

HAN YUANDI, REIGNED 48 TO 33 B.C.E., AND HIS ADVISORS

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Thanks partly to the predilections of Chinese historians and the form in which our sources have been constructed, the fifteen years of Yuandi's reign have largely been ignored, in favor of a concentration on other periods. Attention has tended to fasten on the early years in which the Han dynasty was founded, or on the reign of Wudi, portrayed as the heroic age of Western Han, or on the final decades that ushered in the rise and enthronement of Wang Mang. Yuandi's reign may be thought to have been unremarkable, and indeed peacefully free of major upset, in so far as it witnessed no major military engagements with non-Han peoples and no major institutional changes; and there were no open rivalries deriving from the influence of the families of rival imperial consorts that could threaten the survival of the house of Liu. Documents found at Yinwan 尹灣 (in present-day Jiangsu) that are dated between 15 and 10 B.C.E., testify to the extent to which records of the administration of officials were being kept, with details of their accomplishments. This style of government was being practised at no small distance from the capital and with little possibility of direct supervision by the central government, and there is no reason to suppose that these standards were necessarily less intensive some thirty years earlier, during Yuandi's reign. Similarly the documents from Juyan 居延 and Dunhuang 敦煌 do not suggest that the line that guarded the trade route to the north-west had been left without the supervision and maintenance of Han officials and conscript servicemen. However, the years were by no means devoid of interest, as may be seen in discussion of the issues that arose and attention to the part played by some of the men who had risen to prominent places in the conduct of the empire.

The treatment of the years from 48 to 33 that follows in no way implies that the particular year of an emperor's accession or death marks a discrete stage of historical development, any more than the fiftieth or sixtieth anniversary of a sovereign's accession signifies a turning point in history. Certainly the death of an emperor could at times have allowed certain individuals the opportunity to seize power, as might be the case with members of an imperial consort's families. But it cannot be maintained that the years in which a particular emperor was on his throne formed a specified period whose character, achievements and failures may be

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assessed in their own right and set against those of the preceding or following years. Nor does the title of this article imply that the emperor who is named played a dominant role in directing the course of history or even took a lively interest in, let alone laid his mark on, imperial government. For Western Han, no more than three emperors may be judged to have done so, Gaozu the founder, Jingdi and Xuandi. Yuandi was not a ruler of that type.

Sources

According to Ying Shao 應劭 (ca. 140 to before 204) it was Ban Biao 班彪 (3 C.E. to 54) who compiled the chapters of imperial annals for Yuandi and Chengdi, but there is no suggestion that the other parts of the *Han shu* that concern Yuandi's reign were not written by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) or his sister Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca. 48 to ca.120).¹ We can have no idea of the type of documents on which Ban Gu was able to call or how complete they were at the time. We can only presume that he had access to some of the memorials that senior officials presented to the throne, and to some of the government's archives.² Nor can we know the extent to which he was selective, omitting parts of a memorial, or some of its arguments, or how far he summarised the texts that lay in front of him. While there are no major sources with which the *Han shu* may be directly compared, or its statements verified, it is possible that the *Yan tie lun* may serve in this capacity to some extent.

Compiled by Huan Kuan 桓寬, who studied the *Gongyang zhuan* in the reigns of Xuandi, the *Yan tie lun* 鹽鐵論 purports to be an account of the debate that was ordered to be held on certain issues of policy, particularly the retention or abolition of the government's monopolies of salt and iron, in 81 B.C.E. Set in dialogue form, it is heavily biased, some of its sixty chapters according more space to the opponents of the monopolies than to their defenders. On several occasions it tells that it was the defenders of the monopolies who were reduced to silence in the face of compelling arguments of their opponents, but in no instance are the defenders of the schemes shown to be winning their case. For these reasons the *Yan tie lun* is to be judged as a propagandist tract that lent support to those who wished to abolish the monopolies.

1. *Han shu* 漢書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 9.299.

2. I have suggested elsewhere that Ban Zhao, who completed the tables of the *Han shu*, had access to official files, such as the lists of the nobilities, with which to complete her tasks. see Loewe, *Men who Governed Han China: Companion to A Biographical Dictionary of the Qi, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), chapters 7 and 8. It may also be asked whether routine reports of provincial government, such as those found at Yinwan, were available.

Although those monopolies survived the attack in 81, the same issue arose again early in Yuandi's reign, with the result that they were in fact abolished in 44 B.C.E., to be restored in 41. It is therefore open to question whether the work that we have before us was in fact compiled to support the abolitionists of Yuandi's reign rather than those of 81 B.C.E., and there is slight textual evidence to support this suggestion.³ If it is asked why, if Huan Kuan was addressing the conditions of his own time, he set the dialogue back to 81 B.C.E., it may be suggested that this was by way of precaution. By so doing he would be avoiding the danger that, by criticising his own contemporaries, he would risk incurring their antagonism and enmity. Possibly he may have had in mind that, as it is stated in the *Lunyu*, it is by familiarity with the past that one can understand the present. It will be seen below that at least two leading persons of the time, Shi Dan 石丹 and Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之 were ready to allude to this *dictum*.⁴

As with the *Han shu*, so with the *Yan tie lun* we have no idea of the sources on which Huan Kuan could call, and cannot know whether these included documents that related to 81 or 44. For his part, Ban Gu seems certainly to have had the *Yan tie lun* at his disposal.⁵ We cannot know whether he drew directly therefrom or from the sources upon which it was based.

Overall the dialogue of the *Yan tie lun* brings out the major difference between those who, like the spokesman for the government and its monopolies, saw the ways of Qin as being best suited for government of an empire, and the critics who pinned their faith to the actions and principles of the kings of Zhou and Zhou Gong, as far as they had heard of them. At its foundation, the Han dynasty had inherited and adopted the institutions of the Qin empire with little change, except for setting up the kingdoms of the *Zhuhouwang* 諸侯王, and it retained the system of punishments for which Qin came to be bitterly criticised. From perhaps 70 B.C.E. onwards Han policies and practices were moving away from the ways of Qin with a growing appreciation of those of Zhou. What may perhaps be a sign of this move may be seen in a recognition early in

3. The edition of Zhang Dunren 張敦仁, which derives from a print of 1501, includes the term Xuandi, which could not have been known before Yuandi's accession. See Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yan tie lun jiao zhu* 鹽鐵論校注, rev. ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992) 6.356 (29 "San bu zu" 散不足). In the edition of Zhang Zhixiang 張之象 of 1554 this is replaced by Bi xia 陛下. See Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2011), 160 n.176.

4. *Wen gu zhi xin* 溫故知新 as in *Lun yu* (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏, ed. Ruan Yuan 阮元, 1815), 2.4b ("Wei zheng" 為政); James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 2nd ed., rev. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1893), vol. 1, 149. See notes 37 and 105 below.

5. *Han shu*, 66. 2903.

Yuandi's reign that the laws and their punishments needed revision, and the abolition in 44 of some seventy items that were punishable.⁶ It was Wang Mang who deliberately set out to show that he was following the practices of that blessed era of Zhou; there may well have been those who wished to do so in Yuandi's reign but no such overt decision was made.

We may perhaps, with due caution, treat the text of the *Yan tie lun* as showing what issues were at stake at that time. The statements and opinions that are put forward forcefully in that document are doubtless imbued with rhetoric and marked by exaggeration. But at least some of its observations may be taken to be based on conditions of Yuandi's reign, in so far as they are reflected or even corroborated in the *Han shu*. The critics of the government pointed to grave imbalances of wealth, claiming that the flourishing prosperity that the cities enjoyed should be set against the poverty of those living in the countryside. At great length they described the contrast between the plain living of the idealised past and the blatant opulence and luxurious extravagance seen in their own time, between the material wealth of some and the indigence of others.⁷ The critics voiced their concern over the sale of offices for cash, the irresponsible nature of government in some of the commanderies and kingdoms, and the unduly harsh demands made on the populace for tax and service. As a result, they maintained, parts of the land were not being worked, offices of government were over staffed and in some of their activities officials were acting like merchants or even competing with them.

The *Yan tie lun* shows that the following matters were at issue.⁸ Should government of the empire be designed to promote ethical ideals or to satisfy material needs, and was it right to depend on punishments as a means of instilling discipline rather than on education in moral principles? The system of collective responsibility for maintaining law and order (i.e., by means of the *wu* 伍 or *shi* 什 groups) might well be effective; but it could also bring about punishment for all members of the group, whether guilty of crime or not, with the result that there were some who felt no disgrace in bearing the marks of a legal sentence that they had suffered unjustly. There was also the question of whether officials were better chosen for their moral training and literary ability or for their competence in handling the practical problems of administration.

Methods of economic administration were subject to debate as seen in

6. A decree, probably of 47, took note of the complexity of the Statutes and Ordinances and the difficulty of understanding them, and called for a discussion of how they could perhaps be abbreviated; see *Han shu*, 23.1103 and 9.281; A.F.P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Han Law* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955) 339, 393n.220; and *Han shu*, 9.285 for the decree of 44.

7. See *Yan tie lun* 6.348-400 (29 "San bu zu").

8. For a longer summary of the arguments of the *Yan tie lun*, see Loewe, *Crisis and conflict in Han China 109 BC to AD 9* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1974), ch. 3.

the relative importance of agriculture, seen usually as the primary occupation (*ben* 本), or that of industry and trade, seen as secondary undertakings (*mo* 末). There was a choice between co-ordinating the working efforts of the population with legal force, so as to achieve higher standards of material living, as against allowing a freedom of occupation with scope for private enterprise. As against the use of money in the form of the cash coin (*qian* 錢) for transactions such as payments of tax, it could be argued that this was better achieved by rendering local produce. Above all, the debate concerned the material benefits of the government's control of the iron and salt mines or the improvements that might be seen in production and distribution if these were left to private management.

Treating with the leaders of the non-Han communities could involve a choice of both principle and policy. An active policy of attracting their loyal support might be seen as better than a non-activist policy of staying aloof from such overtures; there might be advantages in promoting an active export trade, or a distrust in its benefits in so far as they simply brought unwanted luxuries into the empire.

Yuandi: early influences

Before Yuandi's reign started a reaction had set in against the forward looking policies of intensive government that Han had inherited from Qin, operated during the first six decades and taken to greater lengths shortly after Wudi's accession in 141. But towards the end of Wudi's reign it was becoming impossible to maintain the pace of expansion that had been practised hitherto and Han's armed forces were not achieving the successful results that the large expenditure was intended to bring about. Xuandi, who acceded to the throne in 73, certainly favored maintenance of a forceful means of governing and controlling the empire, but by no means would all those around him necessarily agree that attention to practical issues must take priority over principles of morality. Such dissenters included his heir apparent, who took his place on the throne in 48.

Born in 74, Liu Shi 劉奭 was a son of Xuandi and his Empress Xu Pingjun 許平君. Within three years he suffered the loss of his mother in circumstances that can be described only as monstrous. At the orders of Huo Xian 霍顯, whose husband Huo Guang 霍光 effectively controlled the government, the empress was murdered while pregnant; five more years had to elapse before the Huo family met its ruin (66). At the age of eight *sui* Liu Shi was nominated heir apparent (67 B.C.E.). His father, Xuandi, had received instruction in the *Shi jing* from Fu Zhongweng 馮中翁 of Donghai 東海, which may well have included a center of learning;⁹

9. *Han shu*, 8.237. For the presence of scholarly activity in Donghai and perhaps

but we have no hint of how this had affected him. Liu Shi, for his part, had received instruction from Xiao Wangzhi 蕭望之, Zhou Kan 周堪, Shi Gao 史高, and Ouyang Diyu 歐陽地餘, whose names will recur later. He also owed some guidance to Jin Chang 金敞 (son of Jin Anshang 金安上) who was chosen to give him instruction in the traditional institutions of the empire.¹⁰

Xiao Wangzhi had played a significant part in government during Xuandi's reign, and may well have had considerable influence over Liu Shi. A native of Donghai, he had been trained in the Qi version of the *Shi jing* by Hou Cang 后蒼 (also of Donghai), and in the *Lunyu* and parts of the *Li* by Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝.¹¹ He had held junior posts in the first decade of Xuandi's reign, advancing after Huo Guang's death to be Commissioner for the lesser treasury (*Shaofu* 少府) in 65, Metropolitan commissioner of the left (*Zuo pingyi* 左馮翊) in 64 and Commissioner for state visits (*Da honglu* 大鴻臚) in 61. As Imperial counsellor (*Yushi dafu* 御史大夫) in 59, he was demoted to be Senior tutor to the heir apparent (*Taizi taifu* 太子太傅) in 56 when his charge was aged about 18. His memorials show him to have been a man of character who was always ready to express his views, however ill received they might be.

Zhou Kan had also been a pupil of Xiahou Sheng who had instructed him in the *Shang shu*. He took part in the discussions on textual matters that were held in the Shiqu ge 石渠閣 in 51 B.C.E., and was appointed Counsellor of the palace (*Guanglu dafu* 光祿大夫), also to be Junior tutor to the heir apparent, Liu Shi.¹² Thanks to his ancestry, Shi Gao would have had a personal knowledge of the dangers to which the relatives of imperial consorts might be subject. Shi Liangdi 史良娣 had been the wife of Liu Ju 劉據, who had been nominated heir apparent in 122, and died in violent circumstances at the close of the witchcraft affair of 91–90. A cousin of Shi Huangsun 史皇孫, a son of Liu Ju and Shi Liangdi, Shi Gao had taken part in bringing about the downfall of the Huo family, and he was a protagonist for the *Guliang zhuan*, dying in 42. He enjoyed a personal friendship with Xuandi, while being on poor terms with Xiao Wangzhi. Ouyang Diyu was of a family that had studied the *Shang shu* from one generation to another. He instructed Liu Shi in that text, and also took part in the discussions of 51 B.C.E. As Advisory Counsellor (*Jian dafu* 諫大夫), Zhang Youqing 張游卿 instructed him in the *Shi jing*.¹³

even a center of teaching at Lanling 蘭陵 (where Xunzi had taught), see Loewe, *Men who Governed Han China*, 89–90.

10. *Han shu*, 78.3283.

11. *Han shu*, 78.3271. *Li fu* 禮服 is explained as the chapters on *Sang fu* 喪服 in the *Li ji*.

12. *Han shu*, 88.3604.

13. *Han shu*, 88.3610.

According to the *Han shu*, Liu Shi grew up with a liking for traditional scholarship (*hao ru* 好儒),¹⁴ and one may perhaps presume that this had been due to the training he received from his teachers. Soon he was learning how severely his father's officials were treating some of his subjects, and of how Yang Yun 楊惲 and Ge Kuanrao 蓋寬饒 had been sentenced to death for expressing their critical opinions.¹⁵ Protesting at these excessively harsh punishments, he drew an angry response from his father who defended the value of the institutions of the house of Han in contrast with the weak and useless ways of Zhou and with a reliance on moral teachings with which to govern an empire. He added that the scholars of traditional learning of a mediocre grade (*su ru* 俗儒) had no idea of the needs of the present day. By their adulation of what was old and their scorn for what was current they threw the distinction between fact and fiction into disarray. He even added that the person who would jeopardise the ruling house would be none other than his own heir apparent.

How far this account was realistic or due to prejudice or fancy may not be known. Xuandi's disappointment in his son's character and qualities may have played its part in persuading him to reconsider who should follow him as his successor. But despite his father's misgivings, Liu Shi remained as heir apparent. Possibly it was thanks to Xuandi's mistrust of his son's ability that in his valedictory decree he promoted three senior officials, Shi Gao, Xiao Wangzhi and Zhou Kan, with orders to receive his final wishes, assist the government and take direction of the Secretariat (*Shang shu* 尚書), thus overriding the powers of the Chancellor (Chengxiang 丞相) Yu Dingguo 于定國.¹⁶

Imperial consorts and their families

No members of the families of imperial consorts held the most senior official posts during Yuandi's reign and there is little to show that the court and government were subject to their undue influence, or affected by their rivalries and machinations, as had been known in previous reigns and would occur later. Wang Zhengjun 王政君 had become Yuandi's

14. *Han shu*, 8.277.

15. For Yang Yun, charged with gross immoral behavior and executed at the waist, see *Han shu*, 66. 2889. Ge Kuanrao, similarly charged, committed suicide at the palace gates in 60 (*Han shu*, 77.2243).

16. *Han shu*, 78.3283; for the growth of the responsibility of the secretariat, see Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 466–67. Shi Gao received the title of *Da sima*; Xiao Wangzhi appointment as General of the van (*Qian jiangjun* 前將軍) and Commissioner for the palace (*Guangluxun* 光祿勳), and Zhou Kan that of Counsellor of the palace.

consort while he was still heir apparent; she gave birth to Liu Ao 劉鷲, the future Chengdi, in 51 and was nominated empress after her husband's accession in 48. Two other consorts are worthy of mention. Fu *Jieyu* 傅婕妤 had likewise been in favor before then, and certainly Kuang Heng 匡衡 had found reason to protest at the power of the Fu family.¹⁷ Feng *Jieyu* 馮婕妤 was a daughter of Feng Fengshi 馮奉世 who had served in distant military campaigns during Xuandi's reign (see below).

Wang Jie 王接, who held the post of Commissioner for the Guards (*Weizei* 衛尉) in 48 and the honorary title of *Da sima* 大司馬 (Marshal of state) in 43 was not a relative of Wang Zhengjun, whose nephew Chunyu Zhang 淳于長 did not enter public life until Chengdi's reign. We may perhaps infer that it was only after Yuandi's death that the Wang family began to rise to the top, and perhaps see how they were then displacing another family.

The Xu 許 family had included Yuandi's mother, murdered in 71. The nobility of Ping'en 平恩 that had been granted to Xu Guanghan 許廣漢 in 67 lapsed on his death without a son in 60, to be restored to his nephew Xu Jia 許嘉 immediately after Yuandi's accession in 48.¹⁸ In 46 Xu Jia became General of the right, to be promoted with the honorary title of *Da sima* in 41.¹⁹ Yuandi died on a day corresponding with 8 July 33, and was buried 54 days later on 31 August. In the meantime little time had been lost; Liu Ao formally acceded to the throne on 4 August; on the same day Wang Feng 王鳳, brother of Wang Zhengjun, became *Da sima* and General-in-chief 大將軍.²⁰ Shortly after Chengdi's accession, Xu Jia was allowed to retire honorably.

Both Fu *Jieyu* and Feng *Jieyu* were honored by the grant of the newly coined title of *Zhaoyi* 昭儀 that carried precedence over all other consorts except the empress, and conferred the same status as that of the Chancellor and the kings (*Zhuhouwang* 諸侯王). At the death of Chengdi, Fu *Jieyu* contrived to bring about the accession of her grandson Liu Xin 劉欣, known as Aidi. The name of Feng *Jieyu*'s son Liu Xing 劉興 (2) had also been put forward, and it was his son, Liu Kan 劉衍 who duly became emperor, known as Pingdi, in 1 B.C.E. Fu *Jieyu*'s cousins Fu Xi 傅喜 and Fu Yan 傅晏 did not come into prominence until Chengdi's reign; after Aidi's death the family was deliberately removed from any position of prominence.

Feng Fengshi had been magistrate of a county way back in the reign of Zhao di and was known for his service on campaigns against the Xiongnu 匈奴 (73–70) and in the Western Regions. He held the posts of Commissioner of waterways and parks (*Shuiheng duwei* 水衡都尉 62),

17. *Han shu*, 81.3338.

19. *Han shu*, 9.298, 10. 302, 19B. 822.

18. *Han shu*, 9.279, 18.696.

20. *Han shu*, 19B. 815, 819.

Commissioner for the capital (*Zhijinwu* 執金吾 48), General of the Right (*You jiangjun* 右將軍) and Director of the dependent states (*Dianshu guo* 典屬國 44). After suppressing the revolt of some of the Qiang 羌 peoples he became General of the Left (*Zuo jiangjun* 左將軍) and Commissioner for the palace (*Guangluxun* 光祿勳 41), dying in 39 or 38. Although he does not seem to have played a major part in public affairs, his sons held senior posts, but only in one instance in the central government. Feng Li 馮立 rose to be Governor of Wuyuan 五原, Xihe 西河, Shangjun 上郡 and finally Donghai during Chengdi's reign; Feng Can 馮參 served as Governor of Daijun 代郡 (between 16 and 13) and then Anding 安定. Greater interest perhaps attaches to Feng Yewang 馮野王. Appointed Governor of Longxi 隴西 at Yuandi's accession, he became Metropolitan Commissioner of the left in 42, and Commissioner for state visits (*Da honglu* 大鴻臚) in 37 and then Governor of Shangjun. Shortly before Yuandi's death, Li Yanshou 李延壽, who had been Imperial counsellor since 37,²¹ died and it was generally expected that Feng Yewang, who was clearly the most able candidate, would be appointed to succeed him. Perhaps somewhat exceptionally Yuandi exerted his own will, refusing to agree that he should do so; he did not wish to be saddled with the reputation of an emperor who chose to appoint his near kinsmen to high office.²² A decisive act of that sort lies in contrast with what we read of other aspects of Yuandi's behavior, as may be seen below.

Senior officials of the central government

Yu Dingguo 于定國 of Donghai was Chancellor at the time of Yuandi's accession.²³ He had made his mark in 74 by his criticism of the way in which Liu He, 劉賀 emperor for 27 days, had conducted himself. From 69 he held the post of Commissioner for trials (*Tingwei* 廷尉). He held it for the exceptionally long period of eighteen years and was noted for the scrupulous fairness and care with which he fulfilled his responsibilities. Imperial counsellor in 52 he became Chancellor in 51, to hold that post for eight years. Except for one matter, to be mentioned immediately below, he had no cause to disagree with Chen Wannian 陳萬年, the Imperial counsellor, but he did not concur with the views of Gong Yu 貢禹, who replaced Chen Wannian in that position in 44. Yu Dingguo advised

21. Li Yanshou was Commissioner for the capital (*Zhijinwu* 執金吾) in 46 and Commissioner of the guards (*Weiwei*) in 37, to be appointed Imperial counsellor in 36, dying in 33. As Imperial counsellor he gave Gu Yong 谷永 his start in official life by accepting him as a member of his staff, to become Assistant to the Commissioner for ceremonial (*Taichang cheng* 太常丞); *Han shu*, 85.3443.

22. *Han shu*, 79.3302.

23. *Han shu*, 71.3041.

Table 1: Senior officials of Yuandi's reign

Year B.C.E.	Imperial counsellor	Chancellor	<i>Da sima</i>
51	Chen Wannian	Yu Dingguo	
50			
49	Shi Gao		
48			
47			
46			
45			
44	Gong Yu ^a ; Xue Guangde		
43	Wei Xuancheng	Wang Jie	
42	Zheng Hong	Wei Xuancheng	
41			Xu Jia
40			
39			
38			
37	Kuang Heng		
36	Li Yanshou	Kuang Heng	
35			
34			
33	Zhang Tan		Wang Feng
32			
31			
30	Yin Zhong		
29	Wang Shang (1)		

a. Gong Yu held this office for six months only before his death

against the despatch of a costly expedition to suppress the revolts in Zhuai commandery, while Chen Wannian had advised that the rebels should be attacked.²⁴ Yu Dingguo retired honorably. Of all the chancellors of Western Han he is perhaps the one whose performance of his duties and relations with his colleagues passed without incurring problems or arousing antagonism.

24. *Han shu*, 64B.2835. For this incident, see p. 392 below.

Chen Wannian, of Peijun 沛郡, had been governor of Guangling 廣陵, Commissioner for transport (*Taipu* 太僕 in 66) and Metropolitan commissioner of the right (*You fufeng* 右伏風 in 61). He was appointed Imperial counsellor in 51, two months after Yu Dingguo became Chancellor, and he died in office in 44. He had been of particular service to Shi Gao and had been recommended to Xuandi by Bing Ji 丙吉 shortly before the latter's death in 55. Yuandi promoted Chen Xian 陳咸, son of Chen Wannian, to be Assistant to the Imperial counsellor (*Yushi zhongcheng* 御史中丞), in which capacity he was responsible for drafting the memorials sent in from the provincial officials and grading the regional inspectors (*Cishi* 刺史). By criticising Shi Xian, Chen Xian incurred the latter's wrath, to be brought up on a charge of revealing information that was confidential. The death sentence was reduced to a term of hard labor.²⁵ He was rehabilitated during Chengdi's reign.

Gong Yu 貢禹, of Langye 琅邪, who had been instructed in the *Gongyang zhuan* and was an advocate of the Qi version of the *Lunyu*, had been summoned to be an academician. He served as Regional inspector (*Cishi* 刺史) of Liangzhou 涼州 and then as Magistrate (*Ling* 令) of Henan 河南 county, before being appointed Advisory counsellor (*Jian dafu* 諫大夫) early in Yuandi's reign.²⁶ He was Counsellor of the palace in 44 and became Imperial counsellor in that year, dying after a few months in office. Wei Xian 韋賢, of Zou 鄒 (in Lu 魯) and later Pingling 平陵 had been Chancellor from 71 to 67 and had received the nobility of Fuyang 扶陽. His son Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 had tried unsuccessfully to avoid inheriting the nobility. He became Commissioner for ceremonial (*Tai chang* 太常) in 56 and took part in the discussions of 51. Commissioner for the lesser treasury at Yuandi's accession, he was appointed Senior tutor of the heir apparent in 46, to become Imperial counsellor in 43 and Chancellor in 42.

Kuang Heng 匡衡 came from a family of farmers in Donghai and at one time worked as a hired laborer. He evidently showed his love of learning while young, receiving instruction from Hou Cang, presumably in the *Shi jing* and *Li*.²⁷ According to one account, he was graded first class (*jia* 甲) for his responses to imperial rescripts. Xiao Wangzhi respected him highly for his scholarship but was unable to persuade Xuandi, who had no liking for such matters, to give him a chance to show his talents.²⁸

25. *Han shu*, 66.2900.

26. *Han shu*, 72.3069.

27. *Han shu*, 88.3613.

28. There are several differences between the account of Kuang Heng in the *Han shu* and one that was inserted as an addendum in the *Shi ji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959). The *Shi ji* (96. 2688) has him eventually being graded at third class (*bing* 丙) as

Meanwhile Kuang Heng had attracted the admiration of the heir apparent and at the latter's accession Shi Gao brought his name forward. During Yuandi's reign he held the posts of Commissioner for the palace (38), Imperial counsellor (37) and Chancellor (36), to be dismissed in 30 or 29.

The eunuchs

Apart from the officials who have been named as taking a significant part in the conduct of government in Yuandi's reign there were others who enjoyed a position of favoritism and power, the two eunuchs Hong Gong 弘恭 and Shi Xian 石顯. Hong Gong, who was well versed in legal matters and a skilful draftsman of documents, was Director of the palace writers (*Zhongshu ling* 中書令) and Shi Xian held the title of Supervisor (*Puye* 僕射). Hong Gong died a few years after Yuandi's accession and Shi Xian became the director. Both of these men had been made eunuchs by reason of punishment for crime.²⁹

Even in the early days of his reign Yuandi was delegating powers of decision to Shi Xian who was able to act without reference to the duly appointed senior officials. As Director of the Secretariat (*Shangshu ling* 尚書令) shortly after 48, Xiao Wangzhi was only too well aware of Shi Xian's excessively high powers. He wrote that although Wudi had initiated the employment of eunuchs,³⁰ there were no traditional institutions to support their presence and authority, and he asked that their office, the *Zhongshu*, should be abolished. His pleas were completely ineffective; Shi Xian survived without threat, and it was Xiao Wangzhi who was forced to commit suicide for his failure. Zhou Kan and Liu Xiang 劉向 who were also opponents of Shi Xian, were removed from office. Others, who later expressed their views of Shi Xian's faults were executed in public, such as Jing Fang 京房 the younger, or else driven to suicide or punished by a sentence of hard labor.

Shi Xian had been a party to dissuading Yuandi from appointing Feng Yewang Imperial counsellor and for reasons of his own he had recommended Gong Yu.³¹ It was due to his criticism of Shi Xian that Feng

against the first class of the *Han shu* (81.3331). The *Shi ji* has him appointed *Taizi shaofu* 太子少傅 in Xuandi's reign and serving (*shi* 事) Yuandi, whatever that term may imply; the *Han shu* (81.3331) has him serving (*shi xia* 事下) Xiao Wangzhi the *Taizi taifu*, 太子太傅, being himself appointed Counsellor of the palace *Guanglu dafu* and *Taizi shaofu* in Yuandi's reign (*Han shu* 81.338). Xiao Wangzhi had been demoted *Taizi taifu* during Xuandi's reign.

29. *Han shu*, 78.3284, 93.3726.

30. The most conspicuous case in which a eunuch rose to prominence in Wudi's reign was that of Li Yannian 李延年, who was appointed *Xielü duwei* 協律都尉 presumably with the duties that concerned regulating the pitch-pipes.

31. *Han shu*, 93.3729.

Qun 馮遂, another of Feng Fengshi's sons, drew Yuandi's anger and was prevented from rising to a high place in public life.³² Shortly after Chengdi's accession Kuang Heng the Chancellor and Zhang Tan 張譚 the Imperial counsellor entered a memorial in which they listed the evil activities for which Shi Xian had been responsible. Losing the support on which he had relied, Shi Xian forfeited his commanding position.³³

Criticism of Yuandi

We may perhaps observe signs of ostentation and high living on the part of Yuandi. Shortly after his appointment as Imperial counsellor in 44, at a time of popular distress and vagrancy, Xue Guangde 薛廣德 protested against his plan to go on a hunting expedition after performance of the religious cults at Ganquan. He likewise protested against Yuandi's wish to cross the Wei 渭 River by barge, at some risk of danger, rather than by simply crossing the bridge.³⁴ We read that a little later, in the Jianzhao 建昭 period (38–34) when he was approaching forty years of age, Yuandi was subject to illness and was taking no personal part in the conduct of government. Rather was he spending his time in frivolous amusements such as dropping pellets from a height in the hope that they would hit the target, of a drum, below.³⁵ We cannot judge how far attention to these games was no more than a temporary lapse and no regular addiction, nor are we able to determine whether this report was no more than a baseless rumour or anecdote. Elsewhere there is a reference to his love of music.³⁶

We may well ask what sort of a model of monarchy Yuandi left for his son to follow, and we know of at least one outspoken rebuke that he received. He had been expressing his admiration for the talents (*cai* 材) of Liu Kang 劉康, king of Dingtao 定陶, the only person who was a match for him when playing these games. Shi Dan 史丹 protested that real talents lie in intelligence, a love of learning and an ability to understand the present in the light of the past, rather than in skills in the use of musical instruments.³⁷ Shi Dan held junior positions during Yuandi's

32. *Han shu*, 93.3728.

33. *Han shu*, 81.3344, where Zhang Tan is erroneously given as Zhen Tan 甄譚. Zhang Tan, of Langye, had been Governor of the capital (*Jingzhao yin* 京兆尹 40–36) and then Senior tutor of the heir apparent, becoming Imperial counsellor shortly before Yuandi's death. Early in Chengdi's reign he acted with Kuang Heng in proposing the change in the religious cults of state (*Han shu*, 25B.1253).

34. *Han shu*, 71.3047. Xue Guangde had been a teacher of the Lu version of the *Songs* and was a subordinate of Xiao Wangzhi while the latter was Imperial counsellor. He took part in the Shiqu ge discussions of 51.

35. *Han shu*, 82.3376.

36. *Han shu*, 93.3726.

37. *Han shu*, 82.3376. Liu Dan called on the ideal of *wen gu zhi xin* 溫故知新 as

reign, perhaps thanks to the position of his father Shi Gao, and he may have had a deeper motive in mind. At one time Yuandi had seriously thought of dispossessing his named heir apparent, Liu Ao, in favor of Liu Kang.³⁸ Chengdi perhaps realised that he owed much to Shi Dan for his support and Shi Dan rose to hold high offices in his reign, receiving a nobility in 20.³⁹

We may possibly detect a note of criticism that was addressed to Yuandi, although this is not openly directed against him, in a memorial submitted by Kuang Heng early in the reign. Kuang Heng was an academician when he submitted his memorial. He alluded to the popular distress of the time and to some of the good steps that had been taken to reduce public expenditure. But he included a sharply critical note in calling for cutting down that of the palaces and their fineries.

Ban Biao 班彪 wrote the appreciation of Yuandi on the basis of information that his elder relatives, who had been in attendance at the emperor's court, had supplied.⁴⁰ He wrote that Yuandi possessed many talents, being skilled at handling the writing of official documents and being a versatile musician and a composer. As a young man he had come to like the scholars of traditional learning so that after his accession he appointed some of them to office, such as Gong Yu, Xue Guangde, Wei Xuancheng and Kuang Heng, who took their turn as senior ministers. However he was somewhat inhibited by his attention to written forms and their principles, with the result that he was quite indecisive, and the achievements of Xuandi fell into decline. But he was open-minded, encouraging others to express their opinions without hindrance and he was a model of respectful and moderate behavior.

In his own summary Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) chose to mention Yuandi's respectful and tolerant manner of conduct, pointing to his relations with others, thought to be men such as Gong Yu, Xue Guangde and Zhu Yun 朱雲.⁴¹ He also mentioned the personal economies that he had accepted

expressed in *Lun yu* 2.4b ("Wei zheng" 為政) (see note 4 above). The expression is also seen in *Li ji* (*Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 edition) 53.8b ("Zhong yong" 中庸), Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, 423. Wang Chong 王充 cites it twice, in *Lun heng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, ed. Huang Hui 黃暉, (rev. ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 12.557 (36 "Xie duan" 謝短); Alfred Forke, *Lunheng* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1911), Part 2, 77; and *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 28.1139 (81 "Zheng shuo" 正說), Forke, Part 1, 457. Spokesmen for the government in the *Yan tie lun* or others known for their forthright criticism of those who praise the past and denigrate the present would have had little time for the principle of valuing the past as a means of judging the present.

38. *Han shu*, 10.301.

39. *Han shu*, 18.698.

40. *Han shu*, 9.298.

41. Zhu Yun, who had at one time openly criticized Wei Xuancheng, was accused

and remarked that his qualities had been corrupted by the eunuchs.⁴² Meanwhile Wang Mang had paid an honorary tribute to Yuandi. While he held the title of An Han Gong 安漢公 and was thus acting as and seen to be a loyal supporter of the house of Liu, Wang Mang had proposed the conferment of the posthumous titles of Zhongzong 中宗 and Gaozong 高宗 on Xuandi and Yuandi, with the Son of Heaven offering sacrifices at their shrines from one generation to the next.⁴³ Possibly it was deference to Wang Zhengjun, Yuandi's empress and Wang Mang's aunt who was still alive, that lay behind the proposal to confer this honor on her late husband.

Scholars and writers of the time

We are led to suppose that it was thanks to Yuandi's liking for *ru* 儒 learning that exemption from tax and service was granted to those persons who were familiar with one of the five *jing* 經, but owing to the cost of such a gesture, after a few years a quota of one thousand was adopted.⁴⁴ At the same time statutory arrangements were initiated for providing a training in those texts in the provinces.⁴⁵ Some of the men who came to prominence in public life in Yuandi's time or just previously had been trained in these texts, such as Xiao Wangzhi, Gong Yu, Wei Xuancheng, Zhou Kan and Kuang Heng. Some of the leading scholars of the day had taken part in the discussions of 51 B.C.E. and may surely be seen as affecting the scholarly and literary work of their pupils in Yuandi's reign, when other scholars who are named held titles as officials.

The founders of the three schools of interpretation of the *Zhou yi* 周易, i.e., Shi Chou 施讎 of Peijun, Meng Xi 孟喜 of Donghai, and Liangqiu He 梁丘賀 of Langye had been working on that text and framing their views during Xuandi's reign; Jing Fang 京房 the younger, Dongjun 東郡, who led the fourth school, lived during Yuandi's reign until his execution in 37. The family of Xiahou Sheng 夏侯勝 came from Lu. One of those who had called for the deposal of Liu He 劉賀 in 74, he was an instructor of Zhou Kan and Xiao Wangzhi; Ouyang Diyu, whose family was of Qiancheng 千乘, held office as Commissioner of the Lesser Treasury from 43 to 38, and had taught Yuandi the *Shang shu*. Hou Cang of Donghai,

of compliance with murders committed in the county of which he was magistrate and sentenced to death. Reduction to a sentence of hard labor and disqualification from office may have been due to Yuandi's intervention; *Han shu* 67.2914.

42. *Han shu*, 100B.4239.

43. *Han shu*, 12.357.

44. *Han shu*, 88.3596.

45. *Jun guo wu jing bai shi zu shi* 郡國五經百石卒史. See *Han shu bu zhu* 88.6a note.

who had been Commissioner of the lesser treasury (*Shaofu* 少府) in 72, was an accomplished scholar in the *Shi jing*, *Li* and *Chunqiu*. His pupils included Xiao Wangzhi, Dai De 戴德, Dai Sheng 戴聖,⁴⁶ Kuang Heng and Yi Feng 翼奉, and he had instructed Xuandi in the niceties that attended the ritual performances of archery. Yan 嚴 (Zhuang 莊) Pengzu 彭祖 of Donghai and Yin Gengshi 尹更始 of Runan 汝南, who were specialists respectively in the *Gongyang* and *Guliang zhuan*, took part in the discussions of 51; Yan Pengzu became Senior tutor of the heir apparent in 42 and Yin Gengshi held office as Advisory counsellor during Yuandi's reign. A galaxy of scholarly talent that arose in Xuandi's reign and carried its influence forward into that of his son was formed of these men, of whom a high proportion came from eastern parts of the empire.

Trained in the Qi version of the *Shi jing* by Hou Cang, Yi Feng of Donghai was recommended for service early in Yuandi's reign, to receive appointment as an Academician and Advisory counsellor, but he never rose to hold high office.⁴⁷ Some of the ideas that he entertained and the opinions that he expressed accorded with those of his contemporaries, such as his distrust of the growing influence of members of the Wang family,⁴⁸ and his concern with the irregular and excessive practices in some of the imperial palaces and in the funerary park of Duling 杜陵, the site of Xuandi's tomb. In one opinion that was perhaps not shared by others, he even suggested that a move away from Chang'an to a new capital that he named Cheng Zhou 成周 would enable the dynasty to reassert its strength and reduce its expenses. As against the extravagance of the house of Han, particularly under Wudi, he praised the fine examples of the house of Zhou.⁴⁹

In drawing on other concepts, Yi Feng looked at metaphysical or cosmological ideas perhaps more deeply than some of his colleagues. He wrote of understanding or controlling the six humors (*liu qing* 六情) of mankind by means of the twelve pitch-pipes.⁵⁰ He saw the workings of the cosmic order (*dao* 道) in terms of Yin Yang and the Five Phases, and the lessons that are inherent in the *Shi jing*, *Shang shu*, *Yi*, *Chunqiu* and the texts on *Li* and music. He also mentioned the interdependent activities of the three estates of heaven, earth and living creatures. Such was the context within which the conduct of public affairs should be set.

46. For the part played by Dai De (the greater) and Dai Sheng (the Lesser) in the formulation of texts on *li*, see Jeffrey Riegel, in Michael Loewe, ed, *Early Chinese Texts A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley, California: The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 293–94.

47. See his biography in *Han shu*, 73. 3167–78.

48. *Han shu*, 73.3173–74.

49. *Han shu*, 73.3176–7.

50. *Han shu*, 73.3168.

As has been stated, there may be reason to believe that the *Yan tie lun* was compiled early in Yuandi's reign.⁵¹ Chu Shaosun 褚少孫, who may be dated from *ca.* 104 to *ca.* 30 B.C.E., may well have been working on his replacement of lost parts of the *Shi ji* or additions to that text then or later. The sources at his disposal cannot be identified but they may well have included archive material that was kept in the government's offices. Nothing is known of Zhongli Sheng 鍾離生 who is named as one of his informants other than that he was well acquainted with the history of the Han house.⁵² Chu Shaosun had himself had been trained in the *Songs* by Wang Shi 王式 and he may have been responsible for supplying the received text of some of the ten chapters that were missing after Sima Qian's 司馬遷 death.⁵³ His additions included some of the memorials and decrees that concerned the nomination of three of Wudi's sons as kings in 117 B.C.E., parts of Jia Yi's 賈誼 essay "Guo Qin lun" 過秦論 and lists of nobilities conferred during the reigns of Zhaodi and Xuandi.⁵⁴ He also wrote a strong defence of the professional diviners.⁵⁵

In many ways Jing Fang, *ca.* 78 to 37, is the most enigmatic of the intellectual figures of Yuandi's reign, and it is first necessary to distinguish between two men of that name, both of whom were concerned with interpretation of the *Changes*. Jing Fang the elder may probably be dated between 140 and 80,⁵⁶ and it is with Jing Fang the younger that we are concerned.⁵⁷ He had changed his name from Li 李 to Jing; was nominated a Gentleman (*lang* 郎) in 45, and was an expert at the use of the pitch-pipes⁵⁸ and familiar with music. Brought up on a false charge he was executed in 37.

The chapters of the *Han shu* that are entitled "Wu xing" carry numerous citations from the *Jing Fang yi zhuan* 京房易傳; the *Han Wei congshu* includes a text that is entitled *Jing shi yi zhuan* 京氏易傳 on its first page and throughout, but may be listed as *Jing Fang yi zhuan* in a table of contents. The contents and style of this text are markedly different from those of the citations in the *Han shu* and it has been judged by some scholars to be a forgery, perhaps of Song times.⁵⁹ Three titles of works

51. See p. 362, note 3 above.

52. This is as told in one of Chu Shaosun's own statements; *Shi ji* 49.1981.

53. *Han shu*, 62.2724. According to Zhang Yan 張晏 (3rd, 4th century) he wrote (*zuo* 作) chapters 12, 30, 128 and 127.

54. As in *Shi ji* 60, and 20.1059, 48.1962.

55. *Shi ji*, 128.3221.

56. See A.F.P. Hulswé, "The two early Han *I ching* specialists called Ching Fang," *T'oung Pao* 72 (1986), 161–62.

57. *Han shu*, 75.3160.

58. The expression *hao zhong lü* 好鍾律 requires full comprehension.

59. See Rafe de Crespigny, *Portents of protest in the Later Han Dynasty: The Memorials*

that are listed in the bibliographical chapter of the *Han shu* include Jing Fang's name, but none of them survive.⁶⁰ Two of these may have been Jing Fang's account of the teachings of Meng Xi 孟喜;⁶¹ one may have been an account of Jing Fang's teachings that was written by one of his pupils.⁶² The citations of explanations of strange events that the *Han shu* cites are of their own character when compared with those of others and they may have been adopted from those of Jing Fang's own teacher Jiao Yanshou 焦延壽. They may call on natural phenomena, human activities or dynastic history; they may be expressed in terms of the hexagrams. The *Wu xing* are mentioned on at least eighteen occasions.

In addition to his interpretations of strange anomalies, Jing Fang was known as a specialist in understanding or handling the pitch-pipes (*lü* 律). According to a statement attributed to Mao Shuang 毛爽 of about 589 C.E., the treatise on pitch-pipes and calendar (*Lü li zhi* 律曆志) of the *Han shu* derived entirely from Liu Xin 劉歆, while the corresponding chapter of the *Xu Han zhi* derived from Jing Fang.⁶³

Jing Fang aroused the antagonism of some of his contemporaries in two ways. First he gave warning of the excessive influence and part taken by the eunuch Shi Xian in dynastic matters. Secondly he drew up the means for judging the achievements and merits of officials, which may not have been welcomed by all those who enjoyed the luxury of holding a post. Appointed governor of Weijun 魏郡 in 37, he perhaps tried to practise those methods there. Within a month of his appointment, thanks to Shi Xian's efforts, he was imprisoned and executed.

Liu Xiang (79 to 8 B.C.E.) lived through the reigns of Xuandi, Yuandi and Chengdi and it was in the last of these that he made his main contributions to China's cultural heritage. Named originally Gengsheng 更生 and a member of the imperial family,⁶⁴ he can hardly have lived without being acutely aware of the upsets and dangers that might face those who took their places at court or in a senior office. He would surely have known of the cruel fate that overtook Xuandi's empress Xu, mother of Yuandi. This was accomplished at the hands of the Huo 霍 family whose members wished to exercise pre-eminent power in the palace. Aged

of *Hsiang K'ai to Emperor Huan* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, 1976), 70–72. For a recent study, see Guo Yu 郭彧 *Jing shi yi yuan shu* 京氏易源疏 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2007).

60. *Han shu*, 30.1703.

61. *Meng shi Jing Fang shi yi pian* 孟氏京房十一篇; *Zai yi Meng shi Jing Fang liushiliu pian* 災異孟氏京房六十六篇.

62. *Jing shi Duan Jia shi er pian* 京氏段嘉十二篇.

63. *Sui shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 16.395.

64. As a descendant in the fourth generation of Liu Bang's brother Liu Jiao 交, he was not closely related to Xuandi or his successors.

perhaps thirteen when the Huo family was finally ruined (66) he might well have known something of how the austere and highly circumspect Huo Guang 霍光 had kept control of the empire. Whether it was with pleasure, shock or dismay that he learnt of the fall of the Huo family may not be known; he may indeed have been too young to appreciate its significance or experience any emotion.

As a young man Liu Xiang had engaged in experiments in alchemy. His failure to produce tangible results that would be of material benefit led to his imprisonment and the death penalty, from which he was reprieved and ransomed thanks to the intervention of his elder brother Liu Anmin 劉安民.⁶⁵ Despite this inauspicious start, early in Yuandi's reign (48) he was appointed to the high ranking post of Commissioner of the imperial clan (*Zongzheng* 宗正), the only one of the nine ministries of state (*jiu qing* 九卿) that a member of the Liu family was entitled to hold, and he soon found himself involved in the dynastic rivalries of the time. It was Xiao Wangzhi and Zhou Kan who had first recommended him for service. Alarmed at the influence and power of the two eunuchs Hong Gong and Shi Xian, Xiao Wangzhi, Zhou Kan and Liu Xiang tried to eliminate them, unsuccessfully. Liu Xiang was also subject to calumny by the Xu and Shi 史 families.⁶⁶

Xiao Wangzhi had been appointed Commissioner of the palace in 49, to be dismissed after some two years. Hoping to restore him to a place in the government, Liu Xiang had a memorial presented under the name of another person, only for his ruse to be discovered by Hong Gong and Shi Xian,⁶⁷ with somewhat dire consequences. Liu Xiang was imprisoned and reduced to commoner status; two officials who were to take a prominent part in public life, had had a hand in framing a charge against him;⁶⁸ Xiao Wangzhi was forced to choose suicide (in 47). The two eunuchs alleged that Zhou Kan had been conspiring with Xiao Wangzhi against them and he was likewise imprisoned and reduced to commoner status. For reasons that we are not told "the Son of Heaven suffered great remorse"; Zhou Kan who had been Yuandi's tutor, was appointed Commissioner of the palace in 46.⁶⁹ For a short time Shi Xian remained as a person of considerable influence during the reign of Chengdi.

We are not informed who trained Liu Xiang or on what texts his mind fastened, other than that he had been ordered to give instruction in the

65. *Han shu*, 36.1929.

66. *Han shu*, 36.1930.

67. *Han shu*, 36.1930.

68. Wei Xuancheng, who had been appointed Commissioner of the lesser treasury in 48 and was now demoted Senior tutor of the heir apparent in 46; and Gong Yu who became counsellor of the palace (*Guanglu dafu*) in 44.

69. *Han shu*, 36.1932–33, 19B.814.

Guliang zhuan and that he took part in the discussions of 51.⁷⁰ But something of his frame of mind lies revealed in the two memorials that he presented early in Yuandi's reign.⁷¹ In seeking to restore the reputation of his patron Xiao Wangzhi, he drew on occasions of Han times when grave errors had been made by demoting men of quality, such as Ni Kuan 兒寬 and Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, only for them to receive full respect and appreciation of their services, but at a later stage. He called on incidents of the past in order to criticise the situation in which he lived. By contrast with the models set by Shun 舜, Wen Wang 文王 and Zhou Gong 周公, the days of kings Li 厲 and You 幽 of Zhou (857/53–842/28 and 781–771 B.C.E.) had been disastrous. Recent times had witnessed the growth of factions, when men of integrity were in danger; there was a crying need to punish evil doers in the interest of maintaining good orderly government.

With the fall of the eunuchs early in Chengdi's reign, Liu Xiang came back into favor and it was at this stage, with appointment as Counsellor of the palace, that he adopted the name Xiang. He is best known for his activities during Chengdi's reign, in particular for his part in the collection and collation of copies of literature, which was ordered in 26 and led to the production of the catalogue of the imperial library. We hear of his protests against the prominent place taken by women of low class at Chengdi's court and the luxurious style of life at the palace; and of his composition of his *Lie nü zhuan* 列女傳 so as to make his message clear.⁷² He likewise protested against the expenses incurred in the abortive plan to build a tomb for Chengdi to be known as Changling 昌陵.⁷³

Late in Yuandi's reign Liu Xiang had prevented the prosecution of Gan Yanshou 甘延壽 and Chen Tang 陳湯 on the grounds that, successful as they had been in putting Zhizhi *shanyu* 鄧支單于 to death, they had done so without authority (36).⁷⁴ In Chengdi's reign he put forward a strong plea in favor of practising the ritual cults of state in the traditional way rather than transforming them into services to heaven and earth.⁷⁵ With his father he believed that dynastic authority moved from one recipient to another according to the movements of the five phases (*Wu xing* 五行), and that Han had ruled under the patronage of fire.⁷⁶ His surviving writings include the *Shuo yuan* 說苑 and the *Xin xu* 新序; others are also mentioned.⁷⁷

Liu Xiang comes through as a traditionalist with somewhat conservative views, as may be seen in his praise of Zhou and his appreciation of

70. *Han shu*, 36.1929.

72. *Han shu*, 36.1957 and 97B.3974.

74. *Han shu*, 70.3017. See p. 391 below.

76. *Han shu*, 25B.1271.

71. *Han shu*, 36.1930–32 and 1932–47.

73. *Han shu*, 36.1950.

75. *Han shu*, 25B.1258.

77. *Han shu*, 36.1948.

men such as Jia Yi and Dong Zhongshu.⁷⁸ He was less open to new ideas than his son Liu Xin 劉歆.

We may look briefly at two other men whose childhood passed during Yuandi's reign. As a youth Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E. to 18 C.E.) cannot have found occasion to compose his *fu* 賦, some of which were framed as a critique of the extravagant way of the time, until Chengdi's reign or later.⁷⁹ In his *Fa yan* 法言, he re-affirmed and expounded the teachings of Kongzi;⁸⁰ in the *Tai xuan jing* 太玄經 he set out his system of eighty-one tetragrams with their cosmic connotations.⁸¹ Born as he was in ca. 43 B.C.E., Huan Tan 桓譚 can hardly have been an active thinker or writer until the reigns of Chengdi and Aidi, when he was known to have been in contact with Liu Xin and Yang Xiong. Somewhat later he expressed his objections to a dependence on prognostication, thereby arousing Guangwudi's anger and an order for his execution. A reprieve saved his life and he lived until 28 C.E.⁸² Some sixty years later Zhangdi showed his appreciation of Huan Tan by ordering services to be paid at his tomb. No more than fragments of his writings survive, showing how some of his ideas corresponded with those of Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca.100).

Function of the Han emperors

Yuandi should perhaps be seen in the light of the functions and powers of Han emperors. While they rarely took active decisions, in constitutional terms their existence was essential for the effective government of the realm by officials. It was from the emperors that authority devolved to officials; without such a grant they would possess none. That the emperor himself was ineffective, as would be the case when an infant took his place on the throne, need be of no significance. In fact such a disability might well be welcomed by an ambitious man or woman who wished to impose his or her will upon public affairs and who would be well satisfied if the emperor conducted himself in accordance with the ideal of *wuwei* 無為. In addition an emperor could be shown off to be a moral exemplar, practising all the virtues that the renowned teachers of old had propagated. If a critic were to raise the perhaps awkward question of the

78. *Han shu*, 48.2265, 56.2526.

79. *Han shu*, 87A,B.3513–86.

80. For a translation of this text, see Nylan, *Exemplary Figures* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

81. See Nylan, *The Canon of Supreme Mystery by Yang Hsiung: A Translation with Commentary of the Tai hsuan ching* 太玄經 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

82. *Hou Han shu*, 28A.955; Timoteus Pokora, *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and other writings by Huan Tan* (43 B.C.–28 A.D.) (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1975).

source from which the emperor derived his own authority, the answer would be to cite the *Tian ming* 天命 or *the Wu xing*; or a claim might be made for transmission of such authority thanks to semi-divine ancestry.

Invocations of the *Tian ming* were by no means new to Han times, but references that Han officials made to the concept usually concern pre-imperial rulers or heroes. They are applied to Han emperors only rarely, and at a comparatively late time in the dynasty. In his three responses of ca. 134 B.C.E., Dong Zhongshu discusses the force of *ming* in metaphysical terms; he once names Yao 堯 as holding such authority but he does not assert that this had been conveyed to Han.⁸³ In a highly provocative memorial that is dated between 78 and 74 B.C.E., Sui Hong 眭弘 (Meng 孟) called for Zhaodi to abdicate in favor of a person who was really endowed with properties fit for the *Tian ming*.⁸⁴ Shortly after the deposal of Liu He 劉賀 and the accession of Xuandi (74), Lu Wenshu 路溫舒, at that time a junior clerk, extolled the qualities and achievements of Wendi, shedding glory as they did on the *Tian ming*, whereas this gift had been denied to Liu He.⁸⁵

Shortly after Yuandi's accession, Gong Yu seems to have implied that the ruling emperor had received the *Tian ming* with its responsibilities and that as such he should not tolerate a situation in which imperial extravagance contrasted blatantly with popular distress.⁸⁶ In his argument for the restoration of the *Zhaomu* 昭穆 system in 40 (see below),⁸⁷ Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 referred to the receipt of the *ming* by Wen Wang and Wu Wang, but he did not necessarily imply that this had passed to the emperors of Han.⁸⁸ Kuang Heng, however, spelt out with some clarity to Yuandi the duties that the recipient owed.⁸⁹ In the *Yan tie lun*, which may reflect ideas of Yuandi's time, the critic of the government (*wenxue* 文學) once refers to the possession of the *ming* by Wen Wang and Wu Wang; the defendant (*dafu* 大夫) spoke of its receipt by Han Gaozu.⁹⁰

The *Tian ming* recurs, perhaps with greater emphasis, in Chengdi's reign. Called to comment on the awesome occurrence of a solar eclipse and an earthquake on the same day (corresponding with 5 January 29 B.C.E.), Du Qin 杜欽 boldly advised Chengdi to counter the struggles that were taking place among the imperial consorts and their families; he began his homily by reminding his emperor of his duty to stand in awe of the *Tian ming*.⁹¹ Gu Yong 谷永, who also commented on this occa-

83. *Han shu*, 56.2508.

85. *Han shu*, 51.2368.

87. See p. 385 below.

89. *Han shu*, 81.3338.

90. *Yan tie lun jiao zhu* 1 (6 "Fu gu" 復古), 80; 9 (52 "Lun gong" 論功) 543.

91. *Han shu*, 60.2671. Du Qin never held a high appointment, but was at times consulted by those who did.

84. *Han shu*, 75.3154.

86. *Han shu*, 72.3070.

88. *Han shu*, 73.3118.

sion, may have had the *Tian ming* in mind when referring to Chengdi's "acceptance of the mind of heaven" (*cheng tian xin* 承天心).⁹² On a later occasion (15 B.C.E.), in one of the most forthright addresses ever presented to an emperor of a dynasty of China, Gu Yong pointed out precise ways in which Chengdi should reform his government, with a view to restoring possession of the *Tian ming*.⁹³ In the same way, and at much the same time (16 B.C.E.) Liu Xiang cited the *Tian ming* by way of warning to Chengdi that he was not fulfilling his duties. With the backing of Kongzi, he reminded him that the *ming* did not reside permanently with all the incumbents of one and the same house.⁹⁴ The claim to the *Tian ming* was a matter of considerable importance to Wang Mang.⁹⁵

According to our records, the years of Yuandi's reign were marked by a series of natural calamities, including an outbreak of the plague and floods in 48, and famine in the east in 47. A severe winter in 43 was followed by shortages of food; floods disrupted the small but densely populated commandery of Yingchuan 潁川 in 39, and heavy rains and snow fell in 37. Meanwhile earthquakes had shaken the land in 47, 41 and 37; observers had reported abnormal events such as eclipses for 42, 40 and 34.⁹⁶ Such events provided opportunities that critics could exploit. They required explanation that an emperor might demand; and they could not be ignored in his pronouncements or decrees.

Decrees were issued with comparative frequency during Yuandi's reign, as compared with other times; and whereas those of Xuandi had tended to reflect a satisfaction with the current state of affairs, as also seen in the choice of exceptionally optimistic terms for the reign titles between 61 and 49, Yuandi's decrees struck a more sombre note, often carrying an acknowledgement of self-blame. These decrees included a number of references to the need for an harmonious balance between Yin and Yang and the disastrous consequences if this was lost. It was in Yuandi's time (35 B.C.E.) that for the first time an imperial decree mentions the *Wu xing*.⁹⁷ "In recent times Yin and Yang have not been in harmony, the *Wu xing* have lost their rightful order (*shi xu* 失序), the people of the earth suffer dire hunger." The *Wu xing* are not seen again in decrees of the Western Han emperors; but in the previous year Kuang Heng the Chancellor had called on the order of heaven (*tian xu* 天序), the *Wu xing* and the five relationships of kin (*ren qin wu shu* 人親五屬) as forces that

92. *Han shu*, 85.3443.

93. *Han shu*, 85.3464.

94. *Han shu*, 36.1950.

95. See Loewe, *The Men who Governed Han China*, 446–49.

96. *Han shu*, 9.280, 282, 287, 293, 294; 24A.1142. Solar eclipses were reported for 42 (*Han shu*, 9.289); 40 (*Han shu*, 9.291); 34 (*Han shu*, 9.297).

97. *Han shu*, 9.295.

bind human society together.⁹⁸ It was also in Yuandi's reign that Yi Feng 翼奉 was including the *Wu xing* in the movements that take their place within the cosmic order.⁹⁹ In the *Yan tie lun* it is the counsellor, speaking for the government, who expresses his trust in the *Wu xing*.¹⁰⁰ Wang Mang was the first emperor who, we may know for certain, claimed his right to sovereignty under the aegis of one of the five, in his case that of Earth; that Han prospered under that of Fire was a retrospective claim, made in Eastern Han times.¹⁰¹

The earliest statement that Han owed its ancestry to Yao is probably seen in the highly provocative remarks of Sui Meng (Hong) between 78 and 74;¹⁰² it is seen also in Ban Biao's essay on the destiny of monarchs.¹⁰³ But it was Wang Mang who repeated the most forceful claim that an emperor's authority drew from his forebears, in his case Huangdi 黄帝 and Shun 舜.

Officials and their activities

If it is necessary to identify the persons who were responsible for taking decisions in Yuandi's reign, the finger would point to the two senior officials, the chancellor and imperial counsellor. In addition, conferment of the supernumerary title of *Da sima*, which did not bring with it an acknowledged position in the established quota of officials, conveyed considerable authority and elicited widespread respect.

The conduct and quality of some of the officials of the lower grades was giving rise to comment and criticism. Already in Xuandi's time Xiao Wangzhi had seen fit to urge him to appoint officials who were conversant with the *jing* 經 and the *shu* 術¹⁰⁴ and who, being well informed about the past, could understand the conditions of a new age.¹⁰⁵ Early in Yuandi's reign Kuang Heng wrote at length on the need for those in the upper reaches of society to show an excellent example by their conformity with *li* 禮, their love of *ren* 仁 and *yi* 義, and their high standard of behavior and tolerance. But he complained that so far from respecting those basic ideals in the performance of their duties, the officials of mediocre quality (*su li* 俗吏) were behaving oppressively in their search for material prof-

98. *Han shu*, 73.3122.

99. *Han shu*, 75.3172.

100. *Yan tie lun* 9 (54 "Lun zi"), 557.

101. See Loewe, *Men who Governed Han China*, 516.

102. *Han shu*, 75.3154.

103. *Han shu*, 100A.4208.

104. Alternatively the methods of the *jing*.

105. *Han shu*, 78.3274. Like Shi Dan, he was alluding to a passage in the *Lunyu*; see note 4 above.

it.¹⁰⁶ In the same way, after mentioning the imbalance of Yin and Yang and the popular distress of the time, a decree of 42 blamed the oppressive practices of the officials who were making no effort to look after the welfare of the population. Two years later a decree castigated the most senior officials (*gong qing dafu* 公卿大夫) some of whom were bent on their evil ways to despoil the lesser folk.¹⁰⁷ Jing Fang the younger voiced the opinion that abnormalities would cease if officials were tested for their abilities, and he submitted his system for doing so.¹⁰⁸ In Chengdi's reign Gu Yong, perhaps the most courageous and outspoken of all critics in Western Han, was to mention the emperor's use of officials who acted like reapers of the crops.¹⁰⁹

Religious questions

The maintenance of religious rites was of some concern during Yuandi's reign, in particular those that were devoted to serving the memory of the emperor's predecessors. As the generations had passed, the extent and number of these services had grown excessively, including as they did those dedicated to a large number of an emperor's relations and being in no way confined to the emperors themselves.¹¹⁰ An initial attempt to address this question came from Gong Yu early in Yuandi's reign; Wei Xuancheng put forward a more forceful proposal.

Gong Yu, who also expressed some radical suggestions for controlling economic problems, proposed the abolition of the shrines set up in memory of earlier emperors in the commanderies and kingdoms, but failed to have this accepted.¹¹¹ Following two decrees of 40 B.C.E. which ordered senior officials to examine the question and make recommendations, Wei Xuancheng entered a further submission with the support of seventy officials who included Zheng Hong 鄭弘 the Imperial counselor¹¹² and Ouyang Diyu, now Commissioner for the lesser treasury.¹¹³ Forty-four officials joined in supporting a second submission. They argued for the propriety of dismantling a number of the shrines such as those dedicated to Gaozu's father and even Huidi and Wendi, and for restoration of the *Zhaomu* 昭穆 system, which would limit the extent to

106. *Han shu*, 81.3334.

108. *Han shu*, 75.3160.

110. *Han shu*, 73.3116.

112. Zheng Hong, who was well versed in legal matters, had been Metropolitan commissioner of the right in 46. In 42 he was consulted about the right way to treat the Qiang rebels (see p. 391 below), and he had come to approve of Jing Fang's suggestions for testing the merits of officials; at Jing Fang's execution he was dismissed and reduced to commoner status. *Han shu*, 66.2902, 73.3117, 75.3161

113. *Han shu*, 73.3116, 3118.

107. *Han shu*, 9.288, 291.

109. *Han shu*, 85.3458.

111. *Han shu*, 72.3079.

which these services were being practised. Some of these suggestions were adopted, while Xu Jia argued for the retention of the services rendered to Wendi, and Yin Zhong 尹忠, Commissioner for trials, for those to Wudi.¹¹⁴

The arguments of both parties to this debate depended on citing past practice and the statements to be found in books such as those on *li*. Towards the end of Yuandi's reign, Kuang Heng, Chancellor from 36, lent his support to the dismantlement of some of the shrines.¹¹⁵ But the issue was far from being decided. However many of the shrines had been suppressed, some were restored in 34.¹¹⁶ Dynastic politics and the influences of rival consorts' families could at times affect the maintenance or suppression of some of these services, as may be seen in the following instance. Shi Liangdi 史良娣 was the grandmother of Xuandi, who had conferred upon her the posthumous title of Li Hou 戾后. Service to her shrine was suspended in 44, to be restored and then suspended once more after Yuandi's death.¹¹⁷

Meticulous in attending personally at the established cults of state, Yuandi was present at Yong 雍 for services to the Wu di 五帝 in 44, 40, and 38; at Fenyin 汾陰 for those to Hou tu 后土 in 45, 39, and 37, and at Ganquan 甘泉 for those to Taiyi 泰一 in 47, 45, 43, 39, and 37.¹¹⁸ As yet the question whether those cults should be retained or replaced by those addressed to heaven and earth had not yet arisen openly. A proposal to make such a change was put forward by Kuang Heng and Zhang Tang shortly after the accession of Chengdi; this was opposed by Xu Jia and there followed considerable discussion, with several occasions of change and change about.¹¹⁹

Some time later, after the close of Eastern Han, Kuang Heng was to be taken to task for making this suggestion. A citation from the *Jiangbiao zhuan* 江表傳, a work by Yu Pu 虞溥 of Jin times that is now lost, recorded a discussion held in 232 concerning the correct site for holding the *jiao* 郊 in the newly established kingdom of Wu. Sun Quan 孫權 himself took part in the discussions and claimed that there was no written authority of the *jing* or the *zhuan* to support Kuang Heng's statements that Wen Wang had performed these services at Feng 豐.¹²⁰ Sun Quan even classed

114. Yin Zhong, of Weijun, was Commissioner for trials in 45, Counsellor of the palace in 31 and Imperial counsellor in 29.

115. *Han shu*, 73.3121.

116. *Han shu*, 9.297.

117. *Han shu*, 73.3117, 3124. For Shi Liangdi, see p. 366 above.

118. See entries for these years in *Han shu*, 9, e.g., p. 281.

119. *Han shu*, 25B.1253–54, 81.3344.

120. *San guo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 47.1136–37 n.1; *Jin shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 82.2141; *Han shu*, 25B.1254.

Kuang Heng with the mediocre or commonplace traditionalists derisively termed *su wu*. According to this account, or anecdote, Sun Quan was in fact recognising the difficulties of his position, confined as he was to the south-east, with no hold over what could be regarded as the “centre”.

Kuang Heng and Zhang Tang were also responsible for suggesting another reform, this time with success. They noted that there were no less than 683 sites where offerings were being made to local deities, using supplies that offices of government provided. Of those, 208 services conformed with *li*, the remaining 475 did not. The request of the two officials that they should be suspended met with approval.¹²¹

The move to address the cults of state to heaven and earth showed the intention of showing a deep respect for the ways of Zhou, and it had been preceded by other signs of the new outlook, in proposals to treat descendants of that house and those of Kongzi with greater respect than hitherto. Even in Wudi's reign a search had been made to find surviving members of the house of Zhou, and honors were conferred on Ji Jia 姬嘉 by declaring him Zhou zi Nan jun 周子南君 (113 B.C.E.), with a view to maintaining the sacrifices that were due. However, such a title had no place in the established hierarchy; in 44 the position of his grandson was made regular by naming him as a noble under the title of Zhou Chengxiu hou 周承休侯, with precedence below that of the kings (*Zhuhouwang* 諸侯王).¹²² Also in Yuandi's reign Kuang Heng suggested that a search should be made for descendants of Kongzi, deriving as he did from the house of Yin, and that they should receive due recognition. At the time no action was taken, but in Chengdi's time Mei Fu 梅福 repeated the proposal, with the result that in 8 B.C.E. Kong Ji 孔吉 was named Yin shao jia hou 殷紹嘉侯.¹²³

The economy

Perhaps deliberately evoking the actions that preceded the review of the state of the empire in 81, a decree of 48 ordered a commission of twelve men to tour the realm, enquiring into the conditions in which some of the indigent were living.¹²⁴ In 81 these steps had resulted in a discussion of the value of the government's monopoly of the production, distribution, and sale of salt and iron wares, ending with their retention except within the metropolitan area.¹²⁵ In 44 the abolition of these monopolies took

121. *Han shu*, 25B.1257.

122. *Shi ji*, 4.170, 12.461, 20.1046; *Han shu*, 9.285, 18.688, 67.2926.

123. *Han shu*, 10.328, 66.2926.

124. *Han shu*, 7.223, *Yan tie lun*, 1 (1 “Ben yi”), 1; *Han shu*, 9.279.

125. *Yan tie lun*, 7 (41 “Qu xia”), 463–64.

its place among a host of other measures that affected economic issues, only to be revoked three years later. These events require consideration in the light of the natural conditions that marked Yuandi's reign, as have been described above,¹²⁶ the steps taken to reduce the expenditure of the palace and the government, and the questions raised by Gong Yu, including that of the use of coinage.

Yuandi's officials responded to nature's disasters with the realisation that failure to recognise and alleviate popular distress might well lead to a breakdown of law and order. Advisors to the throne were not slow to point to the contrast between the luxurious life of the rich and the indigence of the poor. From 48 onwards orders were given for economies, such as a reduction of the delicacies served at the emperor's table, the complement of staff at the Bureau of Music (*Yue fu* 樂府), the horses kept in the imperial parks, and the feed of other horses and rare breeds of animal kept in the charge of the Commissioner for waterways and parks (*Shuiheng duwei* 水衡都尉).¹²⁷ In the following year the resources of some of the parks and ponds which had been reserved for imperial use were released for the benefit of the poor.¹²⁸ Some of the measures introduced by a decree of 44 were perhaps little more than an ostensible means of showing how the emperor was responding to the need to alleviate distress; others were more far reaching.¹²⁹ The meats served at the emperor's table were to be reduced by half, and feed for the horses in his stables was to be cut down. Of wider significance, the spectacle of the *juedi* 角抵 games that served at times to impress visitors from non-Han communities and may well have acted as an entertainment for the populace were suppressed; some of the buildings in the Shanglin 上林 park were closed. Of yet greater importance, the decree closed the three agencies of the government for the production of textiles and those for salt and iron, and the granaries set up by Geng Shouchang 耿壽昌 in 54 to stabilise the price of grain between times of famine and glut.¹³⁰

The suppression of the monopolies of salt and iron was itself revoked in 41.¹³¹ Further reductions in expenditure in 40 and 38 affected some of the parks and shrines of the imperial tombs or the shrines dedicated to imperial ancestors in the provinces, with some degree of restoration in 34.¹³²

Some of these measures may well have been due to the views expressed by Gong Yu. It had been thanks to the recommendation of Shi Xian early in Yuandi's reign that he was appointed Advisory counsellor, and

126. See p. 383 above.

127. *Han shu*, 9.280.

128. *Han shu*, 9.281.

129. *Han shu*, 9.285.

130. For Geng Shouchang, see *Han shu* 24A.1141.

131. *Han shu*, 9.291.

132. *Han shu*, 9.292, 293, 297.

he proved to be remarkably courageous and outspoken in his criticism of the way of life that was being practised by members of the imperial family. In pointing to the frugality and care to moderate their desires that had characterised the rule of the earlier emperors up to Wendi and Jingdi, his strictures bore a marked resemblance to some of the discourses recorded in the *Yan tie lun*. He entered a strong plea for the reduction of luxuries such as the gold and silver wares whose use was becoming all too common, of the products of the imperial workshops, and of fine fabrics. He spelt out the high cost, both in manpower and money, of running the government's agencies for textiles in Qi, for a low return, and of other enterprises such as the production of vessels of gold and silver, in Shu. Moreover, the extravagant ways of the emperor would spread, practised as they were in the palace of the empress dowager, and inviting imitation by those of lower status. Gong Yu traced how these extravagant ways had started during Wudi's reign and continued under the young Zhaodi and the dispensation of Huo Guang. He asked how a responsible emperor could indulge in these luxuries at a time of famine.¹³³

The memorials that Gong Yu submitted after his appointment as Counsellor of the palace and then Imperial counsellor (44), referred to a number of other matters that needed reform.¹³⁴ He was distressed at the way in which infants were put to death at the age of three to avoid payment of the poll tax, and he sought to reduce its severities. He complained that the state monopoly of iron depended on the use of an excessive number of conscript servicemen and that the work interfered with natural resources and processes.

Gong Yu also addressed fiscal arrangements. Since the introduction of the five *zhu* 銖 cash seventy years previously, private minting of the coins had become widespread and the rich had been hoarding these coins. Merchants had been assured of their profits without paying tax, while the peasantry lay exposed to the hardships of nature and the heavy dues that they had to meet, in cash. As a result many had fled from the proper occupation of working the land to take to trade or industry; those who failed to make a living thereby took to robbery.

Gong Yu believed that all this had come about by reliance on the use of the cash coin. He urged abolition of the offices which were responsible for procuring pearls, jade, gold and silver, with a ban on treating these valuables as items of currency; and he hoped to prevent the growth of commercial monopolies. He suggested that so as to restore more effort to agriculture, tax should be collected and salaries paid, not in cash, but

133. *Han shu*, 72.3069–72.

134. *Han shu*, 72.3075–76, 24B.1176.

in the staple goods of cloth and grain, but this proposal was rejected on practical grounds.

Gong Yu wished to return a large number of slaves to commoner status; attached to offices and paid at public expense as they were, they were virtually idle, and they should be put to work as conscript servicemen. Officials should not be allowed to engage in trade, on pain of dismissal. Standards had fallen woefully, and values had been corrupted owing to the practice of ransoming criminals from punishment, opportunities to purchase office by payment of grain, and employment of officials who were skilled at calculation and deception, and given to practising oppression. He urged Yuandi to follow the examples of Gaozu and Wendi, to choose men of worth and loyalty as his supporters, punish the flatterers and evildoers and cut down entertainments such as the depraved music of Zheng 鄭.

Relations with non-Han leaders: expansion or contraction

Traditionally the years of Wudi's reign (141–87 B.C.E.) have been regarded as the most successful period of Western Han, redounding to the credit of the emperor himself. Wudi's officials and generals, some of whom were members of his empress's family, brought Han influence to bear on ever wider territories, with the result that by 111 up to twenty new commanderies had been set up in the north-west, north-east, south and south-west. But by perhaps 90 B.C.E. this expansionist process had come to a halt; continued demands on manpower and other resources could not sustain the momentum. Nevertheless in the succeeding reigns of Zhaodi and Xuandi, Han retained its presence and claim to authority in most of the areas where the new governors were posted. They did not necessarily control all territories where it was hoped that their orders would be obeyed. In some places, such as Jushi 車師 (Turfan), the Han presence was marked by establishing sponsored agricultural colonies (*tuntian* 屯田) staffed by conscript servicemen, rather than by exercising military force.¹³⁵ By appointing Zheng Ji 鄭吉 to the new post of Protector general (*Du hu* 都護) in 60 or 59 the government was perhaps attempting to co-ordinate Han policies and activities in the ever more remote lands of central Asia, which they knew under the names of Daxia 大夏, Wusun 烏孫 and Kangju 康居. A further measure to promote agricultural work in these regions is seen in the establishment of the post of Wu and Ji colonel (*wu ji xiaowei* 戊己校尉) in Yuandi's time.¹³⁶

135. *Han shu*, 96.3923.

136. *Han shu*, 96A.3874; see also A.F.P. Hulsewé, *China in Central Asia* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 62–63.

Towards the end of Xuandi's reign, Han achieved an accommodation with one of the two rival leaders of the Xiongnu. Such an agreement suited Huhanye *shanyu* 呼韓邪單于 as he was thereby receiving support against his enemy Zhizhi *shanyu* 郅支單于. The Han officials welcomed it, as it deterred the Xiongnu from creating alliances with the leaders of communities such as Wusun; Han for its part wished to monopolise the friendship of the Xiongnu and to thwart any attempts that they might make to act in concert with other parties to Han's detriment. Huhanye's formal visits to Chang'an in 51, 50 and 49 sealed the new type of relationship. It was thanks to Xiao Wangzhi that the visitor was accorded treatment as an honored guest rather than as a vassal.¹³⁷

Huhanye did not visit Chang'an again until 33, possibly because of his pre-occupation with the need to control offensive moves by Zhizhi. In a somewhat irregular way two of Yuandi's officials relieved him of such anxieties by calling out military forces, with whose help they put Zhizhi to death and sent his head to Chang'an (36). In carrying out this bold feat, Chen Tang 陳湯 and Gan Yanshou 甘延壽 had acted on their own initiative without receiving imperial permission to raise the forces that they needed. Instead they had forged a decree that entitled them to do so. Such an action aroused strong criticism by Kuang Heng and Shi Xian with the suggestion that they should be denied any recognition, or even face criminal charges; Liu Xiang mounted a spirited reply praising them for their valuable achievement and their restoration of Han's prestige. The charges were dropped.¹³⁸

To the west, in present-day Qinghai and Tibet, lay the habitat of various other peoples known collectively as the Qiang 羌. They were by no means necessarily of a friendly frame of mind towards Han but as they could in no way form a united or cohesive body they posed less dangerous threats to the Han inhabitants of the commanderies of the west. In fact, as early as Jingdi's reign some of these communities had actually been settled within Longxi commandery.¹³⁹ The real danger lay in the possibility that some of their peoples might link up with the Xiongnu further to the north and together threaten Han security. One of the motives for setting up the four commanderies of the north-west (Wuwei 武威, Zhangye 張掖, Jiuquan 酒泉 and Dunhuang 敦煌) and the protected causeway or line of defences that ran through them may have been the hope of preventing just such a union from taking place. A rebellion in 42 of some of the Qiang people who had been settled in Longxi called for action and it was in suppressing these troubles that Feng

137. *Han shu*, 78.3282.

138. *Han shu*, 70.3015–17.

139. *Hou Han shu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), 87.2876.

Fengshi won himself a fine reputation and reward.¹⁴⁰ Wei Xuancheng, Zheng Hong, Xu Jia, as General of the Left, were among those whose views were sought over the question of what action should be taken.¹⁴¹

The two commanderies of Zhuai 珠厓 and Daner 儋耳, an area valued for its pearl fisheries, had been set up on Hainan Island in 111 and amalgamated into one commandery by the closure of Daner in 82. The peoples of three counties of Zhuai rebelled against Han authority in 59, and others did so in 53 and 48. Opinion in Chang'an was divided, with some officials wishing to suppress these uprisings by force while others such as Jia Juanzhi 賈捐之 argued against doing so. Jia Juanzhi rested his case on the grounds of the expense and the heavy casualties that would be suffered, particularly at a time of popular distress. He added that the inhabitants of parts of the island were quite unfamiliar with a civilised way of life and were no different from animals, and that Zhuai was by no means the only source of pearls. Jia Juanzhi's views prevailed, and with the closure of the Zhuai commandery in 46, Yuandi no longer included the island of Hainan within his empire.¹⁴² A great-grandson of Jia Yi, Jia Juanzhi suffered by his criticism of Shi Xian's faults; he never served in a senior office and thanks to Shi Xian's manoeuvres he was executed in public.

Summary

The short reign of Yuandi passed without major disturbances caused by acute rivalries among the families of imperial consorts. The land was not beset by violent incursions from non-Han peoples of the north. The monarch took little part in the government of his empire; the family of his empress were laying the foundation of their strength. A return to the ideas of a past—perhaps a fictional rather than a real past—was taking the place of a forceful view of the purposes of government.

Major differences separated the empire that Liu Shi inherited from the one that came to Wudi at his accession in 141. There is nothing to show that the senior officials of Jingdi's reign and the early years of Wudi had received any scholarly training, any more than Wudi himself; most of those who served Yuandi's government had had the benefit of instruction from experienced and learned scholars, as had Yuandi. It was not until thirty years after Wudi's accession that the emperor was taking a regular part at stated intervals in performing the cults of state; Yuandi inherited the obligation to attend at regular intervals. Wudi had followed Jingdi,

140. *Han shu*, 9.290; 79.3296.

141. *Han shu*, 79.3296.

142. *Han shu*, 6.188, 7.223, 9.283, 64B.2830, 2834–35.

who had shown his strength by scotching the threat of uprisings by the kings; Yuandi succeeded Xuandi who had taken control of the government after the death of Huo Guang; neither Wudi, who acceded at the age of perhaps sixteen, nor Yuandi, more than sceptical of his father's stern realism, took an active part in government. Proportionately a far greater part of the empire was made over to be ruled as kingdoms by relatives of Wudi than it was to those of Yuandi, when there was far less likelihood that some of these kings might threaten to dispute the emperor's right to his throne. It seems likely that in Yuandi's time there was a greater preponderance of officials who came from eastern parts of the empire, such as the commanderies of Donghai, Langye, and Peijun and Lu kingdom than had occurred previously. At the outset of Wudi's reign, major plans to control and co-ordinate the work of the population, such as those of Sang Hongyang, had yet to be formed; by 48 the efficiency of such arrangements had been tried and found wanting, and was coming into question. Northern parts of the empire lay open to raids and violence from non-Han peoples in 141; in 51 a leader of the Xiongnu was receiving royal entertainment in Chang'an.

Both Wudi and Yuandi, together with their immediate advisors, would have been aware of the dangers and threats to which imperial government had been open in the past; the empress Lü had been able to seize control some forty years before Wudi; the same period separated Yuandi's accession from the turmoil and near disruption of empire in 91–90; even less time had passed since Huo Guang's virtual dictatorship. At his accession Wudi could hardly have contemplated the promotion of scholarship, the proliferation of the statutes and ordinances and the documentation on *li* that had taken place by his death. By Yuandi's accession these were accomplished achievements, old enough to arouse discussion.

We may perhaps single out Xiao Wangzhi, Gong Yu, Wei Xuancheng and Kuang Heng as the officials who did most to influence public affairs during Yuandi's reign, and Jing Fang, Yi Feng and Liu Xiang as those who, more than others, left their imprint on intellectual developments and scholarly activities. The religious issues that had come under discussion during Yuandi's reign continued to arouse controversy during that of his successor, Liu Ao known as Chengdi. The expenditure in the palaces continued to provoke criticism as did the new emperor's choice of women on whom he lavished his favors. During Yuandi's time, his empress Wang Zhengjun seems to have been sufficiently strong to prevent the emergence of other women who would jostle for power, while members of her own family were secure in a relatively stable, if not influential, situation. Criticism arose partly because the girls that Chengdi imported were of low social status and quality.