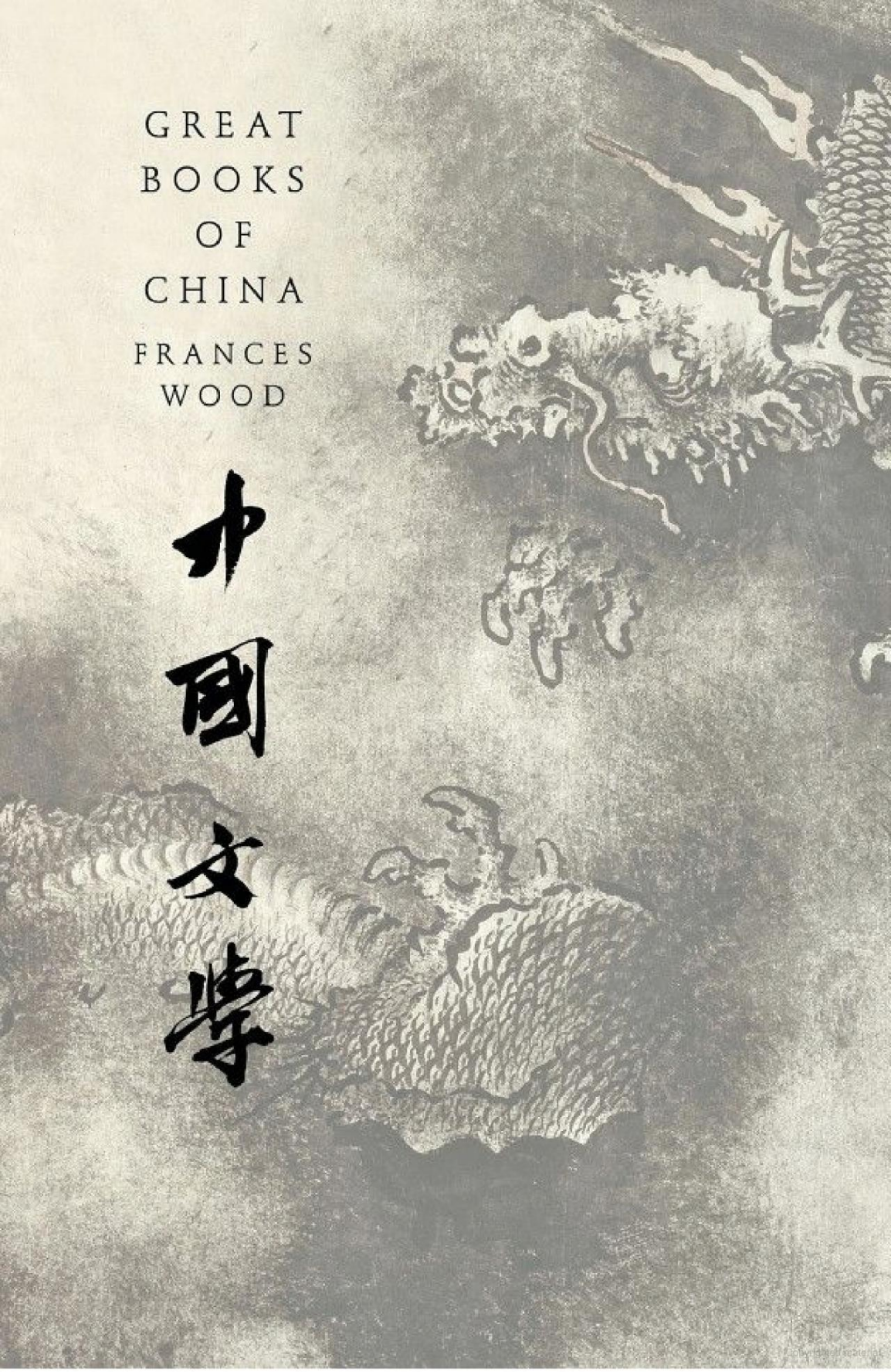
GREAT BOOKS OF CHINA

FRANCES WOOD

中國文學



CONTENTS

*

Foguo ji FAXIAN

Lotus Sutra
Saddharmapundarika sutra Author unknown
Diamond Sutra
Vajracchedikaprajnaparamita sutra Author unknown

Poems
LI BAI
Poems
DU FU

Poems
LI SHANGYIN

The Story of Yingying
Yingying zhuan YUAN ZHEN
Master Dong's Western Chamber Romance
Dong shi Xi xiang ji zhugongtiao DONG JIEYUAN
Romance of the Western Chamber
Xi xiang ji WANG SHIFU

Poems
LI QINGZHAO

The Orphan of Zhao
Zhao shi guer Attributed to JI JUNXIANG

Three-Character Classic
Sanzi jing Attributed to WANG YINGLIN

Twenty-Four Exemplars of Filial Piety
Ershisi xiao Attributed to GUO JUJING

The Water Margin
Shuihu zhuan Attributed to SHI NAIAN or LUO GUANZHONG

The Story of the Three Kingdoms
Sanguo zhi Attributed to LUO GUANZHONG

The Story of the Lute
Pipa ji GAO MING

The Classic of Lu Ban
Lu Ban jing Author unknown

Journey to the West
Xiyou ji Attributed to WU CHENG'EN

Plum in a Golden Vase
Jinpingmei Author unknown
The Carnal Prayer Mat
Rou putuan Attributed to LI YU

Travels of Xu Xiake
Xu Xiake youji XU XIAKE
Tracks of a Wild Goose in the Snow
Hongxuan yinyuan tuji LINQING

The Craft of Gardens
Yuan ye JI CHENG

Exploitation of the Works of Nature
Tiangong kaiwu SONG YINGXING

Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting
Jieziyuan huazhuan Author unknown; preface by LI YU

The Peach Blossom Fan
Taohua shan KONG SHANGREN

Poems/Essays
YUAN MEI

Unofficial History of the Grove of Literati
Rulin waishi WU JINGZI

Three Hundred Tang Poems
Tang shi sanbai shou SUN ZHU

Strange Stories from the Liao Studio
Liaozhai zhiyi PU SONGLING

Dream of the Red Chamber
Hongloumeng CAO XUEQIN

Six Records of a Floating Life
Fusheng liu ji SHEN FU

Poems
QIU JIN

The Travels of Lao Can
Lao Can youji LIU E

'My Old Home' (in **Call to Arms**)
'*Gu xiang*' (in *Nahan*)
Old Tales Retold

Gushi xinbian LU XUN

Miss Sophie's Diary
Shafei nüshi riji DING LING

Mr. Ma and Son
Er Ma
Camel Xiangzi
Luotuo xiangzi
Beneath the Red Banner
Zheng hongqi xia LAO SHE

Family
Jia BA JIN

Midnight
Ziye MAO DUN

Autobiography of a Girl Soldier
Yige nübing de zizhuan XIE BINGYING

The Man Who Came Home on a Snowy Night
Fengxue ye guiren WU ZUGUANG

Little Black's Marriage
Xiao Erhei jiehun ZHAO SHULI

Biography of the First Ming Emperor
Zhu Yuanzhang zhuan WU HAN

Fortress Besieged
Wei cheng QIAN ZHONGSHU

Memories of South Peking
Chengnan jiushi LIN HAIYIN

From Emperor to Citizen
Wode qian ban sheng PUYI

Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung
Mao Zhuxi yulu MAO ZEDONG

Half a Lifelong Romance
Bansheng yuan
Lust, Caution
Si, rong ZHANG AILING (EILEEN CHANG)

Mayor Yin
Yin xianzhang CHEN RUOXI (CHEN JO-HSI)

A NOTE ON
THE CHINESE CHARACTERS

Chinese characters have been used to distinguish the various types of literature included. Sometimes the name of the author has been used (Confucius, Mencius and Mao Zedong) but generally a single character designates history, travel, fiction, memoir etc.

Introduction

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THE EARLIEST SIGNIFICANT BODY OF Chinese writing is to be found on the ‘oracle bones’ of the Shang dynasty (*c.* 1600–1046 BCE). These texts are records of divinations, questions concerning the outcome of such activities as military and hunting expeditions and childbirth; they are not literary but documentary and archival. The shoulder blades of oxen and turtle shells were used for divination by the Shang kings, whose territory centered on the eastern reaches of the Yellow River valley down to the Yangtse. The texts inscribed on the oracle bones were short and to the point, but the characters used were the ancestors of today’s Chinese script, made more intelligible to us through the *Shuo wen jiezi* dictionary (‘analysis and explanation of characters’) of 121 CE. Traditional Chinese historiography traces a line of rulers through from the Shang to the Zhou kings, who came from west of the Shang territories and conquered the Shang in 1046 BCE. Recent archaeological discoveries, at Sanxingdui in Sichuan province, for example, have enriched the picture, demonstrating that there were other, and different, local civilizations flourishing in west and south China at the time, though not recorded in the traditional histories. It is from the Zhou that the first body of literature emerges (including the classics associated with Confucius and the Daoist classics), although the passage of millennia means that surviving texts may have considerably changed from their original state.

Zhou rule, which instituted a system of fiefdoms, collapsed in the fifth century BCE when its territorial control broke down into several distinct ‘warring states.’ Then, after hundreds of years of fighting, a vast area — from north of Beijing to near Guangzhou in the south, and from the eastern seaboard to the western area of today’s Sichuan province — was united by the ruler of the state of Qin in 221 BCE. The ruler of Qin proclaimed himself emperor (thus he is known as ‘the First Emperor’) and moved away from the aristocratic system of rule by fief, replacing it with the beginnings of the bureaucracy, a government staffed by trained officials armed with books containing the legal code and administrative regulations. Though the paramount importance of legal training weakened after the fall of the Qin in 206 BCE, the principle of bureaucratic rule was to continue until the early twentieth century.

The First Emperor unified the state that we now know as China by enforcing several methods of standardization, erasing the differences of the separate 'warring states' by imposing a national standard of weights and measures, coinage and writing system. The form of coinage instituted lasted until the early twentieth century, but the standardization of the script was possibly the most significant element underlying the continuity of Chinese civilization and culture. Over the vast territory of China, then as now, many different dialects (or local languages) are spoken, but the written language is generally common to all, even if the characters might be pronounced differently in different areas. The Chinese script does not represent the sounds of the language today, as it is not a phonetic script but a series of up to 44,000 (the number included in the great *Kangxi Dictionary* [*Kangxi zidian*] of 1716) different characters. Though many non-sinologists still like to describe them as 'pictograms,' very few of today's characters are simple pictures of things: most are much more complex, made up of phonetic elements, phonetic loans, and combinations of these, now frequently combined so that many 'words' consist of two syllables or two characters.[1]

The Qin dynasty, though hugely significant, was short-lived, barely outlasting its founding emperor. It was overthrown by the Han. The Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) continued and further developed the bureaucratic system of government and largely maintained the same system of law and punishment that it deplored in the Qin. Han historical writing pioneered the line of moral justification by which each new dynasty wrote the history of the previous regime that it had overthrown. In order to justify this violent act and demonstrate the righteous assumption of the 'Mandate of Heaven,' it was necessary to vilify the preceding dynasty, thus the Han histories condemned everything about the Qin. It was during the Han that the precepts associated with Confucius (*c*. 551–*c*. 479 BCE) began to be associated with the concepts of moral rule and family worship.

The earliest extant texts (aside from the oracle bone inscriptions, which are divinations rather than literary texts) are those written on strips (or slips) of bamboo or wood during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). These rare survivals include the earliest versions we have of the Confucian classics and Daoist classics.

The collapse of the Han dynasty in 220 CE was followed by over three centuries of disunion, with various small states and ruling houses competing and fighting for power: the eras of the 'Three Kingdoms' and the Western Jin, followed by the 'Sixteen Kingdoms' in the north and the Eastern Jin in the south, and then the Northern and Southern dynasties. At last the Sui dynasty re-established central control in 581 CE. But the Sui rule did not last long and was overthrown in 618 CE when the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) was established. The Tang is often regarded as a 'golden age': the capital city, Chang'an (today's Xi'an, in Shaanxi province),[2] was the greatest in the world, boasting a rich and multicultural population, with merchants from all over Central Asia bringing luxury goods to the city and building mosques and Nestorian and Manichaean houses of worship alongside the Buddhist and Daoist establishments already there. A great age of poetry, many descriptions survive of the wealth, luxury, and splendor of the court (its

furnishings and entertainments) and the contemporary fascination with Central Asian fashions in clothing, music, and dance.

Tang dynasty wall paintings from Buddhist cave complexes such as that near Dunhuang (Gansu province) reveal some of the earliest extant depictions of landscape, a subject that was to dominate Chinese painting for the next millennium. Paintings on paper and silk survive only through later copies that may not wholly reflect the appearance and style of the original. As with painting, an art to be learned and developed through constant copying of masterpieces, the art of poetry — developed to a high point during the Tang — often rested on the delicate and subtle interpretation of well-known themes and subjects, with frequent references to masters of the past.

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Paper, invented in China in the second century BCE, came into more widespread use from the third century CE, and the earliest form of a book on paper was that of the scroll, imitating the format of the earlier bamboo and wooden strips, which were combined in bundles and then rolled up. Fragments of historical works, poetry, and popular literature, written on paper scrolls and dating mainly from the Tang, have been found among the mostly Buddhist texts preserved in Cave 17 at the Buddhist cave-temple complex near Dunhuang. There, too, was found the world's earliest surviving, securely dated, printed 'book,' a long paper scroll of the Chinese translation of the *Diamond Sutra*, dated to 868 CE.

Woodblock printing originated in China during the Tang dynasty, and may well have been largely inspired by the Buddhist practice of repetition as an activity that would gain merit and perhaps allow the practitioner to escape from the cycle of rebirths. As described in the *Lotus* and *Diamond* sutras, chanting the texts of the sermons of the Buddha would gain merit. Copying such religious texts would also gain merit, as would paying for the reproduction of Buddhist images. Woodblock printing — where a manuscript text was placed face down on a block of wood, the characters then carved onto the wood in reverse, before the block was inked and an impression taken on paper — enabled the mass production of Buddhist texts and images. Many tenth-century small block-printed sheets, with images of the Buddha or Bodhisattvas combined with a short prayer, were found at Dunhuang. In Japan, printing remained a religious activity, restricted to Buddhist temples until the twelfth century, but in China, the tenth century saw a massive growth in woodblock printing, with schoolbooks printed in large numbers as well as other useful books such as the almanac (*Tongshu*), which every household needed. The circulation of the almanac was technically an imperial monopoly but Chinese entrepreneurs, ignoring legal prohibitions, saw the economic potential of mass production through woodblock printing. The woodblock method, by which entire sheets of texts were carved onto a single block, remained the fundamental printing technology in China until the nineteenth century. Experiments with movable type made of wood, porcelain, or copper in the eleventh century never replaced the woodblock, since the nature of the Chinese script — with its

tens of thousands of different characters — made movable-type printing impractical.

The beginnings of the transformation of the book format are also seen at Dunhuang, with two examples of 'whirlwind binding,' a format in which separate leaves of paper were held together in a piece of split bamboo but then rolled for storage (like a scroll). The name probably derives from the way that the separate leaves curled up when unrolled. This use of separate leaves anticipated the later codex format. During the Song dynasty (960–1279), printing flourished and books were produced in the codex format, with separate leaves sewn into a soft paper binding, which was to dominate until the twentieth century, when very different Western binding styles were introduced.

A complexity of the long history of texts in China is the survival of examples. Those of the Han were copied and recopied, possibly incorporating later additions, corrections, or errors; for example, the earliest surviving text of *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji*) can be found in a Song printed edition. It is impossible for us to know whether the Song version of this significant text, written by Sima Qian in the first century BCE, preserves the original accurately.

The way in which texts were used in traditional China is also significant. Although patronage and recommendation was the most common way of entering the government administration, from the Han onward rigorous examinations, with questions on administration and the Confucian classics, began to form part of the procedure. Such civil service examinations became increasingly important throughout the succeeding centuries, and by the time of the Song there was a highly prestigious three-level examination system (with regional, provincial, and palace exams), and the palace exam presided over by the emperor. With some interruptions, this system persisted until its abolition in 1905. Beginning in the thirteenth century, the examinations were based upon knowledge of the Confucian 'Four Books' (*Si shu*) — the *Analects* (*Lun yu*), the *Mencius* (*Mengzi*), the 'Great Learning' (*Da xue*), and the 'Doctrine of the Mean' (*Zhongyong*) — and the essays on set subjects taken from these works had to be written in a strictly regulated style, known as *ba gu wen* or 'eight-legged essay.'

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The Tang dynasty — though imperilled by a rebellion in 755–763 CE led by An Lushan, a general of Central Asian origin — lasted until 907 CE when it was succeeded by another (brief) period of disunion, the 'Five Dynasties' in the north of China and 'Ten Kingdoms' in the south. This was ended by the establishment of the Song dynasty in 960 CE. Though historians downplay this apparent cycle of dynastic change, of disunion and reunion, it is firmly fixed in the popular imagination, exemplified by the opening lines of the fourteenth-century novel *The Story of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sanguo zhi*): 'The empire long divided, must unite; long united, must divide.'

The Song dynasty moved the capital away from Chang'an to Kaifeng (in Henan province), and it was a period characterized by an increasingly free economy as internal markets flourished (supplied by goods moved largely

by waterways); a massive increase in the publishing industry based on the widespread development of woodblock printing; an interest in antiquarianism and a re-examination of Confucianism, which underpinned the ethos of both state and family. The flourishing economy led to the first issue of paper banknotes. It was, however, a period which also saw the rise of several warlike states of northern peoples (including the Liao dynasty founded by the Khitan people, and the Jin dynasty set up by the Jurchen people), resulting in the invasion and abandonment of the capital Kaifeng in 1127. Though the Song court re-established itself in the beautiful lakeside city of Hangzhou (in Zhejiang province), threats of invasion from the north continued, and in 1279 the Mongols invaded China to found the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). This was the first Chinese dynasty to be given an auspicious name, *yuan* ('primordial'). Previous dynasties had reflected personal or place names but the Mongols had no such associations or practices.

Though part of the massive Mongol expansion across Asia, Mongol rule in China was greatly adapted to Chinese ways. But although the first Mongol emperor of China, Khubilai Khan (1215–1294), assumed 'an increasingly obvious facade as a Confucian Chinese emperor,' he chose to rely on Central and West Asian advisors, avoided the employment of Chinese officers and ministers, and frequently failed to hold the bureaucratic selection examinations.[3] Despite discriminatory laws, or perhaps because intellectuals were unable to follow their traditional path into the civil service, the Yuan dynasty saw a flowering of Chinese literature, most notably in the development of the drama and the novel.

The last decades of the Yuan dynasty saw a rise in popular rebellions driven by disastrous floods in northern China and a crippling drought in the south. In 1368, the charismatic rebel commander Zhu Yuanzhang drove the Mongols out of China and established the Ming dynasty, which lasted until 1644. The Ming dynasty followed the Yuan in taking an auspicious name — *ming* ('bright, illuminated') — and it was a consciously 'Chinese' dynasty, harking back to the glories of the Tang in particular, and re-establishing the old system of bureaucratic examinations. Zhu Yuanzhang, who became the Hongwu emperor, was an extraordinary character. Born into utter poverty, he was forced to take refuge in a Buddhist monastery until he left to join a rebel band through which he rose to ultimate power. Though initially a reformer, conscious of the need to help landless peasants rebuild agriculture and of the benefits of universal, free education, he became increasingly paranoid — and soon after his death in 1398, the Ming saw a second 'founding' with the usurpation of the throne by his fourth son, who proclaimed himself the Yongle emperor in 1402. It was during the Ming that China engaged more fully with the outside world, first on its own terms with the massive convoys led by the eunuch admiral Zheng He (1371–1433) to Southeast Asia, India, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa, and later through the arrival of Portuguese traders at the beginning of the sixteenth century and of Jesuit missionaries such as Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). Literature flourished during the Ming with novels, poetry, and books of essays on good living as well as a growth in writing about science and travel.

A series of emperors with little interest in the affairs of state and the growth of corruption, together with natural disasters, led to peasant uprisings in the mid-seventeenth century and a state of chaos that provided the opportunity for another northern group, the Jurchen from Manchuria, to sweep down and take the country, ending Ming rule. In 1644, the Manchu Jurchen established the Qing ('pure, clear') dynasty, which lasted until 1911. Before their conquest, the Manchus had absorbed something of the Chinese system of administration, and unlike the Mongols who kept Chinese scholars away from the administration, the Manchus adopted Chinese methods and traditions while still retaining their own identity through their social organization, belief systems, language, script, and dress.

During what is called the 'long eighteenth century,' covering the reigns of the Kangxi emperor (r. 1661–1722), the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1722–1735), and the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796), the Qing seemed magnificent and flourishing; but by the nineteenth century, internal pressure from massive popular rebellions (including the Tai-ping Rebellion, and later the Boxer Rebellion) and external pressure from the increasingly determined commercial adventurers from Europe and America caused a steady decline. British attempts to trade with China for tea, which had become a staple, led to an imbalance in trade as the Chinese had no interest in British trade goods. This trade deficit was addressed by the export of opium from British India which led to dramatic social problems in China and a massive outflow of silver to pay for the illegal drug. Official Chinese attempts to stop the trade led to two Opium Wars (1840–42, 1856–60) and humiliation for China as ports were forced open to foreign commerce and residence.

The Qing government stumbled toward reform in the late nineteenth century, setting up modern (Western-style) shipyards and arsenals, the beginnings of a more modern legal system, and establishing schools and sending students abroad to study, but the reforms were too little, too late.

In 1912, after a rather muddled uprising, China saw a truly dramatic change with the establishment of a republican government — after two millennia of imperial rule. Though the new government began with high ideals — it did its best to initiate modernizing reform and modern institutions — the difficulties of escaping from traditional ways and the legacy of a number of local armies (set up in the last years of the nineteenth century) soon saw fragile central power break down into warlord rule, with bitter battles fought between local despots. At the same time, Japan was doing all it could to exploit China's fragmentation with a view to invasion. The warlords aside, two political parties were competing for power: the Nationalist Party (Guomindang/Kuomintang) led by Chiang Kai-shek, and the Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1921. Though encouraged by Soviet Russia to cooperate, relations between these two Chinese parties broke down when Chiang Kai-shek, leading an expedition northward — ostensibly to regain control of the country from the warlords — in 1927 turned on the Communists who had seized control of Shanghai in advance of his arrival. The massacre of workers there and a series of failed uprisings in China's cities led the Communist Party to turn from urban insurrection to work in the countryside (against Soviet advice, which held that a revolution could only be led by the urban working class). Mao Zedong, who fought his

way to the top of the Communist Party, led this rural campaign, establishing the Jiangxi Soviet in southeastern China in 1931. Turning away from the campaign against the warlords, Chiang Kai-shek ordered five massive attacks, forcing the Communists to abandon Jiangxi in October 1934 and embark upon the Long March, finally arriving in Yan'an in distant Shaanxi province a year later.

Japan seized control of Manchuria in 1931 and began a full-scale invasion of China in 1937, an invasion characterized by acts of terrible cruelty such as the massacre known as the Rape of Nanjing in 1937 when over 100,000 civilians were killed and many women and girls attacked with deadly savagery. In its distant northwestern base, the Communist Party led effective, wide-scale guerrilla resistance to the Japanese, attracting support from the local peasants and, increasingly, intellectuals and city dwellers, shocked at the corruption of Chiang Kai-shek's government and its failure to join the Communists in a united front against Japanese invasion. Defeat in World War II ended Japan's ambitions in China, and a civil war between the Nationalists and Communists ended in Communist victory and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Chinese literature of the republican era reflected a new internationalism and awareness of the outside world, with many works reflecting the influence of Western writers such as Ibsen and Gogol. The most dramatic change in literature, however, came about with the May Fourth Movement of 1919, a political protest against China's treatment at the Versailles Peace Conference which was transformed into a 'self-strengthening' movement with a strong emphasis on literary reform. The old, difficult Classical Chinese style of the highly educated was abandoned by writers who saw the vernacular — closer to the current spoken language — as the best vehicle for literature that could free China of the shackles of the past. Writers of the period struggled with censorship, but this struggle continued with greater ferocity in the post–1949 period, which saw a series of anti-intellectual campaigns. The Communist Party line that literature should be for the masses, rather than for the intellectual elite, severely restricted subject matter and, at times, even attempted to control style. Nevertheless, many writers managed to create new and impressive works despite restrictions.

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When I started work in the Chinese section of the British Library, there was a rule in place that no translations of literature were to be acquired, as readers were expected to read the original. This antiquated regulation must have dated back to the foundation of the British Museum and its library in the mid-eighteenth century when gentlemen were expected to be able to read Latin, Greek, French, and German, but it did not make much sense in the twentieth-century Chinese section of the British Library. Quite apart from the fact that few readers at the library were able to immerse themselves in *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*) or *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*) in Chinese, the titles that were chosen for translation, whether from Chinese to English or vice versa, were in themselves

interesting. Who made the choices? Why did they choose one book over another?

In my own work, though I have read many texts, I have translated one work of fiction, a modern novel — Dai Houying's *Stones of the Wall* (*Ren a ren!*) — because, in the early 1980s, it was the only post–Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) novel that I had found difficult to put down. Most I found hard to pick up, let alone translate, but Dai Houying's novel was quite gripping and constructed in what, for China, was a new and interesting style.

Since I was fascinated by the Chinese language from the moment I began to learn it in 1967, I have always tried to share the fascination, for through language and literature it is possible to grasp something of China's cultural history and current preoccupations. China is too important to be ignored, and while its politics may not please many, the complexity and depth of China's culture is there to be explored, partly through translations of the great books of China.

In the preface to his *Anthologie de la littérature chinoise classique*, Jacques Pimpaneau writes, 'To create an anthology is to commit a crime, to select some authors and send others, even if they are not without interest, to the hell of oblivion. And it is a mutilation of the texts from which one selects a single passage …' [4] Yet he continues to reflect that it is through anthologies and selections that we begin to appreciate our own literature at school and that an approach to Chinese literature may necessarily involve this same process of reading short passages in order to gain an idea of the literature of the world's most significant continuous culture. He recounts a meeting with a tourist guide in China who was keen to discuss *Madame Bovary* and comments that it would be unlikely to find a tourist guide in France who was familiar with the eighth-century Chinese poetry of Du Fu and Li Bai.

Using another example, a full translation of Shakespeare's plays was published in China in 1954. Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, and a number of major French and other European authors were also translated into Chinese in the last hundred or more years and, perhaps more interesting, enjoyed considerable popularity. I remember a taxi driver in Shanghai clutching a battered copy of the Chinese translation of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, a sight that would be highly surprising in London — not to mention a copy of a translation of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

Guilty of the same process of offering a selection of Chinese literature through which some great authors and great works have been excluded, I am hoping that interested readers can make use of existing translations of the works described. Many other translations of Chinese works are listed in the wonderful *Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature* (Vol. 1, 1986; Vol. 2, 1998), edited by William H. Nienhauser, Jr. There are also some fine and useful modern anthologies, including Pimpaneau's and *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (1994), edited by Victor H. Mair, and *The Columbia Anthology of Chinese Folk and Popular Literature* (2011), edited by Victor H. Mair and Mark Bender.

I have chosen sixty-six works, from the *Book of Songs* (*Shi jing*) compiled over 2,500 years ago to late-twentieth-century novels. While I have tried to give a fairly comprehensive overview of types of writing — from poetry,

drama, and fiction to science and travel — I have been limited, not only by my own preferences but by the availability of translations into Western languages that will enable readers to pursue the texts for themselves. Mainly for reasons of space, a number of works could not be included, such as the oeuvre of the poet Tao Qian (also called Tao Yuanming, 365–427 CE), including his prose work *Peach Blossom Spring* (*Taohuan yuan*), a phrase that has come to mean 'utopia' in Chinese; the epic ancient poetry collection *Songs of the South* (*Chu ci*),translated by David Hawkes (1985); Han Shaogong's extraordinary novel *A Dictionary of Maqiao* (*Maqiao cidian*) (1996), translated by Julia Lovell; and pieces such as my favorite Chinese poem, 'sung at the burial of kings and princes,' which is included in Arthur Waley's *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* (1918):

> How swiftly it dries,
> The dew on the garlic leaf!
> The dew that dries so fast
> Tomorrow it will fall again,
> But he who we carry to the grave
> Will never more return.

*

I have used the pinyin system of romanization, which was introduced in China in 1958 and adopted as an international standard in 1982. Unfortunately, many of the translations I have listed use the old (nineteenth-century British) Wade-Giles romanization system or the even more complex French romanization. The Buddhist site known in pinyin as Dunhuang, pronounced 'Doon-hwang' however you romanize it, was Tun-huang in Wade-Giles and Touen-huang to the French.

In pinyin, though many of the letters are used in the same way as we do in English, some letters differ. The following rough guide lists the problematic letters, where pronunciation needs to be noted or where pinyin and Wade-Giles differ (and Wade-Giles consistently uses an apostrophe after certain letters to indicate aspiration):

a: 'ar' as in 'bar'
b: as in 'bar' (Wade-Giles: p)
c: as an initial consonant, 'ts' as in 'its' (Wade-Giles: ts)
d: as in 'dog' (Wade-Giles: t)
e: 'er' as in 'her'
g: as in 'go' (Wade-Giles: k)
i: varies according to the preceding consonants: pronounced 'ee' unless preceded by c, ch, r, s, sh, z, zh, when it is pronounced 'er' as in 'her'
j: as in 'jingle' (Wade-Giles: ch)
k: as in 'kill' (Wade-Giles: k')
o: with a slight 'r,' or as in 'lord'
p: as in 'pick' (Wade-Giles: p')
q: 'ch' as in 'chick' (Wade-Giles: ch')
r: an unrolled 'r' (Wade-Giles: j)

s: as in ‘smile’ (Wade-Giles: s, ss, sz)
t: as in ‘tuck’ (Wade-Giles: t’)
u: either ‘oo’ as in ‘fool’ or, with an umlaut, as the German ‘*ü*’
x: between ‘ss’ and ‘sh’ (Wade-Giles: hs)
z: ‘ts’ as in ‘its’ (Wade-Giles: ts, tz)
zh: ‘j’ as in ‘jingle’ (Wade-Giles: ch)

A complication in the pinyin system is that vowel combinations such as ‘i’ and ‘a’ (as in *tian*, ‘heaven’) are not pronounced as individual sounds (‘i’ and ‘a’) but as a combination, pronounced ‘yeh.’ Thus *tian*, with its ‘i’ and ‘a,’ is pronounced ‘tien.’ Similarly, the ‘o’ in *guo* (‘country’) is pronounced in the standard manner, but when followed by ‘ng,’ as in *zhong* (‘middle’), is rather longer — thus *zhongguo* (China) is pronounced ‘joong guor.’

Book of Songs

Shi jing
(*c*. 1000–*c*. 600 BCE)

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Author unknown

THE *Book of Songs* (*Shi jing*), ALSO CALLED *Classic of Poetry* or *Book of Odes*, is one of the Confucian classics revered since the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). It is a collection of 305 poems (or songs) dating back to *c*. 1000–*c*. 600 BCE. Later tradition holds that Confucius was instrumental in gathering and forming the collection, which is doubted, but it is certain that he enjoyed the collection and made frequent references to it in his conversations recorded in the *Analects* (*Lun yu*): 'Why is it none of you study the *Songs*? A quotation from the *Songs* may stimulate the imagination, show one's breeding, settle difficulties, and express complaints.' Or, 'If a man has studied the three hundred *Songs* yet fails in his administrative duties … what use are the *Songs* to him?'

However the collection was compiled, it survived in several versions into the Han dynasty and was found inscribed on wooden strips in a tomb dated to 165 BCE in Anhui province, and also inscribed on a set of stone tablets in 175 CE and another set dated 837 CE. Quite a number of the poems survive on paper in the great corpus of (mainly Buddhist) manuscripts dating from *c*. 400–*c*. 1000 CE in the cave-temple complex near Dunhuang.

The *Book of Songs* is divided into four parts: one hundred sixty 'Songs of the [Northern] States,' which describe in quite lyrical terms the life cycle of the common people, their festivals and daily lives, with much reference to flora and fauna; seventy-four 'Lesser Songs' describing upper-class life, with some poems interpreted as complaints against the state regime; thirty-one 'Greater Songs' on the Zhou (1046–221 BCE) and the overthrow of the Shang dynasty (*c*. 1600–1046 BCE), with more criticism of contemporary politics and references to the mythology of earlier periods; and the remaining forty songs of praise on rituals, rites, festivals, and music practiced in various Chinese states. The connection with ritual is important: many songs may have been performed during rituals which were of huge significance to the ruling elite.

Though the poems (or songs) originally rhymed, the rhymes have largely been lost due to changes in the pronunciation of modern Chinese. Many of them contain repetition, characteristic of their folk or ritual origins.

Among the first group, the following poem contains typical references to wildflowers and wildlife interspersed with a lament about separation:

‘Guan,’ ‘guan’ cry the ospreys on the island in the river
The graceful lady is a suitable wife for the lord.
Scattered grows the yellow-heart duckweed, here and there
The graceful lady is a suitable wife for the lord.
Waking and sleeping he sought her, sought her and did not find her
Waking and sleeping he thought of her, grieving, grieving, tossing and turning.
Scattered grows the yellow-heart duckweed, here and there
The graceful lady is a suitable wife for the lord.
He must woo her with lutes.
Scattered grows the yellow-heart duckweed, here and there,
With drum and chimes he must delight her.

There is a similar use of bird and flower motifs in another poem:

How the tuberose fills the valley: its leaves are thick, thick.
The yellow oriole flies and perches in the thicket and calls.
How the tuberose fills the valley, its leaves are dense, dense.
I cut it and I boiled it to make fine cloth and coarse,
Clothes that I will always wear.
I have told the housekeeper,
I have told the housekeeper that I am returning to my parents.
I wash my clothes, I rinse my clothes,
Which to wash, which not?
I am going to stay with my parents.

The secure daily round of agricultural life is contrasted with a woman’s worry about her absent husband. He is away on compulsory military service, but men were also expected to take part in corvée labor, a form of taxation which might involve the construction of defensive walls or road-building in a distant and, perhaps, dangerous place. The wife longs to care for him and ensure that he is properly fed:

My husband is away on military service,
I don’t know when he may return.
Where is he?
The chickens roost in their coop,
Oxen and goats come down from the hill.
My husband is away on military service
How can I not think of him?
My husband is away on military service
Not days but months.
When will he return to me?

The chickens roost in their coop,
Oxen and goats come down from the hill.
My husband is away on military service,
Without food or drink.

A simple wish for family continuity is often expressed, here through the sounds made by locusts, themselves emblematic of huge numbers:

The locust wings say ‘numbers, numbers,’
May your sons and grandsons be many, many.
The locust wings flap, flap,
May your line of sons and grandsons extend forever, forever.
The locust wings extend, extend,
May your sons and grandsons be united, united.

There are themes of hunting and warfare:

The hare nets are impressive, impressive,
Ding, ding, the noise of the hammers.
The warrior’s head is held high,
Shield and wall to his prince.
The hare nets are spread across the paths,
The warrior’s head is held high,
A good companion to his prince.
The hare nets are spread in the middle of the forest,
The warrior’s head is held high,
Stomach and heart to his prince.

Animals and humans are compared in the context of what were to become major themes of Confucian virtue such as righteousness, correct conduct, and respect for the rituals that held communities together:

Look at the rat,
A rat has its skin,
A man without righteousness,
A man without righteousness,
What should he do but die?
Look at the rat,
A rat has its teeth,
A man without control,
A man without control,
Why should he not die?
Look at the rat,
A rat has its bones,
A man without respect for ritual,
A man without respect for ritual,
He should die quickly.

One very simple poem that still retains its rhyme at the end of each line (and makes great use of the repetition that is also seen in some of the much later *Nineteen Old Poems* [*Gu shi shijiu shou*]) is the eighth in the 'Songs of the [Northern] States':

Thick, thick grows the plantain
We go to pick it
Thick, thick grows the plantain
We go to collect it.
Thick, thick grows the plantain
We pick with our fingers
Thick, thick grows the plantain
We gather handfuls.
Thick, thick grows the plantain
We fill our aprons
Thick, thick grows the plantain
Full aprons tucked into our belts.[1]

The *Book of Songs*, as the only work of literature mentioned by Confucius, was to become one of the 'Five Classics,' adopted during the early Han period as the basis, or curriculum, for a 'Confucian' education system designed to train government officials. The Five Classics (*Wu jing*) are: *Book of Songs*; *Book* (or *Classic*) *of Changes* (*Yi jing*), a divination manual; *Book* (or *Classic*) *of Documents* (or *History*) (*Shu jing*), a book of government documents and proclamations purporting to date from the semilegendary Xia dynasty onward; *Book of Rites* (or *Ritual*) (*Li ji*), a book of ritual, incorporating discussions on ritual by Han dynasty scholars; and *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu*), annals of the state of Lu, from 722 BCE to 481 BCE.

The significance of these five works is that they formed the basis of Confucian education and the training of government officials not just during the Han dynasty — when they had some relevance — but right up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Book of Changes

Yi jing
(1st millennium BCE)

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Author unknown

IN THE HAN DYNASTY (206 BCE–220 CE) an ancient divination text was incorporated into the Five Classics and given the name by which it is still known, *Book* (or *Classic*) *of Changes* (*Yi jing*, or, in the old Wade-Giles romanization system, *I-ching*). It derived from the *Zhou Changes* (*Zhou yi*), a manual for divination that may have been compiled as early as the ninth century BCE, during the Western Zhou period (or, as some suggest, as early as the eleventh century BCE). The addition of a series of explanatory texts dating from about the third century BCE resulted in the compilation we now know as the *Book of Changes*. Recent archaeological excavations of parts of the text of the *Book of Changes* inscribed on bamboo or wooden strips during the subsequent millennium demonstrate its popularity.

The *Book of Changes* consists of interpretations of sixty-four hexagrams. Each hexagram is composed of six horizontal lines stacked one above the other, with each of the six lines either being solid (unbroken) or broken into two halves, thereby creating sixty-four possible combinations. The two most important hexagrams are the first one, *qian*, with six solid lines, which is glossed as 'heaven,' 'creative principle,' *yang*; and the second one, *kun*, with six broken lines, which is glossed as 'earth,' 'passive principle,' *yin*.

Among the sixty-four hexagrams are 'peace' (*tai*), with three broken lines above three solid lines, and 'stagnation' (*pi*), with three solid lines above three broken lines. Some of the others are 'argument or conflict' (*song*), 'fellowship' (*tongren*), 'contemplation' (*guan*), 'return, or turning point' (*fu*), and 'retreat' (*dun*).

The ancient primary interpretations of the hexagrams are brief, but the accompanying later commentaries are often very long. For example, the ancient text of the first hexagram, 'heaven,' is only a few lines long, but in later centuries it was accompanied by several pages of commentary to expand the gnomic response.

The work reflects the cosmological theories of the late Warring States period with its stress on the *yin-yang* dialectical theory and the division of all

things into the Five Elements (water, fire, wood, metal, and earth, which were thought to be the basis of composition of all things). Their interaction accounted for the formation of the earth and the shifting fortunes of humans and nature and could be seen to create 'change.' The question of how much human beings could influence or react to changes of circumstances underlay the act of divination. Much of the *Book of Changes* commentary seeks to expand the significance of the work beyond personal divination to a Confucian explanation of the workings of the cosmos. As such it was used by later scholars, provoked by the popularity of Daoist cosmology, to create a Confucian alternative.

The method of divination is highly complicated, and the instructions are mysterious and imprecise. It was traditionally done with fifty yarrow stalks, i.e., long, dry sticks. According to the *Book of Changes*, ritual associated with divination started with the care of the text which should be kept wrapped in clean silk and stored on a high shelf (which was not, however, to be higher than a man's shoulder). When opened, the text should be laid upon its protective wrapper. The fifty yarrow stalks, one to two feet long, should be kept in a plain but elegant box which was not to be used for other purposes. To begin the divination process, the question is raised, not about what might happen but what should be done — should a certain action go ahead? The text is placed on a table in the center of the room, facing south; and on a lower table, to the south of the main table, the sticks are placed beside an incense burner. The questioner faces north and performs three full kowtows (*ketou*, meaning 'knock head'), bowing low and placing his forehead on the ground three times. Then he puts burning incense in the burner. Taking the sticks in his right hand, he waves them three times through the smoke rising from the incense, rotating his hand clockwise, and returns one stick to the box. Taking the remaining forty-nine sticks, he bunches them together and then divides them into two piles. These sticks are then sorted and resorted until the questioner arrives at certain numbers that correlate to the solid and broken lines of the hexagrams in the *Book of Changes*, which are still not easy to understand, let alone interpret. (At a later time coins were also used, in combinations of 'heads' and 'tails.' Apparently this method saves time and was used by professional fortune-tellers. Three coins are thrown six times and the results — combinations of tails-tails-tails, heads-heads-heads, tails-tails-heads, and heads-heads-tails — correlated to hexagram lines.)

In the interpretation of the hexagrams, 'nine' stands for a solid line and 'six' for a broken line; and lines are read from bottom to top. For the first hexagram, 'heaven,' the statements for the six (solid) lines are:

'Nine in the bottom line': 'The hidden dragon does not act.'
'Nine in the second line': 'A dragon is seen in the field; it would be profitable to visit a great man.'
'Nine in the third line': 'The superior man is alert all day and in the evening. If there is danger, he is not at fault.'
'Nine in the fourth line': 'If the dragon jumps over a chasm, he is not at fault.'

‘Nine in the fifth line’: ‘There is a flying dragon in the sky; good to see a great man.’
‘Nine in the top line’: ‘The dragon regrets.’
And ‘for all six lines’: ‘Crowds of headless dragons, good luck.’

For the second hexagram, ‘earth,’ the statements for the six (broken) lines are:

‘Six in the bottom line’: ‘The hoarfrost means that real ice is coming.’
‘Six in the second line’: ‘Straight and wide: without exertion, everything will profit.’
‘Six in the third line’: ‘He restrains his talent in the king’s service, though unfinished, final success is assured.’
‘Six in the fourth line’: ‘A sack tied up, no blame, no praise.’
‘Six in the fifth line’: ‘A yellow jacket: ultimate good luck.’
‘Six in the top line’: ‘Dragons fighting in the wilderness, their blood is black and yellow.’
And ‘for all six lines’: ‘The power of endurance.’

In general, some of the text lines connected to the sixty-four hexagrams have a very clear message. For example, ‘Now is the time to set armies marching to subdue the cities and countries of the empire.’ Or, ‘The time is favorable for legal processes.’ But other lines are more mysterious: ‘The ablution has been performed but not the sacrifice’; ‘The ridgepole sags’; ‘The inn has burned down’; ‘A cow is lost through sheer carelessness.’ The hexagram ‘development’ (*jian*), for one, relies upon the activities of wild geese: ‘The wild goose moves gradually to the river bank’ means ‘the younger son is in trouble,’ while ‘The wild goose moving to dry land’ means ‘the husband goes out and never returns.’

Of course the significance of the gnomic interpretations depended very much on the question that was posed. This would naturally influence the action that might be undertaken.

Classic of the Way and of Virtue

Daode jing
(6th to 4th centuries BCE)

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LAOZI
(*c*. 6th century BCE)

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Zhuangzi

(*c*. 4th century BCE)

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ZHUANGZI
(*c*. 4th century BCE)

THESE TWO WORKS ARE VIEWED AS THE origin of Daoism, a complex phenomenon in Chinese culture.[1] In the *Classic of the Way and of Virtue* (*Daode jing*) it is stressed that the *dao*, often translated as 'the Way,' is ineffable and ungraspable — too great, too significant to be described. It might be glossed as the underlying principle behind the cycle of life and death, the creative force behind the universe and its creation, the source of everything and the relationships between all things.

Since the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), there were two major strands of Daoism, philosophical and religious. Religious Daoism, associated with major temples across China, served the population through ritual and ceremony, offering a series of deities to worship and beg for favors. Philosophical Daoism offered an alternative to the very worldly, political aspects of Confucianism, with an attempt to understand the world and one's place in it through a concentration on nature and natural phenomena — rather than the Confucian observance of ritual and social conventions. Put at its most simple level, there was a saying that people in China were 'Confucian in office, Daoist in retirement, and Buddhist as death approached'— for Confucianism permeated the ethos of government and Buddhism offered a comforting prospect of paradise and a series of rituals

that conducted the soul there, while Daoism offered the prospect of unity with nature, and acceptance.

'Daoist in retirement' described the ideal of retreat to a country estate or urban garden once free from the restrictions of Confucian official life. The construction of gardens with their miniature mountain scenes and carefully chosen plants, which could be appreciated according to the seasons, was an expression of the way that Daoism formed part of the traditional culture. Poetry and painting reflected the same desire to escape from bureaucratic office life into the majesty of nature where one could 'study the *li* ["pattern"] of the bamboo' and marvel at the way that it grew, equal segment by equal segment, in a pattern ordained not by humans but by nature.

The text itself, with its early origins, presents problems of transmission (as does the *Zhuangzi*). Stone-carved versions of the *Classic of the Way and of Virtue* survive from 708 CE and 738 CE, the latter an 'official version' carved at the order of the Xuanzong emperor of the Tang (r. 712–756 CE). It is a short text in about five thousand characters, comprising eighty-one sections that are most commonly arranged in two parts: one part on the *dao*, 'the Way'; the other on *de*, which is traditionally translated as 'virtue' but is considered by many to be closer to the Latin *virtus* (meaning 'strength' and 'vigor'). Though traditionally referred to as the *Daode jing*, the recent discovery of the text written on silk in a tomb at Mawangdui (Hunan province) dated to 168 BCE revealed a different order, a *Dedao jing*.

The *Classic of the Way and of Virtue* is traditionally assumed to have been compiled by Laozi (literally, 'the old man'), allegedly an older contemporary of Confucius and described in Sima Qian's *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji*) as a native of the state of Chu (in the south) named Li Tan or Li Er, who served as archivist to the Zhou court. Though there are stories about Confucius consulting Laozi, scholars tend to agree on the largely fictional nature of Laozi. (Early Chinese texts, including the *Classic of the Way and of Virtue* and the *Analects* [*Lun yu*] of Confucius, have been described by experts such as A. C. Graham as compilations gathered by disciples, rather than being unique compositions by the 'original' author. Such compilations, perhaps from a variety of different sources, were subject to addition and subtraction, particularly as time passed.)

The *Classic of the Way and of Virtue* is enigmatic. In the *Daode jing* version, it begins: 'The Way that can be spoken of is not the eternal Way; the name that can be named is not the eternal name. The unnamed is the beginning of heaven and earth, the named is the mother of the ten thousand things [everything]. Eternally without desire, one can observe the mystery. Eternally desiring, one can see its form. These two have the same origin but their names are different. The origin is spoken of as primordial, primordial of primordial, the gate of mystery.' Section 14 says: 'Look and you cannot see it, it is said to have gone. Listen and you cannot hear it, it is beyond hearing. Grasp and you cannot hold it, it is ungraspable. These three cannot be grasped, therefore they are joined into one. Above it is no brightness, below it no dark; a thread without name, it returns to non-existence. It is described as formless. Form without substance, its appearance is dim. Face it and there is no beginning, follow it and there is no end. The ancient way is powerful and present, knowing its beginning is called knowing the Way.'

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By contrast, the text of the *Zhuangzi* consists of a series of anecdotes and reflections not unlike the *Analects*, but much more playful. The *Zhuangzi* is traditionally ascribed to Zhuangzi ('Master Zhuang'), also called Zhuang Zhou, who is described in *The Grand Scribe's Records* as a contemporary of the Hui King of Liang and the Xuan King of Zhou, who were rulers in the fourth century BCE. We know next to nothing about Zhuangzi; he might have lived in the state of Song, and around the time of Mencius.

The *Zhuangzi*, too, has long been recognized as a compilation rather than the work of one person. It seems to have consisted of fifty-two sections at one time but survives as thirty-three sections, and though it was first printed in 1445, sections have been found in the corpus of manuscripts from the fifth to eleventh centuries CE discovered at the cave-temple complex near Dunhuang; there is also a partial manuscript from the Kozanji temple near Kyoto (Japan) founded in the eighth century and restored in the twelfth century.

Zhuangzi, as revealed in the text, is a paradoxical and playful character. One of the most famous passages relates to fish. In section 17, 'Zhuangzi and Huizi were walking on the bank beside the Hao river. Zhuangzi said, "Look at the little fish swimming as they please. That is what fish enjoy!" Huizi said, "You are not a fish. How do you know what they enjoy?" Zhuangzi said, "You are not I, how do you know I don't know what fish enjoy?" Huizi said, "I am not you so I definitely do not know what you know. But you are definitely not a fish, so you still don't know what fish enjoy." Zhuangzi said, "You asked me how I know what fish enjoy: you knew I knew when you asked the question. I know it by standing here beside the river."'

According to the *Zhuangzi*, when Zhuangzi's wife died, Huizi went to see him and found him squatting on the ground, banging on a basin and singing. Feeling that this was going a bit far, Huizi remonstrated with him, reminding him that the couple had been together for a long time and that she had brought up their children. Zhuangzi disagreed, saying that he had been desolate at first but he had considered his wife's life and its changes, from before existence, through the existence of body and soul, to the end. 'It is like the natural progression of the seasons. Now she is lying down peacefully in the Great Inner Room. If I were to follow her, crying and howling, it would show that I did not understand [this natural progression].'

Not all the stories are about Zhuangzi. For instance, 'The Official in Charge of Ancestor Worship, dressed in his black robes, looked into the pigpen and asked the pigs, "Why do you object to dying? I'm going to feed you up for three months, then I will fast for ten days and make preparations for three days, put down white mats and lay you on the sacrificial altar. Don't you consent?" If he had been talking on behalf of the pigs, he'd say it was better to eat bran and stay in the pigpen. If he were talking for himself, he'd rather be honored in his lifetime as a high official and lie on a fine hearse when he died. The pigs would certainly refuse that plan. Why were his ideas so different from those of the pigs?'

Many of the stories have entered the Chinese language, such as that of the frog in the well who was convinced that the entire universe consisted of the tiny circle of blue sky above his well — which has come to stand for narrow-mindedness. Other images are similarly well-known, such as that of Zhuangzi refusing office by comparing a long-dead tortoise venerated in a temple to a turtle alive and well, saying he'd rather be like that live turtle, happily dragging his tail through the mud. In the *Zhuangzi*, Daoism stands for nature, spontaneity, and simplicity, against Confucian ritual and complication.

Analects

Lun yu
(*c*. 1000–*c*. 600 BCE)

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CONFUCIUS
(*c*. 551–*c*. 479 BCE)

THE *Analects* (*Lun yu*) OR 'SAYINGS' OF Confucius contain most of what little we know about the philosopher whose ideas formed the core of 'Confucianism' (a Western term), which lay behind the beliefs about state and society that underpinned the Chinese imperial system for two thousand years, from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) to the fall of the Qing in 1911.

Despite his enormous significance, not much is known about the life of Confucius, a latinized name given by seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries in China. Born Kong Zhongni, supposedly in 551 BCE, he lived for much of his life in the state of Lu (in present-day Shandong province). As a young man he is said to have held minor offices as Keeper of Granaries and Director of Public Pastures, but his ambition to achieve higher office through his wisdom was never realized, and he traveled from state to state with a group of disciples in search of a sympathetic ruler who would admire and follow his teachings. He lived during a time now known as the 'Spring and Autumn.' The centuries of 'Spring and Autumn' and 'Warring States' were also a time known as the 'Hundred Schools of Thought,' when the proponents of different philosophies (including Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, and Legalism) sought to impose their views. Confucius was one of many thinkers at the time.

The *Analects* is supposed to have been created by Confucius's disciples but was probably composed long after his death by the disciples of disciples. Though the entries are all brief, it is uneven in content and is seen as a compilation from differing sources. Early references suggest that the *Analects* had existed in various forms and the surviving version is that of Zheng Xuan (127–200 CE), a noted commentator on the Confucian classics. Unlike many early texts that survived only in manuscript copies until woodblock printing became commonplace during the Song dynasty (960–1279), parts of the *Analects* were inscribed on stone in around 175 CE. (The Xiping Stone Classics were carved at the instigation of scholars who wanted

to establish a permanent version of the text to prevent arguments about variant texts.) Fragments of the text, probably dating from the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), have also been found among the great corpus of paper documents dating from the fifth to eleventh centuries CE hidden away at the Buddhist cave complex near Dunhuang.

The text mainly takes the form of brief exchanges or anecdotes: 'The master said, "Do not concern yourself with government matters unless they are the responsibility of your office"; "When the master was with a mourner, he ate modestly [not till he was full]"; "If on one day he wept, he did not sing on the same day."' There are quite a few references to Confucius's behavior and habits, particularly in book 10 (there are twenty brief chapters, or 'books,' in the *Analects*): 'If his mat was not straight, he would not sit on it';[1] 'He did not talk when eating, nor did he talk in bed,' and in eating, he sought to balance rice with meat, made sure that gifts of fine meat were not kept too long in case they spoiled, and enjoyed the taste of ginger, although not to excess. In his clothing, he seems to have considered purple and strong red colors unsuited to 'the superior man' and so he avoided these colors, even in informal dress. 'In summer, he wore an unlined garment but always over an undergarment. He wore a black jacket over a lambskin, an undyed jacket over fawn skin, and a yellow jacket over fox fur. His informal fur robe was long with the right sleeve short. His robe for sleeping in was twice as long as his body and he lay on thick fox and badger skins.' The deference of his demeanor, especially in the presence of a duke, but also when in 'the vacant place of a prince,' was emphasized. He bent low on entering a palace gate, stood respectfully to one side rather than occupy a central position, and he was careful what he wore when on condolence visits.

The main significance of the *Analects* lies in what is conveyed about learning, moral development, leadership, and the relationship between heaven and humans, particularly those in high office. Confucius is not considered an innovator since he reflected many views that were widely held during his time, such as the need to follow 'the Way,' an undefined path, which Raymond Dawson describes in the Confucian context as 'an ideal ethico-political system' rather than the Daoists' 'Way of nature.'[2] Another ancient Chinese concept that lies behind the conduct of government in particular is that of the 'Mandate of Heaven' (*tianming*), the idea that a good ruler governs with heaven's support — which can be withdrawn if he behaves in an immoral or unjust manner. The confusion and strife of the period in which Confucius lived caused him and others to look back on the early days of the Zhou dynasty (established 1046 BCE) as a golden age of virtuous rulers. In the *Analects*, Confucius says, 'I am ruined — I no longer dream of the Duke of Zhou,' one of the architects of the Zhou dynasty venerated by Confucius for his nobility and self-sacrifice. And, 'I transmit but am no innovator. I am trustworthy and I love antiquity.' The sense that innovation is not necessarily helpful to good government is expressed in Confucius's response to a question about good government: 'Let the ruler be a ruler, let the minister be a minister, let the father be a father, and the son a son.' Being a ruler, or a father, carried the firm implication that the person in question carried out his responsibilities in a just and moral manner. His stress on the status quo is also reflected in his view of *junzi*, the 'superior

man' or 'gentleman,' as opposed to the 'small man.' It is clear from many references that in Confucius's view, the 'superior man' can improve himself through study (which Confucius frequently emphasized), but the 'small man' is not receptive to learning and will never achieve higher status.

Confucius's conservatism was also characteristic of the era in that he paid no attention to the lowly status of women; indeed, he appeared to consider them as lower than the 'small man.' One of his rare references to women concerns King Wu, who boasted of having ten competent officials — to which Confucius responded, 'As one of them was a woman, there were in fact only nine …'

On the basis of the *Analects* alone, with its brief anecdotes of a fundamentally unsuccessful would-be official, it is quite hard to understand how 'Confucianism' became the underpinning of the Chinese system of education and bureaucracy. But in the early Han period, the scholar Dong Zhongshu (*c*. 179–*c*. 104 BCE) advised the emperor Wudi to establish an imperial academy to train officials, and the 'Five Classics' (*Wu jing*) — *Book of Songs*, *Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, *Spring and Autumn Annals* — formed the curriculum. These five works were only loosely associated with Confucius, and it was not until the Song period that official education became more strictly 'Confucian' through the use of the 'Four Books' (*Si shu*), which were more closely associated with him. These four texts are the *Analects*, the *Mencius* (the work of Confucius's major disciple, Mencius), and two chapters from the *Book of Rites* : 'Great Learning' (*Da xue*) and 'Doctrine of the Mean' (*Zhongyong*).

Confucius's influence on traditional Chinese society is seen in many ways which go beyond the anecdotes in the *Analects* and his (loose) association with the Four Books and Five Classics. While long-entrenched social concepts such as family loyalty and filial piety, traditionally ascribed to him, antedate the philosopher, the traditional veneration for education can certainly be seen in his works.

Mencius

Mengzi
(4th century BCE)

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MENCIUS
(*c*. 372–*c*. 289 BCE)

LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE LIFE OF the Confucian philosopher Mencius (a latinized name), or Mengzi, but he is traditionally described as the major disciple of Confucius (though he lived over a century later, during the Warring States period). Like Confucius, he traveled from state to state, attempting to counsel various rulers. The work ascribed to Mencius, which bears his name, is one of the Four Books, traditional Confucian texts (including the *Analects* [*Lun yu*]) chosen by the great philosopher Zhu Xi (1130–1200) during the Song period as fundamental to understanding Confucianism and to passing the imperial bureaucratic exams. Apart from Mencius's ideas, expressed in his text, there are a somewhat confused and confusing biography of him in Sima Qian's *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji*) and anecdotes, particularly referring to his mother who was sufficiently admired to be included in a first-century BCE compilation, *Stories of Exemplary Women* (*Lie nu zhuan*). A widow living with her young son in the state of Zou (in today's Shandong province), she was said to have moved house three times in an attempt to find a suitable home for him. She moved away from a house beside a burial ground because the little boy was getting too interested in funerals and playing at being a grave digger. The next house was near a market but she soon found him playing at being a street hawker, which was also unsuitable, so she found a house by a school where he absorbed more appropriate rituals to emulate. Later she also intervened in a quarrel between Mencius and his wife, who was so upset at his criticism that she threatened to return to her parents. Mencius had apparently entered their bedroom without warning and found her scantily dressed (in another version of the story, she was sitting in an inappropriate way) and scolded her. His mother reminded him that, according to proper ritual, a person should announce his arrival at the gate, should raise his voice when approaching a room (in order to give the inhabitants time to get dressed or sit up straight), and lower the eyes in the room and not stare angrily as Mencius had done. (In another version of the story, it concludes

with a mysterious quotation from the *Book of Songs* [*Shi jing*], 'When gathering turnips, pay no heed to the roots …')

Mencius's ideas are often bracketed with those of another great Confucian philosopher, Xunzi (c. 312–c. 230 BCE), and they are usually described in opposition to each other — with Mencius's view being that humans are born good, although they must still aspire to improvement, while Xunzi declared that human nature was fundamentally bad and needed firm control through education. The argument was fiercely fought at the time and Xunzi (whose book of essays is called *Xunzi*) influenced some of his contemporary thinkers who developed the Legalist school. This was most influential during the brief Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE), when the population was controlled by a carefully compiled legal code (rather than moral exhortation). Xunzi's influence continued through the Han dynasty but effectively disappeared thereafter, never achieving the status of Mencius nor inclusion in the Four Books.

Though the *Mencius* is very much preoccupied with the same concerns as Confucius in the *Analects* — education and self-cultivation, good government and proper reverence for ritual — its composition and style are different. Like the *Analects*, it consists of records of conversations between the philosopher and his contemporaries, but the episodes in the *Mencius* are longer and allow for fuller exposition of ideas. (The *Analects* is very much concerned with the character of Confucius, and the short passages are often somewhat obscure.)

Mencius's ideas about human nature comprise the distinction between humans and animals, for though both have 'base' natures or desires, humans also have hearts which can think (the heart being seen as the 'thinking' organ) and which distinguish them from animals. In one chapter of the *Mencius*, he debated this with another philosopher, Gaozi, who held that man was fundamentally amoral and this was man's nature. Seeking to separate humans from amoral animals, Mencius argued by analogy, using the definition of 'white': Were all white things the same? Was the whiteness of white feathers the same as the whiteness of white jade? Or white snow? And by extension, was the nature of man the same as the nature of a dog or an ox? Mencius thought not.

A long passage in which Mencius is actually discussing the importance of cultivating the 'good' heart — but where he uses the analogy of the deforestation of a famous mountain — has often been quoted to demonstrate both changes in the ecology of fourth-century BCE China and the damage that humans could do to their environment.

'The trees on Ox Mountain were once beautiful. But because they were close to a great city, chopped down with axes and hatchets, how could they remain beautiful? But with the rest they got through the days and nights, watered by rain and dew, they were not without new shoots. But then oxen and sheep were brought to graze on the mountain and it became completely bare. Now when people see its bareness, they assume that it was never covered in trees. But is that the nature of the mountain? And when it comes to man, can he be completely lacking in benevolence and righteousness? If he lets go of his good heart, it is like the action of the hatchets and axes on trees. If they are chopped away at every day, can they be beautiful? If a man,

despite the rest he gets day and night, the freshness of morning air, in his likes and dislikes is not like other men, it is because he wastes what he has gained. If this happens repeatedly, then the restorative night air will not be sufficient to preserve his good nature. Then he is not very different from animals and people will think he never had much worth. Is this really what man is like? Given its proper care and nourishment, there is nothing that will not grow. Without such nourishment, everything will decay.'

The length and depth of exposition of the ideas in the *Mencius*, as well as Mencius's supposed closeness to Confucius, assured the position of the work in the Confucian canon as used from the Song dynasty onward.

Master Sun's Art of War

Sunzi bingfa
(*c*. 544–*c*. 496 BCE)

*

SUN WU
(*c*. 544–*c*. 496 BCE)

IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER, *Master Sun's Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa*), despite its antiquity, is probably one of the best-known Chinese books. It is available in a number of English-language editions and has also been taken up in books by business strategists and management gurus. Earlier applications of the text related more closely to its original intention. Mao Zedong praised the work for its practical application to guerrilla warfare — 'forage from the enemy'; 'attack where the enemy does not expect you' — and stressed its perennial usefulness to the military. Though the first Western translation was made by a French Jesuit, Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot (in 1772), later translations included those by military men such as Captain E. F. Calthrop of the British Royal Field Artillery (made between 1905 and 1908).

Recent archaeological discoveries in China have elucidated many of the mysteries about *Master Sun's Art of War*. It had been known from woodblock-printed editions dating from the Song dynasty (960–1279), some 1,500 years after the original compilation, but the discovery of sets of bamboo slips in Han tombs dated to *c*. 140–118 BCE revealed a very early version of the work. The bamboo slips found at Yinqueshan in Shandong province include the thirteen-section text known from the Song dynasty, as well as five sections that had been lost. The text was found with other military works, including Sun Bin's *The Art of Warfare* (*Sun Bin bingfa*). Until recently there was some confusion between Sun Wu (also called Sunzi), literally Master Sun of Wu, and Sun Bin (*c*. 380 – *c*. 316 BCE), but it is now clear that we have two separate works, one by Master Sun of Wu and one by a descendant of his, Sun Bin.

Little is known about the life of Sun Wu, who might have been a contemporary of Confucius. There is a description of his activities in Sima Qian's *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji*), in which Sun Wu, serving as an advisor to King Helü of Wu (r. 514–496 BCE), demonstrated the drilling of troops by using the king's women of the court. He lined them up, appointed

commanders, and ordered them to drill, 'Eyes right! Eyes left!' but they just collapsed with laughter. To the king's horror, Sun Wu ordered that the two women in command (favorites of the king) be executed. After that, the women of the court obeyed his orders. Though early commentators have cast doubt on the story and the cruelty of the exposition, the Yinqueshan bamboo slips bear it out.

Further archaeological discoveries have also elucidated aspects that were previously thought to be anachronistic. The use of crossbows, which transformed Chinese military techniques, has now been pushed back to *c.* 500 BCE. When the two texts by Sun Wu and Sun Bin were still confused, contradictions about tactics (such as the question of whether or not to attack a fortified city) were problematic, but we can now begin to understand that changes in fortifications as well as modifications of weapons were responsible for the differences, or developments, in the authors' approaches.

Apart from military technology, philosophical concepts form a background to *Master Sun's Art of War*. Ancient Chinese theories of *yin* and *yang* and the Five Elements pervade the text. Soft and hard, weak and strong, these ideas form the basis of analyzing the condition of the enemy and the topographical challenges upon which strategic decisions are to be made, with the proviso that each situation is unique and requires flexibility. The somewhat heterodox and contradictory nature of the text can be explained, as with other early Chinese texts, by its origin as a compilation rather than being one person's work.

While the thirteen sections of *Master Sun's Art of War* vary between the practical and the philosophical, the emphasis on practicality underlies most of the propositions. The question of waging war in distant places and the consequent need to ensure a chain of supplies for an army far from home — which involves considerable expense and difficulty — is discussed at length, with the suggestion that a clever army can supply itself by foraging from the enemy. Such foraging is a tactic, but the most significant preparations are made before any engagement is undertaken, and the outcome of battle should be predictable to a well-prepared general.

Preparation involves 'temple calculations' where, it would seem, army commanders meet (in a temple) to assess their chances and weigh the balance of possibilities before engaging in battle. *Master Sun's Art of War* constantly reminds generals that astrology, past history, and omens are not useful indicators of success or otherwise. The commanders need to consider the relative strengths of their own and the enemy's army as well as the advantages of the topography, and various sections of the book describe good and bad situations for different military maneuvers: open areas, hills, valleys, and the multiple varieties of such formations. There are also many references to the relative significance of the 'ruler' and the general. *Master Sun's Art of War* comes down firmly on the side of the general — 'if the way of battle guarantees you victory, it is right for you to insist on fighting even if the ruler does not want you to' (but also not to engage if success is unlikely) — because the exemplary general is aware of all the circumstances.

Many of the pieces of advice given are effective couplets: 'Where you are capable, seek to appear incapable; when you are ready, seek to appear

unready; when near, seek to appear far; if the enemy appears to have an advantage, use it; if he seems to be in chaos, take advantage … if he is rested, harry him … attack when he is unprepared … go where he does not expect you.' But the general should bear in mind that a fortified city with a defensive moat but no supplies could not be held by any of the great fighters of history. And in the section on 'Waging War,' the difficulties experienced by ordinary people are spelled out: 'maintaining an army at a distance causes poverty,' and 'when an army is nearby, prices go up and the people's livelihood suffers.' The conclusion is that 'there is no example of a country profiting from prolonged warfare.'

The last section of the book deals with espionage — which provides the essential preparatory foreknowledge underpinning a successful campaign (rather than omens and astrology). There are five different types of spy listed: local spies, inside agents (i.e., recruited enemy officials), double agents, as well as expendable spies (whose lives may be sacrificed) and non-expendable spies who work within the army or outside the army and who furnish real information or supply false information to the enemy. Spies of all sorts are described as a key element in warfare and, indeed, they underpin the message of *Master Sun's Art of War* : preparedness is key.

Almanac

Tongshu

(*c*. 1000–*c*. 600 BCE)

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Author unknown

UNLIKE JANUARY 1, WHICH MARKS the beginning of the new year in the Gregorian calendar, the Chinese New Year is a movable feast, celebrated somewhere between mid-January and mid-February. And while the twelve astrological signs of the Western zodiac divide one year into twelve periods, the Chinese zodiac has a twelve-year cycle of animals — including Tiger, Dragon, Horse, and Monkey. Each new year is signified by one of these animals in turn (and they are also used to designate the twelve hours of the traditional Chinese day).

The Gregorian calendar is solar, and the Islamic calendar is lunar; China, on the other hand, for thousands of years has used a lunisolar calendar (i.e., in relation to sun *and* moon). It consists of twelve months, with the New Year fixed as the second new moon after the winter solstice. The solar year is just over 365 days, while the lunar year is circa 354 days. In a lunisolar calendar like that of the Chinese, a whole leap month (not just certain leap days) has to be inserted about every three years. (In Lu Xun's story 'My Old Home' ['*Gu xiang*'], the little boy Runtu was born in a leap month [*run*], which was noted in part of his name.) Though the Gregorian calendar was officially adopted in China in 1912 with the advent of the republic, the traditional calendar is still popularly followed and the Chinese New Year remains the major festival of the year.

Because of the complexity of lunisolar calculations, the Chinese calendar and its associated almanac (*Tongshu*) became important household possessions. So significant was the establishment of the annual cycle that from the ninth century CE onward (if not before), private publication of calendars was prohibited by law; setting out the annual calendar was an imperial activity and its publication an imperial monopoly.

The traditional date for the adoption of the lunisolar calendar is 2265 BCE, and calendrical references are found on the inscribed oracle bones used to record divination by the Shang kings (*c*. 1600–1046 BCE). The significance of calculation lay not only in the need to fix the New Year and subsequent important festivals but also in controlling the agricultural cycle. The

agricultural aspect of imperial control was seen in the custom, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, whereby the emperor would follow his New Year observations at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing by proceeding to the Altar of Agriculture next door and plowing the first ceremonial furrow to initiate the new agricultural season.

Imperial astronomers, whose activities are known in detail from the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) onward, worked out the date of the New Year and predicted other astronomical events such as eclipses, and the calendar was written out for official distribution throughout the country at the start of the year. When Jesuit missionaries first arrived in Beijing in the last years of the sixteenth century, they specifically used their astronomical skills to ingratiate themselves with the Ming emperors. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) arrived in Beijing in 1598 and was appointed as a court advisor on the strength of his skill in predicting solar eclipses. Ricci was followed by Johann Schreck (1576–1630), who arrived in China in 1619 to continue the work as court astronomer; and he, in turn, was followed by Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666). Though they incurred the enmity of the previously dominant Muslim court astronomers, Jesuits continued to work in the imperial court after the fall of the Ming in 1644, acting as court astronomers to the new Qing dynasty.

The lunisolar calendar, fixing the dates of significant annual festivals, was only part of the traditional household almanac called *Tongshu* (which literally means ‘book of all things’). Interestingly, in the collection of paper documents dating from the fifth to the eleventh centuries CE found in the cave complex near Dunhuang, there were a number of manuscript almanacs and even three printed versions, two of these datable to 877 CE and 882 CE — which makes them very early examples of woodblock printing. These early woodblock-printed popular almanacs were illegally produced despite the imperial monopoly, but obviously a lot of money could be made through the sale of such an essential household item.[1] They list the days of the year that are auspicious or inauspicious for various activities, such as traveling or construction work, and the seasons of the agricultural year: ‘the start of spring, spring rain, awakening of insects, grain rain, start of summer, full grain, small heat, great heat,’ and so on. The 877 CE printed almanac from Dunhuang includes a diagram of a house with a garden at the rear, agricultural implements to the western side, a privy to the east, the whole surrounded by a diagram of a geomancer’s compass. The cycle of twelve animals is also charmingly depicted.[2]

Consultation of the almanac is recorded for example in Cao Xueqin’s novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*), where the (eventually unsuccessful) examination candidate prepares to make his trip to the capital by looking up an auspicious day for travel. And in H. Y. Lowe’s *The Adventures of Wu* (1940/1941), which describes life in Beijing in the first half of the 1900s, the family almanac is consulted and the day is found to be a good day for entering school, making sacrifices, shaving, commencing building works, and buying property, but a bad day for crossing rivers.

Elements in the almanac of popular use are the combinations of the ten ‘heavenly stems’ and twelve ‘earthly branches,’ which are used to form a sixty-year cycle (often used traditionally for dates) and to predict a child’s

fortune by examining the stem-and-branch combinations for the year, month, day, and hour of the birth. The twelve animals, which designate subsequent years, are also popular in fortune-telling. Their characteristics, briefly, are as follows: Rat: ‘clever, home-loving’; Ox: ‘gambles but generous and patient’; Tiger: ‘loyal but quick to anger’; Rabbit: ‘clever and talented’; Dragon (the best sign): ‘powerful’; Snake: ‘quick to seize opportunities’; Horse: ‘hardworking’; Goat or Sheep: ‘patient and gentle’; Monkey: ‘quick-witted and clever’; Rooster: ‘reliably punctual’; Dog: ‘not a leader’; and Pig: ‘loves comfort.’

Much of fortune-telling and divination was a specialist trade, but the modern almanac still contains sections on prognostication by facial features and handreading; fortune-telling by physical sensations such as eye tics, ringing in the ears, or burning ears; tables of auspicious and inauspicious dates; good and bad days for particular activities; and plenty of charms consisting of magical Chinese characters to ward off various evil spirits or unhappy events.

There are also strange sections left over from the past, such as the charming story of Confucius and the child Chong Ni, in which the child gets the better of the great philosopher. One section discusses how to tell if a cat is any use: it should have a loud voice to frighten rats but if it has a long body, it will leave to live with another family. And there is a guide on how to run the home: Rise at daybreak and water the dust in the courtyard, then sweep it away. You should keep your house tidy. Do not hire handsome servants, but reward all servants appropriately and be nice to your neighbors. Beware of people who move like crabs as they are not straightforward.

Sold to this day in vast numbers throughout the Chinese world, almanacs with their red covers and auspicious pictures remain a key element of the Chinese year (although only certain sections would be consulted on a regular basis today, except perhaps by the superstitious). However, important elements remain the listings of the dates of major festivals such as the Double Fifth (on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, near the summer solstice), a day of danger but one on which dragon boat races are held, and the Mid-Autumn Festival (on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month), when it is good to climb a hill and drink wine with friends while admiring the great globe of the harvest moon.

Proper Ritual

Yi li

(Western [or Former] Han/206 BCE–9 CE)

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Author unknown

CONFUCIUS WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH ritual and its proper observance, as the constant references in the *Analects* (*Lun yu*) show. Throughout China's imperial history, at every social level, from the imperial court to the peasant family, ritual remained crucial. According to traditional Chinese cosmology, the correct ordering of human affairs — expressed by the performance of the correct rituals, whether in the home or at court — would please heaven and thus ensure the safety and prosperity of the state.

The importance of ritual at the Qing court (1644–1911), for example, can be seen in the many paintings of ritual events such as the annual reception of foreign ambassadors at court, the annual ceremony of plowing the first (ceremonial) furrow in the Temple of Agriculture, and the several tours of southern China by the early Qing emperors and their massive retinues.[1] The paintings show how palace officials and servants were ranged in rows, bearing pennants and placards of different colors; how the emperors were carried in imperial yellow sedan chairs, with yellow silk parasols held above their heads, through ranks of soldiers; and how animals were laid out for sacrifice. The Qing court also published a multivolume illustrated work, *Illustrated Compendium of Ritual Objects for the Court* (*Huangchao liqi tushi*) (1766), which depicts the different ceramic vessels, bamboo baskets, ritual weapons, and court uniforms appropriate for each season and each ceremony. That such paintings and publications appeared during the Qing may relate to the fact that the Qing emperors were not Chinese but Manchus from the far northeast, and they were particularly concerned to demonstrate their mastery of Chinese protocol and ritual in their government of the country. (Earlier versions of such paintings and manuals of ritual and ritual implements may well have existed but none have survived.)

Though there were revivals of ritual — such as those enacted for Confucius's birthday in the Confucian temple in Qufu in Shandong province (witnessed by Linqing, the author of *Tracks of a Wild Goose in the Snow* [*Hongxuan yinyuan tuji*] in the mid-nineteenth century) — the establishment of a Communist government in China swept aside most traditional rites and

ceremonies. The continuing importance of ritual is most evident in other East Asian cultures such as Japan but also, to a lesser extent, in Taiwan. The long-held practice of thrice refusing an offer of a government appointment, for example, with the assumption that the offer will be agreed after three polite refusals, still persists.

The *Proper Ritual* (*Yi li*), a book that has also been translated as *Etiquette and Rites* or *Ceremonies and Rituals*, was probably compiled during the Western Han dynasty but based on a corpus of earlier texts describing ceremonial and ritual practices. It is one of the 'Three Ritual Classics' (*San li*), together with the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li)* and the *Book of Rites* (*Li ji*; this is also one of the Five Classics), both similar compilations of a similar date. The earliest surviving fragments of the *Proper Ritual* were found in a first-century CE tomb at Wuwei in the northwestern province of Gansu (in 1959), and the earliest printing of the text was in the tenth century CE.

In China there has always been a love of classification and numerical listings, and the Confucian classics underwent various categorizations. In addition to the Five Classics (*Wu jing)* and the Four Books (*Si shu*), a grouping of 'Thirteen Classics' (*Shisan jing)* was devised during the Song (960–1279). The 'Thirteen Classics' consist of: the Five Classics (*Book of Songs*, *Book of Changes*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals* — which was subdivided into three parts); the *Analects* and the *Mencius*; the *Proper Ritual* and the *Rites of Zhou*; as well as the *Book of Filial Piety* (*Xiao jing*, dating probably to the Western Han) and the *Er ya* ('Approaching Correctness,' a lexicographical work dating to circa the third century BCE).

The *Proper Ritual* differs slightly from the other two ritual texts in that it is concerned almost entirely with the behavior and rites of officials of different rank and in a variety of formal situations, rather than the history of rituals or details of the implements used. The seventeen chapters of the *Proper Ritual* include: Capping rites marking the end of childhood for the son of a common officer; Nuptial rites for a common officer; Rites for common officers attending a meeting; Rites of a district symposium; Rites of a district archery contest; Banquet ritual at state (not imperial) level; Rites of great archery contests; Rites of courtesy calls (state to state); Rite of the 'gong' feast for a great officer; Rites of imperial audience; Mourning dress; Mourning rites for a common officer; Post-burial rites for a common officer; Rites of a simple food offering; Rites of a [more complex] double food offering; and Servants clearing the way. This last rite was an important part of official meeting and travel protocol: whenever an official left his office, his way would be cleared, according to his rank, by servants, standard bearers, and soldiers.

As stated in the *Proper Ritual*, the banquet offered by the prince to an envoy from another state begins with an invitation to enter the palace (which has to be politely declined several times), much kowtowing by the envoy, and the preparation of food cooked in great tripods. Finally, the envoy reaches the banquet hall and kowtows twice:

The tripods are brought in and the stands filled:

Ordinary officers take up the tripods, leaving the covers outside the gate and, entering the door in order, lay them to the south of the tablet, facing south and arranged in importance starting from the west.[2] The men on the right draw out the poles and, sitting down, lay them to the west of the tripods, afterward going out by the west of the tripods. The men on the left then await the order to set the meat on the stands.

Then the cooks bring in the stands and set them out to the south of the tripods; the pantrymen, facing south, put the ladles into the tripods and withdraw.

Then the great officers, in order of precedence, wash their hands, standing to the southwest of the water jar, and facing west, in rank order, starting from the north. They go forward and wash in turn, the man withdrawing meeting the other man coming forward in front of the jar. When their washing is finished, they go forward in turn and, facing south, ladle out the meat.

Those who set the meat on the stands face west.

When the fish and dried game are cooked, they set the joints on the stands with the underside foremost.

The fish are seven in number, laid lengthwise on the stand, and resting on their right sides.

The set of entrails and stomachs are seven in number and occupy the same stand.

There are seven sides of pork on one stand.

The entrails, stomachs, and sides of pork are all laid across the stands, and hanging down at either side.

When the great officers have finished the ladling, they place the ladles in the tripods and, withdrawing in the reverse order of their coming, return to their places.

Laying out the principle set of viands [the main dishes]:

The prince goes down to wash his hands and the envoy descends also, the prince declining the honor. When the washing is finished, the prince, with one salute and one yielding of precedence, goes up the steps, the envoy going up also.

Then the understeward brings the wet hash [stew] and sauce from the east chamber, and the prince sets them down. The envoy, declining and with his face to the north, removes them and sets them down on the east in their proper place.

Then the prince takes his stand on the inside of the inner wall, looking west, and the envoy stands to the west of the steps in an expectant attitude.

Then the understeward brings out from the east chamber six holders [dishes] and places them to the east of the sauce, and arranged in importance starting from the west. There are pickled vegetables and, on their east, the pickled hashes. Then come pickled rush-roots, with, to their south, elk

flesh hash with the bones in; and on the west of this, pickled leek flowers, with deer flesh hash following.

Then the officers place the meat-stands to the south of the holders, and arranged in importance starting from the west. The beef comes first, then the mutton, and then the pork. The fish is to the south of the beef, and is followed by the dried game and the entrails and stomachs, the sides of pork being by themselves on the east side.

Different types of millet are served in dishes with tortoise-shaped covers and ‘the wine for drinking’ is poured into a goblet. Offerings from these dishes are then made, with much kowtowing before the prince invites the envoy to take his mat and eat some millet porridge.

It can be seen from this small section of the description of one type of official banquet that the guests did not attend for the food which would have been cold, to say the least. What was all-important was the ritual.

The Grand Scribe's Records

Shi ji
(1st century BCE)

*

SIMA QIAN
(*c*. 150–*c*. 86 BCE)

SIMA QIAN WAS THE SON OF SIMA TAN (d. *c*. 108 BCE). Sima Tan was 'Prefect of the Grand Scribes' under the Han emperor Wudi (r. 141–87 BCE), and his official duties were 'the supervision of sacrifices and the calendar, the management of astrological questions, and the care of the imperial library.' According to Sima Qian, it was his father who began to compile a volume setting down all of China's history from the beginning to his own time, using the resources of the imperial library. Sima Qian, succeeding his father in office, was determined to continue the project. When he offended the emperor by defending an army commander who had been betrayed while fighting the Xiongnu tribes in the north, he was sentenced to either death or castration. He chose the latter so that he could continue his father's work. Sadly, he could have avoided both punishments had he had enough money to pay a large fine.

Sima Qian's universal history, *The Grand Scribe's Records* (*Shi ji*), was of huge significance to Chinese historiography. Written in a clear and straightforward manner, making use of imperial archives to record events in a largely chronological sequence — but with the addition of appendices on ritual, music, the calendar, astronomy, sacrifices, economics, and biographies of notables — it set the style for subsequent histories. His work covered some 2,500 years of Chinese history, from the time of the legendary Yellow Emperor down to Sima Qian's own lifetime, the reign of Wudi. No previous historical writing in China had been so extensive in scope, either in terms of time span or coverage of topics such as biography and astronomy. Earlier historical works such as the *Book of Documents* (*Shu jing*) and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chun qiu*) were collections of documents and commentary, and in the case of the latter restricted to events in the single state of Lu.

China's history after *The Grand Scribe's Records* was recorded in much detail in the great 'Twenty-Four Histories,' each covering a single dynasty. These were compiled by successor dynasties, many decades or centuries

after the fall of the dynasty described, and are often prejudiced — for the victorious dynasty needed to justify the overthrow of its predecessor — but their basis in archives means that they are still useful. The first 'dynastic' history book after *The Grand Scribe's Records* is the *History of the Han* (*Han shu*), covering the period from 206 BCE to 23 CE. It was completed in 111 CE and it noted that the purpose of history was based on the approach of two earlier compilations: 'The *Book of History* [or *Documents*] broadens one's information and is the practice of wisdom; the *Spring and Autumn Annals* passes moral judgement on events and is the symbol of good faith.'[1] Thus chronological description was important but essentially somewhat secondary to the didactic and improving nature of historical writing. Reflecting the increasing veneration of Confucius during the Han, it was believed (inaccurately) that Confucius arranged the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and wrote the prefaces to the *Book of Documents* — thus Confucius's views on the conduct of rulers and the existence of a past golden age of perfect rule were intrinsic to the writing of later histories.

Sima Qian recorded his father's dying words, which included praise for the current Han dynasty that had 'put in order the laws' and 'settled questions of rites and ceremonies.' The Han had overthrown the short-lived Qin (221–206 BCE), which was accused of discarding and destroying such works as the *Book of Songs* and the *Book of Documents* by order of the First Emperor. In this context it was essential that official historians clarified the Han right to rule by vilifying the regime it had overthrown (despite the fact that Sima Qian himself had incurred imperial wrath). Vilifying the Qin helped to prove that the good Han dynasty was not destructive but had received heaven's approval, the Mandate of Heaven, to rule.

Sima Qian's account of the reign of the First Emperor (who ordered the creation of the massive 'buried army' of terracotta warriors, to be placed beside his tomb) is told chronologically. In 221 BCE, the year in which the ruler of Qin ended his conquests by uniting all of China, he issued edicts about his new rule and decreed that since (according to the cycle of the Five Elements) the Zhou dynasty had been under the element of fire, 'Qin must be able to conquer fire, so now came the era of water. The start of the year was changed to the first day of the tenth month … Black was decreed the imperial color for garments and flags, and six became the paramount number … carriages were to be six feet wide and the emperor's carriage was drawn by six horses.' This decree conjures up the impressive sight of an imperial procession, with black pennants flying from the carriages filled with black-clad officials passing through villages of peasants in undyed cloth garments.

One of the most notorious acts of the First Emperor, set out in detail by Sima Qian to underline the emperor's refusal to accept Confucian beliefs, was his 'burning of the books.' His prime minister, Li Si, is recorded as suggesting 'that all historical records, except those of Qin, be burned. If anyone who is not an official court scholar dares to keep ancient songs, historical documents, or the works of the Hundred Schools [of Thought], they should be publicly executed … If thirty days after this order they have not had these books destroyed, they should have their faces tattooed [a punishment] and be condemned to hard labor on the Great Wall.'

One of the biographies in *The Grand Scribe's Records* is that of Confucius, which may be compared with the description Sima Qian recorded of the appearance and character of the First Emperor. Confucius is accorded a very long biography, and Sima Qian's detailed account forms an important part of the Han dynasty elevation of Confucius from unsuccessful advisor to preeminent thinker. It begins with his birth in around 551 BCE after his mother, far younger than his father (who had contracted an 'unusual marriage' with such a young girl), prayed for a child on Ni Hill, a sacred hill near Qufu. Confucius's filial piety is evident in the care he took to bury his mother in a temporary grave until he could find his father's remains and unite his parents in a single grave. Described as being over two meters tall, his career is first set out in a breathless rush before a more detailed account. Promoted from his office in charge of saddlery and harnesses, he 'left Lu; he was chased out of Qi, rejected in Song and Wei, endangered between Chen and Cai, and then returned to Lu.' A further breathless list of names and events follows: 'When Confucius was thirty-five, on account of a cockfight Ji had had with Hou, Ji was regarded as the guilty party by Duke Zhao of Lu. Duke Zhao led his soldiers to attack Ji, but Ji, massing his family forces with those of Chen and Zhou, defeated Duke Zhao who fled to Qi. Soon after there was a revolt in Lu and Confucius went to Qi to serve Guo in the hope of thus making contact with Duke Jing. He discussed the music of Qi and listened to songs. He studied them and abstained from meat for three months. He was praised by the people of Qi. When Duke Jing asked Confucius about government, he replied, "In order for there to be good government, the ruler must be a ruler, the subject a subject, the father a father, and the son a son." Duke Jing replied, "Well said."'

Apart from his height, little is said about Confucius's personal appearance, although remarks about his proper behavior (taken from the last section of the *Analects* [*Lun yu*]) abound in *The Grand Scribe's Records*. By contrast, the physical description of the First Emperor takes the form of a report by Wei Liao, who came to advise the emperor in 237 BCE, during the period in which he was undertaking the conquests leading up to 221 BCE. Despite the fact that 'he treated Wei Liao as an equal, sharing clothes, food, and drink with him … Wei Liao said, "The King of Qin has a nose like a wasp, the breast of a chicken, and a voice like a jackal. He is merciless and has the heart of a tiger or a wolf. He may humble himself when he is in difficulty but when he is successful he swallows men up without scruple … If he succeeds in conquering all, we shall all be his captives …"'

Even though many subsequent dynasties carried out ruthless censorship and literary purges, and despite the lack of contemporary records corroborating his supposed horrible deeds, Sima Qian's account of the First Emperor helped to set him up as a demonic figure, a reputation which persists to this day.

Nineteen Old Poems

Gu shi shijiu shou
(Eastern [or Later] Han/25–220 CE)

*

Author unknown

THE *Nineteen Old Poems* (*Gu shi shijiu shou*) are thought to have been composed during the Eastern Han dynasty. They survived through their inclusion in the *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wen xuan*), a famous anthology of model forms of poetry and prose writing (featuring over 700 text pieces by over 100 writers) that was compiled between 520 and 530 CE by Xiao Tong, son of the emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (502–557 CE). During the Song dynasty (960–1279) this anthology became a very significant source for all those wishing to succeed professionally, particularly in the first stage of the examination system that enabled entry into the imperial bureaucracy. A popular rhyme noted that 'if you master the *Wen xuan*, you are halfway to your licentiate.'

Though the *Nineteen Old Poems* are anonymous, it is often assumed that they were written by an aristocrat, because the poems' themes and descriptions are of a rich lifestyle, of abandoned women and traveling men, and contain political allusions relevant to imperial courtiers (although these themes were common, almost intrinsic, in a great deal of earlier and later Chinese poetry).

Significantly, in terms of form the *Nineteen Old Poems* are in fact not 'old' but represent a radical departure from the previous *shi* poetry style, which was almost invariably cast in regular lines of four characters (including the poems in the *Book of Songs* [*Shi jing*]). The *Nineteen Old Poems* have regular five-character lines instead, thus forming a new *shi* style, often with a caesura or break after the first two characters. (The total number of lines in each poem varies.) Though in later centuries poems using seven-character lines became more common (with the caesura after the fourth character), both types — lines with five characters, and seven-character lines — reveal a rhythm that Perry Link has described as deeply embedded in modern Chinese, used even in traffic directives and slogans.

The *shi* form of poetry has a long history, deriving from the *Book of Songs* and developing into verses composed of lines of four, five, or seven

characters. The *fu* form, on the other hand, described as ‘rhymed prose’ (i.e., longer pieces with varying line lengths), developed during the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).

In many of the *Nineteen Old Poems*, in the first few lines the caesura is preceded by duplication, which creates a strong pattern that is not always reflected in translations. A characteristic example of the format is the second poem, with its equally characteristic theme of abandonment:

Green, green, the grass on the riverbank
Thick, thick, the willows in the garden
Fine, fine, the lady in the tower
Pale, pale, by the window
Fair, fair, her rouged face
Fine, fine, her outstretched hand.
Once she was a singing girl
Now the wife of an unfaithful man.
The philanderer left and has not returned
How hard it is alone in this empty bed.

The tenth poem is similar in theme and form but refers to folk tradition rather than a personal history:

High, high, the herdboy’s star
Bright, bright, the girl by the river
Clack, clack, the shuttle of her loom.
At the end of the day she has not finished the pattern
Her tears fall like rain.
The river is clear and shallow
The distance between them is short.
Full, full the river between them
Looking, looking, unable to speak.

The ‘herdboy’s star’ is Altair, and Vega is known in Chinese folklore as ‘the weaving maid’s star.’ They stand on either side of the ‘heavenly river,’ the Milky Way. According to Chinese legend, the two lovers, the herdboy and the weaving maid, can only meet once a year when a flock of magpies forms a bridge that enables them to cross the ‘river’ on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month.

The sixth poem also dwells on separation:

Passing the river, I gather lotuses
In the lotus marshes there are many fragrant plants
For whom do I pick them?
My love is far away
I turn and look back to my home village
The road is long, limitless and endless,
Hearts united yet living apart
A painful sadness until we grow old.

Here, the narrator appears to be a man, and though the separation would seem to be from his wife or mistress, the theme of separation and distance is also used to indicate political distance from a ruler and the theme of exile, from court or from home.

A similar idea is expressed in the first poem:

Traveling on, on, again on,
I am alive yet separated from you
Over ten thousand miles lie between us
Each on one edge of the sky
The road is difficult and long
Who knows if we will meet again?
The barbarian horse turns to the north wind
The bird from Yue perches on southern branches
It is a long time since we parted
Daily, my clothes and belt hang looser
Floating clouds hide the bright sun
The traveler does not wish to return
Thinking of you makes me grow old
Months and years past, suddenly it is evening
But let us not dwell on this
Try to eat and thrive.

That separation does not mean death is emphasized in the second line and recurs in the last line, where there is a determination to survive the ordeal. Some have seen this slightly odd emphasis as referring to the earlier *Songs of the South* (*Chu ci)* — an anthology of poems associated with the southern state of Chu and attributed to Qu Yuan (*c*. 340 – *c*. 278 BCE) — which includes odes addressed to the spirits of the dead, hoping to call the spirits back to the world.[1]

Here, however, the main character stresses the fact that he is still living. Distance is emphasized in the lines about the horse and the bird. The horse, associated with northern tribes, is described as ‘barbarian,’ and Yue was the name of an area in the south of China. The distance and the differences between north and south China, including their different inhabitants, perhaps express some of the fears of the period in which the nineteen poems were written — the Han dynasty was weakening and the threat of invasion and disunion was growing. The line ‘Floating clouds hide the bright sun’ anticipates a popular poetic trope: the ‘bright sun’ stands for the emperor and ‘clouds’ for political problems — often poor advisors — preventing the emperor from seeing clearly. This poem can therefore be understood as a lament about separation from loved ones — but also as the grief of the sage separated from his ruler.

The ninth poem is a simpler lament, set in an enclosed domestic courtyard:

In the courtyard grows a marvelous tree
A profusion of flowers among the strong green leaves
I reach for a branch and pick a wonderful flower

I will send it to the one I love.
The sweet scent fills my breast and sleeves.
The road is long, how shall I send it?
The flower in itself is not worth it
But I am saddened by the time we have been separated.

These themes of love and separation, as well as carefully concealed hints of political problems, remained characteristic of Chinese poetry throughout the centuries.

Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms

Foguo ji
(fifth century CE)

*

FAXIAN
(*c*. 337–*c*. 422 CE)

FAXIAN WAS A BUDDHIST MONK FROM Shanxi province who in the year 399 set out on foot from China to India in search of Buddhist scriptures. *Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms* (*Foguo ji*) is the account of his journey and of what he saw in India and Sri Lanka. Faxian's work was very influential both in the development of Chinese Buddhism, through his collection of Buddhist scriptures and their subsequent translation into Chinese, and also through the rediscovery in the nineteenth century of Buddhist monuments in India recorded in the account of his travels.[1]

Buddhism (in a variety of concepts and practices) came to China from India sometime around the first century CE, brought along the series of ancient commercial routes (known as the Silk Road) that ran along the northern and southern edges of the Central Asian deserts. Originally an ascetic, monastic tradition, over centuries Buddhism was gradually transformed in China, for the monastic tradition ran counter to China's older belief systems that stressed family cohesion and family worship. The possibility of salvation in paradise through Buddhist practice, a concept lacking in Chinese religion and philosophy, may have offered some hope to many Chinese during the difficult period of disruption and division after the fall of the Han in 220 CE. Despite occasional persecutions during the Tang period (618–907 CE) — largely due to the great economic wealth of the major Buddhist temples at the time — Buddhism remained a significant aspect of Chinese culture and belief.

The first translations of Indian Buddhist texts into Chinese were made by the Parthian monk An Shigao around 148 CE, followed by a series of translations by the Gandharan monk Lokaksema *c*. 164–*c*. 186 CE. These translations were of sutras (sermons or discourses of the Buddha) and commentaries but not of the *vinaya*, texts dealing with rules for Buddhist monks and nuns. Faxian wrote, 'When I was in Chang'an [today's Xi'an] I regretted the lack of the Buddhist rules, so in 399 I agreed with Huijing,

Daozheng, Huiying, Huiwei, and others to go to India to seek out the *vinaya*.'

This group of monks set out northwestward on the Silk Road toward the great Central Asian deserts that lie between China and India. Beyond Dunhuang, Faxian said, 'in the desert [literally, the "river of sand"] there are evil spirits and hot winds that kill all men who encounter them. Above, no birds fly; below, no animals move. Looking in all directions for a route to cross the desert, as far as the eye can see, there is nothing that can be perceived except dead men's bones marking the route.' They traveled to the oasis town of Khotan (today's Hetian), where the inhabitants followed Mahayana Buddhism; further west, in the oasis of Kashgar (Kashi), near where the northern and southern Silk Roads met (and where a route led through the mountains to Afghanistan and India), they encountered the variant tradition now known as Theravada Buddhism. They reached Gandhara, ruled by a descendant of the great patron of Buddhism, Emperor Ashoka, and the group divided. Some of the monks were ill and some stayed to care for them; others went elsewhere, leaving Faxian traveling on his own to 'the place of the Buddha's skull' in Nagarahara (today's Jalalabad, Afghanistan). 'In the country of Nagarahara, in the city of Xiluo, is the Buddha's skull bone, now covered with gold and the seven precious jewels. [2] The king deeply venerated the skull bone and feared that it might be stolen, so he ordered eight men of notable families to hold a seal each and these seals were used to seal up and protect the shrine. Every morning the eight men went together and each inspected their own seal and then the door was opened. When the door was opened, they washed their hands in scented water. The Buddha's skull was brought out and placed on a high platform … The skull bone is yellowish, a rounded square, about four inches long and slightly convex. Every day when it is brought out, the protectors of the skull climb a high tower and beat huge drums, blow on conch shells, and clash bronze cymbals. On hearing this, the king comes out to offer flowers and incense and make obeisance. Every day he enters the precinct through the East Gate and leaves by the West Gate.'

Faxian appears to have stayed in India for ten years or more, visiting such sites as Kapilavastu, the Buddha's childhood home; Bodh Gaya, the place of his enlightenment; Varanasi, near where the Buddha preached his first sermon; and more Buddhist sites such as Vaishali and Ramagrama, and Ashoka's pillar at Sarnath.

For two years he then visited Sri Lanka, which he described as 'the country of the Buddha's tooth'; he saw the shrine of the Buddha's tooth at Kandy and, more significantly, obtained a copy of the *vinaya* and other Buddhist scriptures, 'all in Sanskrit,' as he wrote. Eventually Faxian returned to China by sea. The trip was dangerous for the ship was frequently tossed by gales and seems to have been blown off course to Java. He described how he had boarded a merchants' ship which was dangerously overloaded with more than two hundred people. During a gale, the merchants ordered many things to be thrown overboard to lessen the weight of the vessel. Faxian threw his water pitcher into the sea and, 'fearing that the merchants would throw his sutras overboard, prayed with all his heart to the Bodhisattva Guanyin that he might return to China.' (Chapter 25 of the

Lotus Sutra contains a long passage in which it is recommended that all in peril, whether from robbers, falling rocks, childbirth, fire, demons, or dragons, should call on Guanyin, whose name in Chinese means ‘the one who hears the cries of the world.’) Faxian wrote of his prayer, ‘I have traveled very far in search of the dharma, let me get home to spread the dharma everywhere.’ Then a great wind blew for thirteen days and nights and they came to an island and were able to find the place where the boat was leaking. According to the *Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, Faxian on his long journey ‘had traveled through more than thirty countries … [and afterward] he recorded his experiences on bamboo slips and silk.’

When Faxian returned to China in the year 421, he brought with him the *Mahasanghika Vinaya* from Pataliputra in Central India (which he translated into Chinese before his death) and the *Mahisasaka Vinaya* from Sri Lanka. The massive work of translation of Buddhist texts to which Faxian contributed had another lasting effect: because Buddhism remained a significant religion in East Asia for many centuries while it declined in South Asia, many Sanskrit sutras have survived only in their Chinese (and Mongolian and Tibetan) translations.

Lotus Sutra

Saddharmapundarika sutra
(translation into Chinese 3rd to 5th centuries CE)

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Author unknown

* * *

Diamond Sutra

Vajracchedikaprajnaparamita sutra
(translation into Chinese 5th century CE)

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Author unknown

BUDDHIST IMAGES AND BUDDHIST TEXTS were brought to China from South Asia to serve as models for temple art and for translation from Sanskrit (and Prakrit) into Chinese. Over hundreds of years, numerous Chinese monks, including Faxian (*c*. 337–*c*. 422 CE) and Xuanzang (*c*. 602–664 CE), traveled to India in search of sutras (sermons or discourses of the Buddha) and other Buddhist texts. (Xuanzang, born in Henan province, set out for India in 629, against imperial orders, and returned in 645 to devote the rest of his life to translating the many sutras he had brought back with him.) The translation industry in China was such that many sutras now exist only in their Chinese version, while the originals were lost as Buddhism declined in its homeland. The whole process of translation was elaborate because Sanskrit texts contained not only a strange vocabulary related to the Buddha's life and faith practice in India, but new and complex ideas for which there was no existing vocabulary in Chinese. It seems that the early translators decided to use a version of Chinese that was close to the vernacular, so that many people could understand it. They often had to work in teams, with Chinese alongside non-Chinese interpreters such as An Shigao (fl. 148–180 CE), who was a Parthian; Zhu Fahu (also called Dharmaraksha, fl. *c*. 233–*c*. 310 CE) of Indo-Scythian origin; and Kumarajiva (334–413 CE), who had a Kashmiri father and a Kuchean mother.[1]

First published in 2017 in the United States of America by BlueBridge, an imprint of United Tribes Media, Inc.

This edition published in the UK in 2017 by Head of Zeus Ltd

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (HB) 9781786694522
ISBN (E) 9781786694515

Board: Nine Dragons, Chen Rong, 1244 © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA / Francis Gardner Curtis Fund / Bridgeman Images

Jacket Design: Leo Nickolls

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