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NOTES ON THE “NOTE” (*JI* 記) IN EARLY ADMINISTRATIVE TEXTS

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Abstract

This article examines *ji* 記 in received and excavated texts from the late Warring States, Qin, and Western Han periods. In pre-imperial texts, the word rarely appears, and when it does, it usually refers to records of historical events, precedents, or authoritative knowledge, but the word, in contrast to later periods, never means “note” or “letter.” By contrast, Western Han documents from the arid northwest regions contain many examples of texts that self-identify as *ji*. These *ji* are best characterized as less formal notes or letters that invited or required exchanges of items or information between people. The articles argues that this incorporation of *ji* into different kinds of administrative work gave the word a wider and subtler palette of meanings than it apparently enjoyed in the pre-imperial period, judging from the extant sources. The shift is echoed in descriptions of practices at the Western Han imperial court. Thus, a closer look at *ji* reminds us that administrative texts help us understand not only government operations, but also shifts in manuscript practices during the early empires.

Michael Loewe’s still essential *Records of Han Administration* (1967) raised the question, intentionally or not: what, exactly, do we mean when we speak of “administration” in the early Chinese empires? Certainly, the manuscripts from Juyan 居延 surveyed in *Records* show the broad array of activities that Han officials and soldiers carried out, from tax collection to signal observations to criminal arrests and investigations. Since the Han military installations along the Hexi 河西 corridor were staffed by soldiers and officials on government salaries,[1] it makes perfect sense to see most of the documents they produced as administrative. In the decades after the publication of *Records*, archaeologists began to discover and excavate an increasing number of pre-Qin 秦 and early imperial tombs, many of which yielded new manuscripts, from versions of the *Laozi* 老子 to *fu* 賦 verses. Scholars have regularly described these texts as

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[1] For examples, see Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), vol. 2, 101–3. See also document 6 below.

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"philosophical" or "literary," contrasting them with administrative texts (including those recovered from the arid northwest). This division can hold great heuristic value,[2] even when we recognize that excavation site and medium are equally important for differentiating types of manuscripts.[3] Accordingly, this essay makes no attempt to reject the distinction.

Nevertheless, the distinction is porous, insofar as texts used in government administration could use complex rhetorical patterns and specialized references to authoritative knowledge. Nor did conventionalized patterns of administrative language prevent the expression of emotions.[4] In received texts, the most obvious examples of heavily embellished administrative writings include imperial edicts, as well as memorials and kindred documents officials submitted to the throne. Such texts essential to administrative operations represent some of the most sophisticated and influential writings available to students of early China.[5] The rhetoric of persuasion, in which the most educated

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[2] For one productive example, see Matthias Richter, "Textual Identity and the Role of Literacy in the Transmission of Early Chinese Literature," in *Writing and Literacy in Early China: Studies from the Columbia Early China Seminar*, ed. Li Feng and David Prager Branner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 206–36. A binary division between "administrative" and "literary" by no means accounts for all excavated sources: "legal" texts (e.g., those from tombs at Shuihudi 睡虎地 and Zhangjiashan 張家山), and "technical" texts (e.g., the "daybooks" [*rishu* 日書] and medical texts) do not fit easily into either category.

[3] For example, when we compare a registration record written on a wooden board found in a rubbish heap with a copy of the *Laozi* elegantly transcribed on silk and interred in a tomb, differences in content are by no means more salient than differences in media and archaeological context. See Enno Giele, "Excavated Manuscripts: Context and Methodology," in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 114–34. Some silk letters have been recovered from the desert northwest, as noted in Giele, "Private Letter Manuscripts from Early Imperial China," in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), esp. 407–11.

[4] For emphasis on this point, see Charles Sanft, *Literate Community in Early Imperial China: The Northwestern Frontier in Han Times* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2019).

[5] Possible links between imperial unification and the emergence of different textual and literary categories remain a matter of debate. Martin Kern has written that during the Han dynasty "edicts, petitions to the throne, and court debates" were "new forms of writing that developed together with the imperial state." See Kern, "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings Through Western Han," in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen, vol. 1, *To 1375* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 109. These sources, however, probably had different developmental trajectories. For obvious reasons, imperial edicts arose with the establishment of the empire; the *Shi ji* 史記 (comp. c. early first century B.C.E.) explicitly links the two; *Shi ji*, comp. by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86 B.C.E.) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), 6.236. But royal commands, petitions, and court debates all had

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had been well schooled, circulated from the capital to outlying regions in the empire through this sort of writing. Drawing upon literary and philosophical refinements was thus a routine part of some administrative work.[6] Rather than a set boundary between the "literary" and the "administrative" categories, then, we might imagine a continuum for texts produced as part of governmental operations, extending from the most basic records entirely bereft of rhetorical flourishes (e.g., population registries) to the most refined documents circulating at the highest levels (edicts, records of court debates, remonstrations, petitions, and so forth).[7]

This essay explores that continuum by examining texts called *ji* 記, through both the received corpus and manuscripts recovered from the northwest desert that date to Western Han 西漢 (202 B.C.E.–9 C.E.), Xin 新 (9–23 C.E.), and Eastern Han 東漢 (25–220 C.E.). One key point to recall in this discussion: it would be a serious mistake to reduce *ji* to a specific written form, not least because one of the word's fundamental meanings is simply "to write down" or "to record." Depending on context, when used as a noun, *ji* can be translated in a variety of ways: "annals," "record," "note," and "list" are all good choices. As the excavated evidence confirms the great diversity of uses for the word *ji* during the four centuries under review, we would be ill-advised to try to establish clear categories of usage for *ji*, let alone generic distinctions. Indeed, with the exception of *shu* 書 ("writings"), there is probably no other single word referring to written texts in classical Chinese with a similarly broad range of meanings. Unlike *shu*, however, texts called *ji* are distinctly uncommon in transmitted pre-imperial sources, even when we factor in the usual difficulties of dating pre-imperial texts.[8] When the word does appear in these pre-imperial sources, it typically refers to "annals" or "records," typically those stored by royal courts. By contrast, *ji* appears in numerous Han texts, often to indicate much less formal "notes" and "letters." This essay, then, grapples with tracking what appears to be a dual change: ever more texts over time come to be labeled as *ji*, while some *ji* become increasingly informal in tone.

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pre-imperial precedents. See David Schaberg, "Functionary Speech: On the Work of *Shi* 使 and *Shi* 史," in *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court*, ed. Garrett P. S. Olberding (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 22–31.

[6] Editor's note: that explains why the *wenxue* 文學 ("document drafters") have often been cast as "Literary Talents" by those who have not examined their administrative status.

[7] My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers, who suggested situating administrative texts on a continuum.

[8] A telling fact: according to the CHANT database, the pre-imperial *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (comp. 239 B.C.E.) uses the word *shu* 45 times and *ji* just 5 times.

Why and how did these shifts happen? How did a word that referred primarily to relatively rarified textual forms, maintained by politically powerful institutions, come to be associated with a much less formal kind of writing that in some cases *required* exchange or knowledge of other texts in order to establish its meaning? Given the paucity of relevant sources, this essay cannot explain the multiple factors that likely drove such complex changes, but, notably, the evidence from both excavated and received administrative texts suggests that the division between formal and informal documents predates the proliferation of *ji*.[9] At this point, what is clear is that received and excavated Han administrative texts exhibit a broad array of *ji*. As the examples cited below suggest, we can confidently characterize many of these *ji* as "notes" or "letters,"[10] and they fulfilled a broad range of functions. By my hypothesis, governance required different registers of formality, and *ji* became an important yet less formal means for ensuring that certain tasks were carried out. As we will see, to the extent that such neat divisions can be postulated, these *ji* were very often not just top-down orders, but rather texts that invited or required exchanges of items or information between people. Over time, this incorporation of *ji* into a broad range of administrative work, whether in official government pronouncements or in epistolary exchanges, apparently gave the word a much wider and subtler palette of meanings than it enjoyed in the pre-imperial period. "Records of Han administration" can therefore help us understand not only facts about governmental operations during the early empires, but also shifts in manuscript practices. Sometimes these records even open windows onto the emotional intimacies possible in administrative work.

Annals and Records: Received Texts and *Ji* in Pre-Imperial Times

When we look at the sources that can be plausibly, if not definitively, dated to pre-imperial times, the word *ji* appears but rarely. This is especially true of *ji* as a noun, though even verbal uses of *ji* ("to write down," "to record") are uncommon.[11] Writing a history of *ji* based on evidence from pre-imperial texts thus becomes impossible. For instance, in the mammoth *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 of today (successor to the Han-era *Zuoshi chunqiu* 左氏春秋) the word appears just three times, all in a single statement supposedly made by Guan Zhong 管仲 to the prince Qi 齊.[12] After learning that his liege planned to interfere in the domestic politics of the small kingdom of Zheng 鄭, Guan Zhong warned him not to pursue a nefarious scheme hatched at a covenant meeting of the realms. As Guan Zhong explained, "no realm failed to record" (無國不記) what happened at such meetings, so treacherous schemes would soon become common knowledge, with the inevitable result the speedy collapse of the entire covenant.[13] The anecdote is part of a larger theme in the *Zuo zhuan* emphasizing the role recordkeeping played to circumscribe the choices available to important political actors.[14] As Guan Zhong's statement suggests, ruling houses maintained records of major events and agreements in their archives; a range of pre-imperial and early imperial texts, not to mention bronze inscriptions, also attests to the existence of such records (in chronicle form or not).[15]

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[9] In particular, documents called *shu* 書 seem to have been sealed, while those called *xi* 檄 were not. For a discussion with relevant citations, see Chen Yunqing 陳韻青, "Qin Han wenshu xingzheng zhong de 'feng' yu 'yin'" 秦漢文書行政中的"封"與"印," paper presented at conference, Chutu wenxian yu Han Tang fazhi shi yanjiu 出土文獻與漢唐法制史研究, Department of History, Peking University, November 28, 2021 (the paper is under review for publication as of March 2022).

[10] Or even "memo," a possibility first suggested by Harrison Huang, whom I am happy to thank here. At the end of this essay, I speculate that perhaps the meaning of *ji* as "remember" or "memorize" first achieved prominence during Western Han, a point impossible to prove given the paucity of securely datable materials from the period. Still, claims in Wang Li 王力, chief editor, *Gu Hanyu zidian* 古漢語字典, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2000), 1262, that the "base meaning" (*ben yi* 本義) of *ji* is "memorize" (*ji zhu* 記住) are overly confident. See n. 12 below.

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[11] To take the extant *Chun qiu* 春秋 (*Annals*) commentaries as an example, the *Gongyang* 公羊, *Guliang* 穀梁, and *Zuo zhuan* 左傳 typically use *shu* 書 to describe the act of writing. Verbal uses of *ji* do not occur in the *Guliang* and *Zuo zhuan* (in fact, the word does not occur at all in the former). By contrast, they are more common in the *Gongyang*, where the word *ji* is mostly confined to the standard question–answer formula used to categorize a recorded event as a "disaster" (*zai* 災) or "prodigy" (*yi* 異). The formulaic question "Why was this written?" (何以書) is answered by the equally formulaic statement "To record a disaster" (記災也) or "To record a prodigy" (記異也).

[12] The number increases to just five if we include both 紀 (OCM *kəʔ) and 記 (OCM *kəh), which partially overlap in the *Zuo zhuan*, not surprising given their cognate relationship. The latter word appears only three times, all in the Guan Zhong speech discussed here. The word *ji* 紀 usually refers to the name of a realm and secondarily as "guiding line" or "regulation," with occasional verbal uses as "regulate" or, once, "calculate." Wolfgang Behr noted that 記 probably derived from 紀, which itself emerged from the root *li* 理 (OCM: rəʔ; "to divide, regulate, mark"). See Behr, "Language Change in Premodern China: Notes on its Perception and Impact on the Idea of a 'Constant Way,'" in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism, and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture From a New Comparative Perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, Achim Mittag, and Jörn Rüsen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17. Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 298, presented a similar understanding. Cf. Wang Li, *Gu Hanyu da zi dian*, 1262 (see n. 10 above).

[13] *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981 [2009]), vol. 1, 318 (Xi 僖 7.3); *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan / 左傳*, translated and introduced by Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, and David Schaberg, 3 vols. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), vol. 1, 287.

[14] See *Zuo Tradition*, trans. Durrant et al., vol. 2, 1075, with supporting examples.

Plausibly, this association of *ji* with recordkeeping by the royal courts continued through the end of the Zhanguo 戰國 period (475–221 B.C.E.). In the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Annals of Lü Buwei*; comp. 239 B.C.E.), the word *ji* appears in four anecdotes, three of which refer to a record of some kind. Close reading of two of these vignettes show the need to deliberate carefully on translation. The first comes in a story of Zixia 子夏, who while traveling to Jin 晉 encounters a man "reciting" (*du* 讀) a passage from a *shi ji* 史記 (archival record), which states that "Jin troops and three pigs forded the Yellow River" (晉師三豕涉河). Zixia argues that the graphs *san shi* 三豕 ("three pigs") should actually read as the date *ji hai* 己亥 (i.e., number 38 in the sexagenary cycle), a proposition proven correct after Zixia arrives in Jin and makes inquiries about the phrase in question.[16] The oft-cited story, if somewhat ambiguous,[17] plainly presumes that Zixia or someone else could consult an archival document to ascertain what was recorded in writing. The fact that the word in question is a date (*ji hai*) suggests that understanding *ji* as a chronological “annals,” here, could be justified, though by no means with absolute confidence, since the story does not clarify the precise format of the text.

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[15] The most famous example is the *Chun qiu*, an annal associated with the state of Lu 魯. The topic of pre-imperial annals is controversial and the limited evidence requires careful interpretation. According to the *Shi ji*, the Chancellor Li Si 李斯 famously argued that the "archival office" (*shi guan* 史官) should burn anything that was not a "Qin record" (*Qin ji* 秦記) though the passage does not explain the term's meaning (*Shi ji*, 6.255). The best essay on the book burning story remains Jens Østergaard Peterson, "Which Books *Did* the First Emperor of Ch'in Burn? On the Meaning of *Pai Chia* in Early Chinese Sources," *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995), 1–52. The "Fei ming xia" 非命下 chapter of the *Mozi* 墨子 speaks of "records of Shang, Zhou, and Xia" (商周虞夏之記), but we cannot automatically understand this statement as a reference to annals in royal courts.

For an overview of the chief annals in pre-imperial times, see Yuri Pines, "Chinese History Writing Between the Sacred and the Secular," in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang Through Han (1250 BC–AD 220)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), vol. 1, 316–23. There is no consistent terminology for "archives" or "libraries," let alone a clear distinction between the two kinds of institutions, in the early Chinese or ancient Mediterranean sources. See Michael Nylan, "On Libraries and Manuscript Culture in Western Han Chang'an and Alexandria," in *Ancient Greece and China Compared*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd and Jingyi Jenny Zhao (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 373–409. For *shi* 史 as "archivist," see Stephen Durrant, Wai-Yee Li, Michael Nylan, and Hans van Ess, *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), esp. 18–21.

[16] *Lüshi chunqiu zhuzi suoyin* 呂氏春秋逐字索引, Institute for Chinese Studies Concordance (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1996), 22.6/149/6–9 ("Cha zhuan" 察傳). The translation is mine, but see *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, trans. John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 584.

[17] The story says only that Zixia "asked about it" (*wen zhi* 問之), but does not describe anybody actually consulting an annal or chronicle stored by the Jin court.

Our second story is quite another matter. It describes a hunt in which King Zhuang of Chu 楚莊王 (r. 613–591) shoots a rhinoceros. Before the king can finish the job, an attendant pushes the king aside to take the final, killing shot. Incensed at the unwarranted interference, the king orders his underling to be executed but soon he relents, after some officials protest that the rhinoceros-killer’s exemplary service record suggests he must have had good reason to so act. Three months later, the man sickens and dies. Around the same time, Chu successfully attacked Jin, and when the victorious army returns to claim its rewards, the younger brother of the rhinoceros-killer, to King Zhuang’s astonishment, steps forward to ask for his award. The king demands an explanation, and the man insists on the loyalty of his deceased brother:

> 臣之兄嘗讀故記曰殺隨兕者。不出三月。是以臣之兄驚懼而爭之。故伏其罪而死。
>
> My brother once recited an old record (*gu ji*) that said, “The one who kills a rhinoceros will not live longer than three months.” This is why my brother was terrified and fought to kill it. He was ready to accept the blame for his crime, and so died.[18]

The king ordered open the “Ping Storeroom” (*ping fu* 平府), at which point his officials discovered “there was indeed such an old record” (*gu ji guo you* 故記果有), and so the king rewarded the younger brother generously. This story is *not* about a court annal or chronicle, so “record” is plainly the appropriate translation for *ji* here.[19] For the compilers of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, then, *ji* referred to a physical text, stored somewhere at a royal court, that contained necessary information about "past events and their outcomes" that could help to guide action in the present or future.[20]

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[18] See *Lüshi chunqiu*, 11.2/54/4–5 (“Zhi zhong” 至忠); *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 245. The *Shuoyuan* 説苑 (comp. c. 17), “Li jie” 立節 chapter (*juan* 4), contains this anecdote, though it has the king shooting a pheasant, not a rhinoceros. *Shuoyuan* 説苑 (*Han Wei congshu* 漢魏叢書 ed.), 12.1–2; accessed via Scripta Sinica database, http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw.

[19] A close parallel occurs in the “Jin teng” 金縢 chapter of the *Shang shu* 尚書 (*Documents*). That narrative similarly describes a seemingly transgressive act, which proves to be in fact a display of the highest loyalty after the king and his officials consult a record stored away in a secure location (in this case, not a “storeroom” but a “metal-bound coffer” [金縢之匱]). See *Shangshu zhu shu* 尚書注疏 (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 ed., 1815), *juan* 13, 187-2; accessed via Scripta Sinica database, http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw. In the “Jin tang,” the official under suspicion is Zhougong 周公 (the Duke of Zhou).

Whether understood as "annals" or "records," the above stories characterize *ji* as texts providing information about historical events and precedents. This same understanding of *ji*, separate from any real or imagined relationship with royal courts and archives, is found in the few Zhanguo, Qin, and Western Han texts that mention "old records." Elsewhere the *Lüshi chunqiu*, for instance, refers to a "record of high antiquity" (*shang gu ji* 上古記),[21] while the *Xin shu* 新書 advises us, "teach the old records to understand what leads to failure or success and so be on guard with dread (教之故記，使知廢興者而戒懼焉).[22] Meanwhile, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (late third or early second century B.C.E.?) quotes simply a "record" (*ji*) that has no clear relationship to historical knowledge, since it predicts that the myriad things will be completed after "penetrating the One" (*tong yu yi* 通於一).[23] Evidently, *ji* could thus refer to any other text that offered authoritative knowledge, not necessarily knowledge imputed to the distant past. Of course, many other texts called by different terms were cited for the same purpose, with resort to old wisdom books common enough to be parodied in the *Zhuangzi*.[24] While many questions remain unanswered and probably unanswerable, barring a major archaeological discovery, for now we can say that most pre-imperial texts rarely use the word *ji* and it almost *never* means "letter" or "note."

Quite the opposite is true when we turn to received Han texts, which teem with references to a myriad *ji*.[25] Some of the best-known examples come in the catalogue of texts recorded in the *Han shu* "Yi wen zhi" 藝文志 (Treatise on Arts and Letters), where we find numerous titles, most of them now lost, employing *ji* under different headings. We wonder, for instance, about the contents of *Tu shu mi ji* 圖書祕記 (Palace Records on Charts and Texts).[26] Based on their titles, some of these *ji*, if not all, provided explanations of, or were at least associated with, an original or larger text. Thus we read of a *Qi za ji* 齊雜記 (Miscellaneous Records on the Qi *[Odes]*),[27] the *Gongyang za ji* 公羊雜記 (Miscellaneous Records on the Gongyang [Tradition for the *Chun qiu*]),[28] and the lengthy ritual text in 131 *pian* 篇 entitled simply *Ji* (Records).[29] Two texts on the *wu xing* under the *Shang shu* (*Documents*) category contain the term "traditions and records" (*zhuan ji* 傳記).[30] Meanwhile, the "Yi wen zhi" seems to distinguish "records" (*ji*) texts from other texts called *nian ji* 年紀 (chronicles).[31]

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[20] Durrant et al., *The Letter to Ren An*, 20.

[21] *Lüshi chunqiu*, 13.6/67/23; *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 295.

[22] *Jia Yi Xinshu zhuzi suoyin* 賈誼新書逐字索引, Institute for Chinese Studies Concordance (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1996), 5.1/33/19–20 ("Fu zhi" 傅志). As the concordance editors noted (see n. 13), the actual text reads *gu she* 故設, but *she* here is almost certainly corrupt, since a parallel passage from *Guoyu* 國語 uses the term *gu zhi* 故志 (*zhi* and *ji* being synonyms). The *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 contains a version of the story from the *Lüshi chunqiu* about Zi Xia's interpretation of "three pigs" (see above) in which the questionable phrase comes from a text called *shi zhi* 史志 (not *shi ji* 史記, as in the *Lüshi chunqiu*).

[23] See Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, *Zhuangzi ji shi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, [1961] 2014), vol. 2, 411 (*juan* 12, "Tian di" 天地).

[24] E.g., in the "Tian dao" (Way of Heaven) chapter, Wheelwright Bian criticizes Huan Gong 桓公 for being too obsessed with old books, the mere "dregs" (*zao po* 糟魄) of dead sages. *Zhuangzi ji shi*, 2.493–4.

[25] To quote William Hung, "I have not calculated all of the so-called *ji* because there are so many different kinds that it is difficult to determine their total number" (所謂記無算者，以其種類多而難計其數者). Hung was referring primarily to *ji* associated with ritual texts, but the statement reflects the larger diversity of *ji* in Han sources. See Hong Ye 洪業 (William Hung), "*Liji yinde*, 'Xu'" 禮記引得序, *Shixue nianbao* 史學年報 2.3 (1937), 288b.

While bibliographic categories are at best only tangentially related to the social practices of texts,[32] it is tempting to ascribe this broadening connotation of *ji* to a developing practice of writing commentaries or proto-commentaries for authoritative texts. The category of *ji* was never entirely stable, however, and cannot be reduced to merely an explanatory commentary on a text.[33] The discovery at Wuwei 武威 of a Western Han manuscript version of the *Yili* 儀禮 undermines neat narratives. While the received *Yili* contains sections at the end of several chapters marked *ji* that provide supplementary explanations for information supplied in the chapters, its excavated counterpart includes those sections in their respective chapters without labeling them as *ji*.[34] This evidence shows there was no hard and fast distinction between, on the one hand, explanatory "notes" to older authoritative texts, and the texts themselves. Returning to the earlier examples drawn from the "Yi wen zhi," where the word *ji* appears in the text titles, it seems best to use "record" to render the word, since that translation does not necessarily imply a subservient relationship between the *ji* and other texts. If this impulse is correct, we must broaden our search if we wish to explore the trajectory by which *ji* assumed broader connotations during the Han, becoming "letter" or "note."

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[26] *Han shu* 漢書, Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 C.E.) et al. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962), 30.1765.

[27] *Han shu*, 30.1707.

[28] *Han shu*, 30.1713.

[29] *Han shu*, 30.1709.

[30] According to the titles, the first of these "traditions and records" on the *wuxing* was by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79/78–8 B.C.E.) and the second by the *Shang shu* expert Xu Shang 許尚. Note that the "Wu xing zhi" (Treatise on the Wuxing) in the *Han shu* regularly cites *zhuan*, marked by "a tradition states" (*zhuan yue* 傳曰), but the phrase "a record states" (*ji yue*) occurs only once.

[31] The *Chun qiu* category of the "Yi wen zhi" contains two texts with *nian ji* in the title: (1) *Taigu yilai nian ji* 太古以來年紀 (Chronology Since High Antiquity); (2) *Han da nian ji* 漢大年紀 (Great Chronology of the Han). Texts in the *Chun qiu* category with *ji* 記 ("records") in the title include two texts related to the *Gongyang* commentary to the *Chun qiu* and one text entitled *Han zhu ji* 漢著記 (Notable Records of the Han), which Yan Shigu's commentary likens to a "record of daily life" (*qi ju zhu* 起居注) from his own era during the Tang (*Han shu*, 30.1713–14). The *Shi ji* and *Han shu* themselves used the word *ji* 紀 to refer to the pre-unification annals of ruling houses (only in the *Shi ji*) and to individual emperors (in *Han shu* as well). A clearer division between 紀 and 記, with the former referring more specifically to texts arranged in an explicitly chronological sequence, seems to mark a change from pre-imperial times. Perhaps the *Lüshi Chunqiu* played a role in this change, since the titles of the first twelve sections of that text, each referring to a month of the year, end with the word *ji* 紀. Note, however, that only two other texts in the "Yi wen zhi" contain *ji* 紀 in their titles, and neither can be unambiguously understood as annals of ruling houses. The two titles are *Chen Shou Zhou ji* 臣壽周紀 (Zhou Records by Official Shou) (*Han shu*, 30.1745); and *Zi gu wu xing xiu ji* 自古五星宿紀 (Annals of the Five Planets and the Lunar Lodges from Ancient Times) (*Han shu*, 40.1766).

[32] See Colin McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Notes and Letters: Excavated Manuscripts and *Ji* in Administrative Practice

However scant the evidence from the received texts, it seems undeniable that, over time, *ji* began to encompass more kinds of writing in different registers. An enormous corpus of excavated administrative documents, spanning the entire early imperial period from Qin to Eastern Han, affords new perspectives and evidence for such a shift.[35] We can

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[33] For instance, in his annotation to a *Shi jing* 詩經 poem, Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 C.E.) quoted a text that he called *Liji* 禮記, but the quoted statement is found in the *Yili* 儀禮 (i.e., *not* the received *Liji*). Furthermore, the quote is from the chapter "Shao lao kui shi" 少牢饋食, which, unlike other *Yili* chapters, does not contain a section called *ji*. See Hong Ye, "*Liji yinde*, 'Xu,'" 282a; and Xing Wen, "New Light on the *Li ji* 禮記: The *Li ji* and the Related Warring States Period Guodian Bamboo Manuscripts," *Early China* 37 (2014), 528–29. For a broader discussion of *jing* and textual authority during Han, see Michael Nylan "Classics Without Canonization: Learning and Authority in Qin and Han," in *Early Chinese Religion: Part One*, ed. Lagerwey and Kalinowski, vol. 2, esp. 721–76.

[34] For a detailed discussion, see Yamada Toshiaki 山田利明, "Yili zhong 'ji' de wenti—guan yu Wuwei Han jian" 儀禮中"記"的問題—關於武威漢簡, trans. Diao Xiaolong 刁小龍, in Zhang Huanjun 張煥君 and Diao Xiaolong, *Wuwei Han jian 'Yili' zhengli yu yanjiu* 武威漢簡「儀禮」整理與研究 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue, 2009), 332–51.

[35] No specific claim is made here about whether this shift necessarily implies an increase in literacy rates, a complicated problem requiring separate treatment. Two studies that address literacy in relation to Han administrative documents from the northwest are Robin Yates, "Soldiers, Scribes, and Women: Literacy Among the Lower

footnote continued on next page

begin with the Qin manuscripts recovered from a well near Liye 里耶, in Hunan 湖南 province, less for the information they provide than for what is absent from the material published thus far.[36] While the Liye corpus attests all sorts of texts circulating at the edges of an expanding Qin empire, from central government orders to reports and requests of various kinds, so far not one published Liye document refers to itself or to other texts as *ji*.[37] Of course, that does not mean that the Liye cache contains nothing that we can call “notes” or “letters,” as is evident from the following example:

Document 1

(□ = character missing or unreadable due to damage; / = blank space separating text on strip)

尉敬敢再拜謁丞公: 校長寬以遣遷陵船徙卒史酉陽₌，□□船□元陵, 寬以 船屬酉陽校長徐。

今司空顧丞公令吏徒往取之，及以書告酉陽令。事急。敬已遣寬與校長囚吾追求盜者。敢再拜謁之。

I, Commandant Jing, daring to salute repeatedly, deliver the following to Assistant County Magistrate Gong: Constable Kuan used a boat of Qianling County to transport a minor official (*zushi*) to Youyang County. The Youyang County … boat … Yuanling County, and Kuan entrusted the boat to Constable Xu of Youyang County.

Orders in Early China,” in Li and Branner, *Writing and Literacy in Early China*; and Sanft, *Literate Community in Early Imperial China*. But the evidence is too scanty and too disputed to posit literacy rates, let alone upward and downward changes in literacy rates.

[36] For an introduction, see Robin Yates, “The Qin Slips and Boards from Well No. 1, Liye, Hunan: A Brief Introduction to the Qin Qianling County Archives,” *Early China* 35–36 (2012–13), 291–329. See also Maxim Korolkov, *The Imperial Network in Ancient China: The Foundation of Sinitic Empire in Southern East Asia* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2021), esp. 1–34 (Introduction).

[37] The point receives detailed treatment in Takamura Takeyuki 高村武幸, *Shin Kan kandoku shiryō kenkyū* 秦漢簡牘史料研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2015), 159–86. As Takamura notes, many kinds of administrative documents known from Han are absent in the published Liye corpus, and Takamura argues that this picture probably will not change significantly even as more of the Liye documents are published. I have confirmed Takemura’s assertion that the word does not appear in the transcriptions and photographs of the boards contained in the two volumes published so far of the Liye corpus. See Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 湖南省文物考古研究所, *Liye Qin jian (yi)* 里耶秦簡（壹）(Beijing: Wenwu, 2012) and *Liye Qin jian (er)* 里耶秦簡（貳）(Beijing: Wenwu, 2017). Of course, full publication of all legible strips is needed before reaching a definitive conclusion.

> Now, the Director of Works desires Assistant County Magistrate Gong to order an official and convict laborers to get it, and then inform in writing the Magistrate of Youyang County. The matter is pressing. I, Jing, have dispatched Kuan and Constable Qiuwu[38] to pursue the thieves. Daring to salute repeatedly, I deliver this.[39]

As this document is in fragments, some aspects of the exchange remain elusive.[40] For our purposes, details are less important than two points about the nature of Jing's correspondence with Gong. First, the document clearly addresses a matter of official business (retrieving the missing boat). At the same time, it opens and closes with a phrase *gan zai bai* 敢再拜 ("daring to salute repeatedly") that commonly figures in epistolary documents from Qin and Han.[41] The document thus crosses boundaries between the administrative document and letters of a more private nature.[42] Second, Jing urges Gong "to inform in writing" (*yi shu gao*) the magistrate of Youyang, noting that the matter is urgent (*shi ji* 事急).[43] Perhaps this explains

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[38] Several boards refer to people (or the same person?) named Qiuwu 囚吾, serving in different official posts. See 8-681, 8-1610, and 8-1783+8-1852, identified in You Yifei 游逸飛 and Chen Hongyin 陳弘音, "Liye Qin jian bowuguan cang di jiu ceng jiandu shiwen jiaoshi" 里耶秦簡博物館藏第九層簡牘釋文校釋, Jianbo wang 簡帛網, December 22, 2013, www.bsm.org.cn/?qinjian/6146.html, accessed on August 30, 2022.

[39] *Liye Qin jian (yi)*, 41 (8-167), 70 (8-472), 137 (8-1011). My reconstruction and translation of the letter is indebted to the transcription and annotations provided in Chen Wei 陳偉, ed., *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi* 里耶秦簡牘校釋 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue, 2012), 101. The transcription partially follows Chen Wei, but omits 8-194, since that small fragment does not seem to fit physically with the other three, larger fragments and disrupts the letter's flow.

[40] For instance, is the theft connected to the boat or the transported minor official (*zushi* 卒史)? Or were Kuan and Qiuwu pursuing robbers unrelated to the boat, which then had to be brought back to Qianling County by other means, prompting Commandant Jing to write to Assistant Magistrate Gong? For the latter, see Zhu Shengming 朱聖明, "Liye Qin jian suo jian Qin dai Qianling xian gong chuan xiangguan wenti yanjiu" 里耶秦簡所見秦代遷陵縣公船相關問題研究, *Gudai wenming* 8.2 (Apr. 2014), 48.

[41] Other common phrases in early imperial letters include *zuxia* 足下 (at [somebody's] feet) and *fudi* 伏地 (prostrate). For a useful table of common epistolary terms, see Enno Giele, "Private Letter Manuscripts from Early Imperial China," in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, ed. Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 425–26. Secondary studies refer to this document as a letter. See, e.g., Zhu Shengming, "Liye Qin jian suo jian," 48.

[42] Giele, "Private Letter Manuscripts," 403–4, notes problems with the category of "private," but observes that "personal" is perhaps no better. Individual officials, after all, could exchange letters about government business; indeed, Jing's letter to Gong seems to be a good example.

[43] Commandant Jing's letter seems to follow a pattern evident in the Liye manuscripts: county magistrates (the highest official in the local bureaucracy) and

footnote continued on next page

why Jing seems to have personally delivered the letter. In any case, compared to a formal official document, the Liye letter was written with a hastier hand and focused on a pressing administrative need.[44]

It was the “note” (*ji*) that often filled this role in daily administration during Western and Eastern Han. Had Jing lived in a later period he might have asked Gong to write a *ji* instead of a *shu*.[45] The following Han examples are not meant to be directly comparable to the Liye letter. The first group, after all, is made up of notes sent by higher-level officials “informing” (*gao* 告) subordinates,[46] and generally my discussion aims to highlight the distinct characteristics of each manuscript, without ever implying the creation of typologies or of administrative genres. The examples have been chosen to showcase the complex roles fulfilled by *ji* in the administration of the two Han dynasties. Note, meanwhile, that only if the published Liye corpus continues not to yield texts entitled *ji* might we begin to posit a historical change within the textual practices of imperial administration.

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assistant county magistrates channeled communications from lower officials to other counties or to Dongting commandery headquarters. Jing would not have been able to send such a request directly to the magistrate of a different county of Youyang. See Zhu Shengming 朱聖明, “Qin dai difang guanyuan de wenshu chuandi zhiquan—yi Liye Qin jian yidi tongji wenshu wei zhongxin de kaocha” 秦代地方官員的文書傳遞職權—以里耶秦簡異地同級文書為中心的考察, *Nandu xue tan (Renwen shehui kexue xue bao)* 38.1 (2018), 31–39.

[44] The calligraphy of the letter appears hasty when compared with official documents from Liye (e.g., 8-135A+B, also about a missing boat, but a summary of a formal inquiry), or even in the letter between friends that Giele translated (for images, see “Private Letter Manuscripts,” 465).

[45] My discussion of excavated *ji* has benefited from: Ukai Masao 鵜飼昌勇, “Kan dai no bunsho ni tsuite no yichi kōsatsu—‘ki’ toyiu bunsho no sonzai” 漢代の文書についての一考察–「記」という文書の存在, *Shisen* 9 (1988), 18–30; Lian Shaoming 連邵名, “Xi yu mu jiang zhong de ji yu xi” 西域木簡中的記與檄, *Wenwu chunqiu* (1989), (Z1), 21–27, 69; Nakayama Shigeru 仲山茂, “Kan dai ni okeru chōri to zokuri no aida” 漢代における長吏と属吏のあいだ, *Nihon Shin Kan shi gakkai gakuhō* 3 (2002), 13–42; Sumiya Tsuneko 角谷常子, “Kandoku no keijō ni okeru yimi” 簡牘の形状における意味, in *Henkyō shutsudo mokkan no kenkyū* 邊境出土木簡の研究, ed. Tomiya Itaru 富谷至 (Kyoto: Hōyu, 2003), esp. 98–104; Takatori Yūji 鷹取祐司, “Kan kan shoken bunsho kō—sho, keki, ki, fu” 漢簡所見文書考--書·檄·記·符, in Tomiya Itaru, *Henkyō shutsudo mokkan no kenkyū*, 119–60; Fujita Takao 藤田高夫. “Kan ki gōshiki” 官記偶識. *Kansai daigaku bungaku ronshū* 56.2 (2006), 39–51; and Takamura Takeyuki, *Shin Kan kandoku*, esp. chaps. 1–2.

[46] During Qin and Han, county commandants and assistant county magistrates had the same salary rank (*Han shu*, 19a.742), so Jing and Gong in theory would have been relative equals. Zhu Shengming, “Qin dai difang guanyuan,” 34, notes that the Liye documents show the assistant county magistrate using *gao* to address the commandant on one strip (8-69), but on another strip (9-112) using *gan gao* with the commandant and *gao* with the county bailiff (*sefu* 嗇夫).

Group 1: *Ji* Sent by Superior Officials to "Inform" (*gao*) Subordinates

All of the following documents share two characteristics: 1) they are sent by superior officials to "inform" (*gao* 告) subordinates about an action they are to carry out or, in one case, that has been carried out; and 2) they all self-identify as *ji*.

Document 2

九月辛巳官告士吏許卿記到持千秋閣單席詣府無以它為解 988A (Recto)

Ninth month, *xinsi* day. A notification from the company to the officer Xuqing. When this note arrives, take the single-layer mat from the building at Qianqiu squad and go to the bureau of the Yumen commandant.[47] No other matter can excuse delay.

士吏許卿亭走行 988B (Verso)

The official Xuqing shall travel by the relay stations.[48]

The text on verso would presumably have served as a pass, allowing Xuqing to travel between watchtowers on his way to making the delivery of the mat to the Yumen commandant. Perhaps he also used it as a pass on his return trip, hence the discovery of the document in the Maquanwan cache (and not at the site of the Yumen commandant bureau).[49]

Document 3

四月戊子官告倉亭隧長通成記到馳詣府會夕毋以它為解急□□

教 1065A (Recto)

Fourth month, *wuzi* day. A notification from the company to Tongcheng, leader of Cangting squad: when this note arrives, ride to the bureau of the commandant to meet. Arrive by sunset. No other matter can excuse delay. Urgent …

Instructed.

---

[47] Qianqiu was a squad under the Yumen 玉門 company, which reported to the Yumen commandant of Dunhuang commandery. So Qianqiu was being ordered to go from the squad to the commandant's bureau. See Bai Junpeng 白軍鵬, *Dunhuang Han jian jiaoshi* 敦煌漢簡校釋 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 2018), 17. Zhang Defang speculates that the strip refers to a storage facility of some kind in Qianqiu. See *Dunhuang Maquanwan Han jian jishi* 敦煌馬圈灣漢簡集釋, ed. Zhang Defang 張得芳 (Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua, 2013), 624.

[48] *Dunhuang Maquanwan Han jian jishi*, 148 (excavation no. 79.DMT12:31).

[49] The latter was located near the Xiaofangpan 小方盤 site. For the two locations, see Wu Rengxiang 吳礽驤, *Hexi Han sai diaocha yu yanjiu* 河西漢塞調查與研究 (Beijing: Wenwu, 2005), map 12.

> 倉亭隧長周通成在所候長候史馬馳行 / □署□□令□
>
> / 記□日一□ 1065B (Verso)
>
> Zhou Tongcheng, head of Cangting squad, is at post. He shall go using a horse of the company head or company *shi*. [Lower text too fragmented to translate, but note *ji* 記][50]

The translation of the text on verso must remain tentative, as the rationale for mentioning both the company head and *shi* is unclear. If more of the lower text were legible, the translated text would be more comprehensible. Perhaps that lower text, rendered in much smaller graphs, was written by a different party, after Tongcheng arrived at the commandant bureau. The size of the characters on recto and verso are different, but they do not betray obvious differences in handwriting, suggesting that both sides were composed at the same time by the same person. Confusingly, the note somehow ended up back at company headquarters, even though it asks Tongcheng to go to the commandant bureau. Perhaps Tongcheng brought the document back with him as a travel pass of sorts when returning from the bureau.

The sequence by which different portions of the text were written is even more complicated in the document 4. The different underline styles, explained below, indicate my tentative reconstruction of that sequence:

Document 4

> □□癸卯官告第四候 / 長記到馳詣官會
>
> 無以它為解急□ / [董]雲叩頭唯卿幸為持具簿奉賦[急] 113:12A (Recto)
>
> … *guimao* day. A notification from the company to the senior officer of the fourth company: when this note arrives then ride to the company to meet. No other matter can excuse a delay. Urgent. [Dong] Yun bows to the floor: to your honor happily I present a complete list of salaries disbursed. [Urgent.]
>
> □ / □□□哀憐罰鐵者頃蒙恩叩=頭=
>
> 第四候長行者致走 113:12B (Verso)
>
> … sadness, fined in iron. Now receiving your favor, I bow to the floor, bow to the floor.
>
> A runner for the senior officer of the fourth company will deliver it by foot.[51]

---

[50] *Dunhuang Maquanwan Han jian jishi*, 160 (excavation no. 79.DMT12:108).

[51] Jiandu zhengli xiaozu 簡牘整理小組, ed., *Juyan Han jian* 居延漢簡, vol. 2 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 2015), 23.

In all likelihood, the dashed underline on recto indicates the portion of the text that was written first. It includes the phrase "notification from the company" (*guan gao* 官告),[52] followed by orders for the recipient to travel immediately to the company for a meeting. Next came the single underlined text on verso, written by somebody in the fourth company (*di si hou* 第四候), who ordered the runner to deliver the requested document on foot.[53] The third stage is seen in the double-underlined text on recto, in which Dong Yun presents the salary list. The fourth and final stage comes in lower verso, marked above with an undulating line. Here I follow Fujita Takao's speculation that this final line was written later, either as a draft for this document or as practice for a different document; certainly it does not sit easily with the rest of the text.[54] Significant questions remain, and the order of writing given here can only be provisional.[55] Notably, too, the document seems to show one company "notifying" the head of another company, when typically a superior company office (*hou guan* 候官) would "notify" subordinates, such as squad heads (*sui zhang* 隧長). I am not sure why this document does not conform to this pattern.

Document 5

三月辛未府告騂北亭長廣
與俱車十六兩馬三匹·人廿八☐ 73EJT23:349A (Recto)

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[52] The pattern in these texts is for *guan* 官 to refer to the "office of the company" (*hou guan* 候官), while *fu* refers to the "bureau of the commandant" (*wei fu* 尉府) (see later examples below).

[53] My interpretation here partially depends on observed differences in handwriting, which are subtle but I believe significant. These include the different manner of writing *si* 四 between recto and verso, while the two *zhe* 者 on verso are obviously and substantially different.

[54] Fujita Takao, "Kanki gōshiki," 41. The phrase *ai lian* 哀憐 appears in other documents, including letters. See, e.g., *Juyan Han jian*, vol. 2, 138, 157.10A+B.

[55] Fujita understands the notification from the company on recto and the statement about the runner on verso to have been written at the same time by the company issuing the notification; Fujita, "Kanki gōshiki," 41. Fujita worked, however, with an older volume of the Juyan strips, which did not fully transcribe all characters on lower left recto and lower right verso. The newer volumes from the Institute of History and Philology with revised transcriptions are more detailed and thus provide information unavailable to Fujita. I have three outstanding questions: First, why would a different company be able to send the Fourth Company runner, unless the Fourth Company runner was somebody in the home company responsible for making deliveries to the Fourth Company? Second, why are there subtle, but evident differences in calligraphy between recto and verso (see n. 53 above)? Third, how did the runner know which document to deliver? Perhaps this request was communicated orally.

> Third month, *xinwei* day. The bureau of the commandant notifies Guang, head of Xinbei station.
>
> Bestowed equipment: Chariots: 16. Horses (for each?): 3.[56] · People: 28.
>
> 府記予騂北亭長 73EJT23:349B (Verso)
>
> A note from the bureau of the commandant: give to the head of Xinbei station.[57]

Unlike the notifications discussed above, the intended recipient here is neither a company nor squad (*sui*), but a station (*ting*), in this case probably a postal relay station.

In addition to being notifications (*gao*) that self-identify as *ji*, the previous four examples share other features. First, all of the documents appear to be comprised of one single strip,[58] as does document 5, a broken strip whose bottom half is missing. A second common feature supports this determination: all of the documents contain writing on both sides of the strip. Only on the strip in document 4 is it possible to observe definitive differences in handwriting between verso and recto. These shared features, along with the fact that the recto text on documents 2–4 served as a kind of travel pass, all point toward the quick, temporary nature of the note, with the text serving as a mobile possession of the recipient used for a short period of time, allowing for travel along a designated route. Conspicuously, document 5 departs from this pattern, as it seems to have only a delivery address.

Third, the notes all evince larger exchanges or administrative processes. They provide no explanations or justifications: document 2 does not describe why a mat is needed from Qianqiu station, for instance, nor does document 3 tell us why Zhou Tongcheng had to report so quickly to the company. Such information was either already known or best communicated orally. Document 5, meanwhile, offers no rationale for the items it enumerates. It seems to be a kind of list or inventory, drawn up for reasons that the document does not supply. Other strips utilize this same format, including another Juyan document whose title, rendered in larger characters at the top, is "inventory of items for the general" (*jiangjun qi ji* 將軍器記),[59] below which appears a list of items in smaller characters. The fact that document 5 may be more of a list than a note might explain why the calligraphy seems more careful than in the previous three examples, if we assume that the items on the list had to be checked off upon receipt.[60]

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[56] The dot after the character *pi* 匹 suggests that the entries for chariots and horses constitute one unit and should be read together. There is no evidence of a dot between chariots and horses.

[57] *Jianshui jinguan Han jian* 肩水金關漢簡, ed. Gansu sheng bowuguan 甘肅省博物館, et al., (Shanghai: Zhongxi, 2012), vol. 2, bk. 2, 163 (black and white photograph).

[58] For discussion of a four-sided *ji*, sent from the commandant headquarters and calling upon subordinate companies to search for men previously sent out to deliver an order, see Takatori Yūji, "Kan kan shoken bunsho kō," 127.

Group 2: Notes Requesting More Information

The examples in Group 2 show that sometimes the external referent of a note, the object that it requested or described, was not just a person or thing but additional information. The large font *ju ye* 俱謁 ("deliver in full") in the transcription of document 6 reflects the comparatively larger size of the two characters on the document itself (see Figure 1):

Document 6 (Figure 1)

張蓋眾 / 詣府受奉須定賦籍前記召金關隧長

張蓋眾 / **俱謁** 賦奉記到趣遣須以俱遣殷華

謁告 / 候遣吏齋吏受奉券至今不到解何 73EJF1:27A (Recto)

When opened, hide from crowd	Report to the bureau of the commandant and
When opened, hide from crowd	present the salary [list]. We must fix the record of
Delivered notification	disbursements. Previously a note summoned the Jinguan squad head to ***DELIVER IN FULL*** the disbursed salaries. Upon arrival of the note, they were to be gathered up and sent, as required to make [the list] complete. We sent Yinhua and the company sent the officials Zhai and Shou. The salary registers today have still not arrived. What Is the explanation?

官 / 會癸酉夕毋留急 = = 73EJF1:27B (Verso)

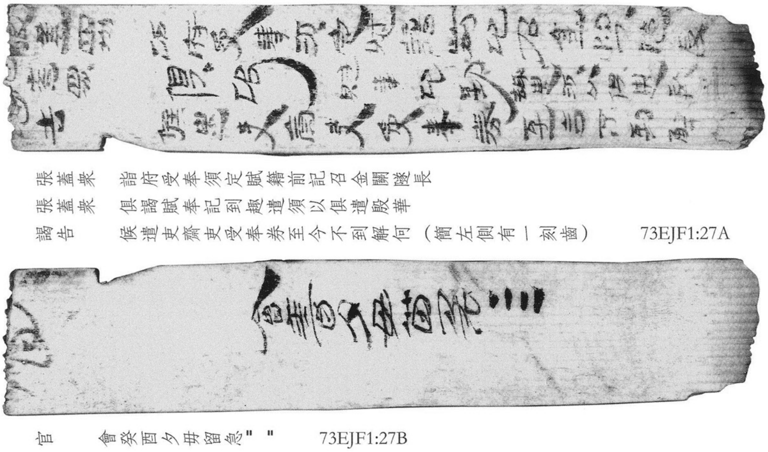
To the company. Meet on *guiyou* day by sunset. Do not tarry. Urgent. Urgent. Urgent.[61]

---

[59] *Juyan Han jian*, vol. 3, 242 (293.2+293.1).

[60] Compare, for instance, the rather sloppy *fu* 府 in document 3 (recto) with its counterpart in document 5 (recto).

[61] *Jianshui Jinguan*, vol. 4, bk. 2, 280 (black and white photograph). I have not found any studies of this strip.



張蓋衆 詣府受奉須定賦籍前記召金關隧長
張蓋衆 俱謁賦奉記到趣遣須以俱遣毀華
謁告 候遣吏齎吏受奉券至今不到解何（簡左側有一刻齒） 73EJF1:27A

官 會癸酉夕毋留急" " 73EJF1:27B

Figure 1. *Jianshui Jinguan*, vol. 4, book 2, 280.

The translation here can only be tentative. Particularly unclear is the opening statement, *zhang gai zhong* 張蓋衆, as the phrase is separated by a gap from the text below. Note that there is a notch next to the gap, but on only one side of the strip. Possibly, this notch provided a place for binding the strip with a cord and affixing a seal,[62] or perhaps the notch allowed the strip to sit in a bag, hiding the sensitive information from view while keeping the top part visible for the convenience of the messenger, who was sent specially by the commandant, apparently. The delay in obtaining the salary registers has caused consternation with the commandant, if the larger font *ju ye* (“deliver in full”), perhaps the ancient analogue to all caps in an email, is any indication. The role of the Jinguan squadron head remains unclear: is the commandant upset with him, or the company head, or both?

Document 7

六月辛未府告金關嗇 / 夫久前移檄逐辟橐他令史

解事所行蒲封一至今 / 不到解何記到久逐辟詣 183.15A (Recto)

Sixth month, *xinwei* day. Notification from the bureau of the commandant to Bailiff Jiu. Previously we sent a sealed document stating that you were to pursue and capture the magistrate’s official from Tuota named Jie. When the matter was carried out, [you were to report back]

---

[62] Fujita, “Kanki gōshiki,” argues that the notched *ji* he analyzed, which feature gaps between the upper and lower portions of the text, were all bound and sealed. All the strips he discusses, however, are notched in the middle, not toward the top, unlike document 7.

> in a single sealed envelope. Even today such a document still has not arrived. What is the explanation for this? When this note arrives, you are to pursue and capture him and then go to …
>
> 會壬申旦府對狀無以它為解各 / 署記到起時間令可課
>
> 告肩水候=官=所移卒責不與都吏趙卿 / 所舉籍不想應解何記到遣吏抵校
> 及將軍未知不將白之 183.15B (Verso)
>
> for a meeting by sunset on the *renshen* day at the bureau of the commandant, to report back. No other matter can excuse a delay. Each bureau that receives this note is to record the time so that it can be checked. A notification to the Jianshui company: the conscripts transported by Jianshui company do not correspond with the list submitted by the *duli* Zhaoqing. What is the explanation? When this note arrives send the officer Di to check them. The general does not yet know this. I will not let it be known to him.[63]

In document 7, the precise relationship between the second line on verso (beginning with "A notification to the Jianshui company" [告肩水候官] and continuing to the end) and three other lines (the two lines on recto and the first line on verso) is unclear. The fact that the final four characters of the second verso line are crammed in at the end to allow for an ending flourish on *zhi* 之 (similar to the *ke* at the end of the adjacent line) shows a conscious effort made to make sure the entire line fits onto the board.[64] Perhaps after the initial notification to Jinguan made it back to the commandant, the board was subsequently reused for a second notification to Jianshui.

Documents 6 and 7 differ in form and content from the first group of notes examined above (documents 2–5): not only are documents 6 and 7 longer, but they also do far more than convey simple orders to someone to report to an office. In soliciting additional information, they provide some background to justify their request and to convey its urgency, even if documents 2–5 stipulate some urgency as well. Their formulaic nature notwithstanding, two phrases—"no other matter can excuse a delay" (*wu yi ta wei jie* 無以它為解) and "How are you to explain [this]?" (*he jie* 何解)—nearly leap off the strips, as do the triple exhortations of "urgent" (*ji* 急). The large character *ju ye* 俱謁 in document 6 highlight the demands of the writer. The closing statement in document 7, meanwhile, suggests some worry connected with the general, perhaps because he might discover discrepancies between the numbers of conscripts listed in the previous submission and the number actually provided.

---

[63] *Juyan Han jian*, vol. 2, 210.
[64] A point also noted in Fujita, "Kanki gōshiki," 48.

Group 3: Notes Between Officials and Friends Employing *bai* 白

While document 7 implies some nervousness on the part of the writer, documents 8–10, in Group 3, show nothing of the sort. Use of the word *bai* 白 ("to let it be known") is common in letters from the later Eastern Han and post-Han period[65] and, when paired as a compound with *ji*, *bai* accompanies documents of a more formal nature, often in official communications.[66] Document 8 is just such an example, but the later examples become successively more unrelated to professional responsibilities, without ever entirely abandoning the world of work:

Document 8

肩水臨田隧長歸方恢叩頭白記

槖他候長楊卿閣下 73EJD:308 (Recto)

Gui Fanghui, leader of Lintian squad, Jianshui company, bows his head: a note to let it be known:

To the office of Honorable (*qing*) Yang, head of Tuota company[67]

As this strip appears to record a location for delivery, presumably Gui Fanghui would have also been carrying the actual note with him for delivery to Yang. The word *qing* 卿 (literally, "minister," and so "honorable sir") is probably a polite form of address, with *qing* often employed in letters between friends. Whether the note was related to official business or an affair more private in nature remains unclear. If it was official business, then Gui Fanghui was not following the usual chain of command, for he served under Jianshui company, as the address indicates, not Yang's Tuota company.

Document 9

頭良孟今旦聞子侯來也失不以時詣前死=罪=屬自馳詣門下道蓬楊卿舍文君言子侯

73EJD:187A (Recto)

From Touliang Meng: Just this morning I heard that you, Zihou, had arrived. It was my fault that I did not get to visit you in time. Deep

---

[65] Antje Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 77–78.

[66] Sanft, *Literate Community in Early Imperial China*, 152, observed that documents using *baiji* 白記 often (though not exclusively) also indicate the full name and surname of the writer. Richter, *Letters and Epistolary Culture*, 78, notes that *bai* alone in letters seems to be "hierarchically neutral," being used by both superiors and inferiors.

[67] *Jianshui Jinguan*, vol. 5, book 2, 308 (black and white photograph).

> apologies, deep apologies. I took my own [horse?] and galloped to your residence, but on the road I passed by Honorable Yang's house and Wenjun said that you, Zihou …
>
> □□南□□不為□□□下□得令長□□□叩₌頭₌謹請文君□記再拜白
>
> 73EJD:187B (Verso)
>
> … south … did not … received, ordering company heads … Bowing my head, bowing my head, with great care I begged Wenjun [to deliver?] this note. Repeatedly bowing, I let it be known.[68]

Many of the characters, especially on the verso side, are indecipherable, so the specific content of this note cannot be understood. What is clear is that Meng proceeds in great haste, as he is dismayed that he just missed seeing Zihou. He thus probably wrote the note immediately after encountering Wenjun, whom he likely has asked to deliver the note on his behalf. Note that this strip was found in the same group as document 9, so the Honorable Yang mentioned in both documents is likely the same person, which would locate this incident in Tuota company.

Document 10

> 陳惲白少房凡此等事安足已窮子春也叩頭不宜遣使
>
> 到子春送焉記告尹長厚叩₌頭₌君知惲有疾不足少 73EJT4H:5A (Recto)
>
> Chen Hui explaining to Shaofang. How could such trivial matters suffice for me to trouble you, Zichun? I bow my head to the floor. It was not right to dispatch an envoy to Zichun to deliver it to you, so I had my note reported to Yinzhang. I deeply bow my head to the floor, bow my head to the floor. You should know that my sickness is not sufficient to trouble … .
>
> 子長子春也前子春來桼人出自己小疾耳立偷也今
>
> 客居□時愈也子春又舍金關使幸欲為之官入故敢取 73EJT4H:5B (Verso)
>
> Zizhang and you, Zichun. Previously when you came to visit me and then left, I was just slightly sick and then got better quickly. Now, with a guest in residence … in time I will get better. Furthermore, Zichun, the fact that you are in Jinguan makes me happy. I hope that when I have reason to go to the company office, I may venture to take [the opportunity to visit?].[69]

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[68] *Jianshui Jinguan*, vol. 5, book 2, 164 (black and white photograph).

[69] *Jianshui Jinguan*, vol. 5, book 2, 103 (black and white photograph).

My translation is tentative, not only because the language is difficult but also because the hastily written cursive means that the editor’s transcription must suffice. Note that this document appears to be following up on a previous “note” that Chen Hui had Yinzhang (the same person as Zizhang?) deliver to Zichun. That the note opens with the phrase “Chen Hui lets it be known” (陳惲白) suggests that it was written just on this one single strip. Nonetheless, as the ending proves somewhat confusing, we cannot discount the possibility that more text once continued onto a second strip (now missing). That said, the final line on the verso seems to head toward a conclusion, since Chen Hui has finished assuring Zichun that his sickness is no problem, and he changes the topic to discuss a future visit to Zichun in Jinguan.

Document 10 is the closest we have come so far to a genuine letter between friends, and it makes perfect sense to refer to it as such, even as a “private letter.” Short and probably quickly written, it aimed to assuage the concerns of a friend worried about the writer’s health. The previous document 9 appears to be even more rushed than document 10, as document 9 was written quickly to communicate with a friend he has just missed. In this sense, documents 9 and 10 impress us with the urgency of the notes, even as they clearly display the intimacy of friendship.

Returning to the Capital: A Distressing Letter and Using Notes at Court

Notwithstanding the complexities of interpretation, the foregoing discussion provides some sense of the diverse uses to which *ji* was put in the militarized frontier regions of the northwest. While questions remain, the previous examples display common features: these notes tend to be brief and sometimes hastily composed and transcribed; often they convey urgent or important information; and, in some cases at least, the notes relay emotions that can range from anxiety to friendliness. It behooves us to keep the foregoing in mind when we encounter *ji* in other texts, whether excavated or received. Note, for instance, the *ji* solicited in the following letter (document 11), one of the mid-Western Han manuscripts recovered from Tomb 19 (M19) near Tianchang 天長 in Anhui 安徽 Province. Written on a wooden board, the letter is addressed to an official named Meng 孟 (probably Xie Meng 孟) by a friend or associate named Ben Qie 賁且. The sometimes cryptic nature of the letter renders any translation tentative.[70]

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[70] Giele, “Private Letter Manuscripts,” provides a brief overview of the Tianchang find. For the excavation report, see Tianchang shi wenwu guanli suo 天長市文物管理所 and Tianchang shi bowuguan 天長市博物館, “Anhui Tianchang Xi Han mu fajue

footnote continued on next page

Document 11

賁且伏地再拜請

孺子孟馬足下，賁且賴厚德到東郡，幸毋恙。賁且行守丞，上計以十二月王戌到洛陽，以甲子發。與廣陵長史卿俱□，以賁且家室事羞辱左右。賁且諸家死有餘罪，毋可者，各自謹而已，家毋可鼓者，且完而已。賁且西，故自亟為所以請謝者，即事復大急，幸遺賁且記，孺子孟通亡桃事，願以遠謹 [M19: 40–10A] 爲故。書不能盡意，幸少留意。志歸至未留東陽，毋使歸大事，寒時幸進酒食。□□□賁且過孟故縣毋緩急，以吏亡劾，毋它事，伏地再拜。孺子孟馬足下 [M19: 40–10B]

I, Ben Qie, convey my best regards and a request

My very dear lad Meng,

Relying on good fortune, I have arrived in Dong commandery, thankfully without incident. Carrying out the duties of assistant to the Governor, I was on my way to deliver accounts to the capital. I reached Luoyang on the *Renxu* day in the twelfth month. On the [auspicious] *Jiazi* day, I left.[71] With[72] the senior official from Guangling, we together .... He brought up matters related to my household, in an attempt to humiliate the members of my group.[73] Members of my own family have committed crimes whose punishment merits death or worse. With respect to forbidden matters, each behaved with perfect circumspection. Because my family could not be implicated,[74] the matter was momentarily dropped and that was the end of it.

---

jianbao" 安徽天長西漢墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu* 2006.11, 4–21. For a detailed discussion of the letter translated here, see Yang Zhenhong 楊振紅, "Jizhuang Han mu 'Ben Qie' shu du de shidu ji xiangguan wenti" 紀莊漢墓「賁且」書牘的釋讀及相關問題, *Jianbo yanjiu* (2009 [2011]), 1–13.

[71] In other words, Ben Qie spent just two days in Luoyang.

[72] The excavation report transcribed the character after *fa* 發 as *bing* 兵 ("army"), but Yang Zhenhong, following another interpretation, rendered it as *yu* 與.

[73] The meaning of *zuo you* 左右 is unclear. It could be a reference to Ben Qie himself (He Youzu's interpretation), Ben Qie's attendants (argued by Yang Zhenhong), Meng (Antje Richter, private communication, April 2014), or just "unnamed parties" (Michael Loewe, private communication, March 3, 2015). Given that Ben Qie immediately mentions members of his family, I suspect that *zuo you* might refer to family members traveling with him who had their own histories of bad behavior and thus know how to act with care when being grilled.

[74] Following the interpretation of He Youzu 何有祖, who glosses *gu* as *shu* 屬. See He Youzu, "Anhui Tianchang Xi Han mu suo jian Xi Han mu du guankui" 安徽天長西漢墓所見西漢木牘管窺, *Bamboo and Silk Manuscripts* (bsm.org.cn), December 12, 2006, www.bsm.org.cn/?hanjian/4703.html, accessed March 18, 2022.

> I am traveling west. The reason I quickly make this request is because the matter has become increasingly urgent. Please send me a note (*ji* 記).
>
> My dear lad, you have fled the scene, as you prudently wanted to distance yourself. I know that writing cannot fully express intent, but please impart some small sense of it. I plan to return home directly without stopping by Dongyang, lest I bring [news of] this grave matter home with me.
>
> During this cold season, take care to eat and drink … I passed through your old county and there was no pressing business. An official had fled and was under investigation, but nothing else. Conveying best regards, I salute you, my very dear lad Meng.[75]

For the moment, we can set aside the dramatic and evidently stressful incident that prompted Ben Qie to send this letter to Meng. We do not understand what happened to Meng nor the precise nature of his relationship with Ben Qie, but plainly the men were intimate acquaintances, so Ben desperately sought to understand Meng's plans during a tense and perhaps dangerous time. As a result, we can safely assume that the "note" Ben Qie requested would have been private correspondence meant for his eyes only. More important for our purposes, the evident urgency of the situation recalls the quick notes dashed off by commanding officials and, especially, the friends and acquaintances discussed above (e.g., documents 9 and 10). While the difference between "note" and "letter" are subtle, the former does seem more appropriate in this case, especially if Xie Meng had fled, was in straightened circumstances, and could not write a full-fledged explanation of his whereabouts. In this sense, Ben Qie's use of the stock phrase "writing cannot fully convey intent" (*shu bu neng jin yi* 書不能盡意) seems particularly apt, since it would perhaps have been impossible, even dangerous for Xie Meng to go into great detail.[76]

When we turn to practices evident at the imperial court, the specific meanings attached to *ji* become even clearer. The *Han shu* regularly uses various compound terms that match *ji* with other words in order to refer to different types of documents exchanged between friends or associates, without ever straying too far from administrative matters. The case of *zou*

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[75] For the image, see "Anhui Tianchang Xi Han mu fajue jianbao," 21, image #26 (verso), #27 (recto). The transcription follows that provided in Yang Zhenhong, "Jizhuang Han mu 'Ben Qie' shu du de shidu ji xiangguan wenti."

[76] The phrase is famously used at the very end of the "Letter in Reply to Ren An" (Bao Ren An shu 報任安書). See *Han shu*, 62.2736. It is perhaps a variant of the famous saying from the "Xi ci zhuan" 繫辭傳 chapter of the *Yi jing* 易經: "Words do not fully convey intent; writing does not fully convey words" (言不盡意，書不盡言).

ji 奏記 (“presented note”) is perhaps the most enlightening, since it contrasts rather clearly with *zou shu* 奏書 (“presented document”).[77] Neither of the terms appears very frequently, but compared to the former, the latter is more formal, for, with one exception, it is always submitted to the ruler (or empress).[78] Moreover, the phrase *zou shu* is usually paired with an additional graph characterizing the purpose of the document: *jian* 諫 (“to remonstrate”), *xie* 謝 (“to demur”), or *jie* (“to warn”).[79]

By contrast, there is no instance of a “presented note” (*zou ji*) submitted to the ruler. Rather, all of the notes are exchanged between officials, and the writer almost always holds a relatively low office. This pattern would seem to contradict the evidence in the administrative documents from the desert northwest analyzed above, since they suggest a pattern of “notes” sent as brief orders to subordinate officials. Orders, however, could open up opportunities for more intimate exchanges between superior and subordinate. In the *Han shu*, the recipient of a “presented note” (*zou ji*) is inevitably a patron, potential patron, or friend of the less powerful person who wrote the note. The case of Zheng Peng’s 鄭朋 note to Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 (d. 46) is a case in point, since Zheng Peng “secretly desired to attach” (陰欲附) himself to the powerful Chancellor, as the *Han shu* makes quite clear. After denouncing Xiao’s enemies and gaining an appointment at court, Zheng delivered to Xiao a note of praise, embarrassingly fawning, that prompted Xiao to “admit” (*na* 納) Zheng into his inner circle of advisors.[80]

The compound “writings and notes” (*shu ji* 書記) is also instructive, even if appears but once in the *Shi ji* 史記, when describing writing practices in Anxi 安息 (Persia), where the people wrote horizontally on pieces of leather in order to make “writings and notes” (*shu ji*).[81] The *Han shu* includes this same story, but elsewhere uses the term to refer specifically to private correspondence, as when Chunyu Zhang 淳于長 (d. 8 B.C.E.) “exchanged writings and notes” (交通書記) with a somewhat desperate former Empress Xu 許后 (d. 8 B.C.E.), who was bribing Chunyu to speak on her behalf with Chengdi 成帝 (r. 33–7 B.C.E.) after he had demoted her as empress in favor of a beloved consort more likely to bear a child. When their exchanges came to light, Chunyu's "writings" (*shu* 書) were deemed "perverse and depraved" (*bei man* 誖謾), and he was dismissed from his post, while the former Empress Xu was forced to commit suicide.[82]

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[77] If “*zou ji*” were submitted to the ruler (to date we have no instances of this), we would translate as memorialized notes. I hope to discuss this in a future publication.

[78] The exception is Gu Yong’s 谷永 (d. 8 B.C.E.) memorial to Wang Feng 王鳳 (d. 22 B.C.E.) (*Han shu*, 85.3454). At the time, however, Wang Feng was in charge of the government. Submitting a document to Wang, the uncle of Chengdi, might not have been too dissimilar from giving a document to the emperor or empress dowager.

[79] See, e.g., *Han shu*, 51.2338 (*jian*); 72.3061 (*jie*); 76.3220 (*jian*); 85.3454 (*xie*).

[80] *Han shu*, 78.3284.

[81] *Shi ji*, 123.3162. The phrase could also be rendered as “written notations,” perhaps as a way to refer to the foreign writing script. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

As we can see, the "note" circulated outside of official channels, and was often used in the most intimate contexts, but neither was it completely divorced from the work of government. A final contrast between the *zhao shu* 詔書 ("edict") and *zhao ji* 詔記 ("edict in note form") makes this distinction clearer still. The former is ubiquitous throughout the *Shi ji* and *Han shu*, in all cases indicating an official order or proclamation from the emperor or empress dowager.[83] The latter, however, appears but once, in a well-known memorial submitted by Xie Guang 解光, at the outset of Aidi's 哀帝 reign (r. 7 B.C.E.–1 C.E.), in which Xie summarized his investigation into the mysterious deaths of two children Chengdi allegedly fathered with a consort and former empress. Xie's investigation implicated Zhao Zhaoyi 趙昭儀, one of Chengdi's most favored consorts and the sister of Zhao Feiyan 趙飛燕, whom Chengdi had installed as empress to replace his Empress Xu.[84] For our purposes, the politics and intrigue that prompted the investigation are less important than what this one instance reveals about communications within the imperial court. Immediately after the birth of one of the children, for instance, the emperor reportedly sent several "edicts in note form" sealed in silk envelopes, one of which ordered the baby and its mother to be imprisoned. One follow-up order asked the jailkeeper whether the baby had died, and to "handwrite the response on the back of this board" (手書對牘背).[85]

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[82] *Han shu*, 93.3731. It is unclear from the story whether the *shu ji* 書記 and *shu* mentioned in this story are the same thing. My reading here takes *shu ji* as the actual documents exchanged, with *shu* referring to Chunyu Zhang's "writings" or his writing style. A story in the "Wai qi zhuan" chapter, however, mentions people *tong shu* 通書 (circulating letters) (see *Han shu*, 97b.3983). Elsewhere, we read that Jia Shan "waded and hunted through writings and notes" (涉獵書記). Because of this "wading," Ban Gu writes that Jia was a man who who "could not be considered a pure classicist" (不能為醇儒). Perhaps the compound term *shu ji* helped underscore, in pejorative terms, this varied background of learning. See *Han shu*, 51.2327.

[83] Note, however, that in the *Han shu* the texts of edicts are prefaced only by the word *zhao*. The word *zhao shu* occurs only in quoted statements in which the speaker refers to an edict.

[84] For Xie Guang's memorial, see *Han shu*, 97b.3990–96. Wilber translated *zhao ji* as "private edict," without making all of the distinctions given here. See C. Martin Wilber, *Slavery in China During the Former Han Dynasty* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1943), 424–32.

[85] *Han shu*, 97b.3991.

There is some slippage between *shu* and *ji* in Xie Guang's report, but nonetheless the story indicates that the term *ji*, when appended to *zhao*, implies a quicker, less formal direct communication by the emperor, unmediated by the document drafters who produced the elegant edicts intended for public circulation.[86] The conflict within the palace and between the emperor's various consorts was not mediated through or driven by an "edict," but rather through a veritable stream of *ji* issued from the emperor's chambers by personal messengers. Nonetheless, as Xie Guang took pains to point out, these *ji* were sealed by officials and resulted in a series of actions executed on the emperor's behalf. On the one hand, this interplay between private, intimate exchanges and official documents is not particularly surprising in the case of the emperor, since it is hard to imagine any piece ascribed to him that was not examined or at least delivered by an attendant of one kind or another. At the same time, we already saw a somewhat analogous (if not "the same") dynamic play out at the lowest administrative levels. The request to write on the back of the board is fully in keeping with the excavated *ji* described above, all with writing on both sides, in some cases in multiple hands. Moreover, many of the *ji* were part of larger exchanges of documents and information, one link in a complicated web of urgent requests. Administrative practice, whether at court or in the frontiers, required a certain number of affective, casual, and rushed communications, and the "note" emerged to fill that need.

Final Notes to Remember

In highlighting the ubiquity of notes in Han administrative and literary practice, this essay makes no argument that "notes" and "letters" did not exist during Qin or pre-Qin times. Such an absurd claim is demonstrably false, since the Qin document from commandant Jing (Document 1) is a "letter," by any definition, albeit one addressing official business. This essay makes more modest claims, calling attention to two facts that emerge from sifting through the available evidence. First, on the whole, pre-imperial sources simply do not refer to *ji* often. On those rare occasions when the word appears, it tends to invoke annals or records associated with royal courts or, more broadly, any kind of old record that contains authoritative knowledge, often about the distant past. By contrast, received Han sources teem with all sorts of *ji*, and not just "annals" or "records." Thus, judging by the evidence at hand, the word by Western Han became more common and broadened by usage;

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[86] To write a response on the back of an official edict (*zhao*) seems unimaginable.

if the published Liye material continues do not yield any manuscripts that self-identify as *ji*, the case for dating this change to the Western Han itself will be stronger, though not beyond a reasonable doubt, for we cannot assume that the Liye material is "representative" of Qin practices throughout the Qin kingdom and Qin empire.

Second, close examination of excavated sources from the northwest illustrates the implications of choosing "note" or "letter" as translation for *ji*. Translation decisions can only be made on an individual, case-by-case basis. Still, as the examples above suggest, "note" seems preferable when the document is hastily written, or in a perceived crisis (*ji* 急). Brevity and swift delivery were then primary concerns, with the *ji* helping to facilitate the quick exchange of information or resolve misunderstandings. Such patterns in the manuscript evidence also figure in the anecdotes alleging *ji* exchanged at the imperial court. Particularly striking in this regard is the parallel between the translated *ji* manuscripts cited here, which have multiple hands writing on both sides of the document, and the *Han shu* story about the jailkeeper asking the recipient of the "edict in note form" (*zhao ji*) to write a response on the back of the board.

This spontaneous and occasional nature of so many excavated *ji* thus places today's readers at the heart of the Han administration. Study of the history of institutional structure and official positions (*zhidu shi* 制度史 in Chinese scholarship) is critically important. This essay could not have been written without the assistance of studies such as *Records of Han Administration*, along with numerous other books and essays by Michael Loewe. At the same time, the evidence cited above shows us that close study of manuscript sources, always somewhat fraught, also helps us understand Loewe's "operations of government" better. So many of the excavated "notes" are manifestly *not* manuscripts that existed on more or less independent terms—unlike an imperial edict, say, or a summary report of an investigation. Rather, they reflect individual moments in complicated webs of exchange, where small bits of information needed to be communicated efficiently.

Given the number of newly published excavated manuscripts, significant research remains to be done on the precise dynamics and rhetorical patterns found in such texts, including the striking similarities between the roles played by *ji* in efficiently recording and conveying information, often of an urgent nature, and the "memorandum" favored in modern bureaucracies. The memo, like the Han "note," is often marked up with handwritten reactions and follow-up requests,[87] and the word's obvious connection to "memorize" cannot but evoke the fact that in Chinese *ji* also came to mean "to remember." Perhaps this slippage between the "note" and "remembering" began to emerge during the Han, though this supposition is pure speculation. The connection between the two is nonetheless beautifully evoked in an anecdote from the *Liezi* 列子 (c. third century C.E.?) which explicitly puns on the double meaning of *ji* as "to remember" and "to note down." The story describes one Huazi 華子, a man who "in his middle age fell sick with forgetfulness" (中年病忘). For years, this man suffered from a dementia so severe that he forgot to walk and sit down. Through an unnamed, mysterious means, a classical master (*ru sheng* 儒生) from Lu 魯 managed to cure him, so at dawn one day Huazi's dementia lifted and he became fully "conscious" (*wu* 悟). Furious, he lashed out at his wife and son and chased away the classical master with a dagger-axe. His neighbors asked about the strange behavior:

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[87] See, for instance, examples from a presentation by a Smithsonian archivist: Mitch Toda, "The Evolution of the Memo," November 17, 2011, www.slideshare.net/SIArchives/evolution-of-the-memo, accessed March 17, 2022.

> 華子曰：「曩吾忘也，蕩蕩然不覺天地之有无。今頓識既往，數十年來存亡、得失、哀樂、好惡，擾擾萬緒起矣。吾恐將來之存亡、得失、哀樂、好惡之亂吾心如此也，須臾之忘，可復得乎？」
>
> 子貢聞而怪之，以告孔子。孔子曰：「此非汝所及乎！」顧謂顏回記之。
>
> Huazi said: "In the past, I forgot. Just bobbing along, I did not know whether or not heaven and earth even existed. Now suddenly I have realized what has happened over the last few decades. In jumbled disorder, there rose up the countless strands of what has been preserved and lost, succeeded and failed, the sorrows and pleasures, and likes and dislikes. I am now terrified by the future havoc that may be wrought by instances of preservation and loss, success and failure, sorrow and pleasure, and likes and dislikes. Just one instant of forgetting: how can I ever get that back again?"
>
> Zigong heard about the incident and found it strange, so he related the story to Kongzi, who then said, "How could you be up to understanding it?" He then turned and told Yan Hui to note (*ji*) the story down.[88]

The anecdote memorably juxtaposes the forgetfulness of the man, and the relief such forgetfulness brings, with the need to "remember" or

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[88] *Liezi jishi* 列子集釋, ed. by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2016), 3.115–16 ("Zhou Mu wang" 周穆王). As Yang notes, some versions of the received *Liezi* end the anecdote with *ji zhi* 記之 and others *ji zhi* 紀之. Needless to say, the persistent interchangeability of the characters long after the Han is a reminder that any distinctions between the two made in the *Han shu* "Yiwen zhi" had a limited impact.

“note” in written form (*ji*) his story. Presumably, a record of the story would allow Kongzi, Yan Hui, and others to refer to and learn from it in the future, but underlying is the unstated question: do such acts of noting and remembering contribute to the kind of pain and anxiety Huazi experienced? The *Liezi* invites us to ponder the potential contradictions, even dangers, of a world filled with the early equivalent of Post-Its, in which we always have a brush (or pen or phone) at the ready when something noteworthy comes up.

戰國秦漢時期行政文獻中的「記」

何祿凱

提要

本文針對戰國秦漢文獻和簡牘中的「記」加以考察。在該字不常出現的先秦文獻中，「記」通常指的是歷史事件、先例或有權威性知識之記錄，而據某些故事，有時這些故事被藏在朝廷的府庫中。記通常不等於筆記 (note) 或信件 (letter)，但從河西地區出土自稱記的簡牘來看，到西漢時期這種用法已經出現了。這些記不僅是下行命令，也包含要求人與人之間交換物品或信息的筆記和信件。本文主張，跟先秦的用法相比，將「記」納入不同類型的行政工作，給予「記」這個字更廣泛的定義。西漢朝廷使用記的描述也呼應了這種變化。官員甚至皇帝使用記的方式跟更正式的文獻（奏摺，敕令等等）相比，差異顯而易見。因此，仔細研究記讓我們更深刻了解不僅是行政制度，也是古代中國寫本文化和實踐的一些變遷。

Keywords: manuscript culture, excavated texts, government administration, early imperial period
寫本文化, 出土文獻, 政府管理, 戰國, 早期帝國