

BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

A Note on the Authenticity and Ideology of Shih-chi 24, "The Book on Music"

New evidence of several kinds is adduced to show that the present monograph on music ("Yüeh shu") in the *Shih-chi* cannot be the production of Ssu-ma Ch'ien but must rather date to the late Western or early Eastern Han, a conclusion that also unsettles the traditional dating of the "Yüeh chi" chapter of the *Li chi*.

Chapter 24 of the Ssu-ma Ch'ien's 司馬遷 (c. 145–c. 86 B.C.) *Shih-chi* 史記, the "Book on Music" ("Yüeh-shu" 樂書), has long been strongly suspected of not being authentic but a significantly later and in parts badly flawed text. This assumption, gradually established by traditional scholars under the T'ang, Sung, and Ch'ing dynasties,¹ has been effectively confirmed and further refined by modern Chinese scholarship.² The present note may serve to summarize the established evidence and to add some new findings that corroborate earlier views. I will also suggest a tentative date of composition for this chapter on the basis of its underlying ideology within the context of Western Han cultural and intellectual history.

According to Ssu-ma Ch'ien's biography in the *Han-shu* 漢書, ten of the 130 *Shih-chi* chapters were missing by the second half of the first century A.D., having only a title listing but no text (*yu lu wu shu* 有錄無書).³ One of these ten chapters, as they are noted by the *Han-shu* commentator Chang Yen 張晏 (third century), is the "Book on Music."⁴ The *Shih-chi* commentator Ssu-ma Chen 司馬貞 (eighth century), after quoting Chang Yen, holds that the "Book on Music" was based on the "Records of Music" ("Yüeh-chi" 樂記) chapter of the *Li-chi* 禮記.⁵

In the modern punctuated edition, the "Book on Music" occupies sixty-three pages⁶ that can be divided into

three parts: the first four pages relate the continuous degeneration of (ritual) music from high antiquity through the Ch'in dynasty and then deal briefly with the music of the Han. The last three pages of the chapter present a story that is based on an earlier account in the *Han Fei tzu* 韓非子⁷ and close with the historian's judgment, introduced by the standard formula "the Grand Historian says" (*t'ai-shih kung yüeh* 太史公曰). The middle part of the chapter, comprising almost ninety percent of the text, is virtually identical with the complete *Li-chi* chapter "Records of Music," differing only in some textual variants and an alternative arrangement of a few paragraphs. On the assumption that the "Yüeh-chi" is indeed the earlier text, Ssu-ma Chen's observation that it served as the blueprint for the "Yüeh-shu" can hardly be challenged. Considering further that the final passage paraphrases a story taken from the *Han Fei tzu*, we are left with the few introductory pages as the only portion of the text original to the "Yüeh-shu."

Unfortunately, even these pages present not much more than a sketchy and stereotyped narrative of cultural decline; only in its final section on the sacrificial music of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's own emperor Han Wu-ti 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 B.C.) does the text turn to concrete historical issues. It is therefore this section that deserves closer examination in order to determine the textual value of what is left after leaving aside the "Yüeh-chi" and *Han Fei tzu* material. The account on Wu-ti's ritual music may be given in full here:

When the present emperor ascended the throne, he created the nineteen [musical] pieces. He ordered the palace attendant Li Yen-nien to arrange their melodies in an orderly sequence and promoted him to the position of

¹ For an overview, see Yü Chia-hsi 余嘉錫, "T'ai-shih kung shu wang-p'ien k'ao" 太史公書亡篇考, in *Yü Chia-hsi lun-hsüeh chi* 余嘉錫論學集 2 vols. (Taipei: Wen-hai ch'u-pan-she, 1979), 1: 38–49.

² In addition to Yü Chia-hsi, see also Ch'iu Ch'ung-sun 丘瓊霖, *Li-tai yüeh-chih lü-chih chiao-shih* 歷代樂志律志校釋 (Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1964), 1–12. Both scholars discuss extensively the earlier scholarship.

³ *Han-shu* (rpt., Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1987), 62.2724.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Shih-chi* (rpt., Peking: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1982) 130.3321.

⁶ *Shih-chi* 24.1175–1237.

⁷ This narrative is from the chapter "Ten Faults" ("Shih kuo" 十過) and illustrates the fault of being "fond of musical tones" (*hao yin* 好音); see Wang Hsien-shen 王先慎 (1859–1922), *Han Fei tzu chi-chieh* 韓非子集解 (*Chu-tzu chi-ch'eng* ed.) 3.42–45.

Commander for Regulating the Pitch Pipes. Those officials who master only one of the canonical books cannot understand the [song] texts on their own; only if one assembles all the erudites of the Five Canonical Books and has them together discuss and recite the texts may one comprehensively understand their meaning; they often are in phrases approaching the elegant standard.⁸

Under the House of Han, it was always in the first month that the emperor went out to sacrifice to the Grand Unity at Kan-ch'üan, beginning at dusk to perform the nightly sacrifice, and ending only when dawn was reached. Constantly there were meteors passing through above the sacrificial altar.⁹ Seventy boys and girls were made to sing in chorus. In spring they sang "Azure Yang" ("Ch'ing Yang" 青陽), in summer they sang "Red Shining" ("Chu-ming" 朱明), in autumn they sang "Western Whitelight" (西嶽), and in winter they sang "Obscure Darkness" (玄冥).¹⁰ At present [these songs] are widely known; therefore I will not discuss them.

⁸ The precise meaning of *erh ya* 爾雅 ("to approach the elegant/classical standard" or "to cause to draw near classical correctness") here and elsewhere in the *Shih-chi* (60.2118, 121.3119; cf. also *Han-shu* 88.3594) is unclear. A reference to the dictionary of this title seems highly unlikely.

⁹ If the falling down of meteorites or passing through of meteors (the light phenomenon caused by meteorites; in early texts, *liu-hsing* 流星 seems to be used for both) is more than symbolic, this may be a reference to the Geminid, Ursid, or Quadrantid showers that reach their maxima in mid-December and early January. However, for the fifty-four years of Han Wu-ti's rule, not a single instance of meteors/meteorites is recorded in the astronomical chapters of the *Shih-chi*, *Han-shu*, or *Ch'ien-Han-chi* 前漢紀 although one of Wu-ti's state sacrificial hymns (no. 17, see *Han-shu* 22.1068) mentions "meteorites are falling down" at the occasion of a sacrifice. Strikingly, in both the ritual hymn and in the passage under discussion here, the appearance of *liu-hsing* is presented as an auspicious cosmic response to the imperial sacrifice. This interpretation runs against all *Han-shu* and *Ch'ien-Han-chi* accounts on *liu-hsing* for the later period of the Western Han. For the rulers following Wu-ti, meteorites are invariably mentioned as omens of imminent disaster: see my *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer: Literatur und Ritual in der politischen Repräsentation von der Han-Zeit bis zu den Sechs Dynastien* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997), 267–77. If anything, it would be the positive understanding of *liu-hsing* that might testify to the authenticity of the passage under review, reflecting an earlier interpretation. Isolated as this evidence stands, one may explain it as a direct reference to the above-mentioned hymn.

¹⁰ These hymns are translated and discussed in Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 202–9.

Again, earlier [the emperor] had obtained a divine horse from the Wo-wa 渥洼 River, and following this, he had the "Song of the Grand Unity" ("T'ai-i chih ko" 太一之歌) composed. The song text goes:

"The Grand Unity bestows us,
the heavenly horse descends!
Soaked with red sweat,
bathed in liquid hematite!
Dashing forward lightly and carefree,
it crosses ten thousand miles.
Today, what could compare with it?—
The dragon is its friend!"

Later, [the emperor] attacked Ferghana and obtained a thousand-mile horse which was named Pushao 蒲梢, and again he had a song composed about it. Its verses are:

"The Heavenly Horse is arriving,
it comes from the western pole.
Passing through ten thousand miles,
it returns to [the lands] of virtue.
Assuming numinous force,
it subdues the outlying countries.
Wading through the flowing sands,
it makes the fourfold barbarians surrender!"¹¹

The commandant of the capital, Chi An 汲黯, submitted [a memorial], saying: "In general, when the kings created the [ritual] music, upwards it was presented to the ancestral spirits, and downwards it was to transform the common people. Today Your Majesty has obtained the horse, has had a text composed and made into a song, and has had it applied to the ancestral temple. How could the former emperors and the common people comprehend these tones?" The emperor, remaining silent, was displeased. The chancellor Kung-sun Hung 公孫弘 said: "[Chi] An has criticized the sage's composition; he and his family should be extinguished."¹²

The final narrative, as many scholars have pointed out,¹³ is historically impossible: the songs were composed in 113 and 101 B.C., while Chi An had died in 113 B.C.

¹¹ The songs are shorter variants of two of Wu-ti's state sacrificial hymns, as recorded in the *Han-shu*; for their longer counterparts, see *Han-shu* 22.1060–62; for translation and discussion see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 227–40.

¹² *Shih-chi* 24.1177–78.

¹³ See, e.g., Yü Chia-hsi, "T'ai-shih kung shu wang-p'ien k'ao," 39–41; Ch'iu Ch'üung-sun, *Li-tai yüeh-chih lü-chih chiao-shih*, 8, 12.

and Kung-sun Hung in 121 B.C. Moreover, Chi An was never commandant of the capital; in the year of his death, he was not even in the capital but was serving as governor of Huai-yang 淮陽 (in modern Honan province);¹⁴ and finally, the title "commandant of the capital" (*chung-wei* 中尉) had been abolished in 104 B.C.¹⁵ Since the rest of the "Yüeh shu" consists, in any case, only of derivative or—in the case of the introductory passages—stereotyped texts, the anachronisms in the only original passage have been taken as sufficient proof that the "Book on Music" cannot have come from Ssu-ma Ch'ien's hand.¹⁶

As a matter of fact, the brief narrative quoted above is replete with historical flaws much beyond those recognized since Sung times. I should like to add the following pieces of evidence:

1. The text speaks of the "nineteen songs" of the present emperor, clearly referring to the nineteen "Chiao-sso ko" 郊祀歌, the "hymns for the suburban sacrifices." We know that Ssu-ma Ch'ien stopped his work on the *Shih-chi* in about 100 B.C.; but the latest of the nineteen sacrificial hymns—number 18—dates as late as 94 B.C.¹⁷ Ssu-ma Ch'ien therefore could not have spoken of nineteen songs.¹⁸

¹⁴ See *Han-shu* 50.2322.

¹⁵ See *Han-shu* 19A.732.

¹⁶ The earliest scholar to point out the impossibility of the Chi An-Kung-sun Hung episode seems to have been Ssu-ma Kuang 司馬光 (1019–1086) in his *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien Kao-i* 資治通鑑考異; see Yü Chia-hsi, "T'ai-shih kung shu wang-p'ien k'ao," 40. A curious attempt to save this part of the "Book on Music" as Ssu-ma Ch'ien's original work has been launched by Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎, *Shiki kaichū kōshō* 史記會注考證 (rpt. in *Shih-chi hui-chu Kao-cheng fu chiao-pu* 史記會注考證附校補, 2 vols., Shanghai: Shang-hai ku-chi ch'u-pan-she, 1986), 24.8–9. Takigawa proposes that both the two personal names and the title "commandant of the capital" may have been altered by later editors. These speculations have been forcefully rejected by Yü Chia-hsi, and my following remarks should provide sufficient evidence to dismiss conclusively Takigawa's claim for the basic authenticity of the passage.

¹⁷ For the text, see *Han-shu* 22.1069. The only way to understand the "nineteen songs" as complete without the last one is to assume that the two songs on the heavenly horses—whose *Han-shu* versions are different from those quoted here—were initially counted as two; in the *Han-shu*, they are numbered as only one. However, there is no support for such an assumption.

¹⁸ This problem has also been pointed by Ssu-ma Kuang in his *Tzu-chih t'ung-chien Kao-i*; see Yü Chia-hsi, "T'ai-shih kung shu wang-p'ien k'ao," 40. The *Shih-chi* commentator Ssu-ma Chen mistakenly understands the "nineteen songs" as the *An-shih*

2. The text states that a scholar versed in only one of the canonical books would be unable to understand the hymns and that specialists on all five canonical books would need to be consulted. This view is alien to the idea of scholarship under Han Wu-ti when individual specialists were assigned to individual books of the recently defined canon; it was indeed Kung-sun Hung who successfully proposed that one could graduate from the imperial academy by mastering a single canonical text.¹⁹ On the other hand, the comprehensiveness of the *wu ching* 五經 and their mastery as a whole is a distinctively Eastern Han ideal of scholarship. And most suspiciously, the term *wu ching* does not appear in any other passage of the *Shih-chi*.²⁰

3. This same sentence does not speak about the *composition* but rather the *understanding* of the hymns. This seems to reflect the perspective of later readers instead of the original authors; at the time when Ssu-ma Ch'ien worked on the *Shih-chi*, the songs were actually being composed and must certainly have been understood by the court officials involved.

4. The text mentions only four of the nineteen hymns—exactly those four that in Eastern Han times came to serve as the core of the musical program of the suburban sacrifices.²¹ Although they certainly reflect the division of seasons according to the Five Phases system, they were by no means seasonally performed under Han Wu-ti. In Ssu-ma Ch'ien's day, the suburban sacrifices to

fang-chung ko 安世房中歌 which date from the reign of Han Kao-tsu 漢高祖 (r. 206/2–195 B.C.); for a discussion on their date see Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 105–11.

¹⁹ *Han-shu* 88.3594.

²⁰ See Michael Nylan, "The Chin wen / Ku wen Controversy in Han Times," *T'oung Pao* 80 (1994): 117. One may add that at least one scholar, Fukui Shigemasa 福井重雅, has argued that the "Erudites for the Five Canons" (*wu ching po-shih* 五經博士) were not installed under Han Wu-ti; the well-known event, allegedly of 136 B.C., should be regarded as an Eastern Han projection. See his articles "Rikukei · rikugei to gokei: Kandai ni okeru gokei no seiritsu" 六經六藝と五經: 漢代における五經の成立, *Chūgoku shigaku* 中國史學 4 (1994): 139–64; "Shin Kan jidai ni okeru hakase seido no tenkai: Gokei hakase no secchi o meguru gigi sairon" 秦漢時代における博士制度の展開: 五經博士の設置をめぐる疑義再論, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 54 (1995): 1–31; "To Chūjo no taisaku no kisoteki kenkyū" 董仲舒の對策の基礎的研究, *Shigaku zasshi* 史學雜誌 106 (1997): 157–204.

²¹ See Derk Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China: New Year and Other Annual Observances During the Han Dynasty 206 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), 189–209; Kern, *Die Hymnen der chinesischen Staatsopfer*, 45–48.

the heavenly deity Grand Unity were located at Kan-ch'üan, some 110 km northwest of the capital. Ideally, Han Wu-ti's sacrificial schedule would have asked for a visit to Kan-ch'üan every three years;²² actually, his trips were much more irregular, but in no case more than once in a year.²³ The reality of seasonal suburban sacrifices reflects, of course, the transfer of the suburban sacrifices from Kan-ch'üan and Fen-yin (the place for the sacrifice to the earth deity Hou-t'u 后土) to the altars in the suburbs of the capital—a historical move that after some shifts back and forth in late Western Han times was finally accomplished in A.D. 5 on the initiative of Wang Mang.²⁴

5. Finally, we also should ask why only these four hymns are mentioned. At least, we would have expected the fifth hymn that belongs to this particular cycle, namely the one directed to the direction and season of the "middle." This was in every respect the central hymn under Wu-ti after he had changed in 104 B.C. the cosmic-patron "phase" of the dynasty from water to earth. Michael Loewe has pointed out that Ssu-ma Ch'ien himself was probably closely involved in this decision.²⁵ Leaving out just this most important hymn may again reflect a peculiar Eastern Han view that the Western Han—like the Eastern Han itself after A.D. 26—had actually ruled under the phase of fire.²⁶ But perhaps even more telling is the fact that the "Book on Music" remains completely silent on all the other hymns (except those on the heavenly horses) from the Wu-ti period that celebrate both the appearance of auspicious omens and the encounter with spirits during the sacrifice. It was only about 32 B.C. that these hymns, though apparently still in use, were censored and condemned as licentious "melodies of Cheng" (*Cheng sheng* 鄭聲).²⁷ In the "Monograph on Ritual and Music" ("Li-yüeh chih" 禮樂志) of Pan Ku's *Han-shu*, this worst possible label is applied to Wu-ti's ritual music in what looks like a fragment from a late Western Han memorandum. This brief evaluation is

directly attached to the texts of the nineteen hymns and obviously serves the historian's purpose to dismiss these songs.²⁸ Chi An's alleged criticism of the hymns on heavenly horses—celebrations of Han Wu-ti's military expansion deep into Central Asia—is exactly in line with the later condemnation of the whole body of Wu-ti's sacrificial hymns.

Listing these additional fragments of evidence that consistently point to a much later composition of the "Book on Music," we are already considering the ideology of this *Shih-chi* chapter. My final remarks will focus on this issue in order to suggest that the spurious passage quoted above is not accidentally part of the "Book on Music" but directly contributes to its overall intent—that being a critique of Han Wu-ti's sacrificial music, ritual splendor, and imperial representation from the perspective of a ritual classicism that began to gain political and cultural dominance during the final decades of the Western Han. Three observations may suffice here.

First, the closing passage of the "Yüeh shu," based on the *Han Fei tzu*, relates the story of Duke P'ing of Chin 晉平公 (r. 558–533 B.C.) who on one occasion is said to have insisted on the performance of exciting new melodies (*hsin-sheng* 新聲), although he had been warned that this would lead to disaster. Predictably, his country suffered from draught for three years, and the Duke himself finally died from a disease.²⁹

Second, this short narrative is followed by a highly classicist statement on the correct order of ritual music that "upwards was to serve the ancestral temple and downwards was to transform the common people." (Note the proximity of this formula to the one ascribed to Chi An.) As in the preceding *Han Fei tzu* narrative, it warns against licentious melodies and notes that the ancient kings had their people listen to the "Ya" 雅 and the "Sung" 頌.³⁰

Third, although earlier treatises on music, like the "Yüeh-lun" 樂論 in *Hsün tzu* 荀子 or the respective paragraphs in *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* 呂氏春秋, deal at length with various aspects of orthodox music and inappropriate melodies, by far the most polemical and vigorous attack on "new melodies"—synonymous with "licentious melodies" (*yin-sheng* 淫聲), "melodies of a perishing state" (*wang-kuo chih sheng* 亡國之聲), or "melodies from Cheng and Wei" (*Cheng Wei chih sheng* 鄭衛之聲)—are

²² *Shih-chi* 28.1403; *Han-shu* 25B.1248.

²³ For an overview, see Edmund Burke Holladay Ord, "State Sacrifices in the Former Han Dynasty According to the Official Histories" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1967), 224–65.

²⁴ See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 B.C. to A.D. 9* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), 170–78.

²⁵ Michael Loewe, *Divination, Mythology, and Monarchy in Han China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994), 57.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59–60.

²⁷ On the meaning of "melodies of Cheng," see Jean-Pierre Diény, *Aux origines de la poésie classique en Chine* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 17–40.

²⁸ See *Han-shu* 22.1070–71.

²⁹ *Shih-chi* 24.1235–36.

³⁰ *Shih-chi* 24.1236–37. Contrary to this, the fragmentary memorial in *Han-shu* 22.1070–71 notes that the music employed at Wu-ti's sacrifices was completely devoid of "classical melodies" (*ya sheng* 雅聲).

found in the "Wei Wen hou" 魏文侯 paragraph of the "Yüeh-chi," which is fully incorporated into the *Shih-chi* "Book on Music."³¹ According to information in the *Han-shu*, the "Yüeh-chi" was compiled from existing sources early in the reign of Han Wu-ti³² before that emperor's sacrificial music began to be composed in approximately 113 B.C. Lacking any precedent or parallel in earlier sources, the "Wei Wen hou" paragraph is most likely a Han text—but why is it so polemical? What is this text reacting to? If it is indeed—and not just metaphorically—arguing about music (and this is suggested by the very context of the "Yüeh-shu"), the only possible choice in sight is Han Wu-ti's ritual music as it was perceived from the perspective of late Western Han ritual criticism. It was Wu-ti, let us not forget, who in one of his state sacrificial hymns boasted of "these new sounds" (*tzu hsinyin* 茲新音)—a formula that would have upset any ritual classicist.

In sum, the *Shih-chi* "Book on Music" conveys consistently the same message: a spurious account of Wu-ti's music serves to condemn the hymns on the heavenly horses directly, the middle part of the "Yüeh-chi" is an altogether highly classicist document including an aggressive attack on "new melodies," the following narra-

tive from the *Han Fei tzu* is exclusively devoted to just this point, and the concluding remarks attributed to the Grand Historian reiterate the program. Historically, it is not before the last decades of the Western Han that we encounter this ritual classicism in full force, effectively voiced by highly influential officials like K'uang Heng 匡衡 (chancellor 36–30 B.C.) who based their criticism of the remnants of Wu-ti's state rituals on a gradually emerging canon of ritual writings that purportedly reflected the correct model of high antiquity.³³

At the moment we dissociate the "Book on Music" from Ssu-ma Ch'ien's original *Shih-chi*, we also lose our single *terminus ante quem* for the *Li-chi* chapter "Yüeh-chi." And indeed, with the "Wei Wen hou" paragraph almost certainly being a Han product, one may be tempted to date both the "Yüeh-chi" and the *Shih-chi* "Book on Music," or at least substantial parts of them, within the same context of late Western / early Eastern Han ritual classicism. In this sense, the "Book on Music" suddenly appears as an original text of its own times, some decades after Ssu-ma Ch'ien.

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³¹ *Li-chi cheng-i* 禮記正義 (*Shih-san ching chu-shu*) 38.310a–39.313c; *Shih-chi* 24.1221–25.

³² *Han-shu* 30.1712.

³³ For an overview on K'uang Heng's activities, see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict*, 154–92.