

HISTORY AND LORE: INTERPRETIVE EMPLOTMENT AND “EMPTY WRITING” IN THE “HEREDITARY HOUSE OF ZHAO”

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Abstract

This study identifies two textual strata in the “Zhao shijia” of the *Shi ji*: the “wo 我 stratum” and the “legendary stratum.” While the “wo stratum” points to the existence of Zhao local historical records, the “legendary stratum” reveals an interpretive framework that guides the chapter’s presentation of the Zhao history toward the central concern and anxiety over the succession of lineage and power. The series of prophetic dreams and supernatural encounters that were emplotted in the narrative of Zhao history comprise this “legendary stratum” and point toward a key figure, King Wuling of Zhao, during whose time the Zhao state reached its pinnacle of power and prosperity. Accounts that are clearly fabrications, such as the story of the orphan of Zhao and later prophecies of the decline of the Zhao, show hidden connections to the personal experience of Sima Qian and to possible political dissent and discourses criticizing Emperor Wu of Han. In identifying such fabricated “empty writing” hidden in the chapter’s framework of interpretive emplotment, this article aims to offer one way to read the *Shi ji*’s account for the hereditary house of Zhao that follows a coherent pattern on the meta-level of historical narrative.

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Introduction

Among the various perspectives that scholars have brought to the study of the *Shi ji* 史記, two complementary approaches, in particular, reveal interesting dynamics in this canonical work. The first approach focuses on the micro level, identifying the discrete building blocks, different textual sources, and shifting structures and styles to reveal the diverse compositional practices and discursive tendencies contributing to the formation of the text; the second studies the text on a macro scale and focuses on systematic features, overall schemas, and meta-level governing principles that weave a coherent narrative. Despite the myriad conflicting and variant components, this latter approach points to a consistent and integral purpose, focusing on meaning in the work. Following in the footsteps of scholars who have pursued both these paths to fruition, this study discovers in one of the *Shi ji*'s longest chapters, the “Zhao shijia” 趙世家 (Hereditary House of Zhao), an ideal point

Abbreviations in Citations:

GSR	<i>Grand Scribe's Records</i> , vols. 1, 2, 5.1, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 2002, 2006, 2016, 2019.
<i>Han shu</i>	<i>Han shu</i> 漢書. 12 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1962.
He Jianzhang	He Jianzhang 何建章. <i>Zhanguo ce zhushi</i> 戰國策注釋. 2 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990.
Legge	James Legge (1815–1897), trans. <i>The Chinese Classics</i> . 5 vols. 2nd rev. ed. Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985.
Li Jingxing	Li Jingxing 李景星. <i>Shi ji pingyi</i> 史記評議. Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1986.
Liang Yusheng	Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1745–1819). <i>Shi ji zhiyi</i> 史記志疑. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1981.
<i>Shi ji</i>	<i>Shi ji</i> 史記. 10 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1963.
<i>Shi ji pinglin</i>	<i>Shi ji pinglin</i> 史記評林. Ling Zhilong 凌稚隆 (fl. 1576), comp. 5 vols. Rpt. Taipei: Diqiu, 1992.
SBBY	<i>Sibu beiyao</i> 四部備要
SBCK	<i>Sibu congkan</i> 四部叢刊
Takigawa	Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎 (1865–1946). <i>Shiki kaichū kōshō fu kōho</i> 史記會注考證附校補. 2 vols. Rpt. [Tokyo, 1934]; collation notes by Mizusawa Toshitada 水澤利忠. Shanghai: Guji, 1986.
Tan Qixiang	Tan Qixiang 譚其驥, ed. <i>Zhongguo lishi ditu ji</i> 中國歷史地圖集. 9 vols. Shanghai: Ditu, 1982.
Wang Liqi	Wang Liqi 王利器 (1912–1998), ed. <i>Shi ji zhuyi</i> 史記注譯. 4 vols. Xi'an: San Qin, 1988.
Wu and Lu	Wu Shuping 吳樹平 and Lu Zongli 呂宗力 [Lü Zongli], eds. and trans., <i>Quanzhu quanyi Shi ji</i> 全注全譯史記. 3 vols. Tianjin: Guji, 1995.
Yang, Zuo	Yang Bojun 楊伯峻. <i>Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu</i> 春秋左傳注. 4 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua, 1982.

of departure for what might be called the middle way, or a “meso-approach.” Here the textual excavation of two contrasting types of narrative strata: the “*wo* 我 stratum” and the “legendary stratum,” each suggesting varied origins and functions, reveals a coherent and instructive narrative framework for the chapter’s interpretation and representation of Zhao history.

Employing this meso-approach, this article first contrasts the features of these two strata, and then focuses on the “legendary stratum” to examine the chapter’s interpretive emplotment of a series of myths, legends, dreams, and supernatural encounters into the history of the Zhao clan. In exploring the joint significance of these stories to the chapter, it argues that instead of mere deftness and style in storytelling, this “legendary stratum” functions as a structural and semantic framework that offers implicit guidance for the representation and interpretation of Zhao history. In addition, it holds a meta-level significance pertaining to Sima Qian’s personal tragedy and disguised criticism of the ruler of his time, Emperor Wu of Han 漢武帝 (r. 141–87 B.C.E.). Thus, in this case, particular types of narrative elements, when extracted and examined as a textual stratum, turn out to reveal the hermeneutic strategy and structural design that not only hold together the different traditions and their multiplicity of source material for the presentation of a historical narrative, but also foreground an integral, coherent emphasis that hints at a meta-historiography across a larger set of texts centered upon the author-figure Sima Qian.

Studying historical writing as a form of narrative, a rhetorical construction that shares features with literature, Hayden White establishes his concept of “metahistory” on the basis of the prefiguration of the historical field. Metahistory consists of a poetics of historical writing beneath the surface of, or rather transcending, data (such as the details of events, figures, institutions, etc.), one that is essentially governed by the use of language. Involved here are different strategies of explaining the past—“explanation by formal argument, explanation by emplotment, and explanation by ideological implication,”¹ which allow a wide range of interpretations and meanings for the same set of data about past happenings. In the case here, Sima Qian explained Zhao history through interpretive emplotment, especially of the transformative fabrications from his “empty writing,” and represented the Zhao clan’s past through a narrative that, on a meta-level, can be read as rhetoric for the purpose of a personal discourse.

1. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, [1973] 2014), xxix–xxx, 1–37.

The idea of “interpretive emplotment” used in this study, rather than just “emplotment,” is thus meant to highlight the transformative process by which the historian’s understanding of the past as a receiver of various sources and traditions, governed by the historian’s specific hermeneutic inclinations, becomes an explanation and representation of the past for others through a narrative with the historian’s own rhetoric and discourse, governed by his or her own prefiguration of historical thinking and personal mode of storytelling. This dialectic between understanding and explanation, here in the “Zhao shijia,” is at once the outcome of a hermeneutic strategy and the basis that produces implicit structures and frameworks that instruct the reader in how to understand the past and lead the reader toward the central concerns of its narrative. Here, the “meta” part of history is on the level of larger narrative components, “building blocks” positioned within a composite text to realize a design of narrative flow. There is also meta-significance embedded on the micro or semiotic level, such as names (Gongsun Chujiu, etc.) used as signs of symbolic meaning, but mostly the meta-significance is found in structures of interpretive emplotment of narrative units such as myths, dream-visions, interactions with the supernatural and divine, and the interpretations and prophecies therein—and is manifested through the overarching hermeneutic framework within and beyond the chapter. On the macro-scale, across the whole text of the *Shi ji*, the meta-significance of the continuation of lineage and ancestral sacrifices remains one of the major through-themes. But the metahistory, the set of strategies of explanation, inevitably becomes heterogeneous and pluralistic, as it interacts differently with various topical concerns and contents in different chapters and manifests its influence through distinct strategies of interpreting and representing the past.

Composite Text, Composite “Author-figure”

As William G. Boltz points out, early China texts, both excavated and transmitted, “tend to be structurally composites” and were “constructed out of an assemblage of individual textual units,” and larger texts were compiled from putting together such “textual building blocks.”²

2. William G. Boltz, “The Composite Nature of Early China Texts,” in *Text and Ritual in Early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 57–59. See also Martin Kern, “Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants and the Modes of Manuscript Production in Early China,” *Journal of East Asian archaeology* 4.1 (2002), 143–81; Enno Giele, “Using Early Chinese Manuscripts as Historical Source Materials,” *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003), 409–38; Lai Guolong 來國龍, “Lun

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The *Shi ji*, with its one hundred and thirty chapters covering more than 2,500 years of history and legend, is certainly such a text.

The composite nature of the *Shi ji* manifests itself on several levels. Identifying embedded textual components in the “Jin shijia” 晉世家, William H. Nienhauser Jr. explains that Sima Qian’s notion of *Chun qiu* 春秋 refers to the whole range of source materials related to the classic, in both written and oral forms.³ Thus, this major source for the *Shi ji* was itself a composite tradition to begin with, apart from the plethora of other texts and traditions of which Sima Qian may have made use.⁴ Multiple genres were employed to shape the content of the *Shi ji* as well. For example, both David Hawkes and Stephen Owen have written about the composite nature of the *Shi ji*’s biography of Qu Yuan 屈原 (c. 340–278 B.C.E.), noting that the text reads like a not-very-successful patchwork of material from varied genres, with poetry, songs, and narratives, juxtaposing contradictory, and in some cases obviously unhistorical, accounts.⁵ Martin Kern, on the other hand, discusses the connections between cultural memory and the formation of texts conveying the tradition surrounding the epic figure Qu Yuan.⁶ Among other types of sources, the *Shi ji* is also known for utilizing archival

Zhanguo Qin Han xieben wenhua zhong wenben de liudong yu guding” 論戰國秦漢寫本文化中文本的流動與固定, *Jianbo* 2 (2007), 515–27; and many other studies.

3. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “For Want of a Hand: A Note on the ‘Hereditary House of Jin’ and Sima Qian’s ‘Chun qiu,’” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127.3 (2007), 246.

4. For a study of Sima Qian’s possible source texts, see Jin Dejian 金德建, *Sima Qian suojian shu kao* 司馬遷所見書考 (Shanghai: Renmin, 1963). See also discussions in Bruce J. Knickerbocker, “Penetrating the Transformations from the Ancient to the Present: Sima Qian’s Conception of the Kingly Way in the Use of Sources for the Hereditary Houses of the *Shi ji*” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), and, recently, Trever McKay, “Identifying the Textual Sources of *Shi ji*: Reviewing Past Research for a More Encompassing Methodology,” *Early China* 41 (2018), 375–413.

5. The biography of Qu Yuan in the *Shi ji* can be viewed as a rehash of Prince Huainan’s 淮南 (i.e., Liu An 劉安, 179–122 B.C.E.) “Introduction to Li sao (On Encountering Trouble)” 離騷傳, with “The Fisherman” 漁父 poem incorporated as a dialogue, also including the song “Heavenly Questions” 天問, the whole text of “Embracing Sand” 懷沙, as well as a story of court intrigues involving someone called Qu Ping 屈平 from unknown sources that partly resembles the style of the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 narratives. See David Hawkes, trans., *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1985), 15–66. Stephen Owen, “Poetry and Authorship: The *Songs of Chu* (Chuci),” in *How to Read Chinese Poetry in Context*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 30–47.

6. Martin Kern, “Cultural Memory and the Epic in Early Chinese Literature: The Case of Qu Yuan 屈原 and the Lisao 離騷,” *The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 9.1 (2022), 131–69.

records and orally transmitted anecdotes.⁷ Sometimes a single chapter bears the traces of distinct sources and textual marks—inconsistencies, sudden shifts in narrative directions, etc.—left by multiple hands involved in the compilation, resulting in a chapter with a composite structure, undecided in its representational purposes, and likely unfinished.⁸ Thus, the compilation process was itself of a “composite” nature. Especially in the hereditary house chapters, syntax breaks and “floating” textual headings (for example, standalone names and dates) suggest that sections of source texts might be copied in, possibly by various hands, at different times under topic headings or labels that aided the organization of materials.⁹ Conventional views hold that Sima Qian’s efforts to preserve different traditions and multiple perspectives in his sources actively introduced variations and discrepancies throughout the *Shi ji*, while the complex nature of the compilation process inevitably brought in more.

Therefore, what we see today as the *Shi ji* as a whole, and its chapters (here the “Zhao shijia”), should be treated as composite textual spaces where records from different sources and accounts of varied origins were consolidated. From the perspective of this study, some could be emplotted into, or imposed upon, the rest of the material in these textual spaces to offer interpretive instructions and to organize the content. Such interpretive emplotment could be performed by the conventionally recognized original “authors” of the *Shi ji*, or even by possible later redactors after their time.¹⁰ In Harold Bloom’s notion of “the Bible as a

7. For Sima Qian’s use of archives and other possible local sources, see Zhou Jing 周經, *Sima Qian Shi ji yu dang’an* 司馬遷史記與檔案 (Beijing: Dang’an, 1986); William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “A Reexamination of ‘The Biographies of the Reasonable Officials’ in the ‘Records of the Grand Historian,’” *Early China* 16 (1991), 233; and “Tales of the Chancellor(s): Sima Qian’s Unfinished Business,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 25 (2003), 99–117; Yuri Pines, “Biases and Their Sources: Qin History in the *Shi ji*,” *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005–06), 10–34.

8. Nienhauser identifies in the “Zhang Chengxiang liezhuan” 張丞相列傳 chapter several distinct sources for Zhang Cang’s 張蒼 life, one focused on private life, one emphasizing his role in the dynastic process as creator of the calendar, a third centered upon his political life, and a fourth one that placed him among other early Grand Masters of the Imperial Scribes. See Nienhauser, “Tales of the Chancellor(s),” especially 112.

9. William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “A Note on a Textual Problem in the ‘shih chi’ and Some Speculations concerning the Compilation of the Hereditary Houses,” *T’oung Pao* 89.1/3 (2003), 39–58.

10. William H. Nienhauser points out the murky textual lineage of the *Shi ji* with one example: as noted in the *Gu shi* 古史, Su Che 蘇轍 (1039–1102) once claimed that the account about Viscount Jian of Zhao’s 趙簡子 dream and Bian Que’s 扁鵲 explanation of it was removed from the “Zhao shijia” because the “hereditary houses” was a more serious genre. See “Translator’s Note for Pien Ch’üeh,” *GSR*, 9:20–21; Yang Yanqi

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library of literary texts,”¹¹ the Pentateuch we have today can be viewed as a result of a series of normative revisions, such as censoring, mutilating, and adding, to the original *Book of J* over a long period of text formation, with J referring to a hypothetical early compiler at the court of King Solomon. With each revision, the Elohist, the Deuteronomist, the Priestly authors, and the Redactor contributed multiple distinct textual strata to the formation of the Pentateuch. Though of a different nature and context, the complexity in the formation of the *Shi ji* is reminiscent of that in the case of the Pentateuch. The study here thus does not attempt to resolve the issue of authenticity and authorship of the “Zhao shijia,” or that of the personal narrative in chapter 130 of the *Shi ji*, or the letter to Ren An.¹² Instead, it works with a general concept of “Sima Qian” as perhaps a “composite” author—be it Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 B.C.E.), Sima Qian, Chu Shaosun 諸少孫 (c. 104–c. 30 B.C.E.), Yang Yun 楊惲 (d. 54 B.C.E.), or even Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 C.E.), certain later redactors, or combinations of these hands that put together, edited, and revised the *Shi ji* for different purposes. With the “Zhao shijia” as the main object of study, I hope to discuss the intertextuality among textual contents, structures, metaphors, symbols, fabrications, and possible “empty writing,” in relation to a “composite” image of Sima Qian emerging from a set of

楊燕起, *Lidai mingjia ping Shi ji* 歷代名家評史記 (Beijing: Beijing Shifan Daxue, 1986), 662. But the chapter we have today contains this passage in parallel with the account in the biography of Bian Que. This could suggest later redactions and revisions, or indicate the circulation of different versions.

11. Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg, *The Book of J* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 12.

12. Many studies address this topic. For example, all authors discuss the issues of authenticity and authorship in Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, Michael Nylan, and Hans van Ess, eds., *The Letter to Ren An and Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), especially in Durrant, “Seeking Answers, Finding More Questions,” 30–50, and Li, “The Letter to Ren An and Authorship in the Chinese Tradition,” 96–123; See also Hans van Ess, “The Friends of Sima Tan and Sima Qian,” 67–77 and Dorothee Schaab-Hanke, “Inheritor of a Subversive Mind? Approaching Yang Yun from his Letter to Sun Huizong,” 193–216, in *Views from Within, Views from Beyond: Approaches to the Shiji as an Early Work of Historiography*, ed. Hans van Ess, Olga Lomová, and Dorothee Schaab-Hanke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015); William H. Nienhauser, Jr., “Sima Qian and the *Shiji*,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing: Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600*, ed. Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 463–84; Esther Sunkyung Klein, “The History of a Historian: Perspectives on the Authorial Roles of Sima Qian” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2010); David R. Knechtges, “‘Key Words’, Authorial Intent, and Interpretation: Sima Qian’s Letter to Ren An,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 30 (2008), 75–84; Dorothee Schaab-Hanke, “Did Chu Shaosun Contribute to a Tradition of the Scribe?” *Oriens Extremus* 44 (2003/2004), 11–26; and many others.

writings centering upon this author-figure. The name “Sima Qian” is used as the referencing symbol for this composite author-figure, a signifier that is open for interpretation in terms of referent, boundaries, and transformations over time. The set of writings from which “Sima Qian” emerges, including above-mentioned personal narrative and letter, Sima Qian’s biography in the *Han shu*, and other texts that contribute to the construction of this author-figure, can perhaps be called the “Sima Qian textbase.” This study thus offers one reading of the “Zhao shijia” through identifying coherent patterns in its narrative of Zhao history and making connections between the chapter’s interpretive framework and the central concerns of the *Shi ji*’s author-figure as foregrounded in the “Sima Qian textbase.”

While the “Zhao shijia” is certainly a composite text that bases the history of the Zhao clan on a complex pool of sources and indeed bears many of the above-mentioned features,¹³ it stands out as a rather strange case with its own set of textual anomalies. Here we find not only systematic discrepancies in dating and recounting historical events, but also, more interestingly, drastic contradictions and strikingly unique, fabricated additions when compared with parallel accounts from other *Shi ji* chapters such as the “Qin benji” 秦本紀 and the “Jin shijia,” the chronological tables, and major source texts such as the *Zuo zhuan* 左傳, the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策, etc. Following the leads offered by these discrepancies and contradictions, this study identifies in the “Zhao shijia” text two narrative strata of contrasting natures that are of interest to the analysis here.

13. For studies on the history of the Zhao, see Dong Yue 董說 (1620–1686) and Miao Wenyuan 繆文遠, *Qi guo kaoding bu* 七國考訂補 (Shanghai: Guji, 1987); Handan shi lishi xuehui 邯鄲市歷史學會 and Hebei sheng lishi xuehui 河北省歷史學會, *Zhao guo lishi wenhua luncong* 趙國歷史文化論叢 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 1989); Zhang Wushi 張午時 and Feng Zhigang 馮志剛, *Zhao guo shi* 趙國史 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin, 1996); Tao Zhenggang 陶正剛, Hou Yi 侯毅, and Qu Chuanfu 渠川福, *Taiyuan Jin guo Zhao Qing mu* 太原晉國趙卿墓 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1996); Shen Changyun 沈長雲, et al. *Zhao guo shigao* 趙國史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2000); Bai Guohong 白國紅, *Chun qiu Jin guo Zhao shi yanjiu* 春秋晉國趙氏研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2007); Fujita Katsuhisa 藤田勝久, “Dui *Shi ji* ‘Zhao shijia’ de shiliao kaocha” 對史記趙世家的史料考察, in *Shi ji Zhanguo shiliao yanjiu* 史記戰國史料研究. trans. Hirose Kunio 廣瀨薰雄 and Cao Feng 曹峰 (Shanghai: Guji, 2008), 270–306; Zhang Longfeng 張龍鳳, “Zhao guo lishi dili yanjiu zongshu” 趙國歷史地理研究綜述, *Handan xueyuan xuebao* 邯鄲學院學報 25.4 (2015), 32–35; Shi Xuecong 史雪聰, “*Shi ji* Zhao shijia xinzheng” 史記趙世家新證 (M.A. thesis, Shanxi shifan daxue, 2019); Wang Xiaomin 王小敏, “*Shi ji* Zhao shijia xushi yanjiu” 史記趙世家敘事研究 (M.A. thesis, Shaanxi shifan daxue, 2019).

The “Wo Stratum”

While some discrepancies are textual problems with unknown causes,¹⁴ a more systematic and consistent type of discrepancy in the “Zhao shijia” clearly indicates strata of texts from different sources. When compared to other records, especially those in the *Shi ji*’s own chronological tables, the dates of some historical events in the “Zhao Shijia” chapter are consistently off by one year, starting around the years of the death of Marquis Lie 烈 of Zhao (r. 408–387 B.C.E., or r. 408–400 B.C.E. according to “Zhao shijia” records) and of the succession of Marquis Jing 敬 of Zhao (r. 386–375 B.C.E.).¹⁵ Fujita Katsuhisa 藤田勝久 offers a thorough study on the possible sources of the records on the period during and after the reign of Marquis Jing (from 386 B.C.E. onward) and argues for the existence of chronological historical records kept at the Zhao state capital, Handan 邯鄲.¹⁶ Because the First Emperor of the Qin (Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, r. 221–210 B.C.E.) was born and raised in Handan, these Handan records were probably regarded as Qin-related documents, and thus survived the burning of non-Qin records during the Qin dynasty.¹⁷ Sima Qian’s access to these Handan records would explain, first, the myriad of new information offered in the “Zhao shijia” after Handan became the capital of Zhao in the first year (386 B.C.E.) of Marquis Jing. Second, it would explain the many systematic discrepancies between the dates in the “Zhao shijia” and those in the chronological tables. The reason, according to Fujita, is that the Zhao used a calendar with the new year starting after the twelfth month, but the Qin used a calendar attributed to the legendary Emperor Zhuanxu 顓頊 with the new year starting after the tenth month.¹⁸

14. For example, the “Zhao shijia” (*Shi ji*, 43.1792–93) and the chronological tables (*Shi ji*, 15.687–92) both seem to err on the time of Viscount Jian of Zhao’s death, dating it to 458 B.C.E. According to the accepted dating in the *Zuo zhuan* (Yang, *Zuo*, Ai 27, 1734–36), Viscount Jian died in the thirty-sixth year (476 B.C.E.) of Duke Ding of Jin (r. 511–475 B.C.E.), see also Liang Yusheng, 23.1055; Takigawa, 43.28–29; *Shi ji pinglin*, 43.286. In one explanation for this chronological problem in the “Zhao shijia,” Wu and Lu hold that the section of text from “That year, the Yue King Gou Jian destroyed Wu” (是歲，越王勾踐滅吳) to “In the seventeenth year of Duke Chu of Jin, Viscount Jian expired” (晉出公十七年，簡子卒) is an interpolation (43.1652, n. 1).

15. The “Zhao shijia” offers an additional step of power transition, stating that “in the ninth year (400 B.C.E.), Marquis Lie expired, and his younger brother, Duke Wu was invested” (九年，烈侯卒，弟武公立; *Shi ji*, 43.1798) before Marquis Jing. In the chronological tables, the first year of Duke Wu was 399 B.C.E. (*Shi ji*, 15.710).

16. Fujita Katsuhisa, “Dui *Shi ji* ‘Zhao shijia’ de shiliao kaocha,” 270–306.

17. Fujita, “Dui *Shi ji* ‘Zhao shijia’ de shiliao kaocha,” 290–92.

18. Fujita, “Dui *Shi ji* ‘Zhao shijia’ de shiliao kaocha,” 286–87.

In addition to Fujita's findings, the presence of such a textual strata consisting of chronological state records is also substantiated by the chapter's use of *wo* 我 ("us," "our," or "ours") to refer to the State of Zhao.¹⁹ The first appearance of this usage is in the fourth year (383 B.C.E.) of Marquis Jing²⁰ and the last appearance is in the twentieth year (246 B.C.E.) of King Xiaocheng 孝成 of Zhao (r. 265–245 B.C.E.), when Ying Zheng 嬴政, the future first emperor, was enthroned as King of Qin.²¹ The twenty-four instances of *wo* being used to refer to the Zhao in the "Zhao shijia" chapter reveal a consistent textual stratum with a pronounced local identity, suggesting an origin in local historical records. Another piece of evidence corroborates this idea by offering a glimpse of the self-aggrandizing spirit in expressions of self-identity that appear in Zhao local records. The "Zhao shijia" notes that in 400 B.C.E., Duke Wu 武, the younger brother of Marquis Lie, was installed as ruler after Marquis Lie's death, and Marquis Jing only succeeded after this Duke Wu died in 387 B.C.E.²² This record bears the signature of the systematic one-year discrepancy caused by Zhao using its own calendar, while the *Shi ji*'s chronological table subsumed this record into a different calendrical system and put the first year of Duke Wu of Zhao as 399 B.C.E.²³ It contains another interesting and jarring discrepancy because at this time in the narrative the designation of the Zhao ruler should have been *hou* 侯, "Marquis," instead of *gong* 公, "Duke."²⁴ This is also the only place in the chapter where a Zhao ruler is referred to as "Duke." The "Zhao shijia" text here must have followed a different source because this unique record of Duke Wu's installment was not found in the *Shiben* 世本 version of Zhao history, nor in accounts from "those who recount the tales of Zhao" 說趙語者.²⁵ Thus, this mistaken title could very well be a textual residue, just like the many usages of *wo* in the chapter, that was

19. On the usage of *wo* in the *Shi ji* in general, see Zhang Xun 張循, "Shi ji suo yong 'wo' zi shuo" 史記所用"我"字說, *Shixue shi yanjiu* 史學史研究 117.1 (2005), 9–14; and Tsang Chi-hung 曾志雄, "Shi ji ji'nian de 'wo'" 史記紀年的"我," *Weinan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 渭南師範學院學報 30.3 (2015), 39–46.

20. "In the fourth year [383 B.C.E.], Wei defeated us at Tu tai (Rabbit Terrace)" (四年, 魏敗我兔臺; *Shi ji*, 43.1798).

21. "In the twentieth year [246 B.C.E.], the King of Qin, Zheng, was first invested. Qin seized our Jinyang" (二十年, 秦王政初立。秦拔我晉陽; *Shi ji*, 43.1829).

22. *Shi ji*, 43.1798.

23. *Shi ji*, 15.710.

24. See Takigawa, 43.37. Some traditional scholars, including Liang Yusheng (9.404, 23.1058) and Qian Mu (Wu and Lu, 43.1657, n. 2), thus reject the notion that there was a Duke Wu after Marquis Lie.

25. See Qiao Zhou's 譙周 (d. 270) comment, *Shi ji*, 43.1798, n. 1. The phrase Zhao *yu* means "words of Zhao" but is taken by conventional scholars as if it were a title, *Tales of Zhao*, *Zhao yu*.

introduced from local records where the Zhao state’s self-aggrandizing accounts referred its rulers as “Dukes.” These pieces of evidence—this chapter’s systematic one-year discrepancies in chronology, its usages of *wo* to refer to the Zhao state, the jarring “Duke” title in the case of Duke Wu’s succession, and the possible additional source—all support the idea that the years from Marquis Lie’s death to Marquis Jing’s succession may be the starting point for the use of Zhao local records, to which Sima Qian must have had access.

These systematic features reveal one consistent textual stratum in the formation of the *Shi ji*’s narrative of Zhao history. Here I call it the “*wo* stratum,” meaning the stratum of the local chronological records of Zhao. In addition, this study discovers a second textual stratum that could contain components of a similarly local origin but that serves a very different function in the “Zhao shijia” narrative. It will offer a glimpse into the interpretive emplotment that constructs an implicit framework for representing and understanding the major developments in the history of Zhao, and discuss possible meta-level concerns retrospectively projected into the past.

The “Legendary Stratum”

This second narrative stratum can be identified based on a unique feature of the chapter: the use of mythical lore, dream prophecies, visions, divinations, and encounters with spirits and deities to foreshadow and highlight the major events in the Zhao clan’s historical trajectory. Here I call it the “legendary stratum.” The *Shi ji* is a complex text that involves a plethora of such accounts in various forms. In particular, its narratives concerning the Zhao and Qin states tend to include more of these components than other chapters, with the “Zhao shijia” containing a particularly large number, many of them not found in any other historical sources of the time.²⁶ This would suggest that in addition to fact-oriented, concise chronological records, the Zhao may also have kept a set of legendary accounts of its past. Many accounts within this textual stratum are prophetic and were possibly designed within the Zhao political culture to legitimize the clan’s self-claimed feudal lord status. Though oral transmission was also possible, these legendary accounts, if in written form, likely survived the burning of books and records during the Qin dynasty due to their Qin-related motifs emphasizing a common ancestor shared by both Qin and Zhao, and later became accessible to Sima Qian.

26. Liang Yusheng, 1051–52.

Scholars have identified a rich tradition of dream culture and dream interpretation in the Zhao and Qin regions of early China.²⁷ Traditional scholars in particular commented on the use of dreams in the “Zhao shijia” as an enriching device that forms a consistent spiritual theme, foreshadowing later developments in the history of the Zhao clan, which shows great style and deftness in storytelling.²⁸ Still, some criticized the many dream accounts and supernatural encounters in the chapter as something strange and fallacious, inappropriate in historical writing, related to the excessive worship of gods and spirits in the Zhao state and Sima Qian’s personal interest in the uncanny, reflecting a style that was “sensational” (鈞奇), “imaginary, erroneous, shadowy, and erratic” (虛誕飄忽).²⁹

However, a closer look at the “legendary stratum” reveals that the use of these accounts was selective, and therefore their inclusion in the Zhao chapter does not necessarily reflect the simple goal of preserving the legends and lore from accessible sources. For example, two clearly Zhao-related dreams from the *Zuo zhuan*, one of Sima Qian’s main sources, are found left out of the “Zhao shijia” chapter: one from the thirty-first year of Duke Zhao of Lu 魯昭公 when Viscount Jian of Zhao 趙簡子 dreamt about a naked boy singing, and another from the fifth year of Duke Cheng of Lu 魯成公, where Zhao Ying [Yingqi] 趙嬰 dreamt of a heavenly spirit asking for sacrifice, and, by following its directions, brought disaster upon himself.³⁰ Rather than merely collating stories, the *Shi ji* chapter’s “legendary stratum” consists of a mythical account of the origin of the Zhao clan, the lore about the Orphan of Zhao that tells of the Zhao lineage being wiped out and then restored, and four dream- or vision-prophecies and two encounters with the supernatural that foretell successes of the clan, its decline, and ultimate downfall. I argue that these accounts might have been emplotted into the history of Zhao to construct a prophetic, and thus reflective, interpretive framework that coherently emphasizes the key idea of *xu* 續, “succession, continuation,” of bloodline, noble status, and hereditary political power.

27. See Lü Miaojun 呂廟軍, “Xian Qin Zhao ren meng wenhua jiexi” 先秦趙人夢文化解析, *Handan xueyuan xuebao* 22.2 (2012), 39–43; also Xiong Daolin 熊道麟, *Xian Qin meng wenhua tanwei* 先秦夢文化探微 (Taipei: Xuehai, 2004).

28. Li Jingxing, 45–46.

29. Liang Yusheng, 1051–52.

30. Yang, *Zuo*, Zhao 31, 1513; Yang, *Zuo*, Cheng 5, 821; See also Liang Yusheng, 1051.

Mythical Beginning

The beginning of the chapter identifies a common ancestor of the Zhao and the Qin, Zhong Yan 中衍, who was chosen by Emperor Da Wu (i.e. Tai Wu) 大戊 of Yin 殷 via divination to be his chariot driver. Zhong Yan is described later in the chapter as one who “had the body of a bird but [spoke the] language of men” (鳥身人言), a crucial feature that appears in multiple chapters about the mythical origins of both the Qin and Zhao clans.³¹ The “Zhao shijia” then traces the Zhao clan’s descendants to Zao Fu 造父, who was favored by King Miu 繆, i.e. Mu 穆, of Zhou (r. c. 956–918 B.C.E.) and presents a legendary account about the establishment of the clan in the Zhou:

King Mu ordered Zao Fu to drive [his chariot] and went to the west on a tour of inspection. [King Mu] met with the Queen Mother of the West, enjoyed [the rendezvous] so much that he forgot about returning.³² However, King Yan of Xu rebelled. King Mu sped his horses one thousand *li* a day to attack King Yan of Xu, and crushed him. Only then did he bestow Zhaocheng (The Walled City of Zhao) upon Zao Fu, and from then on they became the Zhao Clan.

繆王使造父御，西巡狩，見西王母，樂之忘歸。而徐偃王反，繆王日馳千里馬，攻徐偃王，大破之。乃賜造父以趙城，由此為趙氏。³³

This founding myth sets an underlying tone, inaugurating the “Zhao shijia”’s unique feature of utilizing legendary accounts to highlight crucial developments in the history of the Zhao. Throughout the text, accounts of four dreams or visions and of two supernatural encounters are strategically emplotted in the narrative, foreshadowing major events. Within this interpretive framework, the legendary account about the orphan of Zhao presents the first major crisis facing the clan, which is foretold by the first prophetic dream in the chapter.

The Orphan of Zhao

The story, widely known by the title “The Orphan of Zhao” 趙氏孤兒 in the literature and drama of later times, contributes the most significant level of textual discrepancies that signal the “legendary stratum.” This account in the “Zhao shijia” apparently contradicts evidence found in all

31. *Shi ji*, 43.1784, see also 1.10–11, 5.173–74; *GSR*, 1:4–5, 87.

32. For this legendary romance, see *Mu Tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳, 3.1a, *SBBY*.

33. *Shi ji*, 43.1779.

other historical records and is identified by almost all commentators as spurious. It starts with a brief recounting of historical context:

[As for] Zhao Shuo. In the third year of Duke Jing of Jin (597 B.C.E.), [Zhao] Shuo, on behalf of Jin, commanded the Lower Army to save Zheng and fought King Zhuang of Chu (r. 613–591 B.C.E.) by the Yellow River. [Zhao] Shuo took Duke Cheng of Jin's older sister as his wife.

趙朔。晉景公之三年，朔為晉將下軍救鄭，與楚莊王戰河上。朔娶晉成公姊為夫人。³⁴

In the original text, the name “Zhao Shuo” is a floating textual fragment, functioning as a topical marker or label at the beginning of the section that recounts the life events of this figure.³⁵ The narrative then quickly moves to present the major issue facing the Zhao clan:

In the third year of Duke Jing of Jin, Tu'an Gu, a Grand Master, desired to execute the Zhao Clan.³⁶

晉景公之三年，大夫屠岸賈欲誅趙氏。

This could also be a line signaling the topic of the following section, with its time marker mechanically repeated immediately after its appearance three lines above. This feature suggests source materials from different origins were being organized by these textual labels and time markers into their expected positions in the chapter, and thus reflects the practice of episode emplotment in the formation of a historical narrative. But the narrative does not continue to address how the Zhao clan was wiped out, as cued in this topic line. Instead, it turns abruptly to note a dream of Zhao Dun, the father of Zhao Shuo:

Earlier, when Zhao Dun was alive, he saw in a dream that Shu Dai was holding his waist and crying, and was extremely sorrowful; then he stopped and laughed, clapped his hands, and sang. [Zhao] Dun divined about it; the patterns [of cracks on the tortoise shell] ceased, but later resumed. Yuan, the Scribe of Zhao,³⁷ interpreted it and said,

34. *Shi ji*, 43.1783.

35. This is a usage similar to the topic marker “Zhao Su” 趙夙 that occurs earlier (*Shi ji*, 43.1781). The topic label apparently has no syntactical connection with the text that follows and is a structural feature in the composition of the *Shi ji* chapters about hereditary houses. See also Nienhauser, “A Note on a Textual Problem,” 56–57.

36. An abbreviated account of Tu'an Gu and the execution of the Zhao clan can be found in the “Hann shijia” 韓世家, *Shi ji*, 45.1865–66.

37. Takigawa (43.9) notes that Zhao should not have its own scribe, therefore the character Zhao 趙 before *shi* 史 could be added by mistake. Chavannes interprets it as

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“This dream is extremely evil. It is not about My Lord yourself, but the son of My Lord. However it is indeed the fault of My Lord. When it comes to your grandson, Zhao will increasingly decline each generation.”

初，趙盾在時，夢見叔帶持要而哭，甚悲；已而笑，拊手且歌。盾卜之，兆絕而後好。趙史援占之，曰：「此夢甚惡，非君之身，乃君之子，然亦君之咎。至孫，趙將世益衰。」³⁸

The word *chu* 初 again marks the point where material from another source, often without a clear time reference, was brought into the chronological accounts to refer back to earlier happenings, sometimes serving to explain current situations or to foreshadow future events.³⁹

Here Zhao Dun dreamed about the baffling emotional expressions of Shu Dai, one of the Zhao clan ancestors. Dream divination foretold trouble for his son Zhao Shuo and the Zhao clan, and identified the cause in Zhao Dun himself. Zhao Dun was in charge of the Jin state administration when Duke Xiang 襄 of Jin (r. 628–621 B.C.E.) died, and his manipulation of the succession of the Jin throne brought trouble on all sides. He deemed Duke Xiang’s son, the legitimate heir, too young, and planned to instead invite the Duke’s brother back from the state of Qin to become the next ruler of Jin. Duke Xiang’s wife, mother of the legitimate heir, cried day and night, entreating Zhao Dun. He started to fear the political power behind the heir’s mother and eventually installed the heir, Duke Ling 靈 of Jin (r. 620–607 B.C.E.), on the throne. He then sent troops to stop the Qin armies on their way escorting Duke Xiang’s brother back to Jin and engaged in battles with the state of Qin.⁴⁰ Duke Ling of Jin, unfortunately, was vicious and later sought to kill Zhao Dun. When Zhao Dun fled the capital, one of the Zhao clansmen assassinated Duke Ling, and another of Duke Xiang’s brothers (and thus Duke Ling’s uncle) was then installed: this was Duke Cheng 成 (r. 606–600 B.C.E.).⁴¹ After Duke Cheng’s death, his son Duke Jing 景 (r. 599–581 B.C.E.) succeeded.

“le clerc attaché” of the Zhao clan, see Édouard Chavannes, trans. *Les Mémoires historiques de Se-ma Ts’ien*, 5v. 1895–1905 (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1969), 5.16.

38. *Shi ji*, 43.1783.

39. David Schaberg identifies analepsis in the *Zuo zhuan* as “a retrospective operation [that] corresponds to the proleptic figures of prediction and foreshadowing.” Often initiated by the word *chu*, analepsis “interrupts the temporal progression of the anecdote series and returns the reader to the first causes of the event.” Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 205; Nienhauser, “Tales of the Chancellor(s),” 108.

40. See *Shi ji*, 43.1782; 39.1671–73; 5.195.

41. *Shi ji*, 43.1782; 39.1673–75; 5.196. The “Zhao shijia” contradicts other historical records in terms of the identity and kinship relations of several of the Jin rulers.

By the time of Tu'an Gu's retaliation against the Zhao clan, Zhao Dun had already died and his son Zhao Shuo succeeded him as the head of Zhao clan, inheriting his noble rank and political power at the Jin court.⁴² Zhao Shuo became even more powerful in Jin politics and military command, later marrying Duke Jing's aunt, the sister of Duke Cheng.

It was in this context that the "Zhao shijia" continues its story about Tu'an Gu's planned attack. The story tells that Tu'an, a favorite of Duke Ling and now Duke Jing's Minister of Justice, incriminated Zhao Dun by identifying him as the head of the assassins, his goal being to wipe out the Zhao clan. Hann Jue 韓厥 at this time was not yet installed as one of Jin's Six Excellencies.⁴³ Unable to dissuade Tu'an Gu, or to persuade Zhao Shuo to flee, he could not forestall the impending disaster. Zhao Shuo told him, "If you, Sir, would be sure not to let the sacrifices to Zhao cease, I, [Zhao] Shuo could die without remorse" (子必不絕趙祀，朔死不恨).⁴⁴ Hann Jue so promised. Tu'an Gu then led the military commanders to attack the Zhao clan at the Lower Palace (下宮)⁴⁵ and wiped out the entire clan, without requesting prior permission from Duke Jing of Jin.⁴⁶

This account of the destruction of the Zhao clan contradicts other historical records. Both the *Zuo zhuan* and the "Jin shijia," among other accounts of the time, recorded that major clan members killed at the Lower Palace, as mentioned in the "Zhao shijia," Zhao Shuo, Zhao Tong 趙同, Zhao Kuo 趙括, and Zhao Yingqi 趙嬰齊, died at different times due to different reasons. To raise one striking example, Zhao Yingqi was exiled by his brothers Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo due to his affair with Zhao Shuo's wife, Lady Zhuang 莊姬, who therefore slandered Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo in front of Duke Jing of Jin; the Duke then had both men killed.⁴⁷ In fact, Tu'an Gu, the archenemy of the Zhao clan, only

42. *Shi ji*, 43.1782.

43. Hann Jue was a descendant of Viscount Wu 武 of Hann whose ancestors had the same *cognomen*, Ji 姬, with that of the Zhou royal house. Viscount Wu of Hann served the Jin and was enfeoffed in Hannyuan 韓原 (Plains of Hann), therefore his descendants took the *cognomen* Hann. In 588 B.C.E., Jin installed Hann Jue as Viscount Xian 獻 of Hann, one of its Six Excellencies. See *Shi ji*, 45.1865–66, 39.1678; *GSR*, 5.1:355–56, 337, n. 299; Yang, *Zuo*, Cheng 2, 790–800.

44. For the parallel account in "Hann shijia," see *Shi ji*, 45.1865–66.

45. Wang Liqi (43.1309, n. 17) reads *xiagong* 下宮 as the inner palace (*hougong* 后宮), while Chavannes (5:18) translates it as "le palais inférieur." The Zhonghua shuju edition of *Shi ji* marks *xiagong* as toponym.

46. "Killing Zhao Shuo, Zhao Tong, Zhao Kuo, Zhao Yingqi, [Tu'an Gu] completely wiped out his clan" 殺趙朔、趙同、趙括、趙嬰齊，皆滅其族. *Shi ji*, 43.1783.

47. According to *Zuo zhuan* records, Zhao Shuo was the commander of the Lower Army in the third year of Duke Jing of Jin (597 B.C.E.). In 589 B.C.E., Luan Shu 欒書 replaced Zhao Shuo as commander. Therefore, Zhao Shuo must have died by then. In

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appears in the “Zhao shijia” account here, not in the “Jin shijia,” nor any *Zuo zhuan* parallel accounts. This *Shi ji* chapter here, appears to be the very beginning of all stories about such a grave crisis for the Zhao caused by this particular figure. He is suspected by multiple scholars to be a purely fabricated figure. The “Zhao shijia” account about the orphan of Zhao, with its drastic contradictions with other historical records, has thus been identified as a complete fabrication.⁴⁸

The “Zhao shijia” story then tells that Zhao Shuo’s wife, Duke Cheng’s sister, was pregnant at the time and fled to the ducal palace to hide. One of Zhao Shuo’s retainers, Gongsun Chujiu 公孫杵臼, asked Zhao Shuo’s friend Cheng Ying 程嬰, “Why didn’t you die?” (胡不死), that is, why did he not choose to commit suicide out of his loyalty to Zhao Shuo. It is certainly strange to ask for such a strong commitment from a friend, and it immediately alerts an astute reader of something unusual. This will be discussed below. Cheng Ying, however, answered without any indication of surprise that he would wait for the baby to be born. If it was a boy, then he would serve him; if it was a girl, then he would die in a dignified manner. Zhao Shuo’s wife indeed gave birth to a son. As the story goes, the baby had to go through a drastic test first when Tu’an Gu heard about this and searched for it in the palace. The lady “put her son in her pantalets” (置兒袴中) and prayed, “If the Zhao Clan is [destined] to die out, then you may cry. If it is not to die out, you shall make no sound” (趙宗滅乎，若號；即不滅，若無聲).⁴⁹ Remaining silent, the orphan survived. Anticipating repeated searches for the orphan, Gongsun Chujiu decided to sacrifice himself to remove any further suspicions and risk. Together with Cheng Ying, they replaced the orphan with another baby. Then Cheng Ying, pretending to seek monetary reward, went to sell out Gongsun Chujiu and led the generals to where he and the false baby were hiding. As a result, both were killed and possibilities of future searches

588 B.C.E., however, Zhao Kuo became an Excellency and Zhao Yingqi’s affair with Zhao Shuo’s wife, Lady Zhuang, was discovered in 587 B.C.E. In the fourteenth year of Duke Jing of Jin (586 B.C.E.), Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo exiled Zhao Yingqi to Qi 齊. In the eighth year of Duke Cheng of Lu 魯成公, and the seventeenth year of Duke Jing of Jin (583 B.C.E.), Lady Zhuang slandered Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo, causing them to be killed by Duke Jing. Yang, Zuo, Cheng 2–8, 785–841. See also *Shi ji*, 39.1676–79; *GSR*, 5.1:352–57.

48. For the details of these dramatic discrepancies in dates and specific happenings, see comments in Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648), *Zuo zhuan zhengyi* 左傳正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu* with *jiaokan ji* 十三經注疏附校勘記, Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764–1849) coll. (Taipei: Dahua, 1989), 26.21–22; Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202), “Cheng Ying Chujiu” 程嬰杵臼, in *Rongzhai suibi* 容齋隨筆 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005), 10.135–36; *Shi ji pinglin*, 43.270; Liang Yusheng, 23.1050–51; Takigawa, 43.10–11, 15–16.

49. *Shi ji*, 43.1783.

and attacks were thus eliminated, while the real orphan, the lone heir of Zhao, was preserved and secretly brought up in the mountains by Cheng Ying.⁵⁰

Cut off, Cease, and Continue

At this point, the story turns to Hann Jue's effort fifteen years later to bring back the orphan and reinstate the Zhao clan at Jin court. Contradicting all other historical sources with regard to Zhao Wu's age when he was brought back, the story situates this major development at the occasion when Duke Jing of Jin became ill and, as recorded in the *Zuo zhuan*, dreamed of a ghost.⁵¹ The "Zhao shijia" story, while omitting the Duke's dream, tells that he divined about his illness and identified its cause to be the evil influence from "the descendants of Da Ye (Ye the Great) whose line was not continued" 大業之後不遂者. Here the key idea of the succession of bloodline is foregrounded as it meant the continuation of sacrifices offered by descendants to the clan's ancestors. Knowing that the orphan of Zhao, i.e. Zhao Wu 趙武, was still alive, Hann Jue immediately pointed this out to the Duke:

Those descendants of Da Ye who whose sacrifices have been cut off in Jin—aren't they the Zhao Clan? Now all those from Zhong Yan are of the Ying *cognomen*. Zhong Yan had the face of a man and the beak of a bird, descended to assist Emperor Da Wu [i.e., Tai Wu] of the Yin, down to the Son of Heaven of the Zhou, all [his descendants] had manifested virtue. Down to [the time of King] You and [King] Li [of Zhou] who did not follow the [proper] Way, Shu Dai then left Zhou to go to Jin, and served the late Lord, Marquis Wen. All the way to [the time of] Duke Cheng, [the Zhao clan] had for generations established merit and never had their sacrifices cut off. Now My Lord, however, has wiped out the House of Zhao, and the people of the capital pity them. Therefore, it was manifested through the tortoise shells and divining straws. May My Lord consider it.

大業之後在晉絕祀者，其趙氏乎？夫自中衍者皆嬴姓也。中衍人面鳥喙，降佐殷帝大戊，及周天子，皆有明德。下及幽厲無道，而叔帶去周適晉，事先君文侯，至于成公，世有立功，未嘗絕祀。今吾君獨滅趙宗，國人哀之，故見龜策。唯君圖之。⁵²

50. *Shi ji*, 43.1783–84.

51. Yang, *Zuo*, Cheng 10, 849–50.

52. *Shi ji*, 43.1784–85. See also *Shi ji*, 39.1679; *GSR*, 5.1:356–57; *Shi ji*, 14.625; *Takigawa*, 43.15–16.

According to the “Jin shijia” chapter, when the Jin executed Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo, and exterminated their entire clan, Hann Jue said, “Can the merits of Zhao Cui and Zhao Dun be forgotten? Why are their sacrifices cut off?” (趙衰，趙盾之功豈可忘乎？奈何絕祀！). The Duke thus reinstated the Zhao clan.⁵³ Note the absence of the whole episode of Gongsun Chujiu and Cheng Ying’s intervention here. While in the “Jin shijia” Hann Jue only cited the “merits” 功 of two recent clan members who made significant contributions to the Jin, in the “Zhao shijia” he traced the Zhao clan’s merits first back to Zhong Yan, the common ancestor of both Qin and Zhao, then to Shu Dai, who first brought the clan to the State of Jin, identifying the clan’s services to the Kings as their “manifested virtue” and their later services to the Dukes of Jin as “merits.” He also made sure to mention Zhong Yan’s bird-like features and identify him as an almost divine figure who “descended to assist” the Yin Emperor. With this, the “Zhao shijia” story clearly stresses the succession of family line, foregrounds its mythical origin, and highlights the crucial mythical features of the Zhao ancestor that functions in the chapter’s “legendary stratum” to repeatedly foreshadow an important descendant of the Zhao, King Wuling 武靈 (r. 325–299 B.C.E.).

The story then emphasizes Hann Jue’s contribution by stating “only then did Duke Jing plan with Hann Jue to invest the orphan son of Zhao” (於是景公乃與韓厥謀立趙孤兒), and he “relied on Hann Jue’s troops to coerce the commanders” (因韓厥之眾以脅諸將), so that Zhao Wu was recognized as the heir and Tu’an Gu’s clan was instead wiped out. Duke Jing “again gave Zhao Wu lands and towns just as before” (復與趙武田邑如故).⁵⁴ Fief towns and lands were inherited by the legitimate heir of the head of a clan, normally the son of the clan head’s main wife. The major discrepancy caused by the “Zhao shijia” dramatization here, one of utmost importance for the survival of major clans during that time, was Zhao Wu’s lineage status.

The “Jin shijia” notes Duke Jing “thus ordered Wu, the son of Zhao [Shuo] born of a side wife, to serve as the descendant of the Zhao [clan] again, and gave the clan their towns again” (乃復令趙庶子武為趙後，復與之邑).⁵⁵ The “Zhao shijia” account, however, eliminates the possibility of Zhao Wu being a son of a side wife by explicitly stating that he was born of Duke Jin’s sister, Zhao Shuo’s main wife.

53. *Shi ji*, 39.1679; *GSR*, 5.1:356–57. The chronological tables also indicate the returning of Zhao fief to Zhao Wu was in the seventeenth year of Duke Jing of Jin (*Shi ji*, 14.625; Takigawa, 43.15–16).

54. *Shi ji*, 43.1784–85.

55. *Shi ji*, 39.1679.

According to a parallel account from the *Zuo zhuan*—one not included in the “Zhao shijia”—“the Marquis of Jin dreamed of a great demon with disheveled hair reaching to the ground. [The demon] beat its breast and leaped up, saying, ‘You have slain my descendants unrighteously, I have already presented my request to the Emperor [of Heaven]’” (晉侯夢大厲，被髮及地，搏膺而踊曰，殺余孫不義，余得請於帝矣).⁵⁶ A shaman then predicted that Duke Jing would not live to taste the year’s new wheat, and indeed the Duke soon fell ill. He then dreamed of the illness manifesting itself as two boys residing in the deepest place of his body, unreachable by any medicine. A physician later confirmed that the illness was incurable, and just as predicted, Duke Jing died the same year, right before he was to taste the newly harvested grains. Gilles Boileau points out that the demon’s behavior is similar to that of a mourner at a funeral, only instead of sons mourning their father, here it appears to be an ancestor of the Zhao clan mourning the death of his descendants. The two boys causing Duke Jing’s illness signify the two clan members killed by him, Zhao Tong and Zhao Kuo. Thus, the interpretation of the dream and the diagnosis of Duke Jing’s illness are all set in a funerary context.⁵⁷ As will be discussed in more detail below, by emplotting prophetic and legendary accounts into its narrative, the “Zhao shijia” constructs a coherent interpretive framework that lends significance to the chapter’s key concern of clan survival and succession of its legitimate lineage. If they had been included, the dreams of Duke Jing from the *Zuo zhuan* would have cohered perfectly with this theme. It is a component virtually calling out to be emplotted in the “Zhao shijia,” one apparently of the same nature as other accounts already emplotted in the chapter’s “legendary stratum.” It is a dream narrative, it is prophetic, and it emphasizes the continuation of the family line. Indeed, it could be deemed crucial to the survival of the Zhao clan. However, the chapter uses the Duke’s illness and the divination of its cause solely as plot devices to introduce Hann Jue’s effort to persuade the Duke to reinstate the orphan of Zhao. For all the criticisms of its tendencies to include fantastic and unreliable accounts such as dreams, the “Zhao shijia” narrative left out Duke Jing’s dreams. Why is that so? Two possible considerations might offer an explanation.

First, in addition to the contents that *were* emplotted in the chapter, the highly suitable but not-emplotted contents also bespeak the design

56. Yang, *Zuo*, Cheng 10, 849–50; translation adapted from Legge, 5:372–74. Du Yu 杜預 (222–285) notes “the demon was the ancestor of the Zhao Clan” 厲鬼也，趙氏之先祖也 (Takigawa, 43.12).

57. Gilles Boileau, “Wu and Shaman,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65.2 (2002), 366–68.

of the interpretive framework. As will be shown below, all the dreams, visions, and supernatural encounters used in the framework are experienced by Zhao clan members, especially the head of the clan, and are used to foretell later major events in the clan’s trajectory. Therefore, the dreams of Duke Jing were left out, despite their relevance to the survival of the Zhao, precisely because they were not experienced by a Zhao clan leader. The dream of Zhao Yingqi was left out of this chapter for the very same reasons. This decision *not* to emplot demonstrates how the dreams, visions, and supernatural encounters this chapter does include were selected and emplotted—not just out of the historian’s idle interest in the strange and sensational, but to advance a meaningful and coherent design. The prophetic framework in the “Zhao shijia” is clearly constructed with dreams, visions, supernatural encounters that were experienced by clan leaders holding hereditary titles at Jin court (and later as kings of the Zhao state) and revealed messages foretelling the future of the clan to these leaders.

Second, the elimination of supernatural intervention directly from Zhao ancestors and spirits of deceased clan members functions to turn the focus to the sacrifice and merit of the living who strived to preserve and restore the Zhao lineage. The “Zhao shijia” story concludes with Cheng Ying’s suicide after Zhao Wu was capped and his coming of age ritually recognized. Unable to dissuade Cheng Ying from suicide, Zhao Wu then carried on his sacrifice like a proper descendant would for an ancestor, “dedicated towns to provide for his offering and sacrificed to him in spring and autumn, [making sure the sacrifices continue] generation after generation, without cease” (為之祭邑，春秋祠之，世世勿絕).⁵⁸ The preservation and extension of the family line ensures continued sacrifices not only to the ancestors, but even to the heroes who sacrificed their own lives to ensure another clan’s lineage continued. This last section of the story thus fully elevates the virtue of Cheng Ying and highlights the actions taken by both Cheng and Gongsun Chujiu, ending the story with a message about loyalty and righteous deeds.

Hidden Virtue

However, these two righteous intervenors crucial to the survival of the Zhao clan could still be fabricated figures. Hong Mai 洪邁 (1123–1202) mentions that the decisions and actions of Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu were typical for knights-errant of the Warring States period, but not likely representative of behavior during the earlier Spring and

58. *Shi ji*, 43.1785.

Autumn era when the Zhao clan met with this grave crisis.⁵⁹ The logic and values behind their choices would betray the story as a later fabrication. While the *Zuo zhuan* presents the killing of Zhao clan members by Duke Jing as part of the political developments at the Jin court, the “Zhao shijia,” significantly expanded and distorted the narrative to produce highly dramatized lore focusing on the complete destruction and later reinstatement of the Zhao lineage, highlighting the merit and sacrifice of Cheng Ying, Gongsun Chujiu, and Hann Jue. This shift toward an active, highly dramatized, morally oriented interpretive reconstruction of a major development in the Zhao clan’s history was accomplished so successfully in the “Zhao shijia” that literary works of later times readily followed the value orientations in this version of the story. The narration of political events from the source text in the *Zuo zhuan* was thus turned into moral discourses and commemorations of righteous deeds and lofty virtue in the literary and cultural memory of pre-modern China.⁶⁰

Hann Jue, on the other hand, was indeed a historical figure. His “hidden virtue” for preserving the Zhao lineage was identified as a cause of the Hann clan’s lasting prosperity at the end of the “Hann shijia” 韓世家:

Hann Jue emotionally moved Duke Jing of Jin, and preserved Wu, the orphaned son of Zhao, and thus successfully brought the righteous deeds and duties of Cheng Ying and Gongsun Chujiu to their completion. This was his hidden virtue [benefiting] All-under-Heaven. As to the merit of the Hann clan, its most significant manifestation was not seen in [the state of] Jin. However [the Hann], together with the Zhao and the Wei, eventually held the status of feudal lords for more than ten generations. How fitting this is!⁶¹

59. Hong Mai, *Rongzhai suibi*, 10.135.

60. For example, Liu Xiang’s 劉向 *Xin xu* 新序 puts this account, almost identical in wording with the “Zhao shijia” story, under the category of “Gentlemen of Integrity” 節士 and his *Shuo yuan* 說苑 puts this account under the chapter “Repaying Favors” 復恩. See Li Jixiang 李紀祥, “Zhao shi guer de ‘shi’ yu ‘ju’: wenshu yu yanshu” 趙氏孤兒的史與劇：文述與演述, in *Shijian, lishi, xushi: shixue chuantong yu lishi lilun zaisi* 時間、歷史、敘事：史學傳統與歷史理論再思 (Taipei: Maitian, 2001), 116–17. Li Jixiang points out the transformations of perspectives over time toward the narrative of this particular episode in Zhao history. For more studies on later developments of the story, see Stephen H. West and W. L. Idema, *The Orphan of Zhao and Other Yuan Plays: The Earliest Known Versions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Yu Shiao-ling, “From Revenge to What? Seven Hundred Years of Transformations of *The Orphan of Zhao*,” *CHINOPERL Papers* 26 (2005–2006), 129–48.

61. Translation based on Juri L. Kroll, “Toward a Study of the Concept of Linear Time in the *Shiji*,” in *Views from Within, Views from Beyond*, ed. Van Ess, Lomová, and Schaab-Hanke, 34–35.

韓厥之感晉景公，紹趙孤之子武，以成程嬰、公孫杵臼之義，此天下之陰德也。韓氏之功，於晉未覩其大者也。然與趙、魏終為諸侯十餘世，宜乎哉！⁶²

As shown above, the Zhao clan’s “manifested virtue” and “merits,” known to the public through their long service to kings and dukes, still needed to be cited by someone to remind the Duke of Jin to justify their reinstatement. But Hann Jue’s “hidden virtue” was so far-reaching as to benefit All-under-Heaven and evoke Heaven’s response to ensure the longevity of his own clan and justify its later feudal lord status.⁶³ Such is the virtue and power in preserving family lineage, in preventing the cutting off of the descendant line and the cessation of sacrifice to ancestors, especially when it is service rendered to others. Sima Qian further emphasizes this in the concluding chapter of the *Shi ji*, starting the list of Hann Jue’s notable deeds, and the reasons for the “Hereditary House of Hann” to occupy one chapter, with:

The hidden virtue of Hann Jue was what caused Zhao Wu to be restored. He preserved and made the severed lineage continue, reinstated the ousted [heir of Zhao], thus the people of Jin esteemed him.

韓厥陰德，趙武攸興。紹絕立廢，晉人宗之。⁶⁴

The reader might ask—what outcome, or Heaven’s response, would cause Sima Qian to again claim “How fitting this is!” if someone contributes to or causes the opposite, namely, the destruction, the “cutting off” of a clan’s lineage?

Perhaps that was a question Sima Qian would want his readers to ask. Durrant points out that the desire to tell good stories “undermines Sima Qian’s pursuit of a unified version and frustrates all of us who would describe precisely the Han historian’s ‘philosophy of history.’”⁶⁵ At first reading, the orphan of Zhao account in the “Zhao shijia” perfectly illustrates this critique, with its disproportionately extensive length, its excessively elaborate details, its dramatic plot turns, and its gener-

62. *Shi ji*, 45.1878.

63. Juri L. Kroll examines the concept of “hidden virtue” in detail and holds that, in Hann Jue’s case, Sima Qian was likely trying to explain the long rule of the Hann state which could not be attributed to Hann’s meritorious service to the Jin. Hann Jue’s good deed was important for All-under-Heaven because the Zhao later became a powerful state that influenced the whole political picture of the Warring States era. See “Linear Time in the *Shi ji*,” 34–35.

64. *Shi ji*, 130.3310.

65. Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), xviii.

ous offerings of the secret conversations and inner thoughts of those involved. It reads as pure fabrication forcefully emplotted into a narrative that is supposed to be historical—so much so that the reader cannot help but also ask: why?

One possibility is that the meaning and purpose are embedded in some of the most obviously fabricated elements of the story, at the semi-otic level of words, signs, and even names that bespeak a crucial concern, and anxiety, over the violent *jue* 絕, “severing, ceasing, cutting off” and the *shao* 紹, “preserving, continuing” of the bloodline and the legitimate lineage. This crucial concern was embedded as early as the emplotment of Zhao Dun’s divination about his dream where the patterns of cracks on the tortoise shell first “ceased” and then later “resumed,” foretelling first the disaster, then the reinstatement of the Zhao. The concern manifests itself repeatedly in the story, identifying the cause of evil influences to be those “whose line was not continued,” and the reward for those who preserved others’ lineage to be sacrifice “continuing generation after generation, without cease,” especially for Cheng Ying who had no descendants of his own.

What’s in a Name?

This concern borders on a kind of anxiety or even fixation if the names of the story’s two martyr heroes are brought into consideration: Gongsun Chujiu’s *cognomen* characters, *gongsun* 公孫, literally mean “noble grandson,” or “honorable descendant,” while his given name of *chujiu* 杵臼 means “mortar and pestle.” The pestle is, of course, a penis-shaped object. Cheng Ying’s *cognomen* was pronounced the same with *cheng* 呈, “to reveal, to present, to produce,” and was close in pronunciation to the character *cheng* 成, “to form, to complete, to establish,” or just “to cause something to be.”⁶⁶ His given name Ying 嬰 literally means “baby.” Thus in order to preserve the lineage and establish the orphan of Zhao, “Honorable Descendant Mortar and Pestle” (Gongsun Chujiu) completed his duty first, then “To Establish and Produce the Baby” (Cheng Ying) carried out the more difficult part of bringing up, and eventually producing the grown orphan to succeed to the clan’s noble status at court when it was time for him to be publicly recognized and reinstated as the head of the clan. It may not be too far-fetched to interpret these names as metaphors for the male and female roles in reproduction when the text notes that after Cheng Ying’s death, Zhao Wu “wore Hemmed Sackcloth for

66. For reconstructed Old Chinese pronunciations for 程, 呈 and 成, see Guo Xiliang 郭錫良, *Hanzi guyin shouce* 漢字古音手冊 (Beijing: Beijing daxue, 1986), 266.

three years” (服齊衰三年) in mourning for him,⁶⁷ which could be viewed as following the ritual propriety of a son mourning his deceased mother (when the father had already died before the mother).⁶⁸

Names with such unusual design certainly contribute to the idea that these two heroes were fabricated figures. Or, if there were intervenors who died for the preservation of the Zhao lineage, these figures remained anonymous to history, while their “names” became symbols and reconstructions in the “Zhao shijia” story, engineered for its particular purpose. Could it be the name of Hann Jue 韓厥, the real historical figure in the account, that inspired the chapter’s design of names for this story? According to reconstructed Old Chinese pronunciations, Hann was actually pronounced the same as *han* 扞, “to defend against, to resist, to stop” and his given name Jue 厥 pronounced close to *jue* 絕, “to cut off, to cease.”⁶⁹ Thus the name Hann Jue could be interpretively read as “to resist the cutting off [of family line].” What was to be gained by going to such great lengths in fabricating a crucial point in the continuation of the Zhao lineage? What could be so important here for this chapter to contradict all other historical records and emplot this lore that is easily identified as pure fabrication?

A look at the name Tu’an Gu 屠岸賈 suggests a possible explanation very close to Sima Qian’s trauma of suffering castration when he offended Emperor Wu, a personal tragedy foregrounded in most narratives from the “Sima Qian textbase.” Both of the same pronunciation in reconstructed Old Chinese, *tu* 屠 could be read as *tu* 徒, “penal servitude” and a general reference to imprisonment and punishment; while *an* 岸 was pronounced exactly the same as *an* 豸, “prison, imprisonment, litigation,” and also was very close in pronunciation to *an* 按, “according to.”⁷⁰ When used together with *yu* 獄, the term for prison *anyu* 豸獄 was often written interchangeably with *anyu* 岸獄.⁷¹ Now with *gu* 賈 meaning “trading,” “monetary transaction,” or as a verb, “to purchase,” the name

67. *Shi ji*, 43.1785.

68. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), *Yili zhushu* 儀禮注疏, annotated by Jia Gongyan 賈公彥 (Tang dynasty), (Taipei: Yiwen yinshu guan, 2007), 353, 386–87, 391. See also Ding Linghua 丁凌華, *Zhongguo sangfu zhidu shi* 中國喪服制度史 (Shanghai: Renmin, 2000), 48–60, 94; Wu Fei 吳飛, “Xiandai xueshu zhong de sangfu yanjiu: yi sanbu sangfu xue zhuzuo wei zhongxin” 現代學術中的喪服研究：以三部喪服學著作為中心, *Lingnan xuebao* 嶺南學報 4 (2015), 185–218.

69. For reconstructed Old Chinese pronunciations of 韓 and 扞, see Guo Xiliang, *Hanzi guyin shouce*, 186; for 厥 and 絕, see 45–46.

70. For 屠 and 徒, see Guo Xiliang, *Hanzi guyin shouce*, 104; for 岸, 豸, and 按, see 184.

71. Sometimes also written as *anyu* 豸獄. For one example, see “Xiao yuan” 小宛 (Mao no. 196) in the *Book of Odes*, “Alas for the distressed and the solitary, deemed fit for the inmates for the prisons” 哀我填寡，宜岸宜獄. Legge, 4:335.

Tu'an Gu could thus be interpreted as "punishment and imprisonment bought with money" (徒豕賈) or "punishment [measured] according to the amount of money paid" (徒按賈). Multiple scholars pointed out that Sima Qian's castration might have been the result of his purchasing remission by paying a ransom to commute his death sentence to a lesser punishment.⁷² According to his letter to Ren An 任安 cited in his biography in the *Han shu* 漢書, Sima Qian defended Li Ling 李陵, the general who surrendered to the Xiongnu, and thus was deemed by the enraged Emperor Wu as trying to slander the emperor's favorite Ershi General (貳師將軍), Li Guangli 李廣利. He was sent to the judges, and was subsequently found guilty of "deceiving the emperor" (誣上),⁷³ an offence punishable with death. Han dynasty penal practices, however, allowed "those who were sentenced to death to pay a ransom of five hundred thousand cash to reduce the death sentence to a punishment one level below" (死罪人贖錢五十萬減死一等).⁷⁴ Also during Emperor Jing's time, there were precedents where "those sentenced to death who wanted [their punishment to be commuted to] castration, their requests were granted" (死罪欲腐者，許之).⁷⁵ As Sima Qian lamented in his letter, "My family, being poor, had insufficient funds to purchase remission of my crime" (家貧，貨賂不足以自贖), it could be concluded that he was only able to reduce his punishment by one level to the sentence of castration.⁷⁶ This remission purchased with his meager funds thus results in the humiliating "punishment [measured] according to monetary transaction" (徒按賈), or even more dramatically "slaughter based on purchase" (屠按賈), or "punishment/slaughter and imprisonment bought with money" (徒/屠豕賈). According to the "Zhao shijia" story, Tu'an Gu wiped out the Zhao clan at the Lower Palace, "Xia gong" 下宮, a place has since puzzled historians and scholars because it could not be found in any other source records. Following the interpretation ventured here, the "Xia gong" could perhaps be a veiled reference to where the "slaughter" and "punishment" took place—the "Silkworm Chamber" (蠶室)⁷⁷ for the execution of castration (literally, *gongxing* 宮刑).⁷⁸

72. See Han Zhaoqi 韓兆琦, "Sima Qian ziqing gongxing shuo" 司馬遷自請宮刑說, *Beijing shifan daxue xuebao* 北京師範大學學報 2 (1988), 46–47; Durrant, et al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 132n30.

73. *Han shu*, 62.2730.

74. See "Wudi ji" 武帝紀, *Han shu*, 6.205, 6.206.

75. See "Jingdi ji" 景帝紀, *Han shu*, 5.147.

76. *Han shu*, 62.2730. Translation from Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 26, 132. See also Han Zhaoqi, 46.

77. *Han shu*, 62.2730.

78. See *Han shu*, 62.2732, n. 26; and 5.147.

Empty Writing

Fabricated accounts with designed names as codes for hidden messages pertaining to personal grievance immediately brings forth the connection between suffering and writing in Sima Qian’s letter to Ren An. We hear the voice of the author-figure, “the *Odes*’ three hundred pieces were mostly produced by worthy and wise men venting their frustrations” (詩三百篇，大底聖賢發憤之所爲作也), and “filled with pent-up emotions” (有所鬱結). These great men “consequently, narrated the past while thinking of future generations” (故述往事，思來者).⁷⁹ He then raises examples of authors who suffered physically: “As for Zuo Qiuming, who lost his vision, and Sunzi, whose feet were cut off, they were no longer fit to serve at court. So they withdrew and wrote their various accounts to vent their frustrations, intent on handing down their empty writing to make themselves known” (及如左丘無目，孫子斷足，終不可用，退而論書策以舒其憤，思垂空文以自見).⁸⁰ The voice was repeated in multiple texts from the “Sima Qian textbase,” amplifying these key ideas. In writing the *Shi ji*, Sima Qian, certainly with no fewer frustrations or “pent-up emotions,” was doing the same: narrating the past with the goal of “venting frustration” and “making himself known,” with “future generations” in mind as his audience. But why “empty writing”?

Various scholars have offered analysis on the possible meanings of Sima Qian’s term *kongwen* 空文, rendering it as “empty words,” “empty texts,” “empty writing,” “futile words,” “futile writings,” etc. according to different contexts and connotations associated with its usages.⁸¹ In Chapter 130 of the *Shi ji*, Sima Qian attributed to Confucius (through a quote of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒) the line: “Rather than put it into empty words, I would have liked to show it in something as profoundly pertinent and obvious as a concrete deed” (我欲載之空言，不如見之於行事之深切著明也).⁸² Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (679–732) comments that Confucius’s “empty words” referred to “commending and criticizing what were right and wrong” (褒貶是非) and such commending and criticizing in “empty words” was not as good as “having them embedded in and manifested through those matters that brought forth [such discourses]

79. *Han shu*, 62.2735. Translation from Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 28.

80. *Han shu*, 62.2735. Translation based on Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 28, but here rendering the term *kongwen* as “empty writing.”

81. See Wai-yee Li, “The Letter to Ren An and Authorship in the Chinese Tradition,” 105, 112, and Hans van Ess, “Dissent against Emperor Wu of the Han,” 64–66, in *The Letter to Ren An*, ed. Durrant, et.al.; Michael Nylan, “Sima Qian: A True Historian?,” *Early China* 23–24 (1998–99), 205n8, 218–19n58.

82. *Shi ji*, 130.3297.

at that time" (附見於當時所因之事).⁸³ Thus, Sima Qian's "empty writing" (*kongwen*) has generally been interpreted in relation to Confucius's "empty words" or "words of categorical judgment" (*kongyan* 空言), as abstract, theoretical language for moral judgement. And his citing the line attributed to Confucius deemed as an expression of a similar intention to manifest his ideas through "concrete deeds" in historical writing.⁸⁴ The *Shi ji* can indeed be read from the perspective of *kongwen* in this sense.

"The Zhao shijia," however, seems to allow a more literal reading for the *kongwen* of Sima Qian,⁸⁵ as a type of self-expression veiled under the literal "emptiness" of fabricated verbal tricks.⁸⁶ Thus it could be read as a meta-level rhetoric for suppressed discourses, and we can perhaps discern its connection to Sima Qian's practice in the following oft-quoted lines from his letter:

I have presumed in recent times to entrust my spirit to my clumsy rhetoric. I have cast a broad net across the old accounts that have been lost or neglected. Examining these in light of concrete deeds, I have [gathered together all the evidence for cosmic and dynastic cycles,] and studied the underlying principles of success and failure, and of rise and decline. In altogether 130 chapters, I have tried to probe the boundaries between heaven and man and comprehend the changes of past and present, thereby perfecting a discourse of my own.

83. *Shi ji*, 130.3298, n. 4 and n. 5.

84. Wai-yee Li notes that "words of categorical judgment" (*kongyan*, on *Shi ji*, 130.3296) and "writings of categorical judgment" (*kongwen*, on *Shi ji*, 130.3299), as used in chapter 130, "linked specifically to implacable moral judgment in Sima Qian's explanation of the Annals' import." With regard to how the terms were used, Li points out "a distinct difference in emphasis between the Letter and *Shi ji* 130," in chapter 130 it "draws attention to the efficacy or authoritativeness of Confucius's judgments and Sima Qian's aspiration to claim a similar moral authority" but in the letter it is about "self-revelation (*zixian*) and the possible role of writing in rectifying the flaws of existence;" See Li, "The Letter to Ren An and Authorship in the Chinese Tradition," 112.

85. This reading argues for Sima Qian's creative use of this term for his own rhetoric and discourse. Please note that Van Ess holds that these two terms were used for theoretical language in Western Han writings and only later acquired the more literal sense of empty words. See Durrant, et al., *The Letter to Ren An*, 134n53; 149n20; also Van Ess, "Die leeren Worte des Konfuzius," in *Han-Zeit: Festschrift für Hans Stumpfeldt aus Anlaß seines 65 Geburtstag*, eds. Michael Friedrich, Reinhard Emmerich, and Hans van Ess (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 147–67.

86. Nyman, "Sima Qian: A True Historian?," 205n8, and 218, especially in n. 58 where Nyman notes "The same phrases in other contexts (e.g., SJ 8.379, 63.2144, 81.2440) clearly refer to verbal tricks."

僕竊不遜，近自託於無能之辭，網羅天下放失舊聞，考之行事，[綜其終始] 稽其成敗興壞之理，凡百三十篇。亦欲以究天人之際，通古今之變，成一家之言。⁸⁷

Reading *xingshi* here as the “concrete deeds” in contrast to *kongyan*, Hans van Ess suggests that Sima Qian’s *wuneng zhici* could be “an oblique reference to Confucius’s ‘empty words.’”⁸⁸ From here, we can perhaps establish its connection with his own *kongwen*, “empty writing.” If we read *ci* 辭 in the sense of words organized for a discursive goal, as in *shuoci* 說辭, Sima Qian could then be using the “clumsy rhetoric” of his “empty writing” to refer to a meta-level strategy for establishing “a discourse of his own.”

It was in this particular rhetoric and writing practice that he entrusted his spirit, venting his frustration and hoping to make himself known to future generations, at least in the case of the “Zhao shijia.” This rhetoric and writing practice are found in particular in the chapter’s “legendary stratum” in the fabricated story about the orphan of Zhao and later prophetic accounts that could be further fabrications emplotted in the text’s interpretive framework. Here the “clumsy rhetoric” is on the meta-level of historical narrative, thus literally *kong*, “in the air, above the ground,” and the writing itself also literally “empty” of historical factuality. But Sima Qian did seek to make his ideas manifest through anchoring this “empty writing” in “old accounts” that were “lost or neglected,” and re-collected and examined against “concrete deeds.” Read this way, all the text of empty writing becomes a stage where the spirit of the Sima Qian author-figure finds expressions for his unutterable words and voices for his pent-up emotions through the reenactment of past deeds in “concrete” fabrications.

“It was not that I was not able to die”

From the perspective of serious historians, the blatant fabrications in the “Zhao shijia” story of the orphan of Zhao justifies it as a kind of writing that is, if not “clumsy,” certainly “incompetent” (as the word *wuneng* 無能 literally means). In this text full of ungrounded words, the reader gets a glimpse of Sima Qian’s own spirit through the utterances of the fabricated—and who therefore can perhaps also be called “empty”—figures. His spirit is, if the reader imagines boldly, severed into two, each gaining a voice, in “Honorable Descendant Mortar and Pestle” and “To Establish

87. *Han shu*, 62.2735. Translation based on Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 28–29 and adapted for the purpose of this particular analysis.

88. Hans van Ess, “Dissent against Emperor Wu of the Han,” 65.

and Produce the Baby," like two actors playing separate parts. So I will translate their words using their fabricated, literally "empty names."

To die or not to die, that is the question these "empty names" discuss immediately when they enter the stage. "Why didn't you die?" (胡不死)⁸⁹ is in fact the first line of "Honorable Descendant Mortar and Pestle." A grave question, if not accusation, put to "To Establish and Produce the Baby," it immediately echoes the dilemma Sima Qian faced after his humiliating punishment. One is expected to die to demonstrate loyalty in this story, and to die for the sake of honor instead of living on in disgrace, as in the case of Sima Qian. As "To Establish and Produce the Baby" explains he would wait for the birth of the orphan in the hope that he could serve the boy, but if it is a girl, he would "die a delayed death; that is all" (徐死耳).⁹⁰ Imagine the question were put to Sima Qian—this could very well be his answer. He would delay death for a purpose.

To live and to die, how do they compare? This is the second question the "empty names" discuss. Anticipating danger from repeated searches for the orphan, "Honorable Descendant Mortar and Pestle" asks his second question, "To invest the orphan or to die, which is more difficult?" (立孤與死孰難) and "To Establish and Produce the Baby" replies, "To die is easy; to invest the orphan is difficult" (死易，立孤難耳).⁹¹ "Honorable Descendant Mortar and Pestle" chooses the easy task to die first, a sacrifice so that the orphan could be preserved safely, while "To Establish and Produce the Baby" endures difficulty to fulfill his duty to the ancestors of the clan. When brought into contrast, death cannot be compared to living for duty and purpose. This would have also been Sima Qian's answer if the question of comparison had been put to him.

As the plan takes place, the death of "Honorable Descendant Mortar and Pestle" is brought upon him by none other than the person who has been with him all along, but who has now led troops to execute him, apparently as a result of a monetary transaction. In a feigned diatribe, he accuses him, "You treacherous man, 'To Establish and Produce the Baby'! Earlier, you were not able to die at the disaster of the Lower Palace ... and now you even sold me out." (小人哉程嬰！昔下宮之難不能死，... 今又賣我). He further laments, "Heaven! Oh, Heaven! What crime has the orphaned son of the Zhao Clan [committed]? Please let him live, killing only 'Mortar and Pestle' would be enough" (天乎天乎！趙氏孤兒何罪？請活之，獨殺杵臼可也).⁹² The death cries of "Mortar and Pestle" thus lend a kind of voice

89. *Shi ji*, 43.1783.

90. *Shi ji*, 43.1783.

91. *Shi ji*, 43.1784.

92. *Shi ji*, 43.1784.

to the part of Sima Qian’s body and self that he sacrificed, presenting a maddening accusation to the part of him that lived on to fulfill duty and purpose. Such torment was perhaps composed of the pent-up emotions and frustrations that Sima Qian could not reveal, only vent in these fabricated, literally empty, words.

The orphan of Sima Qian, of course, would be the *Shi ji*. In the story, when the orphan of Zhao is finally reinstated, “To Establish and Produce the Baby” is ready to die his “delayed death” and answer the very first accusation again, “In the past, during the calamity at the Lower Palace ... It was not that I was not able to die, but I longed to invest the Zhao clan’s descendant” (昔下宮之難 ... 我非不能死，我思立趙氏之後).⁹³ His choice thus can be clearly justified. However, if prior to the completion of his work, Sima Qian were to have said “It was not that I was not able to die, but I longed to ...” that would simply have been empty words, at most a promise, without any verifiable outcome. Even once the *Shi ji* was completed, his effort and purpose would not be easily recognized and understood by people of his time, as he perhaps foresaw in his letter to Ren An: “This is something that can be discussed with wise men, but it is hard to speak of such things with vulgar people” (此可為智者道，難為俗人言也).⁹⁴ To the vulgar, “it was not that I was not able to die” might remain, literally, empty words. Perhaps this is why Sima Qian used the story of the orphan of Zhao to embed his spirit and frustration, here about a personal matter, in this rather extreme sample of “empty writing,” rendering them manifest in a case of concrete deeds reenacted through his “clumsy rhetoric” that, in this particular chapter, was anchored in the history and lore of the Zhao clan.

Contemplating the Beginning and the End

Is the story of the orphan the only place where the author-figure projected Sima Qian’s personal distress into the narrative of the Zhao history if we read his “empty writing” in this literal sense? There is one other place that could be recognized as the earliest anchor point of such a projection of personal connections into past events: the very beginning of the chapter’s “legendary stratum,” the mythical account of the Zhao clan’s first establishment.

The text tells how King Mu of Zhou ordered Zao Fu to drive his chariot so that he could enjoy a visit to the Queen Mother of the West, “However, King Yan of Xu rebelled. King Mu sped his horses one thousand

93. *Shi ji*, 43.1785.

94. *Han shu*, 62.2735. Translation from Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 29.

li a day to attack King Yan of Xu, and crushed him.”⁹⁵ For this reason, King Mu gave him the City of Zhao to establish the Zhao clan. Both Qiao Zhou 譙周 (d. 270) and the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 hold that King Yan of Xu lived around the same time as King Wen 文 of Chu 楚 (r. 689–677 B.C.E.), far from the time of King Mu.⁹⁶ The account of his rebellion, and the Zhou King’s subsequent expedition against Xu, does not appear in any other records about King Mu’s travels before the *Shi ji*.⁹⁷ It appears that the *Shi ji* is the very beginning of such an account, and Sima Qian’s source for this claim remains unknown to later scholars.

If King Yan of Xu was not a rebel and Zao Fu did not participate in a kingly expedition, then who did? Could this be pure fabrication again, a similar instantiation of “empty writing” embedded in the mythical origin of the Zhao clan? Chapter 130 of the *Shi ji* traces the Sima family’s lineage back to Xiufu 休甫, the Earl of Cheng 程伯 who served King Xuan of Zhou 周宣王 (827–781 B.C.E.). During that time, “they lost their profession and became the Sima (Marshal) clan” (失其守而為司馬氏), and “for generations managed the scribes of the Zhou” (世典周史).⁹⁸ While the *Tong zhi* 通志 notes that during the time of King Xuan, the Earl of Cheng, i.e. Xiufu, “conquered the region of Xu and was commended with the bestowal of a clan name based on the office he held” (克平徐方，錫以官族).⁹⁹ This expedition was eulogized in the poem “Chang wu” 常武 (Mao no. 263) in the *Odes*: “Give a charge to Xiufu, Earl of Cheng, to undertake the arrangement of the ranks, and to warn all my troops” (命程伯休父，左右陳行，戒我師旅). The poem repeatedly identifies the place the King’s troops attacked as “the land of Xu” (徐土), “the region of Xu” (徐方), and “the cities of Xu” (徐國).¹⁰⁰

If we take this as the beginning point where Sima Qian’s personal circumstances were perhaps projected into past events by a type of concealed interpretive emplotment, with further connections made through the “clumsy rhetoric” in the story of the orphan, will this extend further into the rest of the “Zhao shijia”? And where would this scheme of “empty writing” lead the reader? Sima Qian’s letter claims that “in altogether 130 chapters I have tried to probe the boundaries between heaven

95. *Shi ji*, 43.1779.

96. *Shi ji*, 43.1780, n. 6, *Han Feizi*, 19.2a–b, SBBY.

97. Xu Shidong 徐時棟 (1814–1873) thoroughly refuted this record in the *Shi ji*’s “Zhao shijia” and “Qin shijia.” See his *Xu Yanwang zhi* 徐偃王志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 123–30.

98. *Shi ji*, 130.3285–86. Translation by Hans van Ess, “Sequence of his Honor, the Grand Scribe’s Own [History], Memoir 70,” *GSR*, 11:311.

99. Zheng Qiao 鄭樵 (1104–1162), *Tong zhi* 通志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 10A.171a.

100. Legge, 4:555–59.

and man and comprehend the changes of past and present, thereby perfecting a discourse of my own.”¹⁰¹ Will we have a new reading of the nature of this goal if we consider the rather radical case of the “Zhao shijia” where blatant fabrications emplotted in the historical narrative manifest a practice of “empty writing”? Where would the chapter go, on a meta-level that is, after the striking discourse in the episode of orphan of Zhao that gave vital attention to the “cutting off,” “cessation,” and “continuation” of family lineage and sacrifice to ancestors?

The *Shi ji*'s repeated commendations of Hann Jue's “hidden virtue” reflects Sima Qian's strong, positive position on the preservation of family lineage. From the unvoiced and negative perspective, the castration Sima Qian suffered was a violent act against the Sima lineage. After all, Sima Qian had no male siblings,¹⁰² and historical records only mention a daughter, no sons. If he did not have sons hidden in the mountains like the orphan of Zhao, then his humiliating punishment would have left the Sima family line cut off and sacrifices to their ancestors would cease. What then would the text suggest of the ruler, Emperor Wu, who indirectly caused such an act of *jue* 絕 and did something exactly opposite to the “hidden virtue” of Hann Jue?

The Prophetic Framework

The rest of the “legendary stratum” in the “Zhao shijia” does seem to live up to the expectations offered in Sima Qian's letter that he had “studied the underlying principles of success and failure, and of rise and decline”¹⁰³ to present them in the 130 chapters of the *Shi ji*. As discussed before, the episode of the orphan of Zhao that carries the “empty writing” addressing personal angst and anxiety over the continuation of lineage is foreshadowed in a dream that is the first of a series of six prophetic accounts throughout the chapter. These legendary accounts, consisting of four dreams and two supernatural encounters, form a prophetic framework that encompasses the major developments in the *Shi ji*'s unique representation of Zhao history, foreshadowing the crucial points in the survival of the Zhao lineage and the succession of hereditary power. The six accounts can be divided into two groups: prophecies of success pointing to a coming powerful king, King Wuling, in the timeline of Zhao history; and prophecies of the Zhao house's later decline

101. *Han shu*, 62.2735. Translation based on Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 28–29.

102. “He had no elder or younger brothers” (無兄弟之親). *Han shu*, 62.2733.

103. *Han shu*, 62.2735. Translation based on Durrant, et. al, *The Letter to Ren An*, 28.

with hidden connections to the ruler of Sima Qian's time, Emperor Wu of Han.

A Powerful King

Group one includes two dreams (D₁, D₂) and two associated supernatural encounters (E₁, E₂), all of which occur before the reign of King Wuling 武靈 (r. 325–299 B.C.E.), when the Zhao reached its height of prosperity and strength. These accounts were emplotted directly before or at the beginnings of the narrations of crises to foreshadow survival, later successes, and expansions of Zhao territory. The first dream (D₁) is, of course, Zhao Dun's dream foretelling the disaster caused by Tu'an Gu, leading to the lore of the orphan of Zhao; this is presented in the chapter as the first severe crisis the Zhao clan faced and overcame. The ancestor who appeared in the dream, Shu Dai, was the Zhao ancestor who first brought the clan from the Zhou to serve the Jin state and to establish the Zhao clan there.¹⁰⁴ Zhao Dun used divination to interpret Shu Dai's initial sorrow and his later turn toward joy. Emplotted at the beginning of the narration of the crisis, this dream foreshadows not only the disaster, but also the eventual survival of the family lineage, just as the crack patterns on the tortoise shell that first ceased but eventually continued.

The second dream (D₂), or rather a dream-like vision during illness, was emplotted right at the turning point between a description of the Zhao clan's political power and glory and the narration of the clan's second major crisis. After Zhao Wu was restored, the Zhao clan gained in status and power at the Jin court. The state of Jin, however, started to decline, and the clans of its Six Excellencies, including the Zhao, grew more and more arrogant. At this point, the "Zhao shijia" narrative emplotted an account with no specific time anchor, simply starting abruptly with "Viscount Jian of Zhao fell ill, remaining unconscious for five days" (趙簡子疾，五日不知人). According to the physician Bian Que 扁鵲, Duke Mu of Qin (r. 659–621 B.C.E.) 秦繆公 was once like this, but then awoke after seven days and spoke of his ascendance to the Heavenly Emperor's palace during his dream:

I went to the [Heavenly] Emperor's place and was exceedingly pleased. The reason that I [stayed] so long is there happened to be [things for me] to learn. The Emperor told me, "The state of Jin will [soon] suffer great disorder and will not be at peace for five generations; its descendant will become Hegemon, but will die before reaching old age; the

104. *Shi ji*, 43.1780.

son of the Hegemon will soon take command, as a result the men and women in the state will not to be separated.”

我之帝所甚樂。吾所以久者，適有學也。帝告我：「晉國將大亂，五世不安；其後將霸，未老而死；霸者之子且令而國男女無別。」¹⁰⁵

Bian Que then pointed out that these three prophecies were all proven to be realized in Jin.¹⁰⁶

The “Zhao shijia” account notes that the Duke’s vision was then written down and stored away, and “the ‘prophecy of Qin’ thus originated from this” (秦讖於是出矣).¹⁰⁷ The story appeared to be preserved in textual form and circulated, likely orally, as a prophecy, as here the physician Bian Que brought it up in reference to Viscount Jian’s illness. This dream-vision, however, is not found in the *Shi ji*’s “Qin benji” perhaps because the “prophecy of Qin” consisted, rather strangely, mostly of predictions about Jin. Though its predicted events can be found in historical records about Jin, it is not included in the “Jin shijia” either. The only places it is found in the *Shi ji*, apart from the “Zhao shijia,” are the “Fengshan shu” 封禪書 and the biography of Bian Que.¹⁰⁸ Traditional scholars thus regarded it as spurious, among the long list of the *Shi ji*’s unreliable accounts and strange dreams.¹⁰⁹ Here in the “Zhao shijia” it does seem to be an intentionally included component that leads to the almost identical situation experienced by Viscount Jian of Zhao.

The account notes that after two and one-half days, just as Bian Que predicted, Viscount Jian awoke and spoke of his own dream-vision:

I went to the [Heavenly] Emperor’s place and was exceedingly pleased. I roamed with the hundred gods through Molded Heaven. The Vast Music nine times accompanied the Wan Dance. It was not like the music from the Three Eras, and its sounds moved the heart

105. *Shi ji*, 43.1786–87. For a parallel account, see *Shi ji*, 105.2786–87.

106. According to Bian Que here, these three prophecies respectively corresponded to the disorder during the reign of Duke Xian 獻, to the Hegemony of Duke Wen 文, and to Duke Xiang 襄 defeating the Qin army and returning home to indulge in licentiousness (*Shi ji*, 43.1786–87). Duke Wen of Jin was already sixty-two years old when he finally became ruler of Jin. He only held power for nine years and died shortly after becoming the Hegemon (Wang Liqi, 43.1312, n. 8–n. 12). However, Liang Yusheng (23.1053) comments that there is no mention of Duke Xiang indulging in licentiousness in the *Zuo zhuan*.

107. *Shi ji*, 43.1786–87.

108. The “Fengshan shu” provides a terse summary of Duke Mu of Qin’s vision (*Shi ji*, 28.1360). The biography of Bian Que offers a parallel to the “Zhao shijia” account in which Duke Mu of Qin’s vision is included (*Shi ji*, 105.2786–87; *GSR*, 9:5–9).

109. See Liang Yusheng, *Shi ji zhiyi*, 1051–52.

of men. There was a black bear that intended to come and grab me. The Emperor ordered me to shoot it. I hit the black bear and it died. There was also a brown bear that came, and I also shot at it; I hit the brown bear and the brown bear died. The Emperor was exceedingly happy and bestowed upon me two bamboo boxes, each being a match [for the other]. I saw a boy at the side of the Emperor. The Emperor gave me a Di dog and said, 'When the time comes that the boy is fully grown, bestow it upon him.' The Emperor told me, "The state of Jin will decline generation by generation, and after seven generations it will perish.¹¹⁰ The Ying *cognomen* will crush the people of Zhou to the west of Fankui,¹¹¹ but still will not be able to possess it. Now I have been contemplating the meritorious service of Shun of Yu,¹¹² and in the future I will unite Meng Yao,¹¹³ a daughter of his royal descendants, with your seventh-generation grandson."¹¹⁴

我之帝所甚樂，與百神游於鈞天，廣樂九奏萬舞，不類三代之樂，其聲動人心。有一熊欲來援我，帝命我射之，中熊，熊死。又有一羆來，我又射之，中羆，羆死。帝甚喜，賜我二筥，皆有副。吾見兒在帝側，帝屬我一翟犬，曰：『及而子之壯也，以賜之。』帝告我：『晉國且世衰，七世而亡，嬴姓將大敗周人於范魁之西，而亦不能有也。今余思虞舜之勳，適余將以其胄女孟姚配而七世之孫。』¹¹⁵

Duke Mu and Viscount Jian woke with the same first words. Could these again be fabricated words? Whose "empty writing" might they be? The "Zhao shijia" narrative certainly creates a clear parallel between a Viscount and a Duke, and between the predictions in their respective dreams. It also hints that a similar "prophecy of Zhao" might originate from Viscount Jian's experience as it again explicitly notes the vision

110. In 376 B.C.E., the Marquises of Wei, Hann, and Zhao divided Jin territory among their three clans and demoted the Jin Duke to the status of a commoner. See *Shi ji*, 39.1687; *GSR*, 5.1:367.

111. Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. 730) notes that "the Ying *cognomen*" refers to the Zhao clan, "the people of Zhou" refers to the state of Wey 衛 (*Shi ji*, 43.1787, n. 2).

112. The ancestor of the Zhao clan, Da Fei 大費, aided and regulated lands and waters with Yu, and helped Shun to tame birds and beasts. Emperor Shun conferred upon him the *cognomen* Ying 嬴. See "Qin benji" on *Shi ji*, 5.173; *GSR*, 1:87.

113. This would be Wa Ying 娃嬴, the daughter of Wu Guang 吳廣 who was a descendant of Shun. See *Shi ji*, 43.1788, n. 3; 43.1804; 43.1805, n. 4.

114. I.e., King Wuling of Zhao. Scholars point out the many inaccurate places in the prophetic accounts, for example, here from Viscount Jian to King Wuling was ten generations instead of seven (Liang Yusheng, 23.1053; Takigawa, 43.20; Wang Liqi, 43.1312–13, n. 9; Wu and Lu, 43.1647, n. 14).

115. *Shi ji*, 43.1787.

was recorded in writing.¹¹⁶ Though at this point the Zhao men were still servants and ministers to the Dukes of the Jin state, by constructing such a parallel, this account functions to subtly direct readers’ thoughts to the future feudal lord status of the Zhao house, just like that of the Qin. Similar to the “prophecy of Qin” above, the Heavenly Emperor’s prophecy here is also about developments for the Jin, of which the fortunes of the Zhao clan were one part. The decline and demise of the Jin after seven generations is contrasted here with the union between a daughter from the legendary sage emperor Shun’s royal lineage and a future descendant of Viscount Jian. This certainly hints at the Zhao replacing the Jin as a house legitimately attaining feudal lord status. This subtle prediction would be proven true later, when three major clans in the Jin (the Hann, Zhao, and Wei) toppled its ruling house and divided up Jin territory to declare their own feudal states, claiming the status of lords. The prophecy also foretells the coming of the powerful King Wuling, the first ruler of Zhao to claim the status of king, who, according to the “Zhao shijia” narrative, did indeed marry a descendant from Shun’s lineage. Interpretations of other details in Viscount Jian’s vision were offered when he later encountered a man from his dream (E1):

On another day, Viscount Jian went out and there was a man blocking the way ... Viscount Jian summoned the man, and said, “Ah! [You are the man] I saw [in my dream] called Zi Zhe” ... The man blocking the way said, “During the illness of Your Lordship your servant was at the Emperor’s side.” Viscount Jian said, “Yes, that was the case. [At the time] you, Sir, saw me, what did I do?” The man blocking the way said, “The Emperor commanded Your Lordship to shoot at the black bear and the brown bear, and they both died.” Viscount Jian said, “That is the case. What might this mean?” The man blocking the way said, “The state of Jin is on the verge of a great disaster, and Your Lordship will initiate it. The Emperor commanded Your Lordship to destroy the two Excellencies,¹¹⁷ for the black bear and the brown bear were both their ancestors.” Viscount Jian said, “The Emperor bestowed upon me two bamboo boxes, each being a match [for the other]. What did this mean?” The man blocking the way said, “Your Lordship’s son will overcome two states in Di [territory], both with the Zi cognomen.”¹¹⁸ Viscount Jian said, “I saw a boy at the Emperor’s side. The Emperor gave me a Di dog and said, ‘When the time comes that the boy has fully grown, bestow it upon him.’ Now this boy ... what does it mean

116. *Shi ji*, 43.1787.

117. The Fan 范 and Zhonghang 中行 clans, see *Shi ji*, 43.1788, n. 2.

118. The two states were those of the Dai 代 and the Zhi 智 Clans (*Shi ji*, 43.1789, n. 4).

to bestow the Ti dog upon him?" The man blocking the way said, "The boy is Your Lordship's son. The one that is the Di dog is the ancestor of Dai.¹¹⁹ Your Lordship's son is surely about to possess [the state of] Dai. When it comes to Your Lordship's descendants, there will soon be [one that] reforms the administration [of the state], adopts the clothing of the Hu, and annexes two states among the Di tribe."

他日，簡子出，有人當道 ... 簡子召之，曰：「謹，吾有所見子晰也。」 ... 當道者曰：「主君之疾，臣在帝側。」簡子曰：「然，有之。子之見我，我何為？」當道者曰：「帝令主君射熊與羆，皆死。」簡子曰：「是，且何也？」當道者曰：「晉國且有難，主君首之。帝令主君滅二卿，夫熊與羆皆其祖也。」簡子曰：「帝賜我二笥皆有副，何也？」當道者曰：「主君之子將克二國於翟，皆子姓也。」簡子曰：「吾見兒在帝側，帝屬我一翟犬，曰『及而子之長以賜之』。夫兒何謂以賜翟犬？」當道者曰：「兒，主君之子也。翟犬者，代之先也。主君之子且必有代。及主君之後嗣，且有革政而胡服，并二國於翟。」¹²⁰

The account ends with the man who declined Viscount Jian's offer of an official position simply disappearing—he "could not be seen anymore" (遂不見)—and it notes Viscount Jian personally recorded this encounter in writing and stored it away.

Again, the mysterious man predicted great disaster for Jin, noting now it would be initiated by the Zhao. On the other hand, the Zhao was predicted to significantly expand its clan territory and increase in political power: Viscount Jian, himself, would destroy two noble households and one of his sons would conquer new territory. In particular, one of Viscount Jian's later descendants would reform Zhao administration and culture, improve its military power, and further expand territory—again referring to the future King Wuling. From here, the account then turns to narrate how Viscount Jian identified among his many sons the one capable of becoming a general and fulfilling the predictions in his dream—this was the new clan head, Viscount Xiang 襄 of Zhao (r. 475–443 B.C.E.). Therefore, this emplotment of a dream-vision and its associated supernatural encounter again emphasizes the ideas of "descendant," "the son," the later selection of the "capable son," and the descendant predestined by a higher authority to lead the Zhao to its

119. Dai was a branch of the Northern Di 北狄 tribes, thus the Di dog signifies its ancestors (Wang Liqi, 43.1313, n. 9; Wu and Lu, 43.1647, n. 8, 43.1648, n. 14). This is a sign that the son of Viscount Jian, Viscount Xiang, will murder the King of Dai and take his state which indeed happened in 457 B.C.E. See *Shi ji*, 43.1793–94, 15.693–94.

120. *Shi ji*, 43.1788. Following Sima Zhen's "Suoyin" (*Shi ji*, 43.1788, n. 1), the study here reads 子晰 as the name of this person for a more interesting interpretation.

pinnacle of prosperity and power. The name of the mysterious man from the dream perhaps already says it all: Zi Zhe 子晰, literally, “the son, clearly [seen or identified].”

The prophecies in Viscount Jian’s vision (D₂) and his supernatural encounter (E₁) are emplotted in the narrative right before the second crisis of the Zhao. At the time, Jin was already in trouble due to the rebellion of the noble clans of Fan 范 and Zhonghang 中行. Viscount Jian of Zhao demanded the tribute he previously obtained from the state of Wey 衛¹²¹—the five hundred households that he later placed in Handan 邯鄲—from Zhao Wu 趙午, the Grand Master of Handan. His plan was to have the households moved to the Zhao clan’s stronghold city of Jinyang 晉陽, perhaps for the purpose of bolstering the defense of the Zhao clan. His demand unsatisfied, Viscount Jian captured Zhao Wu, who was also a minister of Jin, without the permission of the Jin ruler. This caused not only revolt in Handan but further rebellions within Jin. Thus, the prophecy that Viscount Jian would bring disaster to Jin was fulfilled, and because of this, the Zhao clan came to its second major crisis. The Fan and Zhonghang clans soon attacked the Zhao, and Viscount Jian took refuge in Jinyang, where he was besieged by the troops of the Jin lord.¹²² It was right before the narrative of this crisis that the two legendary accounts, the dream-vision and supernatural encounter of Viscount Jian, are emplotted to foreshadow Viscount Jian eventually destroying both the Fan and Zhonghang clans, the expansion of Zhao territory under his son, Viscount Xiang, and the coming of King Wuling. Viscount Jian was indeed able to regain the trust of the Jin lord, by fighting and overcoming the Fan and Zhonghang clans, and dividing up their territories with the Duke of Jin. After the crisis was over, the Zhao clan became even more powerful, to the point that it again monopolized Jin court administration.¹²³ Later, Viscount Xiang, the son of Viscount Jian, did overcome the state of Dai, just as the emplotted account predicted.

But soon the Zhao clan faced another crisis, just before which the second supernatural encounter of the prophetic framework is brought into the narrative. This is when the Earl of Zhi 知 became increasingly powerful and arrogant. He commanded the clans of Hann 韓 and Wei 魏 to attack the Zhao clan when they refused his request for land. Viscount

121. The *Zuo zhuan* record of “Zhao Yang of Jin commanded army and besieged Wey” 晉趙鞅帥師圍衛 dates this event to 500 B.C.E., the twelfth year of Duke Ding of Jin (Yang, *Zuo*, Ding 10, 1576).

122. *Shi ji*, 43.1789–90.

123. *Shi ji*, 43.1792.

Xiang, just like his father, took refuge in Jinyang.¹²⁴ A household servant, Yuan Guo 原過, followed the Viscount to Jinyang but fell behind (E2):

When he reached Wangze (King's Lake), he saw three men who were visible from their belts up, but invisible from their belts down.¹²⁵ They gave Yuan Guo a piece of bamboo with two sections, [its ends] not yet opened. They said, "Give this to Wuxu of Zhao for us" ... Viscount Xiang fasted for three days, sliced open the piece of bamboo himself, and there was red writing that read, "Wuxu of Zhao, we are the celestial envoys¹²⁶ from the Marquis Shanyang of Great Mount Huo.¹²⁷ On the *bingxu* day of the third month, we are going to cause you to revolt against and destroy the Zhi Clan. If you in turn establish us in [temples in] a hundred towns, we will bestow upon you the territory of Linhu. When it comes to your later generations, there will be a powerful king of a ruddy, dark complexion, with the face of a dragon and the beak of a bird.¹²⁸ The hair on his temples and his eyebrows [will be disheveled] and his mustache and his beard [long]; he will have a large body and large chest, long legs, and broad shoulders. He will fasten his clothing to the left, dress in armor, and mount a horse. He will entirely possess [the territory of] Hezong, reaching to the various Mo tribes of Xiuhun. To the south he will launch attacks against other [parts] of the Jin,¹²⁹ and to the north he will wipe out the tribe of Heigu." Viscount Xiang bowed twice, and accepted this decree from the three gods.

至於王澤，見三人，自帶以上可見，自帶以下不可見。與原過竹二節，莫通。曰：「為我以是遺趙毋卹。」... 襄子齊三日，親自剖竹，有朱書曰：「趙毋卹，余霍泰山山陽侯天使也。三月丙戌，余將使女反

124. *Shi ji*, 43.1794.

125. For a parallel account of the mythical encounter and the prophecies about the Zhao clan, see *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (1.5a–b, SBBY).

126. The "Ji yao pian" 紀妖篇 in the *Lunheng* 論衡 (22.6a–b, SBBY) reads "the son of heaven, Marquis Yang of Great Mount Huo" (霍大山陽侯天子). The *Fengsu tongyi* (1.6a–b, SBBY) reads "the grand officials of Marquis Yang of Great Mount Huo" (霍大山陽侯大吏). Liang Yusheng (23.1056) believes *dali* 大吏 is the only correct text, while Wu and Lu (43.1654, n. 6) reads *dali* as a copying error in the place of *tianshi* 天使.

127. Great Mount Huo, also called Mount Yue 嶽 or Tai Yue 太嶽 (Great Sacred Mountain), is modern Mount Huo 霍山, located a few miles southeast of modern Huo County, Shanxi (Tan Qixiang, 1:17, 23; *Shi ji*, 2.52–53, 2.67–68, 5.174–75; *GSR*, 1:22–23, n. 21, 1:29, n. 103, 1:88, n. 15; Wang Liqi, 43.1308, n. 4). The most direct common ancestor of the Zhao and the Qin, Fei Lian, was buried on this mountain (*Shi ji*, 5.174–75; *GSR*, 1:88, n. 18).

128. An allusion to one of the ancestors of the Zhao, Zhong Yan, see *Shi ji*, 1.10–11, 5.173–74, 43.1784; *GSR*, 1:4–5, 87.

129. Since Jin was divided up by Zhao, Hann and Wei, here the other parts of Jin refer to the territory of Hann and Wei (Wu and Lu, 43.1654, n. 19; *Shi ji*, 43.1795, n. 6).

滅知氏。女亦立我百邑，余將賜女林胡之地。至于後世，且有伉王，赤黑，龍面而鳥喙，鬢麤髭頰，大膺大胸，脩下而馮，左袷界乘，奄有河宗，至于休溷諸貉，南伐晉別，北滅黑姑。」襄子再拜，受三神之令。¹³⁰

The celestial envoys from the Marquis Shanyang of the Great Mount Huo foretold Zhao's victory over the Earl of Zhi, and of the coming of a powerful king (i.e., King Wuling) under whose reign the territory of Zhao would greatly expand. This account (E2), too, was emplotted right at the beginning of the narration of a major crisis, before Jinyang was besieged and attacked,¹³¹ to predict victory and expansion. This is the first prophecy that refers to the head of the Zhao clan as “King” (*wang* 王), at a point in Zhao history when members of the Zhao clan, though powerful enough to monopolize Jin affairs, were still ministers and servants of the Jin lords. While previous prophecies emplotted in the chapter hint at feudal lord status for the Zhao, this prophecy is explicit about the title and status of “King” and describes the physical appearance of the first king of Zhao. From this point on, the “Zhao shijia” narrates the successes of the Zhao clan as foretold by the first group of accounts in the prophetic framework within the “legendary stratum.” We notice that immediately after Viscount Xiang, the next ruler of the Zhao clan started to claim the title of “Marquis.” During the reigns of the Marshes, Zhao moved its capital to Handan, and it later divided up the Jin state territory together with the Hann and Wei clans, bringing an end to the Jin. Later, under King Wuling, because of his reform policies in court administration and military training, and his expansion of Zhao territory, the Zhao reached its pinnacle of prosperity, power, and influence among the many feudal states.

Written down, Stored away—by Whom?

As mentioned above, the accounts in the “legendary stratum” create significant discrepancies between the “Zhao shijia” text and other historical sources. It seems that in addition to the local chronological records indicated by the “*wo* stratum” of the chapter, the Zhao clan might have also circulated and transmitted legendary accounts about its own history. Utilizing these, Sima Qian constructed an overarching framework foreshadowing the major events of Zhao history and offering interpretive guidance to the Zhao clan's trajectory.

130. *Shi ji*, 43:1794–95.

131. *Shi ji*, 43:1795.

On the most obvious level, all the accounts above predicting the rise of Zhao and the coming of King Wuling explicitly note the existence of textual records written down by witnesses, and thus seem to suggest both the truthfulness of these accounts and their written transmission. With regard to Duke Mu's illness and vision, the "Zhao shijia" account notes "Gongsun Zhi wrote this down and stored it away, and the prophecy of Qin thus originated from this" (公孫支書而藏之，秦讖於是出矣)，¹³² its parallel account in the "Fengshan shu" also records that "the Scribe wrote it down, recorded and stored it away in the archives. Then the later generations all said Duke Mu of Qin [once] ascended to Heaven" (史書而記藏之府，而後世皆曰秦繆公上天)。¹³³ As discussed above, these explicit statements were likely intended to function as verification and affirmation by providing the origin, and thus the basis and logic, of the circulation of such prophecies. The notion that such prophecies became public knowledge known to all later generations offered strong legitimizing power when the events prophesied did come true. Offered as a precedent for and a parallel to Viscount Jian of Zhao's vision, it would then shore up the trustworthiness of the latter account; the claim that it was widely known by later generations likely functioned to suggest the circulation and transmission of the Viscount Jian of Zhao's dream in a similar fashion in later times. Indeed, the account claims that after Viscount Jian woke and recounted his dream, "Dong Anyu received his words, wrote it down, and stored it away" (董安于受言而書藏之)，¹³⁴ with regard to Viscount Jian's subsequent encounter with the man from his dream, the account says that "Viscount Jian wrote this down and stored it away in the archives" (簡子書藏之府)。¹³⁵ In the case of Viscount Xiang's household servant beholding the celestial envoys, "writing in red" (朱書)¹³⁶ was received, which could surely be kept as a record. With this repeated emphasis on the existence of written records in almost exactly the same wording and the parallel precedence identifying Duke Mu's dream as the origin of prophecy of Qin, these accounts seem to be trying to send a message that the dreams, visions, supernatural encounters, and prophecies of Zhao clan leaders therein would surely be knowledge widely available to later times just like the prophecy of Qin. These prophecies foretell the downfall of the Jin, the rise of the Zhao, and the coming of the powerful King Wuling, indicating the Zhao, then ministers of the Jin lord, would claim their own feudal lord status and take up

132. *Shi ji*, 43.1787.

133. *Shi ji*, 28.1360.

134. *Shi ji*, 43.1787.

135. *Shi ji*, 43.1788.

136. *Shi ji*, 43.1794.

the land of the Jin. Such a subversive act would certainly invite severe criticism from moralists quoting principles of loyalty to and reverence for one’s ruler or might even elicit military rectification from other noble clans or lords. These prophetic accounts would work to legitimize the Zhao’s actions by framing them as predestined happenings that were prophesied by heavenly and divine authorities.

Then again, a closer look reveals that these accounts, allegedly well documented and widely known at the time, were likely much later fabrications, a similar type of “empty writing” with their own meta-level rhetoric. They functioned retrospectively to project the legitimacy for Zhao clan’s feudal lord status, and its rulers’ claims to the titles of Marquis (侯) and King (王), several generations back into the clan’s past. Their explicit references to written records might be merely a device of propaganda and a means of political legitimation. For example, they repeatedly foretold the coming of the powerful King Wuling, even specifically referring to his deeds of “reforming the administration [of the state] and adopting the clothing of the Hu” (革政而胡服).¹³⁷ However, later in the narrative of the chapter, when King Wuling, confronted with strong objections at court, tried to persuade his mentor, his uncle, and his ministers to support his new reform policies, he never once mentioned these prophecies supposedly recorded and stored away securely by earlier rulers of the Zhao.¹³⁸ Had these prophecies indeed existed and been passed down, as the accounts in the “Zhao shijia” ask readers to imagine, they would have made strong arguments in favor of King Wuling’s decisions. All he would have had to do would be to cite these prophecies and point out he was fulfilling exactly what was foretold by divine authorities.

But, whose “empty writing” exactly would these be, now that we have established they were not written down and stored away by their alleged witnesses? At least three possibilities exist: first, as discussed above, they were propaganda created by later Zhao rulers for the purpose of political legitimization; second, they could simply be the “empty writing” of the Sima Qian author-figure during the process of the *Shi ji*’s compilation, or even perhaps later redactions; third, a combination of these two formation processes, if there were no other contributing factors unknown to us, that resulted in the redaction of past “empty writings” from the Zhao for the construction of the present “empty writing” in the *Shi ji*, the latter then adding one more layer of meta-level rhetoric of its own.

137. *Shi ji*, 43.1788.

138. Takigawa (43.32) quotes Nakai Sekitoku’s assertion that the prophecy must have been fabricated after the time of King Wuling.

Sima Qian certainly seemed to be untroubled by any apparent loopholes in the logic of the “Zhao shijia” narrative introduced by the “legendary stratum” accounts, nor was he disturbed by their jarring discrepancies with other historical records. Even within the *Shi ji* itself, inconsistencies abound between parallel accounts presented in different chapters. For one example pertaining to the “legendary stratum,” the Heavenly Emperor told Viscount Jian in his dream, “Now I have been contemplating the meritorious service of Shun of Yu, and in the future I will unite Meng Yao, a daughter of his royal descendants, with your seventh-generation grandson” (今余思虞舜之勳·適余將以其胄女孟姚配而七世之孫).¹³⁹ But in the parallel account found in the biography of Bian Que, this promise and prophecy about King Wuling of Zhao is not mentioned at all.¹⁴⁰ As also mentioned above, Duke Mu of Qin’s dream-vision is not even included in the “Qin benji,” nor is it or Viscount Jian’s similar dream-vision included in the “Jin shijia,” even though the prophecies in both dreams clearly foretell the fate of the Jin. It is clear that the *Shi ji* made selective use of and redaction to source material for the “legendary stratum” here, if not emplotting its own creation.

Thus, if the first possibility (identified above) holds, these accounts, as “empty writings” for Zhao propaganda, were simply employed for a framework of prophecies in the presentation of Zhao history. This could suggest that Sima Qian likely accessed these accounts as Zhao-related records to begin with, knew their origins, and understood their nature and significance were intertwined with the Zhao clan’s trajectory, not with that of Qin or Jin. Naturally, these accounts were emplotted in the “Zhao shijia,” and by inserting them at the point in the narrative when they were supposed to have occurred, Sima Qian took the opportunity to construct a hermeneutic scheme that served his narrative of the Zhao history with its emphasis on the continuation of family lineage and power.

If that was the case, these legendary accounts could have existed in written form, or as part of the oral tradition of the Zhao, or both. The survival of these legendary accounts, if in written form, could be attributed to their Qin-related motifs that emphasized a common ancestor of both the Zhao and the Qin ruling clans, even though later accounts of the Qin dynasty book burning appear to be rather exaggerated. As Fujita Katsuhisa argues, since the First Emperor of the Qin was born and raised in Handan, the Handan records were probably regarded as Qin-related documents.¹⁴¹ Two major elements, the shared ancestor Zhong Yan

139. *Shi ji*, 43.1787. 43.1788, n. 3; 43.1805, n.4.

140. *Shi ji*, 105.2786–87.

141. Fujita Katsuhisa, 290–92.

中衍 and the Great Mount Huo, are most significant common themes. In the “Qin benji,” Zhong Yan is described to “have the body of a bird but [speak the] language of men.”¹⁴² Zhong Yan’s later descendant Fei Lian 蜚廉 had two sons, E Lai 惡來, whose descendants became the Qin, and Ji Sheng 季勝, whose descendants became the Zhao.¹⁴³ The distinct feature of having a bird’s beak is mentioned several times in the legendary accounts of the “Zhao Shijia” when describing the rulers of Zhao, especially King Wuling, the prophesied king “with the face of a dragon and the beak of a bird.”¹⁴⁴ For the motif of the Great Mount Huo, the “Qin benji” records that the most direct common ancestor of the Zhao and the Qin, Fei Lian, was buried on this mountain.¹⁴⁵ Several of the legendary accounts in the “Zhao Shijia” contain references to it; for example, in the second supernatural encounter, the celestial envoys proclaimed that they were from the Marquis Shanyang of the Great Mount Huo.¹⁴⁶ In terms of religious culture, the Zhao and Qin states shared the totemic belief in bird deities and both had records of ancestors and clan heads bearing characteristics of birds. In the Zhao state, practices of mountain and river worship, such as worship of the Great Mount Huo, were closely related to ancestral and totem worship.¹⁴⁷ These themes were likely employed in the accounts of the “legendary stratum” to not only lend spiritual authority to their prophecies and legitimization efforts, but also elevate the significance of the Zhao house to the same level as that of the Qin who at the time already established their own state and feudal lord status.

It is also very possible that the legendary accounts about the Zhao survived through oral transmission, and that Sima Qian and Sima Tan had access to oral recountings of these stories during their lifetimes. At the end of the “Zhao Shijia,” Sima Qian identifies Feng Wangsun 馮王孫, i.e., Feng Sui 馮遂, as his informant for old accounts about the Zhao.¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he attributes the same identification to Sui’s father Feng Tang 馮唐 “whose grandfather was a native of Zhao. His father

142. *Shi ji*, 1.10–11, 5.173–74.

143. *Shi ji*, 43.1779.

144. *Shi ji*, 43.1795.

145. *Shi ji*, 5.174–75; GSR, 1:88, n. 18.

146. *Shi ji*, 43.1794–95.

147. Wei Jianzhen 魏建震, “Xian Qin Zhao shi duoshen chongbai shitan” 先秦趙氏多神崇拜試探, *Shijiazhuang xueyuan xuebao* 8.4 (July 2006), 70–75. For the origin of bird totem worship, see Chen Zhi 陳致, “A Study of the Bird Cult of the Shang People,” *Monumenta Serica* 47 (1999), 127–47 and revised version in Chinese “Yin ren niao chongbai yanjiu” 殷人鳥崇拜研究, Shang Fei 尚飛 trans., in *Renwen Zhongguo* (Shanghai: Shanghai Wenyi, 2002), 214–35.

148. *Shi ji*, 43.1833, see also *Shi ji*, 102.2761.

moved to Dai. When the Han [empire] rose, he moved to Anling and ... served Emperor Wen” (其大父趙人。父徙代。漢興徙安陵 ... 事文帝).¹⁴⁹ Takigawa comments that the *Shi ji*'s narrative of Zhao history contains many accounts not documented in the *Zhangguo ce* and they were likely obtained from Feng Sui.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, Liu Chenweng 劉辰翁 (1232–1297), citing Sima Qian's note that Feng Sui was “on good terms with me” (與余善)¹⁵¹ to explain why he had access to such “accounts not necessarily [shared] with others” (他人所不必者), poses the question “who can distinguish the fine line [these accounts] tread between hearsay and documented records?” (孰知其切於傳聞與記載哉).¹⁵² Hans van Ess notes that Sima Qian could have met Feng Sui only if the latter reached a very advanced age, and thus Feng Sui was likely the friend of Sima Tan.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, these records indicate oral transmission of past happenings, or hearsay, in the land of Zhao within several generations of the Feng family and later to the Sima family.

Riding A Flying Dragon

The second group of prophetic accounts consists of two dream-visions (D3 and D4) and constitutes the latter part of the prophetic framework that guides the interpretation and presentation of Zhao history. These two dreams are emplotted in the narration of the height of the Zhao clan's power and are used to foreshadow troubles and decline.

In one dream (D3), King Wuling saw a singing virgin and his longing for this dream beauty caused Meng Yao 孟姚, that is, Wa Ying 娃嬴, to be brought to him and made his Queen:

In the sixteenth year (310 B.C.E.), King Hui of Qin expired. King [Wuling] took a tour of Daling. On another day, King [Wuling] saw in his dream a virgin playing a zither and singing a poem, which said “A Beauty dazzling and radiant; her face, like the blossoms of the trumpet creeper. It is fate, fate, after all no one appreciates my bountiful beauty!”¹⁵⁴ On a different day, King [Wuling] drank wine and

149. “Zhang Shizhi, Feng Tang liezhuan” 張釋之馮唐列傳. *Shi ji*, 102.2757–58. Takigawa (43.96) concludes that what was heard from Feng Wangsun was originally told by Feng Tang.

150. Takigawa, 102.17.

151. *Shi ji*, 102.2761.

152. *Ban Ma yitong* 班馬異同, 18.7a, *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1986).

153. Hans van Ess, “The Friends of Sima Tan and Sima Qian,” 74.

154. The maiden laments her beauty not being known to the people of the world. Zhang Shoujie (*Shi ji*, 43.1805, n. 2) notes that *ming* 命, “fate,” can be interpreted here as *ming* 名, “name,” and Ying 嬴 could be the *cognomen*. Takigawa (43.48) and Liang

footnote continued on next page

made merry, spoke several times of what he had dreamt, and wanted to see [someone with] her looks. Wu Guang heard about it, sent in his daughter Wa Ying (The Beauty-bountiful) [to King Wuling] through his wife. This was Meng Yao. Meng Yao was extremely favored by King [Wuling], and she was made Queen Hui.

十六年，秦惠王卒。王遊大陵。他日，王夢見處女鼓琴而歌詩曰：「美人粲粲兮，顏若苕之榮。命乎命乎，曾無我贏！」異日，王飲酒樂，數言所夢，想見其狀。吳廣聞之，因夫人而內其女娃贏。孟姚也。孟姚甚有寵於王，是為惠后。¹⁵⁵

The temporal markers in this narrative, “on another day” and “on a different day,” likely indicate material inserted from different sources that did not have specific dates. In this account, the beauty’s song uses the blossoms of the trumpet creeper, or bignonia, as a metaphor for her beauty, but it also alludes to the *Odes*, where the poem (Mao no. 233) reads “the flowers of the bignonia are of a deep yellow. My heart is sad; I feel its wound” (苕之華，芸其黃矣；心之憂矣，維其傷矣).¹⁵⁶ Later in the poem, when the bountiful flowers of the bignonia are gone, the speaker says, “If I had known it would be thus with me, I had better not have been born” (知我如此，不如無生) and “If some men can get enough to eat, few can get their fill” (人可以食，鮮可以飽).¹⁵⁷ In the “Zhao shijia” text below, we learn that King Wuling favored He 何, the son born of Wa Ying, whom he dreamed of and later made Queen. He deposed his initial heir, Zhang 章, and made He the heir, and after the passing of Wa Ying, invested him as king. During the power struggles resulting from this, King Wuling was besieged in his own palace and starved to death.¹⁵⁸ Thus the trumpet flowers in the Beauty’s song is both a reference to herself and her sorrow at her beauty not being recognized, as well as an allusion to the *Odes* poem that foreshadows the starvation of the King. Thus King Wuling’s dream predicted the cause—the Beauty herself, who can be viewed as the beginning of his lamentable end—and also the manner of his death. And perhaps the alluded-to lines of “If I had known ...” also hint at a touch of regret for the King. This dream comes before the narration of King Wuling’s adoption of Hu clothing, his military successes, and his expansion of Zhao territory as predicted

Yusheng (23.1063) quote the *Lienu zhuan* 列女傳 that reads “Oh fate, fate! I happened to be born according to the timing of Heaven that after all no one knew my overflowing beauty” (命兮命兮，逢天時而生，曾莫我贏贏). See also Wu and Lu, 43.1661, n. 5.

155. *Shi ji*, 43.1804.

156. Legge, 4:423.

157. Legge, 4:423.

158. *Shi ji*, 43.1812–16.

in earlier dreams and supernatural encounters. It foreshadows the successional strife resulting from King Wuling's indulgence in Wa Ying and his favoring of her son. The ensuing power struggle cost King Wuling his life and precipitated the decline of the Zhao ruling house.

A fourth dream-vision (D₄) appears in the narration of the fourth year (262 B.C.E.) of King Xiaocheng 孝成 (r. 265–245 B.C.E.). The dream works as a sign of the ruin of the Zhao through a double foreshadowing—predicting two Zhao rulers' military decisions, identical mistakes that both resulted in disaster, with the latter decision directly causing the demise of the Zhao state:

In the fourth year (262 B.C.E.), King [Xiaocheng] dreamt that he wore clothes of two different colors to the left and right of the middle seam in the back, rode a flying dragon, and ascended to the heavens; he then fell [to the ground] before reaching there, and saw gold and jade piling up like mountains. The next day, King [Xiaocheng] summoned a scribe [in charge of] milfoil divination called Gan to divine about it. [Gan] said, "Dreaming about wearing clothes of two different colors to the left and right of the middle seam in the back is a sign of ruin,¹⁵⁹ riding a flying dragon and ascending to the heavens, but falling [to the ground] before reaching there, is a sign of possessing momentum but not real power; seeing gold and jade piling up like mountains is a sign of trouble."

四年，王夢衣偏袷之衣，乘飛龍上天，不至而墜，見金玉之積如山。明日，王召筮史敢占之，曰：「夢衣偏袷之衣者，殘也。乘飛龍上天不至而墜者，有氣而無實也。見金玉之積如山者，憂也。」¹⁶⁰

This dream account is emplotted in the narrative just before the governor of Shangdang 上黨, an area of the Hann state, came to present to King Xiaocheng of Zhao seventeen big towns, since the Hann could no longer defend them against the attacks of Qin and the people of Shangdang would rather become part of Zhao than of Qin.¹⁶¹ Tempted by such great profit, just as foreshadowed by the piles of gold and jade in his

159. Zhang Shoujie (*Shi ji*, 43.1825, n. 1) glosses *du* 袷 as the middle seam in the back of clothes and quotes Du Yu that *pian* 偏 means to have two different colors on the left and right of the middle seam. The "Jin yu" 晉語 chapter of the *Guoyu* (7.10b, *SBBY*) reads "[Duke Xian of Jin] sent Shensheng to launch an expedition against Dongshan, and had him put on clothes with two different colors on the left and right of the middle seam" (使申生伐東山，衣之偏袷之衣), with the comment "the seam is in the middle, to the left and right [of the seam, the color] is different, therefore it is called *pian*" (袷在中，左右異，故曰偏). In both cases, the mission met with an unfortunate end.

160. *Shi ji*, 43.1824–25.

161. *Shi ji*, 43.1825.

dream, King Xiaocheng accepted the towns, and thus engaged in war with Qin in Changping 長平. There he made the mistake of replacing the fine general Lian Po 廉頗 with the incompetent Zhao Kuo 趙括, leading to the slaughter of Zhao troops and, shortly thereafter, the siege of the Zhao capital by the Qin army.¹⁶² Though the Zhao was able to resolve this crisis by successfully bringing in relief troops from other states, wars between Qin and Zhao continued. As foreshadowed by his ominous dream, King Xiaocheng’s failure, caused by his greed and military mistakes, led the Zhao in the direction of its downfall.

After only two generations, Xiaocheng’s grandson Qian repeated precisely the same mistake. Listening to the slander of a personal favorite, who, unfortunately, had been bribed by the Qin, Qian executed the fine general Li Mu 李牧, replacing him with two incompetent generals. Again, Zhao troops were slaughtered; Qian was captured and Qin took Zhao capital Handan for good.¹⁶³ Here, Qian’s mistake is almost an exact parallel to King Xiaocheng’s mistake, which had been foreshadowed by his dream of ascending to the heavens and falling down before reaching there. Thus, the end of Zhao can be understood as foreshadowed twice—through the dream of King Xiaocheng, and then through the aftermath of his mistake. Sima Qian thus laments “Isn’t this absurd?” (豈不繆哉).¹⁶⁴ It is indeed absurd for the Zhao rulers to repeat the same mistake. It is possible that Sima Qian here might be indicating the ruin of Zhao had deep roots: in the later Zhao ruler’s inability either to understand the signs and prophecies, or to avoid repeating mistakes.

Thus the prophetic framework’s first group of accounts about dreams, visions, and supernatural encounters are emplotted in the narrative before impending disasters, used to foretell both a crisis and the overcoming of the crisis, later successes, and the expansion of Zhao territory. More importantly, they all point to the coming powerful king, King Wuling. Its second group of dream accounts are placed in narrations of prosperous times, when the heads of the Zhao clan had claimed royal titles and enjoyed substantial military power and political influence among the warring states, to foretell its ruin. As suggested, these six accounts in the prophetic framework, together with the legendary origin of the clan and the lore of the orphan of Zhao, form a “legendary stratum” that, on a metahistoriographical level, provides an overarching interpretative framework for the Zhao clan’s past.

162. *Shi ji*, 43.1826.

163. *Shi ji*, 43.1832–33, 102.2758. See also *Shi ji*, 15.755–57, 6.233–34, 6.239, 81.2451; GSR, 1:133–34, 1:137, 7:272; and He Jianzhang, 21.806.

164. *Shi ji*, 43.1833.

The Anxiety of Succession

It appears that the chapter's overall vision for this prophetic framework and its interpretive emplotment of legendary accounts was meant to reinforce the key idea of *xu* 續, "succession, continuation," again and again at crucial points in Zhao history. This is manifested in the outline of the "Zhao shijia" in the last chapter of the *Shi ji*. Here a series of developments of great significance are listed that roughly correspond with the sequence of foreshadowing in the prophetic framework:

(1) Only for the reason of the [Bay] Steed and the Green Ear, was Zao Fu commended. (2) Zhao Su served [Duke] Xian [of Jin], [Zhao] Cui continued and [Han] Jue extended [the lineage]. (3) [Zhao Cui] assisted [Duke] Wen [of Jin] and [Viscount Jian] respected the king [of Zhou], and they spent their whole lives as attendants to the Jin. (4) Viscount Xiang was trapped in straitened circumstances and humiliated, only then did he take the Earl of Zhi into captivity. (5) Zhufu [i.e., King Wuling] was detained alive, and starved to death after searching for bird nests. (6) Qian, the King, indulged in licentiousness, and did reject a fine general. (7) The excellent [Viscount Jian, Zhao] Yang suppressed the rebellions against Zhou. [Thus] I composed "Hereditary House of Zhao, Number Thirteen."

(1)維驥騶耳，乃章造父。(2)趙夙事獻，衰續厥緒。(3)佐文尊王，卒為晉輔。(4)襄子困辱，乃禽智伯。(5)主父生縛，餓死探爵。(6)王遷辟淫，良將是斥。(7)嘉鞅討周亂，作趙世家第十三¹⁶⁵

The first line refers to the establishment of the Zhao clan. Zao Fu was favored for identifying great horses for King Mu of Zhou and thus made the driver of his chariot. This line corresponds to the account in the "legendary stratum" about how Zao Fu was commended by the King and given the City of Zhao to establish his clan there. The first part of the second line refers to Zhao Su's contribution to the peace of the Jin state and the expansion of Zhao territory thereafter. This major development in terms of the Zhao clan's power is related to the continuation of sacrifices to Great Mount Huo. This is when Duke Xian of Jin initiated military expeditions against the small states Huo, Wei, and Geng 耿. Zhao Su was responsible for attacking Huo, causing the Lord of Huo to flee his land. Subsequently, Jin experienced a great drought, and diviners concluded that "Great Mount Huo was emitting the evil influence" (霍太山為祟).¹⁶⁶ Thus Zhao Su was sent to reinstate the Lord of Huo so that

165. *Shi ji*, 130.3310.

166. *Shi ji*, 43.1781.

the sacrifice to Great Mount Huo would be continued. This done, the Jin state regained its prosperity as well, and Duke Xian of Jin bestowed the land of Geng to Zhao Su. The second part of the second line refers to two major contributions in terms of succession and lineage continuity. Although the character *jue* 厥 is not marked as a proper noun in the Zhonghua shuju text, reading it as the name of Hann Jue contributes significantly to the meaning of the text here. This interpretation brings out a parallelism with the first character in the phrase, *Cui* 衰, which refers to Zhao Cui. Zhao Cui served the noble scion Chong'er 重耳 of Jin and played an important role in his accession to the Jin throne,¹⁶⁷ and Hann Jue contributed greatly to the survival of the Zhao clan and the continuation of its noble status and political power at the Jin court. This first dire crisis for the Zhao clan and its resolution are foreshadowed by Zhao Dun's dream, the first account (D1) in the prophetic framework.

The third line, continuing the work highlighted in the previous line, tells about Zhao Cui's contribution to the prosperity of Jin and Viscount Jian of Zhao's deed in maintaining stability in the Zhou royal house.¹⁶⁸ During Viscount Jian's time, the Zhao clan experienced another major crisis, but the later prosperity of the clan was predicted in Viscount Jian's dream vision (D2), and his subsequent supernatural encounter with a man from his vision (E1). The fourth line refers to Viscount Xiang overcoming the Earl of Zhi, also foreshadowed by an emplotted account of the celestial envoys from Great Mount Huo delivering a message to him (E2). The fifth line refers to King Wuling's death, which is, as discussed above, foreshadowed by his dream of the singing beauty (D3). This marks the decline of the Zhao. The sixth line refers to Qian, the King of Zhao, rejecting the fine general Li Mu and instead using incapable ones in battles against the Qin. This was the direct cause of the demise of the Zhao state. Qian's mistake is almost an exact parallel to King Xiaocheng's, which is foreshadowed by his dream of riding a flying dragon but falling down before reaching the heavens (D4).

The seventh line points out the main merit of the Zhao clan, which justifies its significance in the history of hereditary houses. It functions as a concluding declaration of purpose after the previous six lines marking the major developments in Zhao history. All events outlined in the appraisal pertain to the continuation of lineage, political power, and the status of the Zhao clan, and of those of the Jin and the Zhou where Zhao

167. *Shi ji*, 43.1781–82.

168. Viscount Jian gathered and led the feudal lords in suppressing the rebellion caused by Prince Chao 朝 and by ensuring King Jing 敬 of Zhou's (r. 519–476 B.C.E.) accession to the throne. *Shi ji*, 43.1786. See also *Shi ji*, 4.156–57; *GSR*, 1:77–78; Yang, *Zuo*, Zhao 25, 1457.

clan leaders assisted and contributed their merit. The most commendable act pointed out by the seventh line is Zhao Yang (Viscount Jian) suppressing the turmoil in the Zhou royal house, supporting the continuity of its power, and ensuring its stability.¹⁶⁹ Among the significant developments listed, all successes and failures pertaining to the Zhao clan's own succession and continuation are foreshadowed by emplotted accounts from the "legendary stratum" of the chapter.

The overarching framework, corresponding to the final appraisal of the chapter, offers guidance for understanding Zhao history: the trajectory of the Zhao clan's development and demise represented in the *Shi ji's* narrative, and the rhetoric of this representation, should be understood from the crucial perspective of the continuation and succession of lineage and power. As Michael Nylan points out, Sima Qian's appraisals in many chapters of the *Shi ji*, both those for the basic annals and the hereditary houses, explicitly or implicitly refer to "issues of genealogy" and "the continuation or discontinuation of ancestral sacrifices."¹⁷⁰ The utmost importance of the continuation of lineage and of the sacrifices to clan ancestors is clear in the "Zhao shijia" chapter. It proves to be key to the chapter's representation of the trajectory of the Zhao clan through the well-designed prophetic framework that highlights crucial developments in its narrative. By emplotting the series of lore, prophetic dream-visions, and supernatural encounters to form a "legendary stratum" within the text, Sima Qian offers a hermeneutic guidance to his audience in locating this meaning in the *Shi ji's* representation of Zhao history.

Two Powerful Kings

By this time, the reader may already have noticed one interesting difference between the two groups of prophetic accounts identified above. The two dreams in the second group read quite differently. They do not explicitly claim the existence of their written records, offering no information on who wrote them down or stored them away. They cannot have been part of the scheme, as proposed above, for the purpose of justifying the feudal lord status for the Zhao. Nor do they maintain

169. See note 168.

170. Nylan notes that appraisals "in each of the first seven chapters (ch. 31–37) consider the proper criteria for the continuation or discontinuation of sacrifices to family line, while those in later chapters consider one's duty to the Central States (chap. 38), applaud the Central States for their traditional regard for the repayment of obligations, and consider what real commitment and worthy ambitions can or cannot accomplish (chap. 39–41)." See Nylan, "Sima Qian: A True Historian?," 243.

any ties to the mythical origin of the clan, or the striking bird-like features of the Zhao ancestors. Could they belong to a different type of source? Could they have been transmitted orally? Is it possible they were no longer local records of Zhao? Not found in any records other than the *Shi ji* “Zhao shijia,” could they be fabrications of a much later date, added by Sima Qian himself, or even someone after his time? If so, could they be governed by any additional meta-level rhetoric for discursive purposes?

If one examines the “Zhao shijia” against the context of the “Sima Qian textbase,” one can, in fact, see images of not one, but two powerful kings. The one who is illuminated most clearly, the key figure of the whole series of prophecies, is King Wuling of Zhao; while the one in the shadows is Emperor Wu of Han, the ruler of Sima Qian’s time. Just like King Wuling of Zhao, Emperor Wu harbored great ambitions to expand the territory under his control. He continued the warfare against the Xiongnu on the northwest border of the Han territory, just as King Wuling undertook multiple military excursions against the Hu tribes in roughly the same regions about two hundred years earlier. The two dreams in the second group may serve as anchor points that pull the fate of the Zhao kings and the major events of the present ruler’s reign into an uncanny parallel, perhaps projecting the ominous prophecies of the latter half of Zhao history into the present dynasty’s future. We also find Sima Qian’s personal fate deeply entangled with those events in the present that are tied to the Zhao clan’s history via these two anchor points.

Sons of Singing Beauties, Incompetent Generals

As discussed above, King Wuling’s dream about Wa Ying (D₃) foreshadows the great turmoil in power transfer directly caused by his favor for the Beauty and her son over the already invested heir apparent. As the heir was replaced and King Wuling indeed abdicated the throne to the favored son, ensuing power struggles led to the rebellion of the deposed heir, battles between the troops of his two sons, and armies controlled by other Zhao nobles moving in to take over the situation. The deposed heir was killed, and the abdicated King Wuling starved to death in his own besieged palace. We can perhaps discern, in the shadow, a similar devastating turmoil during Emperor Wu’s time. This incident, later dubbed by historians as “the Disaster of Witchcraft and Sorcery” (巫蠱之禍), cost the lives of tens of thousands, as well as those of both the Empress and the already established Crown Prince, and later caused the political powers behind another prince to be completely wiped out as well.

King Wuling's dream also allows the reader to see, again in the shadow of the Zhao events, how the mothers of these two embroiled Han princes, Empress Wei 衛 (d. 91 B.C.E.) and Lady Li 李 (d. c. 100 B.C.E.), became Emperor Wu's consorts. While in King Wuling's dream, Wa Ying attracted his attention by playing a zither and singing a poem, Empress Wei first gained Emperor Wu's notice when she, then a singing girl, performed at a banquet. Emperor Wu saw her and immediately took her.¹⁷¹ Lady Li, on the other hand, became known to the emperor though her brother Li Yannian 李延年 (d. c. 80 B.C.E.) who was an entertainer and sang to Emperor Wu about an unrivaled beauty. Upon hearing his song, Emperor Wu longed to see such a one, just like King Wuling, thinking about the Beauty in his dream, "wanted to see [someone with] her looks" (想見其狀).¹⁷² Lady Li was thus brought to the emperor who then found her "charmingly beautiful and good at dancing" (妙麗善舞). She soon became the emperor's favorite consort.¹⁷³ There is, however, one ironical difference: the "Zhao shijia" account explicitly identifies the singing Beauty in King Wuling's dream (later his Queen) to be a descendant of the sage king Shun; but in the Han emperor's reality, his royal consorts, the mothers of his heir and favored sons, were in fact true entertainers. Thus the parallel between the Zhao king's past, as represented in the *Shi ji* chapter, and the Han ruler's present is one of veiled bias.

When "the Disaster of Witchcraft and Sorcery" happened, Empress Wei's son was already the established Crown Prince though the Empress herself had long lost favor. Lady Li had passed away well before this, but leaving behind a favored son, Prince Changyi 昌邑. Another Lady who was currently in favor, and much younger, had given birth to the emperor's most favored son a couple of years earlier. The delighted Emperor Wu entitled her palace gate "Gate of the Mother of Yao" (堯母門),¹⁷⁴ a title bespeaking loudly the new son's prospect for royal succession but laden with threatening connotation to all other princes. The disaster started, interestingly, with the noble Gongsun 公孫 family as the target.

Toward the end of 92 B.C.E., someone accused Gongsun Jingsheng 公孫敬聲 (d. 91 B.C.E.), the son of the Grand Councilor Gongsun He 公孫賀 (d. 91 B.C.E.), of carrying on an illicit affair with a princess and using witchcraft and sorcery to curse Emperor Wu. The Gongsun clan was soon wiped out. As the Gongsun family were connected to the Empress's Wei family through marriage, and thus were supporters of the Crown

171. *Shi ji*, 49:1978.

172. *Shi ji*, 43:1804.

173. *Han shu*, 97:3951.

174. *Han shu*, 97:3956.

Prince, in favor of his succession to the throne. The “Witchcraft and Sorcery” incident soon implicated both the Crown Prince and Empress Wei.

In the summer of 91 B.C.E., Emperor Wu fell ill suddenly while staying in a palace outside of the capital. Someone who feared the power of the Crown Prince seized the opportunity and caused the emperor to believe that the cause of illness was again witchcraft. When dolls used for witchcraft were found in the palace of the Crown Prince, the Crown Prince and Empress Wei had the slanderer killed and fought against troops led by the new Grand Councilor, Liu Quli 刘屈氂 (d. 90 B.C.E.) who, under Emperor Wu’s orders, locked down the capital. Liu was, in fact, associated with Prince Changyi, the son born of Lady Li. The battle lasted for days. In the end, the Crown Prince’s army lost and Empress Wei committed suicide. The Crown Prince escaped, but soon was surrounded and committed suicide as well.

Sima Qian himself was not involved in this incident, but his friends were. One friend, Tian Ren 田仁 (d. 91 B.C.E.), who let the Crown Prince escape the capital, was soon executed. Though Ren An did not lead his soldiers to participate in the battle in capital, he was implicated by accusations of having connections with the Crown Prince. Ren An was subsequently imprisoned and executed. Sima Qian’s letter to Ren An was generally believed by scholars to be a reply to Ren’s request for help within this context.¹⁷⁵

But Emperor Wu’s favor for Lady Li did indirectly cause repeated failures in his military campaigns against the Xiongnu after 100 B.C.E., and thus Sima Qian’s personal tragedy. Though Lady Li died early, her two brothers, Li Guangli and Li Yannian remained Emperor Wu’s favorites. Li Yannian was favored due to his musical skill,¹⁷⁶ while Li Guangli was none other than the aforementioned Ershi General who was, unfortunately, incompetent as a military commander. In 99 B.C.E., Li Guangli led troops to fight against Xiongnu but was defeated, and it was during this battle that Li Ling surrendered.¹⁷⁷ Li Ling’s duty in this expedition was to attack the Xiongnu at a different location, and “with this, they wanted to split the Xiongnu troops, and not let them concentrate on going after the Ershi General” (欲以分匈奴兵，勿令專走貳師).¹⁷⁸ Therefore, when Sima Qian defended Li Ling, Emperor Wu suspected that he was using Li Ling as an excuse to “slander the Ershi General” (沮貳師), and Sima Qian was found to be guilty of “deceiving the emperor,”¹⁷⁹ an offense

175. For a detailed account of the whole incident, see *Han shu*, 66.2877–83.

176. *Shi ji*, 49.1980.

177. See “Xiongnu liezhuan” 匈奴列傳, *Shi ji*, 110.2917–18.

178. See “Li Jiangjun liezhuan” 李將軍列傳. *Shi ji*, 109.2877. GSR, 9:227.

179. *Han shu*, 62.2730.

punishable with death. Sima Qian's suffering originated in Li Guangli's military incompetence and Emperor Wu's blind favoring of him.

Ironically, in less than ten years, Li Guangli also surrendered to the Xiongnu. In 90 B.C.E., he was sent to fight the Xiongnu again, and was again defeated. Li Guangli's daughter was the daughter-in-law of Liu Quli, who rose to power after the fall of the Gongsun clan; therefore both supported Lady Li's son Prince Changyi and plotted to have him installed as the Crown Prince. Before his second expedition against the Xiongnu, Li Guangli reportedly expressed his hopes for Prince Changyi to Liu Quli, who had by then become Grand Councilor: "I hope Your Excellency would soon request [His Majesty] to install Prince Changyi as the Crown Prince" (願君侯早請昌邑王為太子).¹⁸⁰ However, those in the palace also exploited the "Witchcraft and Sorcery" situation by reporting that the wife of Liu Quli was involved in a similar practice of cursing Emperor Wu and using magic powers to cause Prince Changyi to be the next emperor. Liu Quli's family was wiped out. Li Guangli's wife was imprisoned, and soon his family was also wiped out. Upon hearing this, Li Guangli led his troops to surrender to the Xiongnu.¹⁸¹

Sima Qian comments at the end of the "Xiongnu liezhuan": "If one wishes to undertake the government of a sage, [the important point] lies solely in choosing and employing military and civil leaders! It lies solely in choosing and employing military and civil leaders!" (欲興聖統，唯在擇任將相哉！唯在擇任將相哉！).¹⁸² It echoes his lament over the repeated mistakes by Zhao kings in replacing fine generals with incapable favorites. In the "Zhao shijia," the parallel mistakes by King Xiaocheng and King Qian were foreshadowed by Xiaocheng's dream (D4) of riding a flying dragon but falling to the ground before he could reach the heavens. Here, in Sima Qian's reality, the repeated failures of Emperor Wu's expeditions against the Xiongnu further paralleled the repeated mistakes of the Zhao kings because Emperor Wu's choices of military leaders were also based on personal favoritism.

"If We Could Be Truly Like the Yellow Emperor"

It is not surprising that the "Witchcraft and Sorcery" situation could be manipulated so easily to serve the schemes of various factions in power struggles over royal succession. Emperor Wu's gullibility, when it came to accusations of sorcerous conspiracies, was in fact rooted in his own aspirations to obtain immortality, and his blind trust in various reli-

180. *Han shu*, 66.2883.

181. *Shi ji*, 110.2918. *GSR*, 9:301.

182. *Shi ji*, 110.2919; *GSR*, 9:302.

gious and spiritual masters who avidly promoted the efficacy of magical methods in attaining this goal. The key to success was, as they advised Emperor Wu, to emulate the Yellow Emperor. And so he did.¹⁸³

The *Shi ji* gave concentrated attention to Emperor Wu’s efforts in this aspect.¹⁸⁴ Compared to its parallel chapter in the *Han shu*, the *Shi ji*’s “Basic Annals of Emperor Wu,” is a very strange account. It only recorded Emperor Wu’s activities in sacrificing to and serving various gods and spirits, while his military campaigns against the Xiongnu, his expansionist ambitions and other accomplishments were not mentioned. Scholars have long reached the consensus that Sima Qian’s original chapter about Emperor Wu, entitled “Jinshang benji” 今上本紀 (Basic Annals of the Current Sovereign), was missing or explicitly taken out, and its current content was simply copied from Emperor Wu’s section in the “Fengshan shu.” However, the ritual specifics and procedures of his sacrifices were not so much the focus here, and the text rather devoted itself to a thorough account of the ruler’s worship of a hodgepodge of gods, ghosts, and spirits. It starts with “when he first ascended the throne, he was particularly respectful in sacrifices to ghosts and spirits” (初即位，尤敬鬼神之祀).¹⁸⁵ Then the records therein show that, leading up to Emperor Wu’s Feng and Shan sacrifices, a series of “masters of methods” (*fangshi* 方士), “masters of techniques” (*shushi* 術士), shamanesses (*wu* 巫), Spirit Mistresses (*shenjun* 神君), and magicians, contributed to the construction of the Yellow Emperor as an ideal model for Emperor Wu to emulate in his pursuit of immortality.

In particular, Li Shaojun 李少君, a master of methods specialized in the worship of the God of the Furnace, in dietary practices, and in “delaying old age” (卻老), proposed a method of turning cinnabar grains into yellow gold. He claimed that Emperor Wu, by using wine cups and bowls made of such gold, would be able to prolong his life and gain the ability to meet with immortals from the Isles of Penglai

183. To situate Emperor Wu’s aspirations and his advisors’ practices into the Han dynasty developments of the HuangLao 黃老 tradition, see Mark Csikszentmihalyi, “Traditional Taxonomies and Revealed Texts in the Han,” in *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage and Ritual*, ed. Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth (University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 90–97. For detailed discussions on the religious and intellectual tradition centered around the Yellow Emperor, see Csikszentmihalyi, “Emulating the Yellow Emperor: The Theory and Practice of Huanglao, 180–141 B.C.E.” (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1994), 58–95, 165–214. For the HuangLao tradition in the *Shi ji*, see Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, “Constructing Lineages and Inventing Traditions through Exemplary Figures in Early China,” *T’oung Pao* 89.1/3 (2003), 80–87.

184. See Csikszentmihalyi, “Emulating the Yellow Emperor,” 88–94 for details.

185. *Shi ji*, 12.451, 28.1384.

(蓬萊). Once that goal was achieved, then “on seeing them, by means of performing the Feng and Shan sacrifices, you will never die” (見之以封禪則不死), and the basis of such a claim was that “this is what the Yellow Emperor did” (黃帝是也).¹⁸⁶

Even after the death of Li, Emperor Wu continued to support various magicians’ work in producing yellow gold and elixirs for immortality and in searching for and summoning spirits, gods, and immortals. Through these specialists, he even received, indirectly, a message from the Yellow Emperor himself that claimed:

The rise of Han ought once again to correspond to the time of the Yellow Emperor. The sage ruler of the Han is among the grandsons or great-grandsons of Gaozu. The precious tripod will appear and then he will communicate with the spirits and perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices. Of the seventy-two kings who performed the Feng and Shan sacrifices, only the Yellow Emperor was able to climb Mount Tai to perform the Feng sacrifice.

漢興復當黃帝之時。漢之聖者在高祖之孫且曾孫也。寶鼎出而與神通，封禪。封禪七十二王，唯黃帝得上泰山封。¹⁸⁷

Based on this, the magicians at Emperor Wu’s court repeatedly recommended that he perform the Feng sacrifice so that he would “be able to ascend into Heaven as an immortal” (則能僊登天).¹⁸⁸ The Yellow Emperor again was cited as the precedent. He traveled widely to great mountains and worshiped thousands of deities and spirits, and in the end, he gained the ability to communicate with them. The Yellow Emperor thus never died, but instead ascended into Heaven and became an immortal. As the chapter notes, “a dragon with whiskers dangling from its chin came down to meet him. The Yellow Emperor mounted and rode it” (有龍垂胡鬣下迎黃帝，黃帝上騎).¹⁸⁹ The dragon then took off carrying him and over seventy ministers and palace women, leaving the minor officials and common people down below wailing. Upon hearing this, Emperor Wu was recorded saying, “Ah! If We could be truly like the Yellow Emperor. Leaving Our wives and children would be like doffing a slipper” (嗟乎！吾誠得如黃帝，吾視去妻子如脫屣耳。).¹⁹⁰

186. *Shi ji*, 12.452–55. GSR, 2:223.

187. *Shi ji*, 12.467. GSR, 2:236.

188. *Shi ji*, 12.467. GSR, 2:236.

189. *Shi ji*, 12.468. GSR, 2:237.

190. *Shi ji*, 12.468. GSR, 2:237.

Clothes of Two Different Colors

The early Han dynasty saw major developments of the religious and ideological tradition of Huang Lao 黃老 that was centered upon the Yellow Emperor and Laozi 老子. By the time of Emperor Wu, the tradition had become widely influential and established the idea of the Yellow Emperor being the “Ancestor of all under Heaven.” As the Yellow Emperor emulated Heaven and Earth, he was to be emulated by the ruler of men who held the Mandate of Heaven and aspired to be a sagely monarch corresponding with both Heaven and Earth.¹⁹¹ Starting its record with the Yellow Emperor, the *Shi ji* traced major lineages in the Central States to this common ancestor, except for the rulers of the Han.

In the *Shi ji*, the only known ancestor of the Han rulers was “the Grandly Honored One” (太公), the nameless father of Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202–195 B.C.E.) the first emperor, Gaozu 高祖 of Han. He was, however, only the titular father, as the *Shi ji* attributed a mythical origin to Liu Bang: “Mother Liu once rested on the banks of a great marsh when she dreamed she had an encounter with a spirit” (劉媪嘗息大澤之陂，夢與神遇), his father went and “saw a kraken atop her” (見蛟龍於其上).¹⁹² Subsequently, she became pregnant and gave birth. Liu Bang “had a high nose and a dragon’s brow” (隆準而龍顏) and other remarkable features that indicated cosmological ties to the Red Emperor (赤帝).¹⁹³ People were often able to see dragons or “a cloudy emanation” (雲氣) above him. The *Shi ji* then offers a remarkable story of Liu Bang killing a giant snake in the swamp. The snake was then revealed to be the son of the White Emperor (白帝) who was “cut in half by the son of the Red Emperor” for blocking his way.¹⁹⁴ Therefore, when he rose up with his own army to fight for the kingdom, Liu Bang “exalted the color red” (上赤), which then became the official ritual color of the Han dynasty.¹⁹⁵ Divine origin or illicit birth aside, the recorded origin of the first emperor of Han dynasty, as presented in the *Shi ji*, was certainly not to be traced back to the Yellow Emperor, but rather a different, dubious origin with no traceable lineage through generations of identifiable names, its only connection to divinity, here the Red Emperor, was identified by words from the mother of a giant snake.

The *Shi ji* continues to employ similar accounts of dreams to indicate the unusual, and possibly divine, origins of later Han rulers. After the

191. For discussions on texts about the Yellow Emperor and the HuangLao cosmology, see Csikszentmihalyi, “Emulating the Yellow Emperor,” 165–214.

192. *Shi ji*, 8.341. Translation follows that on *GSR*, 2:1–4, see also n. 6 and n. 9.

193. *Shi ji*, 8.342, 8.343, n. 2; *GSR*, 2:5, n. 12 and n. 13.

194. *Shi ji*, 8.347; *GSR*, 2:16.

195. *Shi ji*, 8.350.

turmoil caused by Empress Dowager Lu's 呂 (241–180 B.C.E.) family, the throne went to Liu Heng 劉恆 (r. 180–157 B.C.E.), a son born of one of Liu Bang's secondary wives. The chapter on empresses and imperial consorts, the "Waiqi shijia" 外戚世家, notes that his mother claimed to Liu Bang that she dreamed of "a green dragon laid on [her] stomach" (蒼龍據吾腹),¹⁹⁶ and subsequently, she became pregnant and gave birth to Liu Heng, the later Emperor Wen 文. The same chapter also claims that when Emperor Wu's mother was pregnant, she dreamed that "the sun entered her bosom" (日入其懷),¹⁹⁷ then gave birth to the future Emperor Wu. Thus according to the *Shi ji's* presentation of the Han lineage, despite all his efforts in emulating the Yellow Emperor, Emperor Wu of Han (and his ancestors), unlike all other lords and rulers recorded in the basic annals and hereditary houses chapters, were not descendants of the Yellow Emperor.

Aspiring to ascend into Heaven like the Yellow Emperor, Emperor Wu built shrines across his empire to worship all kinds of gods, ghosts, and spirits; he sacrificed to famous mountains and rivers, sent envoys out to the sea to search for immortals, and went to Mount Tai to perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices. His purpose, though, was not emulating the Yellow Emperor in corresponding with Heaven and Earth, but rather seeking immortality for himself. The *Shi ji* recorded that in all sacrifices to spiritual forces, Emperor Wu "paid respect personally" (親拜見), "exalted the color yellow in clothing, and used music to an extreme extent in the ceremonies" (衣上黃而盡用樂焉).¹⁹⁸ The "Basic Annals of Emperor Wu" five times mentions that the emperor "exalted the color yellow" when he performed sacrificial rites. In 104 B.C.E., the Han court officially changed its calendar to start the year in the first month and declared it the first year of the Taichu 太初 reign, again with "yellow as the exalted color" (色上黃).¹⁹⁹ In the last chapter of the *Shi ji*, Sima Qian further points out, as one of the major accomplishments of Emperor Wu, that he "changed the color of [court] clothing" (易服色).²⁰⁰

Now, if the reader takes a look at the last dream (D4) account in the "legendary stratum" of the "Zhao shijia" again, the connections are hard to miss. A king of the Zhao clan, or Emperor Wu in the shadow, dreamed of riding a flying dragon to ascend to the heavens, which turned out to be a futile aspiration, and he fell to the ground. The account then interprets the Zhao king's dream, and perhaps Emperor Wu's aspirations as

196. *Shi ji*, 49.1971.

197. *Shi ji*, 49.1975.

198. *Shi ji*, 12.475.

199. *Shi ji*, 12.483.

200. *Shi ji*, 130.3303; *GSR*, 2:255.

well, as “a sign of possessing momentum but not real power.”²⁰¹ This could certainly be viewed as an ominous hint that the Han dynasty’s rule, though strong at the moment, would not last long. More importantly, in the dream he wore “clothes of two different colors to the left and right of the middle seam in the back,” which was interpreted as “a sign of ruin.”²⁰² The color of court and ritual clothes of the Han empire did involve two colors, as the color red was used at the beginning (exalted by Liu Bang) and yellow was then adopted as fitting the dynasty’s “virtue” during the time of Emperor Wu.

The last two dreams (D3, D4) emplotted in the “legendary stratum” of the “Zhao shijia” thus served two functions, first, to foreshadow the repeated mistakes by Zhao kings in using the wrong military commanders that eventually led to the demise of the Zhao; second, to draw the present ruler of the Han dynasty into the hermeneutic framework constructed for the past. By projecting the present into the past, the foreshadowing of the Zhao’s decline also suggested dire prospects for the Han empire, and for Emperor Wu in particular, as the ruler made similar mistakes and was being led astray by a series of trusted magicians and masters of different “methods,” down the dangerous road of serving gods and ghosts and seeking immortality. The criticism, though not explicitly claimed to be directed at Emperor Wu, can be found in Sima Qian’s comments in the “Treaties on the Celestial Offices” (天官書): “The ultimate superior cultivates virtue, the next level practices [good] government, the next level carries out relief efforts, the next level conducts expiatory rites, directly below that there is nothing [to be done]” (太上脩德，其次脩政，其次脩救，其次脩禳，正下無之).²⁰³ The much more severe denigration, however, was hidden in the meta-level rhetoric and discourse of the *Shi ji*, anchored in its presentation of major lineages of the Central States, to demonstrate the inferior origin of the Han rulers.

These uncanny parallels and hidden discourses remain in the shadows as none could have been brought forth explicitly, or identified too accurately, during the Han. It is likely that the impact of the “Witchcraft and Sorcery” incident was significant enough on both the political and personal level for Sima Qian to end the records in the *Shi ji* around the time shortly after it and, as argued by Lu Yaodong, with Li Guangli’s surrender to the Xiongnu being the last event recorded for the

201. *Shi ji*, 43.1824.

202. *Shi ji*, 43.1824.

203. *Shi ji*, 27.1351. Translation from David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 510.

Han times.²⁰⁴ The last two dreams (D₃, D₄) in the “legendary stratum” certainly carried unseen weight projected across time from Sima Qian’s present to the Zhao clan’s past. The employment of these two dreams, too, would be part of the *Shi ji*’s “empty writing,” here charged with a hidden rhetoric for unutterable dissent and criticism toward the present ruler, Emperor Wu.²⁰⁵ In addition to foreshadowing the ruin of the Zhao in the past, their meta-level “empty writing” also functions to cast an ominous perspective upon the Han emperor’s present.

Concluding Thoughts

Rather than reading the *Shi ji* as simply a book of subtle political admonishment, and understanding the “Zhao shijia” chapter’s sole purpose as conveying Sima Qian’s personal grudge against his ruler, the purpose of this study has been to offer one reading of the text through identifying coherent patterns in the narrative of the past and making connections between the *Shi ji*’s presentation of past events and the representations of ideas, values, and contexts in correlated writings in the “Sima Qian textbase.” I have attempted to discuss the correlations in contents, structures, allusions, fabrications, and possible “empty writings,” in connection with a “composite” image of “Sima Qian” as the author-figure presented in this set of writings, with the “Zhao shijia” as the main object of study.

The composite nature of the “Zhao shijia” text becomes evident when we compare and contrast the two textual strata identified: the “*wo* stratum” and the “legendary stratum.” The “*wo* stratum” was apparently compiled based on Zhao local historical records, resulting in a patchwork of dry facts about past events, including the usage of *wo*, “us, our, ours,” to refer to the Zhao from a first-person plural perspective. On the other hand, the “legendary stratum” is full of ambiguities and dramatizations characteristic of vivid storytelling, especially in the lore about the orphan of Zhao. The first stratum introduces systematic discrepancies with other records, which serve as additional evidence of its contents’ local origin. The second stratum, however, drastically contradicts records found in other sources. Its accounts are of a legendary, or

204. Lu Yaodong 遼耀東, “‘Wugu zhi huo’ yu *Shi ji* de chengshu” 「巫蠱之禍」與《史記》的成書, *Guoli Taiwan daxue lishi xuexi xuebao* 18 (1994), 39–61.

205. Scholars have identified in the *Shi ji*, and its related writings, certain subversive feelings and political criticism toward the Han ruling house, especially toward Emperor Wu. For examples, see Hans van Ess, “The Friends of Sima Tan and Sima Qian,” and “Dissent against Emperor Wu of the Han.” Schaab-Hanke, “Did Chu Shaosun Contribute to a Tradition of the Scribe?” and “Inheritor of a Subversive Mind? Approaching Yang Yun from his Letter to Sun Huizong.”

fabricated nature, and some can be identified as “empty writing” on the meta-level of the narrative of the Zhao clan’s history to offer concealed discourse and political dissent pertaining to the personal circumstances of the Sima Qian author figure.

These legendary, or fabricated accounts, riddled with discrepancies and contradictions with fact-oriented sources, open up fruitful possibilities for interpretation. Historical factuality and truthfulness were not always the central concern of the *Shi ji*. Many scholars have commented on the distortions, creativity, and imagination in early historical writings, have explored the perspective of “the *Shi ji* as literature,” and have applied theories and practices from the studies of rhetoric, narrative analysis, and storytelling to complex early historical texts such as the *Shi ji*.²⁰⁶ Other issues inextricable from the study of early historical writing include the voice of the historian, issues of authority and uncertainty, dynamics between private knowledge and public opinion, the primacy of moral order over mere facts, and ideological manipulations of narratives.²⁰⁷ It is exactly these contradictions, complexities, and fabrications that can offer glimpses of the text’s unique mode of historiography, its meta-level interpretation, explanation, and representation of the past.

The legendary stratum accounts served different functions in at least three different historical stages; each attached different significance and value to them. First, some of these accounts likely originated as fabrications from later periods of Zhao political culture, serving as propaganda to legitimize their rulers’ claim to the status of lords and kings. Secondly, if ever transmitted in written form at all, they were probably regarded as Qin-related records due to their motifs concerning the shared ances-

206. See Burton Watson, *Sima Qian, Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 159; Joseph Roe Allen, III., “An Introductory Study of Narrative Structure in *Shi ji*,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 3.1 (1981), 31–66; Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu, “Chinese Historical Interpretation in the Reading of Narrative” and “The Poetics of Historiography,” in *From Historicity to Fictionality: The Chinese Poetics of Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 53–92; David Schaberg, “Song and the Historical Imagination in Early China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59.2 (1999), 305–61; Grant Hardy, “Form and Narrative in Ssu-ma Ch’ien’s *Shih chi*,” *CLEAR* 14 (1992), 1–23. Paul R. Goldin, “Appeals to History in Early Chinese Philosophy and Rhetoric,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35.1 (2008), 79–96. Lei Yang, “Building Blocks of Chinese Historiography: A Narratological Analysis of *Shi ji*” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2016); and many other works.

207. See Ronald C. Egan, “Narratives in *Tso chuan*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 37.2 (1977), 323–52; Wai-ye Li, “The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi*,” 391–400; chapter three of Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 92–140; David Schaberg, “Word of Mouth and the Sources of Western Han History,” in *Idle Talk: Gossip and Anecdote in Traditional China*, ed. Jack W. Chen and David Schaberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 17–37; and many other works.

tor of the Qin and Zhao clans. Thirdly, when they reached the hands of *Shi ji* compilers as source material, whether in written form, oral form, or both, they were redesigned and emplotted into the narrative of Zhao history as things that happened at crucial turning points in the Zhao clan's fortunes, just as claimed by the accounts themselves (with their alleged written transmission). Finally, some accounts were very likely the fabrications of Sima Qian, or later redactors of the *Shi ji*, to build hidden connections to the personal circumstances of the author-figure and to Han dynasty court politics under Emperor Wu. These redesigned or fabricated accounts came to be emplotted in this historical narrative on an equal footing on the textual level with all other source materials, apparently eliminating the fundamental distinctions between these very different types of contents and materials that all converged into one text. The interpretive emplotment of legendary accounts served a meta-level function of imbuing the representation of Zhao history with new value orientations and discourses. By offering a coherent hermeneutical framework, the practice of interpretive emplotment, together with the chapter's "empty writing," offer new understandings in the *Shi ji*'s presentation of the Zhao clan's trajectory.

史書傳言：“趙世家”中闡釋性的情節設置和“空文”

秦穎

摘要

本文辨識了《史記》“趙世家”中的兩個文本層系：“我層系”和“傳奇層系”。“我層系”表明趙國地方歷史記錄的存在，而“傳奇層系”則揭示了一個闡釋性的構架，將本章對趙氏歷史的陳述，導向血統和權利的傳承這個核心關注和焦慮。趙氏歷史敘事中的情節設置包括一系列預言夢和神異際遇，以此構成這個“傳奇層系”，並且指向一個關鍵人物，趙武靈王，在他的時代，趙國達到了強盛的頂峰。“傳奇層系”中一些顯然是捏造的記載，比如趙氏孤兒的故事以及後來趙國衰落的預言，顯示出本章的陳述與司馬遷的個人經歷，可能存在的政治異議，以及對漢武帝的批評言論之間的隱性關聯。通過識別隱藏在本章闡釋性情節設置構架中的這種捏造的“空文”，本文旨在提供一種對《史記》趙氏世家記述的解讀方式，這種新的方式在歷史敘事的元層面上遵循一個通譜一貫的模式。

Keywords: *Shi ji*, Sima Qian, dreams, prophecies, metahistory, Zhao shijia
史記, 司馬遷, 夢, 預言, 元歷史, 趙世家