

Dorothee Schaab-Hanke

Der Geschichtsschreiber als Exeget

Facetten der frühen chinesischen Historiographie



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Why did Sima Zhen want to correct the *Shiji*'s account of High Antiquity?*

The Man and Author Sima Zhen

Not very much is known about the life and career of Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (c. 679 — c. 732). Neither *Jiu Tangshu* nor *Xin Tangshu* devoted a biographical account to him. Sima Zhen is mentioned twice in the *Xin Tangshu*: in the biography of the famous historian and history critic Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), in which he is said to have been involved in a scholarly dispute between Liu Zhiji and Song Jin,¹ and in the bibliographical chapter in which his work, the *Shiji suoyin* 史記索隱, is recorded as comprising 30 *juan*.²

From the few data to be gained from these sources concerning Sima Zhen's life it can be concluded that he was born during the Yifeng Era of Emperor Gaozong, i.e., between 676 and 679, and that he died in the latter half of the Kaiyuan Era (713–741) of Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–755).³ He made a career during the reigns of Zhongzong, Ruizong, and Xuanzong, holding for some time the title of *guozǐ bōshì* 國子博士 (Doctor of the National University) and also that of a *guozǐ jìjiū* 國子祭酒 (Chancellor of the National University). He was a *hóngwēnguān xuéshì* 弘文館學士 (Academician in the Institute for the Advancement of Literature), a member of an institution which was originally a center for government-sponsored scholarship. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong this academy lost its importance, since he established a new academy in 718.⁴ Sima Zhen ended up by receiving the comparatively low post as Runzhou biejia 潤州別駕 (Administrative Aide in Runzhou)⁵ during the Kaiyuan Era.⁶

* This paper was first presented in Chinese at a conference on “Thought, Body and Culture – New Approaches to Chinese Historical Studies” (*Sìxiang, shēntǐ yǔ wénhuà – tansuǒ kuàiyuè hàn xué de jiāngyǔ* 思想、身體與文化：探索跨越漢學的疆域) at the National Ch'ing-hua University, Hsin-chu, Taiwan, in November 2004. An earlier version of this article was published in Chinese (see bibliography).

1 *Xin Tangshu* 132.4522.

2 *Xin Tangshu* 58.1457.

3 For a study in which the few available data to reconstruct the life data of Sima Zhen are collected, see Meixun (2000).

4 Cf. Twitchett (1992), 24; for details on the *hóngwēnguān* see, e.g., *Tang bǐjiào* 64.1114. According to Hucker (1985, no. 2911), the institute was staffed with various academicians (*xuéshì*) under the administrative leadership of a Supervising Secretary of the Chancellery.

5 Cf. Hucker (1985), no. 4623.

6 For this title, see the bibliographical entry in *Xin Tangshu* mentioned above.

Although it is not quite clear whether Sima Zhen wrote his comments and supplements as part of his official duties or privately, some of his own remarks suggest that at least the main bulk of the work was done by him privately in his later years, after his retreat from office. This may be concluded from the statement, in his postface to the *Suoyin* commentary, that he, Zhen, learned in his youth from Zhang Jiahui 張嘉會, an academician affiliated with the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (*hongwenguan*). We learn from him that he was the only one to have gained thorough expertise concerning the *Shiji*, but also that he did not compile a commentary of his own and that it was only in his later years that he had intensified his studies of the *Shiji*.⁷ It may, too, be of interest that Sima Zhen mentions in his preface to the supplemented *Shiji* that scholarship on the *Shiji* was transmitted within his family.⁸ If one considers that Sima Zhen called himself the “Little Sima” (Xiao Sima 小司馬), it is perhaps not too farfetched to assume that he might even have felt some family-related obligations towards Sima Qian and Sima Qian’s father, Sima Tan, with whom he shared the family name.

As for the concrete circumstances which had caused him to write his *Suoyin* commentary, Sima Zhen states:

初以殘缺處多，兼鄙褚少孫誣謬，因憤發而補《史記》，遂兼注之，然其功殆半。乃自惟曰：千載古史，良難紬繹。於是更撰《音義》，重作贊述，蓋欲以剖盤根之錯節，遵北轅於司南也。凡為三十卷，號曰《史記索隱》云。

In the beginning I started to supplement the *Shiji* out of the anger I felt at the many lacunae or even deficiencies (in the *Shiji*), including the vulgarities caused by Chu Shaosun; as a consequence, I wrote an overall commentary to it, but the result was of merely limited value, and so I said to myself: An historical work of a thousand years cannot so easily be restored in its (former) beauty. After this I have also compiled the *Yinyi* (commentary) and also rewrote the rhymed eulogies, in the hope I might be able to eradicate all the wrong parts by turning the northern axis to the southern pole. I (thus) wrote altogether thirty *juan*, giving it the title *Shiji suoyin*.⁹

From these words the reader may not only gain the impression that Sima Zhen was, as far as his own effort is concerned, even slightly critical of his own efforts, but also that his initial plan to make an all-encompassing commentary on the *Shiji* became modified during the course of his work and was replaced by a more modest ambition.

7 “*Shiji suoyin houxu*” (*Quan Tangwen* 402.6b): 崇文館學士張嘉會，會獨善此書，而無注義。貞少從張學，晚更研尋，〔...〕

8 “*Bu Shiji xu*” (*Ibid.*, 402.7b): 〔...〕而家傳是學，〔...〕。

9 “*Shiji suoyin houxu*” (*Ibid.*, 402.6b).

The “Sanhuang Benji” as the Document of a Scholarly Dispute

To explain the reason he wrote the “Sanhuang benji,” Sima Zhen expresses twice in his introductory remarks his discontent with the “Wudi benji” chapter of the *Shiji*. In his preface to the “Supplemented *Shiji*” he criticizes the *Shiji*'s account of the Five God-Emperors (Wudi 五帝) and the lack of the “Sanhuang” (Three Exalted) as examples of the deficiencies of the “Benji” 本紀 (Basic Annals) part of the *Shiji*.¹⁰ In the introductory remarks to his “Sanhuang benji” he writes:

太史公作《史記》，古今君臣宜應上自開闢，下迄當代，以為一家之首尾。今闕三皇，而以五帝為首者。正以《大戴禮》有〈五帝德篇〉。又〈帝世〉，皆敘自黃帝已下，故因以《五帝本紀》為首。其實三皇已還，載籍罕備，然君臣之始，教化之先，既論古史，不合全闕。近代皇甫謐作《帝王代紀》。徐整作《三五曆》，皆論三皇已來事，斯亦近古之一證。今並採而集之，作《三皇本紀》。雖復淺近，聊補闕云。

When His Honor the Grand Scribe wrote the “Scribe’s Records,” rulers and ministers of old and the present were included from the very beginning of time down to (the scribe’s) own lifetimes, and he [the Grand Scribe] thought that this would be head and tail of one single family. In the now (available) edition, however, no mention is made of the Three Exalted,¹¹ and the work begins with the Five God-Emperors; this was considered correct on the basis of “The Virtues of the Five God-Emperors” in the *Da Dai lijì*. Besides, the “Generations of Emperors” all enumerate the generations beginning with Huangdi, and this was the reason for starting out with the “Basic Annals of the Five God-Emperors.” In reality, the Three Exalted were even earlier, but only few records contain these. But even at the very beginning of rulers and ministers and among the ancestors of educational change there is a discussion of the old history, and it would not be correct to wholly neglect it. Recently, Huangfu Mi wrote the “Record of Generations of Emperors and Kings,” and Xu Zheng wrote the “Calendar of Three and Five,” and they both discussed the matter of the origin of the Three Exalted. This is almost equivalent to a piece of evidence from ancient times. So today I have selected (sources such as) these and, putting them together, have written the “Basic Annals of the Three Exalted”. Although it is an even more recent (production), I have (herewith) supplemented what had been lacking (in the *Shiji*).¹²

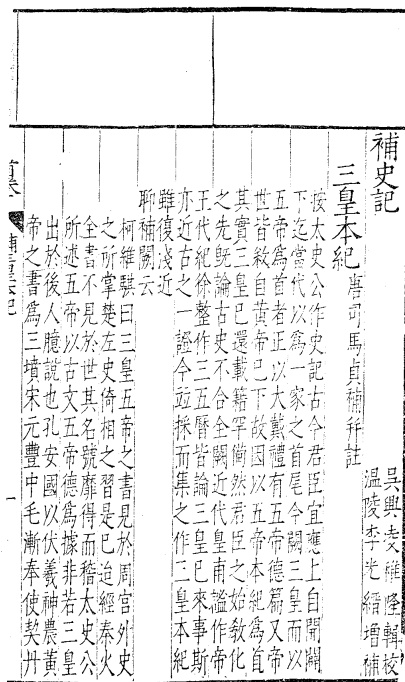
As these notes suggest, Sima Zhen distinguishes between a “wrong” and a “correct” account of history. The “wrong” one, i.e., the one

10 “*Bu Shiji xu*” (in *Quan Tangwen* 402.7b): 借如本紀敘五帝而闕三皇。(“For example, the Basic Annals report of the Five God-Emperors, but they do not mention the Three Exalted.”)

11 To conclude from the fact that Sima Zhen denotes the received *Shiji* edition as the “now (available) one”, it seems that he even intended to leave it up to speculation whether or not there might have existed an original edition which, different from the received one, conveyed a different account of antiquity.

12 *Bu Shiji*, “Sanhuang benji”, 1a (in *Shiji pinglin* I, 1).

traced in the “Wudi benji” of the *Shiji*, was made, according to Sima Zhen, on the basis of the “Wudi de” 五帝德 (Virtues of the Five God-Emperors) – a chapter of the received version of the *Da Dai lijì* 大戴禮記 – on the one hand and on what he calls “Dishi” 帝世 (Generations of God-Emperors), probably the “Dixi” 帝繫 chapter contained in the same source, on the other hand. As for the “correct” succession of God-Emperors, Sima Zhen continues, pieces of evidence are few, but support, he thought, could be gained from the *Diwang daiji* 帝王代紀 (i.e. the *Diwang shiji* 帝王世紀), by Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (Jin), and from the *Sanwu li* 三五曆, a text ascribed to Xu Zheng 徐整.¹³



The first page of the “Sanhuang benji” in the *Shiji pinglin* with Sima Zhen’s introductory remarks¹⁴

Although Sima Zhen apparently does not feel quite satisfied with the sources he could quote as a support for his account of China’s most ancient history, he emphasizes the need for such an alternative account of history, because, as he is convinced, the Three Exalted lived even longer ago than the Five God-Emperors and thus should not be neglected in any further historical account. In what follows, the content

13 The *Sanwu li* 三五曆記 compiled by Xu Zheng 徐整 in 2 *juan* is recorded in the bibliographical chapter of *Jiu Tangshu* (26.1996), section “zashi” 雜史.

14 *Bu Shiji*, “Sanhuang benji”, 1a (in *Shiji pinglin* I, 1).

of both texts at issue here as well as the scholarly traditions in which these texts are embedded will be more closely scrutinized.

The Object of Sima Zhen's Criticism: The "Wudi Benji" Chapter of the *Shiji*

In the first chapter of the *Shiji*, the Five God-Emperors are dealt with one after the other, starting out with Huangdi, the Yellow God-Emperor, and followed by Zhuanxu, Di Ku, Yao and Shun. Some legendary material concerning their life and activities is ascribed to each of these mythical heroes. In his final remark at the end of the chapter, the *Shiji* author states:

太史公曰：學者多稱五帝，尚矣。然尚書獨載堯以來；而百家言黃帝，其文不雅馴，薦紳先生難言之。孔子所傳宰予問五帝德及帝繫姓，儒者或不傳。

His Honor the Grand Scribe said: Scholars often claim that the Five Emperors lived in remote antiquity. But the *Shangshu* only records Yao and [the rulers] thereafter, whereas the masters of the Hundred Schools talk about the Yellow God-Emperor. However, their texts are not (acknowledged) as elegant and fitting. Even civil officials or old masters would have trouble explaining [the history of this period]. (The teachings) that Confucius reported in his answer to Zai Yu's question in the "Wudi de" (Virtues of the Five God-Emperors) and the "Dixi xing" (Genealogies of the God-Emperors) are something that some among the Confucian scholars do not transmit.¹⁵

It is precisely where the *Shiji* mentions the Confucian scholars of Han times that Sima Zhen in his *Suoyin* commentary adds the following, quite critical, remarks:

五帝德、帝繫姓皆大戴禮及孔子家語篇名。以二者皆非正經，故漢時儒者以為非聖人之言，故多不傳學也。

The "Virtues of the Five God-Emperors" and the "Genealogies of the God-Emperors" are both the names of chapters in the *Da Dai li* and in the *Kongzi jiaoyu*. As these two were not part of the orthodox canon, the Confucian scholars of Han times did not regard them as the words of the sage, and in consequence, most of them did not transmit these teachings.¹⁶

What is called a "comment" here should in fact be called a personal statement, as it can quite easily be seen with which group Sima Zhen tends to side: certainly not with the Grand Scribe – Sima Qian or Sima Tan¹⁷ – but rather with those Confucian scholars of Han times men-

15 *Shiji* 1.46.

16 *Shiji*-K 1.47.

17 In this article, any attribution of Chapter 1 of the *Shiji* to either Sima Tan or Sima Qian will be avoided. It is, however, in my view highly probably that the very concept of allotting the first place in this chapter to Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, was of importance primarily to Sima Tan, and perhaps merely tolerated by his son Qian.

tioned in the text. — But let us look first at the Grand Scribe's final remarks in this chapter:

[...] 總之不離古文者近是。予觀春秋、國語，其發明五帝德、帝繫姓章矣，顧弟弗深考，其所表見皆不虛。書缺有聞矣，其軼乃時時見於他說。非好學深思，心知其意，固難為淺見寡聞道也。余并論次，擇其言尤雅者，故著為本紀書首。

[...] On the whole [those accounts of the elders] which were not far from the texts of old and thus come close to the truth. I have read the *Spring and Autumn* and the *Lessons of the States* and it is obvious that they shed some light on the "Virtues of the Five God-Emperors" and the "Genealogies of the God-Emperors". Even though their investigations are not far-reaching, what (the authors of these texts) want to reveal is no empty talk, either. Some (records of past events) are left out of the *Documents*, and there are also lacunae. Some of the missing material can be found in other sources. Only if one carefully and deeply ponders over these will one know their meaning in one's heart. It is certainly difficult to make people who have only superficial knowledge realize the way, about which little is heard. I have collected these teachings and have discussed them one after another, selecting among them only the most elegant words, and this is why I have put [Huangdi] at the top of the Basic Annals.¹⁸

In clear opposition to the decision taken by the *Shiji* author(s), Sima Zhen in the comment he adds right after "Huangdi zhe" 黃帝者 argues:

有土德之瑞，土色黃，故稱黃帝，猶神農火德王而稱炎帝然也。此以黃帝為五帝之首，蓋依大戴禮五帝德。又譙周、宋均亦以為然。而孔安國、皇甫謐帝王代紀及孫氏注系本並以伏羲、神農、黃帝為三皇，少昊、高陽、高辛、唐、虞為五帝。¹⁹

He is called Huangdi (Yellow God-Emperor) because he had the portents of the virtue of Earth, and the color corresponding with Earth is Yellow. This is comparable to the fact that Shennong is the king whose virtue is Fire and that he is thus called Yandi (Flaming God-Emperor). Huangdi is probably taken here as the head of the Five Emperors on the basis of the "Chapter on the Virtues of the Five God-Emperors" of the *Da Dai liji*. Besides, Qiao Zhou²⁰ and Song Jun²¹ both represent the same tradition. Contrarily, Kong Anguo,²²

18 *Shiji* 1.46. Cf. the translation by Nienhauser (1994, 17).

19 *Shiji suoyin* (*Shiji*-K 1.1-2). Cf. the almost parallel statement of Zhang Shoujie's *Zhengyi* commentary.

20 Qiao Zhou 譙周 (199–270) was the compiler of *Faxun* 法訓, *Wujing lun* 五經論 and *Gushi kao* 古史考.

21 Song Jun 宋均 (Sanguo, Wei) wrote commentaries to many of the so-called "apocryphal" scriptures, such as the *Shimwei xu* 詩緯序 and the *Chunqiu wei* 春秋緯, both mentioned in Sima Zhen's deliberations on the comments to the classics on Filial Piety (*Xiaojing*) and *Laoszi* and the transmission of the *Yi(jing)* 孝經老子注易傳議 (*Quan Tangwen* 402.2a-4a).

22 Cf. Kong Anguo's *Shangshu xu* (尚書序 (Preface to *Shangshu*)). Cf. *Shisan jing zhushu* 2064b. As for the term "sanfen wudian" 三墳五典: 正義曰。孔安國尚書序云伏羲神農黃帝之書謂之三墳。言大道也。少昊，顓頊，高辛，唐，虞謂之五典。言長道也。

Huangfu Mi in his *Diwang dajì* and Master Sun in his commentary to the *Xiben*²³ all maintain that Fuxi, Shennong and Huangdi are the Three Exalted, and that Shaohao, Gaoyang²⁴, Gaoxin,²⁵ Tang,²⁶ and Yu²⁷ are the Five God-Emperors.

This is a fairly bold claim for a commentary. But let us proceed to the main text of the *Shiji*. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this essay is the fact that the Grand Scribe reflects on the problem of textual evidence for the earliest rulers in Chinese history. It is thus plain that he as the reflecting historian is highly aware of the fact that those sources which were accepted by the *Ru* scholars scarcely talked about Huangdi or any other of the Five God-Emperors, while the sources in which they were mentioned were not taken seriously by the *Ru* scholars. The *Shiji* author then proceeds to mention the sources from which he draws support for his decision to devote the first chapter of his work to the Five God-Emperors, and allot the first place to Huangdi. He argues that the sources from which he sought evidence for these were close to what he called “elegant and fitting” (*yaxun* 雅馴): the “Wudi de” (Virtues of the Five God-Emperors) and the “Dixi [xing]” (Genealogies of the God-Emperors), both of which are titles of chapters in the received text of the *Da Dai lijì*.²⁸ In fact, if one searches the “Wudi de” chapter of the *Da Dai lijì*, one finds a conversation between Confucius and his disciple Zai Wo in which Confucius states that Huangdi was the first ruler of high antiquity, followed by Zhuanxu, Di Gu, Yao, and Shun.²⁹ The “Dixi” chapter of *Da Dai lijì* for its part contains no conversation with Confucius as the transmitting authority, for its part contains no conversation with Confucius as the transmitting authority, but simply lists a genealogy of ancient God-Emperors, starting with Shaodian, the progenitor of Huangdi.³⁰ Although the *Da Dai lijì* was not reckoned among the “Classics” by the Han *Ru* scholars, it is, as the *Shiji* author argues, rooted in a tradition according to which Confucius taught that there was a succession of rulers in antiquity starting with Huangdi. It is to this that Sima Zhen seems to refer when he speaks of texts “which were not far from the texts of old and thus are close to the truth”.

23 This probably refers to a commentary of the *Shiben* 世本.

24 Gaoyang 高陽 is a cognomen of Zhuanxu 顓頊.

25 Gaoxin 高辛 is a cognomen of Di Ku 帝嚳.

26 The Lord of Tang 唐 was Yao 堯.

27 The Lord of Yu 虞 was Shun 舜.

28 For the “Wudi de” 五帝德, see *Da Dai lijì* 7.1/40/20–43/3; for the “Dixi” 帝繫, see *Da Dai lijì* 7.2/43/5–44/7.

29 *Da Dai lijì* 7.1/40/20–41/6.

30 *Da Dai lijì* 7.2/43/7.

The “Sanhuang Benji” and Its Scholarly Background

Let us now take a closer look at the content of Sima Zhen’s alternative version of antiquity and at the sources he chose to justify his choice.

The “Sanhuang benji” has been transmitted in several editions.³¹ The text falls roughly into three parts. The first and second part offer different versions of what is meant by Three Exalted (Sanhuang 三皇), while a short third part discusses the question of how many rulers of old had proceeded to Mount Tai in order to perform the Feng and Shan sacrifices there, and ends with some calculations concerning the amount of periods and of years that had gone by from the very beginning of time down to the end of the Chunqiu period.

The first part consists mainly of an enumeration of the first rulers in Chinese history, namely firstly: Taihao Baoxi (i.e. Fuxi) as well as, somehow attached to him, Nügua; secondly Shennong, who has also the name Lishi, Master of (mount) Li; and thirdly, Huangdi, who also has the cognomen Master Xuanyuan.

About Fuxi we learn that he ruled in ancient times as a king over All-Under-Heaven. We are told the name of his mother and some other details. As ruler, Fuxi considered the structures of Heaven as well as those of Earth and which he took both as a model for his reign. We also read that Fuxi had the body of a snake and the head of a human being, that he invented the eight diagrams used for divination, and that he made nets, and taught people how to use them for fishing and also that he made the first lute with 25 strings.

Of Nügua, Sima Zhen writes that he had the same cognomen as Huangdi, that he also had the body of a snake and the head of a human being, and that he had invented the first mouth-organ. Sima Zhen then retells the famous myth according to which Gonggong had a struggle with Zhurong, after losing which Gonggong angrily knocked his head against Mount Buzhou, breaking one of the heavenly pillars. But Nügua took some colored stones to repair the pillar, and thus the world was preserved from damage. That Nügua does not have a position of his own is made plain by the remark that both Fuxi and Nügua were equally supported by Wood.

Shennong is depicted in Sima Zhen’s account as the ruler correlated with the virtue of Fire. He is said to have had the body of a human being and the head of an ox. He invented a zither with five strings and taught the people how to carve wood, catch fish in nets, and establish day markets.

Only a short remark is devoted to Huangdi, here called with his cognomen Xuanyuan. About him we learn that he arose 530 years after

31 My analysis is primarily based on the *Shiji pinglin* edition of the “Sanhuang benji”. The version provided by Takigawa differs in some details from the former and will also be adduced here for comparison. See Takigawa, 11-13 [1-8]. For a French translation of this essay, see Chavannes I, 3-22.

Shennong, and we read about the clan names of all the feudal lords during the time of Huangdi.

Sima Zhen then proceeds in his account by adducing an alternative explanation of the Three Exalted, namely: the Exalted of Heaven (Tianhuang 天皇), the Exalted of Earth (Dihuang 地皇) and the Exalted of Man (Renhuang 人皇). It seems that these three also constituted whole dynasties rather than being single rulers, for the account continues by saying that the Exalted of Heaven had twelve representatives, the Exalted of Earth eleven, and the Exalted of Man nine. Once again, the correlation of these rulers with the theory of dynastic cycles is indicated by saying that the representatives of the Exalted of Heaven were supported by Wood and the Exalted of Earth by Fire, the succession in the cycle thus being the same as stated before with respect to the Fuxi-Shennong-Huangdi triade. The number of the reigning years of all the rulers within this triade, altogether nine, is given by Sima Zhen as comprising 150 generations, that is, as Sima Zhen calculates, altogether 45,600 years.³²

After a short record of the descendants of these three ages of reigns – there was a dynasty of dragons after the Exalted of Man, followed by several clans whose names are specifically enumerated – Sima Zhen turns to the question of how many rulers had proceeded to Mount Tai and performed the solemn Feng and Shan sacrifices there. Once again, he traces various traditions and ends up by counting the years from the great beginning down to the time when the unicorn was caught, a time span which comprised, according to Sima Zhen, 3,276,000 years, consisting of altogether 10 periods (*jì* 紀), each of them comprising 70,600 years.³³ He concludes by claiming that Huangdi reigned only during the last of these periods and that the major reason for writing his supplements was to add these data to the Basic Annals.

Despite the somewhat muddling diversity of traditions adduced by Sima Zhen in his essay, the most interesting aspect of his account seems to me to be that he decided to include Nüguā into his version of the Three Exalted. As we shall see below, this in a way runs counter to the triade Fuxi, Shennong, and Huangdi, as it is traced in most sources from his lifetime. But due to his decision to give Nüguā no position of his own but to place him on a par with Huangdi, the triade is preserved by a somewhat strange compromise.

32 Cf. *Bu Shiji*, “Sanhuang benji”, 4ab (in *Shiji pinglin* I, 7-8): 凡一百五十世。合四萬五千六百年。 Cf. Takigawa, 12 [5], who adds a comment to these – admittedly strange numbers – saying that they are all taken from the „Hetu“ and the „Sanwu li“, i.e. apocryphal scriptures. Cf. Chavannes I, 19.

33 Cf. *Bu Shiji*, “Sanhuang benji”, 5a (in *Shiji pinglin* I, 9): 至于獲麟。凡三百二十七萬六千歲。分為十紀。凡世七萬六百年。 Cf. Takigawa, 12 [6]. Cf. Chavannes I, 21. As Chavannes adds in a comment, the *Tongjian gangmu* has 2.267.000 years instead.

We shall now try to find out which sources Sima Zhen referred to by proposing these conceptions. The primary purpose must have been to compete with those by which the *Shiji* author had justified his decision in favour of Huangdi.

Only once in his essay on the Three Exalted does Sima Zhen explicitly refer to the *Yijing* 易經 as his source. But the first part of his essay is in fact based to a considerable extent on the *Yijing*'s "Xici zhuan" 繫辭傳, authorship of which has traditionally been credited to Confucius. There we find the enumeration of Baoxi (Fuxi), Shennong as well as Huangdi, followed by Yao and Shun as the three first rulers in Chinese history, the account of the way in which Baoxi organized his reign by adapting to the cosmos, considering the structures of Heaven as well as that of Earth and taking both as his model for rule. He is described as the inventor of the eight diagrams used for divination and that he made nets and taught people how to use them for fishing. As for Shennong, his function as a teacher for the people how to carve wood, catch fish in nets establish day markets is mentioned, whereas Huangdi is only mentioned briefly, together with Yao and Shun.³⁴ (Cf. also table 3 in the appendix, column 1.) It thus seems as if the overall structure of the first part of the "Sanhuang benji" was taken from the "Xici zhuan."

The next source in which material similar to that represented in Sima Zhen's essay can be found is the *Shijing* 世經 (Classic of Generations), an abbreviated version of which is contained in the "Lüli zhi" 律曆志 (Pitch Pipes and Calendar) chapter of the *Hanshu*.³⁵ The passage taken from the *Shijing* starts with a reference to the *Zuozhuan*³⁶ and compares the succession of rulers stated there with the succession of rulers enumerated in the above adduced "Xici zhuan" passage. Then the *Shijing* is quoted with the words:

稽之於易，炮犧、神農、黃帝相繼之世可知。³⁷

If one consults the [Book of] Changes, one can know that it was the generations of Baoxi, Shennong and Huangdi who had replaced each other.

Apart from confirming the succession Baoxi (= Fuxi)–Shennong–Huangdi, the *Shijing* also speaks of the theory of cycles, correlating Fuxi again with Wood, Shennong with Fire, and Huangdi with Earth. (Cf. also the table in the appendix, column 2.) Briefly speaking, the *Hanshu*

34 *Yijing* 66.81/19-82/5 ("Xici zhuan", part 2); cf. *Shisanjing zhusu* 86b-c.

35 *Hanshu* 21B.1011-1013. Ban Gu, the author of the *Hanshu*, writes at the beginning of this chapter that he had taken most of the material of this chapter from Liu Xin. See *Hanshu* 21A.955. The title *Shijing* 世經 is mentioned at the beginning of the second part of the chapter.

36 Cf. *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 17, the famous passage where Zou (Yan's) attending the court of the duke of Lu is reported.

37 *Hanshu* 21B.1011.

here transmits an earlier text ascribed to the Han scholar Liu Xin in which not only the idea of the Three Exalted Fuxi, Shennong and Huangdi, is propagated but in which their correlation with the elements is also formulated. Perhaps it is even here that the earliest extant piece of evidence for this version of the ideology of dynastic cycles is found.

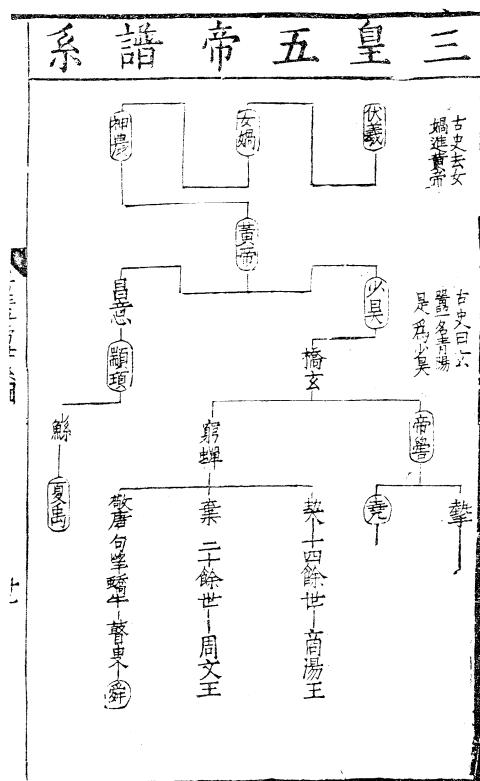


Chart with graphical representation of Sima Zhen's version of the Three Exalted and the Five God-Emperors (*Sanhuang Wudi puxi* 三皇五帝譜系) as reproduced in *Shiji pinglin*, Foreword, 29a (89).

The source that is certainly the one most closely related to Sima Zhen's essay is, however, not the *Shijing*, but the *Diwang shiji* 帝王世紀 (Records of the Generations of Emperors and Kings), a text of which only fragments survived, most of them contained in encyclopedias and commentaries. Sima Zhen mentions this source, calling it *Diwang daiji* 帝王代紀, (Records of the Epochs of Emperors and Kings), because of a taboo during his lifetime. Unlike the two sources analyzed above, the *Diwang shiji* also contains the concept of the succession of Fuxi, Nügua and Huangdi, as it is propagated by Sima Zhen in his "Sanhuang benji." (Cf. also the table 3 in the appendix, column 3.)

A detail of special interest here with regard to the relationship between the “Xici zhuan” and the *Divang shiji* is that, in the *Shisanjing zhusu* edition of the *Yijing*, it is precisely after the passage on Baoxi (Fuxi) as rendered in the “Xici zhuan” that the commentary provided by Kong Yingda adds the quotation from the *Divang shiji* in which Nügua is introduced as an additional person or god. This occurs before the main text proceeds to speak of Shennong.³⁸ In other words, Sima Zhen probably simply copied the content of the “Classic”, together with its exegetical tradition, into his account of the Three Exalted.

Interestingly, the *Hanshu* also contains a historical survey in which Nügua is given a place of his own. That is found in *Hanshu* chapter 20, the “Gujin renbiao” 古今人表 (Tables of Persons from Antiquity Down to the Present). It is here that we find Fuxi in the highest position, the first of altogether nine, which means that he was regarded as one of the “wise” (*shengren* 聖人). After him follows Nügua, although ranking merely in the second-best category, that of “humane persons” (*renren* 仁人). Third in this succession is Shennong, followed by Huangdi, both again being placed in the highest-ranked position.³⁹ Whoever wrote this chapter of the *Hanshu*, or – more precisely – whoever wrote the original account on which this chapter, the only systematic account of history preceding the Han dynasty which the *Hanshu* contains, is based, must have followed the succession Fuxi/Nügua–Shennong–Huangdi, which Sima Zhen adopted in his “Sanhuang benji”.

Apart from those embellishing details in the “Sanhuang benji”, the sources of which have already been traced to the *Divang shiji* or even to the *Shijing*, parallels with some quite different parts of Sima Zhen’s account can be found in quotations from scriptures which have mostly only survived in fragments, quotations from texts which have been subsumed under the category “apocryphal” texts.

Sima Zhen mentions the names of some of these apocryphal sources to which he explicitly refers in his account. For example, in his introductory remarks to his “Sanhuang benji”, he adduces the *Sanwu li* 三五曆 (Calendar of the Three and the Five) by Xu Zheng 徐整 as one of the sources of support of his theory that the Three Exalted lived still earlier than the Five God-Emperors. If one consults the section “Huangdi bu” 黃帝部 (Emperors and Kings), one finds several quotations from this source, mostly concentrating on the concept of the Emperors of Heaven, Earth, and Men. They explain, for example, that

38 Cf. *Divang shiji* as quoted in *Shisanjing zhusu* 86c. Another *Divang shiji* fragment treating Nügua very close to the “Sanhuang benji” account is contained in *Taiping yulan* 78.4b and in *Yiwen leiju* 11.208.

39 *Hanshu* 20.863–867.

the Emperor of Earth had nine heads, and there is an additional comment saying that the three emperors all together reigned 45,600 years, information which is wholly parallel to that given in the “Sanhuang benji.”⁴⁰

In his “Sanhuang benji,” Sima Zhen makes mention of two further apocryphal texts, the *Tunwei* 圖緯 and the *Chunqiu wei* 春秋緯. The *Tunwei* he adduces as a piece of evidence for the Tianhuang (Exalted of Heaven) – Dihuang (Exalted of Earth) – Renhuang (Exalted of Man) triade, adding a remark which sounds as if he wants to apologize for his choice that because this succession is documented in sources such as this one he simply could not wholly dispense with it and therefore decided to include this second version as well.⁴¹

As for the *Chunqiu wei*, Sima Zhen quotes this source at the end of his essay with a computation from the beginning of time up to the capture of the unicorn, comprising a span of altogether 3,276,000 years.⁴² There is another apocryphal text related to the *Chunqiu*, the *Chunqiu yundou shu* 春秋運斗樞, of which fragments are transmitted confirming the triade Fuxi-Nügua-Shennong.⁴³ As the Qing scholar Zhao Yi maintains, this text was used as an important source by the Han scholar Zheng Xuan in his comment on the *Shangshu zhonghou* 尚書中候. Zhao Yi maintains that Sima Zhen in his account mainly sought support from Zheng Xuan's comments.⁴⁴ He also argues that Kong Yingda in his comment on the *Shangshu* honors Zheng Xuan and at the same time refutes Kong Anguo. From his comments the conclusion can be drawn that Sima Zhen by his decision to include Nügua took sides with Zheng Xuan and against Kong Yingda.⁴⁵

40 Cf. *Samwu li* (ji), here probably erroneously written with an “er” 二, as quoted in *Taiping yulan* 78.2a: 《二五歷紀》曰：有神聖人九頭，號人皇。（馬摠云：一百六十五代合四萬五千六百年。）天皇、地皇、人皇為太古。

41 *Bu Shiji*, “Sanhuang benji”, 4a (in *Shiji pinglin* I, 7): 既是開闢之初。君臣之始圖緯所載。不可全棄。故兼序之。天地初立。

42 A fragment of a *Chunqiu wei* giving this computation is not contained in the *Weishu jicheng*.

43 See the quotation from the *Chunqiu yundou shu* collected in Yasui/Nakamura (1994), 710: 伏羲、女媧、神農，是三皇也。

44 Cf. Takigawa, 12 [7]: 趙翼曰：[...] 鄭康成依《運斗樞》註《尚書中候》，乃以伏羲、女媧、神農為三皇，帝鴻、金天、高陽、高辛、唐虞為五帝。司馬貞因之作《三皇本紀》，亦以伏羲、女媧、神農為三皇。

45 Cf. *ibid.*: 孔穎達註《尚書》最尊安國，故其駁鄭注，謂女媧但修伏羲之道，無所改作，不得列三皇，既不數女媧，則不可不取黃帝為三皇。For the passage in Kong Anguo's comment to which Takiagwa refers here, see *Shisan jing zhushu* 2064b: 正義曰：孔安國《尚書序》云：伏羲、神農、黃帝之書謂之三墳，言大道也。少昊、顓頊、高辛、唐、虞謂之五典，言長道也。The comment is added here to the famous *Zuo-zhuan* passage, Zhao 12.9 (Yang, 1340) where the term *sanfen wudian* 三墳五典 is explained.

Summarizing the main results of the above analysis, we may say that Sima Zhen based his account of antiquity primarily upon the *Divang shiji* of which we know that it was still extant during Sima Zhen's lifetime.⁴⁶ Not only the many descriptive details concerning the person of the Three Exalted but also the mentioning of Nügua among the earliest rulers suggest that this text among the parallels found comes closest to the "Sanhuang benji" version.

The *Divang shiji* for its part seems to be rooted very much in the ideological milieu of the *Shijing* as it is quoted in the "Lüli zhi" chapter of the *Hanshu*. The *Shijing* seems, however, to be less fond of embellishing details than the *Divang shiji*. It does not mention Nügua among the Three Exalted but confines itself to Fuxi, Shennong and Huangdi. Besides, stress seems to be laid primarily on the correlation of these earliest rulers with the virtues or elements supporting them: Fuxi with Wood, Shennong with Fire, and Huangdi with Earth. At any rate, Sima Zhen seems to have based his account at least partly on the sources of which Han scholars, and among them prominently Liu Xin, had shown appreciation already and regarded as sources supporting *Ru* orthodox thought.

As for the relationship between the *Divang shiji* and the "Xici zhuan", a further interesting discovery is that the structure of the "Sanhuang benji" seems to be based upon the cosmogony presented in the "Xici zhuan". Furthermore, a closer look into the *Shisanjing zhushu* edition of the *Yijing* reveals that it appears precisely where this cosmogony is stated in the main text. The *Zhengyi* commentator Kong Yingda had already enriched this account by quoting additional details from the *Divang shiji*. By including the "Xici zhuan" account as well as that of the *Divang shiji* into his "Sanhuang benji", Sima Zhen may be said to have melted together a commentary with a sub-commentary; perhaps he even regarded what he had written as "classic and commentary", making up an all-encompassing account of China's most ancient history.

A further important source to be mentioned here are the apocryphal texts. It seems that Sima Zhen had a special fondness for them. Much of the material in the *Shijing* and the *Divang shiji* is taken from the so-called apocryphal texts (*weishu* 緯書). As we saw already, Sima Zhen explicitly mentioned texts such as the *Tuwei* or the *Chunqiu wei* as his sources. One only needs to take a superficial look at the extant fragments of texts of this genre to find a host of further parallels to details contained in the "Sanhuang benji".

46 A *Divang shiji* in 16 *juan* is recorded in both the bibliographical chapters of the *Jiu Tangshu* and of the *Xin Tangshu*. Cf. *Tangshu jingji yimen bezhi*, 84.

As should have become plain from the above said, Sima Zhen's essay on the Three Exalted is a highly complex patchwork fabric which seems to have been drawn from a variety of sources, only a small number of which have been identified and scrutinized more closely here. If one compares the the "Wudi benji" of the *Shiji* with Sima Zhen's "Sanhuang benji", one finds that both of them are loaded with legendary material and it is not so easy for a modern reader to find out in which respect one of these accounts should be more "reliable" than the other. But to Sima Zhen, his alternative version of China's earliest history must have been of considerable importance, and thus the next step in our analysis will be to try and search for the implications for the account of antiquity as suggested by Sima Zhen.

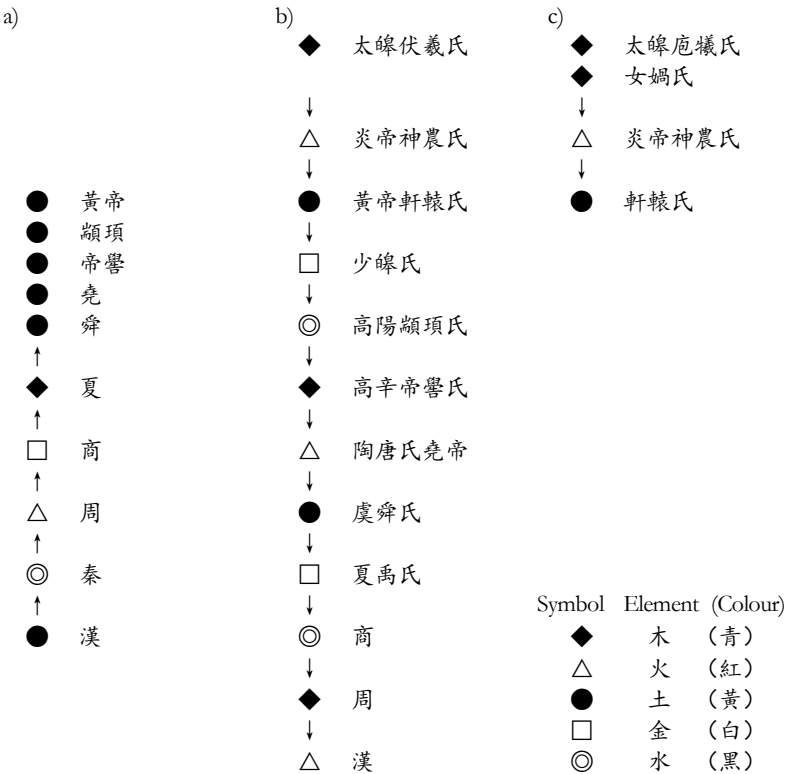
The Implication of Sima Zhen's Account of Antiquity for the Theory of Dynastic Cycles

That Sima Zhen must have been very much aware of the importance that the theory of dynastic cycles had within the *Shiji* is demonstrated not only by his forthright attacks on the *Shiji*'s conception, in both his comments on the *Shiji* and in his own alternative essay, the "Sanhuang benji", but also by the fact that twice in his reflections he mentions that the theory of cycles comprising five hundred years was transmitted in the *Shiji*.⁴⁷

Although, as was pointed out above, Sima Zhen in his essay had developed a kind of synthetic conception in which the triade of Fuxi, Shennong and Huangdi was combined with the idea of Nügua, it is important to see that, as far as the theory of dynastic cycles is concerned, the addition of Nügua did not affect the conception of the Three Exalted and Five God-Emperors, because Nügua in Sima Zhen's account does not require a position of his own within the cycle but is placed in the same position as Fu Xi. In order to illustrate this, the two competing conceptions according to which the mandate of dynasties was believed to rotate – the "theory of mutual conquest" (*xiangsheng* 相勝說) and the "theory of mutual generation" (*xiangsheng shuo* 相生說) – will be shown below in a graphic representation and contrasted with what we may call Sima Zhen's synthetical approach:

47 See his statement at the beginning of his preface to the "Supplemented *Shiji*": 人當五百之運 as well as at the beginning of his preface to *Shiji suoyin*: 遷自承五百之運.

Table 1: Three Versions of Dynastic Cycle Theories



- a) The succession of the Five God-Emperors and of the dynasties down to the Han, according to the “theory of mutual conquest”
- b) The succession of the Three Exalted, the Five God-Emperors and of the dynasties down to the Han, according to the “theory of mutual generation”⁴⁸
- c) The succession of the Three Exalted, according to Sima Zhen’s “Sanhuang benji”

As the above given graphic account illustrates quite clearly, the most striking difference between the two competing conceptions is their impact on the position of Huangdi and the remaining four God-Emperors. While according to the “mutual conquest” model Huangdi as well his four successors all belong to the element of Earth, according to the “mutual generation” model each of the mythical God-Emperors has a position of his own within the cycle, and the first of them is not Huangdi but Shaohao, preceded by the Three Exalted: Fuxi (Nügua), Shennong and Huangdi (cf. table 1).

That the two conceptions of succession of elements correlated to the succession of rulers and dynasties were in fact held by competing

48 Cf. the two competing models as depicted by Gu Jiegang (1930, 1996), 302.

groups of intellectuals is expressed in the “Jiaosi zhi” 郊祀志 (state ceremonials) chapter of the *Hanshu*. In Ban Gu’s words of praise at the end of the chapter, the history of the continuing misinterpretations of these cycles from the beginning of the Han dynasty is described. Started by Zhang Cang, who maintained the view that the dynasty had since the times of the Qin dynasty been supported by the element of Water, this misunderstanding was continued by scholars such as Gongsun Chen and Jia Yi who were convinced that the dynasty was in reality supported by the element of Earth, and it was still upheld, according to the words of Ban Gu, by Ni Kuan and Sima Qian. While these scholars all believed in the succession of the elements in the “mutual conquest” order, it was only with Liu Xiang and his son Xin that the new, correct succession was found, the mutual generating sequence, was found, and it was these two, Ban Gu concludes, who were the first to correctly attribute the element of Fire to the Han dynasty.⁴⁹

As I have argued in a previous study, the question of the position of the Han dynasty in the cycle was by no means a trivial question for the author(s) of the *Shiji*.⁵⁰ Like his father Sima Tan before him, Sima Qian served emperor Wu in the position of Grand Scribe, and both were personally quite involved in the questions of court ceremonial and calendar and especially in the preparation of the Feng and Shan sacrifices on Mount Tai which emperor Wu had decided to perform. These sacrifices had not been carried out since the time of the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty. Both the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* agree in recording that Sima Tan, in his function as the emperor’s advisor in the question of ritual, recommended that he choose the color Yellow as the correct color for the ceremonial vestments. Yellow is the color of Earth and thus correlated with Huangdi, who was, according to their theory, at the beginning of history and was now for the first time recurring as the sixth element in the cycle since the beginning of time.

Seen from this perspective, the correction of the *Shiji's* view of antiquity becomes all the more recognizable as a serious modification Sima Zhen undertook by writing his account of the Three Exalted. We do not know whether he originally planned to actually re-write the *Shiji* itself or whether he merely planned to write this essay as a first attempt at contributing to a new, future book of history in which this part of the *Shiji's* view would be replaced by one which would be more compatible with the Han Confucian view of the world. In either case, his act of correction was significant.

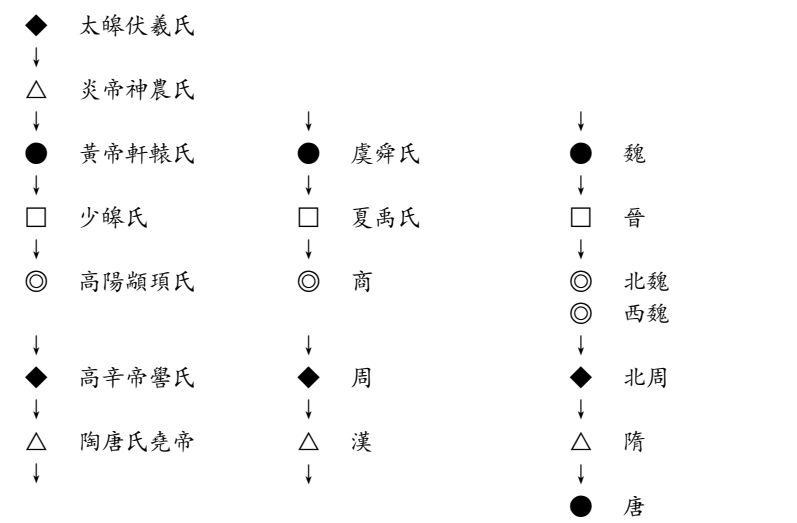
49 *Hanshu* 25B.1270-1271. For Liu Xin’s theory and its basic accordance with the conception represented by Sima Qian see also the study by Wang Gaoxin (2002).

50 See Schaab-Hanke (2002b).

Last but not least, an attempt will be made at explaining what concrete implications the shift from the model of mutual conquest as laid down in the *Shiji* to the model of mutual generation as laid down by Liu Xin and his followers had for the Tang dynasty *Ru* scholars and their needs. It seems that in the Tang dynasty the latter model was used again for purposes of dynastic legitimation. As the scholar Wang Yuqing showed in a study on vestments used for ceremonial purposes, it was supposed by Tang scholars that this dynasty, too, was thought to be supported by the element of Earth and thus the ceremonial vestments had the color Yellow.⁵¹

Below, an adaption from the diagram included in Wang’s study will be sketched, correlating the dynasties starting with the Three Exalted and the Five God-Emperors down to the Tang dynasty (table 2):

Table 2: The Succession of Dynastic Cycles Down to the Tang, According to Wang Yuqing’s Study⁵²



51 See Wang Yuqing (2000), 143-148 (“Sui Tang Wudai jibei xiangsheng” 隋唐五代繼北相生), and the diagram contained there (pp. 160 f).
52 For comments on the symbols, see page 280, table 1.

Why Did Sima Zhen Want to Correct the *Shiji's* Account of High Antiquity?

It is now time to turn to the question raised at the beginning of this study, namely, why did Sima Zhen intend to correct the *Shiji's* account of high antiquity. We already got one answer to this question, the answer that Sima Zhen himself gave on this in his "Postface to the *Suoyin* commentary." He did it out of anger, he explained, but what exactly was it that made him so upset that, after reading the *Shiji's* account of the Five God-Emperors, he decided to write his own comments on and supplements to the *Shiji*?

From the above analysis we can quite easily infer why Sima Zhen felt the need to replace the Five God-Emperors with Huangdi as their head by the Three Exalted: Sima Zhen, as a representative of the Tang scholarly community apparently wanted to adapt the conception of China's most ancient history to the basic tenets of the Confucian ideology of his own times. But if this was his intention, why then did Sima Zhen not entirely adopt the Fuxi-Shennong-Huangdi conception of the Three Exalted but instead prefer the somehow strange compromise of the Fuxi-Nügua construction? And a second question which arises is: Why did Sima Zhen not contribute to a new historical account in which the conception of the Three Exalted was made part of the history of the most remote antiquity but instead prefer to modify an already existing historical account, in a way that he thought "corrected" those parts which seemed to him to be "wrong" or "outdated"?

As regards the first part of the question, namely, why Sima Zhen did not adopt that conception of the Three Exalted which would probably have been much more compatible with the view maintained by other Tang Confucians, we are lucky to have evidence of a scholarly dispute between Liu Zhiji and a competing group of *Ru* scholars headed by Sima Zhen, a debate the documents contributing to which have been transmitted in several sources.⁵³ The debate was initiated by Emperor Xuanzong who encouraged the scholars to discuss the reliability of certain traditions of commentary concerning the *Xiaojing* (Classic of Filial Piety), the *Laozi*, and the *Yijing*. As for the *Xiaojing*, he wanted to know whether the comment by Kong Anguo or, instead, the one credited to Zheng Xuan should be given priority and which should be ignored, indicating that the two commentaries disagreed with each other on certain points. Liu Zhiji in his response argued very strongly

53 For the documents submitted to the throne by Liu Zhiji and Sima Zhen, see: *Cefu yuangui* 604.9a-11b; *W'enyuan yinghua* 604.9a-11b; *Tang huiyao* 77.1408-9; *Quan Tangwen* 402.2a-4a. Both documents have been translated into English by William Hung (1960-1961).

in favor of Kong Anguo's commentary, downplaying the importance of Zheng Xuan's work and even doubting the authenticity of the text attributed to him. Sima Zhen, for his part, challenged the view that Kong Anguo's commentary on the *Xiaojing* was authentic and defended the Zheng Xuan commentary, which in his view contained nothing running wholly counter to the classics, even if it was not, in fact, written by Zheng Xuan himself. On the whole, Sima Zhen argued in favor of giving both commentaries official approval.⁵⁴

As can be concluded from this dispute, Sima Zhen was much less of a purist than Liu Zhiji as far as the treatment of commentaries is concerned; in other words, he seems to be highly interested in saving commentaries such as that of Zheng Xuan from losing official acceptance. As we saw, it was Zheng Xuan's commentary to which the Fuxi-Nügua-Shennong triade is traced, and thus the view of antiquity Sima Zhen chose in his "Sanhuang benji" corresponds well with the position he took in favor of Zheng Xuan in his memorial to the throne.

The answer to the second part of the question above raised, namely, why Sima Zhen did not leave the former conception of history laid down in the *Shiji* as it was but even had the ambition to "correct" it, the answer is, of course, a matter of speculation. It is, however, perhaps not too farfetched to assume that the key to understanding Sima Zhen's intention lies in his opinion regarding the *Hanshu*. As we can conclude from Sima Zhen's "Postface to his *Suoyin* commentary," he considered the *Hanshu* to be the ideologically more reliable work.⁵⁵ This claim has a long history itself. It was made – among others – by Ban Biao, the father of Ban Gu, and by the Han philosopher Yang Xiong, among others, and it was repeated by many later scholars, who thus made clear with whom they sided. If one compares the number of commentaries written on the *Hanshu* with those written on the *Shiji* during Tang times one can easily see how much more the *Hanshu* must have been appreciated as a text. But Sima Zhen was, as we saw, a specialist on the *Shiji*, and it would be plausible to assume that he cherished the hope that by changing certain parts of the *Shiji* he might be able to help this work to achieve a higher status in the scholarly world than it had up to that time.

54 David McMullen (1988), 86, mentions this debate in his study on scholarship in Tang China judging it as "invaluable [...] in showing the sophistication of early eighth century view of textual transmission".

55 [...] 其班氏之書，成於後漢，彪既依遷而述，所以條流更明，且又兼採眾賢，群理畢備，故其旨富，其詞文，是以近代諸儒，共所鑽仰。其訓詁蓋亦多門，蔡謨集解之時，已有二十四家之說，所以於文無所滯，於理無所遺。而太史公之書，既上序軒黃，中述戰國，或得之於名山壞宅，或取之以舊俗風謠，故其殘文斷句，難究詳矣。 See *Quan Tangwen* 402.5b-6b; *Shiji pinglin* I, 37.

Sima Zhen's view that it was very important to correct especially the first chapter of the *Shiji*, which traces the emperors of the earliest antiquity, can perhaps be explained by the fact that during the eighth century the Three Exalted were mentioned very frequently both in official documents and in theoretical essays.

In the section "Gujin zhengshi" 古今正史 (Correct Histories of the Past and Present) of his *Shitong* 史通, Liu Zhiji treats the question of the correct view of antiquity. On the basis of quotations from the *Yijing*, *Liji* and *Chunqiu*, he confirms the concept of Huangdi, Shennong and Fuxi as the Three Exalted and rejects the Five God-Emperors as the most ancient rulers of Chinese history. Interestingly enough, he criticizes both Sima Qian and Ban Gu for their reluctance to deal with the earliest history of China.⁵⁶

In *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu* we find records of the establishment of temples in Chang'an and Luoyang in which sacrifices were addressed to the Three Exalted during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong.⁵⁷

The combined term "Three Exalted and the Five God-Emperors" are mentioned in the introductory remarks to the bibliographical chapter of *Jiu Tangshu*.⁵⁸ It seems that this term had become almost commonplace even at that time.

Finally, it should be added that the question of the correct succession of the early God-Emperors had regained importance in the Tang dynasty in the context of the Feng and Shan sacrifices, especially during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong. It was Zhang Yue 張說 (667–730), the emperor's "chief-ideologue", responsible for the ceremonial reforms, who encouraged the emperor to perform the holy Feng and Shan sacrifices, and even more splendidly than they were performed during the time of Emperor Wu of the Han.⁵⁹

Concluding Remarks

If one takes a glimpse at the reception of Sima Zhen's ideas in later sources, one finds quite critical comments concerning his attempt at correcting the *Shiji*'s view of the world. The *Shiji* commentator Taki-

56 He quotes Sima Qian with the words that as far as the time of Shennong and before that is concerned, nothing could be known for certain (see *Shiji* 129.3253), and Ban Gu with the statement that one could not know any details about the matters of Huangdi and Zhuanxu (cf. *Hanshu* 62.2737). See *Shitong* 12.329.

57 See e.g., *Jiu Tangshu* 24.915; 130.3619; cf. *Tang huiyao* 22.430; for emperor Xuanzong's edict initiating the construction of these temples, see *Quan Tangwen* 31.13a-b.

58 *Xin Tangshu* 57.1421: [...] 至於上古三皇五帝以來世次，國家興滅終始，僭竊偽亂，史官備矣。

59 As for the texts of the hymns sung during the ceremony and which were composed by Zhang Yue, see *Yuefu shiji* 5.67-69; cf. *Jiu Tangshu* 30.1097-1099.

gawa Kametarô in his *Shiki kaichû kôshô* 史記會註考證 remarked on Sima Zhen's essay:

三皇之名既無定說。何問其事有無。司馬貞為補本紀。非也。今錄之索隱序後。以與史文區別。

As for the names of the Three Exalted, there is no confirmed tradition, so what sense does it make to scrutinize whether these had existed or not? Sima Zhen should not have written his supplementary basic annal. Now I have put it after the prefaces of the *Suoyin* (commentary) in order to separate it from the historiographical text proper.⁶⁰

Édouard Chavannes, who, in the course of his translations from the *Shiji* into French took the time to translate the “Sanhuang benji”, writes angrily about it in a note:

Dans sa double tentative pour compléter l'oeuvre de Se-ma Ts'ien soit par les trois souverains Fou-hi, Niu-koa et Chen-nong, soit par les dynasties surnaturelles du Ciel, de la Terre et de l'homme, Se-ma T'cheng n'a rien ajouté de positif à l'histoire de Chine.”⁶¹

Even if one is not convinced, however, that Sima Zhen's corrected draft of history is more successful than the former effort done by Sima Qian was, one should be cautious in judging whether or not Sima Zhen's contribution was positive or not for China's history. His essay is an important document for the scholarly debates during the eighth century in China and offers valuable insights into the motivation for Tang scholars to reconsider history within the framework of the classical scholarship of their own time.

60 Takigawa, 12 [8].

61 Chavannes I, “Introduction”, 216.

Appendix

Table 3: The “Sanhuang Benji” and Its Parallels in Earlier Texts

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀
[1]太皞庖犧氏。風姓代燧人氏繼天而王。母曰華胥。履大人跡於雷澤而生庖犧於成紀。蛇身人首。 2a 有聖德。	古者包犧氏之王天下也。 ⁶²	[...]太昊帝：易曰：「炮犧氏之王天下也。」言炮犧繼天而王，為百王先， ⁶³	大皞帝包犧氏，風姓也。母曰華胥，燧人之世，有大人跡出於雷澤，華胥履之而生包犧。長於成紀，蛇身人首，有聖德，[→] ⁶⁴
仰則觀象於天。俯則觀法於地。旁觀鳥獸之文與地之宜。	仰則觀象於天。俯則觀法於地。觀鳥獸之文。與地之宜。		伏羲氏仰觀象於天，俯觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，[→] ⁶⁵
近取諸身遠取諸物。始畫八卦以通神明之德。以類萬物之情。	近取諸身。遠取諸物。於是始作八卦。以通神明之德。以類萬物之情。		[←]近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是造書契以代結繩之政，畫八卦以通神明之德，以類萬物之情，[...]。 ⁶⁶
造書契以代結繩之政。於是始制嫁娶以儷皮為禮。			[←]制嫁娶之禮，取犧牲以充庖廚，故號庖犧氏，是為犧皇。後世音謬，故謂之伏羲，或謂之密犧。[→] ⁶⁷
結網罟以教佃漁。	作結繩而為罔罟。以佃以漁。蓋取諸離。		
故曰宓犧氏。養犧牲以庖廚。故曰庖犧。			[←]取犧牲以充庖廚，故號曰“包犧氏”。後世音謬，故或謂之伏羲，或謂之慮犧，一號雄氏，[→] ⁶⁸
有龍瑞。以龍紀官。號曰龍師。		首德始於木，	太昊庖犧氏，風姓，有景龍之瑞，故以龍紀官。 ⁶⁹
作三十五弦之瑟。			伏羲作瑟三十五弦。木德王。 ⁷⁰
木德王。			
注春令故易稱帝出乎震。月令孟春其帝太皞是也。		故為帝太昊。作罔罟以田漁，取犧牲，故天下號	庖犧氏，風姓也。蛇身人首，有聖德。燧人氏沒，庖犧代之，繼天而王。首
都於陳。東封太山。立一			

62 *Zhouyi*, “Xici zhuan”, Part 2 (*Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c).63 *Hanshu* 21B.1011-1012 (*Shijing*).64 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [1-1]).65 *Taiping yulan* 721.2b (*Diwang shiji* [1]).66 *Taiping yulan* 721.2b (*Diwang shiji* [2]).67 *Chuxue ji* 9.196 (*Diwang shiji* [2]).68 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [1-2]).69 *Chuxue ji* 30.730 (Huangfu Mi *Diwang shiji*).70 *Lushi, bouji* 1.6a/61 (*Shiji*).

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀
<p>十一年崩。 其後裔當春秋時。有任。 宿須 2b 句顓臾。皆風姓 之胤也。</p> <p>女媧氏亦風姓。蛇身人 首。有神聖之德。代宓犧 立。號曰女希氏。無革 造。惟作笙簧。故易不 載。不承五運。</p> <p>一曰。女媧亦木德王。蓋 宓犧之後。已經數世。金 木輪環。周而復始。特舉 女媧以其功高而充三皇。 故頻木王也。 當其末年也。諸侯有共工 氏。任智刑以強霸而不 王。以水乘木。乃與祝融 戰。不勝而怒。乃頭觸不 周山。崩。天柱折。地維 缺。女媧乃鍊五色石以補 天。斷鼇足以立四極。聚 蘆灰以止滔水。以濟冀 州。於是地平天成不改萬 物。</p>		<p>曰炮犧氏。</p> <p>祭典曰：「共工 氏伯九域。」言 雖有水德，在火 木之間，非其序 也。任知刑以 彊，故伯而不 王。秦以水德， 在周、漢木火之 間。周人保其行 序，故易不載。</p>	<p>德于木，為百王先。帝出 于震，未有所因，故位在 東方。主春，象日之明， 是稱太昊。都陳，[→]⁷¹ [←]在位一百一十年。 [→]⁷² [←]包犧氏沒，女媧氏代 立為女皇，亦風姓也。 [→]⁷³ 女媧氏，亦風姓也。承庖 羲制度，亦蛇身人首，一 號女希，是為女皇。未有 諸侯，有共工氏，任智刑 以彊，伯而不王，以水承 木，非行次，故《易》不 載。⁷⁴ 帝女媧氏。亦風姓也。作 笙簧。亦蛇身人首。一曰 女希。是為女皇。其末諸 侯共工氏。任知刑以彊。 伯而不王。⁷⁵</p> <p>[←]女媧氏沒，次有大庭 氏、柏黃氏、中央氏、栗 陸氏、驪連氏、赫胥氏、 尊盧氏、混沌氏、皞英 氏、有巢氏、朱襄氏、葛 天氏、陰康氏、無懷氏， 凡十五世，皆習包犧氏之 號也。⁷⁶</p>

71 *Chuxue ji* 9.196 (*Diwang shiji* [1]).
72 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [1-3]).
73 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [1-4]).
74 *Taiping yulan* 78.4b (*Diwang shiji*).
75 *Yiwen leiju* 11.208 (*Diwang shiji*).
76 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [1-5]).

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀
<p>女媧氏沒。神 3a 農氏作。炎帝神農氏。姜姓。母曰女登。有女媧氏之女。為少典妃。感神龍而生炎帝。人身牛首。長於姜水。因以為姓。</p> <p>火德王故曰炎帝。以火名官。</p> <p>斲木為耜。揉木為耒。耒耨之用以教萬人。</p> <p>始教耕故號神農氏。於是作蜡祭。以楮鞭鞭草木。始嘗百草。始有醫藥。又作五弦之瑟。</p> <p>教人日中為市。交易而退。各 3b 得其所。遂重八卦為六十四爻。初都陳。後居曲阜。</p> <p>立一百二十年崩。葬長沙。神農本起烈山。故左氏稱烈山氏之子曰柱。亦曰厲山氏。禮曰。厲山氏之有天下。是也。神農納奔水氏之女曰聽訖為妃。生帝哀。哀生帝克。克生帝榆罔。凡八代。五百三十年而軒轅氏興焉。</p> <p>其後有州。甫。甘。許。戲。露。齊。紀。怡。向。申。呂皆姜姓之後。並為諸侯。或分四岳 4a 當周室甫侯申伯為王賢相。齊許列為諸侯霸於中國蓋聖人德澤廣大。故其祚胤繁昌久長云。</p>	<p>包犧氏沒。神農氏作。</p> <p>斲木為耜。揉木為耒。耒耨之利。</p> <p>以教天下。蓋取諸益。日中為市。致天下之貨。交易而退。各得其所。蓋取諸噬嗑。</p> <p>神農氏沒。黃帝堯舜氏作。〔…〕</p>	<p>炎帝：易曰：「炮犧氏沒，神農氏作。」言共工伯而不王，雖有水德，非其序也。以火承木，故為炎帝。</p> <p>教民耕農，故天下號曰神農氏。</p> <p>黃帝：易曰：「神農氏沒，黃帝氏作。」火生土，故為土德。與炎帝之後戰於阪泉，遂王天下。始垂衣裳，有軒冕之服，故天下號曰軒轅氏。〔…〕</p>	<p>炎帝神農氏，姜姓也。母曰任己，有媧氏女，名曰女登。為少典正妃，游華山之陽，有神龍首感女登於尚羊，生炎帝，人身牛首，長於姜水，〔→〕⁷⁷</p> <p>〔←〕有聖德，繼無懷之後，本起烈山，或稱烈山氏，在位一百二十年而崩。納奔水氏，女曰聽訖，生帝臨魁，次帝承，次帝明，次帝直，次帝釐，次帝哀，次帝榆罔，凡八代及軒轅氏也。⁷⁸</p> <p>〔←〕有聖德；以火承木，位在南方，主夏，故謂之炎帝。都于陳，在位百二十年而崩。至榆罔，凡八世，合五百三十年。⁷⁹</p>

77 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [2-1]).78 *Zhouyi zhengyi* 86c (*Diwang shiji* [2-2]).79 *Chuxue ji* 9.196 (*Diwang shiji* [3]).

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀
<p>一說三皇謂天皇。地皇。人皇為三皇。既是開闢之初。君臣之始圖緯所載。不可全棄。故兼序之。天地初立。</p> <p>有天皇氏。十二頭。澹泊無所施為。而俗自化。木德王歲起攝提兄弟十二人。立各一萬八千歲。</p> <p>地皇十一頭。火德王。姓十一人。興於熊耳龍門等山。亦各萬八千歲。</p> <p>人皇九頭。乘雲車駕六羽。出谷口。兄弟九人。分長九州。各立城邑。凡一百 4b 五十世。合四萬五千六百年。</p> <p>自人皇已後有五龍氏。大庭氏柏皇氏。中央氏。卷須氏栗陸氏。驪連氏赫胥氏。尊盧氏。渾沌氏。吳英氏有巢氏朱襄氏。葛天氏。陰康氏。無懷氏斯蓋三皇已來有天下者之號。但載籍不紀莫知姓王年代所都之處。</p> <p>而韓詩以為自古封太山禪梁甫者萬有餘家。仲尼觀之不能盡識管子亦曰古封太山七十二家。衷吾 5a 所識。十有二焉。首有無懷氏。然則無懷之前天皇已後年紀悠邈。皇王何昇而告。但古書亡矣不可備論。豈得謂無帝王邪。故春秋緯。稱自開闢。至于獲麟。凡三百二十七萬六千歲。分為十紀。凡世七萬六百年。一曰九頭紀。二曰五龍紀。三曰攝提紀。四曰合雒紀。五曰連通紀。六曰序命紀。七曰修飛紀。八曰回提紀。九曰禪通紀。十曰流訖紀。</p> <p>蓋流訖當黃帝時制九紀之間。是以錄於此補紀之也。</p>			<p>天地開闢有天皇氏，地皇氏，人皇氏，或冬穴夏巢或食鳥獸之肉。⁸⁰</p>

80 *Beitang shuchao* 158.3a (*Diwang shishuo*).