A big book like Mark Lewis’s *Writing and Authority in Early China* comes along in our field about once every ten years, providing a benchmark against which the rest of us measure our own efforts, inviting us to recast our own views of the past in unforeseen ways. More often than not, these books assert that much if not all of what happened in the area we now know as China can best be understood through a single dominant concept reflected in and reinforced by a unitary institutional framework. In a previous influential work by Lewis, the concept was sanctioned violence. Here it is writing’s authority. According to Lewis, from early Western Zhou (ca. 1050 B.C.), if not earlier, the written word enjoyed unparalleled authority—so much so that opponents of the state who chose the brush as the instrument by which to skewer the state survived, usually, unscathed and even admired. Of this exalted status, Lewis says, “[E]ven as they increasingly wrote for kings and included kings within their teaching scene, their claims to direct the conduct of kings remained an assertion of ultimate authority” (p. 63). At the same time, the capacities of the written word to expatiate and expound at great length prompted the eventual creation of works of truly encyclopedic nature, which only enhanced writing’s already considerable thrall. Then, at one specific point in time, 134 B.C., a corpus of texts, the Five Classics and their attached traditions, and most especially the *Gongyang* 公羊, came to put a sharper impress on the shape of the contemporary body politic than either the ruling dynasts or their bureaucratic functionaries, all of whom had to acknowledge its unchallenged sway. Throughout the remainder of Han, according to Lewis, writing functioned as “textual double of the polity” and as “the imaginary realm . . . against which actual institutions were measured” (p. 4). Lewis locates in writing itself a wonderfully potent site, thereby departing from more

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conventional narratives, which instead derive writing’s power from “its administrative role” in “the Chinese empire and imperial civilization” (p. 4). For Lewis, however, the acme of writing’s authority came not with the (short-lived) restoration of power to the Liu clan in the early days of Eastern Han, the time to which Lewis would date the “triumph” of his Han orthodox synthesis (by which he means the Confucian ethical outlook), but rather in the years after Han.¹ In language approaching the apocalyptic, Lewis attributes to the time after “the fall of Han” the “final triumph of the textual realm over the administrative reality of Eastern Han” (p. 10). Apparently, writing continued to rally the ranks of the literate elites in the absence of the more tangible institutional supports that sometimes imposed rival claims upon their persons, with the result that the collapse of political empire could only strengthen, rather than weaken a consciousness of writing’s pre-eminence.

For those unfamiliar with Lewis’s book, I offer an abbreviated version of Lewis’s own summary of its contents, as given on pp. 4–11 of his Introduction. There readers will learn that Chapter One, “Writing the State,” which examines the earliest known uses of writing in the archaic and early state administrations, argues that from the beginning even the practical uses of writing “were enmeshed in the realm of the imaginary, specifically in religious beliefs and practices” (p. 5). As Lewis notes, our earliest extant samples of Chinese writing from late Shang and early Western Zhou periods, the bone and bronze inscriptions, represent communications with various inhabitants of the spirit realm. Later, of course, some overtly religious uses of writing, such as blood

¹. Regarding the key term Ru 儒, Lewis criticizes Hsu Cho-yun’s understanding of that group (p. 73). In his Ancient China in Transition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 100–103, Hsu wrote that the Ru had emerged for four principal reasons: first, “to meet the demand for training the new administration experts and strategists”; second, to provide a “liberal education”; third, to calm the fears of “rulers who had reason to be uneasy about unethically ambitious students”; and fourth, to open up “a new and lasting path by which any low-born but able young man could gain high office by his own competence.” Lewis (p. 74) believes that “almost every proposition” in Hsu’s account is wrong, and one need only think of Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 to know that not all Ru were selected for their ethical probity. At the same time, Lewis leaves the reader wondering what he himself has in mind when he speaks of “exceptional cases distinct from the careers of most schoolmen” (p. 74). Lewis also approaches Hsu Cho-yun when he writes that “the schoolmen claimed superiority over those in state service through their condemnation of venal interests.” (p. 79). For an alternate understanding of the term Ru, see Michael Nylan, “A Problematic Model: The Han Orthodox Synthesis, Then and Now,” in Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics, ed. Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 17–56.
covenants, were adapted to more secular ends (e.g., the control of the actions of the officers and people below and the facilitation of the inter-regional exchange necessary to hold large states together). Still, that did not bring a simple conversion of writing’s preponderant uses from the sacred to the secular, as the line between sacred and secular remained unclear, with depictions of the otherworld and specific forms for communication with the dead modeling themselves upon kingly rule among the living.

Chapter Two, “Writing the Masters,” addresses the role of writing in the creation and maintenance of groups organized in opposition to the state. According to Lewis, such groups were primarily composed of descendants from the old aristocratic houses whose fortunes had declined during the course of the Zhou dynasty. Such “schoolmen,” as Lewis calls them, organized themselves around “master-disciple traditions that relied on writing” (p. 5). The founders of each group were constituted as “wise men” through the written accounts created and transmitted by their disciples. In return, the disciples expected to gain influence mainly if not exclusively through displays of allegiance to their respective masters, as embodied in written traditions, since in most cases the schoolmen, being “distinct from those in state service” (p. 5), could not secure the prestige customarily awarded those in the state bureaucracies. Lewis initially pits his “schoolmen” (whose exact identity remains vague) against experts in the technical arts, who more easily sold their services to influential members of the court. (Those belonging to the technical group, presumably, were less inclined to aim their critiques at patrons in power.) Before the late Warring States period, however, the lure of official patronage for the schoolmen drew their leaders more closely into the state sphere. This was happening just as the inheritors of the “schoolmen” traditions saw “the importance of direct teacher-disciple contact decline,” with the result that texts by themselves became the most important means of communicating doctrine (p. 5).

Chapter Three, “Writing the Past,” turns to accounts of the past, “another form of writing that emerged from the archaic state but developed among the scholars” (p. 6). While the written accounts of the past had once been limited in genre to genealogies and chronicles, the Warring States accounts increasingly elaborated and reconfigured tales of the ancient hero-rulers (real or fictive), so that the speeches and narratives attributed to them could supply historical precedents and justifications to suit the schoolmen’s rhetorical repertoire. In the single case of what Lewis calls “proto-Daoist” texts, the assiduous search for textual roots for policy delved much further back in time, ending in the claim that their first principles rooted in the very origins of the phenomenal
world. Meanwhile certain “legalist writers, such as Han Fei and his followers” (p. 7), were more apt to devise anecdotes referring to more recent historical events in their framing of arguments in political philosophy.  

Chapter Four, “Writing the Self,” turns to early verse, primarily the Odes 詩 and the Chuci 楚辭, which Lewis considers “another form of writing that served to criticize the state through its textual doubling” (p. 7). For Lewis, what matters is that the collective anthology of the Odes was read as a “coded expression of the sages’ depiction of the rise and fall of the Zhou”; also, that the “Mao Preface” 毛序 (dated only at its eighth mention to the first century A.D.) developed a theory of reading the poems in which the early Zhou kings’ virtue lived on in the pervasive influence their writings had on the historians of later ages who remembered them. Thus “true kingship was preserved not in contemporary rulers but in texts” (p. 7). Lewis concludes. For Lewis the Chuci, too, represents a repository of writings on virtue unrecognized, though that virtue is ill-defined, partaking both of shamanic powers and of the nobility of failure cultivated by aristocratic figures.

Chapter Five, “The Political History of Writing,” deals with three principal figures of legendary fame (Fu Xi 伏羲, the Duke of Zhou 周公, and Confucius), all of whom were credited with the production and preservation of early texts and who likewise—and by no coincidence, in Lewis’s mind—appear either as king or as administrative “doubles” of the king (p. 8). (Lewis’s language here seems to signify that the Duke of Zhou was identified in written histories as regent for the King Cheng 周成王 while Confucius was hailed as “uncrowned king” and patron of the Han dispensation.) All three literary sages entrusted their

2. I myself am increasingly uncomfortable with the rubrics “Legalist” and “Daoist” (which are more useful, admittedly, than “proto-Daoist”), but I confess to finding no better way to refer to the thinkers involved, except by their individual names, which is how early thinkers in most cases referred to themselves and others, as is demonstrated in Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions in the Shiji” (forthcoming). See also nn. 14, 17–19, and 23 below. Lewis seems to equate “philosophical” with “text-based,” and to regard the technical traditions as experientially based. He argues that the “philosophical traditions’ claim to superiority over the technical ones was based on their supposed possession of an encompassing, generalizing wisdom” (p. 279). However, Gu Jiegang’s 顧頡剛 classic work, Handai xueshu shilue 漢代學術史略 (repr., Taipei: Qiye, 1980), Kanaya Osamu 金谷治, Shin Kan shisō kenkyū 秦漢思想研究 (repr., Kyoto: Heiranku, 1960), and Anne Cheng, “Intellectual Self-awareness in Han Times” (unpublished paper delivered at the April 1995 Association for Asian Studies national meeting in Washington, D.C.), all challenge us to examine the continuities between the “philosophers” or Ru and the fangshi 方士 in ways that Lewis fails to do.
distinctive ways of thinking and acting to writing, and insofar as they were perceived as rulers, strengthened the pre-existing associations between empire and writing.

Chapter Six, “The Natural Philosophy of Writing,” analyzes the Yiijing in terms of the received text of the “Great Tradition” (“Da zhuan” 大傳 or “Xici” 繫辭), which develops early theories that posit the natural—and therefore supremely powerful—foundations not only of visual signs (e.g., the trigrams and hexagrams) but also of the familiar forms we see as “ordinary” written Chinese characters. The same text, as Lewis tells us, draws direct parallels between the astute observation of the starry images (xiang 象) in the skies and the careful interpretation of written lines in the Yiijing text. As visual signs like the trigrams and hexagrams supposedly unfolded “through the numerical process of repeated division” (p. 9), by extension writing itself, as well as the organization of texts, could be explained through numerical correspondences with the structure of the world. The Yiijing, for this reason, “was declared to be the foundational text for all possible depictions of reality through signs” (p. 9).

Chapter Seven, “The Encyclopedic Epoch,” relates the attempts by late Warring States, Qin, and early Western Han thinkers to provide on inscribed silk sheets or bamboo strips a series of comprehensive portrayals of the entire universe then known, distilled perforce to its essential features (p. 9). During this same period, rival traditions began to declare “central works, chapters, or passages to be jing 經, canons/classics” (p. 9), arguing that such works as were in their group’s possession had lasting relevance and value. Thus a hierarchy of written works was established, which consistently rated the more all-encompassing texts more highly. Then, beginning no later than Qin, dreams of enhanced ideological and political unity propelled some authors and readers of texts to take a more active role in promoting unity through their written works. Large synthetic works said to retrieve the wisdom of the ages employed complex temporal schemata with the aim of reconciling competing traditions in a seamless whole. A “universal history” by Sima Tan 司馬談 and his son Qian 遼 invented a new historical genre. Reflecting similar impulses, the rhapsodic fu 賦 by Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 sought to catch within their hypnotic lines the limitless variation and richness of the entire macrocosm. No less a conceptual breakthrough than these written texts by the (unrelated) Simas was the catalogue of the imperial library, wherein a complete set of texts was portrayed as “double” of the state (p. 10).

And since the increasing hegemony of the Five Classics canon over other texts came gradually to correspond with the ruler’s sway over
lesser men, Chapter Eight, entitled “The Empire of Writing,” narrates the process whereby that canon came to be established, the “culmination of the dream of a constant, encompassing text that would reunify polity and library, king and sage” (p. 10). For Lewis, the triumph of the “Confucian” canon, which is always presumed, grows naturally out of “certain fundamental changes in the nature of the Chinese polity and social order,” including the suppression of the feudatories, the abandonment of universal military service, and the formation of a new elite in which powerful families exerted their privileges in the three areas of imperial service, large-scale landownership, and trade. Supposedly, then, from the time of Emperor Wu 武帝 through Eastern Han, a single Confucian orthodoxy premised on the written “Confucian” canon dominated and shaped contemporary political and personal expression. Significant opposition to the canon’s hegemony reared its head only in the final days of Han, when the court dominated by eunuchs and imperial affines enraged the literate elite, whose very identity rested upon their self-image as makers, readers, and transmitters of written texts. The elite in defiant response, we are told, placed their faith ever more strongly in “that mass of signs” found “in the parallel realm formed by the canon and its associated texts,” for “only by recreating the order articulated in these literary works could the great families secure the honored status and income from office that were essential to their continuity” (p. 11). (Such blanket statements are troubling, for Lewis cites no names of the late Eastern Han, Wei-Jin, and Nanbeichao men who set about “re-creating orders” comparable to those enunciated in the canons and their commentaries.)

Even this abbreviated outline of Writing and Authority in Early China reflects several striking features of Lewis’s book; for example, the tone of its generalizations, which are frequently couched in dramatic and dichotomous “not X but Y” form. Essentially, in Lewis’s construct the whole of early history from late Shang through post-Han constitutes a single era whose chief identity rests upon the extraordinary continuity of the written script since the Anyang period. Lewis collapses verbal speeches, recitations, complex modes of behavior, the technical arts,

3. The seductive quality of any notion of early orthodoxy as robust as Lewis’s is worrisome to the degree that it appears to obviate the necessity for historians to remain alert to alternate realities when faced with the steadily growing piles of literary and archaeological data to be sifted through and analyzed. The fact that Mark Lewis comes close to making his grand construction is testament to his own solid scholastic achievements, which are evident on every page, but also to the reader’s propensity to prefer manageable simplicity to the inconvenient messiness of historical realities.
Michael Nylan cosmic regularities (*:数, also rendered as “numbers”), and historical events, seeing all from the single vantage point of “writing.” This approach (at points without supporting evidence) claims for its oppositional authors of written texts an exalted status based on practical wisdom, literary skill, and moral vision. Lewis’s compelling tale about “the schoolmen’s claim to virtual kingship” (p. 176) cannot help but remind readers, then, of the intensely religious overtones attached by scholar-officials in Warring States and Han to the figure of Confucius, one who from a position of manifest powerlessness went on to reign supreme as “uncrowned king” over all right-thinking people in the civilized world. In thrusting the literary, especially the scholastic, to the very center stage of early society and politics, it may appeal to today’s academics, who see themselves as latter-day inheritors of this Confucius and his :zhen Ru 真儒 “truly committed classicists.”

To those sympathetic to this approach, I readily acknowledge Lewis’s remarkable ability, demonstrated repeatedly in Writing and Authority in Early China, to summarize and synthesize a vast wealth of information now available in the proliferating primary and secondary sources. To my mind, Chapters Three, Four, and Five, devoted to “Writing the Past,” the Odes, and the Yi Jing, prove particularly useful, both for reference and as teaching tools. “Writing the Past” and the Odes chapter are at points downright dazzling. Chapter Three opens with a statement of elegant concision:

Writing about the past is inevitably tied to present concerns. In narrations of origins people sanction present practice, imagine lost paradises that highlight current failings, or posit eras of primitive savagery from which humanity has been redeemed by recent innovations. (p. 99)

The chapter goes on to present a wide range of idealized portrayals of the ancient sage-kings of the legendary pre-Xia, Xia, Shang, and early Western Zhou to be found in the literature that Lewis calls “philosophical” and that I would call “political persuasion.” In Lewis a survey of written genealogies and chronicles then gives way to portraits of the latter-day sages touted in the “Legalist” and Ru traditions, with passages based on the presupposition that merely to portray a sage is inevitably to challenge the status quo, a point well worth discussing in our classrooms and conferences.

Building upon Chapter Three’s statements about prose critiques of the state, Chapter Four takes up the subject of the verse critiques, principally the Odes (regarded as coded expressions of protest) and the southern musical traditions associated with the Chuci, many of which,
in extolling unrecognized virtue, claim authority for the poet as they condemn the banalities of the current regime.\textsuperscript{4} In Lewis’s formulation:

In imperial China poetry was the form for expression of the self and the mode of writing most closely identified with an individual, authorial voice. Although the roots of this development can be traced back to the pre-imperial period, the writing of verse in early periods, like that of philosophy and history, was collective in nature. Emerging in cult practices and court entertainments, verse was generated and transmitted within small social groups that thereby gave form to their shared communal code of values. . . . Only at the very end of the Warring States period \textit{[with the Chuci]} . . . did readers begin to treat poems as the public expressions of the private experience of named individuals, and the ideal of authoritative self-expression \textit{[italics his]} detached itself from writing understood as public and collective. Thus in the history of putting verse into texts in pre-imperial China one can trace . . . the invention of the social role of author. (p. 147)

I would argue that any commitment to the self’s unique personal voice betrays a far more modern sensibility than can be found in Warring States, Qin, or Han, and that what we take to be early “self-expression” is in fact the highly skilled use of established formulas by those in authority—not outside—to convey praise or blame for select offenses (often personified by a ruler, a minister, or a direct superior, and less often by a woman).\textsuperscript{5} Nevertheless, in Chapter Four, “Writing the Self,” Lewis does a superb job of piecing together recent scholarship on the \textit{Odes}. He begins with the \textit{Chunqiu 春秋} accounts of public recitations of the

\textsuperscript{4} Lewis seldom distinguishes between general critiques of the state and specific critiques of a particular regime or an unjust ruler. Many critiques of an evil regime or ruler ultimately celebrate the well-ordered state. In his discussion of the \textit{Odes}, Lewis fails to account for the fact that many of the individual odes celebrate the state, so intent is he upon adopting the Han scholastic reading cited in the Mao commentary. Nor does he consider that however much the \textit{Chuci} criticizes particular actions by a particular ruler in time, it by no means queries the basic institutions and modes of operation of the state.

\textsuperscript{5} For the argument against our modern preoccupation with the unique personal voice, see Michael Nylan, “Individualism and Filial Piety in Han China,” \textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society} \textbf{116} (1996), 1–27. Of course, many early texts speak of words as the “expression of oneself,” but those same texts generally emphasize commonalities in human experience. See, e.g., \textit{Guoyu 國語}, in \textit{Guoxue jiben congshu 國學基本叢書} (Taipei: Wenhua, 1968), vol. 381, 11.141–42 (Jinyu 晉語 5). Part of my argument on this particular topic has been informed by Christopher Connery, “Jian’an Poetic Discourse” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1991).
odes, explaining their importance in diplomatic missions and other social exchanges. As he sees it, the custom of “breaking apart the stanza to extract a meaning” (duanzhang quyi 斷章取義) marked a transition between the ancient Zhou oral odes and the written poetry of the Warring States period, in that it “established a precedent for assigning to poems meanings not visible in their surface reading, and thus made them apt objects for commentary” (p. 148). For Lewis, themes of the triumph of slander, the isolation of the just, and the “world turned upside down” were just as vital to the development of poetic self-expression, as they called into question the presumption of Heaven’s impartial justice and even the power of the ancestors and gods to bestow the great blessings anticipated by those who sacrificed to them (p. 152).6 To Lewis, “What the odes indicated is the presence of a space in the intellectual field, perhaps newly opened, wherein it was possible to question the virtue of Heaven or its response to human actions, and to proclaim personal innocence—or even superiority—in the face of failure or suffering” (p. 153).7

Chapter Five treats the mythic origins of writing in connection with the Yijing and three of its supposed authors: Fu Xi, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius (though it swings too abruptly back and forth between mythic representations and historical facts, which is bound to confuse the novice reader). Lewis ambitiously outlines a three-phase sequence in the relation between textuality and kingship: “a phase of origins in which the ruler was the pure master of visual signs, a middle stage in which government and texts existed as parallel realms united in a single figure, and a final stage in which political power and textual authority were separated into spheres of pure power and empty written form” (p. 195). Lewis writes of high antiquity as a “prepolitical age” whose “protokingship” found its “textual equivalent” in the absence of fully developed writing and the presence of rudimentary script forms, such as trigrams and knotted cords (p. 195),8 in this reproducing one stand-

8. I query the applicability of the phrases “prepolitical” and “protokingship” to “an age of Fu Xi,” who was a legendary figure. According to legend, Fu Xi ruled with a full complement of officials, so I wonder whether Lewis refers here to the (highly controversial) attempts made by some Chinese archaeologists to impose a Xia dynasty and the Marxist schema of historical stages upon early Shang and pre-Shang sites. By
point seen in the Han systematizing thinkers. Middle antiquity he defines by the introduction of the dynastic state and the multiplication of texts associated with early Zhou, and especially the Duke of Zhou. The third phase, “the realm of pure textuality as a political reality outside the state,” is embodied for Lewis in the figure of Confucius. A parallel is then drawn between these three stages from the sage Fu Xi to Confucius and the three textual layers of the Yijing ascribed to those sages by some Han commentators: the Trigrams, the Line Texts, and the Ten Wings.9 Though there exist pre-Han and Han references to the legendary Cang Jie’s 倉頡 invention of writing,10 Lewis dismisses Cang Jie from real consideration, so that he can plunge into the many tales surrounding Fu Xi and his consort Nü Wa 女媧, the links between Fu Xi and Yu 禹, the flood-queller, the dragon of generative power, marriage, and the invention of musical instruments (pp. 202–8)—strands that he weaves (tenuously, to my way of thinking) into a sweeping narrative of generation, visual signs, and writing.

Moving on to the mythology of the Duke of Zhou, Lewis seems on much firmer ground, mainly because legend made the good duke subject or author of numerous authoritative texts, including the Line Texts

“dynastic state” (see below), for example, Lewis appears to mean, “hereditary slave society.” Here, as in a few other passages (e.g., p. 233 on Confucius), Lewis comes perilously close to adopting as “history” the multiple fictions of the works he treats. In fact, whenever Lewis speaks of the “prepolitical,” of “protokingship,” or of the birth of the “dynastic state,” it is unclear whether he speaks of actualities (known primarily through archaeology) or the stuff of legends. If the latter, it would be helpful to know why the Xia and Shang states (if not the pre-Xia) are not considered dynasties. Sometimes Lewis’s well-meaning attempts to synthesize all available secondary literature on his chosen subjects continue and so compound earlier mistakes in the secondary literature.

9. Different Han commentaries do not all agree in their ascriptions to authors of the various layers of the Yijing, though many do follow the “Xici” in this matter.

10. Lewis writes: “Fu Xi is not only the first of the sages, but also an encompassing figure whose discovery of the trigrams contains the work of all the sages. He directly contemplated natural patterns, whereas all later inventions—including his own—were inspired by the hexagrams created in the primal revelation. . . . This primal discovery, the root of civilization, is ultimately identified as the beginning of writing” (p. 198). According to Lewis, Cang Jie is merely a minor double of Fu Xi, a figure whose chief interest rests in the fact that he is a minister rather than a ruler. (This ignores Cang Jie’s central role in connection with writing, as attested from the Warring States period, in Xunzi yinde 荀子引得, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series, Supplement No. 22 [repr., Taipei: Chengwen, 1968], 81/21/58.) Of course, Lewis’s three-phase schema would be weakened by a fuller discussion of Cang Jie, as the existence of ministers certainly implies the existence of more than a “prepolitical” organization in high antiquity. The negative associations of Cang Jie’s invention (the ghosts weep at the invention) are also damaging to Lewis’s hypothesis.
of the *Yijing*, the “Jinteng” 金滕 (Metal coffer) chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書, several *Shangshu* chapters said to transcribe his speech, the *Zhouli* 周禮, and at least one song in the *Odes*, Mao 155. Note, however, that Lewis, to keep his tripartite structure trim, must slight the most famous figure associated with ideal antiquity, King Wen 文王, to dwell on the Duke of Zhou, a character constituted as much, perhaps, by his non-appearance in Confucius’s dreams as by any writings he reportedly composed.11 Lewis’s ten-page account of the duke constitutes one of the more substantive disquisitions on this culture hero who has been relatively neglected in modern scholarship. This section makes for fascinating reading. Lewis then goes easily to the Confucius found in Sima Qian’s *Shiji* 史記, recapitulating the main lines of Sima Qian’s biography and the relation of that biography to the Confucius of the *Gongyang*, while speculating on a few differences that distinguish Sima Qian’s version of the Master from those found in earlier literature.

iors that served as “signs” revealing the leaders’ personal aspirations and the tenor of the times. Lewis is right to draw our attention to the Zuo’s preoccupation with ritual as telling “sign,” a preoccupation so extreme that “there is scarcely a story in the work that can be read without knowledge of the rituals that inform the actions of the participants and the readings intended by the authors” (p. 133)—even though his own discussion of ritual may undermine his book’s chief assertion. One of the best sections in Chapter Four also relates part of the Zuozhuan, in this case a long entry recounting an exchange of odes between Chong’er 重耳 (the future Duke Wen of Jin 晉文公, then stateless) and his potential patron, the powerful Duke of Qin. This entry gives Lewis the opportunity to ruminate on the special place of poetry as opposed to prose within pre-imperial tradition, and on the nature of the authority lent by learned citations.

It is just this sort of extended digression, which occurs even in the relatively tightly-built Chapters Three through Five, that readers may welcome, along with the quantity of sheer detail that spills out from the confines of his neat hypothesis. Wherever they appear, such departures from theme make Lewis’s book a more diverting and more accurate mirror of the richness and variety found in the early extant written records. Of particular interest to me were remarks such as those on the predilection of sages to name prodigies and spirits, as verified in the “Demonography” from Yunmeng 雲夢 (p. 34); also, the references to Sunzi’s 孫子 proposal to use counting rods to calculate the antagonists’ relative strategic advantages at the start of a campaign, and to the mysterious board game of liubo 六搏 (p. 282). Lewis’s grasp of recently excavated manuscripts allows him to introduce aspects of many of these works within a plausible intellectual context for the general reader.

12. For Lewis, this portrayal of ritual in the Zuo is generally confirmed by the Gongyang, though the latter text seeks to convince its readers that the Chunqiu’s preferred mode is to assign meaning chiefly through word choice rather than through the choice of events narrated. From this, Lewis concludes that the Gongyang “implies that texts, above all the Chunqiu,” were “the sole locus of kingship and political authority in the Eastern Zhou” (p. 146). Lewis’s propensity to use absolutes and dichotomies in analysis does not serve him well here, for it undercuts the important point he has just made: that correct ritual behavior is perceived as the chief way to attain and retain charismatic authority.

13. Of course, many of Lewis’s observations linking poetic practice and assertions of personal virtue might extend to the Zhou bronze inscriptions, given their intertextuality and the bronzes’ increasing regularities of rhyme and meter.

14. In placing early texts within an intellectual context, Lewis likes to construct genealogies. See, for example, p. 21, where the legal texts of Yunmeng “inherit” the role of the documents cast on Zhou funerary bronzes and are “successors” of the Jin covenants. Most of these documents are categorized in terms of “schools,” often as
Laudable, too, is Lewis’s presentation of some pieces of evidence that run contrary to his view of writing’s unparalleled authority. His espousal of writing’s unparalleled authority notwithstanding, he readily admits that textual scholars were “not the most numerous or esteemed” members of the court during the Warring States period (p. 78); also that “the schoolmen and their writings . . . [were] initially of little value or interest to those in political life” (p. 82). He acknowledges that even the Han traditions about Confucius and Sima Qian make “literary work . . . a sign of desperation and failure” (p. 196), though the transmission of these men’s work worked ultimately (when?) to elevate writing’s authority.\textsuperscript{15} He accounts for this spectacular anomaly—that writing was authoritative but its practitioners had low status—by asserting that his schoolmen, though “less socially important . . . nevertheless acquired significance because of their insistence on aiming their writings at the conduct and character of the ruler” (p. 96). But who achieved this significance, and when, and how?\textsuperscript{16} Lewis further notes that the “Confu-

“proto-Daoist” (a rubric never adequately explained). This becomes important when Lewis later defines part of the Yi jing as a “ru response to proto-Daoist texts” on p. 241.

\textsuperscript{15} Even the legendary Duke of Zhou’s writing “fails to achieve its goal” in combating slanderous opponents (p. 214). As for Confucius, as Lewis himself demonstrates, Han authors tend to depict the Sage most often as brilliant official or potential official, rather than as scholar-author (p. 221). In Han, “none of the leading scholars from the text-based traditions gained a significant office” (p. 74). Scholarship, he avers, was “not primarily a road to office” (p. 75). (And classical learning seems to have been less germane than the attainment of regular bureaucratic positions when it comes to deciding how a man’s life was to be presented for commemoration.)

\textsuperscript{16} Many who prided themselves on their mastery of the written word were accused of propounding “empty words and vain phrases,” even when their efforts, like those of Sima Tan, Sima Xiangru, and Yang Xiong 揚雄, were lucky enough not to be classed with those of the court entertainers. For the low position of fu writers whom Lewis portrays as authorities, see Gong Kechang, Studies on the Han fu (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1997), chap. 1. Sima Qian plainly says that he was “among the lower officials and participated in the lesser deliberations of the outer court” (Hanshu 漢書 [Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962], 62.2728), and his father, Sima Tan “was certainly kept for the sport and amusement of the emperor, treated the same as the musicians and jesters and made light of by the vulgar crowd of the day” (Hanshu, 62.2732). Burton Watson, Ssu-ma Ch’ien: Grand Historian of China (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 88, lists a number of passages from the Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 and Shiji 史記 which speak of “empty words” or “empty sayings”; to his list could be added multiple references from the Hanfeizi 韓非子 and several from Zhuangzi 莊子. Christoph Harbsmeier, in the introduction to chap. 30 of his forthcoming translation of the Hanfei (Yale University Press), notes that, “Any philosophy was only seen as relevant . . . insofar as it could be applied meaningfully to . . . the consideration of the historical heritage. . . . The truth of a philosophical point was in its . . . relevance to a proper understanding of history.”
elian text-based schools differed . . . in that they were part of a broader social grouping of men who did not invariably devote themselves to the transmission of texts” (p. 57). But the relation he perceives between the supposedly text-based Confucian schools and non-text-based broader social groupings awaits clarification.

Such inconclusive formulations are made more puzzling when Lewis uses key terms and phrases vital to his thesis in ways that do not contribute to a logical understanding. A vast array of doubles—mythic, inanimate, and human—traverse the pages of this book, for instance, but the word “double,” like the copula “to be,” masks a multitude of disparate relations; in what precise ways are these things or persons doubles, and when, and how? Lewis’s rendering of jia 家 (originally “unit” or “specialist,” but by late Han also “scholastic lineage”) as “school” is also problematic, as he himself admits, since it “carries many inappropriate associations” (p. 55). But the substitute he prefers, “textual tradition,” seems just as odd, in light of his concession that “the accepted early strata contain few references to any sorts of texts, but later strata indicated the study of certain writings, notably the Odes and the Documents, and debates over points of ritual practice” (p. 56). It is tempting to read this last assertion across the grain as a virtual admission of the

17. Lewis defines the Mohists by their attention to duty, righteousness, and warfare (p. 68) and the proto-Daoist (those that “ultimately emerged as Daoism”) at once as “textual traditions formed around writings” and “meditation-based schools” (p. 69).

18. Lewis’s “schoolmen” are an ill-defined bunch, at any rate. At one point they consist only of the Ru and the Mohists, but in other passages the term seems to embrace any literate professional and perhaps other persons as well. Similar confusion attends a few other claims related to writing’s unparalleled authority, for example: “Without the text, there was no master and no disciples (beyond the lives of the individuals involved)” (p. 58). While this seems obvious upon first reading, does it mean that Confucius was not a master until the earliest stratum of the Analects or the proto-Analects was composed?

19. Other shifting translations are offered by Lewis: he belatedly notes, for example, that the jing 經 (“canons” or “constants”) that he has hitherto identified as “texts” may refer to “disciplines” as well (p. 233). For the definitions of liuyi 六藝 and wen/shi 文實, see nn. 100 and 105 below. It seems that for Lewis, references to “study,” “learning,” “techniques” (shu 術), and shu 數 (which he translates in connection with the Yijing as “[written] numbers,” but which often represents the “cosmic regularities”) all describe written texts, as on p. 71, where “the methods [shu 術] of Lord Shang and Guan Zhong” are reduced to “legalist writings,” and p. 292, with an analysis of the Xunzi quote. If sayings or practices were ultimately transcribed in the course of time, does that constitute evidence in favor of writing’s great authority? Does the authority of a text once written down significantly differ from what it was when it was only available in an oral version? Lewis dismisses such interesting questions, which have been taken up with remarkable force and vigor by students of classical Greece, Rome, medieval learning, and modern linguistics.
centrality of ritual practice (rather than of writing), not only because “the early strata contain few references to any sorts of texts,” but also because references to the *shi* 詩 and *shu* 書—Lewis’s anthologized *Odes* and *Documents*—(a) may well have been to versions circulating orally; (b) may not have been to the particular versions of the canonical texts that Lewis cites; and (c) certainly are to be viewed within their performative contexts.\(^\text{20}\) Later in the chapter, Lewis lists, along with “the *Odes* and *Documents*,” the skills promoted by Warring States educational programs according to the received literature, programs training men in “ritual, music, meditation, linguistic paradoxes, rules of argument, principles by which a king should control his ministers, and so on” (p. 74),\(^\text{21}\) painting a far more complex picture of writing’s role in elite culture than elsewhere.

Why then, already in line 2 of the Introduction (p. 1), does Lewis reveal his disinclination to discuss the roles of oral texts and public performance as they relate to writing?\(^\text{22}\)

Another phrase central to Lewis’s hypothesis is “opposition to the state.” “Opposition” did occur on many levels, impelled by many motivations; that goes without saying. Still, the defiance expressed by disempowered elites tied to the old Warring States regimes in response to the newly established Qin and Han empires reads quite differently from the opposition registered by career bureaucrats in the hire of the imperial state—or by those anxious to gain admittance to the ranks of the state bureaucracy. Both the vocabulary and substance of oppositional rhetoric, in other words, was forever reacting to new realities, perceived and actual, unfolding during the seven centuries or so (fourth century B.C.–third century A.D.) covered by Lewis; the language, however laden with historical allusions, was apt to be pointed and direct, aimed at certain targets. Sima Qian’s *Shiji* and Wang Chong’s *Lunheng* 論衡

\(^{20}\) One recent study connecting the style and content of oral performance texts (the *fu*) to the style and content of prose writings is Taniguchi Hiroshi 谷口洋, “*E’nanji no bunji ni tsuite*” 淮南子の文辭について, *Nippon Chūgoku gakkaihō* 日本中國學會報 47 (1995), 17–32. The centrality of ritual, rather than writing, seems to be attested by the *Zuo*: “Rites form the great warp of kingship. With one action that goes against the rites in two ways, the great warp is no more. Words should establish rules. Rules should make manifest the warp of rites. The warp of rites is forgotten behind many words. What use is it then to elevate records and documents?” (*Chunqiu jingzhuan yinde* 春秋經傳引得, Harvard Yenching Sinological Index Series, Supplement No. 11 [Peiping: Harvard Yenching Institute, 1937], 389/Zhao 15/3).

\(^{21}\) Though it might be asked how such an educational program is related to an oppositional stance, Lewis is right to point out the oppositional features of much of the *writing* of the period, even if he exaggerates their importance.

\(^{22}\) Of *xing ming* 形名, Lewis writes, “These ‘names’ were originally oral, but since they were to serve as a standard for judgment in the future, they must have been set in writing” (p. 33).
illustrate the point to perfection. Neither work is directed against the state *per se* (indeed, both consistently celebrate the prosperity and peace made possible by the centralized empire under good rule). Both complain of a specific list of state abuses, fostered not only by autocratic emperors (e.g., Emperor Jing 景帝 and Emperor Wu) but also by the craven *shi* 士 on their staff, who set aside the dignity attached to their good birth and training in order to become willing slaves in the promotion of the reigning emperor’s misguided agenda.

If, for the moment, we grant the “oppositional stance” of all the texts which Lewis names as such,23 there remains a complication, for even with polemical texts strongly marked by oppositional stances, other agendas are often simultaneously at work. The *Shiji* and *Lunheng*, to take our two examples, concern themselves with many topics beyond political opposition, including: (1) the interaction of fate and just retribution operating over several generations in the determination of fortune; (2) the relation of fame to writing; (3) the definition of nobility, when tested under extreme circumstances; and so on.24 And when one turns from Sima Qian to Sima Xiangru, the limitations of the loose rubric of “oppositional stance” become evident, since the two Simas are such different writers addressing different themes with different styles. It makes equally good sense to see in many of Lewis’s “oppositional” Warring States and Western Han texts—the *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, *Hanfeizi*, and the *fu* among them—spectacularly successful rhetorical ploys expressly designed to gratify the ruler’s own inflated sense of self and determined pursuit of pleasure.25

23. On the other hand, Lewis’s characterization of the *Lushi chunqiu* and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 as “state-sponsored compendia” (p. 302) is questionable, for the works can easily be read, in company with earlier texts, less as a “re-assertion of the intellectual hegemony of the state” (p. 303) than as ambitious assertions of charismatic authority by their sponsors, two persons near the throne. Griet Vankeerberghen, for example, details the attributes of perfect sagehood that Liu An 劉安 hoped his young nephew, Emperor Wu, would discern in him; see Vankeerberghen, *The Huainanzi and Liu An’s Claim to Moral Authority* (Albany: State University of New York Press, in press). Lewis discounts the suggestion that Lü Buwei 吕不韋 or Liu An plotted rebellion, insisting that both books were probably written to guide the conduct of a young ruler (p. 303).

24. Lewis inexplicably slots the writings of military commanders on campaign under this overly broad rubric of “oppositional texts,” in company with those of his surprisingly subversive “Legalists” (see n. 19 above). He also writes of musical performance as “an act of defiance” (p. 230), setting aside early Chinese notions of music as a centering device for the unsettled psyche.

25. On the subject of rhetorical ploys, one might name the numerous writings on pleasure in Warring States, which have been touched upon in Griet Vankeerberghen, “Emotions and the Actions of the Sage: Recommendations for an Orderly Heart in
Issues surrounding writing’s origin in religion are likewise crucial to Lewis’s final thesis, yet surprisingly untouched. Lewis’s account lacks a thorough exploration of the implications to be drawn from alternate ways of viewing writing’s origin and development in the geographic area corresponding to the modern boundaries of the People’s Republic of China. To date, the majority of scholars in our field, operating on the overtly politicized assumption that there exists a unified China that goes back at least to Shang, have taken up one of two alternatives when interpreting the evidence at hand: either the civilizations evolving in that area were truly unique in their development, or they followed roughly the same patterns of state and societal formation as other early civilizations elsewhere experienced. Admitting that either scenario (not to mention a host of others) may yield a measure of genuine insight into the distant past, we should admit also that the two scenarios convey totally different messages regarding the important issue of writing’s authority.

If the origin and evolution of Chinese writing, Shang through Han, has parallels in the origin and evolution of writing in other cultures, a view that Lewis’s rather perfunctory citation of Jack Goody’s generic list of writing’s authoritative functions in the Introduction seems to endorse, then we can only conclude that our early data relating to writing’s origins inexplicably lacks important early examples of secular (often bureaucratic or commercial) writing (such as documents that calculate, label, record, and order things and people). After all, in all other known early civilizations, be they Sumerian, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Persian, Maya, Greek or Roman, writing’s religious functions appear in tandem with its secular functions; besides, no one can reasonably think that the oracle bone writing at Anyang represents the very earliest stage of Chinese writing. Setting aside the important question of why our early...
evidence about writing may be skewed (due to preservation bias, political prejudice, lack of interest on the part of social scientists, and other factors), what changes must be made to Lewis’s hypothesis if writing had not a single origin in early religious activities? In the case of early civilizations for which we have a much larger sampling of different types of written documents—e.g., early Greece and Rome—scholars have been far less inclined to inflate the prestige and authority of the written word.

But should we decide to take up Lewis’s dual contention that writing’s authority may be traced to the Shang oracle bones, and that writing in its evolving uses never lost its initial whiff of the sacred (pp. 5, 13), we still confront a peculiar picture that calls for explication. If the case of early civilization in China is unique, in that writing’s origins there lay solely in concerted attempts to contact the spirit realm, making writing and religion nearly synonymous, why is the use of writing so very circumscribed in early religious and ritual contexts, judging from the extant sources that we command? In the long centuries covered by the bone and bronze inscriptions, we find a single standard formula for written applications dedicated to the gods, ghosts, and ancestors. Where is the wealth of inscribed temple votive offerings and commoners’ pleas to the otherworld that we would expect to supplement—and occasionally confound—the official, state-sponsored, and capital-centered writings on religion, materials to compare with that which Mary Beard has so brilliantly taken into account for Graeco-Roman paganism?27 Should

Oriental Society, 1994); and Robert W. Bagley, “The Earliest Known Chinese Writing: Bias of the Sample and Archaeological Context” (unpublished paper delivered at a conference on the origins of writing at Brigham Young University, April 2000). In the latter, Bagley notes that “the suggestion that writing was invented to serve ritual purposes has no basis apart from the claim that at Anyang it was confined to ritual, which is unlikely to be true.” Lewis, by contrast, dismisses the idea that writing in late Shang had important functions in the round of daily activities outside the kingly court and cult: “Some scholars speculate that the earliest script forms had been developed for use in daily activities, but that the evidence of this has vanished with the perishable materials to which such writings are committed. In fact, the early graph forms are clearly tied in form and significance to divination. . . . Whatever other roles writing played in Shang times, it was in the inscription of the religious activities of the rulers that the graphs found their definitive import” (p. 15). I am unsure why Lewis insists that one early use of writing was more definitive than another.

For the role of writing in other early civilizations, readers may consult Charles Keith Maisels, Early Civilizations of the Old World: The Formative Histories of Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia, India, and China (London: Routledge, 1999).

27. See Mary Beard, “Ancient Literacy and the Function of the Written Word in Roman Religion,” Literacy in the Roman World (Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series No. 3), ed. Mary Beard et al. (1991), 35–58. Two of the best contemporary descriptions of heterodox cults, both in Ying Shao’s 應邵 Fengsu tongyi 風俗通義,
we trust the lacunae in our present sources to be real evidence of a substantive difference in cultural approaches to the divine? Did the early elites in the area under consideration (of commoners we can say little) always approach through written communications the full range of deities glimpsed in the oracle bone inscriptions, missing from the bronze inscriptions, and fully in view in Qin and Han? We simply do not know. On what scholastic basis, then, comparative or other, can we hope to formulate a grand synthetic vision about writing’s special authority in religious contexts of a particular time and place?

In short, I find too few acknowledgements in Lewis’s monumental book of the obvious: that what we learn from archaeology is often in conflict with what we find in the literary records, and that the literary sources themselves do not always agree, even on major issues, even within the same text, despite Lewis’s claim that the dominant aim of official learning is to reconcile contradictions. Silent on disparities among our sources, and with key components of the argument (“doubles”; “schools” and “schoolmen”; “opposition to the state”; and writing’s relation to religion) so broadly conceived, Lewis’s otherwise masterful book reads in some passages less as a work of history than as a work of moral philosophy, the latest in a long series of commentarial exegeses composed by subtle Ru masters in the Gongyang mode, a book which tends to gloss over (pun intended) the ruptures and aberrations we would expect to find in history. For one thing, Lewis’s hypothesis would tie seemingly unrelated events together via the moral motivation of the agents involved. For another, he portrays his Warring States and Han texts as masses of signs no less portentous than the starry images recorded in the omen treatises; they attain an existence fairly independent of what was happening below, on the ground. The importance of state unification in 221 B.C. is remarked, and brief nods are made to altered socio-economic forces around the time of the Eastern Han founding.28

fail to mention inscriptional materials, though they mention wu 巫 magicians, raising the dead, the slaughtering of sacrificial animals, and the indiscriminate mixing of men and women in cultic songs and dances. See Fengsu tongyi tongjian 風俗通義通檢, Centre Franco-Chinois d’Études Sinologiques Index No. 3 (repr., Taipei: Chengwen 1968), 9.67–68 (“Chengyang Jingwang si” 城陽景王祠) and 9.70 (“Baojun shen” 鮑君神). Of course, the argumentum ex silentio is never strong enough to prove the presence or absence of such activities, but it is possible that, aside from rituals of the ruling house, inscriptive materials were not commonly in use in connection with more ordinary cultic activities until calligraphy itself became “divine.” See n. 43 for further information.

28. Sociopolitical changes in Eastern Han are largely attributed by Lewis to the retraction of “bureaucratic control . . . with the abandonment of compulsory military service and of restrictions on ownership of land,” which made the state’s influence in
Nonetheless, the chief forces identifiably influencing the production and diffusion of texts are said to be other texts with which they are in conversation. In this imagined “empire of the text,” even the personal situations and proclivities of their authors seldom intrude upon the literary imagination. That may explain why real time and real place play so little part in this highly patterned tour-de-force, except in Chapter Eight, which covers the political background to Emperor Wu’s decision to canonize a set of texts in some detail. Lewis does not always date the texts he mentions nor does he summarize their contents in chronological order. His chosen writers are either at court or longing to be there (if only so that they may dutifully remonstrate), and the courts mentioned, Shang through Han, whether imperial or aristocratic, exhibit few distinguishing features.

Granted, many of these texts do engage in a shared discourse, but the lack of specific context for that discourse leaves me searching for underlying rationales or motives by which to explain significant devel-

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29. The question “What was the main form of textual unit operating in pre-Han and Han?” has seldom been asked by classicists in our field; when it is, answers to that question will no doubt radically alter our perceptions of the ancient modes of transmission of knowledge. When Lewis supplies a date for a received text, he generally ignores the complex issues surrounding dating. It is nearly certain that most of the early texts he surveys, which he would call “philosophical,” first circulated in parts, which were only later made into the larger received texts that we now know. The original date of composition for each part, therefore, seldom coincides with the final date of compilation. Nor does Lewis alert the reader to the fact that certain written texts he reviews (e.g., the Shiji and Lunheng) did not circulate widely immediately after their initial compilation.

30. I am also concerned that texts from widely different areas, even long before the imperial period, are said to relate to “China,” an entity of modern construction, though I acknowledge the difficulty of continually reminding the reader of the fragmented state of politics and consciousness in “the geographic area that is today known as China.”
opments in genre and content. Under what impulse or set of impulses do the supposedly oppositional texts give way to encyclopedic texts composed in celebration of the state? By what mechanism does the function of the Odes in the late Warring States, “where the presentation of a verse was intended to elicit a particular action,” yield to citation of the Odes meant to reinforce an argument or make a point (p. 166)?

As soon as such questions about timing are posed, others arise: for example, how many separate forms of opposition do the texts reflect, at what date and in what forms; how does the authority of any one canonical text, say the Odes anthology, differ in origin and practice from that of any other canonical text at any given time and place; and do such differences constitute a sufficient explanation when asking why one or another version of a canonical text rose or fell in popularity over the years?

That we cannot answer such basic questions means that we have only just begun to assess the possible significance of writing and the canon in the early period. How can we presume that writing’s authority reigned with equal effectiveness at every time and place in every arena of early state and society? The cases of Greece and Rome would suggest that writing’s authority was not determined once and for all by a single event or set of events. (To allege that would be to uphold mythic structures.) In Greece and Rome, it proceeded rather gradually, alongside and in continual interaction with the oral, to claim an authority in certain areas, an authority that seldom went entirely undisputed. Absent studies of comparable sophistication on many aspects of the ancient world of Zhou through Han, I suspect that attempts to pull together our shaky intuitions and bits of knowledge into a coherent narrative

31. For reasons that elude me, Lewis would have the reader starkly contrast the function of the Odes, as presented in late Warring States disputations, with its use in mid-Western to Eastern Han. After all, throughout the period under review, the texts emphasize “the role of poetry as evidence of historical realities” (p. 165). And it is Lewis who tells us of the ongoing belief that the songmakers of old were driven to compose their texts by the moral and political decay they had witnessed—views that reappear time and time again in pre-Han and Han texts, including Sima Qian’s “Letter to Ren An” (Hanshu, 62.2724–36) and the “Great Preface” to the Odes.

are premature. My own predilection would be to head in another direction than that taken by Lewis, emphasizing the many areas where we remain in ignorance; Socrates and Confucius agreed that knowledge consists in knowing what one does not know. Why are modern academics so reluctant to admit to great ignorance, especially when that admission allows the luxury of lingering over intriguing problems that cannot as yet be solved? (The keen pleasures to be had from informed speculation on writing’s role were recently brought home to me by Robert Bagley’s marvelous essay on the inscribed bell and chime-stone sets found in the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, dated ca. 433 B.C.; the essay shows that every question that we want to ask about this particular set of bells, from the intentions of its designers to the history of its assembly from smaller sets, leads us back to the problem of the inscriptions themselves and what kind of authority they invoked.33) There is the fear, too, that in the rush to make it all make sense, we risk overlooking the seemingly inconsequential, the bricolage, that could yet prove crucial to a more penetrating understanding of the past. Of course, as teachers and as scholars we generalize in every statement that we produce. Still, in my own case, an intense admiration for Han thinkers is offset by an unwillingness to engage in what those same Han thinkers saw as the highest sort of intellectual endeavor: sorting the myriad things of phenomenal existence, and especially of the social sphere, into discrete lei 類 “correct categories,” each carrying its own moral imperatives. 34

Lewis, perhaps in a counter-quest for tidiness and coherence, chooses to support his hypothesis by the very texts that most easily satisfy the preconceived notions about writing’s authority that we have inherited as working academics in our world. (Nearly all come from the thinkers’ sections in the imperial library catalogue as recorded in Hanshu 漢書 30, except for archaeologically excavated texts analogous in intent and format.) Little mention is made of the medical tracts reviewed by Sivin and Lloyd (despite the crucial role of bibliotherapy in classical times) or the apocryphal traditions collected by Yasui Kōzan and Nakamura Shōhachi 內村璋八 (Jūshū isho shūsei 重修緯書集成 [Tokyo: Meitoku, 1939].

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33. Specifically, why did those who commissioned the bells seek to persuade a group of readers, as yet unidentified, of the perfect comparability between the Zeng state musical scale and those of Zeng’s neighbors? See Robert W. Bagley, “Percussion,” in Music in the Age of Confucius, ed. Jenny F. So (Washington, D.C.: Sackler Gallery, 2000), 60.

(1971–92]), to cite but a few examples. No mention is made of texts that we do not have but might reasonably expect to find. But Lewis cannot really validate his bold thesis until he weighs other sorts of evidence (some of it visual) that might foster a counter-hypothesis presuming significant variations in the role and standing of writing over time.

Of course, no book—and this book is long indeed, 365 pages in main text—can be blamed for not incorporating every piece of evidence at hand. And Lewis’s propensity to hurry through most texts that he does review may have sprung from the need to remind readers at regular intervals of his intended focus. My discomfort with Lewis’s book stems more from my conviction that Writing and Authority’s final chapter on the establishment of the “Confucian” canon continues—and so sustains—the common wisdom on writing’s role. Weakness in the very chapter that should provide the crown for Lewis’s venture raises worrisome questions about the book’s overall thesis, its many passages of outstanding merit notwithstanding. Realizing both that Lewis’s understanding of the Han differs substantially from my own and that he has at most of the points of disagreement the full weight of mainstream views behind him, I would like to lay out possible objections to the mainstream views, many of which can be traced back to the deeply politicized assessments of Qin and Han made in late imperial China. In the interests of laying out the issues as clearly as possible, I deliberately take a rather extreme position here, hoping that the following remarks will prompt debate on a subject too long considered settled by historians in the field. I am well aware that, as our knowledge-base improves, we are likely to find that the truth lies somewhere between the positions sketched out by Lewis and by me.

Before turning to Lewis’s Chapter Eight on the canonization of the “Confucian” classics, let me cite the words of a Tang scholar, Dan Zhu 啟助. Tang classicists do not always bear infallible testimony regarding the early empires, of course, but we who live at further remove should not dismiss early views out of hand. Dan wrote:

> In ancient times, all exegetical traditions were orally transmitted. Only since the Han have they been written down. . . . Thus we know . . . that the meanings were orally transmitted and not yet committed to bamboo and silk. Later generations of scholars thereupon elaborated and linked up these accounts . . . and arranged them . . . to turn them into exegetical traditions.35

35. Dan Zhu, cited by Lu Chun 隋淳 (ca. eighth century) in Chunqiu jizhuan zuanli 春秋集傳纂例 (Siku quanshu 四庫全書 ed.), 146.380–81. Dan is discussing the compilation of the Zuo from many early sources. He therefore talks of specifically “arranging
As Lewis states, the canon was constituted by its commentaries (p. 301), so if by chance Dan was well informed about the distant past, then what passes for conventional wisdom about the nature and sequence of events in pre-Han and Han classicism needs drastic revision. Because Lewis follows conventional wisdom in making six standard, logically separable claims, the remainder of this review will concern itself with textual learning in pre-Han and Han, a topic to which Lewis directs our attention. These standard claims presume (1) a strong desire by Han emperors (presumably following Qin) to preserve an interpretive monopoly over texts, as the emperors equated political with literary influence and longed to end sectarian hostility. The claims further say (2) that this Han canonization of antiquity represented a reversal or rejection of the dominant values of the late Warring States polity (e.g., Writing and Authority, pp. 10, 71, 96). They suppose (3) that the institution of the Academicians was designed to advance an interpretive monopoly over texts. They insist (4) that the Imperial Academy required its graduates as their chief responsibility to maintain careful textual transmission, and that graduation from the Academy was the primary route to public office. They see (5) the expansion of the imperial library under Emperor Wu and his successors as a significant factor enhancing the authority and circulation of written texts. And they posit (6) the existence of “schools” (chief among them the “Confucians”) dedicated exclusively or chiefly to the written transmission of key texts ascribed to their founders and chief disciples. Such a scenario presupposes some surge

36. Lewis’s acknowledgement that the “texts mentioned . . . under the rubric jing were all recent compositions” (p. 301) tallies ill with his treatment of them elsewhere in the book as more ancient written texts. Note that when I speak of common wisdom, I consider Michael Loewe an exception. The acknowledged leader of Han studies, Loewe has, in every essay he has written, carefully distanced himself from the standard views in the field. Beginning at least with Crisis and Conflict in Han China (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), he has avoided the notion of “schools”; eschewed talk of “Confucians” and “Legalists” as opposing advocates favoring ritual or law, respectively; and resisted the notions that the Han scholar-officials were uniformly “humanistic” (i.e., secular) in their orientation. This essay therefore owes a great deal to him, though he is in no way responsible for its errors.

37. Lewis also follows conventional wisdom on the Qin, emphasizing a few key events, including unification itself, the Burning of the Books, without mentioning an earlier biblioclasm attributed to Shang Yang 商鞅 in 350 B.C. by Hanfei, as cited in Wang Xianshen 王先慎, Hanfeizi jijie 韓非子集解 (Taipei: Shijie, n.d.), 13.67.

38. Lewis posits a shift “from an early reliance on face-to-face transmission from teacher to disciple outside the state sphere toward a transmission based primarily on texts, debates between philosophic traditions in the courts, and patronage by leading
in literacy rates coming in response to Han institutional measures devised to train men in an orthodox, text-based synthesis, but Lewis’s account, in company with most others, is silent here.39

Curiously enough, the extant Han texts themselves supply abundant evidence against all six parts of the foregoing picture. I say “curiously,” because our main written sources for Han are either state-sponsored works or policy-related, being the work either of potential candidates political figures” (p. 302). It is Lewis’s belief that, “As texts became more numerous and available in the late Warring States period, commitment to a master or group was increasingly replaced by attachment to texts.” According to Lewis, by the mid-fourth century B.C., “the importance of direct teacher-disciple contact declined, and texts became the primary means of communicating doctrine” (p. 5). The supposition that masters became mere authors at one particular point in history, rather than repeatedly, not long after the death of each lineage master, seems to ignore the evidence. Lewis goes well beyond the present evidence, as I understand it, when he regards the existence of several distinct layers in some famous texts (especially the Zhuangzi 莊子 and the Mozi 墨子) as sufficient proof that “intellectual commitments were no longer defined by loyalty to the doctrine of a single teacher” (p. 6). I find no evidence of such a thoroughgoing shift. See n. 2 above for further information.

39. The longstanding account of textualization in Han often presupposes a surge in literacy rates in response to the throne’s encouragement of literary learning. Typically, when historians suggest an increase in literacy in Han, they point to a single sentence reiterated in the Han records. The sentence says that when Gongsun Hong “became prime minister and enfeoffed marquis on account of his specialization in the Chunqiu,” there and then “the learned wellborn men in the empire were to a man influenced by this” (Shiji, 121.3120; see also Hanshu, 88.3593). This phrase is usually taken to mean that men came to see that the best way to secure fame and fortune for their families was to give their sons a classical education. Presumably mastery of one classic and its interpretations could become the road to high rank and wealth for some, especially under those emperors who particularly liked elegant literary flourishes and harsh punishments for traitors. (The Gongyang masters for the Chunqiu were known to specialize in providing canonical justifications for executing suspected rebels among the aristocratic class.) However, the ability to read and write a classical text could gain a person great status in Han only to the degree that it was a highly unusual skill. Therefore the brief statement about Gongsun Hong hardly constitutes convincing proof of any dramatic rise in literacy. There is little evidence of state support for schooling (despite frequent pious talk about the local schools of ideal antiquity), and all the scanty evidence that exists concerns the state’s support for what we might call tertiary education. Primary education, as far as we know — teaching young children the basics of reading and writing — remained the private responsibility of each family, and this means that literacy rates could not have increased much beyond the pre-Han figures, when literacy was generally limited to skilled workers and land-owning elites. The Qin and Han states, which so deftly used writing to increase their prestige, made few state-sponsored initiatives for the promotion of literacy. Contrast R. McKitterick, *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 324 (Conclusion); and Yu Shulin 余書麟, “Liang Han sixue yanjiu” 兩漢私學研究, *Shida xuebao* 師大學報 11 (1966), 1–59.
for office or of imperial officials. The written texts at our disposal, in other words, generally intended to confirm writing’s exalted place in culture as well as its political character. If anything, we would expect texts composed by acknowledged literary giants to exaggerate the case for writing’s authority, since one of the main functions of writing since its inception in China has been self-commemoration linked to commemoration of the state. What we learn from Han written texts is that some men spent large amounts of time in the company of written texts, and very large numbers of people—even the illiterate—were affected to some degree by operations carried on in writing.\textsuperscript{40} Coins, weights and measures, posted edicts, and pieces of political propaganda,\textsuperscript{41} to name but a few obvious examples, bore writing, and they circulated so widely in Han China that even illiterates had a rough sense of their significance. Han China had definitely moved beyond what William Harris calls scribal literacy, “where literacy was restricted to a specialized social group which used it for such purposes as maintaining palace records,” to a stage loosely analogous to Harris’s craftsman’s literacy, the “condition in which the majority, or a near-majority, of skilled craftsmen are literate, while women, unskilled labourers, and peasants are mainly not.”\textsuperscript{42} (I adopt Harris’s terms, which assign writing mainly to the lower orders, because social snobbery seems to have been a factor in the Han elite’s relatively slow embrace of any absolute equation between skill in writing and exemplary civilization.)\textsuperscript{43}

To my mind, strong evidence suggests that Han society was not nearly so text-based, let alone text-centered, as Lewis (who is here in the majority) would have it. The first part of the standard account just outlined presumes a strong and consistent desire by Han emperors to preserve an interpretive monopoly over texts, since they equated textual with political hegemony. Had the Han emperors desired such a monopoly, it seems bizarre that they would have sponsored no fewer than fourteen different—and contending—interpretive traditions relating to the Five Classics, no one of which could or did enjoy preeminence during Han.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{40} Compare Harris, \textit{Ancient Literacy}, 89.

\textsuperscript{41} One thinks of the First Emperor of Qin’s 秦始皇 stelae; also of the stele set up on the peak of Mt. Tai 泰山 in a.d. 56 to commemorate Emperor Guangwu’s 光武帝 achievements.

\textsuperscript{42} Harris, \textit{Ancient Literacy}, 11.


\textsuperscript{44} Martin Kern, \textit{The Stele Inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-Huang: Text and Ritual in Early Chinese Imperial Representation} (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2000), 191,
The Five Classics were originally elevated in status so that they might act as ideological counterweight to powerful factions at court promoting opposing policies. The sponsorship of so many interpretive traditions looks very much like a conscious attempt to disperse the ideological authority of competing factions. Nor can I find convincing evidence that the throne sought to foster a tight ideological synthesis designed to displace the very loose consensus on cosmic and political issues that had arisen in the centuries preceding Han. With whom would the emperors have forged a new interpretive monopoly based on an ideological synthesis? At least half the Han emperors, if our dynastic records can be trusted, despised the professional classicists, the Ru 儒, the group most closely associated with textual conservation, textual transmission, and textual interpretation. It is not just that the Han founder pissed in the hat of one classicist to express his profound disdain for the group, or that Emperor Wu—the much vaunted patron of the classicists—was eager to send to the execution block one of the most respected of their number, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒. Angry dismissals of the professional classicists by Han emperors from Emperor Wu thread through the dynastic histories as a leitmotif. More than one emperor charged that the court classicists were so caught up in the prescriptions inherited from tradition that “they were incapable of coming forward with any worthwhile

writes that the Qin state intended the University and Academicians to narrow the scope of authoritative learning, so as to do away with the troublesome 百家 語. Nathan Sivin and Geoffrey Lloyd, in their forthcoming The Way and the Word, argue that 家法 was designed to halt the proliferation of different interpretive traditions. Here I would emphasize that, if such institutions were so designed, they appear to have been ineffective.

45. Centuries before Han, a partial synthesis had emerged among prominent Warring States thinkers typically depicted in modern studies as arch enemies—those people we now call (quite anachronistically) the Legalists, Daoists, Mohists, Confucians, and Yin-yang 董仲舒—though consensus was limited to certain key assumptions about cosmic law, the operations of the human body and the body politic, and definitions of the Good (see n. 51). It was basically this limited synthesis that would prevail through Han times. One searches in vain in the extant accounts of Han court conferences—in fragments collected in Ma Guohan’s 馬國翰 Yuhanshanfangjiyi shu 玉函山房輯佚書 (Jinan: 1871; repr., Taibei: Shijie, 1967), as well as in Ban Gu’s 班固 Bohutong 白虎通 (Po lu t’ung: The Comprehensive Discussion in the White Tiger Hall, trans. Tjan Tjoe Som [Leiden: Brill, 1949–52])—to find some new points of consensus. We can credit Han only with the greater incorporation of Five Phases theory into state discourse.

46. Shiji, 97.2692 (Liu Bang 劉邦 pissing in the hat); and 121.3127–28 (Dong Zhongshu). We know only that Dong was eventually pardoned by imperial edict, and after that, “Dong no longer dared to express his opinions on disasters and portents, but... devoted himself entirely to studying and writing texts.”
suggestions” on current policy matters.\textsuperscript{47} Not to mention that all or nearly all of the remarkable works attempting synthesis were composed by those working under a cloud at court (such as Yang Xiong \textsuperscript{揚雄}), by those liable to charges of treason (such as Lü Buwei \textsuperscript{呂不韋} or the Prince of Huainan \textsuperscript{淮南王}), or by non-governmental compilers (as in the case of the \textit{Huangdi neijing} \textsuperscript{黃帝內經}).\textsuperscript{48} There is, too, the not inconsequential matter of imperial power in Eastern Han, as this had to be a key factor in any successful promotion of a state-sponsored Han ideological synthesis. The relative weakness of the Eastern Han throne vis-à-vis other powerful interests was apparent to all from its early days, since its founder tried and failed for ten years to get his bureaucrats to tender the accurate cadastral surveys needed for the most basic administration of his empire. One wonders, then, whether he and his successors had enough resources (charismatic, cultural, or material) to sway recalcitrant local elites on complex ideological matters.\textsuperscript{49}

Point two of the “victory” construct suggests both that the dominant Han ideology “represented a reversal” of Warring States thought and that it introduced a welcome unity of thought. But if ideological victory is to occur, public rivals must be publicly vanquished. What we find

\textsuperscript{47. Shiji, 28.1395.} Emperor Wu admired the Ru chiefly for their elegant airs and fancy phrases; in court rituals, he “wished rather to choose from the Ru methods in order to make them [the proceedings] more elegant” (\textit{Shiji, 28.1397}). The Ru, for their part, were unable to produce any detailed information on the \textit{feng} 封 and \textit{shan} 禪, because they insisted upon confining themselves to precedents mentioned in the \textit{Odes} and \textit{Documents}; hence, the charge that they were incapable of coming forward with any worthwhile suggestions (\textit{Shiji, 28.1397}). Apparently, Qin and early Western Han emperors were not intimidated by this growing class of learned advisors. They did not forbid the \textit{Yantielun}’s \textsuperscript{鹽鐵論} account, which shows one or more \textit{wenxue} 文學 battling it out with government spokesmen—and winning. To cite a later example, that of Emperor Zhang \textsuperscript{章帝} of Eastern Han (r. a.d. 76–88), less than a decade after he convened “all the classicists” at the White Tiger Pavilion in a.d. 79, he taunted the scholastics with a classical allusion conveying his annoyance that their protracted deliberations never seemed to spark any constructive activity: since “a single [Music Master] Kui was enough for [the sage-ruler] Yao,” he wondered why so little had been accomplished by the large band of ritual experts in his own service; see \textit{Hou Hanshu} \textsuperscript{後漢書} (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1965), 35.1023. The list of Han emperors actively hostile to classical and pseudo-classical models must include Emperors Wen 文, Jing, Xuan 宣, Cheng 成, Zhang (during the later part of his reign), and An 安 as well as most of the late Eastern Han emperors after Emperor Shun 順 (r. 125–44).

\textsuperscript{48. One might even include as “working under a cloud at court” Dong Zhongshu, whose writings were attacked by Emperor Wu and by his own student; see \textit{Hanshu}, 56.2524–25.}

\textsuperscript{49. \textit{Hou Hanshu}, 1B.50, 66–67.} Compare \textit{Cambridge History of China}, 619. Guangwu did execute several officials for submitting fraudulent registers, but this had no appreciable effect on the process.
instead in our sources, aside from nasty *ad hominem* snipes and factional enmities, is remarkably little sectarian hostility between proponents of various theories, and even less discernible opposition by Han thinkers to the ideas of certain thinkers like Laozi. The fact that all literate men in Warring States shared as common intellectual property parts of what would later become the Five Classics greatly facilitated the rapid cross-fertilization of ideas in the discourse of the time, which came close to converging on a few principles for the cosmos, the body, and the body politic. Certainly, some of the best thinkers of the late Warring States (such as Han Fei) show no allegiance to any school whatsoever—because, I would argue, no such schools existed at the time. Xunzi, to take another example, lambastes figures now anachronistically labeled as “Confucians” as roundly as those once conceived as “Daoists,” logicians, or “Legalists.”

As Lewis ably demonstrates in his Chapter Seven on encyclopedic learning, coming down to Han, the strong official impulses moved in the direction of absorption, not exclusion of ideas. Han emperors and classicists alike spoke of state-sponsored learning as a woven net that would serve the state’s interests best if it caught all strains of thinking within its voluminous folds. The decision to appoint Academicians on the basis of their training in at least one of the Five Classics was obviously important (see below), but equally important is the fact that the Han proscribed no text of any persuasion, so far as we know. So those in

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50. Yang Xiong criticizes a preference for primitivism in *Fayan* 法言 1.2, for example, but this idea had been taken up by many.


52. See *Xunzi yinde* 15/6/6-16/6/20 for Xunzi's excoriation of Mo Di 墨翟 and Song Bing 宋鉼, Shen Dao 慎到, Tian Bing 田駢, Hui Shi 惠施, Deng Xi 鄧析, Zisi 子思, and Mencius, among others.

53. Of course, to some degree talk about the state’s desire to promote “broad learning” and its announced intention to “weave a tight net [to capture] omissions and lacunae” that had arisen over the course of centuries was offset by the state’s practical need to cap the number of interpretive traditions accorded formal support. For “broad learning” as the indispensable condition of the professional classcist, see *Liji* 禮記, “Ru xing” 儒行, in *Liji yinde* 禮記引得, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series No. 27 (Peiping: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1936), 41/13. For “weaving the net,” see *Hanshu*, 88.3621; and *Hou Hanshu*, 79A.2546.
imperial employ, such as Liu Xiang 劉向, continued to put in order (and thereby perpetuate) quite unConfucian texts, including the Zhan’guo ce 戰國策, not to mention their experimentation in practices condemned by many self-identified Confucian moralists (e.g., alchemy). Even our scanty extant sources show an enormous range of interpretations attached to written texts or oral traditions claiming inspiration from the classical past. Driven by the repeated losses of pre-Han and Han traditions, as well as by the unslakeable thirst of a few Han emperors for miraculous new texts to justify Han rule, inspirations were shaped by regional variations, personal predilections, factional rivalries, and the discovery of new texts written in pre-Han scripts. Variations in the reception of the many classical precedents—some irreconcilably opposed to one another—could only increase exponentially as adjustments were made to adapt the dominant classical and pseudo-classical messages for wider propagation among those considered “not yet civilized”: the young, the inexperienced, the immoral, the disinterested, and the barbarians.

This may explain why we never read in any Han text of the dynasty’s attainment of ideological unity, though unity is the explicit theoretical goal sought in quite a few influential texts, such as Yang Xiong’s Taixuan 太玄 and Ying Shao’s 應邵 Fengsu tongyi 風俗通義. In ca. 136 B.C., when Dong Zhongshu wrote his famous memorials to Emperor Wu, he stated, “At present teachers propagate strange principles; our fellow human beings hold to unusual practices; the many experts have idiosyncratic methods, and the conclusions to which they point are not identical.” Over three centuries later, the classical master Ying Shao (writing in ca. A.D. 203) lodged a similar complaint: “Each and every person has his own mind, and none achieves the proper balance.” Or, as another text informs us, “Men all use their private judgment, right and wrong has no standard, while clever opinions and slanted pronouncements have

54. At the beginning of Han, after centuries of war, Han classicists bemoaned the faulty nature of their two sources of authority: key texts were missing or nearly undecipherable, while key portions of the ancient systems of “rites and music” were irrecoverable. Over the course of the Western and Eastern Han dynasties, Han classicists were to see further dramatic losses of respected “traditions” in the wars attending the restoration and downfall of the Han, losses that made it all the harder to ascertain, let alone adhere to the Way of the Ancients. In response to these perceived gaps in classical knowledge, the process of gathering, compiling, interpreting, and inventing new “classical” materials proceeded apace in Han, but always with reference to the evolving sociopolitical, economic, and cultural scene.

57. Fengsu tongyi, 4.31. Fengsu tongyi, 4.31.
caused considerable confusion among scholars.” One would have thought that some three hundred and fifty years of a successfully imposed “Confucian synthesis” might have narrowed the range of acceptable models for theory and practice. But the most eminent Han scholars frequently justified—right up to the downfall of Eastern Han—quite disparate views on politics and ethics as “[interpretive] paths all leading to the Dao.”

Turn now to point three of the common view, the institution of the Academicians, who are usually said to have watched over the throne’s interpretive monopoly over texts. Both Qin and Han appointed Academician and literary types to court. By definition, these officials were to be men of wide learning, able to make “connections” (tong 通) between past and present practice. But these Academicians never held an especially high place at the imperial court; this is clear from the fact that many were later advanced to positions as provincial governors or censors, which were mid-level posts in the bureaucracy. So unimportant

58. Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 (Hong Kong: Taiping, 1966), 15A.4a (postface), as trans. in K.L. Tern, Postface of the Shuo wen chieh tzu, the First Comprehensive Chinese Dictionary (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1956), 17. Compare Xu Fang’s 徐防 famous contemporary statement, from a memorial of A.D. 103, which insists that even the “Academicians and students in the Academy . . . all speak from their own minds, with none following the authority of a school’s teaching” (Hou Hanshu, 44.1500). For similar comments, see Hou Hanshu, 35.1213, the appraisal of Zheng Xuan 鄭玄; and Hou Hanshu, 79A.2547, giving a general overview of Eastern Han Ru studies.

59. Fengsu tongyi 前易引得, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series, Supplement No. 10 (Peiping: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1935), 46/Xi B/3, talks of “the same goal, [reached by] different paths; the single focus, [reached] by a hundred thoughts.” See also Shiji, 121.3124, where the different interpretations all “return to one”; and Hanshu, 22.1027, for a variation on this with respect to the Six Classics. Xu Gan 徐幹 in Eastern Han is typical of those who offer praise for those who can see what is common to different categories (Zhonglun 中論, chap. 8). Compare Huainanzi, in Liu Wendian 劉文典, Huainan honglie jijie 淮南子鴻例集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1989), 2.56: “The hundred jia each have different theories. . . . Now in terms of their way of governance, Mo, Yang, Shen [Buhai], and Shang [Yang] each have one rib of the carriage canopy or spoke of the wheel. If you have them all, you possess the correct number, but if you are missing one, the whole thing does not become useless” (trans. after Mark Csikszentmihalyi, private communication, following Wang Niansun 王念孫).

60. See Hanshu, 1.313, in connection with the taixue 太學 and the boshi 博士. See also Hanshu, 88.3598, which tells us that the classicists’ job is to lun tong yi 論同異 (“assess similarities and differences”), in hopes of tracing lines of thought back to their common source.

61. This information can be gotten by comparisons of Wang Guowei 王國維, Han Wei boshi timing kao 漢魏博士題名考, in Xueshu cong bian 學術叢編 (Taipei: Yiwen, 1971), vol. 3, with Yan Gengwang 嚴耕望, Liang Han taishou cishi kao 兩漢太守刺史考 (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1968), and the three chapters devoted to the “Rulin” 儒林 (Forest of
were the Academicicians to the Han state that the office of Academician is not even mentioned in the dynastic records for eighty-three years after 134 B.C., the date when Emperor Wu required that Academicians henceforth be expert in one or more of the Five Classics. By way of comparison, most high offices are mentioned hundreds of times in the same dynastic records covering the same period. Equally troubling for adherents of the text-centered version of Han history is the explicit information included in histories of the time that several of the most famous Han classicists were not experts in texts at all. Two experts in ritual practice (liguan daifu 禮官大夫), we are told, “could not understand the [written] Rites canon.” The famous Han teacher of the Odes, Shen Pei 申培, committed none of his interpretations to writing. And the one man in Western Han accorded the honorific title as “father of the professional classicists,” Shusun Tong 叔孫通, devised rituals for the court, rather than learned disquisitions—whether oral or written—on received texts.

On the subject of the Imperial Academy, Lewis, in company with a classicists) in the Shiji, Hanshu, and Hou Hanshu. Shiji, 112.2949, the biography of Gong-sun Hong, shows how lowly placed and easily dismissed the boshi were, at least at his time. Gongsun Hong after the age of sixty was twice appointed boshi, and each time asked to give advice on foreign affairs. Also, the placement of the “Rulin” chapters in the Shiji, Hanshu, and Hou Hanshu is highly suggestive, for the chapters follow others devoted to harsh officials, eunuchs, and such. Finally, if a man of learning held any important office, he was given a separate biography in another chapter, based on his bureaucratic rank; official standing consistently trumped classical learning in the official histories, as is clear from a listing of Shen Pei’s students who held ranks as boshi and as provincial governors, commanders, and palace secretaries (Shiji, 121.3122).

62. See Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, “Rikukei rikugei to gokei: Kandai ni okeru gokei no seiritsu” 六經六藝と五經: 漢代における五經の成立, Chūgoku shigaku 中國史學 4 (1994), 139–64; “Shin Kan jidai ni okeru hakushi seido no tenkai: gokei hakushi no setchi o meguru gigi sairon” 秦漢時代における博士制度の展開: 五經博士の設置をめぐる疑義再論, Tōyōshi kenkyū 東洋史研究 53 (1995), 1–31. Fukui uses the argumentum ex silen-tio to argue that Emperor Wu never established or restored the office; I conclude instead their relative unimportance to grave matters of state. The date of 51 B.C., of course, is the date of the Shiqu 石渠 court conference convened on the classics, rites, and music; the Shiqu conference, known only from fragments, seems to have been very much like the White Tiger (Bohu) conference of A.D. 79 in its focus on rites and music.

63. Shiji, 121.3126; said of Xu Yan 徐延 and Xu Xiang 徐襄, grandsons of Master Xu of Lu, both of whom were reportedly experts in “demeanor” (rong 容). We are told that it was in this capacity that they were appointed to office; and they began a whole school of interpretation that focused on demeanor rather than textual interpretation. Hanshu, 88.3614, makes them experts not in rong but in song 頌 “praise-songs,” as song were used in ceremonial toasts, by analogy with performances and inscriptions once dedicated to the ancestors.

64. Shiji, 121.3121.

65. Talks with Martin Kern have brought home to me the significance of calling
number of scholars, still holds that the Academy’s graduates qualified for high office on the basis of their allegiance to careful textual transmission. This is, frankly, an astonishing claim. First, insufficient evidence exists to assert that the primary concern of the Academy was ever with the careful transmission or elucidation of texts. Nor was it ever the primary route to office under Han. The Academy was set up, as the Han histories make plain, as a place where candidates for relatively low-ranking scribal offices could study—and be tested on—a basic knowledge of the Chinese characters needed for governmental record-keeping and of the rhetorical flourishes that embellished imperial communications. If a candidate demonstrated mastery of a single canonical text through a test (with the Odes Classic, for instance, sporting 2,826 different characters in its stanzas), the throne could be confident of the candidate’s ability to read and write, to call up a store of past precedents, and to replicate some of the antique literary styles so highly favored at court. By the end of the first century b.c., in Western Han, the throne therefore stipulated that a quota of one hundred candidates would be chosen to fill the lower ranks of the bureaucracy from among those who had passed the Academy’s annual examinations, proving their mastery of a single classic. But at least one expert in the Han field argues that for most of Eastern Han (precisely the era when the state’s text-centered version of Confucianism supposedly triumphed), “this route of entry

Shusun Tong “the father of the Ru.” What we once took for irony we now take for an accurate, if despairing comment on the professional Ru.

66. See, e.g., Shiji, 121.3119; Hanshu, 88.3593–94. Hanshu, 88.3619, shows us that one successful test-taker at the Academy went on to be appointed zhanggu 掌古 assistant to the taishi 太史 “senior archivist.”

67. See Shiji, 121.3118–20, for the original proposal for the Academy students by Gongsun Hong. Note that the proposal suggests that students be tested on their recognition of Chinese characters; nothing is said about their understanding of the text’s content. Unfortunately, we know little about the content of the tests administered at the Academy. It is not even certain that the tests were always written. For the word count for the Odes, see Endymion Wilkinson, Chinese History: A Manual (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), 468, which also notes some 510 alternate characters. (For comparison’s sake, the longest inscriptions known on the oracle bones are some 200 characters. The longest bronze inscriptions are no more than 500 characters: e.g., the “Mao gong ding” in the Palace Museum in Taiwan, which is now considered authentic by most specialists aside from Noel Barnard, has 497 characters; and the inscriptions on the Zhongshan Zhongshan ding and fanghu bronzes of ca. 314 b.c. have 469 and 450 characters respectively.) The Lunyu 論語 has altogether only 15,883 characters in the whole text; the Documents, some 16,000. The Shiji is nearly as long as all Thirteen Classics put together (with 589,283 characters), and is thirty-three times longer than the Lunyu (Wilkinson, Chinese History, 22). Shiji, 121.3122, says that Emperor Wu liked to have fine literary phrases justify his harsh policies; hence the rise of Gongsun Hong.
[via the Academy examinations] to the civil service was almost completely closed.”68

The Academy’s location in the capital was probably vital, as it afforded the men competing for office the possibility of introductions to high-ranking officials. Such introductions could be a real boost to one’s career, since recommendation by high-ranking officials based on one’s conduct (rather than one’s ability to read and write texts) was, after heredity, the primary route to high office in Han.69 The question remains, to what extent did attendance at the Academy make candidates’ careers? Though the number of enrolled Academy students reportedly reached more than 30,000 at one time during the mid-second century A.D., only forty-nine men are listed in the Han dynastic histories as former students at the Academy.70 Certainly in Eastern Han, patronage by local and capital elites was the only sure ticket to a successful career. It seems likely—though it is hard to prove—that the Han bureaucracy had three tracks: one for the prestigious candidates from good families nominated by local recommendation as Filially Pious and Incorrupt, Flourishing Talent, and so on; one for the middle-ranking functionaries (perhaps Academy qualifications were most important here); and one for lower-level functionaries with minimal literacy.71 Three additional bits of evidence are

68. Rafe De Crespigny, “Political Protest in Imperial China: The Great Proscription of Later Han, 167–184,” Papers on Far Eastern History 11 (March, 1975), 1–36, esp. 15–17. According to de Crespigny, “this change in the significance of university examinations reflected a general decline in the university itself and in the orthodox traditions of scholarship” (p. 16). Only briefly, after Emperor Shun’s death in A.D. 144, did Dowager Empress Liang order all officials of 2000-picul to 600-picul rank to send their sons to the Academy and introduce special examinations, so that some fifty to sixty students each year could gain entry directly from the Academy into the ranks of palace courtiers without nomination by their local authorities. The Proscriptions beginning in A.D. 167 soon made attendance at the Academy a liability, rather than an asset, in attaining high office. Hans Bielenstein, The Bureaucracy of Han Times (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 140, by contrast, presumes no change in this respect from the Western Han system.

69. For the numbers of students at the Imperial Academy (taixue), see Xu Tianlin 徐天麟, Xi Han hui yao 西漢會要 (Taipei: Shijie, 1971), 25.219–21; and Xu Tianlin, Dong Han hui yao 東漢會要 (Taipei: Shijie, 1971), 11.111–14. One of many unanswered questions concerns the exponential growth in Academy numbers, which could never have been contained in the buildings on their sites (see Hou Hanshu, 79A.2547). Most “students” must have been clients of the great families. It seems doubtful that the Academy could have offered anything like classes to all these men. Possibly the growth in numbers reflects, in this time of rapid reinfeudation, the desires of talented young men not in command of impressive resources to become the clients of capital officials.


71. Bielenstein, The Bureaucracy of Han Times, 140, says that “It looks as though even
highly suggestive. First, during the two hundred years of Eastern Han, emperors reportedly paid only four visits to the Academy, though it was near the suburban altar sites that they visited annually. Second, Emperor Ming 明帝 of Eastern Han (r. 58–75), the most celebrated patron of the classicists, considered demolishing the Academy on the grounds that it was superfluous once his main ritual center, the Circular Moat (Biyong 辟雍), had been built. 72 Third, the Academy suffered severe neglect under several Eastern Han emperors, which is distinctly odd if it was considered fundamental to the empire’s administration and identity. Under Emperor An (r. 107–25), for instance, the Academicians did not teach, the students did not study, the buildings fell into total disrepair, the gardens were used as pasture, and the trees were cut for firewood. 73

It is no less significant that the Academy never succeeded (perhaps due to inadequate resources and inconsistent directions from the Han

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72. Hou Hanshu, 48.1606. The Supreme Commander Zhao Xi 趙喜 dissuaded Emperor Ming from this course of action, but it is suggestive that the foremost patron-emperor of the Ru thought the functions of the Academy could be integrated and absorbed into the new ritual center. Under Emperor Shun, a teacher famed for his “knowledge of rites and music” was appointed to oversee the taixue (Hou Hanshu, 79A.2557).

73. In a.d. 131–32, six years after Emperor An’s death, a reconstruction force of 112,000 convicts took ten months to restore or build 240 buildings on the grounds under Emperor Shun.
In stopping the wild proliferation of interpretive traditions attached to canonical texts. Only in the last years of the Eastern Han dynasty, in a.d. 175–83, when the chaos at the Academy reached mammoth proportions, was a definitive edition of Five Classics carved on stone for the benefit of the Academy students. And even then, we are told, the Stone Classics did little to diminish scholastic controversies. Notably, when the exponential growth in numbers of the students at the Imperial Academy made the Academy a potential trouble spot in the capital region, the dynasty’s response was to control personal loyalties, not to mandate strict conformity in textual matters: through legal registration, students were required to become quasi-sons to their teachers, so that the teachers could then be held legally responsible for any misconduct on the part of their students.

Point four of the conventional account of the Han synthesis imagines “universal libraries” that enlarged the reading public along with writing’s authority. Yet if the Academy in transmitting texts did not hugely enhance writing’s authority in Han, it is still less likely that the imperial libraries under Han played that role. The mere existence of imperial libraries in Han did not necessarily serve to elevate the scholastic traditions. The imperial libraries, after all, were secret archives

74. For some unknown reason, however, the Analects was printed in the Stone Classics in place of the Odes.

75. That the registry of students (mingdie 名牒) played an important role in Eastern Han is clear from Ying Shao’s Fengsu tongyi, where references to the practice occur in chaps. 3–5. Unfortunately, we know very little else about the practice, except that any official recommending a student was required to take legal responsibility for that student’s conduct, by analogy with a family head’s taking legal responsibility for the conduct of his family members. See Xu Tianlin, Dong Han hui yao, 377. Certainly, such registrations played a major role in the repeated Proscriptions of the period. See Bielenstein, The Bureaucracy of Han Times, 137–41. Note in a.d. 146 the state’s first demand that mature candidates for the Academy formally register their allegiance to the throne via jiafa (presumably allegiance to a textual tradition), rather than resting content with shifa 師法 (modelling oneself on the teacher more generally), which was undoubtedly a push (probably ineffective) for greater social control (Hanshu, 6.281).

76. Hanshu, 10.310, commenting on the events of 30 b.c., says, for example, that Liu Xin was appointed to collate “central [palace?] secret texts”; see also Hanshu, 100A.4203. We know that Ban Gu worked in the Lantai 蘭臺 (Orchid Terrace) for some twenty years (Wilkinson, Chinese History, 752). Sima Qian is said to have consulted texts in the Stone Chamber (Shiji, 130.3296); there is no reference in the Shiji to the Shiqu 石渠, which is mentioned in Hanshu, 36.1929n.8, as north of the Weiyang 未央 main audience hall, but that palace library must have existed by 51 b.c., during the reign of Emperor Xuan, since a court conference was convened there. The only Hanshu reference to the Tianluge 天祿閣 is to Yang Xiong working there (Hanshu, 87B.3580). On the “secret books” (mishu 秘書), however, there are repeated references. See
where materials of possible advantage to the throne were deposited to await the emperor’s perusal. The imperial libraries benefited general scholarship, facilitate correct textual transmission, or broaden the ranks of readers? We know that the imperial librarians were not particularly good at preserving written texts intact. In numerous instances, texts deposited in the imperial library inexplicably disappeared or were tampered with. Evidently, little value was placed on the faithful transmission of texts, even classical texts, since the dynastic histories openly report that the palace eunuchs made good money changing or inserting characters in the texts housed in the imperial libraries when scholar-officials at court wanted in-house writings to corroborate their own views on policy debates. And just as

Hanshu ji buzhu zonghe yinde 漢書及補注綜合引得, Harvard-Yenching Sinological Index Series No. 36 (Peiping: Harvard-Yenching Institute, 1940), V:06010. For Emperor Hui 惠帝 as the first emperor to start up libraries, see Xu Tianlin, Xi Han huiyao, 222.

77. Hanshu, 30.1701; Hanshu, 36.1967. (Hou Hanshu, 79A.2548, reminds us that many of the documents in the libraries were “secret texts.”) That the imperial libraries were not generally open to the public, or even to other members of the imperial bureaucracy, presents a strong contrast with libraries (1) under the Ptolemies in Alexandria; (2) possibly under the Attalyd rulers of Pergamum (Attalus I–III); and (3) certainly under Caesar Augustus in Rome which served as “public libraries” open to scholars who were sufficiently well-connected. I am indebted to Geoffrey Lloyd and Corey Brennan for this information; see also Lionel Casson, Libraries in the Ancient World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). At the Han court, as is clear from one anecdote, it was a very great honor to be admitted to work in the imperial libraries (for a scholar, it was like ascending to Penglai, the isle of immortality), and the post was viewed as a stepping stone to higher rank. The story told of Ma Rong 馬融 (79–106) is that he irritated Dowager Empress Deng 鄧后 by writing a satirical poem, and “he was stuck in the Eastern Lodge for ten years and not allowed to transfer” (Hou Hanshu, 23.822; 60A.1954). That story suggests that the post of imperial librarian was not high in the imperial bureaucracy. In a related area, Nathan Sivin and Geoffrey Lloyd, in their forthcoming The Way and the Word, draw our attention to the public character of forensic debate in Greece, contrasting it with the court location of debate in early China. But the contrasts are not absolute: we know that a few famous texts (such as the Lishi chunqiu) were hung in the marketplace for public perusal and evaluation. We have also the text of the Xunzi, which openly criticizes Mencius and at least eleven other thinkers of the pre-imperial era, and the Hanfeizi, which openly criticizes Hanfei’s teacher, Xunzi.

78. For example, we know that scholars smuggled their own versions into the classics by bribing the librarians of the Orchid Terrace. See Bielenstein, Luoyang in Later Han Times, 69. (By the way, this account is not necessarily aimed against the eunuchs, since many scholar-officials were apparently involved in the scandal.)
we find little regard for the fixed written text, there was no concept of fixed authorship. In two important cases, key texts (one a Confucian canon and the other a state-sponsored interpretive tradition) were recognized as fabrications of contemporary date, but they were nonetheless awarded official patronage, since their contents were “in the spirit of” genuinely older texts describing hoary antiquity.79

The standard tale about textualization in Han tells of organized “schools” (chief among them the “Confucian”) dedicated to—indeed, defined by—the intact transmission of key written texts ascribed to their founders and chief disciples. At best, this is an oversimplification since (1) few well-defined textual communities can be said to have existed prior to the demise of Eastern Han; (2) the jia known from the fifth century B.C. through Han were organized, with one possible exception, more around individual thinkers’ orientations to political rule than around the careful transmission of a particular text or written interpretive tradition;80 (3) numerous accounts depict students travelling from...
master to master to acquire knowledge; and (4) educational programs long after the Han trained men in rituals, recitation modes, oral rhetoric and argumentation, the polite arts, and sometimes in the arcana, as well as in textual traditions, both oral and written.81

Moreover, Han descriptions show that, though much oral instruction must have been based ultimately on written texts, nearly all teaching—even at the highest level—continued to be done orally. The standard phrase used of a master is that he “can talk it [i.e., explicate it]” (*neng yan zhi* 能言之).82 Written texts had to be copied by hand with permission of the owner—permission not always granted since the ownership of certain written texts was considered a valuable asset for those few families who made scholarship “the family business.”83 Texts written on bamboo

from the Western Zhou period or even before. Texts to Sima Qian, even the Odes and *Documents*, were important mainly insofar as they provided descriptions or contexts by which to explain these antique usages; writing in the sense of “literary composition” was in many cases an auxiliary art. Note that Sima Tan’s quite restricted use of the term *jia* (later revised by Liu Xiang) tallies perfectly with that of other classical masters in Han times, especially Yang Xiong. See Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions.”

81. Only the Mohists constituted a well-defined and cohesive group (if not “school”) in the pre-Qin period; and in the closing days of Eastern Han, those trained at Jingzhou and by Zheng Xuan seem to have defined themselves by their school affiliations. 82. The phrase “can talk it” is said of Master Gaotang, a specialist in the rite texts, in *Shiji*, 121.3126; and of Fu Sheng, a specialist in the *Documents*, in *Hanshu*, 88.3603. See also *Shiji*, 121.3125; *Shiji*, 121.3118, which describes all of Ru learning in terms of the masters who can “talk” (*yan*) the Five Canons; and *Shiji*, 101.2746n.2, which only makes sense if we understand the canonical passages as being read out in Qi dialect. Many passages also talk of the masters chanting (*song* 諏) the texts and traditions to their students. For example, the description of two famous teachers, Dong Zhongshu in the mid-second century B.C. and Ma Rong in the late second century A.D., is very nearly the same; both taught by chanting the texts, which were then transmitted through recitation by their chief pupils to the relative beginners. See *Shiji*, 121.3127; *Hou Hanshu*, 35.1207; and *Guanzi* (*Guoxue jiben congshu* 国学基本叢書 ed.; Taibei: Shangwu, 1968), *pian* 篇 59, “Dizi zhi” 弟子職 (Duties of students). The impression that teaching was oral is strengthened by a remark in *Hanfeizi*, 14.71: “Now even if the ruler of men does not teach the officers orally, nor with his own eyes spy out the traitors. . . .” In a famous pictorial brick from Sichuan that shows a master expounding on the classical traditions (see Lucy Lim et al., *Stories of China’s Past. Han Dynasty Pictorial Tomb Reliefs and Archaeological Objects from Sichuan Province* [San Francisco: Chinese Culture Foundation, 1987], 122), the master (unlike his disciples) holds no bamboo bundles or silk scrolls in his hand. Contrast the famous painting of Fu Sheng teaching the *Documents* (attributed to Wang Wei 王維; probably of Song date; now in the Osaka City Museum), where the master holds a text prominently in his hands. Interestingly enough, *Hanshu*, 30.1710, seems to regard the loss of traditions under pre-Han as a loss of *texts*, not of *practices*—in direct contrast to the *Shiji* accounts.

83. See the story of Kong Anguo in *Shiji*, 121.3125; also that of Ouyang Xi 歐陽歙 in
strips (silk was virtually unknown outside the royal palaces) were expensive and difficult to procure, particularly outside the Han capitals and especially before the second century A.D. With bamboo strips, there was the added problem of portability. Endymion Wilkinson estimates that the Shi ji history in 130 chapters would have occupied some 150–300 bamboo bundles (with bundles weighing several pounds), making it well nigh impossible to circulate long texts as complete works. Given the rarity, high price, and bulk of most texts, the only “private” book collections of which we hear before the second century A.D. belonged to aristocrats or semi-legendary figures, except for family book holdings mentioned in the cruder polemics fulminating against learning’s expansion outside the ranks of the hereditary aristocracy.

Hou Hanshu, 79A.2556, whose family for eight generations had served as Academicians. It was said of Dong Zhongshu that he was unusual in that he made scholarship his only business (Shiji, 121.3128): “to the end of his life, he did not engage in any money-making ventures; he made improvement of his learning and writing books his business.” Ca. A.D. 100, we perhaps see a change, in that more writings are mentioned in connection with the scholar-officials who also had successful careers, and writings are increasingly listed in the position where children would be, as “offspring” of the family. But many “big families” made landed wealth and high office their main sources of revenue and status.

84. The first book market was said to be in Luoyang in the Western Han (Wilkinson, Chinese History, 253). Wang Chong visited bookstalls in his own day in Luoyang (ca. A.D. 95), according to Hou Hanshu, 49.1629. Guangwu is said to have brought to the capital of Luoyang 2,000 carts of books altogether, but supposedly in A.D. 196, when the emperor in his haste fled the capital, he carried out only some seventy carts, some part of which were ruined by rain in transit or when the silk was used for other purposes. The rest of the imperial libraries’ contents went up in smoke when Dong Zhuo 董卓 burned the palaces. See Fengsu tongyi, yi wen 佚文, 2.99.

85. I have been trying to find the average weight for a bamboo bundle, but as bundles varied so widely, with the typical bundle having between thirty and sixty bamboo strips, I have not yet had much success. For more information, see Endymion Wilkinson, Chinese History: A Manual, Revised and Enlarged (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 446. Given the weight of bamboo bundles, the notion of the “big book” designed to include numerous pian comes relatively late; even in Eastern Han, the typical bamboo-bundle texts are small, as can be seen from the depictions of Confucius’s disciples at the Wu Family shrines.

86. Those said to have owned libraries include Confucius, Mozi, Lü Buwei, Liu An, and the King of Hejian 河間王. Among “cruder polemics” I include the statement in Hanfeizi, 32.196, that “half the people of Zhongmou” have left their fields to “engage in literary pursuits.” Hanfeizi, 49.347, rants that private families all possess copies of the penal code (“the laws of Shang Yang and Guan Zhong”) but the state is getting poorer and poorer, as it lacks farmers; further, that private families all have copies of the books of Sunzi and Wu Qi, but the armies are getting weaker. “Thus in the state of an enlightened ruler, there are no belles-lettres on inscribed bamboo slips; the instrument of education is the law. There is no talk of former kings and the people’s models
Contrary to the usual views, which assume that written texts gained unprecedented authority in Han, “reading and writing” (i.e., basic textual mastery) were held to be “elementary learning” (xiaoxue 小學). Text-learning was the precondition to elite cultivation, but it was hardly a sufficient definition of it. Palace eunuchs and private slaves could be highly educated; indeed such “petty persons” were among the first to be honored as specialists in writing exquisite calligraphic forms. We historians lag far behind the art historians when we fail to credit some part of writing’s traditional authority to the pleasing patterns it formed on ritual items. Equally pertinent is the fact that not a few of the Han’s are the police” (trans. slightly modified from Christoph Harbsmeier’s forthcoming translation of Hanfei [Yale University Press]).

87. See *Hanshu*, 30.1720, for a summary of the works classified as “elementary learning.”

88. This is the proper context into which to fit legends about the First Emperor’s reading through many pounds of documents per day. As Xinyu 新語 (*Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 ed.), A/10b, insists: “To work hard at learning, intoning the Odes and Documents—that’s something any ordinary man can do”; trans. Ku Mei-kao, “A New Discourse on the Art of Government: Being a Translation of *Hsien yu* of Lu Chia (?–178 B.C.) of the Western Han Dynasty” (M.A. thesis, Australian National University, 1974), 96.

89. For slaves as “office workers,” see Ch’ü T’ung-tsu, *Han Social Structure* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), 145. For one anecdote showing that even the slaves of a certain Ru master were literate, see Liu Yi-ch’ing, *Shih shuo hsìn yü*: A New Account of the Tales of the World, trans. Richard Mather (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 94; for learned eunuchs, adept in framing the language of edicts, overseeing the correction of imperial editions, or submitting elegant memorials full of classical citations, see *Hou Hanshu*, 78.2513, 2519, 2528, 2533. Note in addition that Yang Xiong in *Fayan* 法言 (*Xinbian zhuzi jicheng* 新編諸子集成 ed.; Taibei: Shijie, 1978), 2.4, denounced as “children’s amusements” the carving of seal characters. The Hongdumen xue 鴻都門學 (Academy of the Vast Capital Gate) was established by Emperor Ling 灵帝 in A.D. 178 so that young men might be trained in the arts of writing government documents, which often required poetry and calligraphic forms. Many shi, including Cai Yong 蔡邕, objected to the establishment of the Academy, charging that its students were “petty persons” being trained in trivial pursuits (*Hou Hanshu*, 60B.1992). Only in the late second century A.D. do we see elites beginning to take great pride in putting brush to paper or silk. For further information, see Nylan, “Calligraphy.”

90. This observation draws upon Robert W. Bagley, “Meaning and Explanation,” *Archives of Asian Art* 46 (1993), 6–26. As it would be hard to imagine a situation where a text-centered culture (e.g., Shang) evolved into a less text-centered culture (Warring States and Han), which then became more text-centered again, it is interesting to see that two recent papers by David Keightley seem ready to query the assumption that Shang oracle bone inscriptions represent documents gathered for state archives. See Keightley, “Making a Mark: Reflections on the Sociology of Reading and Writing in the Late Shang and Zhou” (paper prepared for the “Sociology of Writing” conference at the University of Chicago, November 6–7, 1999); and “The Diviners’ Notebooks:
most prominent public figures, including self-identified Confucian moralists, went on record condemning what they regarded as an over-preoccupation with memorizing, composing, or teaching commentarial traditions on the state-sponsored canon, which they believed could detract from single-minded efforts at self-cultivation. Xu Gan 徐幹 at the end of Eastern Han said, for example, “Those classical scholars who only practice book learning are not worth looking up to.”91 True men of worth were told to aspire to higher models than the mere scribes and scribblers, whose preoccupation with textual matters precluded the desirable breadth of understanding found in the true sage.92 As a rule,

Shang Oracle-bone Inscriptions as Secondary Sources” (paper prepared for the Paris conference celebrating the 100th anniversary of the discovery of oracle bones, September 24, 1999). In my view, it is entirely possible that writing somehow “fixed” the divination rituals and that the inscriptions, even when ritually housed, were never consulted after their carving. (Rosalind Thomas, Literacy and Orality, chap. 3, esp. p. 94, discusses the crucial distinction between making records and making documents, where there is the expectation that documents will be consulted later.)

Turning to the Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, some inscriptions were written across several different bronzes, which were then separated, or were written in different directions across bronzes. Others, as Keightley notes in “Making a Mark,” 22, were “found deep in the dark interior of certain Western Zhou ritual bronzes,” in places where “it would have been virtually impossible for those who used the vessels in the rites to read.” (This subject is intelligently discussed by Lothar von Falkenhausen in Early China 18 [1993].) Such facts suggest that their inscriptions cannot be “documents” as part of an “archive” in any modern sense belonging to those two words; the inscriptions, like the wine and food, were for the ancestors to savor. (With the inscribed bells, by contrast, the inscriptions appear on the outside surface, where they can be carried on the wind.) They suggest also that the semantic meaning of certain proclamations and incantations was conveyed chiefly through oral recitation, rather than through reading. See also David Keightley, “Art, Ancestors, and the Origins of Writing in China,” Representations 56 (Fall 1996), 68–95.

91. Zhonglun, Preface, probably by Xu Gan himself or an immediate disciple (trans. after John Makeham’s forthcoming translation [Yale University Press]). The passage continues: “Yet there are many who are only too happy to look up to them [the bookworms and pedants] and only a few who argue against doing so.” Prior to the passage cited, the preface speaks of the great scholar who commits “sayings of excellence” to memory: “During the day he meticulously studies the classics and their apocrypha, and at night one by one, he observes the constellations. He investigates the primordial chaos . . . [and] he makes long-term considerations. . . . What time does he have to make a clamor about philological matters or to work at securing a hollow reputation by joining the ranks of vulgar fellows?” See also chap. 10 in the same work on the importance of dress as exemplifying virtue.

92. Sima Qian traces contemporary moral decline to two factors: (1) the imperial bureaucracy under Emperor Wu tested candidates for public office on their mastery of written forms, rather than their commitment to the values reflected in classical literature; and so (2) the Ru ranks had lately been filled by careerists willing to promote the “wealth and power” agenda of Emperor Wu, ever since Emperor Wu made
rulers, officials, and other men who enjoyed a measure of social standing did not define themselves mainly by their mastery of texts. Like Socrates in the *Phaedrus*, they might be expected to object to the inherent “deadness” of the book, meaning its inability to answer new questions or expand upon old statements—and object they did.

The literary sources constantly make the point that to be civilized (or, in the case of the “barbarians,” to be sinicized) was to study and then exemplify the rites and music associated with antiquity. This is demonstrated by the very passage that is invariably cited—but only in part—by those asserting writing’s unparalleled authority in Han. The text has Emperor Ming of Eastern Han (r. 58–75) lecturing on the classics and handing out written texts to the palace guards (the *Classic of Filial Piety*, or *Xiaojing* 孝經, whose inculcation was meant to ensure that the guards remained loyal to the throne). But few take note of either the ritual context or the performative aspect of Emperor Ming’s text-related activities, as mentioned in the passage. The emperor wears his Communicating with Heaven hat; he visits the Bright Hall, where he holds a ceremonial audience; he ascends the Numinous Terrace, to signify his connection with the celestial harmonies; and so on.93 Public performance and oral rhetoric play at least as important a role in this passage as any mention of written texts. It is no coincidence that many Han imperial institutions having to do with written texts were put under the jurisdiction of the Ministers of Rites (the *taichang* 太常). (Chao Cuo 朝錯, when dispatched to recover the pre-Qin *Documents*’ traditions from Master Fu Sheng 伏生, was a staff-member in that office.)94

According to the leading classical masters in Han—men who authored many texts themselves—true men of worth were to exemplify social patterns worthy of emulation, patterns publicly expressed primarily through ritual and music, for which written texts served generally as aids to memory over the generations.95 Texts doubtless were deemed

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93. *Hou Hanshu*, 79A.2545–46. An interesting passage in the *Liji* lists all the things to be borne with the left hand held up, including writing tablets, stalks of dried flesh, flutes, pillows, bows, and so on. No special distinction seems to have been accorded writing or writing tools (*Liji yinde* 17/20).
94. *Shiji*, 121.3124; *Hanshu*, 88.3603, 3610.
95. *Shiji*, 121.3119, shows, for example, that the Imperial Academicians’ “disciples”
worthy of preservation insofar as they authenticated the genealogies and ideologies that determined status of all sorts. But ultimately texts were insufficient and unreliable guides to behavior. There was not only the problem of linguistic inadequacy, which was widely recognized. It was a commonplace also that written texts in general—even those transmitted from the sages of old—were inherently problematic teaching tools, being liable to loss, forgery, and misinterpretation. And while official tallies and private contracts proved extraordinarily useful in certain transactions, in the end only public performance was a completely trustworthy index to men’s aspirations and intentions, and only a teacher of tremendous insight could weigh the respective merits of different writings properly. Thus, we must conclude, writing in many

were to be appointed and later advanced on the basis of their (1) knowledge of rites and music; (2) loyalty to the throne; and (3) good reputations. While at the Academy, they were to be tested on their acquisition of learning in the “arts” (a term that can refer to either the Six Canons or the Six Polite Arts). For the canons as aids to memory, one might compare the instructive work on medieval Europe by M.J. Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Building on the work of Francis Yates, Carruthers show convincingly that medieval writers never considered writing a substitute for memory, but rather an aid to memory. No medieval text, she points out, makes a distinction between the act of writing on the memory and writing on some surface. Writing in itself was of no particular significance; significance was attached to important teachings which had been preserved in memory, thought about and commented on, and which thereby had become an important cultural resource. The purpose of reading, reciting, or listening to a text was to see through the text to the spirit of the author, then to internalize that spirit in one’s own self. This corresponds closely to Yang Xiong’s attitudes toward reading and writing in Han China.

96. See, e.g., Zhou yi yinde 44/Xi A/12, a passage treated by Lewis in his chap. 6, pp. 254–55; the remark attributed to the Documents canon in Hanshu, 36.1966; Fengsu tongyi, 2.9; Hanfeizi, 34.238, which considers the problem of “empty words”; and Hanfeizi, 32.209, which criticizes over-credulity with respect to texts. For stories that treat past traditions with skepticism, see Michael Nylan, “Han Classicists Writing in Dialogue about Their Own Tradition,” Philosophy East and West 47.2 (1996), 133–88.

97. See, e.g., Mencius 7B/2; Hanfeizi, chaps. 32–33, which contain numerous anecdotes designed to demonstrate the unreliability of writing; Hanfeizi, 47.328, which speaks about the problems when “writings are too concise or written laws too elliptical”; and Hanfeizi, 48.336, which says, “It is the nature of statements that they become true because many believe them.” Certainly, the main point of Sima Qian’s interspersing the full texts of the First Emperor’s stele inscriptions with Sima Qian’s descriptions of the emperor’s conduct is to remind us that texts can lie. Of course, many thinkers railed equally against the pernicious oral persuasions that “create disorder and anarchy in the world” (e.g., Xunzi yinde 15/6/1–2).

98. Xunzi yinde 11/4/52. See, for example, Mencius 7A/21, which characterizes the noble man in terms of his ability to “render his message intelligible without words”; Xunzi yinde 5/2/38, 24/8/105, 87/23/6; Fayan 1.1–2; and Hanshu, 36.1971, which insists
areas enjoyed no special authority over and above either speech or public practice—though the tide probably began to turn in favor of writing’s role by roughly the first century a.d. Doubtless our preoccupation with three early examples (Confucius, the Supreme Sage; Sima Qian, China’s greatest historian; and Wang Chong, later regarded—contrary to Han assessments—as the Han’s most original thinker) has blinded us to the main point made by these men’s stories: they reportedly devoted their best efforts, we are told, to composing texts that were far too long to memorize, precisely because the more usual paths to promoting their ideas via public service and oral rhetoric had been denied them.99

All this is not to deny that the authority of the written word was growing in pre-Han and Han China. Based on present evidence, we can discern two possible watersheds in the slow transition toward a more text-based culture: ca. 300 b.c. and ca. a.d. 100. Roughly 300 b.c. is when the contemporary records begin to mention explicitly that a good education requires young princes to know how to read and write as well as to perform ritual.100 It is when we first find long texts buried in tombs along with their occupants (although we should keep in mind that of 7,000 excavated Chu tombs dating from the pre-imperial and

that the Way resides in worthy humans with great aspirations. Yang Xiong, ever mindful of the proliferation of competing ethical visions propounded in a broad spectrum of written texts purporting to be authoritative, compared texts to more mundane goods whose real value would have to be “weighed in the balance.” Not texts, but teachers, would distinguish good from bad. And the quality of a man’s teachers, not the number of texts at his command, would determine a person’s ethical character. So while Yang in his own works set a standard for elegant writing, he was quick to express his utter disdain for literary techniques that relied upon memorization and regurgitation—the mere trappings of culture. See also the story told of Mozi, who felt no compunction to consult the many books in his library once he had truly understood the principles of the cosmos, as reported in the “Guiyi” 貴義 chap. of the Mozi. This emphasis on the importance of a teacher or tutor who will lead others through the difficult parts of the ritual of reading may go back to Shang times, Keightley speculates in “Making a Mark,” 37.

99. Note that I do not believe that Confucius composed one or more texts, but traditions recorded in various Han accounts, including his Shiji biography, credit him with the composition of the Chunqiu, the “Great Commentary” (“Xici”) to the Changes, and several other texts; see Shiji, 47.1935-37.

100. I have only just begun a search of pre-Han literature, but the earliest appearance of the term liuyi 六藝 (Six Arts) known to me seems to come from the Shiji, though Analects 1/6 mentions the “arts” (yi). (Lewis’s talk of “Sima Qian’s curriculum” in Shiji, 130.5297, is odd indeed.) The young prince in the Guoyu is to study the histories of the state, rhetoric, precedents, and the legal code, according to Guoyu, 17.191; see also Liji yinde 12/52. It is noteworthy that as late as the Hanfeizi, 10.46, the standard expression for kingly rule is to tingzhi 聽治 “listen (and so attend) to good rule” or tingyan 聽言 “listen to proposals.” That this literally refers to “listening” to a reading of bureaucratic
early imperial period, only twenty tombs include manuscripts of any length). It is when we first hear that specialists in written traditions are necessary adornments to the entourages of princes and kings—along with dwarfs, jesters, and jugglers. It is when texts of great length in new formats less amenable to memorization began to be composed. It is the date when there arose the so-called language crisis—an awareness of the difference between names, words, and real things—a crisis which at least one expert links to the greater ubiquity of writing. And accounts and policy papers is made quite clear by a later anecdote in the same work, Hanfeizi, 35.259, where the king “listens to the accounts (tingji 听计), though there are more than he can listen to in a single session.” See also Guoyu, 1.3, where the ruler hears many sorts of different oral presentations when attending to policy matters; also the numerous Zuo references to the “duke being pleased” (gong yue 公悦) with good speeches (e.g., Chunqiu jingzhuan yinde 136/Xi 28/23, Zuo; 202/Xuan 14/fu; 223/Cheng 6/fu 2). The Hanfeizi at the same time speaks of several rulers who can read, including King Zhao of Wei (r. 295–76 b.c.; Hanfeizi, 32.212); also, of written submissions made to the states’ highest ministers, including their prime ministers (Hanfeizi, 32.208). (By comparison, in Europe, it was not before the Renaissance that kings and princes began to make it a practice to read documents for themselves!)

101. I am indebted to Lai Guolong, a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Art History at the University of California at Los Angeles, for the foregoing statement; and for supplying the additional tabulations. By Lai’s count, twenty Chu tombs from the Warring States period contain writings on bamboo or silk (with six of those tombs containing fewer than ten bamboo strips); five tombs from the Qin dynasty; and seventeen from the Han (excluding the frontier military stations). Many other tombs contain a variety of valuable items, including ritual bronzes and jades; admittedly, many of the tombs of the nobility had been looted, but the grave-robbers of the contemporary anecdotes were looking for precious metals and stones, not texts.

102. For example, the court of the Lord of Chunshen 春申君, according to some legends, included literary men, as well as other sorts of entertainers (Shiji, 78.2395; 74.2346-47). The specialities of the figures at Jixia 稷下 (customarily, if erroneously identified as the Jixia “Academy” in many modern studies, including Writing and Authority, pp. 33, 75-78) were equally mixed. For a definitive review of the material on jixia, see Nathan Sivin, “The Myth of the Naturalists,” in his Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China (Great Yarmouth: Variorum, 1995), 1–33, esp. 19–26.

103. The old formats greatly facilitated memorization; as late as the Hanfeizi, for example, whole chapters of the text are rhymed. For the implications of the language crisis and its relation to writing, see David R. Olson, The World on Paper: The Conceptual and Cognitive Implications of Writing and Reading (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), chap. 4, esp. 71–76. Gongsun Long’s 公孫龍 work and some of the early chapters of the Zhuangzi 莊子 seem still to be making sense of a world in which words have become things in themselves, subjects of philosophical reflection as well as objects of definition. Also notable in fourth century b.c. texts is the use of huo yue 或曰 “another says” for variant versions, for “traditional cultures treat alternative expressions of the same sense as being ‘the same’” while literate ones only consider the stricter criterion of verbatim repetition as the same (Olson, The World on Paper, 87, citing R. Finnegan, Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context [1977]).
it is around this time also that the eye began its gradual ascent to dominance over the ear in theoretical discussions of perceptiveness.\(^{104}\)

The present evidence suggests that another critical shift toward a more text-based culture came in the first century A.D. It was then that the term *wen* 文 (admirable pattern for emulation) was deftly shaped by some literati, Ban Gu 班固 and Wang Chong among them, in order to assert the primacy of the literary heritage (also *wen*) over other sorts of social and cosmic patterning.\(^{105}\) And it was then that the histories recorded a concurrent shift in the classicists' own sense of cultivated identity, moving gradually from an emphasis on rites and music to one on literary texts. A line-by-line comparison of the chapters specifically devoted to the professional classicists in two standard Han histories easily demonstrates this. The *Shiji* (dated 100 B.C.) associates the Ru way primarily with the practice of rites and music, the *Hanshu* 漢書 (dated A.D. 100) equates it with a knowledge of texts. For example, the *Shiji* speaks of the importance of the Six Polite Arts (*liuyi* 六藝; only one of which was writing) to cultivation, while the parallel passage in the *Hanshu* speaks instead of “the texts of the Six [written] Classics,” and then—lest we overlook the importance of writing—the *Hanshu* nails it down by lauding “the written records of Kingly Teachings.”\(^{106}\) Such comparisons of

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104. Music and the ear’s training to perceive fine music dominate discussions of cultivation in the early texts, but the ear’s domination slowly yields to that of the eye. Most have assumed that the introduction of Buddhism is largely responsible for this change, but a growing dependence on reading is an equally plausible factor. For the changing role of music in early Chinese culture, see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music: Chime Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Kenneth deWoskin, *A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1982); Robert Bagley, “Percussion”; and Martin Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zzeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1997).

105. Somewhat confusing is Lewis’s shifting account of the *wen/shi* 文實 relation (pp. 101, 141–44, 236, 272–73, etc.). For more methodical observations, see Martin Kern, “Ritual, Text, and the Formation of the Canon: Historical Transitions of *wen* in Early China,” forthcoming in *Young Pao*, which shows that *wen* 文 more often referred to social and cosmic pattern than to “writing” until mid-Eastern Han; also that *wenzhang* 文章 did not come to refer primarily to literary writings until mid-Eastern Han. Kern’s hypothesis is confirmed by remarks in Li Zehou 李澤厚 with Liu Gangji 劉綱紀, *Liang Han meixue shi* 兩漢美學史 (Taipei: Jinfeng, 1987), 198; also, by a careful reading of the texts on *wen* gathered in *Zhongguo meixueshi ziliao anbian* 中國美學史資料案編 (Taipei: Mingwen, 1983).

106. Compare *Hanshu*, 88.3592, and *Hou Hanshu*, 79A.2545. (A second version of the second story found there has these candidates for public office “carrying on their backs” Confucius’s very own ritual vessels as they go to profess their allegiance.)
parallel passages frequently prove very illuminating on the subject of the literate elite’s own changing conception of classical learning. To take another instance, one entry (dated to ca. 100 B.C.) tells us that when the classicists from Confucius’s home state of Lu went to offer their services to a contender for the throne during the civil wars preceding Han, they “carried the Kong family ritual vessels in order to express their allegiance”; by this gesture, they signified their readiness to place their highly ritualized way of life at the service of the contender. But a mere two hundred years later, we are told, during the civil wars preceding Eastern Han, the classicists “carried their [divination?] charts and written texts” (tu shu 圖書), when heading for the camp of the Eastern Han founder. Example after example of this shift in thinking about written texts can be culled from the dynastic histories and other Han literary works. Once we begin looking for it, the evidence crops up everywhere. And so far in my own investigations, it is only in mid-Eastern Han that we begin to have unambiguous references to scholastic lineages increasingly focused on textual transmission and to the literary heritage as the paramount form of human patterning. In the centuries prior to the first century a.d., entire treatises can be written on wen 文 and wenxue 文學 that do not even mention literary texts in connection with social and cosmic patterning.107

If we speculate about the reasons why written texts might have achieved a new preeminence in the first century a.d., three events spring immediately to mind: first, the steady improvement in the quality of writing materials over the course of the first century B.C. until ca. A.D. 100, when serviceable, less expensive paper suitable for fine writing appeared;108 second, the formation of explicit grammars and dictionaries...
in the first century B.C., culminating in the Shuowen jiezi 说文解字 project of ca. A.D. 100;¹⁰⁹ and third, the creation of a rhetorical formulation at the beginning of the first century A.D. that favored written texts greatly over oral transmission. Perhaps a few words of explication are in order on paper and the formation of dictionaries. Centralized bureaucratic states, let alone empires, had always required careful record-keeping, but we would expect writing to gain in stature once better writing instruments and cheap paper were available. For such technical innovations made the production of multiple copies of the same text easier, and the existence of multiple copies in turn dramatically increased the likelihood that a specific text would be handed down intact through the ages. The chances that one could by putting brush to paper make a statement “for all time” rose appreciably, in other words, and the probable effect of this can hardly be overestimated, given writing’s age-old function of commemoration. At the same time, the formation of lexicons and dictionaries, and most probably also the appearance of those commentaries of quite stupendous length, represent thoughtful responses to a growing awareness of the real limitations of the written word to capture nuance and meaning.¹¹⁰

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¹⁰⁹. The Erya 禹雅 (at least the first part) dates to the third century B.C., according to Bernhard Karlgren and South Coblin; Yang Xiong’s Fangyan 方言, to ca. A.D. 5; and the Shuowen, to A.D. 100. (Nothing more than the title is known of the dictionary attributed to Sima Xiangru.) See Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 96 and 429. Tradition also ascribes the new developments in the conventions for the punctuation of texts to Ma Rong, but those traditions are too hazy to serve as firm evidence. According to Jack Goody, The Interface between the Oral and the Written (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), passim, only when the written script is taken as model for language can there be written explicit logics, grammars, and dictionaries. According to Olson, The World on Paper, 88, such developments reflect the growing awareness that the logographic script cannot completely capture the full meaning that can be imparted by oral speech. “The problem for writing then becomes that of inventing devices . . . which can compensate for what is lost” (p. 111). “Texts written to circumvent the limits of simple transcription are, by definition, texts written to be read” (p. 113).

¹¹⁰. According to Olson, The World on Paper, 95: “To make a written text clear, this must be ‘edited in’ by descriptive commentary and by the elaboration of a meta-
Regarding the early persuasions in favor of writing’s supreme author-
ity, I would mention the classical master Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 B.C.—A.D. 23). Liu Xin was the first, so far as we know, to offer—for factional reasons—a cogent (if entirely facile) argument sharply distinguishing textual from oral transmission. Liu insisted that a stark choice lay between the fragmentary truths contained in longstanding oral traditions eventually transcribed in Han script and truths supposedly preserved in their entirety through the medium of written texts, even when those texts had been unaccountably lost for long periods of time. Liu Xin termed it a question of evidence: written texts were always better than oral texts, for they did not merely record “what had been passed along by hearsay” but “what had been personally wit-
nessed.” (It beggars belief to think that Liu was this naive, but his polemic against conventional attitudes toward writing required such a statement from him in this specific case.) To trust to oral transmission was, he said, to “turn one’s back on written records transmitted [from the past]”—an error compounded since “the level of detailed knowledge [in the two types of texts, oral and written] could never be the same.” In the court debate, Liu Xin’s remarks failed to carry the day, but he may eventually have won the conceptual war, in that later writers such as Wang Chong and Ge Hong 葛洪 cited his rationale when they came to argue—against contemporary convention—for writing’s greater authority.

language indicating how the text is to be taken. In the absence of such commentary, the reader is faced with the task of determining how the text is to be taken. A naive reader, faced with a text, may be tempted, indeed was tempted . . . to ascribe whatever effect the text had on him or her as being the meaning intended by the writer.”

111. Liu Xin, of course, was a key figure at the court of Emperor Ai 哀帝 (7–1 B.C.), when the wrangling over the Archaic Script edition of the Zuozhuan began; see Hanshu, 36.1967–72.

112. The Western Han Fuyang 阜陽 Odes provides a good example of a standard text showing many variant characters, whose phonetic differences do not reflect a local dialect. See “Fuyang Hanjian Shijing” 阜陽漢簡詩經, Wenwu 1984.8, 1–12; Hu Pingsheng 胡平生 and Han Ziqiang 韓自強, “Fuyang Hanjian Shijing jianlun” 阜陽漢簡詩經簡論, Wenwu 1984.8, 13–21.

113. The transcribed oral transmissions, of course, were the so-called Modern Script canons sponsored by the Han court and the written texts that had survived minus their oral interpretations were the so-called Archaic Script texts. For further information, see n. 78.

114. See Wang Chong, Lunheng, esp. chaps. 82–85, whose contents as they relate to writing have been summarized in Nylan, “Calligraphy,” 41–44. Ge Hong, Baopuzi 抱樸子, “Shang bo” 尚薄, asserts that written texts are at least as important as virtuous
The increasingly sharp division between writing and speech and the growing preference for writing over speech were probably aided by two related phenomena in mid-Han. First, the occasional finds of pre-Han Archaic Script characters preserved on bronze, jade, stone, and silk must have underscored the notion that, at least in happy circumstances, writing preserved the genuine Way of the Ancients precisely for posterity. And second, Han scholastics showed an increasing taste for composing texts of truly phenomenal length in new styles that lacked the multiple features—parallelism, rhyme, binomial phrases, and so on—which had made long texts in early periods relatively easy to memorize and recite.\footnote{These long written texts in new formats included many very long commentaries to the Classics and explications of the penal code. The \textit{Hou Hanshu} biography of Ying Shao shows us his phenomenal production of written texts, with some 136 \textit{pian} attributed to him (\textit{Hou Hanshu}, 48.1615). My working hypothesis depends upon this sort of evidence. The “Rulin” chapter in the \textit{Shiji} (\textit{Shiji} 121) tells us which canonical texts the masters specialized in (though some of these texts were possibly thought of as oral). The \textit{Hanshu} “Rulin” chapter (\textit{Hanshu} 88) shows an increasing number of masters writing their own texts in response to the texts they teach (e.g., \textit{Hanshu}, 88.3597, the example of Ding Kuan \textit{丁覲}; \textit{Hanshu}, 88.3604, the example of Zhou Kan \textit{周勘} writing on Five Phases theory). By the time of the compilation of the \textit{Hou Hanshu}, the biographical traditions relating to the classical masters are more preoccupied with their written compositions, and writings are treated as the “progeny” of their authors.}

Given the stiff competition for imperial office during the first and second centuries a.d., calls for “broad learning” meant that well-trained men had to have at least a nodding acquaintance with an ever greater number of these new sorts of long texts if they were to count as learned.\footnote{See the edict of a.d. 57 by Guangwu, on the \textit{zhangju} being too long; citation in Xu Tianlin, \textit{Dong Han huiyao}, 134.} So memorization and chanting very gradually gave way to a greater focus on reading (though the chanting of texts was still the norm long after the Han). Solitary (not to mention silent) reading, meanwhile, gradually produced a very different relationship with texts, a phenomenon we have only begun to explore.\footnote{Wang Chong (27–97) is one of the first we know of to roam the capital’s bookstalls in search of texts to read on his own, and to base his own authority on years of solitary reading and writing, after schooldays spent under the direction of Ban Biao \textit{班彪}, father to Ban Gu. See Jean-Pierre Drège, “La lecture et l’écriture en Chine et la xylographie,” \textit{Études Chinoises} 10.1–2 (1991), 77–112. On p. 103, Drège suggests that “the domination of the eye over the ear in the practice of individual reading” began only in Song.}

As Zhuangzi pointed out long ago, “If right were really right, it would differ so clearly from not-right that there would be no need for argu-
Any reviewer who takes exception to Lewis’ views on writing’s specific authority in Han should at the outset concede that the sources are not numerous or so unambiguous as to allow a scholar to feel confident of having the one “correct” answer on so complex an issue. Even where the language used in pre-Han and Han texts to make assertions about writing’s authority is unambiguous, the picture we derive is by no means always consistent. And even the most honest-seeming and authoritative sources (e.g., the dynastic histories), as commissioned works compiled by highly skilled phrasemakers, present evidence that is slippery and hard to handle, if only because it seeks to further its own agenda. All too often, if I may compare the situation to that in classical Greece (479–323 B.C.), the material before us contains “the scraps that have fallen from the tables of ancient literature, snatches of conversations, anecdotes abruptly curtailed and stories that seem to make no sense.”

Han literary works are in large part responsible for some of our age-old confusion, in that they rarely distinguish speaking clearly from writing (a fact which is in itself significant). Due to the standard Han practice of reading texts out loud, “I heard it said,” for example, can mean, “I read it somewhere.” Du 聽 means both to decipher a text and to read it aloud. Wen 文 refers to literary texts, but also to cosmic and behavioral patterns. The all-important term liuyi refers to archery and charioteering as often as to the Six Canonical Texts, and so on. In all too many cases, in other words, there is no absolute test by which historians today can tell whether it is written or oral texts that are the subject


120. In most Han texts, speech and writing are related, as in one passage cited by Lewis on Huang-Lao, p. 341.

121. The Shuowen definition of du 聽 is to read out loud. Yan Shigu’s 頭師古 (Tang) preface to the Hanshu commentary clearly defines du as to recite out loud. Wang Su’s 王 肅 commentary to the Analects defines xi 習 “practice (the text)” as du “read out loud.” Full citations to these and many other examples may be found in Drège, “La lecture et l’écriture,” esp. 79; and Zhang Mingren 張明仁, Gu jin mingren dushu fa 古今名人讀書法 (repr., Beijing: Shangwu, 1998).

122. Lewis largely equates the Six Arts with the “literary remains of earlier rulers,” ignoring a possible reference to the six polite arts of the nobility, only one of which is writing (p. 234). On p. 288, Lewis appears to redefine liu yi as “major texts of the ‘arts’” but it is difficult to think what major texts covered charioteering, for example. For the probability that the term liu yi represents the official Qin designation of the canon, in contrast to earlier usages, see Wang Baoxuan 王葆玄, Xi Han jingxue yuanliu 西漢經學原流 (Taibei: Dongda, 1994). 15–20.
of a particular remark, unless variant characters or contexts appear in comparable passages found in separate texts. Still, we might do well to re-examine some well-known passages whose import is clear enough, for instance the Zuo assessment of the “good” shì 史 (usually translated “scribe”) in terms of his ability to “recite the ‘Three Barrows,’ the ‘Five Canons,’ the ‘Eight Guidelines,’ and the ‘Nine Mounds.’” This is a point that first struck me a few years ago, when I was asked to prepare a text reading of the “Rulin” 儒林 chapters in the Shiji, Hanshu, and Hou Hanshu, chapters which, upon close examination, exhibit surprising variations in content and style, as well as in the choice and arrangement of biographical information. There is much more digging to be done in the available materials related to the production of knowledge, but even the preliminary findings presented here suggest the distinct possibility that an exaggerated view of writing’s authority has obscured for us a much more exciting picture. If, for example, those whose main job it was to transcribe texts were not the same men whose prestige was tied to an ability to recite, transmit, and apply the traditions attached to the canonical and near-canonical texts, it may be that culture and writing were by no means synonymous in early civilization. (Shades of Rome!)

Lewis’s book pushing the primacy of written texts is packed with insights. It includes many passages I wish I had written. While I believe Lewis’s proposed theoretical framework serves his more innovative and subtle arguments ill, I suspect that only books as ambitious as this—books taking into account many of the transmitted texts and recently excavated manuscripts—will force readers to grapple with their old ideas in concerted attempts to construct alternate scenarios. Reading Lewis calls to mind a passage in Alberto Manguel’s highly personal A History of Reading, which speaks of books in this way:

Like Plato, I passed from knowledge to its subject. I found more reality in the idea than in the thing because it was given to me first and because it was given as thing. It was in books that I encountered the universe: digested, classified, labelled, meditated, still formidable. . . . “This was the world and I was king.”

123. Chunqiu jingzhuan yinde 379/Zhao 12/9 Zuo.
124. Albert Manguel, A History of Reading (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), 8–9, with the last sentence citing Robert Louis Stevenson, “My Kingdom,” A Child’s Garden of Verses (London, 1885). Over recent years, prior to the writing of this review, I have had extensive discussions touching upon writing’s authority with a number of scholars, including Robert Bagley, Donald Harper, Martin Kern, Waiyee Li, Geoffrey Lloyd, and Nathan Sivin, which have revolutionized my thinking, and I would like to express my gratitude to those scholars here. Of course, the views expressed here are my own.
Modern students of early Chinese texts will, I expect, exult in Lewis’s book, at once for finding “more reality in the idea than in the thing” and for the universe that it presents to us: digested, classified, labeled, meditated, and still formidable. Whatever reservations one may retain about the overall perspective that Lewis employs to lend shape to his wide-ranging, multi-faceted, and often intriguing arguments, the manifold achievements of the book deserve our first attention.