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Author(s): Kidder Smith and Sima Tan

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Sima Tan and the Invention of Daoism, “Legalism,” *et cetera*

KIDDER SMITH

HERE'S A SHORT VERSION: The “-ism” we invoke when we posit things like “Daoism” was glimpsed for the first time by Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 B.C.E.), lord grand astrologer (*taishigong* 太史公) to the Han court. His essay “Yaozhi” 要指 (Essential points), included in the final chapter of his son Sima Qian's *Taishigong*,¹ analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of six approaches to governance:

Yinyang 陰陽,
Ru 儒 (known to us as Confucians),
Mo 墨 (the Mohists),
Fajia 法家 (called Legalists),
Mingjia 名家 (called Sophists), and
Daojia 道家 (or Daode 道德, the supposed Daoists).

All previous classifications of thought had identified doctrine with the name of a founding teacher, e.g. “the transmissions of Laozi.” By contrast, Sima Tan's account omits all personal names save Mozi, and instead of seeking to group men or texts, it organizes knowledge with reference to its intellectual content. Tan abstracted this content from the *zi* 子 or Masters literature of the Warring States/early Han period and refashioned it into six ideal types. Names for the first three types—Yinyang, Ru, and Mo—preexisted Tan. The other names—Fajia, Mingjia, and Daojia—were his own invention. All six groups were in an important sense synthetic. Though drawing

Kidder Smith (ksmith@bowdoin.edu) is Professor of History and Director of Asian Studies at Bowdoin College.

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¹Generally known in Chinese as the *Shiji* and in English as *Records of the Grand Historian*. See Sima Qian 1959, 130:3288–92. A complete English translation of the “Yaozhi” is found in Watson 1958, 43–48, and a translation by Roth and Queen is included in the second edition of de Bary 1999, 278–82. For an alternative translation of the first part of the essay, see A. C. Graham 1989, 377–78.

Why is Sima Tan's account preserved in the *Taishigong*? Presumably it is because Qian felt it to be his father's major textual contribution to the intellectual and political life of the time. (Ban Gu also reproduces it in his biography of Qian in *Hanshu* 漢書 62.) For a discussion of particular issues in Qian's filiality, see Durrant 1995, 2 ff.

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on presently existent knowledge (e.g. *yinyang* cosmic cycles, the frugality of the Mo), each was in varying degrees a novel combination, crafted for its usefulness in ruling the empire.

But the “Yaozhi” was more than a classification of thought in the service of contemporary politics. It was equally a polemic, for Tan argued that Dao-people take what is essential from each of the other configurations and combine it on the basis of vacuity and accordance (*xu* 虛 and *yin* 因), by virtue of which they offer a completed repertory of political knowledge, a vision of the whole. As such the “Yaozhi” was also a persuasion, an appeal to the Han Emperor Wu (r. 140–87) to rule by Daoist means.²

Tan’s Daojia was one contender in a competition whose terms I can only suggest here, and whose full exposure awaits another study. We may imagine that Daojia’s rival was the equally syncretic Ruhism we have conventionally attributed to Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 195–105) and others.³ Their contest defined a new discourse, in which power derived from an ability to master not one but all fields of politico-intellectual practice, and to render them into a unified field of knowledge. It is, of course, no coincidence that this competition should occur in the late-second-century capital of the Han empire, just as the Warring States period was concluding—for we may view the reign of Emperor Wu as marking the moment, both intellectually and politically, when the experiments of the Warring States came finally to their end and the foundations of the two-thousand-year empire were settling into place.⁴

And here’s a larger story, a movement from the contending voices of the fourth and third centuries, through Sima Tan’s syncretic reformulation, and into a concept that, by the end of the Western Han, we can properly call an “-ism.” The Warring States, of course, knew no Daoists or Legalists, though self-identifying Ru and Mo flourished and divided, and many teachers drew disciples. What we twenty-first-centuryers regard as a great field of creativity, nearly all our predecessors have seen as conflict and disorder. Late-third-century thinkers were the first to grapple systematically with this chaos. Their solutions ranged from the invocation of harsh political authority to an imagining of the whole that lies behind, under, and within the contradictory views of their Masters.

Sima Tan found a use for much of his predecessors’ work. But unlike them, he did not address categories derived from men or texts. Instead, he appropriated his competitors’ *ideas*, recombining them in configurations he called “*jia*” 家. In Tan’s time, *jia* meant “people (with expertise in something)”; *shujia* 數家, then, were “experts in number prognostication” and *Fajia* 法家 would have meant “people (who rule by) *fa* or models” (Peterson 1995). Tan himself might thus be called a Daoist—but with only a whiff of Daoism about him, as I will discuss at the end of this article.

²Received opinion holds the “Yaozhi” to be a historically accurate account of Warring States or Han philosophical “schools.” See, *inter alia*, A. C. Graham’s remark, that “a firm classification of the pre-Han schools begins with Ssu-ma T’an” (1989, 377). A somewhat revisionist view is argued by Ren Jiyu (1981).

³This hunch is shared by Zhang Dake (1985, 7). But is Dong truly a syncretist? Both Michael Puett (Harvard) and Michael Nylan (Berkeley) are very dubious, suggesting that Ruhist syncretism arose after him during the Western Han (private communications, April 1999 and May 2000). We still know remarkably little about court politics under Emperor Wu or the true views of Dong Zhongshu.

⁴For background on this transition, see Nathan Sivin’s very useful article (1995b) and Michael Loewe 1994. It is worth comparing these developments to the social and intellectual circumstances of Greek religion after Alexander. See, for example, the classic account by Frederick C. Grant (1953). For a pertinent discussion of hegemony, discourse, and antagonism that subtly advances the Gramscian project, see Ernesto Laclau 1988.

One hundred years later, Tan's six configurations had become the "schools" of Warring States political thought, with texts, authors, affiliations, and a history. Insofar as Tan had made order from a confusing multiplicity of views, he also provided a tool with which imperial bibliographers could rewrite an early story after their own considerably different interests. This past was cast in a form compatible with the bureaucratic division of labor; each school was said to have descended from a particular official function of the Zhou court, the Fajia, for example, emerging from the *liguan* 理官 or chief of prisons.⁵ That vision of "the many schools" (*baijia*) has retained its prominence down to our recent past.

This article has three sections and a coda. First I examine four nearly contemporaneous classifications of rival thinkers from the second half of the third century B.C.E. found in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, the *Hanfeizi*, the *Xunzi*, and the *Zhuangzi*.⁶ These pose Sima Tan's questions about the nature of political and intellectual unity, but in ways third-century thinkers could not yet resolve. They also provide him with elements he will need to establish his *jia*-concept. By contrasting his work with that of his predecessors, we can better appreciate the novelty of Tan's solution. The second section is devoted to a close reading of the "Yaozhi." There we will discover Tan's six *jia* to be far less straightforward than I have so far suggested. Among other things I will argue that neither Confucius, Mencius, nor Xunzi would recognize themselves as one of Tan's Ru; that "Legalism" is as good (and as bad) a translation of "Mingjia" as it is of "Fajia"; and that Daojia is categorically distinct from Huang-Lao, despite their many similarities of doctrine. In the third section I will examine the route by which "Daojia" (men of Dao) came to mean "Daoism" in the century after Tan's death. Finally I will ponder how similar, and different, Tan's views of "history" (*shi* 史) are to and from our own.

Four Warring States Surveys

The search for unity dominated late-third-century thought. This was no bookish concern: at least since the extinction of Zhou kingship in 256 B.C.E., the premier question of the public sphere had been the inevitable eradication of all but one of the middle kingdoms. Qin's political feat dominates this story. But a drive for unity is equally apparent in intellectual life, as Nathan Sivin's recent work has demonstrated.⁷

With intensive ideological competition, and the contradictions of competing claims, how could such unity be established? The Qin solution—conformity to the emperor's view—was the most successful implementation of a method that had long been popular with those in authority. But we can discern alternatives to it from mid-third century on. First were attempts to combine complementary aspects of hitherto antagonistic materials. This is most apparent in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, which pieces together texts associated with Ru, Mo, and others in quilt-like fashion,⁸ turning

⁵Ban Gu, writing in the *Bibliographic Treatise*, or *Yiwenzhi* 藝文志, of the *Hanshu*, 30:1736.

⁶These are found in: *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* section (*lan*) 5, chap. 7, "Buer" 不二 (Not two'ed), 1123–32; *Hanfeizi jijie* chap. 50, "Xianxue" (Prominent teachings), 456 ff.; *Xunzi jijie* chap. 6, "Fei shier zi" 非十二子 (Condemnation of the twelve masters), 89 ff.; *Zhuangzi jishi* chap. 33, "Tianxia" 天下 (All-under-heaven), 1065 ff.

⁷See Sivin 1995b. These tendencies are apparent even in manifestations such as the initial standardization of the *pian*-order of books (Han 1988).

⁸Michael Carson and Michael Loewe speak of it as a "clever collage" (Loewe 1993, 326).

multiplicity to its advantage and subsuming competing possibilities. Yet the *Lüshi chunqiu* took only the initial steps to reconstitute this knowledge on a new foundation. More ambitious syntheses occur only in the work of Sima Tan and his successors.

There are many ways one might articulate this development. Here I will trace it through four nearly contemporaneous strategies for addressing one's rival's views. I have arranged these texts to show a graded sophistication, from the authoritarian solutions proposed in chapters of the *Lüshi chunqiu* and *Hanfeizi* to the greater intellectual breadth of the *Xunzi* and the subtle syncretism of the *Zhuangzi*.⁹ The significance of Sima Tan's solution will become apparent in contrast with these four texts. Yet, each also contributes to Tan's repertoire of syncretic means. Lü Buwei and Han Fei emphasize the key role of ruler; Xunzi develops a scheme to classify all his opponents; and the *Zhuangzi* syncretist offers a vision of the whole that recognizes the partial correctness of each competing view. What, then, must Tan add to obtain a program that will

- comprehend all current thought
- define the relationships of its component parts
- outrun the lineages in which that thought originated

and thus offer a perfect ideology of rule?

Lüshi chunqiu

Though the *Lüshi chunqiu* is known for its accommodation of diverse textual traditions, the following passage takes an uncompromising stand on ideology: since a multiplicity of views endangers the state, one must enforce unity on a military model.

If one listens to the views of the many, then there is no day that the state will be free of danger. How to know who is right? Lao Dan [Laozi] values the soft, Confucius values humanity, Mo Di values the inexpensive, Guan Yin values clarity, Zi Liezi values vacuity, Chen Pian values things equally, Yang Sheng [Yang Zhu] values himself, Sun Bin values strategic configuration, Wang Liao values being ahead, Ni Liang values being behind.

To unify the ears [of one's troops], use metal drums. To unify their minds, make standards and commands the same. To unify their intelligence, keep the wise from being crafty and the stupid from being clumsy. To unify their strength, keep the brave from going ahead and the cowardly from lagging behind.¹⁰

⁹The *Lüshi chunqiu* is reliably dated to the years around 239 B.C.E. Surprisingly, the other three texts considered here may have been written within a decade of it. Han Fei—assuming his authorship of the “Xianxue”—is dead in 233. And John Knoblock (1988, 246) argues that “Fei shier zi” may be as late as the 230s. The syncretist essay that appears as chapter 33 of the present *Zhuangzi* has been dated to the first half-century of the Han dynasty by Angus Graham (1981, 257). But the author is clearly speaking of a time of disunity, which makes it hard to accept Graham's dating. Thus I believe that Benjamin Schwartz is correct in placing it earlier (1985, 250 ff). Liu Xiaogan (1994, esp. 75–82) also believes it to be pre-Han.

¹⁰Compare this passage from chapter 7 of the *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 (The art of war):

Drums and bells, flags and pennants are the means by which one unifies the ears and eyes of the people.

Once the people have been tightly unified,
The brave have no chance to advance alone,
The cowardly have no chance to retreat alone.
This is a method of employing the many.

Cf. Wu 1990, 122. Translation from Denma Translation Group 2001, 27–28. Note that the last three figures on the *Lüshi chunqiu* list are all military men.

Thus: unified then ordered, differing then in chaos. Unified then secure, differing then in danger.¹¹

(*Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, lan 5, 7:1123–32 [cf. Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 433])

Wise men have different views, but the state can have but one. Which that one is—and “how to know who is right”—seem much less important here than conformation to authority. While a catholic knowledge may be required for rule—thus the broad collecting activity of the *Lüshi chunqiu*—a single ideology is required for the successful implementation of power. Beyond that act of survey and the commitment to unity, there is little here for Sima Tan to borrow.

Hanfeizi

In the opening passage of chapter 50, “Xianxue” 顯學 (Prominent teachings), Han draws our attention to disunity and the impossibility of finding intellectual or historical grounds for reconciliation.

The prominent teachings of this generation are those of the Ru and Mo. The Ru go back to Kong Qiu [Confucius], the Mo to Mo Di. Since the death of Master Kong there have been the Zizhang Ru, the Zisi Ru, the Yan Ru, the Meng [Mencius] Ru, the Qidiao Ru, the Zhongliang Ru, the Sun [Xunzi] Ru and the Yuezheng Ru. Since the death of Master Mo there have been the Xiangli Mo, the Xiangfu Mo, and the Dengling Mo.

Thus, after Kong and Mo, the Ru divided into eight and the Mo split into three. [What each group] accepts or rejects is different, mutually contradictory, yet each calls itself the true Kong or Mo. Kong and Mo cannot return to life, so who will cause the teachings of this generation to be decided on? Both Master Kong and Master Mo took Yao and Shun as *dao*, yet what they accepted or rejected was different, while both called it the true Yao and Shun. Yao and Shun cannot return to life, so who will cause the truthfulness of the Ru and Mo to be decided on?

The Yin and Zhou dynasties are more than seven hundred years away, [the Emperor] Yu and the Xia dynasty are more than two thousand years away, so they cannot decide on the truth of the Ru and Mo. Yet to still want to adjudicate the *dao* of Yao and Shun after three thousand years—[this matter] could not be ascertained! To ascertain something without having conducted an investigation is foolishness. To rely on something that you cannot ascertain is to bring false charges. Thus those who openly rely on the former kings and ascertain Yao and Shun, if they aren't foolish, they're making false charges. The teachings of foolishness and false charges, the conduct of disorder and rebellion—the enlightened ruler does not accept this.

(*Hanzi qianjie* 491–93)

On the surface, Han Fei's chief concern is how one ascertains (*bi* 必, understands as necessarily true) conflicting claims. His answer refers us to the epistemology of the court of law, where evidence must be presented and evaluated—a dead witness, for example, is worthless.¹² On these grounds the splinter groups of late Ru and Mo are either deceiving themselves or lying when each claims authenticity. It is inconceivable that more than one of these groups could be right—the category of partial truth does

¹¹“Buer” 不二 (Not two'ed). *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, lan 5, chapter 7, 1123–32, following Chen's emendations. Cf. Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 433.

¹²Other examples of his legal language include *ding* 定, to decide on a case; *zhen* 真, the truth; *cheng* 誠, truthfulness; *shen* 審, adjudicate; *yan* 驗, investigate; *ju* 據, rely on as evidence; and *wu* 誤, falsely accuse.

not exist. Significantly, this is a question about the nature of authority, and in his final words Han reveals the real venue of this case: it lies before the ruler, the judge-magistrate who accepts or rejects an argument.

And this reveals a deeper level of concern. Once upon a time in antiquity there was one Yao and one Shun. Once there was a Kong and a Mo. Now those teachings are fragmented and multiplied.¹³ How will unity be found—unity in this case being a matter of a single, politically correct view? Han's solution is purely administrative: it is created by the power of the ruler. And thus Han accomplishes a personal goal as well, silencing anyone who speaks in the name of a tradition—everyone but himself, arguing in the present moment. For from the point of view of governance, multiplicity is only an insult. Sima Tan alters this ground: while a genuine ideological unity finds an emperor at its center, he rules effectively only because he can, in words of the "Yaozhi," "move with the seasons and respond to the transformation of things" ("Yaozhi," *Shiji* 130:3289).

Xunzi

At the very beginning of "Condemnation of the Twelve Masters" (Fei shier zi 非十二子) Xunzi identifies a source of potent confusion: "Some men of the present generation cloak pernicious persuasions in beautiful language and present elegantly composed but treacherous doctrines and so create disorder and anarchy in the world" (*Xunzi jijie* 89 [Knoblock 1988, 222]). His text identifies six configurations of destructive teaching, each populated by two like-minded thinkers, who together constitute the Twelve Masters.¹⁴ It is the earliest large-scale survey of competing ideologies that survives in the Chinese corpus.

After pointing out the faults of each, Xunzi concludes his analysis of every pair with an identical warning: "Nonetheless, some of what they advocate has a rational basis (*gu* 故), and their statements have perfect logic (*chengli* 成理), enough indeed to deceive and mislead the ignorant masses" (Knoblock 1988, 222). The only solution is as follows:

If one were to establish a hierarchy of the *fang* 方 (specific formulae) and the *lue* 略 (the general summaries), make words and acts consistent with each other, unify the *tong* 統 (guiding principles ordering the whole) with the *lei* 類 (particular categories of the parts), then gathering together the heroes of all-under-heaven, instructing them in Great Antiquity, and teaching them perfect *shun* 順 (compliance, especially with natural process), then by merely facing toward the south wall of his room and sitting upon his mat, the full array of forms and outward signs of the sage king would gather about him, and because of him the customs of a tranquil age would develop abundantly. The six persuasions could not gain entry to his court, and men like these twelve masters could not associate with him.

(*Xunzi jijie* 95–96 [Knoblock 1988, 225])¹⁵

Unity will be achieved only when true Ru teachings have sealed out the twelve heterodoxies. Now, Xunzi himself borrowed whenever necessary from contemporary

¹³Note that the man, his *dao*, and his teachings are equally represented by the man's name alone.

¹⁴They are: Tuo Xiao and Wei Mou; Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu; Mo Di [Mozi] and Song Jian; Shen Dao and Tian Pian; Hui Shi and Deng Xi; and the later followers of Zisi and Mencius. We will encounter the first five of these names in *Zhuangzi*, chap. 33.

¹⁵I have modified Knoblock's translation for the early parts of this passage.

thought, even admitting in the present case the attractiveness of his opponents' ideas. But his text evinces no interest in a harmony of views. As with Han Fei, diversity only indicates decay, and Xunzi takes it seriously because he stands shoulder to shoulder with it in the king's courtyard, waiting for his chance to be called up.

Yet Xun offers Tan two important tools. First, he has identified ideas as specific or general (*fang/lue*), whole or part (*tong/lei*). By thus separating the constituent elements of a concept, he gives Tan a way to distinguish the foundational assumptions on which the concept rests from individual insights that might be more portable. Second, he has taken the practice of grouping men by similar ideological positions (rather than on grounds of a teacher-disciple lineage) and extended it to cover a considerable intellectual landscape.¹⁶ This distinction is abstract and intellectual, not concrete and sociological. But while Xunzi separates men from their social context, he does not distinguish them from their thought. Thus he concludes his summation of the first pair with the phrase "This is Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu." He does not say, as we might, "These ideas are held by Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu" or "Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu are examples of the kind of thinking I mean." The men are not instances of their politico-philosophical position, they are identified with it. In this essentialist conception, synthesis is as unlikely as constructing an artificial human with the heart of an Italian, the bankroll of a Swiss, and the sense of humor of an American.

Still, Xunzi's attack on diversity, like Sima Tan's synthesis of thought, is possible only because both have comprehended all the competition. This depends on certain historical developments. Texts must be in circulation independent of their proprietary lineages. Sufficient conversations must occur for men to gain credible knowledge of their opponents' views. One needs the concentration and juxtaposition of knowledge imaginable in the mythic Jixia Academy of Qi, where Xunzi resided for a time, or an imperial library, such as we presume available to the lord grand astrologer.¹⁷

Zhuangzi

The text called *Zhuangzi* contains as its chapter 33 the syncretist essay entitled "Tianxia" 天下, or "All-under-heaven."¹⁸ It begins by asserting a primal unity to all things: "There is that from which sageliness is born, that from which kingship is achieved. Both originate in the One," a One that is here projected onto the past. The passage continues, in an adaptation of Angus Graham's translation:

¹⁶His pairing is as follows: Tuo Xiao and Wei Mou; Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu; Mo Di [Mozi] and Song Xing; Shen Dao and Tian Pian; Hui Shi and Deng Xi; and followers of Zisi and Mencius.

His second pair, Chen Zhong and Shi Qiu, were from different states and different times. As far as we know, Song Jian was never a member of the Mohist organization, and neither Hui Shi nor Deng Xi, despite their shared intellectual pursuits, were apparently associated socially—as by family, state, lineage, or in any other way. Not all these groupings are original to Xunzi—for example, in Warring States times Tian Zhong and Shi Qiu were often paired on the basis of their alleged purity. See Knoblock 1988, 171–73 for a fuller discussion.

¹⁷For a dissolution of the Jixia myth, see Nathan Sivin 1995a. Donald Harper suggests that this activity began as much as a century earlier than we have thought. Citing the large number of texts found in fourth-century tombs—texts whose presence was not required by mortuary ritual but was determined entirely by the interests of the deceased—he argues that writing *as such* allowed text-based knowledge to spread (1996). For the briefest summary, see Harper 1996, 3 and 14–15 for a list of tombs and their texts.

¹⁸For a discussion of the syncretist author(s), see Graham 1981, 257–58. On the content of this chapter, see Graham 1989, 374–76.

Did not the men of old provide for everything? They were peers of the daemonic-and-illuminated (*shenming* 神明) and equals of heaven-and-earth, they fostered the myriad things and harmonized all-under-heaven, their bounty extended over the hundred clans. They had a clear vision of number at the root and connected it to the measurements of the outermost twigs, their understanding ranged in the six directions and was open through the four seasons; throughout small and great, quintessential and crude, there was nothing they missed in their circuitings.

(*Zhuangzi jishi* 1065–67 [Graham 1981, 274–75])

By contrast, the present “is in utter confusion” and marked by partiality, for though “the techniques of the many wisemen all have their strengths and their timely uses . . . few can be complete (*quan* 全)” (*Zhuangzi jishi* 1069). The “many wisemen” are then grouped into five positions. Here is how Graham renders the first:

As far as the idea of Mo Ti and Ch’in Ku-li is concerned, they were right; but in putting it into effect they were wrong. The result was simply that Mohists of later generations had to urge each other on to torment themselves until there was no flesh on their thighs or down on their shins. It was a superior sort of disorder, an inferior sort of order. However, Mo-tzu was truly the best man in the empire, you will not find another like him. However shriveled and worn, he would not give up. He was a man of talent, shall we say?

(Graham 1981, 277)

The essay continues with an analysis of four more groups, whose inhabitants overlap somewhat with those of the *Xunzi*.¹⁹

This is an importantly new view, as it posits a unity discernable within the partial correctness of other men’s teaching.²⁰ And it suggests a strategy that Sima Tan also pursues. Here is the beginning of his “Yaozhi,” which opens with a quotation from the “Great Treatise” of the *Yijing*:²¹

“All-under-heaven is single in its extent, yet there are a multitude of anxious plans for it. These return to the same home but by diverse routes.” Now, the Yinyang, Ru, Mo, Ming, Fa, and Daode—their business is to govern. However, their words follow different paths, examining some things but not others.

(*Shiji* 130:3288–89)

But whereas Tan finds the whole in the Han, the syncretist must project it onto past time. And, like Xunzi, the syncretist identifies thought with men: he does not conceive a way to sunder the two and recombine the former, as it were, making an omelet by breaking eggs and discarding the shells.

Tan’s situation is different. The great Qin cultural revolution has accomplished the smashing of more than eggheads. And the Han imperium has provided a present-tense possibility for putting Humpty Dumpty together again, though in a brand-new shape. The main difference between the syncretist and Tan, then, is the political

¹⁹These groups are: Song Jian and Yin Wen; Peng Meng, Tian Pian and Shen Dao; Guan Yin and Old Dan (Laozi); and Zhuangzi himself. The *Xunzi* pairs Song Jian with Mo Di, though it too places Tian Pian and Shen Dao together in a single dyad.

²⁰As Yu Yingshi (1959) and others have noted.

²¹I.e. the “Xicizhuan” 繫辭傳 (“Treatise on appended verbalizations”), a late Warring States/early Han companion to the *Zhouyi* 周易, which was itself canonized in 136 B.C.E. as the *Yijing* or *Classic of Change*. When this passage occurs in section B.3 of the standard *Yijing* text, its two phrases are inverted (Harvard-Yenching Institute 1966, 46).

conditions under which each lived. Let us see how Tan's thought grew from and shaped those conditions.

The Six *Jia*

So far I have presented materials developmentally, as stages of an increasingly complex conceptualization. Though heuristically useful, this picture is distorted in three ways. First, the four texts in question are virtual contemporaries, clustered around the last decade before the Qin dynasty. Second, I have studied only textual fragments; at least in the case of the *Lüshi chungiu* such pieces are unrepresentative of the whole. Third, I have framed these views as if they led naturally to Tan's. As we will see immediately below, however, his positions are always polemical, never the outcome of a necessary development. Still, this presentation has prepared us to understand his assignment of all knowledge to six configurations and the intellectual mobility such a project requires.

On what grounds does Sima Tan constitute the six *jia*? Although we will not be ready to address that question concertedly until near the end of this essay, there are several hypotheses we might test in the course of the present examinations. Are these groups "schools," and if so, in what social or intellectual sense? Are they "specialties," so that "Mingjia" would mean "people who specialize in words," as Petersen suggests (1995)? Are they domains of thought, so that "Yinyang" would indicate a style and particular content of thinking? Or are they practices, so that "Fajia" would constitute a kind of political activity? Each of these possibilities represents one way Sima Tan might have understood the relationship between ideas and the people who hold them.

Yinyang

The "Yaozhi" has two sections. The first contains Tan's short essays on each of the six *jia*. The second consists of his auto-commentary on that material, which is two or three times as long. Throughout this article I will place both the survey and the more extensive analysis in tandem. From the survey:

Benightedly I have observed the techniques of the Yinyang. They emphasize omens and multiply taboos and prohibitions. They cause people to be constrained and increase their fears. But their ordering of the great sequence of the four seasons must not be lost.

(*Shiji* 130:3289)

And from the auto-commentary:

Now, *yin-and-yang*, the four seasons, the eight directions, the twelve asterisms, the twenty-four solar nodes, each has its instructions and orders. Those who go along with this sequence prosper. Those who go against it, even if they do not die they will be lost. But it is not necessarily so. Thus I said, "They cause people to be constrained and increase their fears."

Now, in spring things are born, in summer they grow, in autumn they are harvested, in winter they are stored. This is the great warp of heaven's *dao*. If one does not go in sequence with this, then there will be nothing from which to make the great webbing of all-under-heaven. Thus I said, "The great sequence of the four seasons must not be lost."

(*Shiji* 130:3290)

What is this Yinyang group? And should we not seek to answer that question by finding people who *do* the things that Tan talks of? The initial difficulty is that they are over-many. Though we can identify certain specialists renowned for their abilities to read occult phenomena, much more striking is the permeation of *all* aspects of early Han thought by *yinyang* thinking—even, for example, the militarist.²² The presence of *yinyang* ideas, then, does not provide a person or text with identity or affiliation.²³ Rather *yinyang* is a set of broadly shared assumptions about the relationship of natural and human worlds.

Now, it is surely appropriate that a *taishi* 太史 begin his discussion of governance with these cosmological issues—after all, his court position was responsible for drawing up the calendar, “identifying auspicious and inauspicious days for imperial activity” (Durrant 1995, 3), and “devising and testing methods of computation, as well as for supervising the observation, recording, and interpretation” of phenomena with important astrological implications.²⁴ *Yinyang* is essential to these calculations, but it is hardly coterminous with them. So here is our first surprise. While Tan’s Yinyang configuration indeed includes trigrams and asterisms and the progression of the seasons, such elements constitute only a small portion of contemporary *yinyang*-related materials. Indeed, Tan debunks much of their finely tuned, anxiety-producing prohibitions.

So then what was Sima Tan’s intention at the moment when he invented the Yinyang *jia*? All round him is an overwhelming richness of occult practices, with too many strands interwoven too tightly (and thus hard to differentiate) or too loosely (thus hard to connect). Tan enters, chooses the politically relevant parts of these traditions, rejects others, and gives this grouping of knowledge a name. It is the configuration “Yinyang.” Here is our first glimpse of a process he will repeat five times more, until all significant knowledge has been included or excluded.

We have also made another discovery, which will aid the upcoming investigation of the Ru: A configuration need not be a currently existing school. Nor even a set of currently existing, self-identifying specialists.

The Ru

These are Tan’s opening appraisals:

The Ru (*Ruzhe* 儒者) are wide ranging but with few of the essentials. They labor but to small result. Hence their programs are difficult to follow completely. But their ordering of the rites of sovereign and minister, father and son and their arrangement of the distinctions between husband and wife, old and young must not be changed.
(*Shiji* 130:3289)

²²See, for example, the Yinyang classification within the “Military Writings” (*bingshu* 兵書) section of the *Hanshu Yiwenzhi* (*Hanshu* bibliography), 30:1759–60. This material has been studied by Robin Yates (1988). Elsewhere Yates notes how *yinyang* assumptions “permeated the esoteric arts in Warring States and early Han China” (1994, 143).

²³Robin Yates writes: “In light of the Yinqueshan materials . . . it seems to me that it is quite difficult to distinguish the so-called Huang-Lao Mawangdui silk manuscripts *as a whole* from Yin-Yang texts of a similar antiquity” (1994, 144).

²⁴Sivin, in private communication (March 1999). See his 1969 article for a complex elaboration of these methods, mathematical and otherwise.

The auto-commentary reads:

Now, the Ru take the Six Classics as their model. The texts and commentaries of the Six Classics number in the thousands and tens of thousands [of words]. In several generations one could not get through their teachings; in one's whole lifetime one could not fully investigate their rites. Thus I said, "Wide ranging but with few of the essentials, laboring but to small result." But if one would "arrange the rites of sovereign and minister, father and son, and order the distinctions of husband and wife, old and young," then even the many wisemen could not change it.
(*Shiji* 130:3290)²⁵

As either a historical or intellectual summary of the Ru, this passage would receive very low marks. For example, the scope of *li* 禮 (ritual, ceremony, etiquette) is severely restricted,²⁶ while another characteristic Ruhist doctrine, *renyi* 仁義 (humanity and duty), is entirely absent. As Ren Jiyu (1981, 432) has pointed out, such general principles as Tan does invoke are by no means property of the Ru. As with his treatment of the Yinyang, Tan is presenting Ruhist teachings as the commonplaces of Han socio-political life. In particular I would argue that what Tan praises here—the Ruhist "ordering of rites of sovereign and minister, father and son, and the arrangement of the distinctions between husband and wife, old and young"—is close to what he admires in the Fajia, to wit, their "rectification of the division between sovereign and minister, superior and inferior." I would go further: Everything Ru that might impede a Daojia synthesis has been removed; only generalized hierarchical principles remain. No Ru, of course, would accept this as a positive description of his project.

While there never seems to have been an organization of *yinyang* practitioners, we might reasonably speak of Warring States and Han Ru as forming self-conscious collectivities with teachers, lineage, texts, etc.²⁷ These Ru are not at all what Tan has in mind. Instead, he has selected a few ideas originating in those groups and represented them as one of his six configurations. Thus in an important way Tan's Ru are as synthetic, and as novel, as his Yinyang configuration. In both cases, he has taken a term with a centuries-old history and given it a new referent. The fact that his reduction is so radical suggests the extent to which these labels were up for appropriation in early Han China.

Perhaps Tan had an additional motive for caricaturing these teachings: Ruhism was the strongest competitor to his own political agenda. Thus a significant element of Tan's discussion of Daojia, translated below, is its attack on the Ru. No other configuration is presented so negatively. We will, however, see a similar politicization in Tan's discussions of the Mo.

²⁵For the translation of *baijia* 百家 as "many wisemen," see Petersen 1995.

²⁶For a brief discussion of the broad range of *li*, see Shun 1993, 457–58.

²⁷Knoblock argues that "in Ancient China there was no 'school' of Confucius" (1988, 52). But as Steven Van Zoeren responds, "there were a number of competing schools all claiming to represent the authoritative teachings of Confucius" (1991, 256). Thus Xunzi's attacks on counterfeit Ru in books 6 and 8 take the strategy of designating one historical strand as orthodox. Tan does not take sides—he merely takes those doctrines his project needs.

The Mo

Tan's initial survey:

The Mo (*Mozhe* 墨者) are too frugal to be easily followed. Hence their projects cannot be observed in every respect. But their strengthening of the root [occupations] and sparing use [of resources] must not be discarded.

(*Shiji* 130:3289)

And the commentary, the first paragraph of which I have taken from Burton Watson:

The Mo also revere the *dao* of Yao and Shun and speak of their virtuous actions. They say: The foundations of their halls were three meters high with three steps of earth leading up. Their halls were roofed with untrimmed thatch, and their timbers and rafters were untrimmed. They ate from earthen plates and drank from earthen bowls. Their food was coarse grain with a soup of greens. In summer they wore clothes of coarse fiber and in winter the skins of deer.²⁸

[The Mo] see off their dead in *tong*-wood caskets three inches thick. Raising their voices [in mourning], they do not fully express their grief. They teach that these funeral rites must be the standard for all people. But if all-under-heaven modeled themselves on this, then honored and base would be without distinction.

Now, the generations differ and times change. Programs and occupations will not necessarily be the same. Thus I said "too frugal to be easily followed." But their essentials are "strengthening the root [occupations] and the sparing use [of resources]," so this is a *dao* in which the people are provided for and households are plentiful. That is the strength of Mozi. Even the many wisemen could not discard it.

(*Shiji* 130:3290–91)

Strikingly, this passage does not refer to the thought of any contemporary, living Mo. Indeed, I can find no historical sources that refer to *any* Mohists in the early Han, though there are hints of their ideas here and there.²⁹ Furthermore the Mohism that Tan describes is characterized by the thriftiness associated with its earliest teachings, not the later logic that Angus Graham (1978) has studied nor the defense technology Robin Yates (1980) has clarified for us.³⁰ Once more Tan appears to be ransacking the past for parts, newly freed from their wholes, out of which to build novel intellectual configurations.

If we admit that the Mohist concepts described have no current defenders, why bother constituting such a category and then attack its weaknesses? After all, in the

²⁸As far as Zheng Liangshu (1982, 3468 ff) can determine, none of these sayings derive from the preserved teachings of the Mohists. However, some phrases in the following paragraph resemble those of the *Zhuangzi* syncretist description of Mo Di in chapter 33 (*Zhuangzi jishi* 1072–75).

²⁹See Fukui 1970. Yet Fukui's article, instead of identifying Han Mohists, emphasizes the influence of much earlier Mohist ideas on Han Confucians, particularly Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 and Dong Zhongshu, particularly ideas like "universal love," which Gongsun equates with *ren* 仁 (14). Thus it is Mohist universalism that is at stake, and Fukui, like Tan, divorces it from any historical Mohist. The "rebirth" in Fukui's title is therefore entirely conceptual.

³⁰Each of these has been updated by recent publications in Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation* series, the first by Christoph Harbsmeier's *Language and Logic* (1998), the second by Joseph Needham and Robin Yates's *Military Technology* (1995). Strictly speaking, we cannot use the word "logic" until the entry of Buddhist thought from India.

language of the modern Chinese struggle session, Mohists are “dead tigers”—political warriors so thoroughly defeated in previous campaigns that they are not worth targeting in the present conflict. I have only tentative explanations here. They grow from my claim that Tan is using the label “Mo” to attack certain contemporary positions. One of those positions is a concept of rites in which “the honored and base are without distinction,” a theme that surfaces several times in the “Yaozhi.” This leveling, which Tan finds equally among the Fajia, is antithetical to the “natural distinction of wise and unworthy” (*Shiji* 130:3292) that Daojia promotes. The second object of attack may be strands among the Ru. After all, it is not only the Mo who revere Yao and Shun, hold tightly to outmoded ritualized practices, or fail to recognize that “the generations differ and times change.” But there may also be a simpler explanation for the existence of this *jia*. “Strengthening root occupations and a sparing use of resources” are policies so politically important—and yet so fully identified with the Mo—that Tan simply cannot exclude them from the essentials of governance.

Fajia

While Tan inherited the terms Yinyang, Ru and Mo, it appears that he invented Fajia, Mingjia, and (possibly) Daojia.³¹ Here are his remarks from the initial survey:

The Fajia are strict and of slight kindness. But their rectification of the division between sovereign and minister, superior and inferior must not be altered.

(*Shiji* 130:3289)

His auto-commentary:

The Fajia do not distinguish degree of kinship, do not differentiate noble and lowly—they make a single judgment before the law. Thus the kindness of treating one’s kin as kin and honoring the honorable is cut off. It is a calculus that could be practiced for a time, but one could not long employ it. Thus I said “strict and of slight kindness.” But if one were to honor the ruler and abase the ministers, and clarify official functions so that none oversteps [his allotted task], then even the many wisemen could not alter it.

(*Shiji* 120:3291)

This study has suggested that Tan had neither texts, specific men, nor schools as referents for his six categories. Yet a hundred years after him, in the *Hanshu* bibliography, Fajia came to mean “Legalist” and indicate such men as Hanfeizi and their writings (*Hanshu* 30:1701 ff). In that work Fajia is one of ten categories of Masters texts (*zi* 子), and it includes works by Lord Shang, Shen Buhai, Shen Dao, Han Fei, and six other men. I mention four of them by name because each has a biography in the *Taishigong*; if, when that work was composed, “Fajia” had referred to Lord Shang and his ilk, we would expect to find their four biographies closely linked. Instead Sima Qian has separated them: Lord Shang gets chapter 68 to himself, and Qian places Shen Buhai and Han Fei with Laozi and Zhuangzi in chapter 63.³² Shen Dao, in turn, goes into chapter 74 with other members of the supposed Jixia

³¹The one earlier usage is Mencius’s mention of “*fajia*” in 6B15, which D. C. Lau (1970, 181) translates as “law-abiding families.”

³²We may assume that this conjunction is related to Qian’s retrospective application of the label “Huang-Lao” to certain Warring States thinkers.

Academy, the most prominent of which today are Mencius and Xunzi. These last three are thereby associated with men never considered Fajia.

Clearly, then, for Sima Qian “Fajia” did not refer to Lord Shang and Han Fei. Nor did Qian find any other use for the term, as it appears nowhere else in his *Taishigong*. Perhaps this is because the concept “Fajia” was still so implicated in his father’s “Yaozhi” project that it could have no meaning on its own. Or perhaps because Tan’s schema existed independent of famous men and texts, Qian could not imagine it constituting a historical category. One hundred years later, and only after Tan’s political agenda had been washed away, did the term “Fajia” reemerge in the *Hanshu* bibliography with its new members, as we will see below. To restate an obvious point, then, Tan’s Fajia, like much that is found in the other configurations, are novel, synthetic, and free of texts, men, and lineages.

The term “Legalist” has long been in sinological disrepute for reasons very different from these, e.g. that there was no Legalist “school” comparable to Ru or Mo in Warring States times and that “Legalists” used more than *fa* (models) to administer the realm. Let me offer a new argument: our term “Legalist” includes not only Tan’s Fajia but also the Mingjia he speaks of next.

Mingjia

The first statement:

The Mingjia cause people to be constricted³³ and are apt to lose the truth. But their rectification of word (*ming* 名) and substance must be examined.

(*Shiji* 130:3289)

The auto-commentary:

The Mingjia engage in petty investigations and twisting entanglements, preventing people from returning to their original intent. They decide matters solely on the basis of words (*ming*) [i.e. what has been contracted] and thereby lose the actual human circumstance. Thus I said, “They cause people to be constricted and are apt to lose the truth.” But if one “accuses” the words [i.e. what has been contracted] by holding someone responsible to the substance [of his performance], then in ambiguous situations one is not at a loss. This must be examined.

(*Shiji* 130:3291)³⁴

One can hardly exaggerate the importance to Warring States politics of *ming* (名/命)—words, names, and naming.³⁵ Clear terminology is, of course, essential to any administrative practice, as the passage from Han Fei examined early in this article indicates. Tan’s appreciation of the Mingjia closely resembles Han’s view. Both

³³For this reading see Zheng Liangshu (Tai Lian-soo) 1982, 3466.

³⁴“This must be examined”—*ci buke bucha ye* 此不可不察也. The sentence is as ambiguous in Chinese as in English. Tan’s intention is that we look seriously into these teachings, and his language of legal investigation is consistent with its topic. For an identification of *ming* with “words,” see William G. Boltz 1994, 138 ff.

³⁵We may be most familiar with the Ruhist agenda for the “rectification of names” (*zheng ming* 正名), but the same phrase had widespread application to other political programs. Thus a passage from the *Shizi* 尸子: “The fact that without saying much one’s orders are executed is because of *zheng ming*.” This line is quoted by Carine Defoort in a section of *The Pheasant Hat Master* entitled “The Political Power of Names” (1997, 174).

men are concerned with establishing reliable means to ascertain the truth of someone's claims, whether doctrinal or behavioral. This is the crucial administrative issue of "word and substance" (*mingshi* 名實)—the evaluation of bureaucratic performance. It is also the basis on which all contracts are drawn up. Thus *ming* has profound implications for morality, epistemology, and the law.³⁶

Mingjia concerns, then, are squarely in the domain we associate with our later concept "Legalism."³⁷ Mingjia is simply that portion of administrative practice that emphasizes the formal relations between an official and his supervisor. However, since we know that there *was* no "Legalism" yet, I should probably say it this way: given his political concerns, it is not surprising that Tan selects both *ming* and *fa* from the administrative repertoire of the Warring States and Han eras to establish as separate *jia*.

How, then, did Mingjia become known as "Sophists"—manipulators of linguistic truth—both to the Chinese tradition and then to Westerners?³⁸ As with the transformation of Fajia into Legalism, we must look to the *Hanshu* bibliography, which lists the *Deng Xi* 鄧析, the *Gongsun Longzi* 公孫龍子, the *Huizi* 惠子, and four other works in its Mingjia section. If we believed that Sima Tan's Mingjia referred to a group of Warring States people, these authors would be the likely candidates.³⁹ And here is an assessment of one of them by Wang Chong 王充 (c. E. 27–ca. 100), writing a generation or two after the *Hanshu*:

Gongsun Long wrote the discourse "Hard and White." It splits words (*yan* 言) and dissects phrases in the service of twisty words. It adds nothing to *dao*-principles, it is without benefit to governance.

(*Lunheng jiaoshi* 1990, 1166)⁴⁰

Such Mingjia men sound very much like sophists. In actuality, however, the Warring States had its *own* name for sophists—not Mingjia but *bianzhe* 辯者, "disputers" or "debaters." Indeed, *Zhuangzi* chapter 33 applies this term explicitly to Hui Shi and Gongsun Long in its argument that, in Graham's summary, they "had nothing to offer but barren analysis and speculation about heaven and earth."⁴¹

³⁶Since the Shuihudi discoveries, we have a better sense of the nature and functioning of Qin law. For an exposition of these materials, see the various works of A. F. P. Hulswé.

The most extensive treatment of *mingshi* and its subset *xingming* 形名 is by John Makeham (1990–91 and 1994). He states with great acumen: "It is my interpretation that in the *hsing-ming* context, *ming* means 'words, speech, declaration or claim,' and on the basis of his claim a candidate is appointed to office or allotted a task" (1990–91, 98). Or, I would add, evaluated during and at completion of said task.

Fa and *ming* are linked not only in administrators' texts but also in third- and second-century surveys of political thought. See, for example, the *Zhuangzi* syncretist examined above, who uses these two words to identify an approach to governance he contrasts with the Ru (*Zhuangzi jishi* 1066). See also J. J. L. Duyvendak 1928, 101 and 106 for Lord Shang's usage.

³⁷This term is more properly "administrism," should we seek a way to nominalize these activities.

³⁸Nathan Sivin points out a further parallel between ancient Greece and China. "Sophist" as a pejorative social category was invented by Plato, an artifice only uncovered by classicists in the 1970s (private communication, March 1999). Even so, "sophist" only partially translates the Chinese situation, since these men were not peddling wisdom, merely persuasion.

³⁹See, for example, the treatment of Léon Vandermeersch (1965, 236–40).

⁴⁰Angus Graham renders Tan's initial summary of the Mingjia as follows: "The School of Names makes people glib and prone to lose sight of the genuine; but it is indispensable to scrutinise their correcting of names and objects" (1989, 378).

⁴¹*Zhuangzi jishi* (1111), where Huan Tuan and Gongsun Longzi are referred to as *bianzhe zhi tu*, "disciples of the disputers" (Graham 1989, 285).

But let us recall that Hui Shi was also prime minister in the state of Wei and is said to have written out its code of law,⁴² and that the fourth/third-century persuader Su Qin regarded Gongsun Longzi's paradox, "A white horse is not a horse," as a tool in the administrators' strategy of *xingming* 刑名 (form and claim, a variation of *mingshi*, word and substance).⁴³ Note too Ban Gu's ambivalent judgment of Mingjia in the *Hanshu* bibliography:

The tradition of the Mingjia probably derives from the Office of Rites. In antiquity titles (*ming* 名) and ranks were not the same, and the rites also differed in their regulations. Confucius said: "It is necessary that words (*ming*) be rectified! If words are not rectified, then speech will not be in order. If speech is not in order, then state projects will not be completed."

This is [the Mingjia] strength. But when it is employed for overfine distinctions, then it is only destructive and divisive.

(*Hanshu* 30:1737)

Thus we must assume that men like Hui Shi were intensely committed to the political use of words to make clear distinctions—and equally implicated in the language crisis of late Warring States.

And so some conclusions: that by the term "Mingjia" Sima Tan meant a set of politico-intellectual operations that struck him as equal in importance to *fa*-based ones; that in Warring States those practices had been done by people who would be called "Legalists" from the time of the *Hanshu* bibliography on; and that, as a result of this mid-Han renaming, the term "Mingjia" was assigned to the debaters (*bianzhe*) of *Zhuangzi*, chapter 33—who, it turns out, had been both sophists and administrators all along. Thus Herrlee Creel was both right, and wrong, when he distinguished "legalists" from "administrators" (1970). The moral? As any Mingjia person will tell you, everything depends on the *modus operandi* of your naming protocol.

Daojia

Here, once more, is Tan's initial description, which includes his attack on the Ru:

The Daojia cause the spiritual essence of human beings to be concentrated and unified. Their actions are joined with the formless, their provision sufficient to the myriad things. In the practice of their techniques they accord with the great sequence of the Yinyang, select the good of the Ru and Mo, and adopt the essentials of the Ming and Fa.

They move with the seasons
And respond to the transformation of things.
There is nothing unsuitable
In the practices they establish and projects they carry out.
Their points are simple and easily applied,
Their programs few but results many.

⁴²According to *Lüshi chunqiu*, *lan* 6, chap. 5, 1187.

⁴³According to the *Zhanguo* SBBY 19.4a, as quoted in Makeham 1990–91, 92. Yet this passage has also been called into question by most editors of the text, as it does not fit easily into the context of Su Qin's speech, and Crump omits it. See, *inter alia*, *Zhanguo*, *Zhao* 2(#219):666. Note that in Warring States texts *xing* 刑, "form," is often written 刑.

The Ru are not like this. They hold that the ruler of men is the model for all-under-heaven. The ruler sings and the ministers harmonize, the ruler precedes and the ministers follow along. In this way the ruler labors and the ministers are at ease. It is the essence of the great *dao* to abandon strength and desire and to deprecate cleverness, to discard these and rely on techniques. Now, spirit if greatly used will be exhausted, the [human] form if greatly labored will be worn out. With form and spirit in commotion yet wishing to last as long as heaven-and-earth—this is unheard of.

(*Shiji* 130:3289)

The auto-commentary reads:

The Daojia have no doing. It is also said that they have nothing they do not do. Their substance is easy to practice, but their words are hard to know. Their techniques take vacuity and have-not (*xu* 虛, *wu* 無) as their root, accordance and conformation (*yin* 因, *xun* 循) as their activity.

They have no fixed configuration, they have no constant form,
 Thus they can get to the actual nature of the myriad things.
 They do not precede things, they do not succeed things,
 Thus they can be the ruler of the myriad things.
 They have models (*fa* 法), they have no models—
 They accord with the times in accomplishing their work.
 They have measures, they have no measures—
 They accord with things and join with them.

Thus it is said,

“The sage is not clever.
 He transforms in timely fashion and holds to it.”
 Vacuity is the Dao’s constancy,
 Accordance is the sovereign’s principle.

The various ministers arrive together, and he makes each one clarify himself. When their substance rings true, it’s called “correct.” When it does not, it’s called “hollow.”

If you do not listen to hollow words,
 Then evil will not arise.
 If wise and unworthy are naturally distinguished,
 White and black take form.
 In whatever you wish to do,
 Will there be anything you don’t accomplish?
 So join with the great *dao*, inchoate and profound.
 Its light shines on all-under-heaven, it returns to has-no-name.

In sum, what gives birth to humans is spirit, what supports one is [human] form. Spirit if greatly used will be exhausted, form if greatly labored will be worn out. If form and spirit part, you die. The dead cannot live again, the departed cannot return again. Thus the sage considers this a weighty matter. Looked at from that perspective, spirit is the root of life, form the instrument of life. To say, before you have first stabilized your spirit and form, “I possess that by which to govern all-under-heaven”—how could one do that?

(*Shiji* 130:3292)

What is Daojia? Let us try to recover the moment of its creation, beginning with things other people have called “Daojia” that Sima Tan did not. Of course some of these postdate Tan, such as the divinization of Laozi discernable in the Later Han (see

Seidel 1969) or the Laozi-Zhuangzi association that begins in Wei-Jin times. There are, however, contemporaneous phenomena that Tan clearly excludes—the magicians, the life-extenders, that is, the various shades of *fangshi* 方士 activity. And most strikingly, he omits all mention of another synthetic “Daoism,” Huang-Lao 黃老.

Huang-Lao is a combination of Yellow Thearch (Huangdi 黃帝) and Laozi teachings practiced in the early Han.⁴⁴ Tan’s own teacher, Master Huang 黃生, is identified by Sima Qian as of the Huang-Lao persuasion (see *Shiji* 130:3288, 121:3122). But what is Huang-Lao? Two hypotheses are current, and I would like to differentiate Tan’s Daojia from both. The first identifies four silk manuscripts discovered in 1973 at Mawangdui as the lost *Huangdi sijing* 皇帝四經 texts mentioned in the *Hanshu* bibliography and thus as representative of the Huang-Lao approach.⁴⁵ Now, we can certainly find many points of resemblance between Tan’s views and those of the manuscripts. Such teachings may even have been Tan’s inspiration. But here is the problem: the only contemporaneous occurrences of the term Huang-Lao are in the *Taishigong*, where it is used rather differently from in the manuscripts. There Sima Qian mentions men such as the early Han chancellor Cao Shen (曹參, a.k.a. Cao Can), notable for their hands-off approach to administration. If Huang-Lao includes both their practices and the silk manuscript doctrines, then it seems to have been highly elastic, an attitude of administration, not locatable in a single text nor in any bounded set of texts, an intellectual tendency or group of tendencies rather than a single doctrine. By contrast, Daojia is the self-conscious invention of one man. It is a non-textually based syncretic project that imputes a specific relationship between itself and the other five *jia* configurations, in company with which it constitutes the full array of political knowledge.

I find the second view of Huang-Lao more persuasive. It can be found, for example, in the work of Mark Csikszentmihalyi, who argues that Huang-Lao was “a category created by Sima Qian and retrospectively imposed on a handful of his contemporaries and figures in previous generations” (Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003).⁴⁶ Csikszentmihalyi is especially interested in the concerted discussions of *juan* 80, where Qian describes Huang-Lao as a lineage: a multi-generational succession of acknowledged masters, equipped with texts, official titles, and specific sacred locations.⁴⁷ In each instance we can contrast it with Tan’s Daojia, which has none of these furnishings.

If neither hypothesized Huang-Lao can be identified as Daojia, then what of another contemporaneous “Daoism,” the *Huainanzi* 淮南子? I wish I knew more about its relationship to Sima Tan. We may suppose Tan had access to Emperor Wu’s private copy after the manuscript was presented to the throne and sequestered in 139 B.C.E. We may note many points of congruence between its views and Tan’s.⁴⁸ We may wonder if Tan is significantly indebted to the *Huainanzi* synthesis, and whether he saw it as an ally or competitor. Perhaps future work can clarify this. But whatever

⁴⁴For a brief overview, see Tu 1979. For fuller treatments, see Csikszentmihalyi 1994 and Peerenboom 1993.

⁴⁵Peerenboom argues this view at some length.

⁴⁶For longer discussion, see Csikszentmihalyi 1994, 7–57. See also Hans van Ess 1993. For arguments against identifying the Mawangdui manuscripts with the *Huangdi sijing*, see Qiu Xigui 1993.

⁴⁷In Csikszentmihalyi’s view, Qian’s political motivation is to propose this lineage organization as an alternative to the domination of court life by Ru, who were so “prey to the temptations of a wealth and power discourse that Qian had grown to despise and fear” (Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan 2003).

⁴⁸This view is argued most strongly by Harold Roth (1991a, 1991b).

the similarities among Daojia, Huang-Lao, and the *Huainanzi*, each functioned very differently, and none has the same name in writings from the second century B.C.E.⁴⁹

We can then imagine Tan in the creation of the “Yaozhi,” sorting through an undifferentiated complex of interrelated phenomena, selecting certain noncontroversial factors for inclusion in the six configurations, excising others as useless, and creating for Daojia people a privileged position at the center of all ideology. From this vantage, they would adopt relevant policies from any quarter, oversee both ministers and administration, rule all-under-Heaven, and ensure the emperor a long, potent life. This Daojia is defined equally by its qualities and its procedures: vacuity and have-not as the root, accordance and conformation as their activity.

Is this “Daoism”? That is the issue I will address below.

From Daoists to Daoism

So what *are* these *jia*? Do they constitute “schools,” and if so, in what social or intellectual sense? Earlier, I asked if they were “experts,” so that “Mingjia” would mean “people with expertise in using words.” Are they domains of thought, so that “Yinyang” would indicate a style and particular content of thinking? And are they also practices, so that “Fajia” would constitute a kind of political activity? These are questions about the socio-organizational implications of holding ideas. Answering them will show us how a century after his death Tan’s “Daojia” became Daoism—a set of texts, lineages, and views, with a pedigree extending back to the early Zhou period. The first step is to examine the word *jia*.

In the early Han, as Jens Østergård Petersen has shown, *jia* had the meaning of “people [with expertise in something]” (1995, 34 ff).⁵⁰ The *Taishigong*, for example, refers to a group of *shujia* 數家, “specialists in number prognostication” (14:511). It also mentions that Emperor Wen “liked the *xue* of the Daojia” (*hao Daojia zhi xue* 好道家之學). Here “Daojia” must mean “men of Dao,” as distinct from “*xue*,” their teachings or lineage (23:1160).⁵¹ Likewise, throughout the “Yaozhi” Tan speaks of the actions that each *jia* performs, e.g. “The Mingjia cause men to be constricted” or “The Daojia have no doing. It is also said that they have nothing they do not do.” In this sense a *jia* is a group of human beings.

However, the first three groupings—Yinyang, Ru, and Mo—are never called *jia*. As Petersen (1995, 34 ff) has shown, this is because Rujia would mean “someone who specializes in [a study of] the Rus.” Nevertheless, all six configurations function equivalently insofar as each is newly constructed. The difference in naming protocol between the first three and the others is simply that the words “yinyang,” “Ru,” and

⁴⁹Indeed, the *Huainanzi* does not use the term “Daojia” at all but refers instead to “techniques of the Dao” (*daoshu* 道術). Wang Aihe sharply distinguishes the *Huainanzi* from the version of Huang-Lao found in the *Taishigong*, arguing that “in contrast to the Huang Lao theory of the early Han statesmen, who used the term ‘non-action’ to promote laissez-faire politics,” the *Huainanzi* authors used the term to construct “a comprehensive cosmological and political theory of the emperorship of ‘non-action’” (2000, 193).

⁵⁰Cf. the opening lines of chapter 43 of the *Hanfeizi*, which refer to the arguments of Shen Buhai and Lord Shang as *ci erjia zhi yan* 此二家之言, “the teachings of these two men.” For another study, see Wang Liqi 1989.

⁵¹Cf. “The Empress Dowager liked the teachings of Huang-Lao” (107:2843).

“Mo” already had historical existence.⁵² Thus Sima Qian quite properly refers to his father’s essay as “Liujia zhi yaozhi,” “The essential points of the six *jia*.”

But if these *jia* are constituted of people, what people are they? Certainly not past masters nor identifiable contemporaries. Naturally there are living men advocating some views Tan attributes to every *jia*, but it is unnecessary to his concept that anyone do it just as he describes. In this sense all the practitioners of his *jia* are somewhat hypothetical—just as the configurations are novel and synthetic themselves. Thus the “Yaozhi” omits names that identify a specific person. (The one exception is Mozi—hard to miss in any discussion of frugality.) It also avoids terms like *yan* 言, “words, texts,” since these were always the proprietary teachings of a lineage.

These *jia* must have seemed a funny thing to Tan’s contemporaries. They did not meet the usual goals of ideological labeling: to name names, mark a group of people, or impute a social organization to knowledge. Nor did they identify men who might be employable by the emperor—the one exception being Tan, of course. As much as anything they indicated a conceptual area, a style of practice. Yet *jia* were still person-centered categories for Tan, ideal *human* types, not simply concepts. So although he could image *jia* without lineages, he could not imagine ideas without people holding them. Since all ideas were indelibly ideological—in the sense of being defined by their political application—it would have been weird and useless to consider them abstractly, as a modern historian might. (More on this below.)

Now we can better understand the uniqueness of Tan’s term “*jia*.” Its referent is people with a particular ideology. But its function is to identify a set of ideas in such manner as to make them attractive to the Han Emperor Wu. *Jia* are somewhere between our idea of concrete and abstract, a bit contorted-seeming because Tan’s project depends on distinctions his language does not allow him to make. It was therefore easy for *jia* to lose these original meanings and come to stand for something quite different in new historical circumstances one hundred years later.

If we look at this from Sima Tan’s perspective, we can find one Daoist among the hypothetical Daojia—it is Tan himself. If we look at this from our own perspective, we also see something that hints at Daoism—it is in the quasi-abstract ideas held by the Daojia, and in the *daolun* 道論 that Tan studied with Master Huang (130:3288). How things changed so that we might properly translate Daojia as “Daoism” depends on two further developments. One is the increasing political importance of lineages. The other is the imperial bibliographic project of late Western Han.⁵³

The Warring States certainly had teacher-disciple organizations, and perhaps the transmission of texts was their defining act, as Sivin suggests (1995c). But until the Western Han no one ever referred to these groups using a Chinese term we can translate as “lineage.” That word occurs only when the mastery of classical works afforded potent access to power. My understanding of this derives from the unpublished work of Mark Csikszentmihalyi (1997). He has shown how politically

⁵²Edmund Ryden argues that “Sima Tan reserves the term ‘school’ [*sic*] only for those groups that can be identified synchronically. The diachronic is identified by the use of *zhe* 著 as in Ruzhe 儒者 and Mozhe 墨者 . . .” (1996, 7). While formally he is correct, it is not its syn- or diachronic existence that determines whether a group will be a *jia* but simply the prior usage of its name.

⁵³I am grateful to my friend Jens Østergård Petersen for his objections to my earlier formulation of this argument, and his great helpfulness in its resolution. Separately I must also admit my desire to link Tan’s Daojia and its five supplementary configurations to the cult of Taiyi and the Five Emperors, on which Tan advised Emperor Wu. Consistent as this hypothesis is with Han conceptualizations, I do not see any evidence to support it.

important texts were controlled in entities called “*xue*” 學 and named for their proprietor, e.g. “the *xue* of Mr. Y.” “*Xue*” might stand at once for the person teaching, the content of his learning, his scholastic organization, and sometimes its location.⁵⁴ These were publicly recognized institutions. Indeed, the emperor might formally establish them (*cun* 存), thereby placing their teachings into the *xueguan* 學官 (local school) curriculum.

Such groups were subject to division, with disciples each leading a *xue* of his own. Csikszentmihalyi cites the *Hanshu* account of Shi Chou, a teacher of the *Yijing*. Shi’s disciple Zhang had a *xue*, as did Zhang’s disciple Peng. The term for the entity comprehending all three of these groups is *jia*. Thus the text states, “Shi’s *jia* contains (*you* 有) a Zhang *xue* and a Peng *xue*” (*Hanshu* 88:3598). In this way the word *jia* comes for the first time to combine the intellectual content Sima Tan gave it with a concrete social and textual referent—at once a household, its inhabitants, and their intellectual possessions.

I must imagine that it was this sense of *jia* that made the term attractive to the bibliographers of late Western Han. When Liu Xiang and his son Liu Xin sorted the Imperial library into six divisions, they placed texts related to the Six Classics in first place. Then came ten groups of Masters literature, the *zhuzi* 諸子, each of which they called by the name *jia*, as in “Fajia.” (The first six of these are identical in name, though not order, to Tan’s classification.) The content of these *jia*-categories is a set of texts. But “*jia*” cannot refer immediately to books. It must first mean the people who teach and study the material, their lineage, and then their writings—much the same range we saw for “*xue*.” This blending of categories we usually keep distinct is evident in other aspects of the *Hanshu* bibliography as well. First of all, 90 percent of its texts take their names from their authors, e.g. the *Mengzi*, the *Laozi*. For, as Yu Jiaxi (1985) has discussed, the concept of a title distinct from an author was not well formed at this time. Furthermore Ban Gu’s postfaces to each category, such as the Mingjia description we saw above, impute Zhou-era political practices to the origin of each *jia*. Finally, the term “Rujia,” which we have seen to be ungrammatical in Tan’s usage, appears for the first time, meaning not “people who specialize in the Ru” but “the Ruhist specialty.” Thus the *Hanshu* fuses person, text, practice, school, and history into a single category.⁵⁵ And thus for the first time we have a term, “Daojia,” that we could accurately translate as “Daoism.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴For example, the *taixue* 太學 was “the informal name for the gathering of Erudits under the early Han Emperors and the name of a physical institution from the time of Emperor Wu onward” (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 6).

⁵⁵And two hundred years after that, as Christopher Connery has shown, “the scene of writing implicitly recognizes the ability of a text to find a community of readers over time in the absence of its author and separated from each other. ‘A school of thought,’ by the end of the Han, requires neither academy nor Erudite, but simply a textual existence” (1998, 63). For the use of *jia* to categorize historical people as well as texts, see *Renwuzhi* 人物志, which identifies Lord Shang as a “Fajia” (1.6a [SBBY]).

⁵⁶The Greco-Latin “-ism” seems especially apt, since it covers so broad a range of abstraction. At its simplest it denotes the nominalization of actions; thus “βαπτίζειν to dip, baptise,” becomes “βαπτισμός the action of dipping, baptism.” More complexly it indicates “a system of theory or practice” and “class-names or descriptive terms for doctrines or principles” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. “ism”).

I do not suggest that we translate *jia* as “schools”—a term of little use to this history. As Michael Loewe reminds us, “It is doubtful how far Ch’in or Han thinkers could be classed, or would have allowed themselves to be classed, within any single school of philosophy”—not that such schools existed in the first place (Twitchett and Loewe 1986, 652). After Emperor

Though the bibliographers' sorting principles are hard to recover today (in part because 85 percent of their evidence has been lost), we can be sure that their groupings served a different political purpose from Tan's. This is nowhere more evident from in their need to invent a new term for the syncretic activity we most associate with his Daojia. That term was Zajia 雜家, "those who weave disparate things together." Here were placed the *Liushi chunqiu* and *Huainanzi*, two works that share with Tan the goal of comprehending all knowledge. Tan's own Daojia, however, had no proprietary textual remains by which it might be recognizable within this newer omnivorism. In Ban Gu's discourse it was caricatured as those who "wish to cut off and eliminate ritual learning and concurrently abandon humanity and duty (*renyi*), saying that the employment of purity and vacuity (*xu*) alone can be used to rule" (*Hanshu* 30:1732).⁵⁷ "Daojia" thus went from being the center of everything to just one *jia* among ten, a single view within a huge and different gathering.

A Coda on *Shi* 史

In this article we have been examining the sole surviving text of Sima Tan, an early Han dynasty *taishi* 太史. Working from the answers he devised, we have attempted to imagine the questions he was asking. Now I would like to switch places. For perhaps not by coincidence, *shi* is part of my title, too—I'm professor of history, or *lishi* 歷史.⁵⁸ So what questions would I, a *shaoshi* 少史 or junior scrivener,⁵⁹ want to ask of his material that differ from those he posed himself? After an excursus through some of these—almost none of which is there space to resolve—we will return to Tan's own concerns.

As a historian, I am curious about the Warring States origins of those ideas Tan appropriates to the six *jia*. In particular, I would like to know more about groupings—of men, of ideas, over time, in one place or many, in their relationships with their own and other groups, formed to what ends and by what means, in their conjunction with state power. Until recently, all students of this past accepted the theory of the Many Schools (*baijia*)—six or ten main ones, plus many more smaller, family-owned ones. We have already seen how this concept was born at the moment of the *Hanshu* bibliography, and we know it does not represent conditions in the Warring States.

More recently, though, scholars communicating through Bruce Brooks' e-mail list have proposed the term "lineage" as a means of organizing this period in ways that the inhabitants themselves might recognize.⁶⁰ It seems to me that there are certain social facts that any theory of Warring States lineages must take into account:

Wu this is true in another regard. Michael Nylan states: "This new synthesis of beliefs prevalent among Han thinkers drew on every contemporary current of thought, weaving them together so inextricably that from the first century B.C.E. (in mid-Western Han) it makes no sense to speak of Taoists, Legalists, or even Yin-Yang/Five Phases cosmologists as distinct groups" (1993, 8). For a broad discussion of these new *jia* and a fruitful comparison with the Greek experience, see G. E. R. Lloyd 1996, 31 ff.

⁵⁷See also Queen forthcoming for a discussion of the *Hanshu's* bibliographic principles.

⁵⁸Which in Han might have been written 曆史, indicating more fully the calendrical aspect of the duties. The two *li* graphs are interchangeable in the *Taishigong*, but 曆 is actually a later, derived form of 歷. See Wang Li 1982, 272.

⁵⁹Extrapolating from Charles Hucker (1986), no. 5084.

⁶⁰For documents from his Warring States Workshop, see www.egroups.com/group/wsw. Items 401–16, "lineages," contain messages from Bruce Brooks, Andrew Meyer, Nathan Sivin and others. Further reflections can be found *passim* in items 440–69. Access, however, is restricted to members of the list. For information on joining, contact the URL mentioned above.

- Throughout the period teachers had students, generally described as disciples (*dizi* 弟子) and variously as followers (*turen* 徒人, etc.). There must have been thousands of these, given the hundreds of texts that survived long enough to be included in the *Hanshu* bibliography.
- The Ru and Mo were the only groupings that were broadly identifiable to their contemporaries.
- From at least the mid-fourth century, the teachings of these groups, committed to texts, became increasingly available to any interested party, such that ideas were widely known, exchanged, and arrogated.⁶¹
- There is no word for “lineage” in the language of Warring States.

When we seek to hypothesize a prototypical teacher-student filiation within this material—whether based on text, founder, or social organization—we are confounded by the extreme heterogeneity of our evidence. The accelerating blending and crossing of these threads only complicates the picture.⁶² Such conditions quickly empty the word “lineage” of any useful (i.e. singular) meaning. Thus the e-group discussions were appropriately inconclusive, no one term persuading other scholars to its use.⁶³

Why is there no word for lineage in this period? (All Chinese terms for “schools”—of painting, religious affiliation, political persuasion, e.g. *pai* 派, *liu* 流 or *dang* 黨—take on that meaning only much later.) I think it is because the lineage question was a private matter in the Warring States period, that is, lineages could not yet be used by the state to accomplish anything useful, nor by private teachers to fulfill political ambition. As we have seen, that changed only when essential texts were transmitted by such groups from the middle Han on.

Now I would like to shift modes again. My remarks above have been those of a contemporary historian. I have shown my interest in lineage as an institution that might have masters and texts, maintaining values across time. Yet none of these concerns are apparent in the writings of the *taishi* Sima Tan. Rather than pursuing questions of diachrony and its links, he is committed to a set of synchronous relationships within a whole.

We usually expect such wholes will be constructed from their constituent parts, as when we seek an account of Warring States thought from within stories of individual teacher-student relationships. But for Tan the whole was in an important sense presented to him in advance and was that which selected—even fabricated—its parts. The political representation of that whole was empire.

In the concluding passages of this essay I would like to examine some implications

⁶¹For a discussion of the considerable variety of texts found at Guodian (tomb sealed mid-fourth to early-third century), see Xing 2000. See also the work of Donald Harper summarized above in n. 17.

⁶²Even the relatively well-organized Ru are much less coherent than we may first imagine. In early Han, writes Nicolas Zufferey, “on ne trouve pas de ‘confucianisme’ . . . mais seulement une ‘doctrine des lettrés’ (*ru shu*), qui n’est au mieux qu’un programme minimum de diffusion des lettres et de la culture, de promotion du *wen* comme principe de gouvernement, par des fonctionnaires employés par le pouvoir politique” (we find no ‘Confucianism’ . . . but only a ‘doctrine of the literate’ (*ru shu*), which is no more than a minimum program for the spread of literature and culture, for the promotion of *wen* as the principle of government, by functionaries employed by the political power) (1998, 965).

⁶³I would particularly recommend, but am not permitted to cite, Mark Csikszentmihalyi’s remarks in no. 406. It is also possible to approach this history in a different way, creating what we might call a “lineage of ideas.” Thus Harold Roth identifies distinct elements in Warring States texts that in retrospect could be called “Daoism.” See Roth 1999, especially “Towards a Definition of Early Taoism,” 174–97.

of this whole, beginning with a contrast to a whole of our own. For in our contemporary world the concept “history” functions in a curiously related way. Nothing and no one lies outside of it. Yet this development is itself situated in history: it is a post-war event. Now, the word “anachronistic” had been around since the 1600s, at first meaning “a wrong date” and then, two centuries later, “out of date” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st ed., s.v. “anachronistic”). But it is first in 1957 that the word “ahistorical,” or “out of time,” appeared in the English language: “American sociology has been generally ahistorical in its approach to the study of society. It has instead concerned itself with the realm of ‘contemporary’ events” (J. C. McKinney, in *Modern Sociological Theory*, edited by H. Becker and A. Boskoff, 7:228, quoted in *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “ahistorical”). Ahistoricity becomes possible only when everything is already seen as historical, in history, as conditioned by its relations to everything else in time. And once this universal sense of history has been discovered, there is considerable difficulty escaping it. Not surprisingly, it took us two world wars, and the prospect of global empire, to start thinking this way.

So how does our novel sense of *shi* differ from Sima Tan’s? He, like an American sociologist classifying “the realm of contemporary events,” shows no interest in the past. In his world a *shi* is a registrar or scribe, and a *taishi* is the grand astrologer, charged with interpreting celestial and other remarkable natural phenomena of the present.⁶⁴ But with the “Yaozhi” he dramatically extends this charge, now to include all ideologies and practices of rule. His *shi*, then, is not so much a scribe, nor even interpreter of phenomena, as a master of *shu* 術—the techniques of governance.⁶⁵ He has moved from recording events, to giving them meaning, to ordering the very means through which events themselves can be given order. He is therefore necessarily an imperial *shi*, someone speaking from close by the center. Yet when we look more closely, we see that the epicenter of Daojia is empty. Tan’s essential representation of them reads:

Their techniques (*shu*) take vacuity and have-not (*xu* 虛, *wu* 無) as their root, accordance and conformation (*yin* 因, *xun* 循) as their activity. They have no fixed configuration, they have no constant form, thus they are able to investigate the actual nature of the myriad things.

(*Shiji* 130:3289)

As modern-day historians we can analyze the function of vacuity and have-not, but only a few of us are also trained in their direct apprehension and are therefore willing to take them “as our root.” Yet in other regards we look very much like Tan. Our work also comprehends everything, for we see all its parts interdependently. Our history therefore has “no fixed configuration, no constant form, thus it is able to investigate the actual nature of the myriad things.” Like the *dao*, it is a webbing, one whose order is immanent and always changing. We may claim our practice is also democratic, in that it is contingent on the persuasiveness of its views to the community of historians and other consumers of history. But that too may be just a view from an imperial center, now considerably enlarged.

Synthesis, system, and whole are always a time of great loss, nor does everyone feel comfortable seeing all the world at once. I will conclude, then, with the

⁶⁴For “registrar,” see my 1989 article. For “scribe” and “grand astrologer,” see Hucker 1986, no. 5199 and no. 6212.

⁶⁵As Michael Nylan and Harold Roth have argued in different ways. See Nylan 1999. The abstract may be viewed at www.aasianst.org/absts/1999abst/china/c-63.htm. Roth presents his views in “The ‘Techniques of the Way’” (1999).

contrasting response of Tan's son Qian to all of this. Already before his day the Seven States were gone. Lesser traditions and local texts like the Chu silk manuscript were disappearing from circulation. Now, the grasp of Sima Qian extended to everything of importance that had ever happened in the known world. Yet, Qian does not syncretize. And unlike his father's "vacuity" and "accordance," no one has yet named his "point of view" or "historiographic principles."⁶⁶ Thus, his representation of the whole world cannot be reduced to a whole. While there is room for everything within it, there is no emperor at the center, no place from which to control, no *point d'appui*. Thus Qian is of little use to an imperial project.

Sima Qian deals not in the power of a standardizing political authority but in the larger power of culture, which is full of values, but not systematic at all.⁶⁷ He, as much as Confucius *et alia*, is the father of the literati, the one who showed them how to own the past, present, and future. And as the literati space of resistance to totality, to muscular syncretism, he was ultimately more effective than his father—or even his father's rivals—at shaping the coming world.

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⁶⁶Grant Hardy, for example, cites a passage in the *Taishigong* that "has occasionally been quoted as Ssu-ma Ch'ien's grand theory of history, but Ssu-ma himself never mentions it again" (1992, 11).

⁶⁷As Willard Peterson has also argued in his "Ssu-ma Ch'ien as Cultural Historian" (1994, especially 77–79). See too the excellent piece by Michael Nylan (2001).

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