

Dong Zhongshu,
a 'Confucian' Heritage
and the CHUNQIU FANLU



BY

MICHAEL LOEWE

BRILL CHINA STUDIES

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the *Chunqiu fanlu*

By
Michael Loewe



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Dong Zhongshu,
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PREFATORY NOTE

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References to classical texts are to the *Shisan jing zhushu* of Ruan Yuan (1815); for the Standard Histories they are to the punctuated editions of the *Zhonghua shuju* of Beijing, with references to other editions where this is desirable. Figures follow proper names, as given in my *Biographical Dictionary*, so as to distinguish, e.g., between three men called Wang Shang 王商; Wang Shang (1), Chancellor 29, died 25 BCE; Wang Shang (2), Marshal of State, died 12 BCE; and Wang Shang (3), author of *fu*, dates unknown.

ABBREVIATIONS

AM	<i>Asia Major</i> (third series)
BD	Loewe, <i>A Biographical Dictionary</i>
BHT	<i>Bo hu tong, Baihu tong</i>
BMFEA	<i>Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities</i>
BSS	<i>Basic Sinological Series</i>
<i>Chronicle to Canon</i>	Queen, <i>From chronicle to canon</i>
<i>Crisis and conflict</i>	Loewe, <i>Crisis and Conflict in Han China</i>
CHOAC	Loewe and Shaughnessy (eds.), <i>The Cambridge History of Ancient China</i>
CHOC	Twitchett and Loewe (eds.), <i>The Cambridge History of China. Volume I</i>
CQFL	<i>Chunqiu fanlu</i>
CSJC	<i>Congshu jicheng</i>
DMM	Loewe, <i>Divination, mythology and monarchy</i>
ECTBG	Loewe (ed.), <i>Early Chinese Texts A Bibliographical Guide</i>
HFHD	Dubs, <i>History of the Former Han Dynasty</i>
HHS	<i>Hou Han shu</i>
HHSJJ	<i>Hou Han shu jijie</i>
HNZ	<i>Huainanzi</i>
HS	<i>Han shu</i>
HSBZ	<i>Han shu buzhu</i>
LH	<i>Lunheng</i>
MH	Chavannes, <i>Mémoires historiques</i>
<i>Men who Governed</i>	Loewe, <i>Men who Governed Han China</i>
MSOS	<i>Mitteilungen des Seminars für orientalischen sprachen</i>
QFL	<i>Qianfu lun</i>
SBBY	<i>Sibu beiyao</i>
SBCK	<i>Sibu congan</i>
SCC	Needham et al., <i>Science and civilisation in China</i>
SGZ	<i>San guo zhi</i>
<i>Shuihudi</i>	<i>Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian</i>
SJ	<i>Shiji</i>

<i>TP</i>	<i>T'oung Pao</i>
<i>TPYL</i>	<i>Taiping yulan</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Wen wu</i>
<i>XTS</i>	<i>Xin Tang shu</i>
<i>YTL</i>	<i>Yantie lun</i>
<i>Zhangjiashan</i>	<i>Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian</i>
<i>ZZTJ</i>	<i>Zi zhi tong jian</i>

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INTRODUCTION

On arrival to take up my first academic appointment fifty years ago I had had but little personal acquaintance with historians of China, let alone specialists in the early empires. Very shortly I found myself listening to colleagues and graduate students who were quite certain that the key to understanding the whole of China's history lay in its economic developments; that the many centuries that preceded the foundation of the Republic in 1912 were all to be characterised by an unquestioned predominance of Confucianism; and that the immediate means of understanding China, past and present, lay in a study of the 'gentry'.

In such circumstances a raw newcomer to the profession preferred not to display his shortcomings by asking directly what a speaker meant by 'Confucianism'; rather did he hearken carefully to what his learned colleagues let slip during seminars; and he soon came to the conclusion that there was no acknowledged agreement as to what the term implied; and that vague descriptions, loose references or negative statements such as 'different from Daoism, Legalism' were being voiced in place of attempts at positive or precise definitions. Nor was there any attempt to explain how Confucianism of the later centuries was dependent on the man known as Confucius. It seemed that a blanket assumption 'Chinese empires were Confucian' was being used imprecisely and with as little validity as a statement that 'Western Europe was Christian'.

When, in later stages, it became possible to look more closely at the history of China's early empires I found that great emphasis was being placed on the part played by Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒, the 'great Confucian'. Such assumptions were at times coupled with a nodding reference to doubts regarding his authorship of the *Chunqiu fanlu*, the major work that bears his name; but no such doubts inhibited some senior scholars from quoting that work as testimony of a strong Confucianism that prevailed in Han times and of which Dong Zhongshu was a major protagonist. Clearly these subjects aroused questions; the general statements and conclusions that were to be read required careful scrutiny; and equally clearly such investigations would have to be grounded in wide reading. It is only in later years that I have felt ready

to ask in what ways 'Confucianism' existed in Han times and how far Dong Zhongshu's reputation as a 'Confucianist' may be validated. In doing so, in no way do I wish to assert that some of the ideas and practices that may be regarded as integral elements of a 'Confucianism' of Song, or even Tang, times did not exist in some measure in Han times. Such elements included a belief in the overall powers of heaven; the performance of religious services to ancestors; the importance attached to hierarchies and their requisite rules of conduct; a respect for the ideals of Kongzi; and an idealised view of Western Zhou. But it is too early to conceive of these ideas as forming a systematic, let alone 'orthodox' framework for living or thinking in Western Han.

For such reasons I have attempted as far as possible to avoid using terms such as Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism and Huang-Lao.¹ Other writers are ready to assume the existence of such identifiable and mutually exclusive schools of thought with their pronounced antagonisms from Western Han times, but such an assumption eludes me.² Nor can I see the existence of an interplay of imperial policies and decisions that rested on the rise or fall of officials who were tied inextricably to one or other of these modes of thought. This difference in opinion is of particular significance as against the view that Huang-Lao was in favour during the reign of Jingdi (reigned 157–141 BCE),³ rather than the more restricted recognition of, or even devotion to, its ideals by some persons, including the Empress Dowager Dou; nor do I suppose that Dong Zhongshu and others of his time were propagating 'Confucianism', whatever that term may imply. As in many writings, a straight translation of *ru* 儒 or *ruzhe* 儒者—which signifies specialists in traditional writings—as 'Confucian' has begged too many questions.⁴

¹ By way of exception, see the title of an article published in 1990 'The failure of the Confucian ethic in Later Han times', reprinted in Loewe, *Divination, mythology and monarchy in Han China* (1994). I argued there that it is difficult to see how the ideals associated with 'Confucianism' were being put into practice in Eastern Han.

² For select contributions and views that have been expressed by recent writers, see the Appendix below, pp. 6–18.

³ Sarah A. Queen, *From chronicle to canon: the hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, according to Tung Chung-shu* (1996), pp. 19, 76.

⁴ Lionel M. Jensen, in *Manufacturing Confucianism* (1997) writes of Confucianism as a 'largely Western invention' (p. 5), and considers the growth of a cult of Kongzi or Confucius, the creation of 'Confucianism' and the various purposes to which such concepts have been put. In his review article of that book, Nicolas Standaert points out that the Jesuits did not invent the term or concept of 'Confucianism', which seems

Sima Tan's 司馬談 well known list of six specialities of contemporaneous thought has normally been interpreted as naming established groups or schools or 'parties', held together by their members' shared devotion to a particular set of beliefs or ideals, but it has yet to be shown that cohesive groups of such a type existed in Western Han times. Nor was there a circulation of tracts or 'pamphlets' that set out such a group's attitudes in relation to the cogent and ever present problems of the day. For the nature and importance of those problems we can turn to a few imperial pronouncements, or the essays of Lu Jia 陸賈 (ca. 228–ca. 140 BCE) or Wang Fu 王符 ca. 90–165 CE), and the memorials that officials presented to the throne; and it is from such incomplete sources that we may draw our inferences.

There was a need to assert and support a claim that Qin or Han emperors stood possessed of a right to rule in succession to rulers depicted in mythology or featuring in history; and this right must be strong enough to withstand the claims of others. To some, this question might bring with it the one of how far a ruler should take an active part in government, or how far his duty lay in refraining from initiative and leaving his ministers to take decisions. Behind some minds there lurked the question of a choice between adherence to traditional schemes of organising mankind, and the need to accept innovation so as to meet changed circumstances. In practical terms a ruler or his advisors must choose between co-ordinating the activities and work of the population by means of enforced controls, or adopting a *laissez-faire* attitude that sought to reduce such impositions to a minimum. High-ranking officials could rarely ignore the problems of security of the empire, together with the recurrent question of whether to appease a non-Han leader with gifts or to challenge him with force.

Literate men and women could turn to a variety of teachers of *Zhan guo* times whose writings had arisen at a call to seek eternal values, or to establish a peaceful and orderly way of living on earth, or to pursue wealth and strength as the proper goal of a ruler. This heritage could lead to active discussion over academic matters, such as the validity and interpretation of certain writings acclaimed as old and authoritative, sometimes with the active participation of an emperor;

to have been manufactured in the nineteenth century; see Standaert, 'The Jesuits Did NOT Manufacture "Confucianism"' (1999), especially pp. 116–18 [capitals as in the original].

or it might lead to a ban laid on certain texts that were deemed to be a threat to dynastic power. How effective such a measure was is open to question.

Other differences of view concerned the purpose of the religious cults of the emperor and the rituals whereby these were conducted. Hopes for a continued existence beyond the grave inspired a variety of ways of searching for immortality, expressed both in literature and art. The occurrence of rare and perhaps disastrous events of nature stimulated a variety of explanations, some with implications for the survival of the dynasty. At a personal level, the stresses, trials and uncertainties of life had long produced ways of searching for wisdom or knowledge from occult sources with a trust in specialists who understood the means of procuring such a consolation in times of distress.

At a broader level, there were men of learning who explained the processes of change as seen in the heavens, on earth and in the lives of mankind as stages in a major, universal cycle of being. Differing concepts and forms of such a cycle were applied variously to account for visible phenomena, the destiny of human beings or perhaps the ordering of daily life. Specialists who saw themselves as masters of astronomy produced different ways of registering the passage of time, in calendars that required official approval and adoption.

Attention to these problems varied throughout Qin and Han times. Ideas were presented, accepted or dropped; faith in the teachings of one master or another grew and lapsed; promotion of a project or plan might bring with it unpopularity or even a danger of death. Overall, a sense of hierarchy seems to have imposed itself on the ways in which thinkers framed their conclusions, rulers conducted their government or individuals ordered their family relationships.

Accompanying the marked institutional, social and economic changes witnessed over four hundred years there ran major changes in religious and intellectual movements, whose extent may not always have been recognised by historians, particularly those who have emphasised a continuity in China's traditions. But the differences that arose between Qin, Western Han and Eastern Han times were of a radical nature, such that leading figures of Western Han Might well have been astonished or even shocked, had an occult source shown them a preview of later times. We may reflect or speculate on the astonishment with which Li Si 李斯 (executed 207 BCE), Shusun Tong 叔孫通 (*fl.* 200 BCE) or Lu Jia (*ca.* 228–*ca.* 140 BCE) would have viewed the institutions and practices of Chengdi's reign (33–7 BCE).

Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) or Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) might well have been puzzled by the teachings of the Buddha, and distrusted their implications. The desecration of an emperor's tomb would have been profoundly shocking;⁵ and they might well have deplored the call of at least one writer for a return to the disciplines and severities of Qin.⁶

In all this we are drawn to the part played by Dong Zhongshu in intellectual choice and the practical decisions of the second century BCE. Despite the problems that are involved and which will be discussed below, a number of scholars who write about Dong Zhongshu have been ready to cite various chapters of the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 as deriving from his hand, or to show him to have been a leader of a Confucian mode of thought (see the Appendix below). Many of the secondary writings that are now considered here bring out what may be termed a traditional view of Dong Zhongshu as one of the prime leaders of Confucianism. Possibly those of Anne Cheng, Wallacker, Bujard, Arbuckle, and Queen are among the most valuable, being written critically on the basis of research, rather than as general opinions.

In these circumstances it is clearly necessary to place Dong Zhongshu and his reputation within the context of the historical and intellectual development of Han times, for which a brief summary is offered in Chapter One below. Subsequent chapters consider the circumstances of his life, the position that he took in public affairs and the views of his achievements that were taken from Han to Qing times. An account of his writings other than the *Chunqiu fanlu* is followed by a discussion of the subjects treated and ideas voiced therein. Four subsequent chapters which are concerned with the *Chunqiu fanlu* address the problems of its textual transmission and authenticity, the contents expressed in the book, its ideas and the problems that they raised.

From the appendix which follows it may be seen that, with some notable exceptions, a number of Western and some Chinese writers have been ready to accept a description of Dong Zhongshu as 'Confucian' together with the assumption that a system or mode of thought that is called 'Confucianism' was recognised in Western Han times.

⁵ The tomb of Shundi was desecrated three months after his death in 144 CE; *HHS* 6, p. 276.

⁶ For Cui Shi 崔寔, see Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy* (1964), pp. 205–13.

The chapters which follow question how far such assertions can be validated.

Where it is appropriate detailed evidence has been relegated to the appendices of some of the chapters. Readers who wish for a summary of the arguments may prefer to proceed directly to the conclusions that are set out in Chapter Nine.

Appendix: Evaluations of Dong Zhongshu in Western writings

It was probably Otto Franke (writing in 1917) who first drew the attention of readers of the Western world to the person of Dong Zhongshu. His work, which may be described as a pioneering study, calls for the greatest admiration, attending as it does to nearly all the major questions raised when examining Dong Zhongshu and the *Chunqiu fanlu*.⁷ He sees Dong Zhongshu as being dedicated to the learning of Confucius ('Die Lehre des Konfuzius') (p. 99) and carefully notes his dependence on the *Chunqiu* 春秋 and *Gongyang zhuan* 公羊傳 rather than the *Lunyu* (p. 115). Franke discusses the likely loss of Dong's writings during the turbulent fates that Chang'an and Luoyang suffered, and the possibility that a copy of the *Chunqiu fanlu* was available in Sui times thanks to the search for literature that Niu Hong 牛弘 instituted in 583 (pp. 143–4);⁸ and he regards the possibility that some text was inserted at times later than Dong as being of little significance (p. 146).

A second early reference to Dong Zhongshu's teachings to be presented to the Western reader is seen in an essay of Hu Shih 胡適 (1929) in which he wrote of the establishment of Confucianism as a state religion.⁹ In doing so he took for granted the existence of 'Confucian scholars' known in the early days of the empire and indeed

⁷ The first part of his work was published in 1917, and re-published with the second part in 1920, these being times when aids to help westerners in sinological studies were extremely rare. See *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalistische Sprachen* XXI (1917); and Otto Franke, *Studien zur Geschichte des Konfuzianischen Dogmas und der chinesischen Staatsreligion: das Problem des Tsch'un-ts'iu und Tung Tschung-schu's Tsch'un-ts'iu fan lu* (1920).

⁸ *Sui shu* 32, p. 908. Whether or not such a copy, as listed in *Sui shu* 32, p. 930, survived the loss of the imperial library when shipped by water in 622 cannot be known.

⁹ Hu Shih, 'The establishment of Confucianism as a state religion during the Han dynasty' (1929).