RITUAL, TEXT, AND THE FORMATION OF THE CANON: HISTORICAL TRANSITIONS OF WEN IN EARLY CHINA

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I. Historicizing wen

The word wen 文, in Xu Shen's 许慎 (c. 55-c. 149) Shuowen jiezi 説文解字 defined as “criss-cross pattern” (cuohua 错画),1 has been ruminated upon numerous times during the last two millennia, and it is still under sophisticated deliberation wherever students of traditional Chinese culture and literature meet. This phenomenon is in itself remarkable, revealing the genuine depth of a word that in its significance is rivalled by only a few others, like dao 道 or qi 气. Such profound words, in this respect comparable to logos or pneuma in the West, embody almost universal significance through their originally most concrete meanings, relating physical matter, human activity, and cosmological order to one another. For wen, we hear of the different “patterns” of Heaven, Earth, and Man, and it is wen that mediates between these three, at least in analogical thinking.2 But at the same time, even a word like wen, together with whatever meaning can be proposed for it, is not located beyond the realms of general cultural history; in its usage, it is a genuinely historical phenomenon, changing with times and therefore remaining continuously meaningful in subsequent ages and to different social orders. Wen

1 See Shuowen jiezi zhu 説文解字倉, Duan Yuci 鄧兆瑞 (1795-1815) comm. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1961 [reprint of the Jingyun lou 經雲樓 ed., 1815], 9A.20a).—I wish to thank Professors David R. Knechtges, William G. Boltz, Lothar von Falkenhausen, Michael Nylan, and Pierre-Etienne Will for their most helpful comments and corrections.

2 A still valuable investigation into the various semantic levels of wen in T’oung Pao, “Ancient Chinese Views on Literature, the Tao and Their Relationship,” Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR) 1 (1979): 1-29.

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is neither static nor universal; strenuous claims on its unwavering continuity beyond the realities of social and intellectual processes never escape the aporetic nature of any suprahistorical concept, i.e., being itself a child of its times and hence historically confined.

The inexhaustible efficacy of a word like wen may therefore be found not in its supposed timeless truth, but, on the contrary, in its basic openness which allows it to absorb different meanings according to different circumstances, in other words, to change historically. Instead of adding either to the traditional autochthonous Chinese constructs of cosmology and poetics or to modern Western semiotic theories gone East, the present essay is therefore intended to historicize the “concept” of wen through one of its crucial stages, namely, when the written text rose to its enduring status of being the highest expression of Chinese culture, or, to phrase it more succinctly, when the idea of Chinese culture (wen) collapsed into that of written text (wen). At the same time, it is my hope that certain phenomena bearing the designation wen gain sharper contours not only through the historical perspective but also as significant elements of early Chinese cultural and political history.

I will not deal here with the very origins of the term wen, nor with its earliest occurrences, but enter its history when this is already centuries old. At this stage—in Warring States and then Qin and Han times—wen becomes heavily laden with cosmological meaning and related to a great variety of changing and accumulating cultural practices; and beyond denoting specific phenomena, the term may carry the general meaning of something like “cultural accomplishment,” as is reflected in its ongoing use in posthumous epitaphs. How is, then, such a general meaning related to the various concrete meanings of the same word? One attempt to answer this question has been to propose that we are actually dealing with different words here, albeit homophonous and written with the same graph; a valuable hypothesis that certainly deserves further attention.

Analyzing the use of wen in epitaphs in Zhou times, especially in posthumous designations (shi zi) of deceased ancestors, Lothar von Falkenhauen, following Arthur Waley, has proposed to separate the more general meaning of wen, as it is used in posthumous designations, from the more concrete “pattern.” He carefully avoids assigning any particular meaning to the former, using “accomplished” only as a stop gap translation. See his “The Concept of Wen in the Ancient Chinese Ancestral Cult,” Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR) 18 (1996): 3-22.

In the present essay, however, I will not address the issue on the level of the word. Instead of evacuating the mere general—essentially untranslatable—meaning of wen into a word of its own, I assume that it actually is related to one or more of its specific meanings. This hypothesis bears radically historical implications: the general notion of wen, I propose, flexibly comprises concrete meanings according to their particular status in the whole system of cultural expression at a given time. Consequently, the word wen, when applied in a general sense, may refer preeminently to a peculiar phenomenon of wen only at a moment when this phenomenon is regarded as the foremost expression of “cultural accomplishment,” current in and confined to an identifiable social framework, i.e., historical context. As an example, the general wen, as it appears in posthumous names, can refer to a person's literary or philosophical excellence only when the written word is elevated to be the privileged medium and expression of individual perfection. This was not the case with the Western Han emperor Liu Heng (武帝) who became venerated as the Han emperor Wendi (文帝, r. 180-157 B.C.); but it certainly was with the classicist genealogical enshrinement of literati and philosophers in later imperial China. Yet, even then, the uniformity of designations like wenzhong gong (文忠公) or wen gong (文公) as honorific posthumous titles seems to blur meaningful differences in the understanding and evaluation of wen through subsequent phases and contexts of later imperial intellectual history.

4 I use the terms “classicism” and “classicist” in their ideological sense, where “classicism” denotes the conscious evocation of a model from the past to be juxtaposed to the supposedly degenerated and deficient practice of the present. In many instances, “classicism” (both the adjective and the noun) is the best translation of ru; see Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han ‘Orthodox Synthesis,’ Then and Now,” in Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 17-56. Following Nylan, I avoid the term “Confucian.”

5 On the enshrinement, see Thomas A. Wilson, The Genealogy of the Way: The Construction and Use of the Confucian Tradition in Late Imperial China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Eminent examples of Tang and Song times include Han Yu 简 棟 (768-835), posthumously Han wen gong (文忠公), Ouyang Xiu 欧阳修 (1007-1072, Ouyang wenzhong gong (文忠公), Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101, Su wenzhong gong (文忠公), Wang Anshi 王安石 (1021-1086, Wang wen gong (文公), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200, Zhu wen gong (文公). Although to a certain extent sharing concerns and ideals when referring back to antiquity, these men cherished very different notions of wen and of its relation to dao 道.
Aiming at a historical understanding of *wen*, we need to identify shifts of relative status among the various forms of cultural practice. Especially for Eastern Zhou times, this indirect procedure is the only promising way since many of the numerous instances of *wen* in pre-imperial texts are general enough to allow all kinds of speculations across a broad range of cultural phenomena. Again for pragmatic reasons, I suggest to work retrospectively, setting out from early Eastern Han times and looking back from there—as Eastern Han writers actually did when they tried to legitimize the cultural accomplishments (*wen*) of their own times primarily in terms of “literary writings.” Certainly, *wen* had been related to writing early in Zhou times; yet the social context, function, and status of the written text was fundamentally different in the fourth century B.C. compared to the second century A.D.—as again a fourth century B.C. “philosophical” writing has to be distinguished in both function and nature from a ninth century B.C. ancestral temple hymn or inscription.

In the course of the Eastern Zhou, “writing” had assumed a great variety of forms, including charts (*tu*) and inscriptions, but it still was but one aspect of *wen*, and certainly not the central one. The situation had changed by Eastern Han times, however: now *wen*, beyond the universally applicable “criss-cross pattern,” predominantly meant “writing” and “writings,” “script” and “scriptures,” and in particular the written composition as an emblem of civil achievement. Moreover, at this time the all-encompassing word *wen* had been differentiated into a number of compounds, denoting chosen aspects of the general notion: one may think of *wenxue* 文學, *wenlai* 文來, *wenzhang* 文章, *wenzi* 文字, and others. Of these, the word *wenzhang* is probably the one that most concretely refers to “writing” and “writings,” and to trace the history of this more narrowly defined word may therefore allow us to delineate with relative accuracy the historical process through which the general notion of *wen* became gradually satiated with its particular aspect of “written text.”

What also makes *wenzhang* an ideal starting point for this analysis is that the term itself figured prominently in the discourse on culture long before referring specifically to the written text. By comparison, the term *wenzi* ("patterned phrases") may be less significant for our considerations than it would appear at first glance, because it narrowly refers to the art of verbal expression—i.e., rhetoric in both senses of embellishment and persuasion—from early times on, including both the oral and the written modes of expression.

The other term most pertinent to the issue of *wen* is, of course, *wenxue*. The locus classicus for *wenxue* is a relatively late passage in the *Lunyu* 論語 where Confucius’s disciples are individually recognized with respect to their abilities in the fields of “virtuous conduct” (daxing 德行), “speech” (yanyu 言語), “matters of government” (zhengshi 政事), and, finally, “wen learning” (*wenxue*). Here, the term *wenxue* defies any straightforward translation; Arthur Waley’s rendering as “culture and learning,” also adopted by D.C. Lau, is probably not a lucky choice: on the one hand, the construction of two entities, “culture” and “learning,” does not fit the...
under the Western Han (202 B.C.-A.D. 9), centuries after "the sounds of the Eulogy had ceased" and "the Songs no longer flourished.";16

When the Great Han was consolidated in its initial years, the emperor, day after day, did not get enough leisure.17 Reaching the era of emperors Wu and Xuan,18 they venerated the offices of ritual and examined the wenzhang.19 Within the palace they set up the institutions of the Bronze Horse [Gate] and the Stone Canal [Pavilion],20 outside the [palace] they initiated the task of harmonizing the pitch pipes in the Office of Music.21


16 Ban Gu locates the decline of the royal sacrificial hymns (song 飴), and of the Shijing songs in general, after the reigns of the early Western Zhou kings Cheng 楚 (1042/35-1006 B.C.) and Kang 楚 (1005/59-978) (dates after Edward L. Shaughnessy, Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991], p. xii). Kings Cheng and Kang are eulogized together in Mao shi 毛詩 274; see Mao shi zhengyi 毛詩正義 (Shishan jīng zhushu ed.) 19.2.521c.

17 I follow Yan Shigu's 沼古 (561–645) commentary in Han shu 17.8, where Ban Gu uses the same wording to describe the restless efforts of Han Gaorou 高柔 (r. 265–215 B.C.) after founding the dynasty. As Professor Knechtges has noticed, the line implies that Gaorou "had no time for cultural matters." See Knechtges, trans., Wen xuan: Selections of Refined Literature (to date 3 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992–96), 1:92, n. 4. Statements like these by Ban Gu have defined our view of the Han cultural situation prior to Han Wudi 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 B.C.). I have argued elsewhere that this traditional understanding needs to be re-examined; see my Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Liturgie und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zur Neuzeit (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997), pp. 144–59, and The Texts Inscriptions of a Qin Silk-Huang, chapter 5.

18 Han Xuanzi 漢玄子 ruled 74–9 B.C.

19 The phrase kao wenzhang 考文章 appears in a similar context in Ban Gu's Han shu 80.9324, and also in the Liji (Li Ji 34.278c), where Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200) explains wenzhang as "the rules of ritual" (li 禮), and Kong Yingde 恭英得 (574–648) glosses kao 考 as jiao 教 ("to compare"), with the extended meaning of "to examine."

20 The Bronze Horse Gate (Jinma men 金馬門) was the place where scholars “in attendance” awaited their appointment to a position in the imperial bureaucracy; the Stone Canal Pavilion (Shushu ge 石渠閣) was the name of the imperial library; see Knechtges, Wen xuan, 1:922–94, n. 6.

21 Liu chen shu 失德书 (Shishu congkan ed.) 1.1b-2a. The Office of Music (Yuefu 音符) was mainly concerned with providing musical pieces and hymns for the state sacrifices; its head under Han Wudi was Li Yanmin 田延年 (c. 140–87 B.C.), who received the newly invented title of Commandant for Harmonizing the Pitch Pipes (xiai duxue 侏律都尉). See my Die Hymnen der chinesi-

pattern of the other three binomial phrases, which all denote only a single accomplishment. Moreover, "culture" is devoid of any concrete meaning, and, as such, is also out of place when compared to the other terms.

In Warring States times, wenxue is clearly related to textual learning, a meaning that may even apply for the Lunyu passage in question, since Confucius, like later Mencius and Xunzi, already drew lessons from two exemplary texts, the Songs (the later Shijing 歌頌) and the Documents (the later Shangshu 史書).11 Later, in the Han imperial bureaucracy, officials were frequently appointed to high positions because of their wenxue, referring to their acquaintanceship with the textual heritage, in particular the gradually emerging state-sponsored canon which provided the knowledge of model cases to draw upon for political, ritual, and legal decisions.12 Wenxue was the domain of the ru 学 scholars and was regarded as their genuine learning (rushi 学術, also jingshu 學術).13 It is this semantic stability of the term wenxue in Warring States and early imperial times14 that makes it appear less fruitful for our analysis of cultural changes. Nevertheless, in our discussion of wenzhang we will have to come back to wenxue and to the eventual association of both terms in late Western Han times.

II. What is wenzhang?

In the first lines of the preface to his "Rhapsody on the two capitals" ("Liang du fu" 兩都賦), Ban Gu 漢服 (32–92), the most accomplished writer of his time,15 recalls the revival of literature

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13 The terms rushi and jingshu appear to be almost synonymous, with rushi probably encompassing a broader range of learning. The usage of both terms in the Shiji (rushi: eleven times; jingshu: eight times) and in the Han shu (12 vols., Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1957) (rushi: sixteen times; jingshu: forty times) indicates that rushi was gradually replaced by jingshu after the mid-Western Han. This development matches my argument below that during the Han, the scholars of traditional learning developed from ritual to textual experts.


15 On Ban Gu, see David R. Knechtges, "To Praise the Han: The Eastern

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The text goes on to mention some of Han Wudi’s state sacrificial hymns as well as the auspicious omens that became employed as heraldic regal devices from his times on, and then turns to the literary compositions of the Han. After mentioning the great Western Han scholar-officials and their authors, Ban Gu uses the term wenzhang again:

The pieces that were presented to the throne were more than a thousand, and henceforth, the wenzhang of the Great Han were brilliant and equal in style to those of the Three Dynasties [Xia, Shang, and Zhou].

What is wenzhang in these two passages of Ban Gu’s preface? What were the wenzhang of the Han, matched by Ban Gu with the ritual institutions? What were the wenzhang of the Three Dynasties? What could the historian, poet, and scholar Ban Gu have seen as the common cultural accomplishment of both the Three Dynasties and the Western Han? In the *Thirteen Canonical Books*, the term wenzhang appears altogether ten times: twice in the *Lunyu*, twice in the *Zuo zhuan*, and six times in the *Li ji*; in addition, the “Minor Preface(s)” (“Xiao xu” 小序) of the *Songs*, dating from the Han, employs wenzhang twice, in the introductions to Odes # 55 (“Qi yu” 某箋) and # 255 (“Dang” 蕃). In the passages of the *Lunyu*—both of them probably belong-

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22 Steven Van Zoeren, *Poetry and Personality: Reading, Exegesis, and Hermeneutics in Traditional China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 26, summarizes the discussion as follows: “We can distinguish four strata. First, a group of five ‘core chapters’ composed of chapters 3–7 is probably the earliest material. Second, four chapters—1, 2, 8, and 9—seem to have been added at a later date around the core chapters but contain many early materials. Chapters 10 through 15 seem to constitute another, still later layer, and the last five chapters, 16 through 20, are marked by linguistic criteria as latest of all.” The two passages with wenzhang are from chapters 5 and 8; the passage in chapter 8, with Confucius himself speaking, may belong to the earlier materials.

23 *Lunyu zhushi* [5.15] 5.18a. He Yan 克敏 (190-249) glosses the passage as follows: “Zhang 䚮 is clearly shining (míng 陽). The patterned embellishment (wenxiu 文稍), manifest and appearing, can be followed by the ear and the eye.”

24 *Lunyu zhushi* [8.20] 8.51b. He Yan glosses the final phrase: “When we have an article as follows: “Zhuang 䚮 is clearly shining (míng 陽). The figured patterns (wen 䚮 he had established and the regulations he had conferred are again manifest and shining.”

25 *Lunyu zhushi* [9.5] 9.8a. Peter Bol has made this passage the starting point for his important study, *This Culture of Ours*: *Intellectual Transitions in Tang and Song China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), translating it as: “This Culture of Ours.” This translation certainly reflects the significance of the term in Tang and Song times but I am not sure whether it should
The two passages in the Zuo zhuan employ wenzhang in the context of military and political ritual. Here, wenzhang are forms of emblematic value, that is, again, clear signs; the early commentators gloss these concretely as “guidons and pennants” (jingqi 嘉旗) attached to the war (and ritual) chariots:

Every three years, the ruler, in a military maneuver, leads out the military forces and aligns them; he leads them in and rearranges the battalions. They return to the ancestral temple and perform the [ritual of drinking] to the correct limit. [All this, the ruler does] in order to count the army’s possessions. They show forth guidons and pennants (wenzhang), clarify noble and base, distinguish ranks and array, and follow the order of young and old. [All this] is to practice the majestic demeanor.29

The state of Jin has merits that are not neglected and has achievements that are recorded. It has been invested with territory and fields, mollified with ritual vessels and instruments, distinguished with chariots and vessels, and illuminated with guidons and pennants (wenzhang).30

夫有勞而不庸，有繚而載，奉之以土田，撫之以轡跸，旌之以車駕。明之以文章。

In the Liji, wenzhang appears on the level of normative ritual form:

Establishing the measures of weight, length, and capacity, examining the refined forms (wenzhang), adjusting the commencement of the year and the month, changing the colors of the [ritual] vestments, discriminating the banners and pennants, altering vessels and weapons, and distinguishing the clothing—these are matters [in sagely rulership] that can be changed in accordance with the people.31

立禮度量，考文章，改正朔，易服色，殊徽號，異器皿，別衣服。此其所得與民变革者也。

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29 Chuangtzu Zuo zhuan zhengyi [Yin 5] 3.25a-b. The translation follows the early commentaries by Du Yu 趙岐 (222-284) and Kong Yingda. I translate lü 祿 as “battalion” and jun 纈 as “army” according to Zheng Xuan’s commentary to Zhuli 春秋 (Zhu shu 春秋集解 ed.) 11.73a; a lü consisted of 500 men (with five lü forming one shi 師 ["regiment"]), a jun, the largest military unit, of 12,500. According to Guanzi 隨子 (Da Wang 遊說, Guanzi jiaosheng 隨子校釋, Zuo shi jieyang ed.) 8.128, however, a lü in the state of Qi 畿 had 2,000 men. In general, the relatively common pairing of terms like lü, shi, and jun usually operates as a synecdoche, indicating the entire body of troops.

30 Chuangtzu Zuo zhuan zhengyi [Zhao 15] 47.36a.

31 Liji zhengyi 34.278c.
The square fu and round gui vessels, the sacrificial stands and the plates; the stipulated measures and the refined forms (wenzhang)—these are the instruments of ritual.32

The square gui and round gui vessels, the sacrificial stands and the plates; the stipulated measures and the refined forms (wenzhang)—these are the instruments of ritual.32

King Li was without the Way. The world under Heaven is vast, vast; [but King Li] was without the control-line and net and without the refined form (wenzhang) [of political order].37

The two preface passages to Odes # 55 and # 255 use the word wenzhang in the same sense, denoting—parallel to the “control-line and net” (gangji) (gangji)—some abstract key instrument of good rule.

In sum, the occurrence of the word wenzhang in the Thirteen Canonical Books allows several conclusions. First, the term does not occur in the oldest parts of the transmitted texts, that is, the early strata of the Shangshu or the Shijing; the earliest, actually rather late, instances may well be those in the Lunyu. Second, the single text where wenzhang appears most frequently is a ritual canon, the Li Ji; note that this also applies for the broader term wen, which is uniquely recurrent in the Li Ji chapter “Records of Music,” always denoting the appearance of ritual (musical) form.38 And, finally, there is no instance where wenzhang can be reasonably interpreted in any sense as “literature” or “writings.” Instead, the term seems to comprise the following meanings:

a) the refined personal outward appearance of a scholar (Lunyu, Li Ji);

b) the refined personal appearance of a ruler or some abstract qualities of good rule (Lunyu, Shijing preface);

c) military/ritual insignia (Zuo zhuan);

d) normative ritual forms and standards (Li Ji);

e) textile patterns on ritual vestments (Li Ji).

This set of meanings for wenzhang can be traced throughout Warring States writings. In the Xunzi, the text that is most intensively centered around the conceptualization of traditional ritual and its application to social order—the term appears no less than four times: as textile patterns (seven times), the refined appearance of the sage (three times), insignia of rank (two times), and, more generally, ritual forms (two times).39 In
ritual forms (including a well-ordered way of speaking), and in particular to textile ornament and military/ritual insignia on pennants and blazons.

In this set of meanings, the perfected outward appearance is nothing superficial: “The presence of the sage’s inner power manifests itself in external signs, which can be seen in the forms (wén 文) and outward signs that others recognize. The ritual objects of rulers were intended to display the excellence of their inner power. This could be seen in the ornaments of distinction on a ruler’s robes, in the tinkling of the bells of his chariot, and in the heavenly bodies displayed on his flags and standards.”

Here, we are not in the mediated world of ideological doctrines and their rhetorical formulations but confronted with the immediate aesthetic expression of ritualized political representation: “[C]eremonial ornament was not simply ‘ornament’—rather, it was the means by which the allocation of resources and prerogatives was expressed, enforced, and discussed. The apportionment of good food and the music proper to each was, theoretically, in direct proportion to the character, merit and de of the various nobility.”

In this overall context of Eastern Zhou material culture, wénzhāng is the word for correct and appropriate ornament: we hear of the wénzhāng of the sage, of the scholar, or of the perfect ritual order. As such, wénzhāng does not merely denote marks of distinction but bears already emblematic significance: in this abstraction, “to have wénzhāng” now in a general sense of ritual demeanor, distinguishes by itself the model person. Although the broader term wén can mean the pattern of writing in early texts, having reviewed all cases of concrete and unambiguous meanings of the more narrow term wénzhāng we find no support to read it as (spoken or written) “literary text.” Furthermore, the emblem-

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40 Wang Xianshen 王先慎, Han Feizi jiyi 韩非子集释 (Zhuzi jicheng ed.) 3.49, 6.96, 6.108.
41 Zhang Chunyi 张春仪, Yanshi chunqi jiaozhu 岳氏春秋校注 (Zhuzi jicheng ed.) 2.52, 5.146. In the second passage, the text notes that the persister’s way of speaking had patterned brilliance (yan you wénzhāng 言有文章) and that his learning/techniques (shu 学) had orderly structure (tiao 整).
42 Sun Yirang 孙诒让, Mici jingwen 孟子经文 (Zhuzi jicheng ed.) 8.155.
43 Guo Qingfian 郭庆帆, Zhanzang ji jishu 詩漢集詩文 (Zhuzi jicheng ed.) 1.16, 8.141, 10.160; Lishi chunqi (Zhuzi jicheng ed.) 6.54, 10.98, 14.138.
44 He Jianzhang 何增展, Zhongguo ce shuoshi 中國說史 (3 vols., Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 1.74.
45 Wang Pingzhen 王平珍, Da Dai Liji jiuguo 大戴禮記訓説 (Peking: Zhonghua shuju, 1985) 5.94; Xi Shen 孙祿/Gao You 賈 Âu, Huayan kongjie jie 胡應鏞解剖 (Sibuxonghun ed.) 9.1a, 20.10a; cf. also a memorial from very late Western Han times in Hanshu 62.2920.
47 Powers, “The Figure in the Carpet,” p. 218.
48 This common assumption is indirectly confirmed even by its rejection, e.g., in the performatory use of wénzhāng in Han Feizi 3.49 where the proliferation of wénzhāng among the latter sages is presented as inferior to the utmost simplicity of Yao 28. The passage is but one reflection of the critical dichotomy between substantial simplicity (shu 学) and ornamental structure (wén 文), pervasive in Eastern Zhou and Qin-Han discussions on ritual. In subsequent ages the problem became translated into the rhetoric of literary values, programmatic in Tang and Song statements on guwen (“ancient style literature”).
atic character of the notion of wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\nself, clearly derived from its concrete denotations of ritual emblems, seems to require to read the more ambiguous passages that employ wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\n, e.g., those of the Luyu, in a somewhat abstract sense within the same semantic horizon. There is no indication that "the wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\nof Confucius" that "can be known" could have anything to do with speech or writing—despite the fact that the great ritual specialist of the Tang dynasty and Han\nshu commentator Yan Shigu 蒼舒吉 (581-645) understands wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\nh\n here as the writings attributed to Confucius, i.e., those "of the kind of the 'Xici' 許錫 and 'Wenyan' 文言 [commentaries to the Yijing] and of the Chunqiu 春秋." It is this kind of retrospective reasoning by later scholar-officials that we have to surmount in order to reconstruct the earlier meanings of words in their own historical context.

The texts of the second century B.C.—again as far as they include the term wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\n—also use the term entirely within its earlier range of meanings; these are Jia Yi's 賈異 (200-168 B.C.) Xin shu 新書, Lu Jia's 魯賈 (c. 228-c. 140 B.C.) Xin ye 新說, the sacrificial hymn cycle of the "Anshi fangzhong ge" 安世房中歌 of around 200 B.C., the Han shi waizhuang 漢書外傳, the Da Dai Liji, 大戴禮記, and the Huainian zhi, 輔引之志.

The next major text to consider is Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (c. 145-c. 86 B.C.) Shi ji, 史記. Here, wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\n occurs in eight passages—most of which are not Sima Qian's own words but quotations from earlier texts or later interpolations into the Shi ji. One instance of a quotation is the Luyu passage on "the wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\nof Confucius." In another passage, the Shi ji includes the famous letter that the Qin chancellor Li Si 李斯 (d. 208 B.C.) wrote in prison, using wen\g\nzh\nzh\nh\n in the same sense of normative ritual form, related to the correct weights and measures, in which the term appears in the Li ji. In two passages of the "Book on Ritual" (Lishu 律書), the term refers to textile ornament, as it did in the Xin xi and Li ji. The "Book on Music" (Yueju 曲錄) includes the Li ji passage where wen\ng\nzh\nzh\nh\n denotes the "instruments of ritual." Both "books," however, belong to the famous "lost ten chapters" of the Shi ji, that is, they are later replacements of the original text: the "Book on Music" is almost entirely a reproduction—with some minor rearrangements of the text—of the Li ji "Records of Music" (Yueji), whereas the "Book on Ritual" draws on a variety of sources, in particular from the Li ji and Xin xi. It is impossible to date these chapters precisely; the only safe terminus ante quem is the early fifth century A.D.

Another of the "lost chapters," the "Hereditary Houses of the Three Princes" (San wang shi jia 三王世家), includes wen\g\nzh\nzh\nh\n in an appended passage that is attributed to the supposed compiler of this chapter, Chu Shaosun 車少群 (c. 105-c. 30 B.C.). Here, in a narrative placed in the reign of Emperor Zhao 景 (r. 87-74 B.C.), the ritual specialist Gonghu Manyi 公扈馮倚 claims to "draw upon the comprehensive principles of past and present, the great rituals of the state, and wen\g\nzh\nzh\nh\n that approached classical correctness." This passage is closely parallel to a memorial

56 See Yan Shigu's commentary in Han\nshu 75.3195.
57 To the following list, one could also add Sima Xiangru's 司馬相如 (179-117 B.C.) Changmen fu 長門賦 (Wen xuan 16.15a) and, purportedly earlier, the pseudo-Song Yu's 張永 (c. 200-223 B.C.) Shentu fu 神女賦 (Wen xuan 19a), but these works are most probably not authentic and are of an uncertain date.
58 Xin shu (Congshu jieheng ed.) 1.15, 6.64.
59 Xin ye (Zhu jieheng ed.) 1.1, 7.12.
60 Han\nshu 22.1049; see my Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsoffizier, pp. 100-73, esp. pp. 132-34.
61 Han shi waizhuang (Sibu congkan ed.) 5.1a.
62 Da Dai Liji jiegu 1.12, 5.94.
63 Huainian hangjie jie 1.12b, 1.14b, 2.2b, 2.7b, 5.7a, 8.9a, 9.1a, 9.10b, 11.15a, 20.16a.
64 Shi ji 47.1941.
status of the literary text,\textsuperscript{66} absorbing and replacing to some extent the genuine ritual act as the most significant expression of good rule and thereby representing some overall transformation of the immediate ritual expression into a textually mediated one? What kind of "literature" is under discussion here, and should the designation wen\textsuperscript{zhang} indeed be reserved for specific types of writings, e.g., of particular ritual significance? What is the relation between old wen\textsuperscript{zhang} (meaning ritual demeanor and political order) and new wen\textsuperscript{zhang} (meaning the literary text), given the fact that Ban Gu uses the word in both senses, although mostly in the new one?\textsuperscript{67} And finally: can we date the semantic shift in the word wen\textsuperscript{zhang} more precisely, relating it to some overruling phenomena of Han cultural and intellectual history? To approach these questions we have to look at the criticism of wen\textsuperscript{zhang} as ritual ornament on the basis of the emerging ritual canon.

III. Ritual canon versus ritual practice

A number of texts indicate that the shift in the meaning of wen\textsuperscript{zhang} is indeed a late Western/early Eastern Han phenomenon, i.e., relatively recent in Ban Gu’s times. The earliest instance of wen\textsuperscript{zhang} meaning the written text that I have been able to locate is, surprisingly enough, in Huan Kuan’s 通覲 (first century B.C.) Yan\textsuperscript{t}ie lun 聖繆論, the account of a court debate of 81 B.C. concerned with the political and economic policies of the day. Here, in one of altogether three instances the term denotes written legal statutes or articles, in other words, a corpus of texts that are as far removed from any notion of belles lettres as we can imagine.\textsuperscript{70} By contrast to this apparently unique case, the Hanshu, in addition to some earlier quotations of memorials and other

\textsuperscript{66} If not noted otherwise, I always use terms like "literature," "literary writings," etc. in the broadest sense, including, for example, official panegyrics, memorials, and other forms of functional texts.

\textsuperscript{67} In the Hanshu, Ban Gu uses wen\textsuperscript{zhang} a number of times in the sense of "literary writings" (see Hanshu 28B.1645, 50.1701, 58.2628, 58.2634, 87B.3557, 87B.3583, 99B.4046) but only twice in the earlier sense of ritual order (5.212, 25B.1270); the passages quoted above from his preface to the "Li\textsuperscript{ang} du\textsuperscript{fu}" seem to balance the two meanings (see the discussion below).

\textsuperscript{70} Yan\textsuperscript{t}ie lun (Zhu\textsuperscript{t}i j\textsuperscript{ch}eng ed.), (paragraph 55) 56. In two other instances—p. 5 (paragraph 3) and p. 30 [26]—wen\textsuperscript{zhang} is used in the established meanings of textile ornament and visible patterns.
primary texts,\textsuperscript{71} contains one edict by Emperor Xuan from 55 B.C.\textsuperscript{72} and three memorials to Emperor Cheng (r. 33-7 B.C.)\textsuperscript{73} that all use wenzhang within its earlier range of meanings.

The single original Western Han document in the Han shu that contains the term in the sense of literary writings (or even texts in general) is Yang Xiong’s Făng 韋 (53 B.C.-A.D. 18) preface to his Changyang fu 常陽賦.\textsuperscript{74} Again in his Fayan 法言, he notes that Confucius’s disciples were not sufficient in producing wenzhang, which here refers obviously to written texts;\textsuperscript{75} in another passage of the same work he lists the Songs and the Documents among a sage’s features of outward ritual demeanor.\textsuperscript{76}

A contemporary to Yang Xiong, the textual erudite and imperial bibliographer Liu Xiang, employs wenzhang in his Shui yuan 水經 altogether six times, of which only one instance can be understood as “writing”: here, the text notes that the “men of resolve” (chi shi 務士) have been reciting the wenzhang of Confucius’s Chunqiu.\textsuperscript{77} Most interesting, four of the five other passages include wenzhang in a negative sense similar to its earlier appearance in Mozi and Han Feizi, i.e., as a brilliant yet superficial or even deceitful pattern of material ornament or speech.\textsuperscript{78}

Kuang Heng 防 賢 (chancellor 36-30 B.C.) used the term in this same negative meaning in his famous memorial of 32 B.C., when he proposed to abolish the densely ornamented purple Taiyi 太一 altar in Guanquan 甘泉, claiming that its wenzhang and various features of embellishment “cannot take their model from antiquity.” From Kuang Heng’s memorial it is clear that the ritual structures of Emperor Wu’s reign were still in use at this time.\textsuperscript{79}

At the purple altar of the Great [Unity] sacrificial site at Guanquan, the passages in the eight corners represent the spirits of the eight directions. The altars of the Five Thearchs encircle it below, and again there are the altars of the manifold spirits. According to the Shangshu, there is the principle of sacrificing to the Six Venerated Ones, offering the sacrifice from the distance to the mountains and rivers, and sacrificing all around to the manifold spirits.\textsuperscript{80} But the purple altar has the decoration of patterned ornament (wenzhang), of multicolored carvings, and of the white-black and black-azure counterchange patterns (fufu); moreover, it has nephrite and female musicians; its stone altars and shrines for the immortals, buried carriages with simurgh-bells, red horses and strong foals, and [wooden] figures of dragon steeds [all] cannot find their models in antiquity. According to the principle of the burnt offerings to the thearchs at the suburban altar that Your Subject has learned, one [simply] sweeps the ground and sacrifices—this is venerating substantial simplicity.\textsuperscript{81} One sings [based on the pitch standard] dà jù and dances “Cloud Gate” (“Yunmen”) to await the heavenly spirits; one sings [based on the pitch standard] jì ni and dances “Encompassing Pond” (“Xianchi”) to await the earthly spirits.\textsuperscript{82} For the sacrificial victim one uses a calf; for the seat brushwood and straw, for the vessels earthenware and gourd, in all these following the nature of Heaven and Earth, charming sincerity and venerating substantial simplicity.\textsuperscript{83} One does not dare to elaborate on the patterns (wen). One believes that the merits and virtuous power of the heavenly and earthly spirits are of utmost greatness, and even if one embellished [the paraphernalia to their] refined and minute

\textsuperscript{71} See Han shu 56.2510, 64B.2809; 88.3594, together with the Lunyu quotations in 75.3194, 88.3589, 108B.4225, and the passage in the “Anshi fangzhong ge” from around 200 B.C. in Hanshu 22.1049.

\textsuperscript{72} See 58.2367.

\textsuperscript{73} See Han shu 52B.1256, 87.2950, 80.3324.

\textsuperscript{74} See Han shu 87B.3557, see also Wen xuan 9.2a. This text was probably composed in 10 B.C.; see David R. Knechta, The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the Fu of Yang Hsiun (53 B.C.-A.D. 18) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 115.

\textsuperscript{75} See Wang Rongbao 勝 紅, Fayan yishu 法言文集 (Taipei: Ywen yinshuquan, 1968) 16.2a.

\textsuperscript{76} Fayan yishu 12.6b-7a. In Fayan yishu 14.15a, he includes “embellished phrases” (wen ci) among the outward attributes (biao shi) of a sage.

\textsuperscript{77} Although most Western and Chinese scholars pronounce and transcribe the title as Shui yuan, I follow the practice of Japanese scholars who read it as Zaien (Shui yuan), not Sseosun (Shui yuan). The implied reason is that the book actually contains a great number of dialogues and “persuasions” (shu), typical of Warring States times as we know from the Zhang ict (also edited by Liu Xiang). On the question of shui and shi see my “Peruasion’ or ‘Treatise’—The prose genres shui shu and shu shi in the light of the Guangci kaiyuan 559.17a (1779), in Aa Soes at Tunguos: Pestschrift für Martin Grimm, ed. Lutz Bieg, Erling von Mende, and Maritina Siebert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), pp. 221-43.

\textsuperscript{78} Shui yuan (Shi yu kan gan ed.). 5.2a. The other passages are 2.5a, 8.9b, 20.7b, 20.9b, 20.13a. Of course, this passage cannot serve to explain pre-Han occurrences of the term wenzhang; e.g., in the Lunyu.

\textsuperscript{79} Shui yuan 2.3a, 20.7b, 20.9b, 20.13a.

\textsuperscript{80} From Yang Xiong’s autobiography in Hsuan shu 87A.2334-35 we know that these structures were actually used as late as around 11 B.C. (the probable composition date of Yang Xiong’s “Guanquan fu” 興安賦), after the sacrificial sites at Guanquan had been temporarily abandoned between 31 and 15 B.C.; on these issues, see Knechta, The Han Rhapsody, pp. 44-45.

\textsuperscript{81} See Shangshu shengyi 周書 (Shisan jing shishuo ed.) 5.14b, parallel Shiji 28.1355, Hsuan shu 25A.1191.

\textsuperscript{82} See Li ji shengyi 26.225b; also the discussion of the Qin ju scholars in Shiji 28.1366, Hsuan shu 25A.1201.

\textsuperscript{83} See Zhu li shishuo 22.150-151b.

\textsuperscript{84} See Li ji shengyi 26.224b, passim, as well as Shiji 28.1366, Hsuan shu 25A.1201.
onwards and were frequently quoted in early Han official writings. That Kuang Heng would not cite the book titles Zhouli and Li Ji does not necessarily diminish the actual authority of his references; on the contrary, they may—at least in part—have been common property among the scholar-officials of his times, albeit still in a stage of textual fluidity. Such “fluid texts,” to be sure, are already “texts,” that is to say demarcated entities of distinctive meaning, and as such can be recognized, respected, and transmitted. What distinguishes them from works of canonical status is the fact that they are not yet “closed”; they are still open to subtractions, additions, emendations and all other ways of textual continuation and editing; in other words, to actualization. Yen-zen Tsai has noted that still in Eastern Han times, the Li Ji, in contrast to the Yi Yi—the official ritual canon during the Western Han—and Zhouli, was regarded not as belonging to the canon (jing 錫) proper, but as a collection of expository writings on ritual that served as a complement to, or teaching tradition (shuan 蘇) of,

88 For a brief summary on the ritual texts in Han scholarship see Michael Nylan, “The Chin wen/Ku wen Controversy in Han Times,” T'oung Pao 80 (1994): 99-101, 129-30; for the Li Ji see also Jeffrey E. Kiegle, “Li chi,” in Early Chinese Texts, pp. 293-97. Naruhito Hidemoto, “Zen-Kandai no seishō jōdo nado ni hieru shakai to kokka to ikeru keijutsu no ichi sokumen” 前近代の制度・上層等に見る儒家的形と国際とにおける芸術の一つの端末, Shōkoku Tōryōgaku Kenkyūkai hōkoku 77 (1997): 1-21, who also accepts a date around A.D. 100 for the compilation of the Li Ji, has traced individual passages or chapters of its text through Western Han edicts and memorials. Moreover, the excavated “Ziqi’s” 淳女 manuscript from Guodian 貢店 shows that individual chapters of the Li Ji can indeed—in one version or another—date back from Warring States times.

89 On the formation of the traditional Chinese canon, and a comparison to other scriptural traditions, see Henderson, Scripture, Canon, and Commentary. In addition to Henderson, substantial contributions to the issue of the canon from a cross-cultural perspective are Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992), pp. 103-129, and the collection Kanon und Zensur, ed. Aleida and Jan Assmann (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1987). For a discussion of the multidimensional concept of the canon, both works provide excellent theoretical and historical foundations that could profoundly enrich our understanding of the Chinese canonical tradition, beyond the mere accounts of names and data. Complementary to Henderson’s chapters 4 and 5, the Assmanns’ “Kanon und Zensur als kultursoziologische Kategorien” in Kanon und Zensur, pp. 7-46, gives a complex account on the interdependent phenomena of canon, censorship, and commentary.
the jing. These freely applicable texts served Kuang Heng's purpose since they not only accompanied the canon, but indeed actualized its significance for the project of ritual reforms around 52 B.C.: where the canon requires to be fixed "to the single iota" and becomes therefore more and more removed from reality, it is the commentary that relates the elevated and increasingly unintelligible canonical truth to the current times. Although initially only on the periphery of the ritual canon, the fluid expository texts of the Li Ji bridged the distance to the fixed canonical texts of the Shangshu and the Yi Yi and in this function were valuable to Kuang Heng's argument.

With the chancellor's memorial we are at the core of the late Western Han ritual classicism that was launched directly against imperial ritual splendor as it had been inherited from the times of Emperor Wu. As the latter had purportedly designed his system of cosmological state sacrifices on the model provided by writings (shu) and charts (tu) handed down from the reign of the Yellow Emperor, the later criticism and partial reform of this system was in turn based on the texts of the gradually emerging state-sponsored canon. In both cases, changes of ritual practice were grounded in references to a textual canon, however imaginary; yet we are dealing with canons of very different qualities: the writings and charts associated with the Yellow Emperor represented a tradition of secret knowledge and were introduced to the emperor personally by individual "masters of methods" (fangshi, often labelled "magicians") from the old state of Qi. Different from the writings cherished by the ru scholars—under Emperor Wu the clearly defeated rivals of the fangshi in the court struggle for imperial favor and ritual competence—these texts were apparently not open to commentary or public dispute, and they do not seem to have constituted a scriptural tradition.

And, when Kuang Heng marshalled passages from the ritual texts and the Shangshu against the inherited ritual wenshang of Emperor Wu, he operated on the basis of a canon that was fundamentally alien to the state rituals of that ruler: as he correctly observed, Wudi's system of cosmic sacrifices, including the worship of the heavenly deity Taiyi and the five cosmic thearchs (wu di) at Ganquan, the worship of the earth deity Houtu at Fenyin, the jing and shan sacrifices and the erection of the Hall of Light at the foot of Mt. Tai, had no support from those traditional texts that were promoted by the late Western Han classicists: the nineteen "Hymns for the suburban sacrifice" ("Jiaosi ge") dating from between 113 and 94 B.C., include almost no references to passages from the Five Canons (Wu jing 五經: Yi, Shu, Shi, Li, and Chunqiu 春秋) for which Emperor Wu allegedly had established official teaching chairs in 136 B.C.; moreover, in both contents and form these texts differ radically from their most natural model, the traditional Shijing hymns. From this perspective, and again by comparison with the two preceding cycles of imperial eulogies—the imperial stele inscriptions of the First Qin Emperor (Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝, r. as emperor 221-210 B.C.) and Han Gaozu's "Anshi dangzhong

99 Yen-ten Tsai, "Ching and Chu'an: Towards Defining the Confucian Scriptures in Han China (206 B.C.-220 CE)", Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 1992, p. 319.

98 The earliest instance of this famous "canon formula," to the effect that nothing should be subtracted from nor added to the work, as we know it from the Deuteronomy, may be found in a Babylonian colophon; see Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, pp. 103-6.


96 Both the jing and shan sacrifices and the design for the "Hall of Light" (mingtang) at Mt. Tai were traced to the Yellow Emperor; see Shiji 26.1391 (parallel Shiji 12.467, Hanshu 25A.1297-298) and 26.1401 (parallel Shiji 61.489-81, Hanshu 25B.1249).
ge”—the "jiaosi ge" reflect nothing less than a self-conscious turn away from the established norms of ritual expression. Should it be possible, then, that for whatever reason the assumed official state ideology was indeed excluded from the most solemn texts of official imperial representation?

To solve this enigma—an issue crucial for our entire understanding of Western Han political culture—one may be inclined to follow Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, who in a string of meticulously researched articles has questioned the historical reality of the notion of the Five Canons, of the appointment of official erudites, and of the overarching establishment of ru learning as the imperial state ideology under Emperor Wu. According to Fukui, the designation Five Canons cannot be traced back to a date prior to 51 B.C., when Emperor Xuan summoned the erudites to discuss the Five Canons in the Shiqiu 石渠 palace pavilion; the Hanshu account about the establishment of the Wu Jing

97 For the stele inscriptions see my The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-huang, for the "An shih fangzhong ge" see my Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsfeier, pp. 100-173. In a self-referential gesture, text 8 of the "jiaosi ge" explicitly praises the "new tone" (xin yin 新音) of the state sacrifices; see Hanshu 22.1058. Note that not only Han Wudi's ritual texts are at odds with the established understanding of early Chinese imperial intellectual and political history. Both the Qin imperial inscriptions and the ancestral hymns from the outset of the Han dynasty—divided from one another by about a decade—compellingly disqualify the common view that in Qin and early Han times the texts of the traditional canon, in particular the Shi Jing and Shang Pu, had been burned and suppressed (under the Qin), or at least were despised and unavailable (under the early Han). The ritual hymns and inscriptions of early imperial China, which tend to be completely ignored in historical scholarship, suggest a revision of common wisdom; see my The Stele Inscriptions of Chi'n Shi-huang, 154-96. Such wisdom, to the effect that ru learning was rescued by Emperor Wu from the Qin and early Han suppression was defined by later generations of Han historians and scholars who did not write without their own political interest or obligations. It is not surprising to find Sima Qian's or Ban Gu's narratives fundamentally biased, creating meaningful visions of history that were instrumental to their own times.


99 See Hanshu 5.272. Note also that in this passage the term Wu Jing does not appear in the quotation of the original edict but only in Ban Gu's narrative paraphrase. As Fukui points out, the earliest occurrence of the term in any

boshi 五老博士 at the court of Emperor Wu should therefore be regarded as a later interpolation, either by Ban Gu or by his sources.

One does not need to follow Fukui in this last conclusion; more relevant, however, is his observation that even if we are ready to accept the scarce Hanshu notes on the Wu Jing boshi as trustworthy, we are still dealing with a phenomenon of marginality, if any, historical significance: there is no evidence that the erudites of the Five Canons, and with them the Canons themselves, played any role in the rulership and representation of Emperor Wu. This is not to deny that the texts of the Five Canons were available to, and studied by, individual scholars, some of them serving as high officials; but the availability or even prominence of certain texts is still different from their exclusive instrumentalization as an official ideology. While our historical sources do not fail to mention that the elevation of the Five Canons under Emperor Wu was accompanied by the censorship of competing texts and doctrines, it is primarily with Emperor Cheng that we see the classicist pressure on rivaling ideologies emerging with full force.

known original text is probably that in Yang Xiong's Foyan, that is, again decades later. The Foyan indeed refers repeatedly to the Wu Jing as the normative canon (see, e.g., Foyan yishu 10.25a), while on the other hand denigrating several of the famous Warring States philosophers (as in Foyan yishu 11.25a). For substantial recent accounts of Han canonical learning, incorporating the full scope of traditional Chinese and modern scholarship, see Yen-zen Tsai, "Ching and chuan," Hans van Ess, Politik und Geltersamkeit in der Zeit der Han (202 v.Chr.-220 n.Chr.); Die alttestamentliche Kontroverse (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), and Michael Nylan, "The Chin Wen/Ku Wen Controversy in Han Times." Studies like those by Fukui and Nylan (who questions the reality of a strong "old text" versus "new text" controversy in Han times) demonstrate how often we rely on common assumptions without being able to verify them. A number of these unquestioned assumptions form the backbone of Yen-zen Tsai's study (which nevertheless is in many respects a valuable contribution), where, for example, the terms Liu Yi 梁 "(Six Arts)" and Wu Jing are anachronistically conflated, even referring to early Han times. Wherever Tsai uses the unclear wording "the Six Arts or Five Scriptures"—and this happens frequently—the sources include only the former term; the addition "or Five Scriptures" is Tsai's own conjecture and cannot stand up to precise analysis.

100 See Hanshu 6.212, 8.3599.

101 While in other respects rather traditional, Wang Baoyuan 王則元, Xi Han jingxue yu shi jigai 西漢經學與史稽疑 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1994), pp. 108-27, provides a clear assessment of this issue. By comparison, Tang Zhiyun 汤志云 et al., Xi Han jingxue yu shi jingyi 西漢經學與史經疑 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1994), pp. 15-19, offers nothing but another simplistic reiteration of conventional wisdom.
Fukui's skepticism about the elevation of classicist learning under Wudi is corroborated by the harsh attacks that from late Western Han times were launched retrospectively against this emperor's state ritual and music. The passage from the Hsuehshu immediately following the cycle of the "Jiaosi ge," which seems to include fragments of a memorial written between 32 and 7 B.C., accuses the Emperor of having discarded orthodox music, of having used musical pieces that were not "correct sounds" (yasheng 雅聲) for the suburban and temple sacrifices, and, worst of all, of having spread the lascivious "sounds of Zheng" (Zheng sheng 鄭聲) throughout the court—which was understood as the definite emblem of the ruler's moral degeneration and as announcing the imminent downfall of the state. Few, if any, criticism could have been more fundamental, more authoritative, and more devastating, since nothing was more de-tested as a deep violation of traditional ritual values than the "sounds of Zheng." Confucius himself, speaking in two of the later passages of the Lunyu, had once and for all exposed the desastrous effects of the "sounds of Zheng":

Yan Yuan asked how to govern a state. The Master said: "Enact the calendar of the Xia, ride in the carriage of the Yin, and wear the ceremonial hat of the Zhou. For music, there is the 'Shao' dance. Abandon the sounds of Zheng and keep at distance eloquent flatters, the sounds of Zheng are lascivious, and eloquent flatters are dangerous."

顏淵問為邦。子曰：行夏之時，乘殷之辂，服周之冕，樂則殷舞。故鄭 聲，遂訕人。鄭聲淫，訕人學。

103 See Hsuehshu 22.1070-71. The passage speaks of "today's poems and songs for the Han [sacrifices] suburban altars and ancestral temple" and mentions the Office of Music in charge of them. The office was abolished in 7 B.C., which would therefore be the logical terminus ante quem for this textual fragment. 32 B.C. refers again to Kuang Heng and his followers, who are the fountain of all the following criticism of Emperor Wu's ritual system.

104 Since Warring States times, "sounds of Zheng," "sounds of Zheng and Wei" (Zheng Wei zhi sheng 鄭魏之聲), "new sounds" or "tunes" (xinsheng 新聲 or xinyin 新音), "lascivious sounds" (yinsheng 淫聲), or "sounds of a perishing state" (wuzhuang zhi sheng 止斃之聲) were all synonymous designations for the deprived "new" against the noble "old music" (guye 萬樂). For a discussion of this key issue of cultural discourse in ancient China, see Jean-Pierre Diény, Aux origines de la poésie classique en Chine: étude sur la poésie lyrique à l'époque des Han (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), pp. 17-40; Kuribara Keisuke 豐原圭介, Chigoku hokai gakuron no kenkyui 調和古典との研究 (Tokyo: Daigaku jumikai daigaku, 1978), pp. 65-70.

Lunyu shushu [17.18] 17.69c.

RITUAL, TEXT, AND THE FORMATION OF THE CANON

The Master said: "I detect how the purple encroaches upon the crimson, I detect how the sounds of Zheng bring confusion to the correct music, I detect how sharp tongues overthrow the state and the families."

子曰：惡紫之奪朱也，惡鄭聲之亂雅樂也，惡立國之慶邦家者。

Despite many centuries of debate there is no conclusion on the actual nature of the "sounds of Zheng" in Eastern Zhou times, if we reject the conflation of Confucius's concern with music and the Mao 毛 interpretation of the "Zheng feng" 鄭風 texts during Han times as overly anachronistic. By the end of the Western Han, however, the "sounds of Zheng" and the notion of "correct music" had long turned from musical realities into rhetorical formulae, epitomizing the paradigms of cultural achievement and degeneration. When the late Western Han critics of Emperor Wu exploited a rhetoric that referred to the venerated and idealized music of the past, they accused him of having violated the ritual and musical ideals of antiquity as they were preserved in the traditional canon.

Probably predating the fragmentary Hsuehshu memorial, Kuang Heng, again in 32 B.C., had made another concrete effort to improve the state ritual music in the spirit of high antiquity. Concerned with the texts of Emperor Wu's sacrificial hymns for the suburban altars—which therefore must have been still in use under Emperor Cheng—the chancellor proposed two textual changes: in text seven of the "Jiaosi ge" he asked to change the line "The simurgh carriage [glittering with] dragon scales" (luanhu
were critical of imperial extravagance and of the display of ritual magnificence. As the foremost scholar to redefine and secure the traditional canon, as editor of important pre-Han works and as imperial bibliographer, Liu Xiang, more than any other scholar in his time, imagined the inherited culture as resting solidly on the authoritative canon of the written word, rather than on ostentatious ritual demeanor. It may therefore be more than merely coincidental that the first mention of wenzhang as referring to a particular text—the Chunqiu—should be found in Liu’s Shui yuan, side by side with a preponderantly critical view of wenzhang as ornamental display. The turn to the written canon, which corroborated the rejection of ritual ornament as now “mere ornament,” was instrumental for the redefinition of the term wenzhang.

Around the year 50, Ban Gu’s father, the distinguished scholar-official Ban Biao 使彪 (3-54), presented a memorial on the education of the Heir Apparent. In this early Eastern Han document the new meaning of wenzhang as “classicist writing” emerges with relative clarity, although the original bonds to ritual practice are by no means cut off:

When the Han had risen, the Great Ancestor [i.e., Emperor Wen, r. 180-157 B.C.] ordered Chao Guo [200-154 B.C.] to instruct the Heir Apparent about the rules and methods [of good order]; Jia Yi taught the Songs and the Documents to the Prince of Liang. The Middle Ancestor [i.e., Emperor Xuan] also commanded men such as Liu Xiang, Wang Bao, Xiao Wangzhi [c. 110-47 B.C.], and Zhou Kan [fl. 46 B.C.] to raise and tutor [those] in the Eastern Palace114 and below through wenzhang and 九 learning; there was none who did not venerate and choose these men, and so [the Heir Apparent and the other princes] turned into vessels of virtuous power. Today, although the August Heir Apparent and the princes [already] knot their hair115 and learn and inquire, cultivate and practice ritual and music, the instructors are not yet equal to the worthy and talented [of old], and their offices are mostly lacking the old canonical texts.116 It is appropriate to select broadly from the famous ru scholars and from those who have forceful dignity and accumulated brilliance and who comprehend the matters of gov-

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108 Han shu 22,1057-58; for annotated translations and discussions of the two hymns see my Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsoper, pp. 210-25.

109 Note that “axe-pattern” (fu 伐) is the first word in the conventional sequence fu renwen zhang 賄教大章 that is glossed as denoting the four textual patterns of distinct colons (see the remarks on wenzhang in the Li ji above). The “axe-pattern” is the one in “white and black.”

110 For the self-referential nature of early Chinese ritualism, as it is expressed in hymns and other performance texts, see my The Stele Inscriptions of Chin Shih-huang, pp. 140-47, and my Shi jing Songs as Performance Texts: A Case Study of ‘Chu ci’ (Thorny Caltrop), forthcoming in Early China 25 (2000).

111 Han shu 25B.1258-59, see also Loewe, Crisis and Conflict, pp. 176-77.

112 See his long memorial in Han shu 56.1950-57.


114 The Eastern Palace is the palace of the Heir Apparent.

115 Indicating that they have reached adult age.

116 Here, jiu dian 旧典 (“old statutes”) unambiguously refers to the Confucian canon.
to establish offices [of education] in the Eastern Palace and the various princeloms.117

This memorial, here quoted only in part, mentions some of the key elements of cultural and intellectual change in late Western and early Eastern Han times: the existence of a corpus of "ancient canonical writings" upon which to base the study of ritual and music, the stress on classical learning and its related wenzhang, the genealogy of Han traditional scholarship, and the existence of a class of scholars that was well versed in the canonized writings. Interestingly enough, the genealogy of classical scholars stops with Liu Xiang, and Ban Biao claims that ru learning has yet to be implemented and its institutions to be established in order to educate the princes of the recently restored dynasty. In this respect, the year 50 still belongs to a stage of transition.

The instrumentalization of the traditional canon as an absolute basis of ritual practice and, necessarily related, the conscious rejection of ostentatious ritual ornament, again loom large in Ban Gu's vision of the recent past of the Han and in his ritual program for his own days. Ban Gu not only criticized the state sacrificial music of Emperor Wu as improper and vulgar,118 he also praised the Eastern Han capital Luoyang, and by extension the Eastern Han rulership, for being in accord with the principles of moderation described in the canonical ritual works, and therefore superior to the lavish splendor of the Western Han capital Chang'an.119

Not directly related to the classicist impulse that figures prominently in the writings of Kuang Heng, Liu Xiang, Yang Xiong, and Ban Gu, but contemporary to the latter, is Wang Chong's Shizhuan (27-97) Lun heng 諸衡, where the term wenzhang appears sixteen times, in most cases unspecifically relating to written texts.120 In the two passages where he uses the term with respect to certain textual corpora, Wang Chong mentions the wenzhang of the "literary ru scholars" (wennu) and the wenzhang of the Han dynasty; for the latter, he enumerates Lu Jia, Sima Qian, Liu Xiang, and Yang Xiong—all of them being traditional scholars and officials. Among these, Yang Xiong, who like Liu Xiang worked as an imperial librarian, was the most outspoken ritual classicist and critic of both material splendor and literary ornament.121

Wenzhang, we may conclude at this point, are not just any kind of texts; they are those official writings that were, first, concerned with public affairs and, second, associated with scholars of traditional textual learning. The writers who were actively, though always implicitly, proposing this shift from ritual to textual demanor and who then became regarded as the major representatives of wenzhang in its new sense were all traditional scholars and statesmen; their compositions—historical writings (Sima Qian), political and moral discourses (Lu Jia, Liu Xiang, Yang Xiong), and panegyric pieces of imperial representation (Sima Xiangru, as mentioned by Ban Gu)122—are what was now understood as

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118 See the criticism included in Hanshu 22.1070-71, as mentioned above.
119 See Knechtges, "To Praise the Han: The Eastern Capital Ru of Pan Ku and His Contemporaries."
121 Lun heng jiaoshi, 2:585.
122 Lun heng jiaoshi, 4:1145.
123 See Hanshu 81A.3585-85 and Wen xuan 8.20a-22a. In his views on literature Yang Xiong also developed a decidedly classicist and utilitarian position, rejecting literary ornament for its own sake and consciously employing archaic formulations. See Franklin M. Doeringer, "Yang Hsiaung and His Formulation of a Classicism" (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1971), esp. ch. 4, pp. 119-79. Some of his most outspoken statements against superficial ritual and literary ornament may be found in chapter 2 of his Foyan (Wuzi) 與言 [chapters 3 and 4 in Foyan yishu]; for a translation see David R. Knechtges, "Exemplary Sayings, Chapter 2," in The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature, ed. Victor Mair [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994], pp. 590-93. In the same text, he once notes that "writings that are not [within the domain of the] canonical texts are not writings. Speech that is not [within the domain of the] canonical texts is not speech" (Foyan yishu 8.6a). For Yang Xiong's position as a colator in the imperial library see Hanshu 87B.354, Doeringer, pp. 198-201.
124 Although none of Sima Xiangru's 《穆fafu was officially commissioned, it is clear that Ban Gu regards Sima's great epideictic rhapsodies as "officially" rep-
wenzhang. Considering the meaning of wenzhang as “official writings” in late Western and then Eastern Han times together with its relation to classicist learning, we can understand the semantic shift of the term in a new perspective: as the truth and authority of the canon had eventually absorbed and transformed the power of ritual practice into the mastership of texts, wenzhang—the appropriate appearance—was found less in sensual emblems and increasingly in correct writings that were based on canonical learning: wenxue, in the Han sense of the word. If we follow the texts which have been transmitted to us, the gradual dissociation of the term wenzhang from ritual demeanor and its parallel affiliation with wenxue can therefore be dated relatively precisely: it was initiated in the last decades of the Western Han and accomplished in the second half of the first century A.D., at the latest. Wenxue and wenzhang have eventually become two complementary terms, the first referring to the input of textual learning and the second to the output of textual production. The ru followers, originally choreographers of the rites and reciters of the canon, have eventually turned into scholars of the text.

Having discussed the issues of genuine “ru learning” (rushi) or canonical learning (wenxue or jingshu), of the formation of the canon, of the establishment of the imperial library, and of the role of men like Yang Xiong, Kuang Heng, Liu Xiang, Liu Xin and others at the end of the Western Han and during the Wang Mang interregnum, we cannot ignore a possibly related representative compositions; on the somewhat problematic status of Sima’s works, see below. In this context, one may also think of Sima’s “Treatise on the feng and shan sacrifices” (“Feng shan wen” 芬山文), which includes a long eulogy (song 9) in praise of the Han dynasty. According to tradition, Sima had composed the “Feng shan wen” on his deathbed.


Although he “became a victim of historiography and was reduced from Son of Heaven to usurper” (Hans Jelenski, “Wang Mang, the restoration of the Han Dynasty, and Later Han,” in The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1, p. 229), Wang Mang’s efforts to promote classicist scholarship and its canon (see Han Shu 12.359, 99A.4069) can hardly be overstated. Presenting his rulership, semi-official at first and later official, as a revival of the Western Zhou, he initially attracted scholars like Yang Xiong and Liu Xin as officials and panegyrists. For summaries of his political classicism see Loewe, Crisis and Conflict, pp. 286-506. Doeringer, “Yang Hsiang and His Formulation of a Classicism,” pp. 180-89, and Homer H. Dubs, The History of the Former Han Dynasty (3 vols., Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938-55), 3: 56-57, 1036.

nomenon, albeit of questionable historicity—the so-called “old text/new text” (guwen 古文/jinwen 今文) controversy.”127

Michael Loewe has seen the reforms of the state sacrifices after 32 B.C. as part of the guwen (“old text”) intellectual and political agenda in late Western Han times, linking jinwen (“new text”) scholarship with what he calls the political “modernists” (represented in the policy of Han Wudi), and guwen learning with the “reformists” (represented in the later opposition to Wudi’s political legacy).128 More recently, Hans van Ess, explicitly taking issue with Loewe’s conclusions, has proposed the exactly opposite view, identifying guwen positions as “modernist” politics and those based on jinwen as “reformist,” in particular with respect to questions of state ritual.129 Based on an analysis of the fragments of Xu Shen’s Wu jing yi yi 五經異義, this rather surprising turn is again problematic; however Xu Shen may have (re)constructed and emphasized these categories, they lead to numerous contradictions, due in particular to the strenuous procedure of assigning individual scholars or officials to one of the two camps. For example, labelling Kuang Heng a “new text” proponent130 is either wrong or completely meaningless in view of the fact that, for a number of his arguments, among them the criticism of the elaborate wenzhang of the Taiyi altar, he draws heavily on the so-called “old text classic” Zhou li. Michael Nylan, after a careful investigation into the question of what guwen and jinwen might actually have meant in Han times, has convincingly marshalled a string of similar problems; as a result, she has questioned the historical reality of a fundamental “old text”/“new text” debate during Han times.131

Indeed, it does not seem fruitful to force any particular politi-

127 Of course this is not the place to discuss or even introduce the large amount of Chinese, Japanese, and Western scholarship on the development of the traditional canon, or even on the “old text/new text” issue. The above-mentioned studies by van Ess, Nylan, and Tsai may serve as guides to the relevant material.

128 See his Crisis and Conflict, pp. 165-66.

129 See van Ess, Politik und Gelehrsamkeit, pp. 71, 182-244.

130 See van Ess, Politik und Gelehrsamkeit, p. 207.

cal debate or intellectual development of late Western Han times into the literary corset of an assumed overarching guwen/jinwen dichotomy. Even if we concede some historical reality to this conflict, evaluated on the basis of the meager and contradictory evidence in Western and early Eastern Han sources its actual significance is by no means clear. There is also no particular reason to subordinate Kuang Heng’s and others’ aggressive criticism of the inherited state sacrifices and sacrificial music to an “old text/new text” disputation only because Xu Shen, writing more than a century later, aimed to systematize all kinds of political issues along these lines—an undertaking that closely paralleled his compilation of the Shuowen jiezi, by which he intended to “render the interpretation of the classics doubt-free, thereby putting the full force of their cumulative and sanctified wisdom at the service of the Han government in its very immediate objective of enforcing order in all areas of human activity through a dominant central authority.” Moreover, the debate on ritual was already concerned with the ideological horizon of rulership and therefore was by itself of the highest priority in late Western Han times. Certainly, the newly promoted guwen writings provided some useful arguments here, but the overall criticism of inherited practice was not exclusively confined to texts of either guwen or jinwen provenance. It should also be noted that the Li Ji, by far the most ideological text on ritual and music, cannot be classified as either guwen or jinwen in the Western Han context, since, as noted above, it was simply not recognized as a “closed” canonical work in its own right until late Eastern Han times. Even the “Records of Music”—in this context the most important part of the Li Ji—is of an uncertain date and, in 30 B.C., of an uncertain status; despite the traditional Hanshu account that it was compiled by Prince Xian of Hejian (r. 155-129 B.C.), the younger brother of Emperor Wu, there was good reason to date this text, or at least significant parts of it, more or less from the days of Kuang Heng’s reform initiative.  

Mao 5), see Hanshu 30.1712. According to this passage, the “Yueji” was later edited by Liu Xiang. For the most aggressive paragraph of the text—the “Wei Wen hou zhang” 惠文后章 (Li ji zhengyi 38.810a-39.315c)—in particular I would doubt a composition substantially prior to Liu Xiang’s times. (The inclusion of the “Yueji” in the Shiji “Yueshu” does not constitute a terminus ante quem, since the “Yueshu,” as noted above, is certainly not original but of a later date.) Although the Marquis Wen of Wei (Wei Wen hou) ruled from 427 to 387 B.C., there is no earlier version of this “Yueshu” section, for example in the Xunzi chapter “Yueshu” 言喻 to which the “Yueji” is in many passages indebted. In a uniquely strong tone, the “Wei Wen hou” paragraph condemns the “new” or “excessive tones” (ni yin 尼音) that should be excluded from the state sacrifices. Given the polemical sharpness of this section, which by far exceeds all earlier discussions on “old” and “new” music (see above), one must raise the question of the historical target for this attack. The only candidate in sight would be, of course, Emperor Wu, but his sacrificial music was not established before 114/113 B.C. (see Hanshu 22.1045; according to Hanshu 25A.1232 and Shiji 28.1396 [repeated in Shiji 12.472], the state sacrifices were still without music; at least as late as in 111 B.C.), i.e., almost two decades after the death of Prince Xian! With respect to the guwen/jinwen issue it is noteworthy that Prince Xian is recognized as a collector of “old writings in ancient script from pre-Qin times” (guwen xian Qin ju shu 古文獻秦君書) only in the Hanshu (55.2410), but not in the Shiji.

132 Bolitz, The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System, p. 151, with further reference to Roy Andrew Miller, “Problems in the Study of Shuo Wen Chieh Tsao” (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1953), pp. 278ff. Xu Shen’s Wujing yi yai may lead the question of whether the assumed late Western Han “old text/new text controversy” could actually have been a projection of mid-Eastern Han times—a first projection, furnishing the basis for further, secondary projections by late Qing scholars.

133 On Prince Xian of Hejian as the “Yueji” compiler (together with Master
RITUAL, TEXT, AND THE FORMATION OF THE CANON

IV. From the ritual canon to the genres of literature

Having identified the critical shift from ritual to textual wenzhang, we are now better prepared to follow the argument in Ban Gu’s preface to his “Liang du fu,” which so far we have quoted only briefly. A more complete quotation of this programmatic document will demonstrate how Ban Gu, by subtle rhetorical moves, introduces the traditional significance of the term wenzhang and transforms it into its new meaning and context of “classicist writing.”

Someone has said: “The rhapsody (fu) is a class of the ancient songs.” In the past, after Kings Cheng and Kang had passed away, the sounds of the Eulogia ceased; after the royal blessings had been exhausted, the Songs no longer flourished. When the Great Han was consolidated in its initial years, [the emperor], day after day, did not get enough leisure. When the emperors Wu and Xuan were reached, they venerated the offices of ritual and examined the wenzhang. Within [the palace] they set up the institutions of the Bronze Horse [Gate] and the Stone Canal [Pavilion]; outside [the palace] they initiated the task of harmonizing the pitch pipes in the Office of Music. [This was] to raise up what had been abandoned, to continue what had been cut off, and to give glinting color to the vast achievements.

137 See Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, pp. 87-103. My notion of a “transition from ritual continuity to textual coherence” is an attempt towards a more precise description of what Assmann calls the “transition from ritual to textual coherence.”

138 Apart from some minor changes, I have little to add to the elegant translation of the preface by Professor Knechtges. Given the prominence and availability of his standard work, there is also no need to repeat his meticulous annotations here; see Knechtges, Wen xuan, 1:93-97. In the following, I quote the full preface except its final paragraph, where Ban Gu turns from the general discussion to his subject proper, the Han capitals.

135 Besides van der Loon’s study on the editing of the Guanzi, a good case has been provided for the Xumi; see Knoblock, Xumi, 1:105-10.

136 See Henderson, Scripture, Canon, and Commentary, pp. 41-50.
Therefore, the multitudes were joyful and pleased, and auspicious omens were especially abundant. The [sacrificial] songs "White Unicorn," "Red Goose," "Mushroom Chamber," and "Precious Tripod" were presented at the suburban altars and in the ancestral temple. The omens of the spirit birds, the five phoenixes, the sweet dew, and the yellow dragon were employed as yearly designations [to name reign periods].

Hence, officials who attended [the emperor because of their skill with] words and phrases, like Sima Xiangru, Yuqiu Shouwang, Dongfang Shuo, Mei Gao, Wang Bao, and Liu Xiang day and night discussed and pondered, and daily and monthly presented and offered [their opinions]; while the high dignitaries and distinguished ministers, like those of the ranks of the Grandee Secretary Ni Kuan, the Grand Master of Ceremonies Kong Cang, the Grand Palace Grandee Dong Zhongshu, the Superintendent of the Imperial Clan Liu De, and the Grand Tutor of the Heir Apparent Xiao Wangzhi, from time to time composed [writings] on a special occasion. Some [wrote] to express the feelings of their subordinates and to convey indirect criticism and advice; some [wrote] to spread their superior’s virtuous power and to fulfill loyalty and piety. Observing and obeying, elevating and exalting, they made themselves known to posterity, and [their works] were second only to the *Elegantiae* and *Eulogia*.

Therefore, in the era of Filial [Emperor] Cheng, one evaluated and catalogued them; there were about more than a thousand pieces that had been presented and approved by the emperor. After this, the *wenzhang* of the Great Han were brilliant and equal in style with those of the Three Dynasties [Xia, Shang, and Zhou].

Moreover, the Way experiences decline and glory; learning encompasses the coarse and the refined. Those who in accordance with [the changes of] the times establish their virtuous power do not change their standards because of being far from or near to [their model]. Therefore, Gaoyao sang of Yu [i.e., Shun], and Xi Si praised Lu. Both were acknowledged and collected by Confucius and arranged among the *Songs* and the *Documents*; their principle was one and the same. Observe it in high antiquity, then it was like that; examine it in the house of Han, and it is again like this.139

After this general introduction, Ban Gu closes his preface by presenting his concrete motivation to write his Rhapsody on the two capitals: juxtaposing the dazzling brilliance of the Western Han capital Chang’an with the well-balanced “rules and measures” (*faju* 律度) of the Eastern Han capital Lo-yang. The argumentative points of the preface that concern us here may be listed as follows:

- the present literary writings have evolved from the ancient *Shijing* songs;
- the rise of *wenzhang* during the Western Han is related to the re-emergence of ritual and to the institutions of the appointment hall of the scholars, of the imperial library, of the literary genre of the *fuj*, and of the Office of Music, the latter being in charge of the pitch pipes;
- auspicious omens, interpreted as a cosmic reaction to good rulership, are matched with sacrificial hymns and reign designations, i.e., emblematic literary expression;
- officials who were particularly skilled in verbal expression, as well as the high dignitaries of the state, served the emperor by offering criticism and advice, and their words are again compared to the ancient *Shijing* songs;
- these pieces of official writing—most prominently, the more than one thousand *fuj* that are recorded in the "Epitome of Songs and Rhapsodies" ("Shi fu lie" 鈔賦略) section of the *Hanshu* "Monograph on Arts and Letters" ("Yiwen zhi" 録文志)—were collected and catalogued, and they are again compared to the *wenzhang* of the dynasties of high antiquity;
- present-day literary composition follows the same principles as in antiquity;
- the new, well-measured order, based on the codified and transmitted standards of antiquity, should replace recent ritual splendor.

These statements match what we have observed with respect to the semantical shift of the term *wenzhang* and its underlying cultural changes: the Han writers of *wenzhang* are the *fuj* officials and

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139 On the question of where these hymns on auspicious omens from the time of Emperor Wu were presented, see my *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsoffier*, pp. 174-75; for annotated translations and discussions of these four hymns see ibid., pp. 248-60, 272-79.

140 *Wen xuan* 1.1a-8b.
literati; their works are directly serving the state, and, since around 26 B.C., they have been collected and catalogued by Liu Xiang, Liu Xin, and also Yang Xiong in the imperial library. Moreover, written parts of the tradition, which are supposed to have been authentically transmitted through the ages, are now identified as the wenzhang of high antiquity and are available as immediate models for the present. At the same time, what had been the material side of wenzhang—the ritual splendor of the Western Han—is replaced by a well-measured order that is purportedly based on the transmitted standards of antiquity, i.e., the rules and measures outlined in the books of the ritual canon edited and preserved in the imperial library.

The rhetorical means by which Ban Gu indicates a connection between the wenzhang of antiquity and those of his own times are subtle: the two passages that include the term do not explicitly define it as "writing" but instead keep it in a careful balance between its traditional and its new meaning. On the one hand, Ban Gu employs traditional phraseology (as in kao wenzhang 考文章, parallel to the Liji) and speaks of the wenzhang of the Three Dynasties in the same way as Confucius spoke of the wenzhang of Yao. On the other hand, he parallels these notions with the official literary production of the Western and Eastern Han, including ritual texts: the identity of wenzhang past and present is implicitly suggested. And indeed, with respect to their medium they are now identical: thanks to the meticulous classical scholarship (wenxue) under Emperor Cheng, which has transformed the memory and imagination of antiquity into the reality of a written canon, the ritual norms (wenzhang) of the Three Dynasties are now at hand—collected, edited and stored in the imperial library, side by side with the wenzhang of the present. Whatever a classicist official may look for as the standards of antiquity, he will find it in the written form of the canon, as edited by his fellow officials.

The Hou Hanshu includes a string of passages that are pertinent to the nature of wenzhang in Ban Gu's days. For example, during the successful campaign of the Eastern Han General Dou Xian 封演 (d. 92) against the northern Xiongnu in 89, Ban Gu and Fu Yi 阮衣 (c. 35-c. 90) were "in charge of writings" (dian wen-

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144 Hou Hanshu 23.819. For information on the campaign and its aftermath, see Hou Hanshu 4.168-69, 23.814-20. Both Ban Gu and Fu Yi were on General Dou's staff (see Hou Hanshu 80A.2613). Fu Yi, as a scholar second in reputation only to Ban Gu, was writing within the same ideological horizon of ritual classicism as Ban Gu; see Nekolobov, "To Praise the Han," pp. 131-35, and for Fu's biography, Hou Hanshu 80A.261-13.

145 For the inscription text see Hou Hanshu 23.615-17.

146 This enumeration comprises the genres that are typically mentioned in the Hou Hanshu biographies of the major literati of the first century. See for example, Hou Hanshu 40A.1329 (Ban Biao) and 80A.2613 (Fu Yi) and the whole chapter 80, dedicated to the "Garden of Literature" (Wenyuan liezhuan) of Eastern Han times. The best English summary of Han and Six Dynasties literary genres and their theory may be found in Nekolobov, Wen xuan, 1:2-4, 21-52.
orderings of literature, like the comprehensive systems of Liu Xie’s Wenxin diaolong and Xiao Tong’s 鬚統 (501-531) Wenxuan, these genres reflect the reality of wenxian in early Eastern Han times.147

When Cao Pi calls wenxian “the great undertaking in managing the state” (wenxian jing guo zhi duoy 文章經國之大業), he does not metaphorically elevate the status of literature but refers to the body of writings that served the needs of the government in practical matters (the discursive genres) and symbolic representation (the panegyrical genres). By Eastern Han times, the primary means and expression of good rulership was the literary wenxian. When declaring this principle, Cao Pi may or may not have thought of an earlier formula concerning the basis of the state in the Zuo zhuan: “The great affairs of the state reside in the temple sacrifices and in the war sacrifices.”148 But the juxtaposition of both statements immediately illuminates the fundamentally different perception of government after the gradual institutionalization of literary writing for official purposes had taken place. Cao Pi’s view of the political significance of literature, together with his enumeration of genres, was, as Burton Watson pointed out many years ago,150 completely within the scope of Eastern Han thinking. Wang Chong, for example, dedicated a whole section, entitled “Xu song 頌頌, to the necessity of eulogizing the state,151 claiming that “when the emperors and kings of old established their vast virtuous power, they needed ministers of grand writing skill to praise and eulogize, to record and document; the vast virtuous power would then become brilliant, and ten thousand generations would hear of it,” and that “if the dragon is without clouds and rain, it cannot join Heaven; the men of grand writing skill are the clouds and rain of the state.”152

Of course, political eulogy was anything but new in late Western Han times; politico-religious eulogies are probably the earliest form among known Chinese texts that may be called literary writings on the basis of their poetic structure. The “Zhou song 周頌” section of the transmitted Shijing is regarded as the oldest part of the whole anthology, probably including pieces from the eleventh and tenth centuries B.C.; even when appearing as historical records, the contemporary bronze inscriptions were almost definition texts composed to glorify one’s ancestors and to present oneself as their legitimate descendant. Yet, not only does the word wenxian appear only centuries later, even then it is never applied to the ya 雅 or song 歌: the historical continuity of political eulogy since the early Zhou is not reflected in a coherent terminology. Although, according to Ban Gu, the later eulogy followed the very tradition of the ya and the song, it was very different in nature from what had been inherited from the Western Zhou, the last of the illustrious dynasties of high antiquity. The difference was not on the textual level: one could, and did, model any number of new hymns or inscriptions on the respective patterns of the Shijing. It was on the level of the significance of the text relative to its embedding performance: both the early Zhou and the later imperial eulogies were performance texts and were composed to harmonize with music by poetic features like rhyme, meter, the use of onomatopoeics, etc. in ritual celebrations of religious nature. While strikingly different from the eulogies of imperial times, the texts of the Shijing hymns were only secondary to their performance through music and dance.153 Even

147 The single exception is the genre of the “persuasion” (shui 説; on this pronunciation see the phonetic gloss in Wen xuan 17.6a), which was only retrospectively discussed. It was a genre basically confined to Warring States and early Han times and definitely not continued into the Eastern Han; see my “Persuasion” or “Treatise?”—The prose genres shui and shuo in the light of the Guanci between 古文個體 of 1779.”


151 Lun heng jiaoshi 3:847-58.

152 Lun heng jiaoshi 3:847, 854.

153 As Van Zoonen, Poetry and Personality, pp. 28-51, has pointed out, centuries before their final canonization the Songs appear to be treated as an element of ritual music in the earliest parts of the Lanyu, as texts to be recited or chanted in a later stratum of the received text, and as texts to be studied and discussed only in the very latest sections of the transmitted text. Still in the Zuo zhuan, the practice of “reciting the Songs” (fu shi 唐) was intended to emphasize their emblematic qualities as ideal musical pieces, without presenting any particular moral reading of their texts. The significance of the Songs, it seems, was moved step by step from the musical to the textual level: “As the teaching of the Odes was becoming institutionalized in the Confucian schools, the music that had been the raison d’être of the Odes was falling out of use, leaving behind the Odes as texts and texts only” (Van Zoonen, Poetry and Personality, p. 49).
a text as late as the “Great Preface” (“Da xu" 大序) to the Shi jing, dating by some from the Eastern Han, still acknowledges this primacy of the outward form with respect to the Zhou eulogy.

The eulogies praise the outward appearance of flourishing virtuous power, in order to announce its accomplishments and merits towards the spirits.\(^{154}\)

If this passage—with song (“eulogy”) cognate to rong 容 (“appearance”)\(^{155}\)—defines the eulogy primarily as a dance performance, then we have to recognize an ironic phenomenon: the ritual hymns of the Shi jing, orchestrated with solemn music and measured dances, belonged indeed to the ritual wenzhang of their time when they created a synaesthetical experience that not only represented but constituted and iteratively reaffirmed good rulership. By contrast, when Han writers referred to their own eulogies as wenzhang, both the nature of the eulogy and the notion of wenzhang had been developed from the performative to the textual level of expression. It is only by misinterpreting both the Zhou eulogy and the Zhou wenzhang that we can create an apparent continuity of cultural expression from high antiquity to imperial times. Despite all efforts to project the significance of the written literary text back into early Western Zhou times,\(^{156}\) it is most probably a phenomenon that did not become forceful until the late Western Han: its Eastern Han retrospective application to earlier eras tells us more about the status of literature, accompanied by a particular view of the past, after ca. 30 B.C., than about pre-imperial cultural realities. There simply was no discussion on literary writing as “the great undertaking in managing the state” before the days of Liang Xiang and Yang Xiong.

The process by which the literary text rose to its status as the main emblem of culture was gradual, and it was eventually accomplished by mid-Eastern Han times, just before paper became widely available in China.\(^{157}\) In addition to such factors as the criticism of material ritualism, the fixation of the canon, the institutionalization of scholarly erudition in the form of official chairs, the founding of the imperial library, and the appointment of collators of the imperial collection, one should also consider an increasingly broad literary public that was no longer centered only on the imperial court or on one of the princely courts. The circulation of writings between individual scholars—a process of communication that must have been still essentially public, not private—can be first documented in the correspondence between Liu Xin and Yang Xiong concerning Yang’s dialect dictionary Fang yan 方言.\(^{158}\) Beyond the significance of their very existence, the letters also provide us with most valuable insights into the status of the literary text at the very end of the Western Han.\(^{159}\) Yang Xiong mentions that his earliest writings included a eulogy (song 章) and three inscriptions (ming 篆), in other words, the typical panegyric wenzhang of the day, and that they all had been recited (song 章) to Emperor Cheng.\(^{160}\) This means that besides the rhapsoodies,\(^{161}\) other works of official literary writings,

\(^{154}\) Mao shi zhengyi 1-1.4c.

\(^{155}\) Following Ruan Yuan’s 乾元 (1764-1849) widely accepted analysis; see his “Yanjing shiji 新經箋’, in Qing jingjie 清經解 (ed. Ruan Yuan, reprint [together with the continuation Qing jingjie xubian 清經解續編]) in 12 vols., Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1988, 1068-2409-250a. See also my The State Inscriptions of Chi’in Shi-huang, pp. 143-44.

\(^{156}\) Cao Pi sees the primary cultural achievements of the early Zhou rulers King Wen 夏王 (r. 1099-56-1050 B.C.) and the Duke of Zhou 周公 (r. 1042-1036 B.C.) in their writings; see Wen xuan 52.9b.

\(^{157}\) According to literary and archaeological evidence, paper was known already during Western Han times but it was certainly not widespread. If not its inventor, Cai Lun 釈倫 (d. 121) still is credited with important improvements of paper in China, as it appears from the memorial that he presented to the emperor in A.D. 105 (see Hou Han shu 78.2513). It seems that paper became increasingly popular and widespread only towards late Eastern Han times; see Eva Yuen-Wah Chung, “A Study of the Shu (Letters) of the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220)” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Washington, 1982), pp. 297-295, Qian Cunxun 前存新 [Tsien Tseun-huiun, Yinshua fangyan quan de Zhenguo shu he wensu fujia 華明與方言的中華秦漢文字記述 (Peking: Yinshua gongye, 1988), pp. 99-96, Joseph Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Vol. 5: Chemistry and Chemical Technology, Part 1: Paper and Printing (by Tsien Tseun-huiun) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 38-47.

\(^{158}\) If the two letters are authentic—and there are good reasons to believe so—they were “the first extant examples in Chinese literature of correspondence between two literary figures”; see David R. Knechtges, “The Liu Hsin/Yang Hsiung Correspondence on the Fang Yan,” Monumenta Serica 35 (1977/78): 310. For the two letters, see Qian Yi 彭顯, Fangyan jianshu 甘言集成 (2 vols., Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1984), 13.49a-56a.

\(^{159}\) Knechtges, “The Liu Hsin/Yang Hsiung Correspondence on the Fang Yan,” pp. 319-22, dates the letters around A.D. 7 but also suggests that they have been edited later in Eastern Han times.

\(^{160}\) Fangyan jianshu 13.53a.

\(^{161}\) See Hou Han shu 50.1795, where the rhapsoody (fu 詩) is defined by its mode of presentation: “To recite (song 章) without singing is called fu.” The statement
in particular panegyrical pieces, were still being publicly recited, i.e., ritually performed. Yet at the same time, the Liu Xin/Yang Xiong correspondence by itself seems to testify to the act of individual reading.

Liu Xin again mentions several points that are pertinent to our discussion above: Emperor Cheng’s concern with the canon of ancient writings, the role of philological erudites to establish its correct readings, and the need of catalogues and dictionaries. In short, Liu Xin substantiates his request of a copy of the Fangyan for the imperial library, most elegantly declined by Yang Xiong, by the same arguments that led Xu Shen, almost a century later, to compile the Shuwen jiezi.

Finally, we may turn again to Yang Xiong for evidence of the new status of the literary text, in this case the rhapsody. Although Yang greatly admired the earlier poeta laureatus in the Fu genre, Sima Xiangru, with whom he had much in common—the two writers can be rightfully called the unsurpassed virtuosi of the genre, both were originally from the old state of Shu 蜀, and both stunted—he eventually moved to the conclusion that the Fu was useless for the purpose of influencing the ruler and was not something that a mature man should pursue. According to Yang Xiong, and also to Ban Gu, Sima Xiangru had presented the “Daren fu” 大人賦 as an indirect admonition to Emperor Wu; but the emperor was ignorant enough to take the piece as a plain eulogy. This portrayal of a ruler obsessed with and blinded by superficial ornament—be it literary or ritual—is of course another variant of the typical image through which late Western/early Eastern Han classicists of Kuang Heng’s caliber envisioned Han Wudi. But although Yang Xiong’s understanding of the “Daren fu” has become commonplace, we are still listening to Yang Xiong (and to Ban Gu) here, not to Sima Xiangru himself, and we are perhaps taken in by a fallacy: Yang Xiong saw his own literary efforts towards his ruler parallel to Sima Xiangru’s towards Han Wudi; but none of Sima’s Fu were commissioned by the emperor, while all of Yang’s in fact were. Again, unlike later writers, the Fu composers at Emperor Wu’s court were not respected as political advisors and distinguished officials but served primarily as entertainers and panegyists. The Fu of Yang Xiong and Ban Gu may have added to their authors’ reputation and may in turn have gained significance—especially in Ban Gu’s case—from their official status; by contrast, Sima Xiangru’s Fu writing had no relation to office and political influence. And although the significantly different nature of Sima Xiangru’s and Yang Xiong’s Fu may not as such invalidate Yang’s judgement, it disqualifies Yang’s static view (or perhaps only rhetoric?) of Western Han literary practice.

Moreover, the picture of Emperor Wu as a naive autocrat misrepresents the organization of his court, which, according to all our sources, was filled with both literary entertainers and political advisors; at least some of them, we might expect, would have been clever enough to understand Sima Xiangru’s indirect message and to convey it to the emperor. Do we all, following Yang Xiong, see something that none of them saw? Or are we staring at the age of Wudi through the late Western Han classicist’s glasses? Whatever the case may be, the contradictions in Yang Xiong’s explanation of Sima Xiangru’s literary practice are still valuable to us: they inform us, once more, that by the distance of a century, the status and purpose of the literary text had changed significantly.

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102 Fangyan jianshu 15.50b-51b.
103 See Hanshu 87B.3575 and Fangyan yishu 3.1a-4b, translated by Knechges, see above.
104 For Ban Gu’s remarks on Sima Xiangru see Hanshu 30.1756 and 57B.2699.