the Western Zhou; see also there for the arguments concerning a late Western Zhou date for the relevant *Poetry* and *Documents* passages. The *Documents* chapters discussed here all belong to the authentic “modern text” version of the text, and within that version, they come from the earlier chapters.

⁴⁹ Legge 1895, vol. 4, 322, 399; Karlgren 1950a, 139, 174.

royal speeches that compose the early layers of the *Documents*, scribes are mentioned in a number of chapters. In the “Metal-Bound Coffers” (“Jin teng” 金滕), the scribe presents the Duke of Zhou’s 周公 written prayer (*ce zhu* 冊祝); when the writing is later recovered, the collective group of scribes is consulted about its contents.⁵⁰ In the “Announcement about Alcohol” (“Jiu gao” 酒誥), both the grand scribe and the scribe of the interior are mentioned among the high dignitaries; the grand scribe is so mentioned in the “Establishment of Government” (“Li zheng” 立政) and the “Testamentary Charge” (“Gu ming” 顧命).⁵¹ In the “Announcement concerning Luo” (“Luo gao” 洛誥), the king orders a “maker of records” (*zuo ce* 作冊) to announce a written prayer and, later, a written charge.⁵² In the “Testamentary Charge,” the late king’s testamentary charge is first recorded on bamboo slips; later, in an elaborate ceremony, the grand scribe presents the recorded charge to the new king.⁵³ Finally, another text possibly of Western Zhou origin,⁵⁴ the *Remnant Zhou Documents* (*Yi Zhou shu* 逸周書) chapter “The Great Capture” (“Shi fu” 世俘) that relates the Zhou conquest of the Shang, notes that the victorious King Wu 武 asked his scribe to recite a document to announce the royal conquest to Heaven.⁵⁵ In sum, all the appearances of scribes in the early *Documents* chapters match perfectly well with the account of their position and duties in the *Rituals of Zhou*. In both sources, the different types of scribes, as well as the makers of records, are high officials close to the king. Their duties are centered on ritual as well as on governmental matters, including the public proclamations regarding the ritual order.

The same is true for Western Zhou bronze inscriptions; here as in the *Documents* speeches, the scribes, in Constance A. Cook’s words, were “the most powerful ritualist[s] and minister[s] in the king’s service.”⁵⁶ As patrons of inscribed bronze vessels, not only their names but also their titles appear in the inscriptions. The standard reference work *Index to Bronze Inscriptions* (*Jinwen yinde* 金文引得) notes 83 ap-

⁵⁰ Legge 1895, vol. 3, 353, 359–360; Karlgren 1950a, 35–36. Here and in the following, references to Legge and Karlgren are given for convenience; see Kern 2007 for my disagreements with many of their translations.

⁵¹ Legge 1895, vol. 3, 410, 515, 557; Karlgren 1950a, 45, 68, 71.

⁵² Legge 1895, vol. 3, 451–452; Karlgren 1950a, 55.

⁵³ Legge 1895, vol. 3, 549–551, 558; Karlgren 1950a, 70–71.

⁵⁴ As argued by Shaughnessy 1980–1981.

⁵⁵ Huang Huaixin, Zhang Maorong, and Tian Xudong 1995, 464–465; Shaughnessy 1980–1981, 59.

⁵⁶ C. Cook 1995, 250.

pearances of scribes for the Shang dynasty, 4 for either the Shang or Western Zhou, 220 for the Western Zhou, 11 for the Spring and Autumn period, and 5 for Warring States times. In addition, it registers three inscriptions that refer to makers of records for the Shang and twenty-five for the Western Zhou⁵⁷—though none of these inscriptions mentions a scribe or maker of records as being in charge of the actual practice of writing. Instead, they are representatives of the king who speak on behalf of their ruler either during court ceremonies or when sent out as envoys. Serving in this unique capacity, they were men of great stature who often had their accomplishments recognized and were given permission to have them recorded on inscribed bronze vessels.

This is not to downplay the ample presence of documents at the Western Zhou royal court and their association with these high officials. Following King Zhao's 昭 (r. 977/75–957 BCE) disastrous military campaign southward that resulted in defeat and the death of the king,⁵⁸ large numbers of official appointments were given to members of the elite beyond the royal clan. Meanwhile, the eastern part of the realm appears to have slipped from royal control; “inscribed vessels from the middle and late Western Zhou have been found almost exclusively in the western Wei River capital region.”⁵⁹ In this time of crisis, a series of social, political, ritual, and administrative reforms led to a more complex bureaucracy. At the same time, all aspects of the production of inscribed bronze vessels became increasingly standardized: the design of the vessel, the calligraphy, the phrasing of the text.⁶⁰ The most conspicuous evidence of this increasingly bureaucratic ritual, political, and administrative order are the appointment inscriptions that begin to appear in mid-Western Zhou times with the reign of King Mu 穆 (r. 956–918 BCE), the successor to King Zhao.

In these ceremonies of royal appointment, the king (or sometimes a high-level aristocrat) issued a profoundly formulaic “charge” (*ming* 命, also written as *ling* 令, “order”) or “bestowal” (*ci* [易>]賜) with which

⁵⁷ There is no question that, in many other inscriptions, scribes or makers of records do not identify themselves with their title, but the actual number of these inscriptions is impossible to determine.

⁵⁸ Li Feng 2006, 93–102; Shaughnessy 1999, 322–323.

⁵⁹ Shaughnessy 1999, 323–328 (quotation on 325; see also Li Feng 2000).

⁶⁰ Rawson 1990, vol. IIA, 93, 125. As noted by Rawson (1999, 438–439), “a strong centralized control of ritual seems to have been in place”; for bronze design, a “static repertoire” came into being, “limited and reiterated” and of “persistent sameness”—expressing an aesthetic ideology that embraced the bronze object as well as the wording and calligraphy of the inscription.

he commanded the appointee to a certain position and bestowed on him the insignia and paraphernalia appropriate to his rank. The charge or bestowal was read from a bamboo document (*ce* 冊), a copy of which was given to the appointee; this text then served as the basis for the inscription of a bronze artifact that was cast in his name and with which he could henceforth sacrifice to his ancestors and inform them about his accomplishments.⁶¹ Not only the inscription (and the vessel as a whole) but also the underlying ceremony were strictly codified.⁶² To date, six late Western Zhou inscriptions provide the most comprehensive picture of the ceremony: on the Song-*ding* 頌鼎 tripod (ca. 825 BCE?), which is repeated on at least three *ding* tripods, five *gui* tureens and their lids, and two *hu* 壺 vases and their lids; the Feng-*ding* 鬲鼎 tripod (809 BCE); the Huan-*pan* 寰盤 water basin (800 BCE), which is repeated on at least one *ding* tripod; the Shanfu Shan-*ding* 善夫山鼎 tripod (789 BCE); and the two separate Qiu-*ding* 逯鼎 tripods (786 and 785 BCE), which are repeated on two and ten *ding* tripods, respectively.⁶³ The Feng-*ding* inscription (809 BCE) comprises ninety-seven characters:

It was the nineteenth year, the fourth month, after the full moon, the day *xinmao*. The king was in the Zhao [Temple] of the Kang Palace. He arrived at the Great Chamber and assumed his position. Assisted to his right by Intendant Xun, Feng [I] entered the gate. [I] assumed [my] position in the center of the court, facing north [toward the king]. Scribe Liu presented the king with the written order. The king called out to the scribe of the interior, X,⁶⁴ to announce the written bestowal to Feng [me]: “[I bestow on you] a black jacket with embroidered hem, red kneepads, a scarlet demi-circlet, a chime pennant, and a bridle with bit and cheek-pieces; use [these] to perform your service!” [I] bowed with

⁶¹ *Jinwen yinde* contains forty-two bronze inscriptions that use the phrase “issue the charge/order from a bamboo document” (*ce ming/ling*) and seven more that use “issue the bestowal from a bamboo document” (*ce ci*). Kane 1982–1983; Chen Hanping 1986; Wong Yin-wai 1978; Falkenhausen 1993, 156–167.

⁶² Chen Hanping 1986, 28–31.

⁶³ The pronunciation of the character 逯 (“X”) is unclear; for the text of the X-*ding* inscription, see Chen Hanping 1986, 26; Chen Peifen 1982, 17. For the Song-*ding* inscription, see Shirakawa 24.165–168 (no. 137), with the translation of the *gui* inscription in Shaughnessy 1999, 298–299. For the Shanfu Shan-*ding* inscription, see Shirakawa 26.357–361 (no. 154), with the translation in Shaughnessy 1997a, 74–76. For the Huan-*pan* inscription, see Shirakawa 29.590–595 (no. 177). For the Qiu-*ding* (also called Zuo- or Mai-*ding* by some scholars) inscriptions, see the large number of essays in *Wenwu* 2003.3, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2003.3, and *Zhongguo lishi wenwu* 2003.4. Shaughnessy (1999, 298) dates the Song-*gui* (and by implication the other Song vessels) tentatively to 825 BCE. The remaining inscriptions are fully dated (year, month, day). See also Shaughnessy 1991, 285, table A16.

⁶⁴ The name of this scribe of the interior is unclear.

my head touching the ground. [May I] dare in response to extol the Son of Heaven's greatly illustrious and abundant blessings and on account of this make for my August Deceased Father, the Elder Y, and his wife Zheng [this] precious tripod! May [I enjoy] extended longevity for ten thousand years! May sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure [this tripod]!

唯十又四年月既望辛卯。王在周康昭宮。格于大室即位。宰訊右趨入門立中廷北嚮。史留受王令書。王呼內史留冊賜趨玄衣純黼赤市朱黃鑾旂攸勒，用事。趨拜稽首。敢對揚天子丕顯魯休，用作朕皇考釐(?)伯鄭姬寶鼎。其眉壽萬年。子子孫孫永寶。⁶⁵

This text is in large part identical to the Song, Huan, and Shanfu Shan inscriptions. This fact testifies to a standard institutional writing practice as well as to a written institutional memory of King Xuan 宣 (827–782 BCE) at the Zhou royal court, as the inscriptions date from 825(?), 809, 800, and 789 BCE and the bronze vessels were in the possession of different individuals. The two Qiu inscriptions, at 281 and 316 characters, are far longer in their royal speeches and the final “statement of purpose” by the appointee, Qiu, but they still relate the same sequence of events and mention by name the same scribe who fifteen years earlier appeared already in the Huan-*pan* inscription. Furthermore, right before the statement of purpose (which was not part of the appointment ceremony but was later affixed to the text as it was prepared for inscription), they mention a concluding step in the ceremony that is also related in the Song and Shanfu Shan inscriptions; I quote the second Qiu-*ding*.⁶⁶

[I,] Qiu, bowed with my head touching the ground. [I] received the bamboo slips and suspended them from my girdle before exiting. In return, [I] submitted a jade tablet.

趨拜稽首受冊佩以出，反入堇圭。

The vast majority of mid- and late Western Zhou appointment inscriptions mention neither the initially written order (*lingshu* 令書) nor the appointee's exiting with the inscribed charge; they simply provide the text of the royal appointment charge, often introduced by “the king says” (*wang yue* 王曰).⁶⁷ However, it is clear that the charge was

⁶⁵ Chen Peifen 1982, 17–20; Chen Hanping 1986, 26. Here and below, I provide the bronze inscription characters in their accepted transcription and interpretation by the modern editors.

⁶⁶ For a detailed study and full translation of the Qiu bronze inscriptions, see Falkenhausen 2006; for the present passage, he offers a different, equally plausible translation.

⁶⁷ For a detailed discussion of this phrase and its ceremonial implications, see Luo Tai [Lothar von Falkenhausen] 2006, 363–364.

always issued in an elaborate, strictly orchestrated and standardized court ritual, and that this ceremony is represented most extensively in the Song, Shanfu Shan, and Qiu inscriptions.

The textual performance that emerges from these standardized descriptions—note the uniformity not only of the performances but also of their inscribed records—is a complex interplay between oral and written textual presentation, and it includes high-ranking scribes (or makers of records) in both. First, prior to the appointment ceremony, a written order was prepared at court. After the ritual participants formally assumed their positions, a scribe handed the order to the king. The king then called out to a second scribe to read the written order to the appointee. The document was given to the appointee, who attached it to his girdle. After the ceremony, this written charge served as the basis for the bronze inscription. The appointment ceremony was thus focused on the presentation and handover of a written document that, however, was delivered as the king's direct speech and with the full ritual force and imposing dignity of the royal ceremony. The written document was important, but it was its ritual performance, with the king personally present, that sealed its authority. It is at this point that the function of the high-ranking scribe becomes apparent: he is the chief ritualist and royal representative who reads out loud the document—a text presumably prepared by his staff of low-ranking scribes—in order to announce the charge to the appointee.

Yet, as Lothar von Falkenhausen has shown, even a text like the Feng-*ding* inscription may be telling only half the story. In the magnificent inscription of 373 characters on the Qiu-*pan* water basin that was excavated in 2003, together with the tripods mentioned above, in Yangjiacun 楊家村 (Mei xian 眉縣, Shaanxi), the royal speech is, in fact, given in response to a speech in which Qiu extols his and his ancestors' accomplishments. The Qiu-*pan* is one of only two texts known to date that include both speeches—the other one being the inscription on the Da Ke-*ding* 大克鼎 tripod⁶⁸—while numerous Western Zhou bronze inscriptions relate either one or the other. Yet the Qiu-*pan*'s royal speech is clearly related to its counterparts in the two tripod inscriptions that describe in detail the appointment ceremony. Considering the otherwise very high degree of standardization in mid- and late Western Zhou court ritual and its textual expressions both oral and written, it seems unlikely that the Qiu-*pan* reflects a singular case; in fact, traces of similar speech exchanges have already

⁶⁸ See Shirakawa 28.490–511 (no. 167) and the analysis in Luo Tai 2006, 357–359.

been identified.⁶⁹ Most importantly, Qiu's extensive speech cannot have been an impromptu performance (if that would have been at all permissible in the highly formalized appointment ceremony). It includes—in this respect similar to the famous *pan* water basin of Scribe Qiang—not only a list of Qiu's ancestors but also a list of the Zhou kings whom they had served. Without question, such lists were backed by documents in the royal or Qiu family archives from which Qiu's text was then carefully prepared in writing.

Finally, in another expression of Western Zhou royal ritual and textual culture, parallel to the rise of the appointment ceremony and its representation in bronze vessels, inscriptions of legal contracts appeared in larger numbers.⁷⁰ One characteristic feature of these inscriptions is that they meticulously list the names and titles of the officials who served as witnesses at the time of the legal agreement. The same logic seems to underlie the inscriptions that give more detailed accounts of appointment ceremonies: especially from the appointee's perspective, it was important that his court-sanctioned bronze vessel included the names and titles of the officials who delivered the appointment (and the right to a bronze vessel). Through their texts, such bronze vessels forever contained and displayed the origins of their own existence—the official, bureaucratically verified event of the appointment ceremony—and enlisted both the king and his highest ritual officials as witnesses.

Conclusion

The early passages from the *Poetry* and the *Documents* as well as numerous examples of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions show the high-ranking scribes of the royal court in precisely the functions attributed to them in the *Rituals of Zhou*. As representatives of the king, these officials—especially the scribe of the interior, who ranks the highest in the *Rituals of Zhou* and appears with particular prominence and frequency in mid- and late Western Zhou inscriptions—went on diplomatic and military missions, led important royal rituals, and announced the king's proclamations. They also were the men in command of the official court documents and their ritual presentation but apparently not personally involved in their menial preparation. The

⁶⁹ Luo Tai 2006.

⁷⁰ U. Lau 1999; Schunk 1994; Skosey 1996.

latter duty, and also the maintenance of what must have been sizable royal archives, will have fallen to clerks and storehouse keepers.

The *Rituals of Zhou* account of scribes as chief ritualists and royal representatives, on the one hand, and of menial clerks, on the other, accords well with the available Western Zhou sources. While the clerks, working on perishable stationery, have left no direct traces of their activities, circumstantial evidence for the presence of archives and the use of writing for administrative, legal, economic, and other pragmatic purposes is incontrovertible. Late Warring States and early imperial manuscripts—the earliest evidence we have on wood, bamboo, and silk—show the continuity and extensive proliferation of such writing over time.

Evidence for high-ranking scribes as royal dignitaries comes directly from Western Zhou bronze inscriptions as well as from the early layers of the *Documents* and the *Poetry*. All terms used for scribes in the *Rituals of Zhou* also appear in bronze inscriptions, but only some of them can be found in later texts such as the *Zuo Tradition*, the *Discourses of the States*, the *Ceremonial Ritual*, and the *Records of Ritual*, among others. On the other hand, these later texts show scribes frequently involved in a range of more specifically religious practices; during the Warring States, in fact, the term *shi* referred not merely to clerical officials but also to genuine religious specialists. Yet this is not how *shi* officials (or makers of records) appear in the early passages from the *Poetry* and the *Documents* or in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions—or in the *Rituals of Zhou*. In short, the account of scribes in the latter text matches their characterization in Western Zhou, rather than Warring States and early imperial, sources.

The case of the scribes, however limited it may be, suggests that at least some knowledge of actual mid- and late Western Zhou offices was available to the authors of the *Rituals of Zhou*, and that they championed this knowledge over more recent or contemporary practices. Without access to the numerous Western Zhou bronze vessels that after some three millennia have finally been excavated from tombs and storage pits, the authors of the *Rituals of Zhou* not only listed the correct Western Zhou offices but also managed to avoid conflating earlier with later information. They were able to distinguish ancient, long-discontinued practices from contemporaneous ones and decided to give an account that they knew was far removed from their own time. Nevertheless, as has often been pointed out, this is by no means true for all of the *Rituals of Zhou*; there simply is too much Warring States (or even early imperial) thought and language inter-

woven into the texture of this ideal governmental blueprint, and the fictional nature of the *Rituals of Zhou* arises from the conflation of diachronic phenomena. The complexity of this situation invites us to rethink some of our stereotypes in dating the *Rituals of Zhou* or, for that matter, any other early text. The text as a whole must be a late composite, but its parts are not forged. Whoever compiled or used the text in Warring States or early imperial times thought of it as describing an ideal of perfect and comprehensive order.

Pending further research, the account of the scribes may be a peculiar exception—yet an exception that speaks in a unique way to the nature of the *Rituals of Zhou* as a text. The knowledge about the scribes testifies to an institutional memory that must have existed in the form of archives. Yet unlike most other cultural artifacts, the archives, preserving the bureaucratic order of old, were the products of scribes. Transforming these scribal products into a new one, the *Rituals of Zhou* came to express the ideal order of government and more: the text emerged as the ideal account of institutional scribal memory itself that was instrumental to conceptualizing any such order. Although the *Rituals of Zhou* was a late Warring States or early imperial artifact of writing, the memory of scribes enshrined in it was that of high antiquity; its authors, it appears, imagined themselves as the true successors of the ancient scribes they knew so well. In the end, their text stands as a supreme example of technical administrative writing, devoid of history, moral claims, or explicit argument. Its own imperial history as a Classic, since Han times supported by its association with the Duke of Zhou, emerged from mapping a unified bureaucratic order onto the imagined ideal of the Western Zhou—an ideal past, remembered and imagined, in which the authors of the text had already found themselves.

APPENDIX: THE OFFICES OF WRITING IN THE MINISTRIES
OF STATE, EDUCATION, WAR, AND JUSTICE

As earlier in this essay, the list of offices contains direct translations from the *Rituals of Zhou* while also summarizing, expanding, and explaining the text for the individual offices.

Ministry of State (tian guan)

- The chief steward (*zai fu* 宰夫) exerts control over eight offices of functionaries; the sixth of these eight is that of the scribes (*shi* 史) in charge of drafting government documents.
- The accountant (*si kuai* 司會) conducts audits of the fiscal records and records the fiscal information of various administrative units.
- The manager of writings (*si shu* 司書) is in charge of the writing tables for the various administrative codices as well as for geographical maps. He registers the inflow and outflow of goods. His office belongs to that of the *si kuai*.
- The keeper of consumables (*zhi nei* 職內) records the flow of consumable goods that are coming in and being distributed across the various agencies.
- The keeper of silks (*zhi bi* 職幣) controls and records the silk that is used by various agencies.
- The administrator of the interior palace (*nei zai* 內宰) keeps the population registers and charts of those living within the palace.
- The scribe of female affairs (*nü shi* 女史) is in the service of the queen and writes down her charges.
- The supervisor of palace women's work (*dian fu gong* 典婦功) marks and records the value of the goods produced by the palace women.
- The supervisor of silk (*dian si* 典絲) monitors the inflow of silk and marks and records its value.

Ministry of Education (di guan)

- In the office of the grand minister of education (*da si tu* 大司徒), writing is mentioned as one of the "six arts" (*liu yi* 六藝), which also include the arts of ritual, music, archery, charioteering, and calculating.

- The township head (*zhou zhang* 州長), in the first month as well as at the major seasonal sacrifices, assembles the populace and reads out loud the laws in order to encourage them toward morality and to warn them about unruly behavior.

- The head of the ward (*dang zheng* 黨正) reads out loud the laws to his people at the beginning of the four seasons as well as on the occasion of the major spring and autumn sacrifices; moreover, he keeps records of their virtuous conduct.

- The master of the community (*zu shi* 族師) reads out loud the laws to his people on the relevant ritual occasions; he also keeps written records of their attainment in the polite arts.

- The village assistant (*lü xu* 閭胥) reads out loud the laws to his people and keeps records of those who distinguish themselves through their virtuous conduct.

- The remonstrator (*si jian* 司諫) records the moral conduct and principles he finds in the common people, and he distinguishes who is able to serve in official functions.

- The arbitrator (*tiao ren* 調人) solves disputes among the people; when they cannot be resolved, he produces a written record.

- The marriage monitor (*mei shi* 媒氏) records the names and dates of birth of all children surviving the first three months of their lives; he also records marriages.

- The treasurer of the markets (*quan fu* 泉府) writes price tags on goods.

Ministry of War (xia guan)

- In the office of the minister of war (*da si ma* 大司馬), the scribes in the second month of summer count the war carts and the infantry, and they read out loud the written registers to match them with the actual troops. The officials all carry their insignia, and they write down their own services and designations.

- The manager of rewards (*si xun* 司勳) is in charge of determining merit. He inscribes the names of meritorious persons onto the king's great standard (*taichang* 太常). At the grand winter sacrifice, he calls upon the person in charge of the banner to proclaim the written text to the king and to the spirits.

- The horse appraiser (*ma zhi* 馬質) records the quality of a horse's teeth and hair, as well as its market value.

- The surveyor (*liang ren* 量人) records land formations and road lengths on maps and stores the maps.

- The chief of the tiger braves (*hu ben shi* 虎賁氏) is the chief of the military bodyguard surrounding and protecting the king. When roads become impassable and there are matters like a military draft, he puts the draft into writing and sends it into the four directions.

- The provisioner (*gao ren* 稟人) is in charge of receiving material from the officer in charge of metals, and he gives them to the craftsmen who manufacture bows, crossbows, and arrows. He records the quality grades of these weapons to determine the food provisions given to the craftsmen.

Ministry of Justice (qiu guan)

- The vice minister of justice (*xiao si kou* 小司寇) reads out loud the criminal records of the imprisoned and then determines the crime according to the law.

- The chief judge (*shi shi* 士師) proclaims at court, with the wooden clapper, the “five prohibitions” regarding the royal palace, the officials, the capital, the countryside, and the army. He writes them down on tablets and suspends them from the road gates all over the city.

- The judge of the domain (*fang shi* 方士) brings the death penalty cases to the chief judge to decide, as well as the name of the one who has judged the case.

- The litigation judge (*ya shi* 訝士) reads out loud the vows (threats) and prohibitions at all grand ritual occasions when the masses are assembled.

- The audience monitor (*chao shi* 朝士) requires inscribed two-part tallies to regulate disputes over debts and only then listens to the case. He also punishes those who charge excessive interest for purchasing goods on credit. When a person wishes to take revenge on an enemy, if he has first reported his case in writing to a judge, then killing the enemy is not a crime.

- The population registrar (*si min* 司民) is in charge of registering the population. All those growing teeth (i.e., children of seven or eight months) and older are recorded on tablets. The records include their place of origin, their gender, and their age. Every year, those who have been born and those who have died are recorded.

- The enforcer of agreements (*si yue* 司約) is in charge of the written agreements of the state and the multitudes. All major written agreements are inscribed onto the ritual vessels of the ancestral temple; the minor written agreements are written on red charts on (lacquered?) ritual objects.

- The protector of corpses (*qu shi* 蜡氏) is in charge of any remaining bones from corpses. If somebody dies on the road, he gives orders to bury him and to set up a marker right there. The marker is to be inscribed with the day and month.

- The nest remover (*che cu shi* 誓蒺氏) is in charge of removing the nests of inauspicious birds. On wooden tablets, he writes the appropriate name of the ten days, of the twelve hours, of the twelve months, of the twelve years, and the twenty-eight lunar stations. He suspends the tablets above the nests and then removes the nests.

- The senior messenger (*da xing ren* 大行人) receives and communicates with foreign guests. Nine years after the king has pacified the states and lords, the senior messenger assembles the music masters and scribes, compares the written characters, and distinguishes the sounds of the language. After eleven years, he certifies the jade tallies, unifies weights and measures, accomplishes the rituals involving sacrificial animals, unifies the computation tools, and regulates rules and standards.

- The junior messenger (*xiao xing ren* 小行人) is in charge of the ritual records of the guests from the feudal states. For each of the states, he writes in a register what benefits and what harms the multitudes; what smoothly follows and what goes against ritual customs, governmental affairs, instruction and rulership, punishments and prohibitions; the various kinds of matters that go against the royal orders; the various kinds of calamities; and the circumstances of happiness, kinship, and peace. These five matters he distinguishes for every state, responding to the command of the king and letting him know the state of affairs in all under Heaven.