

delectable examples of the sages, whose lives combined social utility and eternal beauty in equal measure, the good man would have no trouble rejecting as second-rate the showy surface glitter found in later decorative forms.⁴⁶

Up to the very end of Stage 4 in late Western Han, then, the extant literary record is clear on several key points. Ordinary written texts, not to mention script forms, though useful in the maintenance of empire and the furtherance of careers, were by no stretch of the imagination to be regarded as inherently "divine." Only a few revelatory messages directly inscribed in unusual written forms by the gods on rare materials (e.g., on human or animal body parts, or on precious jades) merited that adjective, for example, the mysterious River Chart and Lo Writing, magic squares miraculously traced on the backs of a turtle and a dragon.⁴⁷ Still more notably, the single-minded desire to exemplify cosmic and social principles, in perfect replication of the Ancients' humane example, was best awakened by an acquaintance with charismatic behavior, not by mere knowledge of past speeches or events written down.

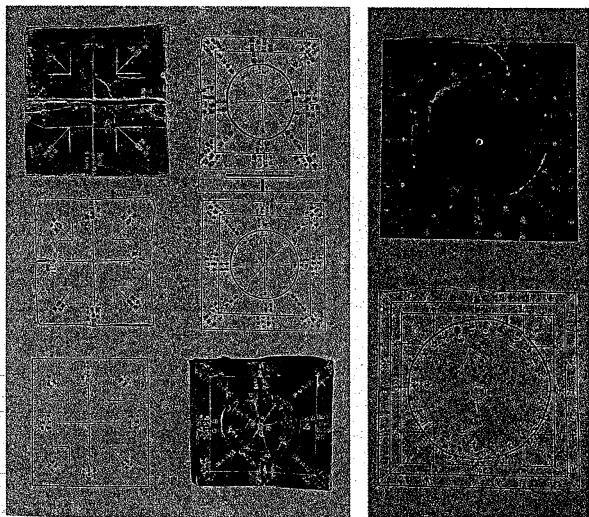
Stage 5: The First Watershed with New Paradigms for Wen

Just at this juncture, however, the first sign appeared to herald what shortly would become a revolution in attitudes about texts and textualization. Around 5 B.C., Liu Hsiang's son, Liu Hsin (53 B.C.-A.D. 23), whose fame as a classicist rivaled that of his famous father, lodged a formal letter of protest at court, complaining that the court-appointed Academicians (*po-shih*) were more anxious to protect their own professional privileges than to discover the essential ethical truths laid down by the masters of classical antiquity; as a result, the Academicians shamefully persisted in upholding their own modern-script (*chin-wen*) versions of the Five Classics, despite the undeniable superiority of recently discovered versions transcribed in archaic (that is, pre-Ch'in; *ku-wen*) script.

As one of the most important archaic-script texts had been attributed to a sage who allegedly had "himself seen the Master," Liu Hsin's main argument in support of the *ku-wen* manuscripts' superiority sharply distinguished between texts that basically transcribed "what had been passed along by hearsay" down through the ages (by which he meant the modern-script versions) and texts that transcribed "what had been personally witnessed" (the archaic-script versions). Even across the ages, one can feel the scorching anger that Liu Hsin leveled at those Academicians who had the audacity to "trust to oral transmission and turn their backs on written records transmitted [from the past]."⁴⁸ "The level of detailed knowledge could never be the same," he concludes, in the two sorts of texts.⁴⁹ To put Liu Hsin's remarks in context, we must remember that in mid- to late Western

Figure 10

Astronomical charts with drawings and transcript, divination board and drawing from the tomb of the Marquis of Ju-yang, Anhwei, ca. 173-65 B.C. Black lacquer on wood. From Toru Nakano et al., *Bronze Mirrors From Ancient China: Donald H. Graham, Jr. Collection* (Hong Kong: Techpearl Printing Ltd., 1994), 46.



Han, occasional finds of *ku wen* characters preserved on bronze, bamboo, and silk served to remind some scholar-officials that, at least in some cases, writing had helped to preserve the genuine Way of the Ancients down through the ages.⁵⁰ Indeed, if the archaic/modern script (*chin-wen/ku-wen*) controversy had any significance for Han, it must have lain in the stark choice it presented literati on the all-important subject of their Central States' heritage, a choice between truths supposedly contained in long-standing oral traditions and truths transmitted through texts. For the modern-script side represented a host of ethical teachings embodied first in oral traditions and then transcribed at a relatively late date in the current Han script, while the archaic-script proponents claimed to have in their possession more accurate written records dating back to the Golden Ages of the distant past.

Of course, neither the sporadic "discoveries" of texts inscribed in nearly indecipherable archaic script nor Liu Hsin's excoriations could ever on their own have occasioned an entire revolution in paradigms. But some sort of quiet revolution had occurred by the second half of the first century AD; gradually, old notions of *wen* as behavioral patterns tied to the cosmic order were supplemented and then overshadowed by a newer idea of *wen* as textual production of benefit to the state. That cannot be doubted, if the literary works of Pan Piao (3-54) and his son Pan Ku (32-92) are at all representative of their era (see below). Unfortunately, the extant texts dating to the period do not satisfactorily explain this revolution. Indeed, their authors seem quite unaware that a revolution has taken place. After all, so much within the upper echelons of the court bureaucracy had remained the same. The demand for careful paperwork in a centralized bureaucratic empire was no greater than it had been in the preceding centuries—though the invention of cheap paper around the year 105, which facilitated the production of multiple copies of standard works, obviously increased the likelihood that vital records would be preserved through the physical medium of texts.⁵¹ Nor were the desires to maintain and expand the empire especially new, even if such desires always came back to writing. From its early days, the administration of far-flung regions had meant frequent written exchanges from capital to outlying district, each of which attested to the absolute superiority of a unified written script over a jumble of local variants.

Despite such obvious continuities, it seems that a number of factors may have converged in the early first century AD, sparking an impulse to privilege state-approved literary production and thereby exempting some specific types of written text from the old charges that they were the last refuge of career functionaries willing to embrace the letter but not the spirit of the past. We can trace to this time, for instance, a self-conscious

desire to separate the wordmeisters (a group once confined to legalistic jurists but now subsuming all court entertainers, with both types of servant equally liable to charges of sycophancy) from the *shih*, who have been destined for high office and great responsibility by virtue of their thorough schooling in classical traditions.⁵² In consequence, the foremost literary figures of the age sought to make their rhyme-prose pieces (*fu*) much less verbal and more textual, for by that means they might not only avoid the "taint" attached to professional entertainers but also better position the men of their class to claim a kind of moral parity with the reigning emperor.⁵³ Yang Hsiung, far more than the poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju (ca. 179–117 B.C.) before him, had already aimed for new effects which relied to an unprecedented degree on the visual pleasures to be had from graphic complexity or graphic alliteration, and from the use of disyllabic or polysyllabic *impressifs* to suggest the sensory experiences of light and color, no less than those of sound and smell.⁵⁴ Over the generations, the *fu* poets' persistent love for exhaustive descriptions of exotic items and monumental sites portending great luxury and high status only heightened the *fu*'s imaginary visual impact, nudging educated tastes ever further away from the very different sensibility gained through sustained study of the relatively simple musical *Odes*.⁵⁵ The wildly enthusiastic reception accorded such supremely artful works, in other words, may well have weaned gentlefolk away from their older habits of oral recitation within the *Odes*' traditions, habits that had previously been the hallmark of ultimate refinement.⁵⁶ Perhaps also the introduction of Buddhist ideas into China moved men to associate sagely wisdom more often with the eye than with the ear.⁵⁷

At any rate, during this same period, from late Western Han through the Wang Mang (r. 9–23) interregnum and the early Eastern Han periods, various court factions at predictable intervals "discovered" miraculous *fu* (charts) and lengthier apocryphal texts testifying to the divine authority invested in one or another of the rival claimants for the throne. Despite the inevitable reactions by skeptics, this may have succeeded in reconfirming for some the sacred origin of graphic images, signifying legitimate authority.⁵⁸ At the very least, each new revelation received from Heaven or the Ancients sent conscientious scholars scurrying once more to try to render current interpretations of classical texts doubt-free, though a spate of extracanonical communications could only complicate the problem of deciphering texts of great age or dubious provenance.⁵⁹

Still, political calculations among the *shih* are probably the major factor leading to the growing emphasis on text-based knowledge. In the wake of the invention of the first truly cheap paper in the first century A.D., literacy had become much more widespread. Some hereditary elites responded to this change with considerable alarm, anxious lest the state's limited

political patronage be shared with the *arrivistes*, defined as those who had merely learnt texts through texts, without spending long years practicing the classics and the allied arts under the tutelage of acknowledged masters. After all, the numbers of literate candidates for office were multiplying far too rapidly for the state apparatus to absorb them, with the result that men of privilege began to engage in sedulous self-promotion via textual genealogies and the genealogizing of their preferred texts. All of this, in turn, generated a vastly changed intellectual climate in the Eastern Han.⁶⁰ (Interestingly enough, however, none of the Eastern Han elite foresaw how much the textualization of classical traditions would itself contribute to the growing tendency to critique the literary basis for their cherished institutions; instead, in their naiveté, they thought of texts simply as a way to conserve the past.)⁶¹

Essentially, those in power could feel confident of their ability to retain power for themselves and their circle of relatives and friends only if they adopted one of two tactics: Either they could up the ante by insisting that only "broad learning" (*po hsüeh*) reflecting a firm grounding in the entire range of canonical and semi-canonical texts—not just one Classic—truly qualified a man for high office and good reputation.⁶² Or they could argue that the skillful reproduction of texts, in their literary and also physical aspects, was the single best test of the degree to which men had fully internalized the authoritative message contained in the state-sponsored texts. With both tactics, truths once assumed to lie in consistent practice informed by reference to cosmic principles and canonical traditions now were to be had only from the kind of persistence in reading and writing that few outside the highest elite circles could ever afford.

No doubt many other factors as yet unclear to us helped to effect this first major paradigm shift.⁶³ What is clear enough, by contrast, is the effect that the shift had upon many Eastern Han texts from at least the year 50 onward. For instance, a memorial presented to the court around the same time by Pan Ku's father, Pan Piao, offers alongside older definitions of *wen* a brand-new definition of *wen* and *wen chang* in terms of neo-canonical writing dedicated to the Han throne by its loyal elites. According to the memorial, the current problems of the throne originated in the court's regrettable emphasis on ritual training at the expense of textual learning: "Although the August Heir Apparent and the princes [already] knot their hair [correctly] and learn to inquire, and though they nourish and practice ritual and music, their instructors are not yet equivalent to the worthy and talented, and the offices are mostly lacking the old canonical texts." The memorial then goes on to propose a suitable remedy: the corpus of ancient canonical writings must form the basis for any study of ritual and music. The memorial clearly intends a correspondent downgrading of rites and

music at court.⁶⁴ Shortly afterwards, Pan Ku, in the preface to his "Two Capitals" *fu*, portrayed the steady production of fine literary pieces—not the ritual splendor associated with the Western Han or the bloody conquests of the Ch'in—as both the chief and the invariable measure of the success of the ruling house. In the same work, he then proceeded to make the astonishing assertion that present-day literary composition follows exactly the same principles as those of antiquity, thereby implicitly answering those critics of the written word who had believed that it could not capture the past in spirit.⁶⁵ Whenever the educated person frames the proper literary phrases, he is said to recreate antiquity, so long as his literary products are offered in solemn tribute to the state.

Examples of this paradigm shift are hardly confined to the literary works of the Pan family, nor are they confined to literary theory alone. The dictionary *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu*, completed in about 100 by Hsü Shen, for instance, presents the related argument that "a proper understanding of the written language" is a prerequisite for participants in successful government; hence Hsü Shen's determination to order the universe through graphic classifiers and his concomitant insistence that the graphic forms themselves conserve and convey archaic meaning beyond mere sound.⁶⁶ By implication, both the activity of writing and the written forms themselves are crucial to the preservation of the archaic past in a way that verbal speech can never be. Turning then to the realm of practical politics, another stunning indicator of this paradigm shift came with Shun-ti's decision in 132 to order candidates who had once been nominated for official posts solely on the basis of their exemplary behavior as "Filially Pious and Incorrupt" to be tested on their knowledge of the written texts of the Classics or on their "ability to draft documents."⁶⁷

Undoubtedly, however, the single most striking illustration of this momentous paradigm shift consists of a simple comparison of parallel passages describing the activities of ardent classicists (*ju*) in the wake of two successive dynastic crises, the first following the collapse of Ch'in in 206 B.C. and the second following the downfall of Wang Mang in A.D. 23. The *Archival Records* account of the classicists, put together around 100 B.C., consistently identifies the exemplary Way of the Ancients with appropriate behavior carried out in the context of ritual and musical performance. (The sole exception to this is the case of Confucius, who reportedly compiled the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Ch'un ch'iu*) on the basis of ancient archives, after he had given up all hope of ever gaining a position of authority in the political arena.) The comparable *Han History* (*Han shu*) account, dating some two hundred years after the *Archival Records*, converts the *Archival Records'* preoccupation with the polite performance arts (*liu i*) to talk about "the texts of the Six Arts," a clear reference to the texts

of the "Confucian" Classics. The *Han History* similarly equates the Way of the Ancients with the "canonical records" (*tien chi*) of Kingly Teaching rather than with ideal conduct.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Confucius himself, once the compiler of a single text, has become redactor of all, a man fully conversant with all "the written records of antiquity and modern times" (*ku chin chih p'ien chi*) and a diligent reader of the *Changes* text. Emendations in the language that the dynastic histories employ in the chapters devoted to classical learning would be noteworthy even if they were not underscored by additional changes registered in the same official accounts. But there are such changes. Thus when the classicists from Confucius' home state of Lu go to offer their services to one contender for the throne during the civil wars that followed despotic Ch'in, the histories say that "they carried the K'ung family ritual vessels in their arms in order to express their allegiance"; by this gesture, the classicists signaled their readiness to place their highly ritualized way of life at the service of the contender.⁶⁹ (A second version of the same story found in the same account has these candidates for public office "carrying on their backs" Confucius' *own* ritual vessels as they go to profess their allegiance.) But a mere two hundred years later, during the civil wars that rocked the empire after Wang Mang's fall, the dynastic histories relate that the Eastern Han *Ju* "carried off on their backs their charts and written texts" (*t'u shu*) when they decided to defect to the camp of the Eastern Han founder.⁷⁰



Figure 11

Unidentified artist (9th century?); attributed to Wang Wei (699?–761?). Detail from *Portrait of the Scholar Fu Sheng*. Handscroll, ink and color on silk. Osaka Municipal Museum. From James Cahill, *Chinese Painting* (Geneva: Skira, 1960), 18. For the evolving iconographic representations of Fu Sheng, see Kaizuka Shigeki, *Kaizuka Shigeki chosatsu shu* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1976–78), v. 6, 303–12.

In light of this dramatic shift from ritual practice to text-based knowledge as the basis for classical learning, refinements in the textual tradition — rather than appropriately modeled social interactions — were increasingly viewed as the primary avenue by which to approach the past. In effect, the sacred past had become largely synonymous with the literary past, its culture heroes recast as literary creators. Take the case of the Ch'in and early Western Han *Documents* (*Shu ching*) master, Fu Sheng, for example, who was originally honored for his faithful oral transmission of the prescribed classical teachings to the state's minions. By mid-Eastern Han, Fu Sheng begins to appear in stone carvings in the new iconographic guise that he will have in later paintings: as devoted teacher at death's door making every effort to pass along to the next generation of students the handscroll on which he has painstakingly transcribed the text of the classic (fig. 11). Notwithstanding the more favorable climate for texts and textualization among classicists in the early second century AD, most of the conceptual strands required for the final elevation of calligraphy to premier art were still missing. Pan Piao and Pan Ku were certain that the rubric of celebrated *wen* (now largely synonymous with *wen chang*, texts of "literary splendor") should be limited to written texts (a) concerned with public affairs and (b) drawing inspiration from classical texts of great antiquity. Their emphasis on literary splendor, in other words, still did not entail a corresponding stress on the beauty of the graphic forms. Apparently, calligraphy's claims to art could not easily be lodged until the topic of *wen* in all its complexity was at least partly divorced from the topic of public office holding.⁷¹

Stages 6 and 7: Empire's Fall and Calligraphy's Rise

It was Pan Piao's student, Wang Ch'ung (27–100) — a thinker far more representative of his age than most modern scholars care to admit — whose work substantially weakened the previously close links forged between the favored textual traditions and government service, though Wang's work was nearly unknown until almost a century after his death.⁷² Wang Ch'ung weakened these links in two ways. First, he redefined the essential project of the classicists, seeing it neither in terms of Western Han ideals, which presupposed a single-minded desire to realize the twin goals of self-cultivation and benevolent government through ritual practice, nor in terms of the Eastern Han ideals espoused by the Pans, which held literary splendor to be a kind of tribute offered up for the glory of the ruling house. Wang preferred to see the classical project in terms of the solitary scholar's ability to attain consistent mastery over the literary forms required in formal public disputations. If the court failed to conduct such disputations regularly, Wang continued, the court of history would itself decide a man's worth on

the basis of his literary production.⁷³ Literary performance, not ethical praxis or faithful service to the authorities, had become in Wang's mind the most reliable test of a man's inner worth—and that, rather than the state's benefit, is Wang's chief concern. (In a perfunctory nod to convention, Wang asserted that such refinements in the individual personality will assuredly, if only gradually, conduce to the greater public good.)⁷⁴ Second, Wang ostensibly continued the celebration of *wen chang* (literary splendor) that Pan Piao and Pan Ku had undertaken before him. But while citing the usual roster of famous men (e.g., Lu Chia [ca. 228–140 B.C.], Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Liu Hsiang, and Yang Hsiung) as models, Wang cast the outstanding contributions of these men in an entirely new light. Although all wrote in their capacity as public servants, a fact that qualified them for true "greatness" in the Pans' calculations,⁷⁵ in Wang's mind these men were chiefly to be praised for their brave oppositional stance to the conventional political discourse bandied about by the "vulgar classicists." For Wang Ch'ung, consumed with rage at the powers-that-be who had overlooked his obvious merit, the force of elegant writing had always to stem from the power of righteous protest—protest denouncing the government's persistent failure to recognize talent.⁷⁶ Grave yet self-interested dissatisfaction with the status quo is the constant Way of the Ancients, according to Wang, rather than an occasional necessity when the times are badly out of joint.⁷⁷

In one essay, therefore, Wang Ch'ung specifically rejects the old-fashioned *Ju* contention that one should "measure talent and ability only in terms of behavioral outcome." Such an idea, he writes, reflects a failure to appreciate the special character of literary works, the production of which ought to be the ultimate goal of all textual learning. At the same time, they also fail who do not see that writing by mere clerks (a term meant to dismiss careerists) differs in quality from the supremely valuable writing by true classicists (defined as those with broad learning). Mere talent or the ability to wield a brush, physically and rhetorically, have little or no inherent value, being the skills of contemptible craftsmen, Wang contends.⁷⁸ "The means by which the classicists surpass the literate clerks" is that their knowledge of texts "refines their characters and ornaments their talents," so that they can "develop more completely in virtue" (a term that Wang consistently equates with literary virtuosity) due to their greater command of proper models. Wang Ch'ung then concludes his essay with the declaration that when it comes to producing works of high literary merit, the skills (that is, the physical ability to produce script forms as well as the ability to produce rhetorically powerful phrases) always count for less than a profound understanding of culture.⁷⁹ Petty skills are no substitute for real art, which relies on knowing the Great Way. By this line of reasoning, writing by mere clerks, whether it benefits the court or not, is by its very nature a

poor and paltry thing (*p'in*). But by contrast, the literary works of those who are truly well-versed in the classics carries a unique flavor, being spare rather than florid; truthful rather than exaggerated; forceful rather than pusillanimous; vibrant with passion rather than dead to the world. Such art, being divine and eternal, is justifiably termed *wen*, for *wen*'s exemplary patterns are by definition supremely important, sublimely beautiful, and notably constant.⁸⁰

Note that Wang attributes to strongly oppositional writing informed by classical values the very same qualities that will a century later be ascribed to calligraphy: the sparseness offset by the contained passion, the directness informed by cultivation, the maturity and "surplus" (*yu i*) capacity that so perfectly mirror the fundamental order of Heaven-and-Earth that they are rightly deemed divine.⁸¹ Through arguments such as these Wang successfully managed to devalue many of the old moralizing texts known from antiquity without ever succeeding in promoting his own literary efforts. Quite significantly, however, Wang's long-winded *Discourses Weighed* (*Lun heng*) offers no sign that he saw any connection between the literary and the calligraphic arts, though candidates for public office would all have practiced writing in a neat hand.⁸² Ignoring the possibilities now open to men of his class, thanks to better writing instruments and cheaper paper, Wang undoubtedly would have viewed the skillfully modulated cursive script on a wooden label for a documents case (fig. 12) simply as yet another source of factual information. Setting down the correct forms was no more than "elementary learning," *hsiao hstieh*, for Wang and his contemporaries.⁸³ Spurred by bitter disappointment, Wang's contributions lay elsewhere. He was one of the first in the Eastern Han, for example, who felt compelled to broach the tricky topic of the complex relation between talent, learning, opportunity, and literary production — a topic that would be taken up over and over again by succeeding generations.⁸⁴ However, what concerns us here is the overall tone of Wang's work, which perfectly reflected the curious ambivalence that Wang and his contemporaries felt toward the royal house and the court. For while Wang refused to regard them as the final arbiters of literary taste, he was nonetheless willing to defer to them, on the off chance that his public protestations of loyalty might yet win him fame and fortune. As we will see, the same ambivalence toward the royal house marks the entire corpus of writings in the late second century.

Wang had composed his bitter *Discourses* in old age — when he had nearly lost hope that he, in the absence of great wealth and influential sponsors, would ever be recognized by the court.⁸⁵ But most members of the educated elite, young or old, who came after him in the final decades of the Eastern Han felt equally uncertain where to place their allegiance, if

only because there remained the possibility that yet another mid-dynastic restoration might mean court patronage for their own factions. Notwithstanding their considerable disorientation, they could not afford to stand quietly to the side as the empire's administration slipped steadily from their hands into those of the parvenus: the maternal relatives of the emperors (*wai ch'i*), the military strongmen, and the eunuchs who increasingly made puppets of the reigning emperors. Inevitably divided among themselves with respect to their career prospects and goals, the classicizing elites were still publicly united in their opposition to the venality and debauchery of the court and its hangers-on. Sick of the effete scions of the Liu house, who now ruled mainly by proxy, the *shih* in the late second century could not but be irked by their present situation, which left them largely without the secure group status that they had come to expect the throne to ensure. Hence the constant stream of memorials, remonstrances, petitions, and critical essays from such literary giants as Chu Mu (100–163) and Wang Fu (95–165), Chao I (ca. 130–185), Ts'ai Yung (132–192), and Ying Shao (d. 203?). Tireless in their fulminations against favoritism by the court, all these scholar-officials of late Eastern Han loudly proclaimed in their writings their consummate loyalty to the throne even as they questioned its ability to attract really good men like themselves to state service.

Faced with uncertainty but unwilling to break with the throne, the *shih* expressed their anxieties in a number of distinctive ways that influenced public discourse under Ling-ti (r. 168–88) and Hsien-ti (r. 189–220). Three sorts of characteristic expression seem especially germane to any discussion about the origins of calligraphy. First, in an age of rapid social change, the *shih* expressed mounting desire for greater permanence through public writings on stone, despite stone's older—and quite unsavory—associations with the megalomaniacal “no-death” impulses of the First Emperor of Ch'in. It was not only that stone was thought to be a more permanent and more prominent medium of communication than bamboo, silk, or paper. The use of stone bespoke as well a desire to have later generations judge the merits of a case now presumably fixed forever (be it an individual life recorded on a stone stele or the state-sponsored versions of the “Confucian” Classics), since those currently in authority could not be trusted to display the requisite discrimination. Second, given the Han court's steady loss of moral credibility, members of the *shih* turned increasingly to their peers when they sought to determine the locus of moral authority in this life and beyond. Thus, memorials and remonstrances might flood into court, but it was the letters to peers (*shu*), often filled with seemingly innocuous accounts of everyday activities, the short but incisive character sketches of famous men circulating as “criticism by the pure” (*ch'ing i*), and the memorial inscriptions for the dead (*pei wen*) that the *shih* most avidly perused,

Figure 12

Wooden label for a documents case, after AD 25. The label identifies its contents as a register of arms and their conditions, "complete, serviceable, broken, or damaged," issued to Ta-chien command, Yü-men Pass, for the year AD 14. From *Shoseki meihin sōkan* (Tokyo: Nigensha, 1965), v. 4, no. 35, 12.



looking for signs of the times and deliberations by the just.⁸⁶ Newcomers to the field may marvel at the literary and artistic energy expended in the production of such projects, as demonstrated in the superbly engraved *Stele for Ts'ao Ch'üan* (*Ts'ao Ch'üan pei*; fig. 13), but the demand for more telling "images" of the leading figures in society arose naturally enough at a time when allegiances too hastily given spelt proscription, destruction, or death to individual *shih*.⁸⁷ Not one whit less public than the materials sent to the court for its approval, this sort of less official—and thus less formulaic—material promised to yield greater insights into the characters of important persons. Third, as the *shih* based their claims to superiority at this time on their position as supposedly "pure" and "plain" public servants (in contradistinction to the "impure" and "frivolous" denizens of the *fin de siècle* Han court), they were apt to despise anything that smacked of the purely decorative or the unserious. Leading *shih* accordingly showed surprisingly little interest in exploring the artistic potential of certain styles of writing that were not emblematic of the serious business of governing (for example, the cursive "grass style" and the intricate bird style), though such styles, in the wake of continuing improvements in the various tools for writing, surely allowed a far wider range of articulation to their users.⁸⁸ The image of the recording clerk (fig. 14), dated to 176, attests to the strange blend of conservatism and innovation that runs through the period, for the image we see presents a study in contrasts. Obviously a man who likes his comforts, the subject has a keen eye as well, and though he poses—in standard fashion—in his official robes and hat in an obvious bid to impress all viewers, he also has his large inkstone and water jar near to hand, as if to indicate his readiness to further the public weal. Faced with such unsettled and unsettling circumstances, the most responsible of the *shih* tried to ascertain not *why* but *when* the dynasty would be in final crisis.⁸⁹ And once they had accepted the inevitability of decline, howsoever reluctantly, nostalgia for the not-necessarily-so-distant past, when good order, right hierarchy, and *shih* predominance prevailed, just as inevitably pervaded the works of the opinion makers.⁹⁰

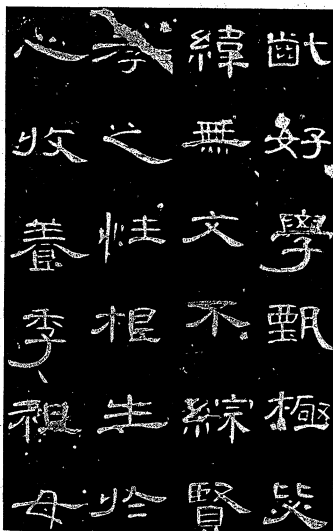
These four tropes of ambivalence—writing to secure lasting fame, writing to gain the admiration of one's peers, writing to maintain one's public dignity, and writing to establish unbreakable affinities with the past—come together in the life of Ts'ai Yung, who was not only one of the first figures to come close to qualifying for the title of "calligrapher" by this essay's definition but also the very man to rescue Wang Ch'ung's writings from oblivion.⁹¹ In late Eastern Han, when for the first time the quality of a man's brushwork could contribute to his reputation, Ts'ai had mastered in addition to calligraphy no fewer than three of the six aristocratic arts associated with the old Chou empire: poetry, music, and literary composition

Figure 13 (left)

Stele for Ts'ao Ch'üan (Ts'ao Ch'üan pei),
185. Rubbing. From *Shoseki meihin sōkan*
(Tokyo: Nigensha, 1964), v. 3, no. 31.

Figure 14 (right)

Image of the clerk in charge of records
keeping. Detail of a wall painting from
tomb no. 1 in Wang-tu, Hopei. Eastern
Han (25–220), 176. From *Han T'ang pi-*
hua (Peking: Wen-wu ch'u-pan-she,
1974), pl. 8.



(*shu*). Ts'ai could compose and chant poetry in all styles, though he tended to favor the new; he was an excellent musician (on the *ch'in*); and he composed elegant essays presumably set down in his own elegant script. But while such arts in aristocratic Chou, in theory at least, were to be employed in government service, Ts'ai resented the throne's assumption that he would trade art for patronage. Ts'ai's official biography tells us, for example, that because of his skill in playing the *ch'in*, he was invited to court shortly after a coup in 159. Doubting that those in charge (the eunuchs and their associates) were capable of appreciating him as anything more than an entertainer, he stayed home, pleading grave illness. There, "at his leisure," he "played with antiquity," avoiding all contact with the prominent men of his own age.⁹² Believing that the moral man must advertise his oppositional stance, Ts'ai's writings proclaimed his steadfast resolve to forego conventional success as a career bureaucrat, even if this meant "turning his back on the ruler." The truly great, a group in which Ts'ai included himself, preferred to "make friends with" the great men of the past through their literary endeavors, for only in that way could they actually "roam free and easily" in this troubled world.⁹³

Despite his air of lofty detachment, Ts'ai continually offered his opinions on court matters in lengthy memorials bound to offend. He argued for major ritual reforms, and he was obviously ambitious for the advancement of his own faction.⁹⁴ Put in charge of collating texts in the Eastern Palace imperial library in 171, within two years Ts'ai Yung was spearheading the drive to fix forever in stone the authoritative versions of the Five Confucian Classics.⁹⁵ As Ts'ai Yung told it, the main canonical works should be inscribed on stone tablets in the capital, so as to prevent the "vulgar classicists" from exploiting for their own selfish purposes the confusion engendered by the many mistakes in the multiple editions then in circulation. Having secured the emperor's assent for the project, Ts'ai Yung personally

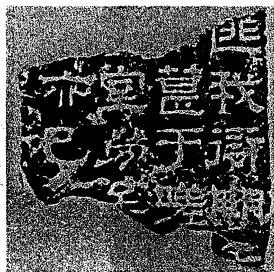


Figure 15
Fragment from *Hsi-p'ing Stone Classic*, Eastern Han period, 175–83.
Rubbing. From Jessica Rawson, ed.,
Mysteries of Ancient China: New Discoveries from the Early Dynasties
(London: The British Museum Press, 1996), 215, fig. 117.2.

supervised the preparation of authoritative editions, and with his own hand he brushed the red characters (to be afterwards cut into the stone by lesser men) on the Stone Classics steles, erected outside the Imperial Academy, several fragments of which survive (fig. 15).⁹⁶ Of course, Ts'ai's inscriptions on stone sent conflicting messages. On the one hand, they professed the state's commitment to honor the antique Way of the sages; on the other, they alluded to the uncomfortable fact that empires might rise and fall, while the monumental works inspired by the classical vision of the Ancients endured forever. No court could ever "own" men of true worth or their worthy writings; the court must therefore acknowledge its subservience to the moral Word—that was the implicit message sent by Ts'ai's vermilion characters,⁹⁷ just as the final execution of the written forms was of less moment than the initial conjunction of inspired soul and divine content.

No less ambivalent was Ts'ai's attitude toward certain script forms, despite—or because of—his own fame with the brush. As the story goes, Ts'ai believed the emperor to be too indiscriminate in both his love of learning and his choice of advisors. So when Ling-ti granted special favors to men who showed special talent in forming the technically demanding designs of the bird script (*kung shu niao chuan*), Ts'ai was quick to denounce the court's preference for technical virtuosity with the brush over genius of the heart/mind, with its mental and moral dimensions. According to Ts'ai, the "twenty or thirty people" summoned to court under Ling-ti, many of whom had been registered at the Vast Capital Gate Academy (*Hung-tu-men hsüeh*) under imperial sponsorship, were men of "bad conduct, disciples of those who rush to grab power."⁹⁸ Ts'ai Yung memorialized the emperor that he would do well to attend to the basics of good government—maintaining a complex ritual schedule superintended by the classicists and advancing men like Ts'ai—instead of offering his precious support to "those who can write or paint and make *fu*," men whose talents did not necessarily extend to formulating good government policy.⁹⁹ For Ts'ai, the political struggle could not be kept separate from an aesthetic struggle, for fine materials exquisitely worked either added to the effete airs besetting the court or they facilitated another mid-dynastic renewal of the throne. The choice was clear enough. For could not every person of sufficient refinement sense the very different implications for human morality that two powerfully beautiful objects might hold? Looking back at the kinds of objects that Ts'ai would have known from court, one imagines that Ts'ai's objections would have singled out for censure those relaying a feeble decadence in high culture, the bronze *hu* from Man-ch'eng, for instance, with its highly stylized but essentially vapid decorations composed of repeated bands of vaguely auspicious slogans set in "bird-and-insect script" and



Figure 16 (left)

Hu vessel with bird script, Western Han (206 BC–AD 9), from the tomb of Tou Wan, Man-ch'eng County, Hopei. Bronze with gold and silver inlay, h. 44.2 cm. Hopei Provincial Museum. From China Cultural Relics Promotion Center, ed., *Treasures: 300 Best Excavated Antiques from China* (Peking: New World Press, 1992), 206.

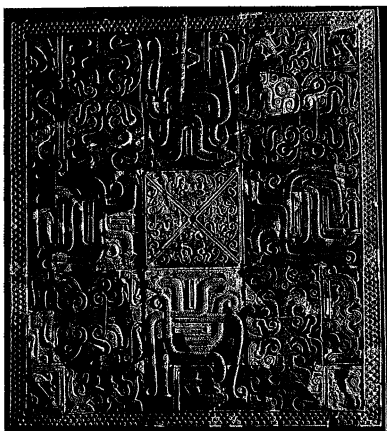


Figure 17 (right)

Liu-po game board, Warring States Period (ca. 470–221 BC), from the tomb of a royal attendant to the Prince of Chung-shan, P'ing-shan County, Hopei. Stone, 44.9 x 40 cm. Hopei Provincial Museum. From China Cultural Relics Promotion Center, ed., *Treasures: 300 Best Excavated Antiques from China* (Peking: New World Press, 1992), 40.

inlaid in gold and silver thread (fig. 16). Good men, in Ts'ai's characterization, "Contained the purity of the numinous empyrean/Like lofty peaks [in their monumental greatness]/ It was they who issued auspicious omens and sent down spirits."¹⁰⁰ In the perfection of their persons, then, noble *shih* represented sites where the magical properties of the revelatory *t'u*, no longer strictly the preserve of the holders of Heaven's Mandate, were conjoined with the solemn dignity imparted by *wen*. Given Ts'ai's faith in the classically trained person as the epitome of permanent value, it is tempting to relate his ideals to items like the massive stone board of fig. 17, whose visual allusions, no less intricate in form than those of the bronze *hu*, artfully lend impressive vigor and vitality to the complex of classical notions that Ts'ai espoused. (The *tlv* groundwork of the stone board maintains the orderliness of the cosmos; the ornate box at center celebrates the centered self as focus of the trained human energies; the coiled serpent and tiger in bas-relief affirms the subtle symmetry threading through the triadic realms of Heaven-Earth-Man; the earthen colors detail the sacred division of the universe into five directions; and so on.) In any case, we know that Ling-ti, as a sign that he accepted some small part of Ts'ai's criticisms, in 178 commissioned the portraits of Confucius and seventy-two disciples to be painted on the walls of the Hung tu men Academy—where the likenesses of the *shih*'s patron saints, no doubt, were meant to serve as visual reminders of the inherent superiority of the *shih*'s way of life over their rivals' irresponsibility.¹⁰¹

At the same time that he was roundly condemning others for writing script in decorative styles, Ts'ai Yung in three separate pieces praised the sacred origins and pragmatic powers of the two script styles—the clerical and seal script—most closely identified with the heyday of the Central States' rule in Western Chou and Han.¹⁰² His "*Fu on the Brush*" began quite typically,

Long ago, Ts'ang Chieh started the business
 [when he invented writing].
 Quill and ink were then created,
 And texts and contracts begun by this.
 Now, given its institution by a top sage
 and [its utility] in setting up norms,
 No thing is more noble than the brush.
 In tracing its ultimate origin,
 In looking to its achievements,
 Its brilliance is such
 That no thing can surpass it!...
 It records the Three Kings in their good fights,
 It duly notes their aides' diligence
 [in the sacred line of duty],

By it is transmitted the Six Classics, and
 By it put together the Hundred Thinkers,
 So as to establish the supreme sovereign
 And put in order the constant relations.¹⁰³

Thus Ts'ai, the most famous writer of his age (in both the senses of literary production and aesthetic production of written forms), strongly asserted that the value of writing must reside in its association with vigorous empire. By this, he implicitly decried the notion that the ultimate value of writing lay in the sheer beauty of its external forms, though legend credits him with the invention of the exquisite "flying white" (*fei-pai*) technique.¹⁰⁴

Ts'ai's writings elevated the notion of *ku*, "solitariness" or the will to stand apart from the crowd, to a high virtue, while insisting that such integrity be somehow employed in the cause of fuller integration in the whole society and state. Such fine distinctions were lost on the court powers. Eventually the sheer contrariness of Ts'ai's political purity, a purity that informed both his official communications with the throne and other ostensibly unofficial but highly public venues (e.g., Ts'ai's acclaimed stele inscription for a leader of student protests), so infuriated the Han court that he was twice sent to jail, where he finally fell ill and died.¹⁰⁵ Ironically, Ts'ai's tragic death—occurring as it did just when the vogue for elegant script forms was gaining a wider currency among the *shih*—may have lent his favorite script forms an enviable air of noble failure. Such an association would, in turn, have helped to remove calligraphy further from the old taint of craft and so qualify it for a higher place as the supreme art of gentlefolk.¹⁰⁶ Possibly for the first time after Ts'ai Yung's death, then, the careful execution of certain script forms identified with moral—rather than actual—rule was enough to advertise to all the world that a person's fund of taste and moral discrimination went far beyond that available to mere careerists, qualifying him for the lasting fame and divine status once reserved for emperors.¹⁰⁷ Still, in Ts'ai's own lifetime, his ability to write aesthetically pleasing forms, like his abilities to make music and poetry, had been regarded as a polite accomplishment only, if the official records are to be trusted.

By his death in 192, many of the elements required for the eventual elevation of calligraphy to the ranks of premier art in China were already in place. At least two script forms (the formal seal and clerical script) had attained some status with the *shih*, in view of their unassailable association with kingly rule. Also, in the absence of real leadership by the throne, leading *shih* saw themselves as loci of the divine powers once believed to be the sole prerogative of the Sons of Heaven. By this point in time, too, as noted above, *shih* as educated men of good birth were intent upon finding new ways out of their present predicament, for the customary pursuits of their

estate, government service and the study of moralizing texts, were increasingly closed to them. There were too many literate people for the court to hire; court appointments were too liable to political corruption; and the official proscriptions in effect for much of the second half of the second century had excluded many potential candidates among the *shih* from office holding.¹⁰⁸

Nonetheless, even in the closing days of the Han dynasty, some key elements required for calligraphy's elevation to art were missing still, chiefly a more pervasive belief among the *shih* in the magical property of calligraphic forms to disclose that divine spark believed to reside in superior humans; also a decided preference for the unofficial in both written content and script style. For when the less modulated seal script and clerical script gave way to the regular, running, and cursive scripts, with each giving greater play to brushes deftly wielded, scripts more easily assumed the nuanced forms of inspired revelations. And once the rhythmic calligraphic forms balanced firm precision with insouciant grace, great value could be attached to them, naturally enough, value that was eventually translated into a thriving art market. For the first time, we see an unprecedented celebration of the sheer physicality of the act, now thought to impart bodily health and sociable pleasures in equal measure to the calligrapher.¹⁰⁹ Only with the final coming together of these disparate elements was calligraphy no longer to be counted as one among many minor polite arts, as it had been in Ts'ai Yung's time. Rather, it had become a symbol saturated with fabulous associations, through whose medium could be glimpsed the sublime perfection of the calligrapher's soul.

The sudden conjuncture of the aforementioned elements is traceable, at least in part, to sweeping changes in the political circumstances of the Chien-an (196–220) and Wei-Chin eras, whose dramatic events, in the words of one great scholar of the period, "transformed China from a powerful empire into a vast cemetery."¹¹⁰ As soon as most of the empire came under the control not of the patrician Yüan Shao (d. 202) but of Ts'ao Ts'ao (155–220), the parvenu grandson (by adoption) of a palace eunuch, widespread disaffection among many *shih* turned instead to outright disgust. Besides, there was no time for indecision and ambivalence now, for office holding had become a positive liability. Aside from the attendant physical dangers, it was quite unclear whether great success in conventional career terms might not earn one eternal condemnation by history as a sycophant or scoundrel among slaves. Obviously, under such unhappy circumstances, when most men could no longer hope to improve their fates very much by accommodations with present realities, many grew intrigued by the idea of acquiring secret powers, no less than by the prospect of a return to fair antiquity through mind travel.¹¹¹

As a result, all over the empire the finest silk was "cut into ribbons onto which magic words and incantations were painted."¹¹² Moreover, the self-referential yet refined public "play with antiquity" performed by *shih* in their artistic pursuits—liable to be condemned as selfish and anti-social in better days when a legitimate dynasty was in charge—now seemed to offer the solace and detachment that one needed first to confront the world in all its confusion and then to advertise one's nobility to one's peers and betters in or out of state service. After all, when no firm answers were likely to be gained from the state-sponsored version of the Way of the Ancients, the turn to calligraphy's "play" with antique forms nicely conveyed both a proper acquaintance with the official past and a considered rejection of it, coupled with a fine disdain for the "ordinary run of people who clung to the ancient books [such as the Five Classics], being entangled in the past."¹¹³ And if the powers-that-be remained suspicious, what better testimony to the disinterested purity of one's motives could there be than short snatches of occasional writing spontaneously set down in the careless cursive script?¹¹⁴ Furthermore, because the allied arts of literary composition and calligraphy had the twin virtues of being at once distinctive yet capable of indirection, there was a strong chance that their writers—like the worthy *Odes*-makers of old—might be better known to the ages through their works in circulation than through the usual commemorative modes considered reliable enough in times of peace: the lengthy genealogies piously promoted by one's descendants over the generations, the official accounts making up the dynastic histories, and even the physical monuments marking ancestral temples and graves.¹¹⁵

With any luck, in other words, clear and vigorous writing might yet triumph over time's ruin. Failing that, long life—and a bit of cash, too—would do in these uncertain times, when man-made disasters often left petty officials and students so poor that they had to eke out their livings as artisans or farmers. So inasmuch as it was the practice of calligraphy that could provide scholar-officials with greater wealth, better physical and psychic health, or simply a convenient excuse for sociable gatherings, it was calligraphy that eventually would become synonymous with scholarly life. No less importantly, to some elite *shih* in this period of rapid reunification, the long hours spent practicing calligraphy while committing the whole of classical literature to memory were exercises to be applauded, insofar as they worked to demarcate those of "good birth" from the merely literate.

It was only with the fall of the Han empire, then, that all conditions for the elevation of the calligraphic form to the status of art were met. That commingling of personal feelings and sociopolitical protest which had begun with Wang Ch'ung a century earlier had evidently needed to acquire an added intensity before it could be transmuted into that "transparent"

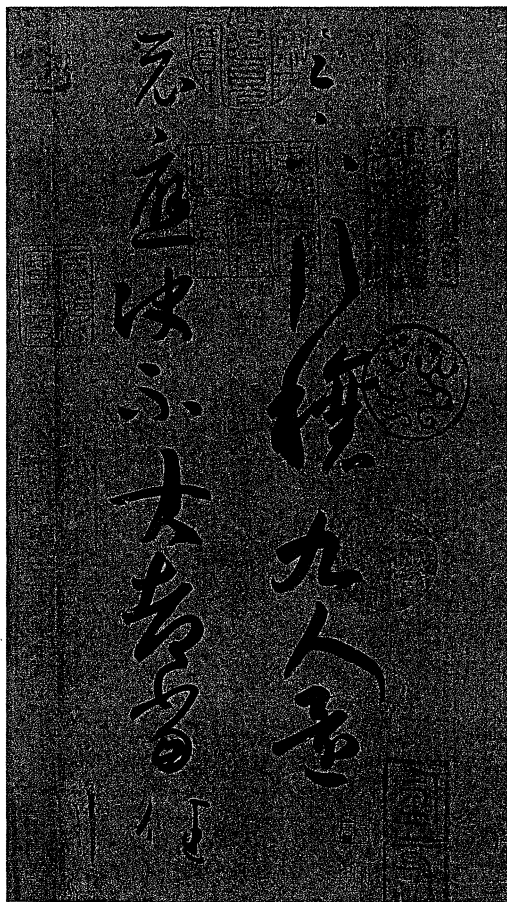
acceptance of fate and change required to produce the perfect conflation of form and content in calligraphic script—or so they presumed at the time. “Only somebody who cared no more for [the usual notions of] honour or disgrace” could produce calligraphy whose “square and round spills forth/ in compositions rejecting every [old] standard.”¹¹⁶

That fine calligraphic writing could now in the post-Han period epitomize the noble spirit is what we learn from the stories told of Wang Hsi-chih (303–361) and his son Wang Hsien-chih (344–388).¹¹⁷ When contemporaries described Wang Hsi-chih’s calligraphy as “Now drifting like a floating cloud, now rearing up like a startled dragon,” they were ascribing divine powers to Wang himself, as the stories show.¹¹⁸ Transparency offset by limpid subtlety, a readiness to embody change while keeping to the still center, and a capacity to exult in one’s commitment to beauty—such qualities were admired in the character no less than in the script.¹¹⁹ In such a context was the famous *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion* (*Lan-t’ing hsü*) composed: “On this day, the sky was bright and the air was clear and mild; a breeze was gently blowing. Feasting our eyes and giving rein to our feelings—how utterly enjoyable! And even though we lacked any accompaniment of silk or bamboo, of pipes or stringed instruments, for every cup there was a chanted poem—quite enough to express the hidden feelings of our hearts!” The same air of easy, effortless grace, I would argue, lingers still about the tracing copy attributed to Wang Hsi-chih entitled *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* (*Hsing-jang t’ieh*; fig. 18).

Paradoxically, it was not long before the freedom occasioned by a partial rejection of failed empire and the old canons generated a host of invented traditions lauding calligraphy’s new conceptual empire, all of them signaling calligraphy’s belated rise to the dizzy heights attained earlier by oral and then written traditions attached to the Classics. There soon arose, for instance, a vast theoretical literature on the subject of calligraphy, much of it positing the old potential identity between beauty and the new morality, suitably framed in a new medium.¹²⁰ Testifying to calligraphy’s sacred origins, legends were spun out and elaborate genealogies drawn up to establish authoritative lines of transmission for masters and products, often with a view to facilitating insertion of the self in a pivotal role in the propagation of a living tradition.¹²¹ Script styles proliferated, so much so that as many as 120 different styles had been recorded by the early sixth century.¹²² And once a distinctive method of critical evaluation for connoisseurs had been set up, and a flourishing art market spawned, it was only a matter of time before the first copies designed to promote faithful emulation of the masters followed, along with outright forgeries of the more powerful examples of calligraphic art.¹²³

Figure 18

Wang Hsi-chih (303–361). Detail from *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* (*Hsing-jang t'ieh*), T'ang tracing copy. Letter mounted as a handscroll, ink on paper, letter, 24.4 x 8.9 cm; scroll, 30 x 372 cm. The Art Museum, Princeton University, bequest of John. B. Elliott (1998–140).



* * *

Martin Kern has rightly spoken of the "inexhaustible efficacy" of the word *wen*, which led it to absorb and reflect a wide range of different meanings in different circumstances.¹²⁴ Over time, *wen* became the most powerful medium available to men of culture wishing to articulate their ideals and promote that process whereby humans through exemplary practice attain the level of divine insight and efficacy formerly attributed to the gods. In early China, nobility of character often presupposed the flexibility to respond appropriately to change. The art of the moral life by definition therefore contained sufficient depth, complexity, variety, and richness to render it a source of perennial delight to the viewer's eye. Discourse about marvelous "patterns" in Chinese culture apparently superseded discourse about logical discrimination for the very reason that pattern was perceived as infinitely inclusive and potentially integrative, in the very likeness of the Great Way, unlike the powers of discrimination, which were necessarily more limited and limiting. As the *Analects* says, a man is "broadened" (*po*) by *wen*.¹²⁵

Nonetheless, long centuries of change were required before one category of significant pattern, the written script forms, would be regarded as a sufficient repository of extraordinary human value in and of itself, rather than the tool of bureaucrats or the specialty of craftsmen. Though much of the picture remains to be pieced together, the common assumption that China has from time immemorial been preeminently an "empire of texts" is demonstrably false. It is the invention of later scholars who have sought to prove by the undeniable fact of a writing system continuously employed within China's borders the more dubious proposition that an essentially unified China has enjoyed for millennia "the longest, continuous civilization" in the world.

1 Special thanks go to Robert W. Bagley, Martin Kern, Michael Loewe, Virginia Bower, and Gerry Boswell for their generous help in the preparation of this manuscript. The citations are from Arthur F. Wright, "Chinese Civilization," in Harold D. Lasswell, Daniel Lerner, and Hans Speier, eds., *Propaganda and Communication in World History*, v. 3, *The Symbolic Instrument in Early Times* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 222; John King Fairbank, *The Great Chinese*

Revolution: 1800-1985 (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 3.

2 The classic works discussing writing as communication with the gods are Kristofer Schipper, "The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies," in Arthur Wolf, ed., *Religion and Ritual* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 309-24; Jonathan Chaves, "The Legacy of Ts'ang Chieh: The Written Word as Magic," *Oriental Art* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1977), 200-215; Emily Ahern, *Chinese Ritual and Politics* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 1981); a newer work is Robert Chard, "Rituals and Scriptures of the Stove Court," in David Johnson, ed., *Ritual and Scripture in Chinese Popular Religion: Five Studies* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), 3-54. Note the many fine works on the history of calligraphy begin with oracle-bone inscriptions, for example that by Tseng Yuho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1993).

I would like readers to register two important points here. First, in popular literature, the Shang oracle-bone inscriptions (OBI) have been characterized as "messages communicated to the spirits."

Nonetheless, the OBI must have been made after the ritual application to the gods had been performed; the OBI represent, then, a record of such invocations made to the gods and sometimes — not always — the responses received from the gods. It is important to remember, then, that ritual communication between the spirit and human worlds did not take written form in Shang, so far as we know. Only later do we find written communications as the primary mode of communication with the gods. Second, if the Chinese method of communicating with their gods via written documents were a sufficient explanation of calligraphy's elevated status as premier art, there should have been signs of such high status long before the late Eastern Han. For another view, see Wang Ning-sheng, "Ts'ung Yüan shih chi shih tao wen tzu fa ming," *K'ao-ku hsieh-pao*, no. 1 (1981), 1-44.

- 3 John Hay, "The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Value in Calligraphy," in Susan Bush and Christian Murck,

eds., *Theories of the Arts in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 74-104. Lothar Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function," *Orientations* 17, no. 10 (October 1986), 35-50, points to three features of Chinese calligraphy which are "unique to this art form": (1) the direct rapport between viewer and artist, made possible through the factors of time and movement; (2) the unparalleled tightness in the artistic tradition, technically, and stylistically, and (3) the peculiar mode of handing down works of calligraphy through the ages, letting them grow continuously and making art history part of the aesthetic experience. None of the three features are unique to calligraphy, however. Theories about the *Odes*, for example, are predicated upon the direct rapport between odes-maker and odes-reciter or odes-reader, and painting scrolls were handed down in much the same way as pieces of calligraphy. More informative is Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties," *T'oung Pao* 70 (1984), 246-78, on early Taoist strains in the history of calligraphy.

- 4 Yin/yang theory (but not Five Phases theory) dominated technical discussions from the late Chou period. A good introduction to this topic is Li Han-san, *Hsien Ch'ün, Liang Han chih yin-yang wu-hsing hsüeh shuo* (Taipei: Wei-hsin Books, 1984); and A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), 313-69.

- 5 Note that "writing" as an important, let alone preeminent, meaning for *wen* cannot be attested prior to the Eastern Chou period. Martin

Kern, "Ritual, Music, and the Written Text: Historical Transitions of *wen* in Early China," ms. under review for publication, shows that "writing" was one aspect of *wen* by Eastern Chou, but "certainly not a central one" (p. 3). Kern's hypothesis is confirmed by remarks in Li Tse-hou with Liu Kang-chi, *Liang Han mei hsüeh shih* (Taipei: Chinfeng, 1987), 198. Undoubtedly, the largest conceptual block to understanding aesthetic notions in early China, then, remains our mistaken belief that writing and written forms are what the early Chinese meant by *wen*. For the definition of *hsiang* as emblematic image, see *Han fei tzu chi chieh*, comp. by Wang Hsien-shen (Taipei: World Press, n.d.), 6.20.108.

Regarding the significance of the revelatory *t'u* (see below), we mistake their purpose if we assume that an interest in them coincides with a desire for the general "dissemination of knowledge." Emperor Wu and his successors had established a policy of storing writings and setting up officials to copy them, but "they were all stored in the secret archives." See Pan Ku, *Han shu* [hereafter HS] (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chu, 1962), 30:1701. Such secret caches supposedly contained the materials the dynasty would need to maintain its power by ritual, magical, and political means. Lothar Ledderose, "Taoist Elements," 27, suggests the secrecy with which later calligraphic masterpieces were kept.

- 6 As far back as the Wu-ting Shang oracle-bone inscriptions, some inscriptions were written in black and red ink and some were carved in inlaid pigment. At least one inscription (not an oracle bone) was inlaid with turquoise, and there were also

jades that show writing in vermilion ink. See Tseng Yuho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, figs. 2.5-2.7, citing materials from the Academia Sinica, Taipei and the Palace Museum, Peking; and Robert Bagley, *Shang Ritual Bronzes in the Arthur M. Sackler Collections* (Cambridge: The Arthur M. Sackler Foundation, 1987), fig. 103.4. It is tempting to regard red ink and precious inlays as "ornament" (what lends dignity to the content of the message), though we know too little of Shang customs to speak with assurance. The *obi* are not really historical records (chronicles), as Bagley reminds us; they often record only the texts of invocations, and not the replies from the ancestors or the historical outcomes. Note that I reserve the term "calligraphy" for a specific art whose particular aims lie beyond mere decoration. In general, it seems that the place of the "polite arts" in pre-Ch'in times was quite different from that in the Wei-Ch'in period, though the continuous use of key vocabulary masks this lack of continuity.

- 7 In no fewer than four out of seven occurrences of *wen* as "writing" in the fourth-century B.C. *Tso chuan*, for instance, the character refers to messages inscribed on a newborn's hand at birth that signify that person's future. See *Tso chuan*, Duke Yin 1 (*fu* 1); Duke Min 2 (*fu* 1); Duke Chao 1 (*fu* 7); Duke Chao 32 (6 *Tso*). The three other uses (in Duke Hsüan 12 (3 *Tso*); Duke Hsüan 15 (3 *Tso*); and in Duke Chao 1 (*fu* 8) use *wen* to refer to the specific written forms that a word takes in signifying the inner workings of the cosmos. *Wen* there refers, in consequence, not primarily to writing per se (for which the terms *shu* or *tien* are used), but to writing as divine

portent. Such written forms must be analyzed in the same way as the graphic forms of the *I ching* hexagrams, so as to reveal the future. This may explain why the later *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu* (comp. ca. A.D. 100) reserves the term *wen* for single graphic elements. See William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 141–42.

- 8 According to extant materials, both the Ch'in and the early Western Han rulers selected for high office those who favored precise methods of bureaucratic naming, although the dynastic histories emphasize the repressive nature of the wealth-and-power discourse of Ch'in imperialism so as to contrast it with the relatively *laissez-faire* Huang-Lao theories adopted by the early Western Han state under emperors Kao-tsu through Wen. Examples of bureaucratic precision under Ch'in have been provided by the nearly thirty statutes and legal catechisms on procedures found in the 1975 excavations at Shui-hu-ti, Yün-meng, Hupei (*terminus ad quem* 217 B.C.), no less than by the military manuals found at Yin-ch'üeh-shan, Lin-yi, Shantung (excavation first reported 1974), dated to the years 140–118 B.C. The need for such precise and uniform application of the laws is explained in a letter dated to 227 B.C.: "Anciently, the people everywhere had their own local customs. They differed in what they found beneficial and in their likes and dislikes.... This is why the sage-kings created laws [*fa*] and regulations [*tu*], with which to straighten and correct the hearts of the people." See Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1, The Ch'in and Han Empires* (Cam-

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 75; *Shui-hu-ti* (1978); and "Chiang-ling Chang-chia-shan Han chien kai shu," *Wen-wu*, no. 1 (1985), 9–15, which reports on early Western Han legal documents in 500 strips from tomb M247, Chiang-chia-shan, Chiang-ling, Hupei.

- 9 For the argument that *Ju* means "classicist," only a small sub-group of which are true "Confucians" in the sense of ethical followers of the Sage, see Michael Nylan, "Rethinking Han Classicism," in Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson, eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999). The sharp distinction between "true *Ju*" and "vulgar *Ju*," which can be traced back to the writings of Hsün-tzu, is an important one in Han times. While cynics may suspect that the Han classicists were wont simply to label all their opponents as "vulgar," the "true *Ju*" were said to have continued Confucius' preoccupation with moral empire, in contrast to the "vulgar *Ju*," who were more intent upon getting ahead in conventional terms. Note the parallel distinction between the "technician" skilled in only one specific art and the "true *Ju*" who can lay claim to an integrated vision of the universe, which is also relevant to this discussion. For Hsün-tzu's dictums on the subject, see his ch. 8 devoted to "Ju Teachings," in *Hsün-tzu yin te* (Peking: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1950) (Sinological Index Series no. 22) 23/8/87; 24/8/90–94; 24/8/100; cf. *chüan* 41 of the *Li chi*, devoted to the "Conduct of the [Ideal] Ju." For the "technicians," see Yang Hsiung, *Fa yen*, in (*Hsin pien*) *Chu-tzu chi cheng* (Shanghai: World Books, 1935; rpt., Taipei, 1978), II, 12:39.

- 10 In their fulminations, they were wont to quote *Analects* 14/25: "The Master said, 'In the old days, men studied for the sake of self-improvement, but nowadays men study in order to impress other people'" (trans. after Waley, 187). On the term *shih*: The word does not correspond to "gentry" since the ultimate basis of *shih* power was not land, but continued access to office. This essay uses the term "scholar-officials" to refer both to scholars and to officials, to potential candidates for office as well as to actual office holders.
- 11 To a degree, all classicists presume and exploit an "experience of deficiency" in the present vis-à-vis the past (to borrow the Egyptologist Jan Assmann's term, *Defizienzerfahrung*). But in late Eastern Han, that "experience of deficiency" greatly intensifies, producing an overwhelming sense of nostalgia for the past.
- 12 This argument directly contradicts Lao Kan's (1960; see n. 14 below) theory, which posits the existence of the calligraphic arts, principally expressed in cursive writing, throughout the Han.
- 13 Richard Curt Kraus, *Brushes with Power: Modern Politics and the Chinese Art of Calligraphy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
- 14 For example, both Lao Kan, "Han tai ti shih shu yu ch'ih tu," *Ta-lu tsa-chih* 21.1/2 (July 15, 1960), 69, and Lothar Ledderose, "Chinese Calligraphy," 36–37, cite an anecdote included in Fan Yeh, *Hou Han shu* [hereafter HHS] (Peking: Chung-hua shu-ch'u, 1965) 14:557. The anecdote says of Liu Mu, cousin and contemporary of Emperor Ming of Eastern Han (r. 58–75), that he *shan shih shu* and *tso ts'ao shu ch'ih tu*. As both statements relate to Liu Mu's fame as author of prose and poetry, the first is more likely to mean that he was "good at composing in the [particular formal] archival style" conventionally used for court documents; and the second, that he composed ten pieces in draft. It is doubtful, in other words, whether either statement refers to fine calligraphic style. Cf. the biography of Huang-fu Kuei's wife, included in HHS 84:2798, where context shows that the phrase *nieng ts'ao shu* is more likely to mean "was capable of drafting [official] documents," rather than was "capable of writing calligraphically in cursive style." My supposition is confirmed by the glosses of Ying Shao and Yen Shih-ku, which refer to writing in large seal script, the script style required for formal bureaucratic documents.
- 15 This essay disputes the notion that there was one culturally unified elite in early China. It assumes instead many competing court and extra-court groups in operation throughout the period under review. Some of these groups tended to value writing as decoration (e.g., Emperor Ling and his trainees at the Hung-tu-men Academy) and some as bureaucratic tool (e.g., those derided as "vulgar *ju*" by moralizing classicists like Yang Hsiung). Other groups were apt to see writing and reading texts as an integral, if elementary, step in the preparation required for true ethical insight.
- 16 Below, I suggest that painting lost out because of its preoccupation with exact or precise representation (*mimesis*), which many classicizing thinkers rejected as less inclusive — and therefore less inherently powerful — than *wen* as distilled but immeasurably rich pattern.
- 17 For *wen* as a crisscross pattern, see

Hsü Shen, *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu fu chien tzu* [hereafter *sw*] (Hong Kong: Taiping Books, 1966), 9A/185. According to that text, "wen is an image [hsiang] of wen [crisscross patterns] that meet [or interact with] one another." (Note that it is rare for the *sw* to define a character in terms of itself.) As Lothar von Falkenhausen (1996), "The Concept of *wen* in the Ancient Chinese Ancestral Cult," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR) 18 (1996), 1-22, points out, all modern amplifications of this statement try "to account for the appearance of the actual archaic graphs, which Hsü [Shen, author of the *Shuo-wen*] and his contemporaries had misread." For the theory that *wen* is a tattoo, see Chou Fa-kao et al., *Chin wen ku lin* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University, 1974), XI, 5533-5535 (entry 1199); Liu Tun-yüan, "Shuo-wen yü wen tzu," *Mei-shu k'ao-ku yü ku-tai wen-ming* (Taipei, Yün-ch'en wen-hua, 1994), 40-45. (Mei-shu k'ao-ku ts'ung-k'an series no. 2). Numerous objections may be leveled at this identification of *wen* as tattoo, for example: (1) There is no reason to assume that the persons represented with tattoos were of high status; and (2) Nor would it be safe to assume that those who made and used the Anyang-period bronzes showing tattooed men also used the same language as Anyang — and so the same word *wen*.

- 18 Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1938; rpt., New York: Grove Press, 1996), with additional trans. by Joseph R. Allen, 346. Herrlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China, Vol. 1: The Western Chou Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 67, believed that *wen* referred to "accomplish-

ments," and even "civilization" from earliest times. No good evidence, however, supports the early abstract use of the character *wen* meaning "civilization" or "culture." I accept the scholarly consensus that *wen* was first applied to noble ancestors as a pious epithet and that only much later, in late Eastern Chou, it was used in posthumous names for dead rulers to reflect history's unbiased judgment.

- 19 Ode 275, "Ssu wen" (Contemplating *wen*). For translations, see James Legge, trans., *The Shiking* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1935), 580-81; Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 160; and Bernard Karlgren, trans., *The Book of Odes* (Stockholm: BMFEA, 1950), 243-44.
- 20 Lothar von Falkenhausen, "The Concept of *Wen*," 3, translates *wen* as "accomplished." I suspect *wen* refers to those patterns that are pleasing to regard, while *wu* refers to those that are fearsome to regard, as in Ode 285. After all, *wen* frequently appears in the compound *lieh wen* ("resplendent and *wen*"), and it is used of pennons and chariot equipment. Cf. *Analects* 3/14, where *wen* is associated with the *yu yü* ("ornamental") behavior of the Chou dynasty. That would account for two later inscriptions dating to the middle Spring and Autumn period where the compound *wen wu* seems to refer to more abstract aspects of governance, the "civil" and the "martial" (*ibid.*, 5).
- 21 Note that the term *wen chang* in modern Chinese refers to "writing" (specifically, "essays"), but it clearly cannot bear that meaning in early extant texts. Martin Kern, "Ritual, Music, and the Written Text," 6ff., argues persuasively that *wen chang* in early texts such as the *Analects* refers primarily to a "well-figured

and clear appearance" or "refined forms" (i.e., an impressive appearance that holds the gaze). Given the importance of the term to later Chinese moral and aesthetic theory, it is interesting that the term does not appear in the canonical *Documents* or *Odes*. Even in Warring States texts, there is no single instance in which *wen chang* refers unambiguously to "literary composition" (ibid., 11). In Western Han texts, the term *wen chang* refers to normative ritual, ritual insignia, or textile patterns (what Kern calls "crafted form"). In Eastern Han, however, the term increasingly refers to "normative texts." See below.

22 For example, *Analects* 7/25 describes *wen* only as one of the four teachings of the Master Confucius. And *Analects* 7/33 has Confucius saying that he surpasses other men in *wen*.

23 See, e.g., *Analects* 1/6. Admittedly, many scholars have assumed that *wen* refers in such passages to the "polite arts" of the Chou aristocracy, defined in most accounts as six in number: rites, music, archery, charioteering, writing (*shu*), and mathematics. But that analysis is far from certain. Two examples in the *Analects* seem relevant here: In the first passage, *Analects* 5/15 (Waley, 110), Confucius responds to a query about the meaning of *wen* in the proper name K'ung Wen-tzu by saying: "He was diligent and fond of study. He was not afraid to inquire of [social] inferiors. That is why he was called 'Wen.'" In the second, *Analects* 12/24, Tseng-tzu says that the "noble man uses *wen* to meet with (*hui*) friends — as friends are needed to support *jen* (humane) behavior." Note that *Analects* 14/18 (Waley, 185) seems to associate condescension and kindness to inferiors with *wen*. Such passages clearly

refer to *wen* as exemplary behavior, though Confucius intends to take a hand in redefining such behavior, so that nobility of character will count for more than aristocratic birth or elite fashion. It seems doubtful that the *Analects'* definition of *wen* as exemplary behavior is an accurate definition of *wen* for the Ancients; it is only the meaning that the *Analects'* Confucius means to attribute to the Ancients.

24 *Analects* 6/18 (Waley, 119). *Analects* 12/8 suggests that it is the patterns in the fur (i.e., what overlays the skin) that make the hides of tigers and panthers far more valuable than the hides of dogs and sheep, which are otherwise similar. Human "ornament" or "refinement" consists of "rites and music," according to *Analects* 14/12.

25 This essay, following Confucius, distinguishes appropriate *wen* from the excessive; the former is something like (noble) "ornamentation," and the second (mere) "decoration," two acceptable translations for *wen*. See *Analects* 6/18; 19/8. It is *wen's* tendency to lapse into mere decoration that is denounced by Han Fei (d. 233 B.C.) and Mo-tzu (d. 390 B.C.). The early Ju classicists, in denying that all patternization is harmful, would have patternization be divided into appropriate and inappropriate sorts, depending on whether it takes or "does not take its model from antiquity" (HS 25B.1256).

26 Shih Ch'ang-tung, *Hsien Ch'in chu tzu mei-hsüeh ssu-hsiang shu-p'ing* (Peking: Chung-hua shu-ch'ü, 1976; 2nd. ed., 1979), 1–26. Shih points out that *mei o* (beautiful and ugly) is interchangeable with *shan o* (good and evil). The *Li sao*, of course, is one of many literary works to play up this identity between the moral and the aesthetic, for there the

beautiful and fragrant flower is metaphor for the noble protagonist: "Having from birth this inward beauty/ I added to it fair outward adornment/ I dressed in selinea and shady angelica,/ and twined autumn orchids to make a garland..." (lines 9–12).

- 27 *Analects* 15/26 (Waley trans., 198, renumbered 15/25). I follow the standard analyses for the dating of the *Analects*.
- 28 See *Chou i yin te* (Peking: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1935) (Sinological Index Series supplement no. 10), 40/Hsi A/3; 45/Hsi B/2; 43/Hsi A/9. Given the constraints of space, there is little time to delve into the intricacies of the Hsi-tz'u's arguments. The best guide to them remains Willard Peterson, "Making Connections: 'Commentary on the Attached Verbalizations' of the *Book of Change*," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 42, no. 1 (June, 1982), 67–116.
- 29 See Jane Geaney, "Language and Sense Discrimination in Ancient China" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1996). *Wen* is still not even the principal word assigned to written texts; *shu* (texts), *tien* (canons), or *tz'u* (phrases) are used more often.
- 30 The *Shih chi*, for example, speaks of the fear with which rulers regarded Tsou Yen, who elaborated a cosmological theory; the *Shih chi* leaves readers to draw the conclusion that Lü Pu-wei and Liu An, Prince of Huai-nan, may have lost their lives in part because the texts which they sponsored encroached upon imperial prerogatives in explicating cosmic patterns. See Ssu-ma Ch'ien, *Shih chi* [hereafter *sc*] (Peking: Chung-hua shu-ch'ü, 1959), 74.2344; 85.2510; 118.3082. HHS 82A.2716 suggests that the state-appointed "aide in the study of patterns" in early Eastern Han still bore an official re-

sponsibility to interpret unexpected changes in the cosmic patterns.

- 31 It is no coincidence that the expression *wen tzu*, where *tzu* refers to *ming*, "naming," appears first on the Ch'in stele at Lang-ya. See *sc* 6.245. The Ch'in invention of the compound *wen tzu* seems to signify the desire to strip significant pattern—at least as it is used by Ch'in subjects—of most of its religious associations. Certainly, it represents a push to greater clarity, when *wen* had always stood for greater inclusivity, being both the sign and what it signifies. *Wen tzu*, in other words, implies the search for exact representation, rather than symbolic expression; a bureaucratic tool rather than the omen requiring interpretation. Ultimately, state control would derive largely from the control over naming displayed in bureaucratic functions.
- 32 For the state's preference for career professionals who composed careful speeches and wrote script forms accurately, see *sc* 121.3118–20. I put "Confucian" in quotation marks because the Five Classics were not inherently Confucian. See Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian Classics"* (ms. under review), ch. 1. In early Western Han, these Classics were prized because they contain "old patterns"—the transcription of cultural traditions transmitted down through the ages. By the Eastern Han, the texts were valued increasingly because they contain "old characters" (*wen*) in antique form, according to Eastern Han scholars like Hsü Shen (active ca. AD 100) and Pan Ku (32–92). See below for the modern/archaic script controversy.
- 33 For the *fu*, see David Knechtges' masterful translations of the *Wen hsüan*, or, *Selections of Refined*

Literature, by Xiao Tong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3 volumes to date; and Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), ch. 5.

- 34 Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions in the *Shi*" (forthcoming). *Analects* 2/12, of course, had decried the notion that the gentleman could be a mere "tool" in the hands of his ruler.

- 35 The term *hsiu wen* is the title for *ch'uan* 19 in Liu Hsiang's *Shuo yüan*.

- 36 Martin Kern, "Ritual, Music, and the Written Text," 26, reminds us that it was Liu Hsiang who "identified individual works, fixed their titles, ordered and named the chapters, and hence divided and arrested the stream of writings into distinctive and self-contained entities," thereby working against the "fluid" nature of most pre-imperial texts. As Kern notes, "The bare fact that many of the excavated pre-imperial and early Han manuscripts do not bear a title or even chapter designations is most telling in this respect."

- 37 Allegedly, there were earlier examples of dictionaries in China (e.g., that by Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju), but these are no longer extant. The *Erh ya* (comp. 3rd century BC?) is often called the earliest Chinese dictionary, but in fact it represents a kind of thesaurus or compendium of glosses that were probably in origin annotations to passages in early texts. See BCT, 94-99.

- 38 However, Liu Hsiang and Yang Hsiung, following the *Tso chuan* and Hsün-tzu, did assume that both speech and writing constituted "portents" or "portraits" of the inner intentions. Speech and writing are "golden" when "they help us see the men who know [the sages]."

See THC 61/A, 3 (Nylan trans., 357).

For the later divine status of the written word, see the works of Ts'ai Yung and Huan Wen (with the latter attributed to Ts'ai Yüan), recorded in *Ch'uan Hou Han wen* [hereafter CHHW], v. 2, in Yen K'o-chun, comp., *Ch'uan Shang-ku San-tai Ch'in Han San-kuo Liu-ch'ao wen* (Hupei, 1894; rpt., Taipei: World Books, 1964), 45/7a and 69/6a-6b, 80/1a-b. Ts'ai says, for instance, that the six seal forms *ju-shen* ("approach divine status"), as they are emblematic of marvelous transformation.

- 39 Therefore, both writers are careful to distinguish, as Ssu-ma Ch'ien had been before them, between authoritative figures who left writings behind and writings that tended to lack "true" authority, either because they are only of superficial attraction or because they are lost, fragmented, or liable to misconstruction. In this they followed the tradition attributed to Confucius in *Analects* 12/3: "The Master said, 'Seeing that the doing of it [humane behavior] is so difficult, how can one be otherwise than chary of speaking about it?' Hence, Yang Hsiung's propensity to talk in terms of a divine Mystery which can be intuited but never adequately verbalized. Cf. *Analects* 13/3. See FY 5.13 on the unreliability of most of the "Confucian" Classics.

- 40 FY 1.2. Though *wen* in mid-Han times comes increasingly to refer to the Classics thought to contain the ritual, political, and legal precedents provided by the Ancients in their conduct, as well as to information demonstrating the close links between Heaven-sent portents and kingly behavior, fierce debates among the literati raged over the primary content of the word *wen*.

Are texts *wen* only insofar they convey the correct moral messages? And must men study texts in order to be called "learned"? Was it not the case that professional bureaucrats were well-versed in the Five "Confucian" Classics and yet demonstrably ignorant of ethical patterns in their behavior? The men who saw themselves as "true *fu*" or "classicists" were far less concerned with the faithful transmission of doctrinal statements than with the emulation of appropriate patterns of conduct (a term that included both speech and actions).

- 41 For Yang Hsiung's famous statement on the relation of single-minded study to real understanding, see Huan T'an, cited in TPYL 739.2a, as translated by Timoteus Pokora in *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan T'an* (43 BC–28 AD) (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese studies, University of Michigan, 1975), 73.
- 42 SY 19.655–56.
- 43 CCYT 44/Hsi A/12. Note that while "words do not fully express ideas," the *Odes* "fully express [their authors'] commitments [*shih yen chih*]." See CCYT 318/Hsiang 27/5 T30. The two statements are not in direct contradiction since the *Odes* communicate by its musical rhythms as much as by its lyrics. Similarly, *t'u* are said to communicate more fully than mere *yen*.
- 44 Mark Lewis (1999), 459 in ms.
- 45 An awareness of this lies behind Yang Hsiung's refusal to submit to the share his notes for the *Fang yen*. This is certainly what Yang refers to in his prose poem when he says that he fears the court's propensity to "redden his clan" (i.e., massacre it). These late Western Han classical masters were far more reliant upon state sponsorship than their early

Western Han predecessors. Liu Hsiang, a member of the royal family, was commanded by the ruling house to undertake various important commissions, for example, and Yang Hsiung's works, unlike those of Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju before him, were nearly all commissioned by the Han court. Note that one meaning of the word *fu* is to "present as tribute" to the throne. For more on this, see David Knechtges, *The Han Rhapsody: A Study of the Fu of Yang Hsiung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

- 46 Yang Hsiung therefore prefers the "offerings of the [sagely] Odes-makers" to "offerings of the phrase makers with [their merely] beautiful styles" (HS 30:746). Yang and Liu mean thereby to assert the superiority of a flexible, generalized intellect (such as might be claimed by the man of letters) over specific skills employed in limited domains (such as might be claimed by the professional artist or bureaucrat). (Note that this turn of phrase may also imply the superiority of the centralized Chou state encapsulated in the *Odes* tradition over and against the southern traditions, as Martin Kern suggests.) In his mature writings, Yang roundly rejects the conventional notion of art, which aims to appeal to as many men as possible through sheer beauty. According to Yang, true connoisseurs prefer the ultimate challenge of apprehending the formless and the soundless (HS 87b.3576–78). See Li Tse-hou, *Liang Han mei-hsieh shih*, 198, and Chang Yung-hsin, *Han yüeh-fu yen-chiu* (Nanking: Chiang-su ku-chi, 1992), 139–40. Both confirm Yang's contention that the composition of *fu* poetry was driven by the desire to make *fu* language as gorgeous as possible.

- 47 Both the Lo shu and Ho t'u were magic squares, but we do not know the exact form that these sacred diagrams took in early times. For further information, see Schuyler Cammann, "Old Chinese Magic Squares," *Sinologica* 7 (1962), 14-53.
- 48 See Liu Hsin's formal letter of protest recorded in HS 36.1969-70.
- 49 HS 36.1967. Liu Hsin, of course, adapts familiar arguments from Warring States' thought (that seeing is believing; that it is better to witness an event than to rely on hearsay; that the senses are generally trustworthy) to a brand-new use. In particular, Liu aims to establish the superiority of one text, the *Tso chuan*, over the *Kung-yang* and *Ku-liang* commentaries on the grounds that the *Tso*'s author knew Confucius himself.
- 50 For example, a bronze tripod was unearthed at Feng-yin in the autumn of 113 B.C., prompting Emperor Wu to initiate new cult activities.
- 51 The invention of cheap paper also made it easier to be literate, since the young no longer needed to study with a master in order to learn a text. Literacy increased in consequence, and this, too, made it more likely that texts would be associated with preservation of past.
- 52 Numerous examples of this separation could be cited. For four, see Huan T'an, cited in *I lin* (SPYX) 3/7b (trans. in Pokora, 15-16) and Yen 15/9a (trans. in Pokora, 168); Pan Ku's "Two Capitals" *fu* (trans. in Knechtges, 95, lines 9-16); and HS 87B.3575, lumping together the jesters Shun-yü K'un and Meng with the poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju as those who "encourage, rather than restrain" bad behavior by the emperor. Note that while Pan Ku's *fu* distinguishes but does not condemn the wordmasters, Pan's other writings openly condemn the wordmasters, as Li Tse-hou, *Liang Han mei-hsüeh shih*, *chüan* 7, shows. Many were still convinced that writing was all too likely to appear as the tyrant's writ. This is no doubt the origin of the myth of Ts'ang Chieh, which says that ghosts cried on behalf of the common people when writing was invented. See the trans. in A. Forke, *Lun heng: Wang Ch'ung's Essays* (n.p., 1907; rpt., New York: Paragon, 1962), II, 184.
- Certainly, from the point of view of some *shih*, the *fu*'s performance was tied too closely to immortality cults, to the military, and to the local magnates' excessive delight in luxury. See Chang Yung-hsin, *Han yüeh-fu yen-chiu*, 94-95.
- 53 For the early history of the *fu* and *yüeh-fu* in connection with court entertainers, see *ibid.*, ch. 4. Han Wu-ti was apparently the first ruler to hire *wen jen* ("men of cultivation") to compose lyrics for his court. The *shih*'s growing desire to distinguish their group from that of mere entertainers began then, as is evident from the biographies of Ssu-ma Ch'ien, Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju, Tung-fang Shuo, and Yang Hsiung (SC 121; HS 57, 65, 87). Hence Yang Hsiung's insistence that those who are mere "artisans cannot surpass those who are connoisseurs [of their art]." See Li Tse-hou, *Liang Han mei-hsüeh shih*, 203. Note that we are told in SC 117:2053 that Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju "never ventured to discuss affairs of state with the high ministers," while Yang Hsiung felt supremely qualified, despite some justifiable fears for his life, to pronounce verdicts on public policies and a host of historical figures in his two prose masterpieces, the *Fa yen* and the *T'ai hsüan ching*. Note also the slim possibility that Yang

- Hsiung's speech impediment played a role in this change also, though the poet Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju earlier suffered from the same malady.
- 54 Martin Kern (private communication) suggests that the *fu* of Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju are "entirely different" from those of Yang Hsiung. Ssu-ma's are "mainly oral texts" in contrast to Yang's, which are mainly "written texts" (though still made to be recited). The fact that the three different versions of Ssu-ma's pieces found in the *Shih chi*, *Han shu*, and *Wen hsüan* often use different graphical components suggests that Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju's piece was known mainly as oral recitation, rather than as fixed text.
- 55 A decrease in oral performance may have sent *shih* scurrying in their search for another performance art that would publicly identify them as "gentlemen." It may be the *Odes*, which had served well as diplomatic language prior to unification in 221 B.C., found no comparable niche in the unified empires of Ch'in and Han.
- 56 See Chang Yung-hsin, *Han yüeh-fu yen-chiu*. Remonstrance of all sorts was seen as more problematic in Eastern Han, as is clear from the gingerly treatment accorded the topic in the *Po hu t'ung*, in *Kuo-hsüeh chi-pen ts'ung-shu* (Taipei: Commercial Press, 1968), v. 68, 2B/1A-5B, and in Ying Shao, *Feng su t'ung i fu t'ung-chien* (Peking: Centre franco-chinois d'études sinologiques, 1943), 5.27. The foregoing remarks represent only the first highly speculative attempt to account for a strong impression gained from the official dynastic histories: that there was a marked decline in interest in the *Odes* traditions after early Western Han. Compare SC 121 (the "Forest of Ju"), where stories of the *Odes* masters predominate, with its counterpart HS 88, where much less attention goes to the *Odes*, aside from repeating the old tales found in SC 121. HHS 79B suggests that there were few acknowledged masters of the *Odes* in the Eastern Han, and the Stone Classics inexplicably omit the *Odes* altogether from its roster of Five Classics, substituting for it the *Analects*. Consider also the disparaging remarks made about Confucius' (reputed) compilation of the *Odes* vs. the fulsome praise accorded Confucius' compilation of the *Ch'un Ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), in Liu P'an-sui, comp., *Lun heng chi chieh* [hereafter LH] (n.p., 1932; rpt., Peking: World Books, 1967), ch. 27, "On pre-eminence" (Forke, II, 295ff.). According to *Po hu t'ung* 4A/9A, following *Li chi* ch. 26, Eastern Han thinkers had the *Ch'un Ch'iu* teaching what the *Odes* was said to have taught in the pre-Ch'in period: "appropriateness of expression and the proper comparison of things." The *Odes* merely teach "affability and liberality."
- 57 Kenneth DeWoskin, *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1982) shows how much early images of sageliness spoke of the ear, in contrast to later Buddhist imagery that focused on the eye.
- 58 Both Wang Mang and Kuang-wu ti (r. 25-57) were widely known to be "true believers" in the political prophecies recorded in the apocryphal texts (*ch'en wei*). For evidence of longstanding traditions requiring the sanction of graphic images for the transfer of legitimate authority, see Toyota Hisashi, "Shū Tenshi to bumbu no so no shiyo ni tsuite," *Shikan* 127 (1992), 2-17.

- 59 Roy Andrew Miller, "The *Wu ching i-i* of Hsü Shen," *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977), 1-21; William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development*, 151ff. Hence, the repeated necessity to resort to scholastic conferences and polemical literature in the attempt to resolve the numerous textual controversies that had arisen in connection with the various editions of the Classics.
- 60 Note that the early Western Han texts, including the *Shih chi*, stress how few and how faulty were the textual traditions that remained from the pre-imperial period. By contrast, Eastern Han scholiasts, living at a time more distant from the past, tended to claim that a number of canonical texts still existed to offer more secure avenues of immersion into the past. Most scholars have thought that the extensive genealogizing of texts was one principal mode of scholarship that had gone on since time immemorial in China, but evidence drawn from the *Han shu* (comp. ca. A.D. 100), itself a genealogizing text, suggests otherwise. The specifics of this argument are to be found in Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions."
- 61 Here I register my disagreement with the dominant Eastern Han views on textualization, which were often rather naive. Setting oral traditions down on paper made them more much liable to critical scrutiny (and potential rejection) by the literate; also, more liable to loss during times of great turmoil. For once great numbers of traditions are written on paper, a corresponding number may not also be committed to memory. In that case, when important libraries are ruined, the loss is irreparable.
- 62 Many scholars, including P'i Hsi-jui, *Ching hsüeh li shih*, ed. by Chou Yü-t'ung (Peking: Chung-hua, 1959), ch. 3-4, have noted the gap between Western Han academic ideals, which assumed a focus on a very few texts, and the repeated Eastern Han calls for "broad learning."
- 63 The enormity of the shift, I suggest, is comparable to that of the shift between Roman Catholicism (which accepts that God operates through an evolving tradition) and Protestantism (which puts first priority on belief in the textual traditions recorded in the Bible).
- 64 I am indebted to Martin Kern, "Ritual, Music, and the Written Text," for drawing my attention to this memorial, for translating it, and for analyzing the memorial in terms of "the instrumentalization of the Confucian canon" (ms., 21-22). Most of this paragraph summarizes Kern's excellent work. The phrase "learning to inquire" is a possible allusion to *Analects* 3/15 and 16/10, which describe the habits and concerns of the truly noble educated man.
- 65 See Martin Kern, "Ritual, Music, and the Written Text," 26ff. (esp. 30). At that point, codifying and expounding the appropriate written texts could become the "great undertaking in organizing the state" because by then a special sympathy, at least in theory, had been established between old and new, between seen and unseen, between thought and deed; again, in theory, this sympathy would lead the empire in the single-minded pursuit of correct goals, so that it could reflect and draw strength from the combined insights of both the Ancients and the new men of Han. Many other pieces of evidence, including the Mao Preface to the

Odes, attest to this change, but the limitations of this essay format preclude any attempt to fully review the relevant materials here.

- 66 William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development*, 151ff. Cf. Wang Ch'ung's arguments on the archaic meanings imbedded in graphic forms, as recorded in LH 3.15.76 (Forke, I, 322) and LH 16.49.337 (Forke, II, 364).

- 67 Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 136. I say "solely on the basis of their exemplary behavior" because that was nominal qualification for such candidates, though many candidates were undoubtedly nominated because of the excellence of their connections.

- 68 HS 88.3589.

- 69 SC 121.3115-16. The classicists of Lu are closely identified with the ethical teachings attributed to Confucius, given the strength of local traditions at that time. And K'ung is the family name of Confucius himself. As neither the Ch'in nor Wang Mang probably deserved their reputations for despotism, my characterization of them simply follows historical convention.

- 70 HHS 79A.2515. Pan Ku's HS does not treat this incident, as it lies outside his purview. The relevant HHS passage surely draws upon Eastern Han traditions, however, as can be seen by (a) clear parallels elsewhere with material in HS 88, Pan Ku's treatise on the classicists; and by (b) clear parallels with another late Eastern Han record, the *Ching-chou wen-hsieh chih-kuan chih* (Official Record of the College in Ching-chou), by Wang Ts'an (177-217). According to Wang's *Record*, Lord Liu, regional governor of Ching-chou "under Han," ordered Sung Chung,

a renowned classical scholar, to establish an academy in Ching-chou to which his colleagues would be invited. Reportedly, "those who came from afar carrying texts on their backs and ritual implements on their shoulders numbered over 300, including Ch'i-wu K'ai." For more information, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, "Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions."

- 71 The cumulative literary achievements of Yang Hsiung, Liu Hsiang, and the Pan family proved so compelling that later men in Eastern Han times took *wen* (expanded now to include "literary texts" composed in faultless form) as the proper focus of cultural accomplishments, even after the central government, and by extension the monumental works that it had sponsored, had fallen into decay or disrepute. Ironically, many wished to emulate Yang Hsiung's genius in writing, while they ignored Yang's strictures against an undue focus on literary activity.

- 72 I do not mean to imply here that Wang Ch'ung was the only person to begin to sever the conceptual links between literary works and state service. Had I more time and space, Chang Heng's (78-138) "*Fu* on the Two Capitals" would also serve nicely for the purposes of comparison, for the *fu* reflects Chang's awareness of the power of language not only to display, enchant, and persuade, but also to reveal the poet's own sensibility toward his subject. Note the reemergence of the ostensibly unofficial voice, which yet remains highly public in its functions.

- 73 LH 28.192 states, for example, "I have never yet understood what was the idea behind Confucius' making rit-

ual." LH 38.272-274 meanwhile debates the commonplace notion that the *Ju* should devote themselves to moral learning. For Wang's views of the importance of writing, see LH 82, *passim*. For Wang, winning rhetorical arguments is the final and most obvious test of the sage. For further information, see Michael Nylan, "Han Classicists Writing in Dialogue about their own Tradition," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 1 (1997), 133-88.

- 74 LH 12.35.252. Based on context, I take Wang's phrase "the Way of the Former Kings" to refer to the "good of the state." Reasoning that all truth and authority derives from a remote origin that has been lost or forgotten and that the moral degeneration of the present age is a direct consequence of losing those primal truths, two main solutions presented themselves to Wang. The first was to re-assess all subsequent literary accounts so as to privilege the main line of transmission of unitary truth from its origin, thereby excluding partial, secondary, or faulty versions of the truth that do not fully reflect the past. The second was to engage in the exact same type of literary activity as men of the distant past, the better to fully "immerse" oneself in their spirit. (In the second point, Wang of course follows Pan Ku's lead.)

Both impulses are familiar to us from Wang Ch'ung's writings, which make twin claims: both that Wang has the requisite familiarity with old books to discern the ultimate past; and that he has the requisite talent to tread the same path as the great literary luminaries of the past. For Wang Ch'ung, the ability to direct one's response to the political scene to the act of literary composition "proves" one's "nat-

ural" fitness for high office. For the literary basis for this belief, see HSWC 7.15b (Hightower, 248).

- 75 Of course it was the Pans who created the Table of Great Men, Ancient and Modern.
- 76 Not surprisingly, by mid- to late Eastern Han, there is far more interest in the notion of Confucius composing counter-cultural works unaided by the state apparatus than there had been at any time since Ssu-ma Ch'ien, who had himself suffered castration by the state. Note that Martin Powers, *Art and Political Expression in Early China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991) tried to draw our attention to a related shift in the terms of discourse for the visual arts.
- 77 Wang occasionally contradicts himself, of course, as I have argued in "Han Classicists Writing in Dialogue." Wang is therefore not above composing formal paeans of praise for the Han ruling house. But such paeans are anomalies best explained by his craven desire for public recognition; they do not tally with his main arguments. In his justly famous letter to Jen An, Ssu-ma Ch'ien had made the argument that the great works of canonical literature had all been composed by men of great moral learning who had suffered grave injustices: King Wen of Chou, Confucius, and Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself. Wang Ch'ung is quite uninterested in morality, by contrast, and far more interested in the link between literature and a lack of public recognition.
- 78 See LH 12.35.252, for the denunciation of clerkly writing; see *ibid.*, 256, for the comparison of clerks to mere craftsmen. In this, Wang appears to gain support from Yang Hsiung's pronouncements, but Wang has twisted them to serve new ends.

- 79 For the identification of the classical meaning (*ching i*) as basic (*pen*) and the writing (*pi mo*) as secondary (*mo*), see LH 12.35.256.
- 80 Real art, insofar as it epitomizes a Great Way rather than a mere concern for profit, is divine and eternal. See LH 12.35.252–53. On the constancy of *wen*, the *Han shih wai chuan* (*Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an so-pen*), 3/19 remarks: "Heaven does not change its course/ Earth does not alter its form./ Sun and moon shine bright./ The ranked stars are constant." The translation follows James Robert Hightower, trans., *Han shih wai chuan: Han Ying's Illustrations of the Didactic Application of the Classic of Songs* (Cambridge, 1952). Thus the greatness of *wen* lies in the fact that it endures. Compare the claims for writing made in Ts'ao P'i's *Lun wen*.
- 81 LH 12.35.255.
- 82 Wang, in fact, seems to have lacked any aesthetic appreciation. For the six forms of script learned by apprentice clerks, see HS 30.1722. For writing texts as merely a way to save oneself future bureaucratic trouble, see Huan T'an, cited in Li Fang, comp., *T'ai-p'ing yü-lan* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1935; rpt. Taipei: Hsin-hsing, 1959), 614/4a (trans. after Pokora, 171).
- 83 See LH 13.38.278 (trans. Forke, I, 106).
- 84 A century later, Ts'ai Yung's (132–192) writings, possibly under the influence of Wang Ch'ung, also include one of the key early texts proposing to assess the relative merits of talent (most often equated with literary talent), of ethical reclusion, and of state service—the merits of which would be debated by almost all important authors of the early Six Dynasties period. For other authors preoccupied with this topic, see Étienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: variations on a theme* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), ch. 13; Mark Asselin, "A Significant Season": Literature in a Time of Endings, Cai Yong and a Few Contemporaries" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1997).
- 85 LH 85, Wang's autobiography, has Wang writing the text in his sixties, after he has nearly given up hope of official advancement.
- 86 Ts'ai Yung's "*Fu* Recounting a Journey" has its counterpart in Chao I's "*Fu* Satirizing the Age, Detesting Iniquity," insofar as both prose poems share a pronounced political bent. See footnote 102 below, and Mark Asselin, "A Significant Season," ch. 2. Pan Ku had written earlier that "One strives that after death his name shall not perish/ This is the standard of the ancients." See *Wen hsüan* 14.645 (trans. after Knechtges, III, p. 101, lines 129–32).
- 87 Mark Asselin, "A Significant Season," introduction (second of the unnumbered pages), writes of "a shift in the center of clerisy-written literature from the court" to "public" exchange, i.e., circulation of works among members of the clerisy class. Numerous other examples could be adduced. These include Chao I, also a famous calligrapher by avocation, who along with Ts'ai Yung wrote the earliest essays on calligraphy. For Han letters, consult also Eva Yueh-wah Chung, "A Study of the *shu* (letters) of the Han Dynasty" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1982). It is important to note that letters were generally written in the cursive styles (running or grass).
- 88 See below for the condemnation of certain script styles by Ts'ai Yung and others. On the technical improvements in the tools for writing

script forms, see Tseng Yuho, *A History of Calligraphy*, Appendix c; Tsien Tsuen-hsuei, "Paper and Paper-Making in Han," in Joseph Needham, ed., *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), v (1), 380–442. As was the case with Islamic calligraphy, "more rounded, cursive scripts had been used since early times for personal correspondence, and to meet the needs of commerce and administration within the rapidly expanding ... empire." See Albertine Gaur, *A History of Calligraphy* (London: The British Library, 1994), 90. A comparison can also be made with Egyptian hieroglyphs, a formal script usually employed only for monumental purposes, since there was a perfectly serviceable cursive script from very early on in the history of writing in Egypt.

89 From 132 to 193, no fewer than fourteen rival emperors proclaimed themselves in the provinces, where insurgent religious sects were employing mystical symbols to herald the end of the dynasty. In addition to the four major external plots against the throne (in 147, 161, 178, 188), there were also a number of failed palace coups against the emperor (in 107, 127 (?), 147, and 188), which had no goal but to replace the reigning emperor with another member of the Liu ruling house.

90 Mark Asselin, "A Significant Season," 4, dubs the works of these men *kairotic* literature (from the Greek *kairos*), in that their structure and themes reflect an unprecedented nostalgia for the past.

91 For Ts'ai's biography, see HHS 60B. Throughout his career, Ts'ai Yung was a study in ambivalence. He pronounced himself too good for the likes of the court, yet he could not

refrain from advising it. The other Han dynasty men whose brushwriting was praised by posterity were Ts'ui Yüan (active 100); Chang Chih (active 190); Chung Yu (151–230) and Chao I (see above). For the questionable attribution of a work praising "cursive-style writing" to Ts'ui Yüan in CHHW 45/7a, see Li Tse-hou, *Liang Han mei-hsüeh shih*, 242. In any event, this piece seems more to praise the convenience of using *ts'ao shu* than its inherent expressiveness as an art form. See also Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements," 267.

92 HHS 60B.1980, which applauds Ts'ai's decision not to consort with the (corrupt) men of his own age. Such a decision would have been unthinkable to classical masters two centuries earlier, who had emphasized that the distinctive way of humans was "to make contact."

93 The idea of "making friends" with like-minded people of the past occurs first in *Mencius* 5B/8. The reference to "roaming free and easily" is, of course, to the first chapter title of the *Chuang-tzu*.

94 See Okamura Shigeru, "Sai Yu o meguru Go Kan makki no bungaku no susei," *Nihon Chagoku Gakkai ho* 28 (1976), 61–78. Mark Asselin, "A Significant Season," ch. 2, shows that Ts'ai Yung was one of many *shih* who were torn between their desire to "clean up corruption in government affairs" and to withdraw from society.

95 Hans Bielenstein, "Loyang in Later Han Times," *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 48 (1976), 70, supplies a list of the classics inscribed on the Stone Classics. Curiously, the *Odes* were omitted while the *Analects* was included. The selection of texts is nowhere explained, according to Bielenstein.

- The Eastern Lodge (*Tung-kuan*) was the most famous of the imperial libraries, where the official dynastic histories were composed in installments. See *ibid.*, 29–30.
- 96 The tablets were regarded as great curiosities at the time. Many came to copy the texts and later *fu* consulted them, until they were destroyed, possibly in the Yung-chia crisis of 312. See HHS 60B.1990.
- 97 When we come to vermilion characters written directly on stone, both the technical requirements and the degree of possible virtuosity of stroke are quite different from those of characters written directly on paper, silk, wood, or bamboo. Lao Kan (1960) therefore wisely suggests that stele inscriptions and formal inscriptions in general should be treated quite separately from documents on more perishable materials. Certainly, the stone-stele style of late Eastern Han is more formal and less “calligraphic” than writings inscribed on other materials. But unfortunately, too few examples remain from this period to explore the implications of such differences in detail.
- 98 HHS 60B.1992. For information on the Hung-tu-men Academy within the southern palace complex, see Hans Bielenstein, “Loyang in Later Han Times,” 27–28. This school was personally established by Emperor Ling on March 15, 178, acting upon a eunuch proposal which sought to establish an institution that would provide a counterweight to the Imperial Academy filled with *shih*. Its stated purpose was to train young men to write government documents on tablets, to compose *fu* poetry, and to improve their calligraphy, especially in a then-popular kind of script known as bird-style. Upon graduation, some of those who attended the school were immediately appointed to high office as provincial governors or inspectors, as members of the palace Secretariat, or as courtiers; some were even granted noble rank. Ts’ai Yung, like many others, regarded the students at this school as mere “utensils” or “tools” liable to sycophancy. Ts’ai was one of many to urge that the entire school be abolished, but such remonstrances were ignored.
- 99 HHS 60B.1996.
- 100 Citing a stele inscription written for Ch’en Shih and attributed to Ts’ai Yung (trans. slightly modified from Asselin, 353).
- 101 See HHS 8.340, 60B.1996; *chih* 13.3272; 14.3294.
- 102 For Ts’ai Yung’s “Power of the Seal Script” and “Power of the Clerical Script,” see CHHW 80/1a–b; cf. Chao I’s “Contra the Grass-style” (*Fei ts’ao shu*), in *ibid.*, 82/9b–11a. Of course, Ts’ai did not favor the decorative bird script derived from the “barbarian” states of Ch’u and Shu, which would imply approval of disunity and regional power. For a prose “Discourse on Calligraphy” attributed to Ts’ai Yung, see Tseng Yuho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, 227.
- 103 *Ch’o* (put together) can mean “to stop,” “to attach together,” or “to compile.”
- 104 See Khoo Seow Hwa and Nancy L. Penrose, *Behind the Brushstrokes: Tales from Chinese Calligraphy* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1993), 28.
- 105 Ts’ai Yung was considered the best composer of stele inscriptions in Han. The most famous of his stele inscriptions (composed in 169) recounted the life of Kuo T’ai, the student protest leader during the famous proscriptions at the end of the Eastern Han. The stele inscription was reportedly written to ap-

prise others of the fact that Kuo T'ai's "deeds will not perish." Ts'ai Yung is also supposedly the author of the important "Stele Inscription for [the immortal] Wang Tzu-ch'iao" (dated to 165), which expressed his dual longings for immortal fame and for another, better way of life.

- 106 For political reasons also, Ts'ai's death ensured his reputation. Ts'ao Ts'ao and his sons were all most anxious to demonstrate the utter depravity of Hsien-ti, the last emperor of Han, so that they could force Hsien-ti to abdicate in their favor. The Ts'aos found useful rhetorical capital in the fact that Hsien-ti had allowed Ts'ai to languish in jail without a hope of pardon. It is not for no reason, then, that Ts'ao Ts'ao acted as faithful patron to Lady Ts'ai Wen-chi, Ts'ai Yung's daughter.
- 107 One is tempted to relate this to the idea, first propounded in late Eastern times by a member of the prominent Hsün family, that any text of sufficient value may qualify as "classic" — not just those products attributed to the ancient sages. See Michael Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, ch. 1.
- 108 At the time of Ch'eng-ti (r. 32–75 c), there were reportedly 3,000 students enrolled in the Imperial Academy; by the mid-second century A.D., there were reportedly over 30,000 students. See Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 68–71; also CHC, p. 465, citing HHS 67:2186. Mark Asselin, 27, also speaks of the dearth of employment opportunities, disenchantment with government corruption, and the court's failure to recognize "worthy" ministers. Chao I's "Fu Satirizing the Age, Detesting Iniquity," lines 19–20, summarizes the current situ-

ation in this way: "Those bowing and bending become the famous and powerful, / Those petting and patting, the puissant and brutal."

- 109 On the greater attention to the extra-mundane: Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements," shows that famous calligraphers such as Wang Hsien-chih "developed a cursive style for secular calligraphy under the influence of manuscripts that had been written in religious inspiration" (269); to the calligraphic qualities familiar from writing in trance were added various refinements by masters of the brush. On the general turn to "unofficial styles": it is surely significant that Wang Hsi-chih and Wang Hsien-chih were known for their running, cursive, and standard (*k'ai*) scripts, and not for their use of clerical script. But note that Wang Hsi-chih still tended to favor the more formal *chin-li* or *k'ai* script. On the cursive scripts as intimations of inspired revelations: Even in the fifth century A.D., T'ao Hung-ching (456–536) remarked of the mystic Yang Hsi that his "writing was hurried and abbreviated," in *ts'ao-shu* and *hsing-shu*, "when he received the revelation." Fair copies, however, were executed in a formal script style (*chin-li*, or "modern clerical," a proto-*k'ai shu*) that was "neat and carefully written." See Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements," 257. For the expansion of script styles by A.D. 252, see Tseng Yuho, *A History of Chinese Calligraphy*, 149. On the healthy pleasures of calligraphy: Writing was seen as a way to nourish the vital spirit in at least two ways. First, it allowed spirit-contact with other great men through history whose gaze is sympathetic; and second, it taught the person that to live well is to "trust

to one's emotions and one's nature."

For further information, see Jean François Billeter, *The Chinese Art of Writing* (New York: Skira, 1990), esp. ch. 6-7, on the "body senses" and the "active body"; and Li Tse-hou, *Liang Han mei-hsieh shih*, ch. 9.

- 110 Étienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, 194.

- 111 Étienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, writes perceptively, "During the long and comparatively peaceful reign of the Han, there was no need for any of the extremist systems of antiquity. [Most] minds did not seek to inquire beyond the limits of Confucian pragmatism" (195). On the desire to return to the past: Social memory had invested the past with greater clarity, meaning, and legitimacy than the present. Hence Ts'ai Yung's *fu*, which says: "I researched into tales of old,/ These affairs were clearly set forth." Thus contemplation of the past was a form of historical retrospection, as well as a way to mitigate one's own sense of alienation from present politics.

- 112 See Wang Fu's chapter "On Excessive Luxury," *Ch'ien fu lun* (SPY) 3/6b.

- 113 See Ts'ui Shih, *Cheng lun*, cited in Étienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy*, 208.

- 114 In other words, in my view, it took the series of crises that occurred in the years 159-220 (including proscriptions of many scholarly factions from public office; massive student protests, a still more massive religious uprising, the massacre of the palace eunuchs, several military takeovers, and the utter destruction of the capital city) for most *shih* to realize that the empire was truly gone and public service either useless or dangerous, that just

as the "[Chou] empire, long divided, had had to unite [so the Han] empire, long united, had to divide." Epigraph drawn from the *Three Kingdoms* (*San-kuo yen-yi*), after the trans. by Moss Roberts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 5. See CHC, 360-65, for the strong presumption that Heaven singularly favored the Liu ruling house, as it had granted them a mid-dynastic restoration.

This sort of writing has often been erroneously described as "private" and "individualistic," but as Barbara Herrnstein-Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 16-17, shows, to read such lyrical works is never to read a "private meditation"; it is to read a piece produced for public consumption. Note also that an admirable adaptability and flexibility was admired when it was thought to be rather in the spirit of the past, not a slavish imitation of the past.

- 115 Already the occasional *fu* had taken over some of the *Odes*' functions. (This may account for the relative lack of attention to *Odes* traditions in Eastern Han. The *Stone Classics* did not even contain a text of the *Odes*.) For example, in a counter-part to *shih yen chih* ("The *Odes* express the inner commitments"), Ts'ai Yung's "*Fu* Recounting a Journey" states outright that he writes "these words revealing my hidden feelings." Note that the feelings may be hidden inside the poet, but the feelings are still about public issues. This very *fu*, for example, openly criticizes court politics.

Regarding the unreliability of conventional modes of commemoration: Ts'ai Yung himself in 191 proposed the removal of the spirit tablets of Emperors Ho, An, Shun,

and Huan from the Han ancestral temple (HHS, *chih* 9.3197), on the grounds that these rulers lacked merit.

- 116 Tung Ch'î-ch'ang's (1555–1636) colophon, assessing a work attributed to Wang Hsi-chih. See Lothar Ledderose, "Some Taoist Elements," 263.
- 117 The best stories are found in Liu I-ch'ing's *Shih-shuo hsin-yü* [hereafter SSHY], which has been beautifully translated and annotated by Richard Mather in Richard B. Mather, trans., *Shih-shuo hsin-yü, A New Account of Tales of the World, by Liu I-ch'ing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1976). Another work full of pertinent information is *Chung-kuo shu-fa ch'üan-chi*, ed. by Liu T'ao [Liu Chen-ch'eng] (Peking: Jung-pao-chai, 1991), v. 19.
- 118 See SSHY 14, entry 29 (Mather trans., 315).
- 119 See, e.g., SSHY 8, entry 133 (Mather, 241); SSHY 6, entry 34 (Mather, 192); SSHY 8, entry 144 (Mather, 243).
- 120 One of the earliest extant critical pieces is *Ku-lai neng-shu jen-ming* (Calligraphers since ancient times), by Yang Hsin (370–442), which is still available in *Fa-shu yao-lu* 1/7a–7b. The *Chen kao* has a whole theory of script, whereby three scripts are said to exist: (1) the highest, which exists only on a timeless, primordial level, and can be used only by celestial beings; (2) the second, "cloud-seal script," which is used for writing talismans, and is not readily intelligible to mortals; and (3) ordinary script, which has been "coerced" into conforming to definite shapes, so that while it is essentially materialized and falsified, it is at least intelligible to ordinary folk. See *Chen kao*, esp. 1/7b–10a.
- 121 The elaboration of legends continued right through the Ch'ing period (1644–1912), when Lu I-ch'en and Chang T'ing-hsiang, in their book *Yü Yen lou shu-fa*, had the primeval culture-hero Fu Hsi creating a divine "dragon script"; Shen Nung, the Divine Farmer, a sacred "grain script"; and the Yellow Emperor, the mysterious "cloud script" used up to their day in sacred Taoist talismans.
- 122 Yü Yüan-wei (502–557), *Liang Yü Yüan-wei lun-shu*, in Chang Yen-yüan, *Fa-shu yao-lu* (*T'ung-shu chi-ch'eng* edition), ch. 2, 25–26.
- 123 T'ao Hung-ching in a postscript (ch. 19–20) to the *Chen kao* (ca. 500) describes "the efforts of connoisseurs and historians, confronted with problems of authenticity, to establish a canon of genuine scriptures." T'ao prescribes standards of connoisseurship; he also describes the efforts of earlier connoisseurs (some working singly and some by committee) to decide questions of authenticity and thereby establish "correct" models for emulation.
- 124 Martin Kern, "Ritual, Music, and the Written Text," 1–2, contributes an important observation: the specific content attributed to *wen* as adjective or noun changed repeatedly in early Chinese history so as to reflect the dominant cultural discourse(s) of the time.
- 125 *Analekts* 9/11.