CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

1

Introduction

Confucian scholars of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) articulated a vision of an omnipotent but disciplined sovereign who relied on their advice and counsel to align the empire with the norms of Heaven and Earth. This view of imperial government, drawn from the scriptural traditions of antiquity, defined Chinese political culture for thousands of years. Indeed, many of the institutions created during the Han persisted into the early twentieth century, when dynastic rule perished forever. The ideal of the ruler as high priest and fount of wisdom, however rarely realized, was central to what is often imprecisely called 'the victory of Han Confucianism.' The contrasting claims of the founding emperors just before and just after the Han period exemplify the extent to which this view of rulership supplanted the ideals of the earlier Ch'in dynasty (221–206 B.C.E.). When the first Ch'in emperor assumed the throne he did not acknowledge the role of any superhuman spirits leading him forward to success beyond paying a bare tribute to his ancestors at the ancestral shrine. Instead the emperor credited his achievements to his ability to conquer his rivals, pacify new territories, and administer them. In contrast, the founding emperor of the dynasty that succeeded the Han engaged in solemn and elaborate religious ceremonies to demonstrate that his succession to the throne followed the will of higher powers.[1] This study illuminates the ideological creation of emperorship and empire that coalesced in the formative years of the Han by re-examining and revising four long-accepted views of Tung Chung-shu (ca. 195–105 B.C.E.), the scholar and statesman most often depicted as the chief architect of this ideal.

---

[1] Loewe 1986, pp. 727–731.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

Founder of imperial Confucianism

Scholars generally agree that in developing a rationale and a model of rulership appropriate to the new circumstances of the unified state, Tung Chung-shu was primarily responsible for the rise of Han Confucianism as an imperial philosophy and cult. To be sure, Tung Chung-shu used cosmology to justify Confucian principles of governance and construct an imperial ideology, but his was not a solitary pursuit. The institutionalization of Confucianism was a historical process that spanned several centuries and involved many groups within Han society. While Tung Chung-shu's reforms were important, he is one of a long list of scholars beginning with Shu-sun T'ung and Lu Chia who served the first Han ruler, Emperor Kao (r. 206–195 B.C.E.).[2] The process also encompassed the activities of Tung's disciples and exegetes of other Confucian texts, such as Liu Hsiang (79–8 B.C.E.) and his son Liu Hsin (d. 23 C.E.), who were active in the centuries following Tung's death. No less important were the successive Han emperors, empresses, and empress dowagers whose varying receptivity toward Confucian scholars often determined the critical difference between principle and practice. Confucian scholars also competed for literary patronage and vied for political influence with followers of textual traditions and devotees of esoteric lore as diverse as the regions over which the Han rulers claimed sovereignty. For example, contenders for the court's patronage included practitioners of a Taoist tradition called *Huang-Lao* (Yellow Emperor and Lao-tzu), as well as doctors, diviners, and magicians known collectively as *fang-shih* (technical masters).[3] This competition determined the degree of Confucian influence in any particular period and consequently the extent to which the institutionalization of Confucianism advanced. Yet the confluence of local cultural traditions at the central court of the Western Han (206 B.C.E.–8 C.E.) rulers also gave rise to the cross-fertilization of philosophical ideas, cosmological principles, and political techniques among these various advocates. As they evolved in this pluralistic atmosphere, traditions (master–disciple lineages that transmitted doctrines and techniques associated with a text or corpus of texts attributed to a founding sage or sages) were neither impermeable nor immutable. Scholars might adopt an attitude of hostility or receptivity toward other practitioners based on a complex array of political and

---

[2] For a brief discussion of their activities, see Loewe 1986, pp. 752–753.

[3] The *SC* and *HS* identify Huang-Lao texts and techniques with the Taoist tradition. See, for example, *SC* 56/2062 or *SC* 107/2843 where the terms *Huang-Lao* and *Tao-chia* are used synonymously. For a more detailed discussion of Huang-Lao, consult Chapter 4.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

doctrinal factors. The institutionalization of Confucianism in general, and Tung Chung-shu's contributions in particular, involved both the rejection and the absorption of principles and techniques from other traditions. As David Hall and Roger Ames have so aptly suggested, he 'is arguably more representative of Han syncretism than of Confucius and even pre-Ch'in Confucianism.'[4]

Father of yin–yang five-phase Confucianism

Historians have frequently portrayed Tung Chung-shu as the grand systematizer of yin–yang and five-phase cosmology, but here too they have overstated the degree to which Tung Chung-shu synthesized these two originally independent systems of thought. Their systematization began at least as early as the third century B.C.E., if not earlier, when the philosopher Tsou Yen established a reputation based on his theories of the five phases. By 250 B.C.E., the committee of scholars working under Lü Pu-wei, who compiled the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* (Master Lu's Spring and Autumn), had also begun to integrate the yin–yang and five-phase correlations that would come to define imperial Confucianism.[5] The Western Han authors of the *Huai-nan-tzu* (Master Huai-nan), *Huang-ti nei-ching* (Inner Scripture of the Yellow Emperor), and *T'ai-hsüan ching* (Canon of Supreme Mystery) continued their efforts.[6] Liu Hsiang and his son Liu Hsin, whose work Pan Ku (32–92 C.E.) drew upon to create the 'Wu-hsing chih' (Treatise on the Five Phases) in the *Han-shu* (History of the Former Han), further harmonized yin–yang and five-phase principles. And in the Eastern Han (25–220 C.E.) Ssu-ma Piao (240–306 C.E.) crowned these earlier efforts with his compilation of a 'Wu-hsing chih' in the *Hou-Han shu* (History of the Later Han). Tung Chung-shu has long been associated with this systematization based on the numerous essays devoted to five-phase cosmology in the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* (Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn), the eighty-two-chapter work tradition-

---

[4] Hall and Ames 1987, p. 24.

[5] Graham 1986b, p. 9.

[6] For a discussion of the integration of yin–yang and five-phase cosmology in these three texts see Major 1993, Sivin 1987, and Nylan 1993. Other writings from the late Warring States to the Western Han, such as the later chapters of the *Chuang-tzu*, the additional text attached to Version A of the Ma-wang-tui *Lao-tzu*, and the Appendixes to the *I-ching*, incorporate yin–yang principles but do not show any influence from five-phase cosmology. While authors of the *Huai-nan-tzu* were setting down essays that combined these cosmological principles, some Han authors did not display such a concern. This divergence in cosmological thinking may indicate that five-phase correlations with other cosmological traditions were not as pervasive during the Western Han as is usually assumed.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

ally ascribed to him.[7] We will see, however, that since Tung Chung-shu did not compose many of these essays, his contributions were far less decisive than usually assumed.[8]

Faithful ideologue of Emperor Wu

Most treatments of Tung Chung-shu also depict him as a devoted ideologue of Emperor Wu (r. 140–87 B.C.E.).[9] According to this view, while advocates of Huang-Lao thought enjoyed the imperial patronage of Emperor Ching (r. 156–141 B.C.E.), Tung waited patiently in the wings for a more favorable patron to appear on the throne. Ready with his bag of cosmological tricks (a theory of the mutual interaction of Heaven and humanity) and interpretive techniques (New Text Confucianism), Tung sprang into action when Emperor Wu ascended the throne in 140 B.C.E. to forward the emperor's expansionist policies and authoritarian inclinations.[10] In fact, Tung's agenda was somewhat different. He was neither simply a passive observer of the Huang-Lao policies of Emperor Ching nor a political lackey for Emperor Wu's activist pursuits; the character of Tung Chung-shu's intellectual authority and his vision of imperial rulership was far more complex and contradictory. Though he criticized Emperor Wu's policies on numerous occasions, for example, he did not use his great moral authority to curb the inherent power of the throne. Though he labored to establish a text-based theology[11] that would limit the emperor's powers, he also drew upon the

---

[7] For example, Knoblock continues this historiographical tendency when he states: 'By 150, the Five Process theory was an integral part of the mainstream of Confucian thinking, as witnessed by the *Chunqiu fanlu* [*Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu*] of Dong Zhongshu [Tung Chung-Shu].' Knoblock 1988, p. 216.

[8] This is not to suggest that Tung Chung-shu's thinking was completely devoid of influence from five-phase thinking, but it did not figure as prominently in his cosmology, and certainly not in his omenology, as hitherto believed.

[9] Although he was an outspoken critic of the emperor, never attaining a high position in government and once nearly losing his life because of his forthright and uncompromising views, Tung Chung-shu has long been the subject of attack in the literature published in the People's Republic of China. Beginning with Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, continuing through the Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius campaign, and most recently in articles written by Li Tsung-kui, Tung Chung-shu has either been ridiculed for his 'superstitious beliefs' or rejected as a sycophant who was merely interested in furthering the powers of autocracy. In discussing certain aspects of his thought, Li Tsung-kui takes an even harsher view, calling Tung a 'criminal.' Fortunately some Chinese scholars have begun to challenge this view. See, for example, Li 1985.

[10] For a recent example of this reading of Tung Chung-shu, see Peerenboom 1993, pp. 254–255.

[11] I do not use the term 'theology' in its conventional sense to denote the study of a transcendent god who creates the universe and its relationship to that creation, but rather to indicate those beliefs concerning the nature of Heaven and human beings' relationship to Heaven that Tung Chung-shu ascribed to the *Spring and Autumn*.

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

Confucian texts to sanction and amplify the ruler's revered position as a 'cosmic pivot,' responsible for aligning the human realm with the moral patterns of the cosmos.

Author of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu*

With few exceptions, Western scholars who have studied Tung Chung-shu have accepted the authenticity of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu.*[12] They have not distinguished the text's dissimilar voices, different dates of composition, or the diverse circumstances under which its numerous chapters were composed. Although attributed to Tung Chung-shu, we will see that the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* is most likely the product of an anonymous compiler who lived sometime between the third and sixth centuries. The received text preserves authentic writings and other materials not authored by Tung Chung-shu.[13] Sorting out the authorship and dates of all the materials in this collection (seventy-nine of the chapters are extant) is a task that exceeds the scope of this study. Yet there exists such a dire need to reevaluate this text, as witnessed by the inaccurate descriptions enumerated in the previous pages, that I have ventured to draw some preliminary hypotheses and conclusions in the first part of this book. Part I identifies the text's various materials, assesses their reliability, and proposes approximate dates for some of the text's authentic writings.[14] I explore the authenticity of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* through three related methodological lenses. The first provides a wide-angle view of the social, religious, and political issues and events that defined

---

[12] For general works devoted to Chinese philosophy that draw upon the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* without noting the issues of authenticity, see Fung 1953 and Chan 1963. For the only general work that raised the authenticity problem see Hsiao 1978; however, Hsiao simply mentioned the problem in a footnote and did not take up the problem in his discussion of Tung's ideas. Unpublished doctoral dissertations devoted to Tung Chung-shu that accept the authenticity of the text in its entirety include Tain 1974, Davidson 1982, and Vuylsteke 1982. Tain explores the problem of authenticity briefly and concludes that the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* is authentic. Davidson and Vuylsteke do not raise the issue at all. For the only doctoral dissertation devoted to Tung Chung-shu that examines the authenticity of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* along the lines of this volume, see Arbuckle 1991. To date, however, it has not been possible to obtain a copy of this study.

[13] For example, the six *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* chapters that discuss yin–yang cosmology contain both distinctive yin–yang theories and different attempts to reconcile accounts of the yearly progression of the yin–yang cycles with that of the five phases. These elements that suggest multiple authorship have gone virtually unnoticed. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Chapter 4.

[14] These issues will be taken up in greater depth in my forthcoming study and translation *The Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu), Basic Texts of Classical Chinese Writing, The Culture and Civilization of China, to be published by Yale University Press.

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

Tung's historical period and his life. The second lens affords a middle-range view of Tung's literary landscape. What can one infer about Tung Chung-shu's writings from descriptions and citations by the author's contemporaries and scholars of later ages? The third and most narrowly focused lens examines the form and content of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu* to unearth, but surely not exhaust, important information embedded in the text's architecture. Part II, the heart of the study, reconstructs Tung Chung-shu's interpretations of the *Ch'un-ch'iu* (Spring and Autumn) and reformulates his role in the creation of Confucian orthodoxy during the Western Han.

Politics and hermeneutics: The reformist exegete

Who was Tung Chung-shu and how did he contribute to the rise of Confucian orthodoxy? Based on a critical reading of the *Ch'un-ch'iu fan-lu*, and on other previously unexamined materials, Part II focuses on Tung Chung-shu's role as a reforming exegete, because through his interpretations of the Confucian texts he delineated his ideal vision of imperial sovereignty. Relying on two attitudes that defined the Confucian scholar, a deference for the past and a veneration for the writings of Confucius, Tung helped shape the fundamental contours of the traditional Chinese state. By recreating history and text, he hoped to reform imperial sovereignty. Following his predecessors Lu Chia, whom Emperor Kao commissioned to write the *Hsin-yü* (New Conversations), and Chia I, who composed the famous essay 'Kuo Ch'in Lun' (Surpassing Ch'in) during the reign of Emperor Wen (r. 180–157 B.C.E.), he also sought to discredit the Ch'in dynasty. The draconian character of the dynasty was a prominent theme in his writings and came to define traditional historiography for centuries to follow, as only the most exceptional historians and officials were willing to discount this mode of criticism.[15] This interpretation of the Ch'in provided an intellectual rationale for discrediting the political and religious framework of imperial sovereignty that had developed under the earlier regime. It also justified the construction of a new political and religious order, albeit one that drew heavily on pre-Ch'in ideas and continued aspects of pre-Ch'in hermeneutics.

Desiring to eradicate Ch'in influences, Tung Chung-shu read anew the texts and commentaries long associated with the Confucian tradition. This was particularly true for the *Spring and Autumn* and the accompanying *Kung-yang chuan* (Kung-yang Commentary), Tung Chung-shu's

---

[15] Loewe 1986, p. 734.

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

special area of expertise. He maintained that the *Spring and Autumn* could resolve Ch'in excesses and endeavored to explicate how and why the text was relevant, indeed indispensable, to the creation of an alternative social, political, and religious culture for the Han. Consequently, Tung Chung-shu and his disciples read into the *Spring and Autumn* a particular vision of history and ascribed to the text new types of legal, ritual, and cosmological authority that were relevant to their reformist goals. I will examine these modes of authority, which made it possible for Tung to end state support for non-Confucian texts and to establish a text-based theology represented in the first Confucian Canon. Henceforth the Confucian Canon – though occasionally eclipsed by competing Taoist and Buddhist canons and though more fluid than its Western religious counterparts – would occupy a prominent position in the doctrinal and political life of the traditional state.

The formation of the Confucian Canon transformed interpreters as well as texts. Through their control over the sacred wisdom and hallowed literature of the past, Confucian scholars sought to define a unique and indispensable role for themselves as a kind of priest-scholar class responsible for the unbroken transmission of this traditional wisdom within the unified empire. In this respect, Tung helped establish basic patterns and tensions that defined the relationship between the state and the intellectual, center and periphery, power and authority, and politics and culture in the ancient regime. For example, Confucian scholars sought to gain political power and influence political policy based on their textual interpretations. Yet they also endeavored to preserve an independent and critical voice based on the authority and prestige derived from their mastery of the Confucian texts. To what extent would cultural endeavors restrain politics or be restrained by them? To what extent would scholars compromise their independence to engage in politics? To what extent would local authority rival or reinforce the literary prowess or military power of the central government? These unresolved tensions, which colored the intellectual history of the Western Han, reemerged in every dynasty to follow. Moreover, some would argue that despite the successive revolutions of 1911 and 1949, they continue to influence the political culture of contemporary China.

Canonization in comparative perspective

The significance of Tung Chung-shu's canon-building efforts transcends the period in which he lived in yet another sense. His efforts to articulate the authoritative and sacred dimensions of the *Spring and Autumn* parallel the work of great exegetes from other religious traditions. Scholars

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

have deeply explored the commentaries associated with the Tanakh of Judaism, the Old and New Testaments of Christianity, and the Qur'an of Islam. Yet studies conducted by earlier scholars of the 'Confucian Classics,' as they are generally called, have focused on the texts and have been largely introductory. Only recently have scholars begun to examine the 'commentarial assumptions and strategies' of Confucian exegetes.[16] In recent years as well, scholars of comparative scripture have begun to reexamine the conventional use of the Bible as the criterion for defining the sacred texts of other traditions – that is, for determining what constitutes 'scripture.' Some have begun to look across cultures at scripture as a concept that can be understood only in relation to a particular community. William Graham explains:

> The sacrality or holiness of a book is not an *a priori* attribute but one that is realized historically in the life of communities who respond to it as something sacred or holy. A text becomes scripture in living, subjective relationship to persons and to an historical tradition. A text is only scripture insofar as a group of persons perceive it to be sacred or holy, powerful and meaningful, possessed of an exalted authority, and in some fashion transcendent of, and hence distinct from, other speech and writing. What is scripture for one group may be meaningless, nonsensical, or even perversely false for another.[17]

This recent tendency in religious studies, best exemplified by the work of W. C. Smith and William Graham, should significantly improve our ability to understand scripture in cultures other than our own, for it views scripture not as a literary genre but as a religiohistorical phenomenon.[18] By locating scripture in the thought and praxis of the community from which its meaning and authority are derived, we gain new insight into the dynamic process by which other communities define the sacred status, authority, and function of their holy books. I have adopted such an approach in Part II, where I describe how Tung Chung-shu and his disciples read the *Spring and Autumn* and what they ascribed to this text. Part II joins ongoing efforts to define scripture not as a text merely similar to or dissimilar from the Bible, but as a text whose generic definition must be derived from its various interpreters in differing contexts across space and time. Only in this way will one be able to construct a definition of the holy book that is truly expressive of the common yet multifarious religious tendency to scripturalize the written word.

---

[16] See Henderson 1991, Van Zoeren 1991, and Smith 1990.

[17] See under the heading *scripture* in Eliade et al. (1987).

[18] See Smith 1971, pp. 131–140. For more recent works devoted to the problem of scripture as a comparative phenomenon, see Levering 1989 and Henderson 1991.

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

The religious dimensions of the Confucian tradition

At the same time, this approach serves to highlight the unique dimensions of Confucian spirituality. 'Scripture' in the Confucian context differed from its Western counterparts, and the differences, as well as the similarities, are worth emphasizing. If one accepts recent arguments that certain presuppositions dominated traditional Chinese culture and distinguished it from the West, how might one define Confucian religiousness?[19] David Hall and Roger Ames have pointed out that the Chinese phrase denoting the unity of Heaven and humanity, *t'ien-jen ho-i*, is 'a convenient formula for capturing what is generally perceived as the fundamental characteristic of Chinese religiousness.'[20] The author of several works on the subject, Rodney Taylor has characterized the religious dimensions of this unity as 'man's capacity to perfect his moral nature and thus emulate or even seek union with the ways of Heaven or the underlying principle.'[21] Tu Wei-ming also develops the notion of unity in his study of the ancient Chinese text the *Chung-yung* (Doctrine of the Mean), traditionally ascribed to Tzu-ssu (492–431 B.C.E.), the grandson of Confucius:

> The relationship between Heaven and man is not an antinomic biunity but an indivisibly single oneness. In this sense, the sage as the most authentic manifestation of humanity does not coexist with Heaven; he forms a coincidence with Heaven. . . . Despite the possibility of a conceptual separation between Heaven and man, inwardly, in their deepest reality, they form an unbreakable organismic continuum.[22]

Tu defines the Confucian way of being religious as 'ultimate self-transformation as a communal and as a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent.'[23]

Building on these discussions of Confucian religiousness, I suggest that 'a faithful dialogical response to the transcendent,' which revealed itself as a concern to 'emulate or even seek union with the ways of Heaven,' was the foundation of Tung Chung-shu's theology. Yet, and perhaps most important, Tung Chung-shu also assumed that if the world were to reflect Heaven's Way, human beings must will it to be so. But human effort alone was not sufficient to unite Heaven and humanity.

---

[19] For example, Hall and Ames argue that early Chinese culture assumed an immanental cosmos, conceptual polarity, and tradition as interpretive context. See their thoughtful discussion in Hall and Ames 1987, pp. 11–25. See also de Bary 1973 and Tu 1979a.
[20] Hall and Ames 1987, p. 241.
[21] See Taylor 1985.
[22] Tu 1976, p. 84.
[23] Tu 1976, p. 94.

Cambridge University Press
0521482267 - From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn, According to Tung Chung-shu
Sarah A. Queen
Excerpt
More information

Tung argued that the texts of Confucius were essential to the process whereby human beings came to embody Heaven, and Heaven came to be personified in human beings. Inasmuch as the Confucian texts in general, and the *Spring and Autumn* in particular, functioned as both the vessel for these religious beliefs and the instrument for their realization, they possessed religious authority. Therefore, rather than following convention and translating the Chinese term denoting the canonical texts of the Confucian tradition, *ching*, as 'classics,' throughout this study I will call them 'scriptures.' I do not intend to gloss over the unique characteristics of the Confucian tradition, but rather to employ the term 'scripture' in a way that expands its 'traditional connotative bounds'[24] to include other varieties of religious experience – in this case, one grounded in a unitary vision of Heaven and humanity. It is significant that Tung Chung-shu and his fellow exegetes attributed the *Spring and Autumn* to the human hand of Confucius and not to a transcendent being. In this sense, examining a Han Confucian's perception of scripture promises to shed new light on an old and perplexing question: How is Confucian spirituality to be understood?

---

[24] Hall and Ames 1987, p. 12.