

Introduction

In an era before strict genre distinctions, Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) wrote a work to which he gave the title *Fayan* 法言. From the beginning, scholars have variously treated Yang's text as a philosophical masterwork, a commentary on the *Analects* (Lunyu 論語) and Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145?–86? BCE) *Shiji* 史記 (usually rendered as *Records of the Historian*), a sophisticated work of self-promotion, and a historical source.¹ Ban Biao 班彪 (3–54), one of Yang's more illustrious younger contemporaries, observed that the title clearly refers to the model of the sages.² The usual English translation of *Fayan* is *Model Sayings*. Like the Chinese, this rendering leaves open two possibilities: that the sayings issue from a model and that the sayings themselves are models of fine rhetoric. Still, *Model Sayings* is ugly in English (and hence a title that Yang would have abhorred). Besides, the word “model” carries unpleasantly prissy connotations for many. More importantly, the process of cultivation that the *Fayan* explicitly seeks to promote is more complicated than simply modeling oneself upon a person deemed superior. Among my working titles was *Exemplary Sayings*, which at least had the virtue of alluding to the similarities in grammar and style of the *Analects* and Yang's *Fayan*. Ultimately, however, I settled on *Exemplary Figures*.³ “Figures,” of course, can refer to “figures of speech,” but the term encompasses “written symbols,” “prominent people,” “the impressions made by people,” “images,” “devices or patterns,” “emblems,” “embellishments,” “portraying by speech or action,” and “cutting a figure”—which are all important subjects in Yang's text.

In the best of all possible worlds, introductions to literary classics would always supply both a “degressive bibliography,” explaining the original state of the text,⁴ and a “progressive bibliography” (i.e., a reception history). While this may be possible with, say, the works of Shakespeare, no scholar of classical Chinese would dare claim that she is able to recover a Western Han (206 BCE–9 CE) text or ascertain the true significance of early textual variants among manuscripts compiled several millennia ago, in the time before printing. As a noted Han expert, Michael

Loewe, has remarked, “The curtain is firmly drawn.”⁵ One early editor of an *Exemplary Figures* manuscript boasted of having “corrected” some 500 separate items in the text. But a later manuscript, supposedly derived from Li Gui’s 李軌 edition (compiled 335), to which Wu Mi’s 吳祕 commentary (before 1081) was appended, still had many variant characters in it.⁶

The number of textual variants that can be culled from extant *Exemplary Figures* editions is huge. The earliest extant complete commentary to *Exemplary Figures* (excluding scattered remarks preserved in the received literature), that by Li Gui, dates to a time nearly three hundred and fifty years after the compilation of *Exemplary Figures*, by which time Yang’s masterwork had already been adapted by many editors and commentators to new cultural contexts. Almost certainly, then, still more variants appeared in the early manuscript copies circulating among editors and commentators. Frankly, two millennia after the composition of *Exemplary Figures*, when multiple commentaries offer multiple readings, no translator can easily determine which variant more likely represents Yang’s original argument, especially given Yang’s love for double entendres and ambiguous phrases. Those versed in textual criticism typically argue the wisdom of an approach called *lectio difficilior*, in which “the harder reading” is thought more likely to be the earliest, since editors tend to revise manuscripts to make them more readable. In the case of *Exemplary Figures*, however, this approach often does not suffice, since there are several “hard readings,” each backed by one or more authoritative commentaries. In the main, there is a tendency for editions and commentators in late imperial China to inject a sort of moral purism more reminiscent of the True Way Learning (Daoxue 道學) than of Han modes of thinking,⁷ and so my translation reflects a general preference for earlier over later readings, unless cogent reasons militate against it. Major variants (defined as variants that give different meanings rather than simply different transcriptions) are usually cited in the footnotes to the Chinese text. Readers of classical Chinese may consult Wang Rongbao’s 汪榮寶 1899 *Fayan yishu* 法言義疏 for a more complete list of variants.

Because so much of *Exemplary Figures* consists of dialogues between Yang and an unnamed interlocutor, the work is often described as “an imitation” of the *Analects*. However, substantial parts of *Exemplary Figures* are not in dialogues but are, rather, epigrams, rhymed encomia, and pithy historical judgments about key figures in Qin (221–210 BCE) and Han history.⁸ Yang employed silences, ambiguities, incongruities, and non sequiturs to focus the reader’s attention. He also loved games of witty wordplay in which he could best his opponents and interlocutors.⁹ And indeed, Yang’s desire to show off his enviable command of rhetorical skills may have dictated the final form of *Exemplary Figures* and Yang’s “philosophical” poems as much as his intention to emulate the Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius 孔夫子) of the *Analects*. (Those rhetorical skills supplied

Yang with a broad array of defensive strategies; for example, accused of criticizing his betters, Yang pleaded his innocence by simply “invoking the argument of the simple formal exercise.”¹⁰ Appreciating the subtle differences between these several registers of writing in *Exemplary Figures*, then, is a first step toward understanding the sheer virtuosity of the text. But the tone adopted in *Exemplary Figures* can be a barrier to understanding. Moderns do not generally expect our moralists or serious writers to be humorous, but Yang is invariably witty, by turns funny, ironic, or even caustic.¹¹

Exemplary Figures, together with several *fu* composed by Yang late in life and Yang’s two other masterworks, the *Supreme Mystery* (Taixuan 太玄) and the *Fangyan* 方言 (usually rendered as *Dialect Words*), show Yang to be the first highly self-conscious author in Chinese history.¹² In these mature works, Yang managed to displace the ruler as protagonist with a portrait of himself as a rhetorical master steeped in classical learning who has successfully emulated the legendary figures from antiquity. Before Yang, the only recognized profession (as opposed to occupation) had been that of the *shi* 士, the officer, the actual or potential “man of service.”¹³ Yang’s self-portrait of the fiercely independent, if highly conservative, master offered something new, in the sense that Yang posited a superior authority for himself that was not tied to heredity or to public office, but was instead based on his superior knowledge of texts, his compilation of reliably superior manuscripts, and his superior understanding of what to do with texts.¹⁴

YANG XIONG’S LIFE

Yang Xiong composed a lengthy autobiography, which became (probably with emendations and additions) the basis for a lengthy two-chapter “biography” of Yang in Ban Gu’s 班固 *History of the Han* (Hanshu 漢書; comp. ca. 92 CE).¹⁵ Students of Yang’s work regard this autobiography/biography as a blessing and a curse. A blessing, because this two-chapter work supplies a great many details of Yang’s life and cites several of his *fu* in their entirety;¹⁶ a curse because it is next to impossible to read Yang’s writings except through the lens that Yang and Ban provided later readers. Since David Knechtges has done such a superb job of translating and annotating the entire *Hanshu* account, I will offer only a bare outline of Yang’s life here, followed by a consideration of some questions raised by the autobiography/biography, by Ban Gu’s concluding Appraisal to the biographical chapters (clearly framed as an apologia for Yang), and by tropes found in pre-Tang anecdotes about Yang as an inspired writer and classical master.¹⁷

Little is known of Yang’s early life, other than that he studied with three of the most famous teachers in Sichuan: Yan Junping 嚴君平, Linlü

Wengru 林閭翁孺, and Li Hong 李弘. All three were experts in divination materials, in “strange characters” (probably transcriptions in seal script), and in important traditions that late imperial authorities tended to reclassify as “Confucian” or “Daoist.”¹⁸ Yang was supposedly over forty when he traveled from Shu (the Chengdu Plain) to the Western Han capital of Chang’an (near present-day Xi’an) sometime around 13 BCE, where he found an early patron in Wang Yin 王音, then marshal of state and cousin of Dowager Empress Wang. Yang was later appointed “courtier and servitor at the Yellow Gate,” in which post Yang served alongside Wang Mang 王莽, nephew of the dowager empress, and Liu Xin 劉歆, a member of the imperial clan and son of Yang’s chief mentor, Liu Xiang 劉向 (d. 7 CE).

The style of poetry most favored at the Han court at the time of Yang’s arrival was the grand display *fu*. Given Yang’s remarkable facility in composing such *fu* on demand, he soon secured imperial favor and went on to become court poet.¹⁹ Once he became a fixture at court, Yang wrote dazzling occasional pieces depicting his emperor as a paragon of virtue, “equal in merit to that of the legendary Five Lords” of antiquity. But even the early *fu* pieces written during Yang’s first years at court illustrate Yang’s profound ambivalence as an onlooker and participant in court spectacles. He was both awestruck by the court’s magnificence and appalled by its extravagance and waste,²⁰ especially when he considered the plight of ordinary farmers and artisans. As Yang matured as a poet, he struggled to break free of the old *fu* conventions, which typically glorified the august presence of the reigning Son of Heaven. The result was his *fu* pitting “Plume Grove” against “Ink Guest” in dialogues that nudged the figure of the ruler firmly offstage.²¹ Wars and hunts should not become the “regular endeavor of state,” he warned.²² Only a fierce determination to conserve men and material would ensure that

Farmers do not cease their harrowing,
Nor weavers leave their looms, and [both empire and emperor]
.
Truly earn their reward from the spirits.²³

Yang had come to the court of Chengdi 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE) when the emperor, who was himself well versed in the Classics, and other members of his court were beginning to seriously rethink older traditions premised on particular views of human nature and of good rule. At the level of both the body and the body politic, there was a partial turn away from the late Zhanguo period (475–222 BCE) models posited by Xunzi 荀子 (d. after 238 BCE) and the other pre-Qin masters, especially their presumption that the more centralized the power, the better. As it happened, Chengdi and his court were unusually receptive to new foreign and domestic policies, as well as new modes of scholarship and of inter-

actions with the divine, if only because the cash-strapped court could no longer afford to continue the old ways inherited from previous reigns.²⁴ So freewheeling was the atmosphere in Chengdi's court that Yang at one point implicitly compared Chengdi with the archetypically evil last kings of the Xia (tradit. 2205–1766 BCE) and Shang (tradit. 1600–ca. 1050 BCE) dynasties; he also hazarded a satirical piece against wine that mocked Chengdi's bibulous habits.²⁵ Later, in *Exemplary Figures*, Yang would more constructively outline a series of methods by which classical learning at the Han court might be redirected to its proper ends (see below), while cleverly avoiding discussion of the tricky question of how true scholars such as Yang were to advise the court, since the very wisest men in antiquity, including Kongzi, had been hard put to save their skins, let alone promote their reformist programs, in similarly troubled times.²⁶ Much of *Exemplary Figures* reflects Yang's search for alternate classical models by which to “restore” harmony, dignity, and restraint to the late Western Han court.

By Aidi's reign (7–1 BCE), however, Yang was fed up with navigating the daily round of court activities and repulsed by a court that was pululating with intrigues among consort clans (*waiqi* 外戚) and male favorites with few, if any, claims to special dignity.²⁷ Yang had attained such a degree of personal authority that he secured the equivalent of a sabbatical for three years, during which time he drafted *Supreme Mystery*, his neoclassic modeled upon the *Changes* (Yijing 易經) and its “Ten Wings.” His mock defense of his decision to retire temporarily from court life declared that he preferred to abandon the rough-and-tumble of court life lest further engagement fail to “vermilion his wheel hubs” (i.e., elevate his official rank) and instead “turn his entire clan blood-red” (i.e., leave him liable to criminal prosecution as a traitor).²⁸ At the same time, he announced his sympathies with the increasingly powerful *haogu* 好古 (loving antiquity) faction, whose members boldly questioned the validity of many of the traditions transmitted by the Academicians charged with the supervision of classical learning at court.²⁹

Twice—once in his autobiography and once in *Exemplary Figures*—Yang insisted that he had abandoned the writing of *fu* altogether around the time of Pingdi's accession in 1 BCE (“I stopped and never again engaged in writing them”).³⁰ As Yang told it, “The *fu* is for the purpose of persuasion. It must speak by adducing examples, [but] by the time it gets around to the moral message, the reader has lost the point.”³¹ Despite such protestations, it is hard to see how Yang could have resisted entreaties and commissions, given his dependence on the court for a salary. If the received traditions are correct (always a big if!), Yang continued to compose new occasional pieces for the court, including three *fu* on luxury items, a eulogy for Dowager Empress Wang,³² several formal “warnings” cataloging the duties and lapses of the major officers in the Han bureaucracy, and the poem “Excoriating Qin while Praising Xin,” a single line of which seems to offer abject

support for Wang Mang, who would later usurp the Han throne.³³ Not surprisingly, this last piece of writing, like the last line of *Exemplary Figures*, which also praises Wang, had disastrous consequences for Yang's posthumous reputation, but Yang himself offered an interpretive key to his work whereby his most hyperbolic praise was meant to indicate ruthless satire. In consequence, these works hardly present the ringing endorsements of Wang Mang that Yang's detractors claim.

Yang's last years, from Chengdi's reign through the first half of Wang Mang's Xin dynasty (9–23 CE), must have been incredibly busy. Sometime during the period 26–6 BCE, when the first imperial library collection was being put together, Yang worked under the direction of his mentor Liu Xiang, organizing and cataloging the library collection.³⁴ Reportedly, in those capacities he proved himself to be a good, if activist, editor, like Liu Xiang.³⁵ In a memorial to the throne, Yang characterized himself as a youth sadly deficient in learning; by his own account, he owed his erudition largely to the research he carried out in the Stone Chamber (Shiqu 石渠), one of the palace libraries.³⁶ He and his mentor were intent upon devising reliable methods by which to determine the best among several variant editions or characters in ancient texts.³⁷ (Yang and Liu Xiang have been dubbed the “twin fathers” of textual criticism in China.) During this time, one or possibly two beloved sons—one allegedly a child prodigy—died and had to be taken or sent back to Sichuan for burial. Yang's position at court as resident “wisdom bag” stuffed with encyclopedic knowledge also meant that learned men of every persuasion regularly consulted him on omens, historical figures, and “strange script.”³⁸ (By his own account, the historical and literary allusions favored by Yang during these question-and-answer sessions became the core around which Yang built his *Exemplary Figures*.)³⁹ At the same time, Yang was tutoring several young men who were interested in pre-Qin script forms and fine literary expressions, and he functioned as official advisor to members of the court on a variety of matters relating to historical precedents, omen interpretation, and classical learning. As if that were not enough to occupy his time, upon two occasions, at least, Yang was pressed to defend himself against the threat of criminal charges (once for recommending to the palace a compatriot from Sichuan who turned out to be a thief, and once for being too intimate with members of a clique accused of treason). And all the while Yang was compiling and polishing his three masterworks.

Of these three masterworks, Yang's posthumous reputation rests primarily on *Exemplary Figures* and *Supreme Mystery*, in that order. Aside from linguists, few scholars today even bother to consult his third masterwork, now called the *Fangyan* (no longer in its original form), not to mention the fragments that survive from his radical expansion of the *Cang Jie pian* 倉頡篇 lexicon. These word lists represented the first steps in the search for ancient etymologies that eventually produced the much better known *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (compiled 100 CE).⁴⁰ Although

the lion's share of readers' attention in the twentieth century has gone to *Exemplary Figures*, it may well be that Yang considered *Supreme Mystery* or the *Fangyan* to be his finest writing. After all, Yang defended his *Supreme Mystery* at considerable length in two mature *fu*, "Dispelling Ridicule" and "Resolving Objections" (Jiechao 解嘲 and Jienan 解難),⁴¹ as well as in *Exemplary Figures*, where Yang remarks on the pleasure he had in composing the *Supreme Mystery* with his beloved son Wu (Crow) and terms the work the equal of Kongzi's writings.⁴² Notably, admirers of Yang in the pre-Tang and Tang (618–907) eras produced many more commentaries on *Supreme Mystery* than on *Exemplary Figures*.⁴³

On the other hand, it was the *Fangyan* (or its precursor transcribed at least partly in seal script) whose painstaking compilation occupied Yang for a full twenty-seven years, roughly three times longer than either *Supreme Mystery* or *Exemplary Figures*. Determined to retrieve what he thought to be the core insights of the distant past, despite his belief that the pre-Han classics suffered from multiple interpolations, omissions, and errors introduced during transmission, Yang endeavored to devise trustworthy methods by which the Classics might be restored to something closer to their pristine states. Yang came up with a solution we might term his "ethnographic impulse."⁴⁴ Apparently, Yang (perhaps in concert with Liu Xiang) believed that if archaic phrases could be culled from the outlying areas far from the capital, at least some of those expressions would contain the aural and semantic clues needed to unlock the true meaning of passages in the older manuscripts and inscriptions that resisted ready decipherment and interpretation. Accordingly, for nearly three decades Yang, with notepad in hand, inquired of every envoy and official from the far-flung regions if they could tell him anything about word usage in their locality. The unusual expressions he duly recorded in the *Fangyan* could then supplement materials preserved in the *Erya* 爾雅 word list and together form a large database of genuinely early vocabulary items that would prove invaluable to scholars intent upon correcting the faulty traditions handed down from the pre-Qin period.

Completion of these three masterworks depended upon the superior access that Yang enjoyed to palace archives and libraries, not to mention the high officials bearing privileged information from distant parts. In any case, as one of a large group of advisers who longed to witness the implementation of the sort of sweeping reforms being touted right then by Wang Mang and Liu Xin, Yang would probably have been disinclined to quit the court during Wang's regency. By 9 CE, the year of Wang's accession to the throne, it was too late to retire, for retirement from office might well be read by Wang as a sign of dangerous disaffection. (As Hans Bielenstein has noted, very few officials *did* resign in protest over Wang's usurpation, if they could avoid it.)⁴⁵ Through it all, Yang perfected a style of writing that lent him an air of "plausible deniability,"⁴⁶ regardless of the political turmoil he witnessed daily at court.

Ban Gu supplied a fairly elaborate defense of Yang's decision to stay and continue serving the new Xin dynasty (9–23) founded by Wang. By Ban's account, Yang held too insignificant a post and was too dependent upon his meager salary to justify his quitting.⁴⁷ Besides, Yang suffered badly under Wang Mang, at one point attempting suicide because of the slanders aimed at him by Wang's toadies. But is Ban's defense true to the facts? While it is difficult to be certain about events so remote in time, it seems that Yang enjoyed considerable prestige at the Han and Xin courts as poet, thinker, and historian.⁴⁸ In addition to his regular salary, he was rewarded with ten units of gold by the Han court for submitting a memorial about Xiongnu policy that carried the day.⁴⁹ (Note that the *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志, summarizing local Shu traditions about Yang, specifically says he was poor “when young.”)⁵⁰ Yang moreover received a full three years' sabbatical from his activities as librarian and court poet so that he might compose his philosophical classics. Since people praised him even in his own lifetime as a Confucian master equal in erudition and character to the Supreme Sage Kongzi, it was hardly surprising that after his death he quickly gained a reputation as the most elegant, impressive, and versatile persuader among the early ethical masters.⁵¹

As I have argued elsewhere,⁵² Yang's ties to Wang Mang have garnered far too much attention, especially after Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) maligned his character, questioned the validity of his cosmological theories and views on human nature, and accused him of disloyally “serving two masters,” Han and Xin.⁵³ Yang could hardly be expected to avoid all contact with Wang Mang, since (a) he had held the same post (Courtier) as Wang Mang and Liu Xin, who ultimately became one of Wang's strongest allies; and (b) Wang and Liu spearheaded a group of reform-minded classicists intent upon reshaping the institutions and operations of the Western Han bureaucracy. Notably, however, *Exemplary Figures* is not dedicated or addressed to any particular ruler or regent. Instead, it explicitly lodges an appeal to “later generations” of the governing elites, who are to reevaluate their priorities in life after recalculating the combined utility and pleasure to be gained from dedicating oneself to the higher ethical commitments of Yang's chosen Way. This explicit appeal to later generations of readers suggests a degree of uncertainty on Yang's part about whether the current power-holders (nominal or real) would heed his complex message and restrain their craven impulses. Subtle wording in the last chapter of *Exemplary Figures* supports the conclusion that Yang saw himself as a loyal servant of the Western Han imperial clan, perhaps because of his strong personal attachment to Liu Xiang, who was no friend of Wang Mang, or because he had doubts about Wang Mang's fitness for the highest office in the land. Equally germane are Yang's repeated warnings about the human propensity to confuse look-alikes and sycophants with true sages.⁵⁴

MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS AND THEMES IN THE TEXT

Along with all other major Han thinkers, Yang Xiong is today routinely, if unjustly, derided as an uninspired and unoriginal scholastic.⁵⁵ Famous thinkers of later ages incorporated in their own writings so much of what Yang Xiong wrote, thereby acknowledging his creation of admirable models combining superb rhetorical skills with sound Confucian ethics, that some of the most innovative features of *Exemplary Figures* strike readers now as less than original. Then, too, Yang wrote so disarmingly that a mere glancing acquaintance with his work does not permit readers to gauge the full depth and extent of the polemical content in his work.⁵⁶

Arguably, Yang's foremost contribution in *Exemplary Figures* is his adaptation of the pleasure discourse inherited from the Zhanguo and early Western Han thinkers to the allied subjects of reading and classical learning; in Yang's view, the pleasures of the mind unquestionably could surpass those of the body. Other historians have stressed Yang's role, in conjunction with his contemporaries Liu Xiang and Liu Xin, in establishing the fashion for citation of the Five Classics (not just the *Odes*) in political pieces, particularly edicts and memorials.⁵⁷ Certainly, Yang insisted on the revelatory character of the Classics rather than using them merely as illustrations or ornaments in persuasions.⁵⁸ Fukui Shigemasa goes so far as to single out Yang as the first either to coin or to popularize the term "Five Classics,"⁵⁹ and while the loss of so many antique writings precludes absolute certainty on this point, it is obvious that Yang, Liu Xiang, and Liu Xin promoted the Five Classics corpus with such enthusiasm that they helped usher in new styles of writing and new ways of thinking about the distant past. Specifically, in *Exemplary Figures* Yang urged those in the governing elite to reexamine their presumptions about classical learning in general and Five Classics learning in particular. Among the most important claims he advanced were the following:

1. To the common objection that "learning is of no possible use," Yang replies that learning has the greatest possible utility, since without it humans can never learn to cultivate their defining qualities as human beings to engage in long-term constructive social relations.⁶⁰
2. To an interlocutor who refines this blanket rejection of learning, arguing that the value of classical learning—in modern lingo, its cultural capital—fluctuates wildly, depending on the current ruler's interest in it, Yang replies that classical learning may be of greatest utility to the person when the "whole world is cold" (i.e., unfair and without comfort).⁶¹
3. To counter the prevailing notion that classical learning is simply one technique among many with the potential to bring fame and wealth to a professional, Yang crafts a five-part answer: (a) it cannot be true that all arts or skills are equally valuable, in that each mandates a stan-

dard “way” or skill, and the relative importance of the goal or product of each profession determines its value to mankind; (b) the arts wielded by men like Kongzi are manifestly superior to those of other professionals because they can improve the dispositions of the persons wielding them, while archers, cooks, charioteers, and carpenters exert mastery over the externals; (c) the goals of classical learning—and, most especially, Five Classics learning—are both broader and more ambitious in scope than other techniques governing other fields of endeavor; (d) classical learning properly wielded is more likely to attain its goal than other techniques; and thus (e) the value of classical learning does not lie primarily in its potential to win men tangible gains (high office, salary and rank, greater longevity, and so on), since it offers intangible benefits like security and cultivation.⁶² (Readers may note similarities with Aristotle here.)

4. To the idea that the chief, if not the sole, use of classical learning is to prepare men for the qualifying examinations for entry into the bureaucracy, Yang replies that, as the examinations not only fail to locate men with true devotion to learning but even select the wrong people,⁶³ the dynasty would fare better if it would not employ the Classics when selecting men for careers in public service.⁶⁴
5. To answer those who assert that the Classics are flawed, Yang retorts that they are still the most reliable guides for judging human conduct and the most discerning and elegant examples of rhetoric. Furthermore, errors, interpolations, and omissions introduced during the course of transmission can generally be corrected by reference to other genuinely early works, including the *Erya*.
6. To answer the objection that the classicists (Ru) in general and the proponents of the Five Classics in particular have never managed to usher in an era of “Great Peace,” despite their long-term employment in high office in certain areas (e.g., the pre-imperial state of Lu and the Han dynasty itself), Yang replies that the right kind of classicists—those who teach power-holders that they must amend their ways—have never been employed in any polity. In other words, the court has all too often employed the wrong kind of classicists—those who wear the right clothes and talk the right talk but fail to act for the common good.
7. To complaints about the difficulty of mastering the Five Classics, Yang responds with certitude: “Were it [the Way] to be made smaller, then it would defeat the sages. How would that be?” In other words, the sages arranged their lives and their writings so that they might serve as perfectly adequate models for all times. Despite the sages’ desire to make them as easy to understand as humanly possible, the Classics would inevitably be less versatile and less applicable to all situations if they were not in their present form and language. Obviously, this sort of experiential learning will be harder to master than the mere memorization, recitation, or drafting of texts.

8. After rebutting his peers' negative views of classical learning, Yang proceeded to frame a positive view of classical learning in general and Five Classics learning in particular, asserting that learning the moral Way embedded in the Classics is the only kind of learning in which single-minded effort is invariably repaid with the realization of the intended goal.⁶⁵ No natural impediment exists to any human becoming a sage through cumulative efforts, since people do not differ substantially in their capacities, but rather in the ways they evaluate, prioritize, and employ what they have learned—and these attitudes are amenable to good training. Even more importantly, a person's persistence in pursuing ethical solutions to life's dilemmas fosters an admirable state of independence that, being impervious to external threat and internal decay, elevates the person above his peers. Having broken free of ordinary travails, the person reaches a refined state of grace and power that Yang likens to divinity (*shen* 神) and to "clarity" or "light" (*ming* 明).⁶⁶

While several of the foregoing claims that come together in *Exemplary Figures* had been advanced long before Yang, promoting these eight ideas as a coherent package was Yang's own contribution. The goal of learning, as Yang saw it, was to have the reading of superb texts strengthen the person's nascent desires for ethical behavior, as the memorization of each text inscribed body and soul with new edifying models.⁶⁷ In the early manuscript culture of Yang's day, reading typically entailed learning something by heart; as a result, reading became a contemplative or meditative act, less a purely intellectual activity than a transformative experience.

Turning from the sublime to the practical, *Exemplary Figures* stands out among extant Western Han works for its relative lack of interest in propagating the virtues of empire or the Han imperial ideology.⁶⁸ Instead, the text offers readers Yang's compelling, if somewhat idiosyncratic, notion of exemplarity (yet another reason to opt for the title *Exemplary Figures*), which reflects his determination to instruct members of the governing elite, who were the only people likely to command the requisite high cultural literacy to read and appreciate Yang's neoclassic.⁶⁹ In *Exemplary Figures* Yang pronounces judgments on a wide range of influential people and writings, even as he constructs himself, in passage after passage, as a figure well worth emulating—indeed, as a figure no less worthy of emulation than Kongzi himself.⁷⁰ (That self-promotional aspect of *Exemplary Figures* has provoked both strong praise and strong criticism down through the ages.)

Major themes of *Exemplary Figures* include timing and timely opportunity, providing conceptual overlap with Yang's *Supreme Mystery*, as well as with his *fu*.⁷¹ Issues of timing were the primary focus of Han intellectual life, as is evident from the "Great Commentary to the *Changes*"

(Xici zhuan 繫辭傳), particularly among those scholars like Yang with a solid grasp of current astronomical theories.⁷² Somewhat surprising, then, is the apparently curt dismissal of divination and star-consultation in *Exemplary Figures*. Given Yang's fame as an expert on omens, it seems doubtful that Yang questions the utility of all forms of divination.⁷³ But certainly Yang was wary of the tendency of unscrupulous officials and would-be rulers to manipulate divination results to give favorable predictions that seemed to confer the sanction of the gods (*fuming* 符命). More importantly, Yang prefers, whenever possible, to redirect attention to human responsibilities and those areas of conduct under people's control, especially the cultivation of their activities in society. In company with other Han thinkers, Yang evinces less concern with the complex interior processes that lead to efficacious social interactions, perhaps because he believed that little can be said about them.⁷⁴

Another theme that Yang returns to repeatedly is that of the gap between the seeming and the real, a gap that ultimately leads him back to the real versus the false followers of Kongzi,⁷⁵ as seen in the following passage:

Someone asked me about men.

"They are hard to know."

"Why so hard?"

"It is hardly difficult to tell the difference between Mount Tai and an anthill or between the Yangzi and Yellow Rivers, on the one hand, and a rivulet, on the other. But the great sage and the hugely clever knave—those are very hard to tell apart. How sad! Those who can distinguish among similar things and people will surely experience no trouble."⁷⁶

Literary scholars prefer to parse Yang's pronouncements on aesthetic values, which are still influential, rather than his views on timing, human agency, or fate. *Exemplary Figures* is famous for denouncing those who would reduce literary tradition to either the handmaiden of government or the merely ornamental. Yang criticized the grand display *fu*—the very genre in which he had made his name as a youth—for captivating listeners with their elaborate devices, gratifying the emperor's sense of self-importance, and encouraging him in immoral conduct. "Grown men do not engage in such activities!" he thundered.⁷⁷ In Yang's view, decor and decorum—the twin goals of all literary production, as of all communicative acts in society—should be the defining marks of every cultivated person and every composition. For it is "rituals and refinements" that ensure productive social exchanges between people of different status and temperaments.⁷⁸ Hence, Yang defined a sage as one "who adds ornamentation to the basic substance" through the institutions of rites and music.⁷⁹ As he argues in one exchange, "If jade was never really meant

to be carved, then the precious *yufan* 璵璠 ornament would never have been fashioned into a ritual object. And if words were never really meant to be embellished, then neither the Canons nor the Counsel [chapters in the *Documents* Classic] would ever have become part of the Classic.”⁸⁰ In numerous passages, Yang built the case that the Five Classics, in particular his beloved *Odes*, provided the very best models of elegant yet analytical rhetoric for all types of writing. Of the *Odes*, he wrote: “The rhymed compositions by the authors of the *Odes* are both beautifully balanced and properly regulated”; elsewhere he suggested that both ornamental phrasing and substantial content were necessary components of powerful rhetoric.⁸¹ His own corpus of writings was likened, in later ages, to “strung pearls” whose individual parts shone gently on each other.⁸²

No less significantly, Yang was the first writer to theorize the different uses of speech and writing:

They say, “Speech cannot fully express what is in the heart, nor can writing fully express speech.” What a difficulty! Only sages apprehend the true meaning of words and achieve the substantial embodiment [of standards] in writing. [Of Kongzi it was therefore said:] “The white sun shone down on him; the Yangzi and Yellow River cleansed him. So powerfully does [his example] flow onward that none have been a match for him.”

Nothing is as good as speech for exchanging remarks during face-to-face meetings, expressing the heart’s desire, or communicating people’s pent-up emotions. And nothing compares with writing for fully delineating the affairs of the whole realm, for recording events of the distant past or making one see what is geographically remote, for clarifying what has been obscured by the mists of time or transmitting whatever has been obscured by the distance of thousands of miles. Therefore, speech is the heart’s sounds, and writing, its images. When sounds and images assume form, then the noble and petty appear in high relief, for sounds and images are surely the means, with the noble and petty alike, to see what motivates them.⁸³

Later literary criticism often drew inspiration from this neat formulation about speech versus writing. (This seems the ultimate origin of Su Shi’s 蘇軾 [1036–1101] dictum that “the writings *are* the person” [*wen ru qi ren* 文如其人].)⁸⁴ Nonetheless, Yang’s stress on the special strengths of writing seems to be without precedent in his own era, when oral exchanges dominated many forms of social interaction. (Earlier Yang had advised the would-be student of classical learning to find a good teacher and, if the good teachers were dead, to consult their writings.) Notably, in *Exemplary Figures*, as well as in Yang’s *fu*, some of the most pleasing effects depend as much on the graphic forms of the characters chosen by Yang as

on their sounds and meanings, though translation inevitably fails to capture Yang's sublime virtuosity in such matters. It is no wonder that Yang shows unusual deference to book learning while refusing to be reduced to a mere scribbler or pedant.⁸⁵

One final theme in *Exemplary Figures* that merits attention is Yang's unprecedented focus on Yan Hui 顏回 (Yuan Yuan 淵), a disciple of Kongzi. It seems nearly unthinkable now, given the honor that later Confucian tradition accorded him, that Yan did not always enjoy an extraordinarily elevated position as Kongzi's favorite and most worthy disciple. But Yan Hui is mentioned only three times in the *Mencius*, the *Xunzi*, and those lengthy compendia *Annals of Mr. Lü* (Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋, compiled ca. 238 BCE) and *The Master of Huainan* (Huainanzi 淮南子, compiled before 139 BCE). If the Japanese scholar Matsukawa Kenji 松川健二 is correct, Yang Xiong, again perhaps in company with Liu Xiang, was one of the first to build a case for Yan Hui as a superior model for aspiring sages intent upon learning how to shape their physical persons and their inclinations.⁸⁶ Yan is praised as a superior model in no fewer than sixteen separate blocks of text in *Exemplary Figures* (sometimes with multiple mentions), and one entire chapter of *Exemplary Figures* is named after him. By way of comparison, the exemplary figure of the Supreme Sage Kongzi is praised in thirty-six passages altogether, while most other disciples of Kongzi are quickly dismissed as unpromising and unnamed students of the Way.⁸⁷ The virtues of Yan Hui are mentioned far more than those of any of the sage-kings.

In the pre-imperial and early imperial periods, high status was almost always a function of heredity. With considerable courage Yang built the case in *Exemplary Figures* that the true measure of a man's worth should be his aspirations and commitments (especially his dedication to classical learning) rather than his birth. Quite fittingly, then, later writers have tended to describe Yang Xiong as a latter-day Yan Hui, one whose poverty did not prevent his ardent dedication to the moral Way.⁸⁸ In any case, some suggest that it was largely due to Yang's influence that the *Analects*—as opposed to the *Annals* (Chunqiu 春秋) or the “Great Commentary” to the *Changes*, two other works ascribed to Kongzi—became over time the principal text to consult for a capsule record of Kongzi's teachings.⁸⁹

YANG XIONG'S ROLE IN CATAPULTING THE SHIJI TO PROMINENCE AND HIS HISTORICAL WORK

Some passages in *Exemplary Figures* criticize Sima Qian for ignoring the teachings of the sages on history. Such criticisms appear to reflect Yang's deep and abiding suspicion of “thinkers who slander the sages with their strange and far-fetched arguments, hairsplitting debates, and paradoxical-

cal language, thereby introducing confusion into worldly affairs.”⁹⁰ Such statements notwithstanding, Yang Xiong was an ardent admirer of Sima Qian and the *Shiji*, from whose content, he insisted, “even the sages could learn.”⁹¹ That admiration prompted Yang (probably acting under imperial orders) to “extend” the history recounted in the *Shiji* into the reigns of Yang’s own lifetime, from Xuandi through Pingdi (74 BCE–6 CE).⁹² It is therefore tempting to credit Yang with authorship of parts of the Basic Annals, Tables, and Biographies now included in Ban Gu’s monumental *Han shu*, since echoes of Yang’s judgments about Han figures appear frequently in that standard history, especially in the concluding Appraisals to the biographical chapters.⁹³ Even though any belated attempts to assign authorship of parts of the *Hanshu* to Yang, barring a relevant manuscript find from an excavated site, must remain firmly in the realm of speculation, it is notable that some of the earliest encomia dedicated to Yang cast him as a historian working in the “praise and blame” mode of the *Annals* ascribed to Kongzi himself.⁹⁴ There being no specific genre of history in Yang’s era, Yang uses the term we translate as “history” (*shi* 史) much more broadly to denote “genuine transmissions from the past.” But in the attempt to further clarify the recent historical record, the lengthy chapters 10–12 and parts of chapter 13 in *Exemplary Figures* provide historical judgments in the strictest modern sense, albeit in the highly compressed style reminiscent of the *Annals* appraisals.

It is well to remember that Sima Qian’s monumental work might have been consigned to the dustbin of history, had it not been for the concerted efforts of Yang Xiong, Liu Xiang, and a second Yang, Yang Yun 楊惲 (d. 54? BCE), a grandson of Sima Qian.⁹⁵ A. F. P. Hulsewé and Michael Loewe share the opinion that the *Shiji* was not in wide circulation in the mid- to late Western Han.⁹⁶ They cite in evidence the Han court’s refusal to grant permission to one Liu clan prince to see the text, which was then housed within the imperial library.⁹⁷ Possibly during the course of reorganizing the library, and probably under the anti-centralizing and anti-Wudi impulses that colored the reformist movement in late Western Han, Sima Qian’s magnum opus came to be elevated to the status of classic around the time of Yang Xiong.⁹⁸ As one Jin dynasty (265–420) text puts it: “From the time of Liu Xiang and Yang Xiong, those who are broadly read in many texts have all said that Sima Qian had the talent of a true historian; they have admired the way he put in order the pattern of events, offering an acute analysis of them that does not suffer from overelaboration.”⁹⁹

Unfortunately, all too few modern scholars have taken the trouble to follow the advice of the historian Hsu Fu-kuan 徐復觀 (Xu Fuguan) to trace the critiques that Yang levels at the *Shiji* via a careful consideration of the pre-Han and Han political figures treated in both the *Shiji* and *Exemplary Figures*.¹⁰⁰ A close examination shows that Yang disputes many individual portraits found in the *Shiji*; apparently, he believes Sima

Qian to have been remiss in identifying the underlying moral issues, even as he deems the *Shiji* a “true record.”¹⁰¹ History is all too often conceived as a narrative, a story, when it is not employed simply as a heuristic device on which to hang names, events, and dates.¹⁰² But Yang, following the lead of Sima Qian, conceived of history as a set of indisputable proofs attesting the ways in which character affects the course of a life, whether that “life” belonged to a state, a person, or a group. For Yang, character trumps plot and narrative in charting the course of history, since Yang holds that “in his every speech, the noble man brings to perfection his visible refinements of character, and in his every action, he perfects his charismatic presence.”¹⁰³ The noble man makes speeches and writings that are “fit to be heard and . . . perused” and “inexhaustible” in their moral excellence and practical applicability.¹⁰⁴ That Yang, in the spirit of Sima Qian, did not hesitate to render judgments on the most controversial matters of his day and the leading figures of the Qin and Han dynasties tells us the lengths he would go to establish his own “true record,” as does Yang’s praise for many officials who had been demoted, dismissed, or even executed by successive Qin and Han courts.¹⁰⁵

If Yang’s *Supreme Mystery* made “reading the things of the world the basis for reading the Classics,”¹⁰⁶ *Exemplary Figures* chiefly examines human motivation as a main thread in the larger patterns of history. And while Yang’s provision of “praise and blame” for historical figures can be read as commentary on the *Shiji*, it is equally possible to see Yang’s remarks as extending Kongzi’s traditional role as compiler of the *Annals* or affirming the *Documents*’ injunctions about the necessity for power-holders to “know men.”¹⁰⁷ In Yang’s view the writing of history constitutes the most important contribution of the sages, insofar as the sages concentrated on the single topic of how to know men. Thinking all members of the governing elite needed to better understand human motivations, fears, and longings, Yang considered his own ability to “know men”¹⁰⁸ to be his principal claim to fame. Certainly, his own discussions of human strategies and capacities in relation to human agency impress historians even today with their cogency and nuance.

Yang would have accepted a distinction current among the early Greeks between two kinds of truth: *alêthês*, or accurate tales (corresponding to Yang’s “substance” 實 or what is “right” 是 or “true” 正), and *etymos*, referring to beliefs that prove themselves “true” over time through the results they produce (typically rendered in Yang’s work as *chuan* 傳, “[hallowed] tradition,” or as “the Way” or Dao 道). Like most thinkers of his era, Yang was preoccupied with the way that traditions shape thought, speech, and action, and throughout *Exemplary Figures* Yang casts the second type of truth as a surer guide when arguing the superior value of the Classics or his own exemplary authority. The evaluation of any concept immediately entailed consideration of how that concept might be implemented in practice, and Yang insisted upon the potential of ethical

persons to find a way of acting that would embody both moral purity and practical efficacy.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, Yang's *Exemplary Figures*—contrary to the “popular wisdom” that insists that premodern Chinese thinkers had little interest in or could not fathom the concept of “truth”—expends not a little time establishing the proper means by which to distinguish true from false, for such distinctions, in Yang's view, form the foundation and “moral core” not only for good government but also for social cultivation.¹¹⁰

YANG XIONG ON THE CLASSICISTS AND CENTRAL STATES CIVILIZATIONS

Many modern readers may find Yang's treatment of the classicists (Ru) and Central States (Zhongguo 中國; in modern times, “China”) civilizations interesting. Given his admiration for Kongzi and a group of sages now deemed “Confucian,” one might expect Yang to extol the classicists as a group. Instead, following the lead of Xunzi and other Confucian masters, Yang speaks with no little asperity about the role some, perhaps the majority, of the classicists have played at various courts. Early on in *Exemplary Figures*, commenting on the Ru, Yang remarks,

The Way of Heaven—was it not invested in Kongzi? But the reins of Kongzi's carriage were set down [at his death]. Is the Way then not invested in these classicists? If one were to try to take up again the reins that were laid down, then the best way of doing this would be to cause all the classicists to make their voices ring out loud and clear, like wooden tongues giving voice to bells of bronze.¹¹¹

Careful readers will note the character of Yang's advice to the classicists here: Yang never states that the classicists after Kongzi propagated his Way using the proper techniques. Other comments by Yang note that while many professional classicists bear a superficial resemblance to Kongzi or other sages of yore—they walk the walk and talk the talk—they still lack a moral core or a strong appreciation of ritual propriety, with the result that their superficial cultural attainments do not transform them into compelling persons on the model of Kongzi. Most of his fellow classicists, according to Yang's account, studied the masterworks of the past simply to improve their chances of attaining high office¹¹² or to lend themselves a refined air—not because they wished to emulate greatness. Another passage underscores this very point:

Someone asked me, “Suppose a man were to take the surname of Kong and the sobriquet of Zhongni 仲尼 [like Kongzi]. If he then

entered Kongzi's gate, ascended his hall, leaned on his armrest, and wore his robes, could he be rightly called Kongzi?"

"The surface pattern would be right, but the substance would be wrong."¹¹³

To this reader's astonishment, Yang even praised figures like Ji An 汲黯 (d. ca. 105 BCE), who is known to history for "slandering the classicists" (*hui Ru* 毀儒). In Yang's judgment, Ji was one of the two best examples of the "straightforward" talker whose word can be trusted.¹¹⁴

While Yang ascribes a kind of godlike perspicacity to the sages, he also insists that, as human beings, they labored under numerous constraints, experiencing the normal travails and trials felt by other human beings. In other words, Yang is never idolatrous toward the sages of legend. For example, even charismatic figures like Kongzi cannot hope to avert death; nor can they hope to change the course of history unless they are lucky enough to meet with the "right time," when those in power are both politically and morally astute.¹¹⁵ They can develop their powers of perception and foresight, chiefly through resort to history as a mirror, but no sage has uncanny prescience. Nor can the sages call upon any higher powers or magical devices to save themselves from the consequences of their actions and the actions of others.

On Central States civilizations, Yang offers an equally balanced picture. He speaks of the valuable legacy of the sage-kings,¹¹⁶ who instituted rites and music, implemented sedentary agriculture,¹¹⁷ and devised ways to school people in the techniques they need to realize their full potentials as social beings. Yet he also notes that those conversant with Central States civilizations often misconstrue the content and importance of this legacy and the ease with which it may be imposed on lands far outside the core regions in the Han realm. At the same time, for Yang the sage's construction of the Five Social Relations and the Five Virtues (the "Five Teachings," in Yang's terms) define what it means to become fully human and humane,¹¹⁸ with the result that the gap between the less developed denizens of the Han realm and the finest examples of humanity living beyond the frontiers is very small and easily bridged by those willing to make concerted efforts to this end.¹¹⁹ Thus Yang Xiong, the ardent proponent of Central States civilizations, is no unthinking booster for empire's impulse toward expansionism, nor is he a patriot supporting his country, right or wrong. Like all the pre-Han and Han masters, he is instead intent upon delineating which matters are fated (i.e., subject to happenstance and coincidence) and which liable to amelioration through human agency.¹²⁰ That Yang always offers these views in constructed dialogues (monologic though these exchanges are) serves to remind us that Yang's views on the merits of Central States civilizations and the sages were probably developed in arguments with interlocutors raising precisely these sorts of questions.

As noted above, Yang may not have believed *Exemplary Figures* to be the finest of his several masterworks. But like the *Analects*, one of the texts of Han “elementary education,” *Exemplary Figures* set out for readers the “elementary” forms of classical learning that Yang hoped his readers would emulate. That probably accounts for its immense popularity, especially in the period from Eastern Han (25–220) through Northern Song (960–1126). Even during Yang Xiong’s lifetime, his disciples and friends hailed him as “not only a Kongzi of the West” (since he hailed from Chengdu, in present-day Sichuan, southwest of the Western Han capital) but also “a Kongzi of Qi and Lu” (meaning, a sage for all times and places). When he died, disciples such as Hou Ba 侯芭 mourned him for six years, just as Kongzi’s disciples had done before. And historians are hard put to find a critical word about Master Yang 揚子, as he was called, throughout the Eastern Han period or the post-Han Six Dynasties (220–589). Admittedly, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) at one point registers a mild criticism, but most of Wang’s *Discourses Weighed in the Balance* (Lunheng 論衡) is extremely deferential toward Yang Xiong, whom Wang ranks far above Kongzi and Mencius as an authority.¹²¹ In the final years of the Eastern Han, an entire private academy was organized around the study of Yang Xiong’s masterworks in Jingzhou 荊州 (Hubei), and it is through the Jingzhou curriculum and connections that Yang’s ideas, particularly those in *Exemplary Figures* and *Supreme Mystery*, came to influence several generations of the Wang family, including Wang Can 王粲 (177–217), Wang Su 王肅 (195–256), and Wang Bi 王弼 (226–49)—hence the ultimate derivation of the term “Mystery Learning” (Xuanxue 玄學) in the Six Dynasties.¹²²

While the clear majority of the extant sources from the Six Dynasties and Sui-Tang (589–907) periods cite Yang’s *Supreme Mystery*, there are abundant allusions to Yang’s *Exemplary Figures* during the same time. For instance, several of the most famous historians of the Six Dynasties allegedly modeled their writings on Yang’s style of history writing, including not only Qiao Zhou 譙周 (fl. 221–263 CE) of Shu (who might be expected to favor a local hero) but also Pei Ziye 裴子野 (469–530), author of the *Song Digest* (Songlue 宋略) and a harsh critic of the now more famous historian Shen Yue 沈约 (441–505)¹²³—not to mention Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) in his masterwork of historical criticism. Liu Zhiji acknowledged at great length the profound debt he owed to Yang Xiong in his intellectual formation.¹²⁴ Yang’s *Exemplary Figures* was also routinely consulted by those with access to power who were anxious to improve local customs and court policies. For example, the poet Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–94) never mentions Yang Xiong by name in his Poem 151, “Allotting Fields to the Poor” (Fu pin min tian 賦貧民田), written ca. 495, but he hardly needs to, for the very air the poem breathes is borrowed from

Yang. The final line of the poem gives the game away because it mentions Zheng Pu 鄭樵 (known by his courtesy style name Zizhen 子真), who won renown largely thanks to Yang's unstinting praise for his steadfast refusal to join the ranks of the Western Han bureaucracy. Intriguing references tell of whole works devoted to Yang's writings by such luminaries as Yu Fan 虞翻 (164–233), Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (215–82), and Fan Ning 范寧 (339–401), but these writings now survive merely as titles or as short fragments preserved in early encyclopedias.¹²⁵

Aside from frequent testimonials from men such as Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824), who traced the transmission of the Dao 道 through Yang Xiong,¹²⁶ the best testimony to the continuing authority invested in Yang Xiong's neoclassical texts comes from Yan Lingfeng's 嚴靈峯 multivolume catalog, where one can see the great numbers of commentaries compiled for *Exemplary Figures* (not to mention *Supreme Mystery* and *Fangyan*) up through the Northern Song period. In confirmation of Yang's secure standing, Yang, along with Xunzi and Han Yu, was enshrined in the Confucian temple from 1083, at one rank below Mencius, where he received sacrifices on the grounds that he “elaborated and illuminated the former sages' Dao, thereby aiding all students.”¹²⁷ In 1068 the Northern Song emperor Shenzong 神宗 (r. 1067–85) singled out Yang Xiong and Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179?–104? BCE) as the two noble epitomes (*junzi* 君子) of old who combined classical learning with a talent for writing.¹²⁸

Yang was probably too famous to have escaped censure entirely in the centuries before the Southern Song (1126–1279), when Yang's reputation took a severe beating from the adherents of the True Way Learning. Early denunciations tended to make Yang's *fu* in praise of Wang's short-lived Xin dynasty their starting point.¹²⁹ But there were other gripes as well. Liu Zongyuan 劉宗元 (773–819) did not feel any qualms about lumping Yang together with a number of Han writers (Sima Xiangru, Liu Xiang, Ban Biao, and Ban Gu among them) whom Liu blamed for following ludicrous old traditions.¹³⁰ (That censure notwithstanding, Liu thought highly enough of *Exemplary Figures* to compose one of the early commentaries to it.)¹³¹ Su Shi, a second well-known critic, decried Yang's complicated arguments and ambiguous expressions in a famous letter to a friend.¹³² But before Zhu Xi's era in the late twelfth century, sustained criticism of Yang or Yang's *Exemplary Figures* was rare.¹³³ Zhu—anxious to displace Yang as the premier master of classical learning after Kongzi and Mencius—excoriated Yang and his teachings on three main grounds: (1) Yang had shown disloyalty to the Han ruling house by supporting the usurper Wang Mang and then compounded that error through the arrogance that led him to claim the status of master for himself and of a Classic for his *Supreme Mystery*, which made all his writings suspect; (2) Yang's cosmology was “incorrect” and in need of revision by Zhu because it failed to distinguish the material aspects (*qi* 氣) from the immaterial principles (*li* 理) of the cosmos; and (3) Yang's theory of human nature

did not follow that of Mencius, despite Yang's spirited defense of Mencius against his many detractors.¹³⁴ Given such criticisms, Zhu Xi was quick to suggest major changes to the wording of Yang's *Exemplary Figures* that would have dramatically altered its meaning.¹³⁵ Those who sought to condemn Yang typically elevated Dong Zhongshu, a relatively marginal figure in Western Han, to the rank of premier Han Confucian master.¹³⁶

In 1371, as a result of such aspersions cast on Yang's character, the director of the Directorate of Education submitted a memorial suggesting that Yang Xiong, among others, be removed from the Confucian temple. Yang was eventually removed from the temple in 1393,¹³⁷ although he was apparently restored to the temple (perhaps in some form of secondary status?) sometime before 1488. In any case, in that year one memorial, swiftly followed by a second, spoke of Yang Xiong "committing crimes against the moral teachings" (*ming jiao* 名教)¹³⁸ as part of a broader attack against "the confused and unorthodox writings of the Han and Wei periods."¹³⁹ Although the dominance of True Way Learning associated with Zhu, along with its "exclusionary logic,"¹⁴⁰ faced strong challenges during the Qing and Republican eras (1644–1949), the damage had been done. Yang's reputation as a philosophical master was never fully restored, for two main reasons: first, the new nationalistic narratives forged in late Qing and the early Republican era continued to demand (even retroactively) that absolute loyalty be rendered to the nation-state; and second, the very influential narratives by such leading May Fourth figures as Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) and Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) invariably assigned a single specialty to each period, with "philosophy" allotted to the Zhan-guo period and the Han left with only the *fu*.¹⁴¹ Until the post-Mao era, the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China also condemned avowedly "Confucian" thinkers as the "running dogs" of slave society.¹⁴² Now that a series of Confucian Revivals has been encouraged by the governments of Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, and the People's Republic, many scholars have begun to show greater interest in restoring the reputations of such long-lost Confucian masters as Yang Xiong.¹⁴³

CONCLUSION

A modern American writer has written,

Clarity is the enemy of self-deception and of the larger deception known as ideology. Style is not the ornament of thought but its very substance, and thinking is an ethical act. Humanism, which seeks a complex integration of disparate experience, requires the most difficult kind of style: a simple one . . . because to become great it must respond to, and thus force an awareness of, the whole of reality.¹⁴⁴

These things Yang knew two millennia before our time.

Some may think Yang's *Exemplary Figures* incoherent, and so it is, if one looks in it for the same kind of systematic logical exposition of a given topic that the *Xunzi* supplies in its philosophical essays. However, Yang supplies his own definition of a Classic: a work that says neither too much nor too little, but has very wide application in human affairs. By these criteria, it matters not a whit how hard the reader of the *Exemplary Figures* must work to piece Yang's meaning together from different passages while weighing their import; after all, similar exercises must be undertaken with the *Analects* and other classics from other traditions. Passages may only seem convoluted and hairsplitting to the sloppy reader who prefers a quick sound bite or slogan—a preference that existed even in Han times.¹⁴⁵ It is these very acts of careful deliberation—likened to the slow process of grinding and polishing jade—that are meant to school the reader in the ways of “becoming a human being” who is compelling in his thinking, in his speech, and in his conduct.

By the Han era, custom dictated that rulers seek out the writings of all peoples (not just their maps), including those of alien and conquered lands, and, by translating them, render them acquisitions of the dominant culture. Thus could space be conquered intellectually as well as physically. Yang's idea of conquering the distant past, making it accessible not only to contemporary readers but also to later generations, was no less an act of supreme intellectual ambition. Of a comparable figure in the classical Mediterranean world, the famous poet-librarian Callimachus, one scholar has written,

His poetry was a mix of different dialects that required the reader to be able to use commentaries, dictionaries, and scholia; it was inextricably linked to the philological work going on in the library. The language made this poetry both obscure and elitist, also loaded with connotations, stuffed with learned references and curios, religious and mythographic memories, as to become a veritable cultural game.¹⁴⁶

Yang, who was so intent upon forging links between pleasure-taking and giving, reading and writing, and classical learning for “later generations,” would doubtless have been gratified to see that this sort of comparison springs to mind in readers today.

Michael Nylan

NOTES

- 1 For Yang as a historian, see, for example, *Shitong* 12.306. There was, of course, no office of Historian at court until the Tang period (618–907), so, more accurately, Sima Qian is “Archivist.” For the relation between the *Fayan* and the *Shiji*, see L’Haridon, forthcoming; Yang 2003, esp. 21–32.
- 2 See *Hou Hanshu* 40A.1325 (Ban Biao biography) for the phrase 依五經之法言, 同聖人之是非. Ban Biao, the father of Ban Gu 班固, knew Yang Xiong and Huan Tan 桓譚 well.
- 3 Yang’s choice of title indicates his desire to borrow from Kongzi 孔子, Zhuangzi 莊子, and Xunzi 荀子, for all these texts discuss “model sayings” or “exemplary figures” (*fayan* 法言), as do the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 and the *Classic of Filial Piety* (Xiaojing 孝經), section 4. See *Analects* 9.24; *Zhuangzi* 10.4/46, 51; and *Xunzi* 16/6/26 (“To speak less but have the speech modeled defines the noble man” 少言而法, 君子也). Both the *Han Feizi* and the *Classic of Filial Piety* say, “If it is not the model sayings of the former kings, one should not dare to say it” 非先王之法言, 不敢道. When criticizing superstitions, the *History of the Han* mentions the “model sayings of the Five Classics” (*Hanshu* 25B.1260, the “Treatise on Suburban Sacrifices”). Waley’s 1938 translation of the relevant *Analects* passage treats “model sayings” as a book title (“The words of the *Fayu* [a book of moral sayings?] cannot fail to stir us, but what matters is that they should cause us to change our ways”). The extant sources include no such title, however.
- 4 McKenzie 1986 defines “degressive” as “considering what the original was.”
- 5 Loewe, personal communication, said of how little we really know of antiquity.
- 6 For the first example, see the preface by Song Xian 宋咸 to a manuscript dated 1037; for the second, see Sima Guang’s 司馬光 comments in the preface to his *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑 (usually rendered as *General Mirror for the Aid of Government*) dated 1081. See also Yan 1993, 5.328. It is very interesting how often Sima Guang relies on Yang Xiong’s *Fayan* when rendering judgments on early figures; he also mentions Yang Xiong in his postface to *Zizhi tongjian*.
- 7 In comparison with True Way Learning (often dubbed “neo-Confucianism”), Han thought tends to be less interior, less abstract, less intent upon moral purity, and more intent upon efficacious action; it is also somewhat more egalitarian in spirit.
- 8 These pithy judgments, which seem to anticipate those in the *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of Tales of the World), recall those in *Analects* 11.2.
- 9 Some of these battles of wit most likely mimicked the court conferences, such as the famous Shiqu 石渠 conference on policy matters in 51 BCE (see below), where scholars sought to best their opponents.
- 10 David Knechtges, personal communication. Yang’s elaborate account of his decision to imitate the Classics may have been, in part, a ploy to counter such potential criticism. See Genette 1997, 246.
- 11 *Wenxin diaolong*, *juan* 14, specifically points to the humor in Yang’s “Dispelling Ridicule” *fu*, where Yang tries to account for his lack of worldly success, which is inexplicable, given his merits. See also Knechtges, in Loewe 1993, 100: “Most of the responses [in *Exemplary Figures*] . . . rely on wit and puns rather than on logical [i.e., systematic] exposition to make their point.”
- 12 Yang’s two other masterworks are the *Fangyan* and *Supreme Mystery*. See Nylan 1993 for a complete study of *Supreme Mystery*. The best study on the *Fangyan* remains Serruys 1959. On Yang as the first self-conscious author in Chinese history, see Taniguchi 2010. Taniguchi notes that the tragic figure of Qu Yuan is merely a creation by Sima Qian in the *Shiji*, and Sima Qian’s “self-consciousness” as an author rests upon two pieces of writing, Sima Qian’s autobiography (*Shiji* 130), part of which derives

- from later authors, and *Hanshu* 62, “The Letter to Ren An,” almost certainly a work of literary impersonation (prosopopoeia).
- 13 Loewe 2006, 71.
 - 14 Nylan, forthcoming-a.
 - 15 Most historians think that Ban Gu appended little to Yang’s autobiography except the final exculpatory tale of Yang’s arrest and attempted suicide under Wang Mang and an admiring appraisal by one of Yang’s most famous disciples, Huan Tan 桓譚 (43 BCE–28 CE). Yang Xiong was close to Ban Zhi 稚 (father of Ban Biao). The Bans continued to sing the praises of Yang Xiong. See Ban Si’s 嗣 “Sheng xian gao shi zhuan” 聖賢高士傳.
 - 16 Yang has one of only three multi-chapter (*juan*) biographies for a single person in the *History of the Han*. The other two figures so honored are the poet Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (ca. 179–117 BCE), who, like Yang, was from Chengdu (in present-day Sichuan) and the usurper Wang Mang.
 - 17 Notably, opinions vary about Ban Gu’s attitude toward Yang. I find it far more positive than Pitner (2010) does.
 - 18 Shrines were erected to Yan Junping (aka Zhuang Zun 莊遵) and Li Hong, under the encouragement of Qin Mi 秦宓 (Three Kingdoms period). See *Sanguo zhi* 38.976.
 - 19 For the importance of the *fu* at the Han court, see Kern 2003, esp. 383. But Kern notes the “virtual absence of the genre in Sima Qian’s *Shiji*” and in the “elaborate *Hanshu* account of literary activities at the [court of] Emperor Wu” (397).
 - 20 For example, Yang describes “the excursion lodges so unique and rare.” Ma Jigao (1987, 138–41) submits that the tension between eulogy and admonition was not resolved in the Han *fu*.
 - 21 E.g., *Fayan* 6.22.
 - 22 See *Hanshu* 87B.2564, 87B.3563; Knechtges 1982a, 45, 44.
 - 23 *Hanshu* 87B.3563; Knechtges 1982a, 44–45.
 - 24 This portrait of Chengdi contradicts many of the prevailing stereotypes. As the last adult ruler of the late Western Han, Chengdi had to be blamed for the downfall of the dynasty. Chengdi was an ardent classicist and an innovative ruler. In Chengdi himself and in many prominent figures at Chengdi’s court, Yang found people who were as sympathetic and open to Yang’s neoclassical arguments as he could hope to meet, and yet the old ways proved far too tenacious for his liking. For Ban Gu’s praise of Chengdi, which verges on the extravagant, see *Hanshu* 100B.4239. That Chengdi had less money than Han Wudi is not the only reason for his promotion of classicism. On this, see the forthcoming conference volume on Chengdi’s reign to be edited by Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen.
 - 25 In his “Sweet Springs” *fu*, Yang compares the building projects at Sweet Springs to the building projects of those bad rulers. See *Hanshu* 87A.3528. Yang’s “Exhortation against Wine” was said to mock Chengdi (see *Quan Han wen*, 52.728). Similarly, once Liu Xiang compared Emperor Cheng to the “tyrants of the Qin.” That Chengdi did not punish Liu Xiang is amazing. See *Hanshu* 10.330, 36.1956–57.
 - 26 *Hanshu* 87B.3570; Knechtges 1982a, 49.
 - 27 I speak here of the Ding and Fu consort clans, as well as of Dong Xian, reputedly the male lover of Aidi, who at least had the signal virtue, from the Eastern Han historians’ point of view, of slowing the seemingly inexorable rise of Wang Mang at court.
 - 28 *Hanshu* 87B.3565; Knechtges 1982a, 46.
 - 29 *Hanshu* 87B.3569; Knechtges 1982a, 49. For the *haogu* movement, see Nylan 2011.
 - 30 *Hanshu* 87B.3575; Knechtges 1982a, 53. See also *Fayan* 2.1: “Grown men do not engage in such activities.”
 - 31 *Hanshu* 87B.3575; Knechtges 1982a, 53.
 - 32 Wang Mang decreed that Yang write this eulogy, according to *Hanshu* 98.4035.
 - 33 See Knechtges 1977.

- 34 Earlier in Western Han, as in the Zhanguo and Qin periods, the throne had access to several archives. But a library is different. For this difference, see Nylan 2011, esp. chap. 4.
- 35 See *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 8, 1.36a (“Mianxue zhang”); Teng 1968, 64–84, esp. 83–84. This saying is often quoted by textual critics. This image of Yang persisted into the Six Dynasties; see Wu Chaoqing, *Collected Writings*, *juan 1* (入蘭臺贈王治書僧孺), *juan 2* (周承未還重贈). Yang is said there to have worked in both the Shiqu and the Linge 麟閣 libraries.
- 36 This remark is now preserved in a letter to Liu Xin 劉歆, in *Guwen yuan*; it is cited also in *Wenxin diaolong*, *juan 38* (trans., p. 289); for a full translation, see Knechtges 1977–78.
- 37 See Nylan 2011, pt. 4.
- 38 *Hanshu* 87B.3585 (Knechtges 1982a, 60) presents some of these questioners as curiosity-seekers since Yang had survived being accused of treason.
- 39 Knechtges 1982a, 57. Readers may wish to contrast my translation with that of Wu Fusheng 2007.
- 40 A laudable exception is Greatrex 1994.
- 41 According to Liu Zhiji’s preface to the *Shitong* 史通 (Anatomy of Histories), “When Yang wrote his *Exemplary Figures*, people of the time competed to fault its reckless foolishness, and so he composed the ‘Jiechao’ to set them straight. Clearly, this is because Yang criticized people of his own era.”
- 42 Or possibly Tongwu (Child Crow).
- 43 According to Yan Lingfeng (1993, 5.323–36, 57–64), five commentaries were produced for *Exemplary Figures* in the pre-Tang and Tang periods (compared with eleven in the Song period). Eighteen commentaries were produced for *Supreme Mystery* during the pre-Tang and Tang periods. Moreover, the commentaries included many by the most famous writers and thinkers of the Wei-Jin period, such as Song Zhong 宋衷, Lu Ji 陸績 (d. 229 CE), Yu Fan 虞翻 (d. 233), Wang Su 王肅 (d. 256 CE), and Fan Ning 范甯 (d. 403 CE). The only person in this period to comment on both *Exemplary Figures* and *Supreme Mystery* was Song Zhong of the Jingzhou Academy (ca. 192 CE) (see below). *Huayang guozhi* (Ren Naiqiang ed.) 10A.533, adds the names of Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139), Cui Yuan 崔瑗 (78?–143?), and several others to the list of commentators. We should not forget that many of Yang’s *fu* also had commentaries written for them.
- 44 Liu Xin’s primary reason for recommending that the *Zuozhuan* (Zuo Traditions 左傳) be officially studied in the Han Imperial Academy was that the text contained so many ancient characters and ancient phrases. Liu Xin wanted to use the text of the *Zuozhuan* to explain the Classics, in much the same way that Yang and Liu Xiang proposed to use the *Erya*.
- 45 This point was made repeatedly by Bielenstein (1953–59, 1980).
- 46 Wang Qicai (2009, 131) points to the practical utility of a new literary trope. Instead of speaking of inaction or new policies endangering the ruler, as the early Western Han writers did, Yang and others began to claim that they would happily endanger themselves for the sake of the dynasty. According to Wang Qicai, this accounts in part for the rhetorical turn away from making a show of one’s bravery to making a show of one’s classical elegance, with Yang Xiong a pivotal figure in shaping the new trend (ibid., 159).
- 47 See the concluding Appraisal to *Hanshu* 87B. A far more spirited defense, articulated by Zhang Heng, argued that since the length of a dynasty is tied to cosmic cycles, Yang’s elucidation of those cycles in *Supreme Mystery* in some sense began the process which “restored” the Han after Wang Mang. See *Hou Hanshu* 59.1897.
- 48 The anecdotes circulating about Yang in early (i.e., pre-Tang) texts can be sorted into several categories: (1) those portraying Yang as a “wisdom bag”; (2) those portraying

- him as a proponent of using the *Erya* to correct the Classics; (3) those commenting on Yang's love for technical matters, including astronomy and music theory; (4) those emphasizing his extreme poverty, including Huan's criticism of Yang as one who cared too much for wealth and status; (5) those attesting the brilliant writer's desperate search for inspiration and fear of writer's block; (6) those portraying his fondness for drink (another plausible excuse for disengagement?); and (7) those declaring Yang to be the best editor, along with Liu Xiang, that the Central States had produced.
- 49 The Xiongnu were a nomadic confederation on the northwestern frontiers of the Han realm.
- 50 *Huayang guozhi* (Ren Naiqiang ed.) 10A.533.
- 51 Huan Tan, cited in *Yilin* 3.9a.
- 52 See Nylan, forthcoming-b.
- 53 See below. In a letter ("Da Xie Minshi shu" 答謝民師書) Su Shi also criticized Yang Xiong's propensity to use unusual vocabulary (see Han and Zhao 2010, 262–66), whereas Han Yu, one of Zhu Xi's heroes, praised Yang warmly, saying that he and Xunzi were surpassed only by Kongzi and Mencius in terms of their ethical teachings and that Yang was equal to Sima Qian and Sima Xiangru as a historian and writer. See Han's "Yuan dao" 原道 essay; and "Song Meng Dongye xu" 送孟東野序.
- 54 *Fayan* 11.15.
- 55 For the Republican era roots of this propensity to allot each era one type of literary activity, see P. Kroll 2010.
- 56 Yang reserves the highest praise for two groups: those courageous enough to criticize the powers-that-be of their own eras and the real specialists in the classical texts (e.g., Wang Ji 王吉 [fl. 74–51 BCE] and Gong Yu 貢禹 [d. 44 BCE], called "shining stars" in *Fayan* 11.23). According to L'Haridon (2006, vol. 1, 58), this use of the Classics as a critical weapon constitutes an important new dimension of or stage in the emergence of a group of men of letters who distinguish themselves both from the emperor and from career classicists.
- 57 Wang Qicai 2009, 115ff. The Five Classics are the *Odes*, *Documents*, *Rites*, *Annals*, and *Changes*.
- 58 I owe this insight to L'Haridon 2006, vol. 1, 124.
- 59 Fukui 2005, passim, esp. 153.
- 60 See, e.g., *Fayan* 1.4.
- 61 *Fayan* 7.18.
- 62 *Fayan* 5.15, 1.21–24, 2.8, 1.8.
- 63 Knechtges 1982a, 50, citing *Hanshu* 87A.3570.
- 64 E.g., *Fayan* 7.16, 8.6.
- 65 *Fayan* 1.19.
- 66 *Fayan* 1.18, 3.21, 4.7, 4.16, 6.3, 6.7–8. Nearly all of chapter 6 relates to this.
- 67 Carruthers 2008, 180.
- 68 The *Shiji*, for example, spoke with pride of the empire in many passages; the "Fengshan shu" chapter throughout describes the "Great Han's charismatic power, which reaches everywhere to the four borders" (Da Han zhi de . . . pang bo si sai 漢之德, . . . 旁魄四塞). Similarly, Sima Xiangru praised the wealth and splendor, and sheer expanse, of the Han Empire. As Wang Qicai 2009, 108 comments, "It must have been the prevailing feeling at the time—a note of justifiable pride in the government."
- 69 Given the idea that "past and present were one" and the ascribed essential natures and motivating forces of human beings, it was reasonable to believe that historians could be seers as well and that one could draw upon the rich resources of history to resolve difficult issues. For early ideas about the historian's job (which serve equally well for China as for classical Greece), see Veyne 1988.
- 70 Surely the desire to display command of a set of technical skills accounts for the

- form of *Exemplary Figures* and Yang's "philosophical" poems as much as Yang's desire to imitate the *Analects*, for in each work Yang artfully arranged dialogues masquerading as battles of wit like those that marked the Shiqu 石渠 court conference in 51 BCE. It was not at all unusual in Yang's era for masters to make such comparisons between oneself or others and the sages of antiquity. For example, a late Eastern Han stele from Shandong erected to Jing Yun 景雲 (dated 173 CE; discovered 2004) compares Jing to Confucius and Shun (two sages). See *Chongqing Zhongguo Sanxia bowuguan*, 98–99.
- 71 E.g., *Hanshu* 87A.3515, which often talks about the "right moment" and what to do if the moment is not propitious for action.
- 72 Cullen 2010.
- 73 Yang was listed as one of nine earlier experts on astronomy in "Lun Tian" 論天, in Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, "Quan Jin wen," 39.406.
- 74 Li Zehou 2000, *passim*, makes the point that this is true about Chinese thought in general and Han classicism in particular; see also Fingarette 1972, esp. chap. 2.
- 75 The same theme had preoccupied earlier self-described Confucian masters. See, e.g., *Mencius* 3A.4.
- 76 *Fayan* 5.26.
- 77 *Fayan* 2.1.
- 78 *Fayan* 4.8.
- 79 *Fayan* 9.7.
- 80 *Fayan* 7.7.
- 81 As one Six Dynasties writer, Xie Lingyun 謝靈運 (385–433), put it, "Ornament and structure together are what perfects the beauty [of the piece]" 文體宜兼，以成其美. See Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, "Quan Song wen," 31.299 ("Shanju" 山居 fu).
- 82 See Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, "Quan Liang wen," 27.283 ("Zhu zhi zhi" 注制旨).
- 83 *Fayan* 5.13. Contrast the reading given this passage in Gu 2005, 35–43, which provides a useful introduction to its import.
- 84 See *Shiqu baoji* 32.31b.
- 85 See Taniguchi 2010.
- 86 See Matsukawa 1994, esp. 23–40.
- 87 Yang may well have been mindful of the tradition whereby no fewer than three of Kongzi's inner circle of disciples (Zixia, Zizhang, and Ziyou) wanted to serve You Rou as if he were the Master himself because of his physical resemblance to the Master. See *Mencius* 3A.4.
- 88 See *Huayang guozhi* (Ren Naiqiang ed.) 10A.533.
- 89 See L'Haridon 2006, vol., 1, 78.
- 90 Knechtges 1968, 99 (trans. modified).
- 91 *Fayan* 12.9.
- 92 *Hanshu* 76.3239.
- 93 E.g., the Appraisals to *Hanshu* 57 and 65 (on Dong Fangshuo). Ban Gu openly imitated Yang Xiong in his writings, according to *Hanshu* 100B.4165. One also suspects that parts of these chapters reflect the prefaces that Yang wrote for thirty-eight *pian* of the *Han Records* (Hanji 漢記). See *Ershi wushi bubian* 1.1588.
- 94 For this insight, I am grateful to L'Haridon 2006.
- 95 *Hanshu* 62.2737–38; *Shiji* 20.1062. Yang Yun, son of the chancellor Yang Chang 敞, received five million cash in assets upon his father's death, as well as his step-mother's wealth, which he then increased several-fold by engaging in business. Both Yangs have biographies in *Hanshu* 66. Sima Qian's daughter was Yang Yun's mother, according to *Hanshu* 66.2885. (The characters *yang* 楊 and *yang* 楊 were

used interchangeably in old editions, and it is conceivable that the two Yangs, Yang Xiong and Yang Yun, were somehow related.) Loewe (2000, 640) says of Yang Yun that his “main service perhaps lay in rescuing Sima Qian’s book from the obscurity into which it had fallen after the author’s death and bringing it to attention during Xuandi’s time.” Yang enjoyed close relations with several distinguished men of letters; he himself was a man of talents with an interest in history, though his outspoken criticisms of others, extravagant lifestyle, and aggressive moneymaking greatly displeased Xuandi, who finally had him publicly executed for “gross immorality.” See J. Kroll 2010.

- 96 See *ECT*, pp. 405–14.
- 97 A request made by Liu Yu 宇, King of Dongping (r. 52–20 BCE), to see a copy of “the Grand Archivists’ writings” (*Taishi gong shu* 太史公書) was denied, but Wang Feng 王鳳, maternal uncle of Chengdi, had seen enough of the *Shiji* to give a scathing assessment of its content, proving that some privileged people were allowed to see the text. See *Hanshu* 80.3324, for the request. For Sima Qian’s tomb and shrine, see *KGYWW* 1981.2, p. 108.
- 98 Yang Yun was able to restore Sima Qian’s good name under Xuandi (r. 92–74 BCE), but his works seem not to have been in wide circulation following that. Yang Xiong praised Sima Qian in his *Exemplary Figures*. For Yang’s own pronounced bias against Han Wudi, see the notes to *Fayan* 13.28, for example.
- 99 For the phrase 然自劉向揚雄,博極群書,皆稱選有良史之才,服其善序事理,辯而不華, see Yan Kejun, *Quan shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, “Quan Song wen,” *juan* 17, preface to the *Shiji jiejie* 史記集解; cf. *Sanguo zhi*, *juan* 13.
- 100 See Xu Fuguan 1979. One exception is L’Haridon 2005, 2006, forthcoming. L’Haridon suggests that one principal difference between Sima Qian and Yang is that Yang put more weight on loyalty than did Sima Qian. The issue is more complicated, however, and not only because Yang mentions loyalty in *Exemplary Figures* only twice (7.20, 10.15). (Ironically, one of the main accusations leveled by Yang’s detractors was that he was disloyal, insofar as he served two dynasties.)
- 101 *Fayan* 10.30.
- 102 Finley 1975, *passim*.
- 103 *Fayan* 12.1.
- 104 *Fayan* 8.18.
- 105 It is probably significant that Yang’s teacher, Yan Junping 嚴君平, was also purportedly a “historian” working in the style of Zuo Qiuming (see *Shitong*, chap. 2). In *Exemplary Figures*, about seventy-five Western Han figures are named, and a clear majority of these are figures whom the court suspected of crimes (e.g., Bing Ji, Dong Zhongshu, Dou Ying, Guan Ying, Han Yanshou, Jia Yi, Jia Juanchi, Li Guangli, Luan Bu, Shen Pei, Master Yuangu, Shi Qing, Sima Qian, Wang Zun Wei Qing, Xiahou Sheng, and Zhi Buyi); who were executed by the court (e.g., Chao Cuo, Han Xin, Han Yanshou, Jing Fang, Liu An, Sang Hongyang, Shangguan Jie, Yuan Ang, and Zhao Guanghan); who were wrongly favored by the court (e.g., Chen Tang, Dongfang Shuo, and Gongsun Hong); or who played more ambiguous roles than they should have, given the trust invested in them by the Han court (e.g., Chen Ping, Zhou Bo, and Huo Guang). By my rough count, Yang considered only fourteen people to have been more or less correctly judged by the Han court: Fan Kuai, Feng Tang (possibly?), the Four Graybeards, Guan Fu, Juan Buyi, Lou Jing, Lu Jia, Su Wu, Xiahou Ying, Yin Wenggu, and Zhang Anshi. I say “rough count,” because figures like the Four Graybeards implicitly criticize one ruler but honor and are honored by another. By means of one incident or another, *Exemplary Figures* portrays every single ruler from the Han founder down to Chengdi, Yang’s own ruler, in an unflattering light. I have argued elsewhere, in forthcoming-b, that Yang Xiong also criticizes Wang Mang.

- 106 Smith et al. (1990, 227–28) identified this way of reading as a Song innovation, but it is certainly Han, if not pre-Han.
- 107 The *Gongyang* 公羊 commentaries to the *Annals*, for example, said that histories were written to elucidate the power of the Way by revealing the distinctive patterns (good and ill) forged through actions and events. See *Gongyang zhuan*, Lord Ai, year 14.
- 108 *Hanshu* 72.3057 says of Yang that he “truly knew men” (楊子雲誠知人).
- 109 Han moralists—in stark contrast to the adherents of the True Way Learning espoused by Zhu Xi—did not posit a strong contrast between moral purity and practical efficacy; they sought instead to cast practical wisdom and calls for efficacy as twin components of the admirable Way of the sages. However, Yang does not hesitate to condemn the Han rulers and regents for empowering greedy, unscrupulous, or sycophantic upstarts who harmed the ordinary subjects most grievously. It is hardly coincidental that most of the political figures whom Yang praises had been executed, exiled, or dismissed by the Han.
- 110 See, e.g., *Fayan* 3.16, 9.17: “True and false—that is the core. If the truth is not perceived as true, nor the false as false, then an administration lacks a moral core.”
- 111 *Fayan* 1.3.
- 112 Because the Classics contained so many different characters and supplied rhetorical models, study of one or more of the Classics was often undertaken to learn reading and writing, and testing of characters and rhetorical forms was used for some posts in government. However, it would be wrong to ascribe to the Han anything like the full-blown examination culture of the Song period. For more on this, see Nylan 2008.
- 113 *Fayan* 2.11.
- 114 Ji An is usually identified as a Huang-Lao proponent, as if that should make him an enemy of all the classicists; see *Shiji* 120.3108, which says that Ji An often slandered the Ru. But Yang Xiong thought him a man of principle, which clearly indicates that the Ru were not a monolithic group—a fact confirmed in many early texts of the time.
- 115 *Fayan* 10.12.
- 116 *Fayan* 3.20.
- 117 *Fayan* 4.11.
- 118 *Fayan* 4.11.
- 119 *Fayan* 3.20.
- 120 *Fayan* 6.11.
- 121 “Of the many writers of Han times, Sima Qian and Yang Ziyun are like the Yellow River and the Han; the rest are like the Jing and the Wei Rivers” (quoted from *Lunheng jian* 29, *pian* 83, entitled “Anshu”).
- 122 Few modern early scholars seem to have put the elementary facts about the derivation of the term Mystery Learning together, probably because Han historians and Six Dynasties historians too seldom read the basic texts from both time periods. See Wagner 2000; Nylan 2001b. Wang Baoxuan (2004) sometimes seems to recognize this link and sometimes to forget it.
- 123 For Qiao Zhou, see Farmer 2007. Qiao was the author not only of writings on history but also of a “Faxun” (Glosses on the Model 法訓) and “*Wujing lun*” (On the Five Classics 五經論), in altogether several hundred *pian*. For Pei Ziyi, see Blitstein 2009; J. Chen, forthcoming; Cao 2002, 297.
- 124 For examples, see *Shitong*, “Preface” (Zixu 自敘), pp. 288–98. See also below.
- 125 Also, the *Zizhi tongjian* 64/27a says that Xun Yue’s *Shenjian* in five *pian* (compiled ca. 205 CE) was described, at the time it was written, as being “somewhat like Yang Xiong’s *Fayan*” (see *Shenjian*, p. 1). Some part of this loss is almost certainly due to the extremely negative pronouncements on Yang Xiong offered by Zhu Xi

- (1130–1200) and other adherents of the True Way Learning movement (see below), whose writings became exceedingly influential guides to reading the Classics after the Southern Song.
- 126 Han Yu traces the transmission of the Way (Daotong) from Mencius to Xunzi to Yang Xiong. There are numerous examples of Han's praise of Yang, one being Han's collected works, *Han Changli quanji* 韓昌黎全集, 14.227, which insists that Yang Xiong, along with Mencius, "enabled people now and afterward to understand how [the sages' teachings] differed from heterodoxies." Nonetheless, Wilson (1995, 81) strongly doubts that Han Yu had the fully developed notion of the Daotong that Zhu, not to mention later scholars, have credited him with. Cf. Ouyang Xiu's praise for Yang's literary skills in *Ouyang Wenzhong quanji* 50.6b, 67.1b, 3.12a.
- 127 See Wilson 1995, 41. Cf. *Songshi* 105.2549; *Gujin tushu jicheng* 199.56a. Farmer 2000, 119, cites evidence for a shrine built to Yang Xiong in Chengdu.
- 128 See *Songshi* 336.10762. Yang Xiong was highly regarded in his own time as a classical master, but this was probably not the case with Dong Zhongshu. See Loewe 2011, which examines the place of Dong within early Chinese history. The names of Dong and Yang are still repeatedly linked in post-Han writings. See, e.g., *Shen Yue ji* 1.96/42 ("On Passing by Liu Huan's Tomb" 奉和竟陵王經劉瓛墓).
- 129 See *Wei shu* 22.1145, 1156 (Zhao Yi 趙逸 biography), 21.114.52; cf. *Yanshi jiaxun* 9.38.16. At the same time, Liu Xin's conduct was deemed far worse, as he was a member of the Han imperial house. See, e.g., *Taiping yulan* 599.
- 130 *Xin Tangshu* 168.5136.
- 131 See Yan 1993, 5.326. That commentary now exists only in fragments.
- 132 Liu Shi Shun 1979, "Da Xie Minshi shu" 答謝民師書. See Han and Zhao 2010, 262–66.
- 133 See *Huayang guozhi* (Ren Naiqiang ed.) 10A.543.
- 134 See Zhu Xi, in Chan 1967. Zhu Xi wrote, "Don't read Master Yang. There is nothing good in what he said, and there is nothing concrete in his theories. Although Xunzi made mistakes, what he said is really concrete." See *Zhuzi yulei* 137.2b (Chan 1967, 93). This diatribe occurs in a chapter devoted to revision of earlier theories about the Daotong, including the assessment of Yang Xiong as one of three Han figures whose "words and deeds are helpful to the education of the world and should be studied." Zhu Xi also said, "Yang Ziyun lost his integrity by serving Wang Mang." See Zhang Boxing, *Jinsilu jijie* 14.5b (Chan 1967, 95). Zhu ascribed to his teacher Cheng Yi the saying "Neither Xunzi nor Yang Xiong could have uttered exceedingly wise sayings" (Chan 1967, 297). Zhu also cited with approbation a criticism of Yang Xiong; trans., p. 298. Zhu believed, with his master Cheng Yi, that "after Mencius, the Learning of the Sage was no longer transmitted. From the Qin and Han dynasties on, none reached the [requisite] level of truth" (Chan 1967, 300).
- 135 Chan 1967, 98.
- 136 For a reception history of Dong demonstrating this very point, see Loewe 2011. Dong was held in high esteem in Southern Song (as earlier) by the very people who were condemning Yang Xiong, including the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi. Lou Yue (1137–1213, *jinshi* 1163) wrote that Yang Xiong should have felt "ashamed" by Dong's statement (recorded in *Chunqiu fanlu* 6.17, p. 162) that "a victory won without reliance on Dao is of less value than a defeat by such reliance." Lou Yue's remarks are recorded in *Songshi* 宋史 395.12045; also in his *Gongkui ji* 77.1a. No reputable Han scholar today regards the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (usually rendered as *Luxuriant Dew on the Annals*) ascribed to Dong as an authentic work by Dong.
- 137 *Mingshi* 明史 50.1297.
- 138 Wilson 1995, 55–56, citing, among other texts, Wang Qi, *Xu wenxian tongkao* 48.3230.
- 139 Thomas A. Wilson notes that debates recorded in the *Mingshi* suggest that he was

- (re?)enshrined just before 1530, and he suspects that “some of the people who were memorializing the throne about his status thought Yang was still enshrined there” (personal communication, 26 July 2010).
- 140 The phrase “exclusionary logic” comes from Wilson 1995, 56.
- 141 Lu Xun (1958) not only emphasized the greater “vigor and force” of other Han writers, particularly Jia Yi 賈誼 and Chao Cuo 鼂錯, but also underscored the overly simplistic idea that each dynasty had one literary specialty. Lu also formed an analogy between the “dark ages” following the Mediterranean classical period and the Han following the Zhanguo period, whereby the Han thinkers were condemned as “unoriginal” “scholastics” intent upon merely classifying the “true philosophy” of the pre-imperial period.
- 142 For the best introduction to the condemnations of Confucian teaching, see Louie 1980. Joseph Needham, in his monumental *Science and Civilisation in China* (over twenty vols. to date), labored under the misapprehension that Confucians were “anti-science” and Daoists “pro-science.” See his volume 2, where this is discussed.
- 143 On the Confucian Revival, see Nylan 2001a, chap. 7; and Nylan, with Wilson, 2010, chap. 7.
- 144 Arthur Danto, cited in *The Nation*, 14 May 2007, 50.
- 145 *Fayan* 8.11.
- 146 Jacob and Polignac 2000, 95.

