Near the end of the *Huainanzi* compiled in the mid-second century BCE, the ideal exemplary ruler is likened to a person who quietly plays the role of ancestral spirit in a sacrifice. The sacrificers bustle around him as they ready their offerings, but he himself remains motionless in dignified stillness like the eye at the center of a storm:

> 今夫祭者，屠割烹殺，剝狗燒豕，調平五味，庖也；陳簠簋，列尊俎，設籩豆者，祝也；齊明盛服，淵默而不言，神之所依者，尸也。

In sacrifice, it is the cook who butchers and hacks, boils and pares, who skins the dog and roasts the pig, who blends and balances the five flavors. It is the invocator who sets out the round and square sacrificial vessels, who arranges the goblets and platters, who positions the baskets and trays. It is the ancestral impersonator who undergoes fasts and purifications and dons resplendent clothes, who remains in deep silence and doesn’t speak, upon whom the spirits depend.¹

The cooks busily readied the feast; the invocators carefully positioned it; and the ancestral impersonator silently accepted it. As if to deepen that silence through contrast, the fastidious invocators had been thoroughly trained in reciting lengthy ritual prayers and chanting ceremonial texts, their tested verbatim recall far outstripping that of other state employees such as clerks and diviners.² Received texts from throughout the Han dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) depict them as protocol masters who were “good at speaking” (*shanyan* 善言), here distancing them from this ancestral impersonator who “remains in deep silence and doesn’t speak.”³

The cooks, invocators and ancestral impersonators all played their active and not-so-active roles, but what of the ancestral spirits themselves?
They would seem to be a further step removed from the dynamic, tangible world, not even manifestly present like the impersonator. When describing the impersonator who “undergoes fasts and purifications and dons resplendent clothes,” the Huainanzi is here quoting from the Liji 禮記 (Ritual records) where it also acknowledges the spirits’ elusive nature: “We look for them but cannot see them; we listen for them but cannot hear them” (視之而弗見；聽之而弗聞). Elsewhere in this same Huainanzi chapter, their physical absence is similarly recognized as a given: “We look for the ghosts and spirits, but they have no form; we listen for them but they have no voice” (夫鬼神視之無形，聽之無聲). Both the Ritual records and the Huainanzi passages then cite the same verse in the Shijing 詩經 or Songs canon that warns how the approach of the invisible spirits “cannot be calculated” (buke du 不可度), and so one must always behave properly as if the spirits were indeed at hand.

Ancestral ritual in early China was therefore an orchestrated dance between what was present and what was absent. Present were food offerings and officiants acting within the well-defined parameters of ritual-time and altar-space. Absent were the unseen and unheard ancestors themselves. The interconnections among the tangible elements of the sacrifice were overt and almost mechanical, but extending those connections to the formless guests—“calculating” their approach—required a medium that was, in itself, formless. Thus, ancestral sacrifice was closely associated with focused thinking about the ancestors, with structured mental effort on the part of the living that reached out to the absent forebears, even giving them shape and existence in some interpretations.

As Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) introduced the topic of ancestral sacrifice in his history of the Western Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE), rituals were generally divided into the four principal clusters of conducting weddings, staging banquets, serving the court and sacrificing to the dead. Only the last includes recourse to a thoughtful component:

人性…有哀死思遠之情，為制喪祭之禮…喪祭之禮廢，則骨肉之恩薄，而背死忘先者眾。

Human nature . . . possesses the emotions of lamenting the dead and thinking about the distant, and because of these emotions, humans formulated rituals for mourning and sacrifice. . . . If rituals for mourning and sacrifice were to be cast aside, then the kindness found in flesh-and-blood relationships would wane, and the masses would turn their backs on the dead and forget their ancestors.
Thinking about the ancestors—about those who had become distant—entailed sacrifice lest they be forgotten. Writing two centuries later, Sima Biao 司馬彪 (240–306) continued Ban Gu’s treatise by covering the developments of ritual in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220). For him, sacrifice was pervasive, spanning all human history and even spreading beyond humans into the realm of animals. In his own introduction to the topic, he also recognized sacrifice’s cognitive aspect. He writes:

祭祀之道，自生民以來則有之矣。豺獭知祭祀，而況人乎！故人知之至於念想，猶豺獭之自然也，顧古質略而後文飾耳。

As for the general principles of sacrifice, they have existed ever since the birth of the people. Even wolves and otters are aware of sacrifices, so how much the more humans, too! The contemplation and reflection thus found within the realm of human understanding are like what comes spontaneously to wolves and otters. [Humans] must turn back to antiquity’s fundamental basics and regard any embellishments and decorations as secondary. 

Ritual almanacs known as “Monthly ordinances” (“Yueling” 月令) from the third and second centuries BCE depict an annual cosmological cycle that includes otters sacrificing fish in the spring and wolves sacrificing other animals in the autumn. Their actions resonated with the seasons, and Sima Biao contends that this natural behavior in animals runs parallel to mental effort in humans. Whereas animals simply acted, humans for their part had to carry out “contemplation and reflection” when it came to sacrifice. The essence of sacrifice was not in our nature; it first had to be nurtured in our minds.

This study is a history of the early Chinese ancestral cult and in particular of its cognitive aspects, whether it is the “thinking about the distant” or the “contemplation and reflection” that extended into the past. For many writers and thinkers, the ancestral cult was not a mechanical offering of food, nor did it entail mere passive reminiscence. Its rituals called for active deliberation and meditation, and it even encouraged the psychological manipulation of its performers before and during the sacrifice through abstentions, alcohol and expectations. To explore the mechanics of ancestral memory (as opposed to the mechanics of public memory, which are handled in this book’s companion volume), this study progresses through five stages or parts:

1. Loosely relying upon performance theory, Part I begins by laying out the basic ritual prescriptions that defined the ideal practice of ancestral
remembrance. By examining the experiential elements, the framing techniques and the ritual microcosm generated through ancestral sacrifice, Part I catalogs the fundamentals of ancestral remembrance such as who merited offerings and when they received those offerings. The word “prescription” (as opposed to “description”) is here used somewhat pejoratively and is meant to imply that the rules of ritual were not necessarily carried out to the last detail and were sometimes not carried out at all. Much of Part I addresses whether these ideals reflect what we now know of actual ritual practice through archeology and textual descriptions.

2. Part II traces a history of imperial ancestral worship through thirteen chronologically ordered cases in which ancestral remembrance became a matter of court debate or underwent significant transformation. It is a history of following, bending and breaking the rules when dealing with the dead, a history that resonates with the contingencies faced by the living as the Qin and Han courts transformed over four centuries. Thus from the prescriptive blueprints of Part I, we progress to descriptions of actual practice and adaptation in Part II. From the tidy system of the Ritual records that would limit sacrifice to the four most recent imperial ancestors (because the rest would have faded from living memory), we move, for example, to heated court debates on whether it was possible to stop the food offerings for the legendary (but now distant) Emperor Wu 武 (r. 141–87). In these thirteen cases, ritual sometimes prevailed; other times it was consciously set aside.

3. Whereas Part II focuses upon the sacrificers, Part III shifts to the sacrifice recipients—the ancestral spirits themselves. Throughout, this study endeavors to avoid generalizations such as “The early Chinese believed. . . .” because the picture is much richer and more complex than that. Part III lays out a five-fold spectrum of ideas about the ancestral spirits. On one end of the spectrum, the living regarded their spirits as active, independent agencies, and on the other, they dismissed them as mere figments of their imagination. As one travels across this spectrum, the role of mentation grows from a minor role in which the sacrificer only needs to be “sincere” for a successful offering to a major role in which the sacrificer engages in intense periods of abstention and meditation until he or she could really see the ancestor as present. Among these differing beliefs on postmortem existence, the notion of thoughtful ancestors—of ancestors projected from the minds of their descendants—will serve as the focus of this book.
4. Just as Part III contextualizes the thought-full ancestors via other beliefs about the dead, Part IV in turn contextualizes them via other types of performative thinking, of thinking that in itself affects the world beyond the mind. Unlike our Western separation of body and soul, of mind and matter, there existed in early China a significant discourse that treated the mind and its vapors known as *qi* 氣 as substantial and mechanically efficacious. The son of heaven’s mind could ripple outward to affect the wind, the cattle and even the nomadic tribes on the periphery; the anxious discontent of the masses could in turn generate earthquakes, droughts and monsters. Performative thinking arises in canonical texts and divination guides, in court propaganda and religious tracts. Part IV thus serves as a second line of ideas along which to contextualize the notion of descendants thinking their ancestors into being and, conversely, of descendants forgetting their ancestors into oblivion.

5. With the ancestor thus twice contextualized, this study concludes by reexamining the bubble of ritual-time and altar-space, especially the imagery of bright centers and dark peripheries, imagery that metaphorically mirrors notions of fading ancestors and blurring memories. That is, the cognitive element explored in this study in turn helps us understand the cosmological, poetic, and artistic depictions of death and remembrance in early China. Within this structuring metaphor, the role of uncertainty itself comes to the fore and becomes ritualized and (paradoxically) certain.

The ultimate goal of this study on ancestral memory is to excavate the color and vitality of the early ancestral cults, quelling our assumptions that it was a simplistic and uninspired exchange of food for longevity, of prayers for prosperity. Ancestor worship was not merely mechanical and thoughtless. On the contrary, it was an idea system that aroused serious debates about the nature of postmortem existence, served as the religious backbone to Confucianism and may even have been the forerunner of Daoist and Buddhist meditation practices.

Before we can trace the ancestral cult’s idea system through this fivefold argument, we first must step back and consider just what it means to be an “idea system” and how one idea system might relate to another. That is, before unpacking the content of the ancestral cult’s Weltanschauung, we need to know how any particular way of understanding the world comfortably sat alongside other ways of understanding the world, in this case how they sat alongside one another in the cultural, religious and historical milieu of early China. For the people of early China and for
us, notions of “idea systems” or “ways of understanding” are vague and rarely the subject of self reflection, but as we all possess them, we need tools for talking about them. In particular, we use structuring metaphors that draw upon tangible objects such as, in early China, a tree rooted in the Dao of the distant past that branches out into a myriad manifestations or a watershed of diverse schools of thought ultimately flowing toward a single river that eventually empties into a sea that again is the Dao. These metaphors provided an imaginable structure when talking about how idea systems such as Confucianism (or Ru or Classicism) and Daoism interacted with one another. Yet why is it necessary to define that structure (in Sections 1 and 2 immediately below) before delving into a discussion of Chinese lineage worship? As seen in Section 3, there is a trio of justifications. First, the most common structuring metaphor for idea systems was in fact the lineage itself. Second, the early Chinese metaphors of lineage, tree and watershed all share a common structure, a structure that is different from the predominant metaphor of conflict that shapes the relationships among idea systems within the Western discourse. This difference in turn forces us to be wary about applying Western theories and terms to the Chinese ancestral cult. Finally, understanding how differing idea systems were interconnected in early China explains how the early Chinese themselves related differing beliefs about the afterlife to one another.

Section 1: Connecting Han Idea Systems

Correcting our earlier assumptions about how idea systems took shape, much recent scholarship has been devoted to removing the -isms of early Daoism, Confucianism, Legalism and so forth, questioning not just the labels but the very idea of labeling and cataloging these idea systems into distinct “schools” or “traditions.” A school implies an institutionalism that includes a number of scholars consciously identifying with a particular idea system; a tradition suggests a continuous and cohesive lineage passing those ideas down over time. The modern tendency to resort to “isms” is a tool of convenience used to tidy up the history of ideas, and most of us are guilty of keeping this device in our intellectual tool belts. In 2003, Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Michael Nylan contended that “A majority [of historians] . . . continue to treat the terms ‘Ru’ and ‘Dao’ as direct and unproblematic references to two scholastic ‘isms,’ Confucianism
and Daoism, and to ignore discrepancies among the rhetorical constructions in early sources.”

We are quick to label pre-imperial thinkers as either Mohist, Daoist, sophist or something-ist even though, according to Nathan Sivin, “Such isms do more to invite confusion than to shed light.” Or as Kidder Smith summarized, “The Warring States, of course, knew no Daoists or Legalists,” and when it came to the concept of Daoism in particular, only “by the end of the Western Han, we can properly call [it] an ‘-ism.’” That is, only in the first century BCE might the use of such isms be warranted because, on one hand, schools and traditions were beginning to self-identify and, on the other, the Han courts were beginning to recognize differences among them as education became more formalized, producing pools of candidates to fill the bureaucracy and preserving the rituals and histories necessary to give the court authenticity.

Staying with Smith and abridging his excellent summary of third-century BCE surveys that divided up the intellectual marketplace, we find four famous listings in which past intellectuals were related to one another and interpreted for contemporary rulers:

1. Lü shi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 (The spring and autumn annals of Mr. Lü). Dated to around 239 BCE, this self-described compendium of all significant knowledge recognized that there existed at least ten intellectual greats—greats such as Confucius, Laozi and Mozi—who put forth visions of how to run the state. This work advises rulers to choose one and stick to him at the exclusion of the others in order to maintain unity and avoid chaos, but it doesn’t explicitly tell the ruler which one to privilege.

2. Han Feizi 韓非子. Han Feizi (d. 233 BCE) acknowledged the existence of competing intellectual traditions as traditions in name only. As for the Confucians and Mohists, who had in fact splintered into eight and three factions respectively, their own unity had been lost in the transmission from the past and thus their current message of state and cultural unity was not trustworthy. Here the ruler is to reject all old idea systems that have become so corrupted in the process of transmission as to be irrelevant to contemporary rulers.

3. Xunzi 荀子. In his essay “Debunking the twelve masters” dating perhaps to around 230 BCE, Xunzi outlines the governance programs of six pairs of thinkers, programs he believes must be set aside if Confucian thinking is to unify the state. Interestingly, Xunzi acknowledges that in each case there was “a reasoning behind their beliefs and a perfect pat-
tern behind their words” (其持之有故，其言之成理) that made their programs persuasive.

4. Zhuangzi 莊子. In a late syncretist chapter called “All under heaven” or Tianxia 天下, Zhuangzi contrasts the people of antiquity, who were fully harmonized with their surroundings, with his confused and partial contemporaries. When reviewing five categories of greats, Zhuangzi doesn’t utterly dismiss them but instead vaunts what partial insights they possessed.

Note that these greats do not yet represent isms; they are for the most part compendiums of individuals or experts without the backing of larger schools. The possible exception is Han Feizi’s acknowledgement of the Confucian and Mohist traditions, but his point is that they are in fact traditions in name only, that these two “schools” have really become splintered among numerous individuals who advocate disparate programs. Furthermore, as will be seen below, the specific groupings each survey identifies were still somewhat fluid and inconsistent even into the middle of the Western Han.

Zhuangzi’s position is of the greatest importance for this study, particularly the way that he values partial insights even though they may individually fail to grasp the big picture. “This is an importantly new view, as it posits a unity discernable within the partial correctness of other men’s teaching,” Smith summarizes. Yet in contrast to Smith, I don’t believe valuing the partial is indeed an entirely “new view” among these four surveys. In other chapters of the Xunzi corpus—chapters perhaps not by the same writer who composed the survey Smith cites—Xunzi laments the fixations of scholarly traditions, fixations that may be partial perspectives on the truth but not the whole truth:

Each of these various methods is only a single corner of the Dao. As for the Dao itself, its body is constant and encompasses all changes, and a single corner is not enough to take it all in. Humans with only “bent” knowledge gaze at their single corner of the Dao but cannot yet recognize it as a corner.

People whose knowledge is “bent” are inferior to those whose knowledge is holistic and complete. According to several sources from Xunzi onward, the impartial purveyors of the Dao included the always-transforming ruler who was described as “round” (huan 圓 or yuan 圓) and thus with-
out corners in contrast to his specialist ministers who had to be “square” (

(fang 方). Partial knowledge isn’t inherently bad, but it’s still just partial. In like fashion, Xunzi elsewhere lines up the great thinkers who put forward programs that were part correct and part incorrect:

As for fools thinking they understand the Dao because they know one thing or one side, this is not understanding it. Shenzi had insight into secondaries but not into primaries. Laozi had insight into contracting but not into extending. Mozi had insight into the even but not into the uneven. Songzi had insight into the few but not into the many.

Even though Xunzi advocates an idea system at odds with that of Zhuangzi, he is like Zhuangzi (or at least the Zhuangzi of the syncretist chapters) in acknowledging how others hold valued-but-partial truths, how others see a corner of reality whereas he himself sees the big picture.

All modern historians who study the formation of early China’s isms over the course of the Western Han inevitably confront Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. ca. 110 BCE) and his own survey of idea systems for government. His famous essay—preserved in the Shiji 史記 (Historical records) of his son Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86)—begins as follows:

《易大傳》：「天下一致而百慮, 同歸而殊塗。」夫陰陽、儒、墨、名、法、道德, 此務為治者也, 直所從言之異路, 有省不省耳。

According to the “Great Commentary” to the Changes canon, “All under heaven is singular in its practice but divided a hundredfold in its deliberations; all under heaven shares the same return destination but via various roads.” [The discourses of] yinyang, Classicism, Mohism, names, systems as well as Dao and De are focused on carrying out good government.

It is only that some of the different paths one takes by following their words are astute while others are not.

Like Zhuangzi and Xunzi, Sima Tan catalogs the competing idea systems, and he refers to each of them as jia 家. Literally meaning “family” or “household” and in the past often translated as “school,” jia has been the focus of much debate: Does it imply schools, texts, individuals, specialties, practices or domains of thought? Can we use other texts to help define it? Does the meaning (and hence translation) change over the Han? Current consensus seems to favor that for Sima Tan, jia are individuals espousing specialized idea systems. As will be seen in the below discussion of struc-
tural metaphors that shape knowledge, I am less interested in the precise implications of *jia*—and Sima Tan might have indeed been using the term loosely—and more interested in the fragmentation of knowledge that this word implies.

Sima Tan takes the various *jia* and briefly lists their shortcomings, explaining why their roads are hard to follow. Yet he always appends a positive quality as well. He thus describes the Classicists who work hard but for meager results:

儒者博而寡要，勞而少功，是以其事難盡從；然其序君臣父子之禮，列夫婦長幼之別，不可易也。

The Classicists exhibit breadth but come up short in the essentials; they labor much but are scant in their achievements. Thus their undertakings are difficult to follow fully. Yet we cannot change their rituals for ordering ruler and subject, father and son, as well as their divisions between husband and wife, young and old.\(^\text{20}\)

Later in the same essay, Sima Tan comments that the interpretations of the Classics run to millions of characters. “An accumulation of generations would be unable to penetrate their scholarship; in youth, one is not able to get through their rituals” (累世不能通其學；當年不能究其禮).\(^\text{21}\) Sima Tan thus values their hierarchical ritual even if their scholarship is too verbose.

After treating other idea systems in a similar manner, he then extols Daoism as different:

道家使人精神專一，動合無形，膽足萬物。其為術也，因陰陽之大順，采儒墨之善，撮名法之要，與時遷移，應物變化，立俗施事，無所不宜，指約而易操，事少而功多。

The Daoists [“Dao specialists” or, literally, “Dao family”] cause the quintessential spirit of humans to concentrate and unify so that their activity joins with the formless and their tranquility finds sufficiency in the myriad of things.\(^\text{22}\) As for their methods, they heed the great harmonies of *yinyang*, select the best from Classicism and Mohism, and extract the essentials from [the discourses on] names and systems. They shift and move with the times, transform and alter in resonance with things. When it comes to establishing practices and carrying out affairs, they do nothing that is not appropriate. Their directions are concise, and their cultivations are restrained. Their affairs are few, and their achievements are many.\(^\text{23}\)
Like Xunzi and Zhuangzi, Sima Tan finds value in the partial glimpses of reality, but here he unites them to define his own Daoism.

Note that we have lapsed into calling some of these jia “isms”—Classicism, Mohism and so forth—in part because Sima Tan himself doesn’t list named individuals as his predecessors had. Even so, the isms employed here are not the same isms we retrospectively apply from our distant time and place. The criteria for Sima Tan’s labels were somewhat selective, and when his contemporaries grouped the named individuals together, those lists still remained rather fluid. In other words, their labels and lists do not match our own. For example, Sima Tan is credited with beginning the universal history project of compiling the *Historical records* that was mainly carried out through his son, Sima Qian. In his biographies, Sima Qian groups some of the aforementioned greats together in a way that belies our modern intellectual alignments:

太史公曰：老子所貴道，虛無，因應變化於無為，故著書辭稱微妙難識。莊子散道德，放論，要亦歸之自然。申子卑卑，施之於名實。韓非引繩墨，切事情，明是非，其極慘礉少恩。皆原於道德之意，而老子深遠矣。

The grand historian says: “The Dao honored by Laozi is an empty absence, and it accordingly resonates with transformation in terms of causeless-ness. Thus his writings and talks are subtle and mysterious and are hard to record. Zhuangzi broke apart the Dao and De and freely analyzed them, but his essentials likewise return to spontaneity. Shenzi exerted himself and extolled the Dao and De in terms of name and reality. Han Fei drew out the marking line and ink, sliced between affairs and emotions, and made clear the relationship between right and wrong. At his extreme, he made his divisions cruel, and he belittled kindness. All of these men originate in the meaning of the Dao and De, but Laozi has become distant and remote.

Even though the “Daoists” Laozi and Zhuangzi are very different from the “Legalists” Shen Buhai 申不害 (b. ca. 400 BCE) and Han Feizi by our modern tastes, Sima Qian grouped them together. Yet much more interesting is precisely how these four people are connected to one another. Whereas Sima Tan highlighted the value in the partial truth of each jia, Sima Qian creates a four-tier hierarchy of value such that by the time we get to Han Feizi, that value has been significantly watered down. Laozi is the oldest and most valued and is fully defended for writing in his subtle and mysterious manner. Zhuangzi, with his increased verbiage, then branches off, and Shenzi, by going so far as to divide up referent and
meaning, seems to branch off from Zhuangzi. Most recently, Han Feizi is the furthest from the mysterious abstractions of antiquity, and his stark divisions and cruelty displace Laozi’s subtle, ineffable message. Yet even though he is distant from Laozi, he remains connected, and earlier in this same set of biographies, Sima Qian states that although Han Feizi “delighted in the scholarship of forms and names, of systems and techniques, his origin [lit. “his return”] was rooted in the Yellow Emperor and Laozi” (喜刑名法術之學, 而其歸本於黃老). At one end, ineffable Laozi embraces “empty absence”; at the other, Han Feizi epitomizes divisions and demarcations, “marking line and ink.”

That move from unified antiquity to splintered present dominates the structural metaphors of knowledge discussed in Section 2, but before turning to them, we continue the story begun by Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Sima Tan, Sima Qian and others who surveyed the competing idea systems with three more examples that take us to the end of the Han. By the close of the Western Han, Yang Xiong (53 BCE–18 CE) was a scholar who leaned toward Classicism, even writing texts that mimicked the style of Confucius’s own Analects, but like all the aforementioned scholars, he does not pencil in distinct borders between himself and the other traditions. He explicitly draws upon their good points and dispenses with their bad, as is shown here in his assessment of Laozi:

When Laozi speaks of Dao and De, I extract from him. But when he tosses away and throws aside benevolence and propriety or when he cuts short and destroys ritual and scholarship, I do not extract from him.27

Yang Xiong shares with Sima Tan a method of extracting the best points of traditions with which he himself does not wholeheartedly identify, but he splits from Sima Tan when it comes to the content of those traditions, here not privileging the Dao family but instead vaunting Classicism. In fact, he directly addresses Sima Tan’s criticism of verbose Classicism:

Someone asked, “Sima Zizhang [= Sima Tan] has said that the Five Canons are not as good as the conciseness of Laozi. [As for the Five Canons,] in one’s youth
one cannot reach the end of their transformations, and by the end of one's life one is still not able to get through their undertakings.”

[Yang Xiong] said, “If this were the case, then the Duke of Zhou was deluded and Confucius was a rebel. When the ancients studied, they [also] had to plough and provide sustenance, only penetrating a single [canon] after three years. As for scholars today, they not only become flowery and grandiloquent with regard to the canons, they also embroider their own sashes and handkerchiefs in turn. How can this be a case of whether it is comparable to Laozi?”

One cannot compare the simplicity of Laozi with the unfortunate verbosity of Han Classicism because that verbosity is the product of later times. Sima Tan should have weighed the primal Dao of Laozi against the primal Dao of the Duke of Zhou, not against the multitudinous interpretations of contemporary scholars who spend their free time decorating themselves in the same way they decorated their canons with endless commentaries. Sima Tan is guilty of comparing apples and oranges.

In a second example dating to the early years of the Eastern Han, the court held an academic workshop in 79 CE at the “White tiger hall” (Baihuguan 白虎觀) attended by counselors of state, academicians and dignitaries, the purpose of which was to locate the trunk of the Five Canons amidst the plentitude of interpretations that had branched off from it. Ban Gu was ordered to assemble an account of this debate, although there is some uncertainty as to whether the received 白虎通 (White tiger hall discussion) is indeed his own compilation. In the following extract, the White tiger hall discussion cites how Confucius gave pride and place to a few core doctrines but still recognized the importance of familiarity with other ways of thinking. For him, the best doctrines originated from the times of Kings Wen 文 and Wu 武, founders of the Zhou dynasty:

問曰：異說並行，則弟子疑焉？
孔子有言：「吾聞擇其善者而從之。多見而志之，知之次也。」「文武之道，未墜于地。」「天之將喪斯文也。」「樂亦在其中矣。」聖人之道，猶有文質。所以擬其說，述所聞者，亦各傳其所受而已。

Someone asked, “If the differing explanations are all put into practice, won’t disciples then be confused by them?”

Confucius had made [the following] statements:

“Of that which I have heard, I select the good and follow it. I see much and fix it in my mind, which is understanding’s next level down.”

“The Way of Kings Wen and Wu has not yet fallen to the ground.”
"If heaven is about to destroy this Wen. . . ."  
"Joy indeed can be found within them."  
The Dao of the sages still has both refinement and substance. As for how we draft our explanations and write down what we have heard, we each just transmit what we receive.

This text requires some explanation, but fortunately in light of their original contexts, the passages from the Analects are consistent in their message. The meaning of the first passage is self-evident. Although Confucius retained much knowledge, he was selective in what he followed. That is, the master himself distinguished between principal and auxiliary messages, not utterly dismissing the latter but simply ranking them lower. As for the second passage’s context, the Way of Kings Wen and Wu had not perished because it came to reside in everyone so that even commoners could be teachers. Like the first quotation, this learning could be divided into greater principles practiced by greater people and lesser principles practiced by lesser people. The third passage also highlights the theme of King Wen surviving through later heirs of Zhou culture. Here Confucius is in trouble in the state of Kuang, and he states, “When King Wen died, did not Wen come to reside right here [in me]? (文王既没，文不在兹乎？) He then states that if heaven were to destroy this Wen—if Confucius were to be fated to perish in the hands of the Kuang people—then the people who came later would not be able to access that culture. (Wen 文 here plays a double meaning, namely King Wen and the “culture” that Wen represents.) Finally, the fourth passage establishes Confucius himself as a commoner—one who finds joy in simple food and simple sleeping conditions. As the second passage indicates, it was through the common people that Zhou culture dispersed and survived so that even commoners such as Confucius could be teachers.

Together these four passages demonstrate that Zhou culture had been transmitted to later generations not just through a single normative source; instead, it dispersed among the people into principal and auxiliary messages. Disciples of the Eastern Han could avoid becoming confused by the profusion of messages by mimicking the discriminating Confucius, who could “select the good and follow it” while still valuing familiarity with those auxiliary messages.

Serving as our last example of one who privileges the principal over the auxiliary without completely discarding the auxiliary, the Classicist Xun
Yue 荀悅 (148–209) was a lecturer in the imperial palace near the end of the Eastern Han, a palace then under control of the Cao family that was about to terminate the Han dynasty and commence the Wei dynasty (220–64). In his Shenjian 申鑒 (Extended reflections) for the emperor, he glorified the “sagacious doctrines” (shengdian 聖典)—one version has the “Six Canons”—by relating them to the other traditions in now familiar terms:

或問：「守。」
曰：「聖典而已矣。若夫百家者是謂無守。莫不為言，要其至矣。莫不為德，玄其奧矣。莫不為道，聖人其弘矣。聖人之道，其中道乎，是為九達。」

Someone asked about maintaining [doctrines]. [1] replied, “[Maintain] only the sagacious doctrines. When it comes to the hundred families, one can say, ‘Do not maintain them.’ Every one of them says something, but their essence is surely most important. Every one of them carries out the De, but subtlety is surely the most profound. Every one of them carries out the Dao, but the sages are surely the greatest. The Dao of the sages—is it not indeed the Dao of the Middle? It is this that forms the Nine Directions.36

All the hundred families have their merits—their various messages ultimately return to the Dao and De—but here Classicism still retains its superior position in the middle of them all, a veritable golden mean.

Let us conclude our own survey of these Han surveys of idea systems with three brief observations. First, for the most part these surveys did not simply list the choices and select one; they privileged one by raising it up as the big picture and marginalized the rest as partial understandings and limited corners of reality. Xunzi, Zhuangzi, Sima Tan, Sima Qian, Yang Xiong, the White tiger hall discussion, Xun Yue and others claimed a connectivity among the jia that privileged one idea system but permitted the co-existence of others.

Second, this claim of connectivity was pervasive, not limited to one ism or one era of the Han. It was indeed so pervasive that it became embedded in a certain set of common structural metaphors—the tree, the river watershed and, most of all, the lineage—through which the different idea systems were interrelated. (These structural metaphors are the subject of Section 2.) Furthermore, this connectivity extended beyond the substance of these idea systems to their audience or recipients, who were themselves not strictly definable as “Classicist” or “Daoist.” All the greats and texts
mentioned above were part of “a spectrum of comprehensive world-views to which every educated person had access,” as Sivin described it,\textsuperscript{37} and archaeology demonstrates how these texts have been found together in the same tombs, no matter with which ism we might label each of them individually. If that audience were in fact the ruler himself, the interrelatedness of idea systems may have resonated with emperors who saw themselves as unifying all under heaven. That is, perhaps intellectual and imperial unity went hand in hand. Ultimately, such pervasiveness of connectivity in the idea systems and in the audience receiving them demonstrates why we must be wary of the isms. We cannot cleanly demarcate Daoism and Legalism, Classicism and Mohism, because there was an express willingness among their adherents to borrow the best points from one another, and they all claimed a return to a common but vague Dao recognized by most early readers. Although it may not have been so pervasive to reach the level of a deutero-truth—that is, a habituated idea so embedded in the culture that people do not even realize they possess it—the very fact that such connectivity was regularly highlighted would suggest that there was a counterforce, that at least a few people were vaunting exclusivity in their own idea systems rather than inclusivity. The above-cited passage from \textit{The spring and autumn annals of Mr. Lü}, for example, suggests such exclusivity, and Eastern Han Daoist religious texts similarly insisted on complete faith in their version of the Dao while damning heterodox beliefs. If this interconnectivity is neither an argument of just a few thinkers nor a deutero-truth of a whole culture, I would suggest we place it somewhere in the middle, treating it as a paradigm, namely an accepted standard or recognized model of thinking that was adopted whenever convenient.\textsuperscript{38}

Third, we need not completely avoid the isms as long as we understand this complexity when using them. As noted above, isms became more tangible over the course of the Han, and individual idea systems asserted their own precedence because each claimed to encapsulate the best elements from the different idea systems while still embodying its own unique truth. With that in mind, I must justify my own usage of one particular ism, namely “Classicism” instead of its alternative names of “Confucianism” or “Ru-ism.”
The Classics are the “Five Canons” referenced by Yang Xiong’s questioner above, the five in the Han not always on the same list but drawn from the following six possibilities:

1. The *Shi* 詩 or *Shijing* 詩經 (*Songs canon*, also rendered the *Odes* or *Book of poetry*);
2. The *Shu* 書 or *Shujing* 書經 (*Documents canon*, also rendered the *Book of documents* or *Book of history*) alternatively called the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Venerable documents*);
3. The *Li* 禮 or more rarely *Lijing* 禮經 (*Ritual canon*), a variable combination of
   a) the *Yili* 儀禮 (*Ceremonies and rituals*),
   b) the *Liji* 禮記 (*Ritual records*),
   c) and the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*Rituals of the Zhou dynasty*);³⁹
4. The *Chunqiu* 春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals*), a history of the state of Lu from the eighth to the fifth century BCE;
5. The *Yi* 易 or *Yijing* 易經 (*Changes canon*, often rendered the *Book of changes*); and
6. The *Yue* 樂 or * Yuejing* 樂經 (*Music canon*), now lost if it ever existed.

Classicism basically hearkened back to the unity of the early Zhou before the state had fragmented into scores of kingdoms and before knowledge had fragmented into multiple idea systems, and the surviving knowledge of early Zhou rites and music preserved in the Classics were seen as the means of resurrecting that unity. This particular ism should perhaps be confined to the Han itself, and as Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan describe it, “the Han classicists could be counted upon to uphold certain common assumptions about the relevance of past traditions to the resolution of contemporary moral and political dilemmas.”⁴⁰ Classicism does not imply that the five or six Classics were free from error (as Mencius and Xunzi themselves noted), and their practical application outweighed rote recitation (as Confucius himself warned). Nor should the term imply that other retrospectively identified isms—such as Mohism—didn’t draw upon the Classics to forward their own agendas. While Mohists cited the same history to different ends, they dismissed the Confucians’ *over*-emphasis on the surviving texts and rigid protocols:

或以不喪之閒誦詩三百，弦詩三百，歌詩三百，舞詩三百。若用子之言，則君子何日以聽治？庶人何日以從事？
Otherwise in the intervening times when you are not mourning, you chant the three hundred poems of the *Songs canon*, strum the three hundred poems of the *Songs canon*, sing the three hundred poems of the *Songs canon* and dance the three hundred poems of the *Songs canon*. If I employed your words, then on what day would a nobleman heed his government obligations? On what day would a commoner discharge his duties?

Thus this label of Classicism might hinge upon the perceived degree of devotion to the Classics rather than mere citation of them. Regardless, it is probably best to limit “Classicism” to the particular Han manifestation of the longer tradition known as Confucianism. When discussing idea systems that existed prior to the Han, we should avoid isms generally, and after the Han (and especially by the Song dynasty), the Classics themselves took a secondary position. Like all the other isms in our tool belt, “Classicism” can result in a poor fit for the task before us, a standardized socket wrench when an adjustable one is needed. Yet we still need a few tools at hand even if they slip and slide a bit.

**Section 2: Metaphors They Lived By**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “ism” as “a form of doctrine, theory, or practice having, or claiming to have, a distinctive character or relation: chiefly used disparagingly and sometimes with implied reference to schism.” Isms are a separating device and are not reflective of the connectivity highlighted in this introduction. Yet the schism of isms goes well beyond the idea of labels. It is inherent in how the Western tradition generally demarcates idea systems; it is a deuero-truth that has been embedded in our culture for thousands of years.

Among the early Greeks, new ideas were transmitted, developed and discussed via formal debates, and that debating mode worked itself into the ideas debated. As Geoffrey Lloyd and Nathan Sivin summarize:

The repercussions on philosophy and science of a deep-rooted preoccupation with competitive debate were not limited to minor stylistic features in modes of presentation. They extended also to certain recurrent, and at points dominant, traits in the styles of inquiry themselves. The primary point relates to adversariality. For many, the establishing of a philosophical or scientific doctrine proceeded essentially by way of defeating the opposition.
Lloyd and Sivin contend that this adversariality came to affect the contents of theories and not just their presentation. One can perhaps see this assumption of adversariality and separation even in the way we have come to organize the universe around us. In the 1960s, Claude Lévi-Strauss noted how the modern West emphasizes borders over continuums and how that preference is indeed reflected in our adoption of metaphors. For example, when we organize species into inert and separate classes, drawing distinct lines between A and Not-A, we seek out metaphors of separation. He writes, “The natural sciences for a long time regarded themselves as concerned with ‘kingdoms,’ that is, independent and sovereign domains each definable by its own characteristics and peopled by creatures or objects standing in special relations to one another.” Yet the divisive metaphor is by no means limited to philosophy and science, and it appears that whenever diverse ideas interact in daily life—when kingdoms conflict—war ensues. In their book *Metaphors we live by*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson list examples of the war metaphor and summarize the general Western notion of ideas in conflict:

Your claims are indefensible.
He attacked every weak point in my argument.
His criticisms were right on target.
I demolished his argument.
I’ve never won an argument with him.
You disagree? Okay, shoot!
If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out.
He shot down all of my arguments.

It is important to see that we don’t just talk about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we do in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument—attack, defense, counterattack, etc.—reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing.
Lakoff and Johnson’s ideas on modern structuring metaphors seem naturally to follow on from the early Greek adversariality described by Lloyd and Sivin and the taxonomic kingdoms noted by Lévi-Strauss. Here, too, Lakoff and Johnson emphasize that the “argument is war” metaphor not only describes how ideas interact, but it also shapes the interaction itself.

Were there structural metaphors for arguments in early China? And given the connectivity outlined above, were they different from those in the Western discourse that led to schisms and adversariality, to kingdoms and war? Consider the following passage by Liu Xiang 刘向 (79–8 BCE), who summarized the cohesion of the various scholarly traditions up to his own day near the end of the Western Han. Here the translation is left somewhat literal in order to highlight the various types of tangible metaphors used when describing how the different traditions related to one another.

諸子十家，其可觀者九家而已。…《易》曰：「天下同歸而殊塗，一致而百慮。」今異家者各推所長，窮知究慮，以明其指，雖有蔽短，合其要歸，亦六經之支與流裔。

Of the ten families of masters, only nine can be observed. . . . The Changes canon states, “All under heaven share the same return destination but via various roads; all under heaven are singular in practice but divided a hundredfold in interpretation.” Now each of the different families pushes its strengths, exhausts its awareness and deepens its forethought in order to clarify its goal. Despite each family’s deceptions and shortcomings, if its essentials are returned to the origin, that family is in fact a branch or the leading edge of a current coming from the Six Canons.

Note that Liu Xiang, who sounds very much like Xun Yue writing two centuries later, uses the same allusion to the Changes canon with which Sima Tan began his own essay (see above). Liu Xiang argues that the lines of the various masters arose and separated from this canonical corpus, and he uses four different metaphors to describe the relationships among the later diverse ideas, namely a river (the “current’s leading edge” of the Six Canons), a tree (the “branches” of the Six Canons), a road (the Changes canon quotation) and a lineage (the references to families or jia).

Section 2 demonstrates the pervasiveness of these structuring metaphors. It then asks why such rhetorical imagery was so common and why, of the four, the lineage metaphor held the greatest sway.
THE RIVER OR WATERSHED METAPHOR

Individually, these metaphors were fully developed in other early texts, with several features of each physical image being applied to the overall structure of knowledge. For an example of the river or watershed metaphor, the *Huainanzi* likens the Classicist tradition to multiple streams from diverse springs that ought to return to a single body of water:

百川異源而皆歸於海，百家殊業而皆務於治。王道缺而《詩》作，周室廢、禮義壞而《春秋》作。《詩》、《春秋》學之美者也，皆衰世之造也，儒者循之以教導於世，豈若三代之盛哉！以《詩》、《春秋》為古之道而貴之，又有未作《詩》、《春秋》之時。

The hundred streams come from different springs, but they all return to the sea; the hundred families have different callings, but they all focus on good government. When the royal Dao degraded, the *Songs canon* was composed; when the house of Zhou was cast aside and rituals and propriety collapsed, the *Spring and autumn annals* was composed. The *Songs canon* and the *Spring and autumn annals* are the beauties of scholarship, but they are both products of declining ages. Even if Classicists heed them for teaching rulership to the age, it surely will not be on par with the glories of the Three Dynasties! The Classicists value the *Songs canon* and the *Spring and autumn annals* because they regard them as the Dao of the ancients, but there also existed that time when the *Songs canon* and the *Spring and autumn annals* had not yet been composed.47

Here the diversity of idea systems is likened to the hundred streams or *baichuan* 百川 all returning to the sea, but it is significant to note that the *Huainanzi* is using this metaphor in a slightly different manner than Liu Xiang had. For Liu Xiang, the lines of scholarship were the rivers flowing away from the ancient corpus of the Six Canons; for the *Huainanzi*, the various canons themselves are flowing back toward a better age, the age of the Xia, Shang and Western Zhou dynasties that preceded the imperial age. The structure of the metaphor is the same, including the devaluation of the branching-out process and an implied desire to return to a unitary source, but that to which the metaphor is applied differs. Metaphors are like a lens through which different objects are viewed, each object being forced to conform to the lens’s organizational principles. As a tool in the art of contextualization,48 the lens will differently identify stream versus sea depending upon how and where the lens is trained.

In general, this river imagery was frequently applied to the idea of scholarship, and scholarship as a whole could also be collectively termed
the “nine currents” (jiuliu 九流). A well-educated official such as Ban Gu was described as “encompassing and penetrating the registers and records, and he was always exhaustive and deep with regard to all the discussions of the nine currents and hundred families (博貫載籍，九流百家之言，無不窮究). Mixing metaphors of river and lineage—the latter to be discussed below—Ban Gu and most other early imperial thinkers recognized a common origin to all truths that later fragmented into a diversity of interpretations.

The Tree Metaphor

Labeling teachings that stray from the norm as “branches,” Liu Xiang envisioned knowledge as a tree, and the Huainanzi also employs the tree or plant metaphor extensively when describing the various idea systems, again collectively labeled the hundred families. It first generalizes about the nature of all growth as follows:

今夫萬物之疏躍枝舉，百事之莖葉條蘗，皆本於一根，而條循千萬也。

In every case the spreading twigs of the myriad material things and the shooting stalks of all activity originate from a common root, only then to branch out into the millions.

The same is true with idea systems, it continues. Each family—the socialist Mohists, the egoist Yangists, the draconian Legalists and so forth—may ignorantly depict its own idea system as the root of a properly structured government, ordered society and harmonized cosmos, but in fact that family’s own idea system is not the root. It is merely one of the branch tips stretching out from the Dao’s trunk in this veritable tree of knowledge. The Huainanzi further projects a temporal dimension on this image, planting the unified Dao in a distant golden age prior to China’s first cultural heroes Huangdi 黃帝 or the Yellow Emperor and Shennong 神農 or the Divine Husbandman, but over the centuries humans projected divisive structures such as yin and yang on the cosmos that in turn led to trusting the senses, to following individual desires and finally to the hundred families offering individuated solutions for an increasingly divided humanity. In the Huainanzi’s view, solving modern social woes begins with re-unifying the idea systems and returning to the root.
As one more example of a scholar gazing back down this tree of knowledge, Wang Fu (ca. 90–165) in the Eastern Han wrote an essay aptly entitled “Wu ben” ("Focusing on the root") in which all the qualities deserving attention are dubbed roots and all the qualities that can be dismissed are dubbed branch tips. The following is an extract from a much longer list:

Teachers regard Dao and propriety as the root; they regard cleverness and discrimination as the tips. Speakers regard trust and agreement as the root; they regard opposition and ornamentation as the tips. Ranked officials regard filial piety and fraternal accord as the root; they regard roaming off with friends as the tips. The filial and the fraternal regard providing nourishment [for elders] as the root; they regard flowery display as the tips.\(^5^1\)

Wang Fu concludes the chapter by noting, “When an enlightened gentleman thus tends to the state, he must promote the roots and depress the tips in order to stop the sprouts of chaos and danger (故明君莅國，必崇本抑末，以遏亂危之萌).\(^5^2\) He not only uses the organic language of root, branch tip, flowers and sprouts in this essay; he also devalues the outward branching relative to the root. Furthermore, many of the activities apportioned to the root reflect unity whereas those apportioned to the branch tips reflect division. The root is associated with the all-inclusive Dao, with agreement, with family emotions of cohesion; the branch tips are associated with rhetorical discrimination, with opposition, with roaming afar. In both the river and tree metaphors, fracturing and division are deplored.

**The Road Metaphor**

Liu Xiang’s above assessment about the state of scholarship in his day included the metaphor of a road network, a metaphor he (and Sima Tan before him) derived from the *Changes* canon. Although this metaphor was less common, Wang Chong (27–ca. 100) similarly observed, “When the worthies and sages died and the great meaning divided, slipping and sliding along different roads, each person opened his own gate” (夫賢聖歿而大義分，蹉跎殊趨，各自開門).\(^5^3\) Again the “great meaning” splintered over the course of history—the Dao (which of course literally
means a “road”) encountered fork after fork—and here each byway led to a gate, “gate” being a common metonym for a school. However, a road network in itself does not inherently possess the branching structure of rivers, trees or lineages—that structure only being imposed by the Changes canon or by Wang Chong. Perhaps for this reason, the road metaphor was employed less frequently.

**The Genealogy Metaphor**

Finally, with regard to Liu Xiang’s “families” of masters, the most elaborate, frequently used metaphor applied to the diversity of ideas was in fact the genealogy or lineage image. For example, the recognized founder of any given tradition could be dubbed an “ancestor” using the term zu 祖 or, more commonly, zong 宗. (In the Han understanding of lineages, these terms technically refer to two distinct types of ancestors, a distinction that didn’t necessarily carry over into their metaphorical usage; as will be seen, zong could sometimes refer to the whole lineage as well.) Not surprisingly, Confucius was dubbed “ancestor” of the Classicist tradition by the Western Han. Sima Qian appends his biography of Confucius with the following:

天下君王至于賢人眾矣，當時則榮，沒則已焉。孔子布衣，傳十餘世，學者宗之。自天子王侯，中國言六藝者折中於夫子，可謂至聖矣！

There have been multitudes of noble kings and worthy men in the world. In their times they may have been resplendent, but once they died, that was the end of them. Confucius was a commoner, but [his influence] has lasted more than ten generations, and so scholars regard him as their ancestor. From the son of heaven, kings and marquises [on down], those who discuss the Six Arts in the Middle Kingdoms will find the right balance in this master. He is worthy of being considered the most sagacious!

Here Sima Qian is explicit in his metaphor. The influence of Confucius was felt by subsequent generations, and so he is called an ancestor. At the same time, by comparing the commoner Confucius to those who actually ought to have been ancestors, namely the hereditary kings who in fact did not leave behind comparable legacies, Sima Qian highlights the fact that this usage is indeed metaphorical.

Yet as noted above, structuring metaphors are contextual lenses through which an object is viewed and then related to other objects, and the meta-
Phor’s qualities are not inherent in the object itself. That is, others within the Classicist tradition were also granted this distinction of being the focal ancestor. For example, Shusun Tong 叔孫通 (fl. early second century BCE) was the court advisor credited for first equipping the imperial lineage with proper rituals, and Liu Xiang states that he “served as an ancestor for Han Classicists, his undertaking being passed down to later heirs” (為漢儒宗，業垂後嗣).56 Another Han Classicist said to have had great impact on the court was Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–ca. 104), and Ban Gu states, “Dong Zhongshu mastered the Gongyang Commentary to the spring and autumn annals, and for the first time made extrapolations based on yin and yang, serving as an ancestor of the Classicists” (董仲舒治《公羊春秋》，始推陰陽，為儒者宗).57 The Classicist genealogy enjoyed several progenitors.

Defining ancestors within scholarly traditions was not limited to just the overall program of Classicism; individual Classics could also have their own designated ancestors. For example, a certain Ding Kuan 丁寬 (fl. mid-second cen. BCE) was recognized as “ancestral teacher” to the Changes canon (祖師) because of his influential commentary.58 Outside the Classicist program, the Daoists typically extended their historical discussions beyond human originators, and yet they, too, still employed the genealogy metaphor, identifying either formlessness or the Dao itself as “ancestor” of the myriad things.59 This metaphor even found expression outside of scholarly discourse as in the case of merchants who regarded the grain speculator Bai Gui 白圭 (fl. early fourth cen. BCE) as “ancestor” of their own profession.60 Nor was this structuring metaphor even limited to humanity. The network of mountain ranges was organized using extensive lineage terminology—progenitors, ancestors, collateral descendants, inheritance and the like—in which an especially lofty mountain might be the “ancestor” relative to all of its more child-like neighbors.61

When addressing the structure of knowledge in particular, the genealogy metaphor began with originating “ancestors” and then subdivided into individual lines of scholarship that came to be called “families” or jia 家 (see Section 1 for a discussion of jia as implying specialization). Generally, early usage of the term jia tended to identify either the immediate living family or sometimes the direct line of descent, whereas the term zong referred to the lineage as a whole including collateral branches. Over the
course of the Spring and Autumn period (722–481 BCE), the *jia* in fact evolved into a smaller and smaller unit as property became distributed among brothers and lineage territory became more and more fragmented. Thus the term *jia* usually carried with it the concept of subdivision. A *shijia* 世家 or “hereditary family” is the direct line of descent, a term used as an organizational principle in Sima Qian’s *Historical records*. In contrast, a *zong* usually referred to all the people who could claim a distant common lineage progenitor or shared the same surname; it generally included all collateral branches and not just the direct line of descent. For example, the *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳 (*Zuo commentary of the Spring and autumn annals*) and the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (*Spring and autumn annals of Yanzi*) both record the following lament of Shuxiang 叔向 (personal name Xi 貫), who predicts that his own lineage, a collateral branch of the ducal house of Jin 晉, is fated to follow the demise of that misbehaving house:

晉之公族盡矣。肸聞之，公室將卑，其宗族枝葉先落，則公室從之。肸之宗十一族，唯羊舌氏在而已。肸又無子，公室無度，幸而得死，豈其獲祀？

The ducal lineage of the state of Jin has become exhausted. I have heard that when a ducal house is about to be brought low, the branches and leaves of its trunk and collateral lineages (*zongzu* 宗族) first droop and then the ducal house follows them. The trunk lineage to which I belong had eleven collateral lineages, but only [my] Yangshe lineage remains. I moreover have no children. The ducal house is unregulated, so if I am fortunate and attain [a natural] death, who will maintain my sacrifices? Thus in contrast to *jia*, which tends to refer to a single line of descent and carries with it the implication of subdivision, *zong* tends to denote the larger family tree and carries with it the implication of wholeness or completeness. As Maurice Freedman explains, “In the family the ancestors tended are rarely more than four generations distant from the living head; in a lineage the first ancestor may be forty generations away.”

Yet this distinction is only generally and not absolutely true because the terms *jia* and *zong* sometimes appear to be interchangeable, at least in metaphorical usage. When pursuing peaceful border relations in the late Western Han, covenant makers claimed that the Han and the northern nomadic Xiongnu could “unite to form a single family” (*he wei yijia* 合為一家). Yet when the king of Wu in the early Western Han was asked...
where he should like to be buried, he noted that “the world is a single lineage” (tianxia yizong 天下一宗) and so it did not matter. Again the distinctions in the metaphorical usage are somewhat blurred, although even here the inward dynamic in the Han-Xiongnu “family” (jia) highlights the idea of intimacy whereas the outward dynamic of the king of Wu’s “lineage” (zong) highlights the idea of expansiveness.

When the metaphors of family versus lineage were applied to scholarly traditions, jia and zong were less interchangeable and regularly maintained the implications of subdivision versus comprehensiveness respectively. As seen above, scholarship subdivided into either nine families or, more commonly, a hundred families. On one hand, likening one’s own scholarship to jia could be an expression of modesty with implications of limitation and partiality. Sima Qian famously described his own grand history of the world as just “the words of a single family” (yijia zhi yan 一家之言). On the other hand, equating someone else’s scholarly tradition with jia could equally be regarded as insulting, particularly when that tradition claimed comprehensiveness. When Empress Dowager Dou (empress to Emperor Wen 文, r. 180–157) desired to speak with the Songs canon scholar Yuan Gu 轅固 about her own fondness for Laozi, for example, Yuan Gu replied—to render his response rather literally—“These are just the words of a ‘family man’” (Ci jiaren yan er 此家人言耳). For this unwise comment that relegated Laozi to a mere corner of the big picture, Yuan Gu was condemned to the animal pens to fight boars. How one used the term jia with its implications of partiality and limitedness depended upon with whom one used the term.

Mixing Metaphors

Thus the three principal metaphors of watershed, tree and genealogy were all applied to the configuration of knowledge, to the traditions of scholarship. More importantly, these metaphors were not randomly chosen but offered three similarly structured images. In reverse order, the genealogy model imagines a single progenitor from which a primary line of descent extends, and this primary line of descent is surrounded by more and more collateral lines (and collateral lines off of collateral lines) so that the end of the image—the present—is many different families. The tree model offers a root from which extends a principal trunk, and from that principal trunk spring more and more branches (and branches off of branches) so
that the top of the image is a flurry of divided tips. The structure of the river image is the same, although the temporal variable is reversed. Instead of a principal river branching out, the creeks and streams run into one another, eventually emptying into a principal river that in turn empties into the undifferentiated sea. In all of these, there is an implicit desire to privilege the principal line and ultimately to privilege the singular and undifferentiated progenitor, root or sea over the divided collateral lines. There is even a frequently voiced desire to return to that undifferentiated state. In other words, while there are three distinct metaphors being employed, the underlying paradigm is the same.

As further evidence that a single basic paradigm was at work here, the mixing of watershed, tree and lineage metaphors was not regarded as problematic. For example, the following verse from an Eastern Han divination guide known at the *Yilin* (Forest of Changes) applies a lineage metaphor to the river in an auspicious prophecy as follows:

海為水宗  
聰明且聖  
百流歸德  
無有叛逆  
常饒優足  

The sea serves as ancestor to water;  
It is astutely bright and sagacious.  
The hundred streams return to virtue  
And there is no opposition or obstruction:  
Constant abundance and extraordinary sufficiency.

Here, too, the desired return to the undifferentiated principle—whether it be progenitor or sea—is explicit.

Likewise, the tree metaphor was frequently mixed with ideas of lineage, as is already evident in Shuxiang’s remark about the collateral “branches and leaves” drooping just before his lineage as a whole was about to collapse. Such arboresque language was common, and one’s descendants were regularly called the *miao* or “sprouts.” An Eastern Han stele dedicated to Grand Commandant Yang Bing (d. 165) described his surname’s derivation by detailing how his family’s “tips and leaves via a collateral [lit. “branch”]” son had their supply city in Yang and so their lineage name came from it” (末葉以支子食邑於楊，因氏焉). In a stele dedicated to Grand Commandant Li Xian (d. 175), its genealogy explains why this western lineage ended up in Runan (in modern Henan province) by stating “the branches streamed forth and the leaves spread out until the family came to be located in this land” (枝流葉布，家于茲土). As in English, lineage is here envisioned as a family tree.
A watershed, tree and genealogy may share the same structure, but the prevalence of the last metaphor may in part be due to the fact that genealogy also had more than just metaphorical associations with scholarship itself. Particularly in the Han dynasty, actual lineages could specialize in certain textual traditions. Biographies in the *Hou Hanshu* (Later Han documents) frequently begin by noting that the subject of the biography “when young continued his father’s undertaking” (shao zhuan fuye 少傳父業), meaning that he mastered the same texts his father had. If generations had specialized in the same text, it could become known as “family scholarship” (jiaxue 家學). Furthermore, the teacher-disciple tradition could adopt lineage trappings, such as mourning for a teacher for three years (a practice made famous by the disciples of Confucius), ascending the teacher’s burial mound to announce one’s own achievements and conducting sacrifices to a teacher’s spirit. All of these Han practices theoretically originated from worshipping one’s departed father. These real and borrowed lineage relationships in handing down scholarship perhaps added to the genealogy metaphor’s weight.

**Recapitulation and Caveat**

Section 1 highlights a perceived connectivity among idea systems in the Han, as authors did not outright dismiss other programs but permitted themselves a selectivity that saw those other programs as partial glimpses of the truth. It was not “I’m right, and you’re wrong”; it was “I see the big picture, and you see a corner.” Section 2 sketches out a basic explanatory paradigm for that connectivity, a structural metaphor under the guise of a watershed, tree and lineage. The epistemological metaphors were readily interchangeable with one another because of their similar structure. By the middle of the Warring States period, many of these idea systems in fact recognized the same trunk chronology of cultural heroes and royal founders, including the Divine Husbandman said to have brought agriculture to the world, the Yellow Emperor credited with a host of technological, medical and calendrical innovations, the sage kings Yao and Shun and the three dynastic founders Yu of the Xia, Tang of the Shang and Kings Wen and Wu of the Zhou. The “ancestors” of other traditions may even figure into the creative histories of one’s own tradition, as when Confucius appears as a significant character in the Daoist *Zhuangzi*, a character there portrayed as often right but sometimes wrong.
There his “branch” seems to be portrayed as just beginning to deviate from the Daoist trunk.

The lineage metaphor becomes more noticeable when it is compared to the “argument is war” metaphor within the Western tradition. A lineage demonstrates connectivity and the dynamism of a temporal dimension rather than the breaks and stasis of the war metaphor. In fact, the early Chinese tradition repeatedly and explicitly condemned schism when ideas and opinions collided. Several modern scholars such as Walter Ong have noted this difference:

Rhetoric of course is essentially antithetical, for the orator speaks in the face of at least implied adversaries. Oratory has deep agonistic roots. The development of the vast rhetorical tradition was distinctive of the west and was related, whether as cause or effect or both, to the tendency among the Greeks and their cultural epigoni to maximize oppositions, in the mental as in the extramental world; this by contrast with Indians and Chinese, who programmatically minimized them.74

Lloyd similarly argues that Greek schools of thought did not primarily hand down a body of learned texts but had to compete for students. Furthermore, students presented their opinions not before their ruler as in early China but before their peers, and this required them to adopt crowd-swaying rhetorical devices and competitive stances. He likens this competitive scholarship to the legal traditions in early Greece that were so different from those in early China:

The first fundamental point . . . relates to Chinese attitudes towards the legal experience, whether in civil or in criminal cases, and to litigiousness in general. Civil law as such was almost unheard of. More generally, so far from positively delighting in litigation, as many Greeks seem to have done, so far from developing a taste for confrontational argument in that context and becoming quite expert in its evaluation, the Chinese avoided any brush with the law as far as they possibly could. Disputes that could not be resolved by arbitration were felt to be a breakdown of due order and as such reflected unfavourably on both parties, whoever was in the right.

So forensic advocacy of the adversarial type developed in the Greek law-courts can hardly be found in China, but that is not surprising, given that the contexts of its use were lacking.75

In the received Chinese tradition at least, this avoidance of “argument is war” and of confrontational litigiousness is repeatedly voiced. The below
Introduction

ten examples, all from different primary sources and representing three different idea systems, show how frequently schism was condemned.

1. Confucius said he would judge disputes like anyone else but voiced a desire for the disputants to resolve their differences and avoid litigation at all costs. Han sources often cited this statement.

2. Mencius lamented that although he was not fond of disputation, in such an age of decline he had no alternative but to engage in it.

3. Xunzi repeatedly condemned “disputation and persuasions” (bianshui 辯說), practices that had arisen since the sage kings disappeared and the world fell into chaos. Perverse persuasions and texts that manifested partiality “separated from the proper Dao” (li zhengdao 離正道), but an enlightened ruler did not engage in such practices. Yielding was superior to contentious wrangling.

4. Zi Gao 子高 (312–262), a sixth-generation descendant of Confucius, continued the tradition that denounced “resplendent verbiage and abundant persuasions” (fanci fushui 繁辭富說). He argued that the ancients avoided litigation because the people and the government shared the same goals and did not act for private gain.

5. Chancellor Gongsun Hong 公孫弘 (ca. 200–121), described as “a paragon figure of the virtues later associated with the Confucian tradition,” was the first high-ranking official to espouse the Classicist tradition in Emperor Wu’s court. Sima Qian wrote that he gave everything that delighted the emperor a Classicist slant. When it came to disagreements, Gongsun Hong “never disputed them at court” (bu ting bian zhi 不庭辯之) but later spoke with the emperor in private explaining his opinions, a procedure that also pleased the emperor.

6. Grand Commandant Liu Ju 劉矩 (d. ca. 170 CE) became famous for bringing potential litigants before him for personal interviews, listening to their complaints, offering advice and avoiding all recourse to legal disputation. He would send the would-be litigants home to think, and in every case they abandoned their litigations. Thus the Classicist masters condemned disputation, and Han Classicist officials in turn avoided it.

7. Schism was also disparaged by the Daoists. Laozi not surprisingly recognized that, in antiquity, martialism, anger and contention were absent from officialdom because officials practiced the “De of not contending” (bu zheng zhi de 不爭之德).

8. Zhuangzi dismissed rhetoricians and disputers more consistently and playfully than anyone else. As the Dao had become lost under the later
“resplendent flowers” of recent lines of scholarship, “There thus exists the ‘It’s so’ and ‘It’s not so’ of the Classicists and Mohists, regarding what is so as that which is surely not so and what is not so as that which surely is so” (故有儒墨之是非，以是其所非而非其所是). 84

9. The Laozi commentary known as the Xiang’er 想爾, attributed to Zhang Lu 張魯 (fl. 190–215), 85 is one of the first texts representing what is often called “religious Daoism” in which Laozi becomes deified, the Dao becomes anthropomorphized and salvation becomes attainable. This text advises against contending with those who do not already delight in the Dao. Arguments of “I’m right; you’re wrong” (我是；若非) are explicitly condemned. 86

10. Buddhism appeared in Han China around the middle of the dynasty and began to enter into academic discourse near the end, and its early sutras continued the denunciation of disputation. Translated in 179 CE, the Banzhou sanmeijing 般舟三昧經 (“Meditation of direct encounter with the Buddhas of the present”) is a sutra that calls the actual Buddha to one’s own mind, an act that is possible because, as all is emptiness, clear concentration on the Buddha is in fact nothing short of face-to-face contact with the Buddha. Given the nature of emptiness, disciples should harbor no conceptions, and if they harbor no conceptions, they would never dispute because conceptions are a prerequisite for disputation. Disputations “are slanderous and disparaging in terms of emptiness, and therefore one should not engage in disputation” (誹謗於空，是故不當共諍). Disciples should instead give themselves over to recitation of the sutras. 87

To summarize, given the shape of the structuring metaphor as one in which diverse ideas are genetically connected at an earlier stage, thinkers throughout the Han period claimed superiority not by going to war with rivals but by affiliating themselves with the undifferentiated root of knowledge. The so-called Three Teachings (Sanjiao 三教) of Classicism, Daoism and Buddhism regularly dismiss disputation, as do other thinkers such as Mozi, who devoted a whole chapter to explaining how disputation arose from benighted leadership. 88 Disputation is a characteristic of the upper branches where separation and divergence are manifest. Pure rhetoric was roundly denounced as the worst intellectual practice because it possessed no substance at all—no “wood” from the family tree—and only highlighted the spaces between the upper branches. From the shape of the metaphor, from the pre-Han and Han scholars’ discourses as to how their idea systems related to other idea systems, and from the ten anti-disputation ex-
amples listed above, it would appear that “argument is war” is strictly a Western tradition whereas “argument is tracing out lineage” uniquely characterizes early China.

Yet such a conclusion would of course be wrong. The very fact that the denunciation of disputation was voiced with such frequency suggests in itself that disputation thrived. A scholar such as Xunzi may have denounced disputation in general, but he certainly engaged in it himself when he found it necessary. Furthermore, several of the above passages relegated the non-disputers of the Dao to the distant past or, as in the last two cases, saw disputation as a symptom of those who fell outside their own religious sects. That is, non-disputation was an aspiration and not a reality. Third, instead of tolerating divergent views, many philosophers and politicians at times actively denounced rivals and even called for their censorship. The passage from *The spring and autumn annals of Mr. Lü* cited in Section 1 hints at such a practice. Elsewhere, the *Guanzi* 管子, a collection of materials of diverse authorship from the fourth to first centuries BCE edited by Liu Xiang, takes an intolerant perspective of rival traditions in certain chapters. Merely listening to the ideas of Songzi, Mozi, and other philosophers or to private criticisms or talk of wealth could cause the state to collapse. Like the aforementioned philosophers denouncing division and disputation, the *Guanzi* indeed condemns factionalism, but in place of selectivity it advocates single-minded adherence to one doctrine of control. Pre-imperial theorists aside, in 213 BCE the Qin dynasty famously closed down the marketplace of ideas by banning all talk of alternative positions, and Empress Dowager Dou, who briefly oversaw the Han court, was not open-minded about rival opinions.

In terms of metaphor, “argument is war” would even find explicit expression in anecdotes from the Period of Disunion following the Han. A discussion between the famous Buddhist monk Zhi Dun 支遁 (314–66) and the leading politician Yin Hao 殷浩 (d. 356) is recorded as follows:

Zhi Daolin [=Zhi Dun] and Yin Yuanyuan [=Yin Hao] were both at the residence of the chancellor-king, and the chancellor-king said to them, “You may endeavor to carry out a conversation, but I fear [the topic of] ‘Talent and nature’ is Yuanyuan’s fortress of the Yao Mountains and Hangu Pass! You ought to be careful there!” When Zhi Daolin began, he always shifted about to keep distant from that topic,
but over and over again he unwittingly entered into such profundities. The chancellor-king clapped Zhi Daolin on the shoulder and laughed, saying, “This is naturally his field of victory. How could you ever cross weapons with him?”

The Yao Mountains and Hangu Pass were the Qin state’s secure barriers, and so in light of Yin Hao’s superior defense, Zhi Dun lost the war.

Thus in early China, the nature of argumentation was not limited to the tracing of genealogy nor to warfare, but it can be said that the former was indeed frequently and adamantly privileged as the ideal paradigm. It was the supreme structure of knowledge, further justified because most traditions jointly owned a semi-fictional past (such as the Yellow Emperor) and shared a reverence for the primal Dao.

**Section 3: Modifying Our Approach to the Ancestral Cults**

But why is understanding this Han “tree” of knowledge necessary before we explore the early imperial ancestral cults? First, the pervasiveness of the lineage metaphor in itself evinces the importance of fully understanding lineage. Second, understanding this basic concept of how idea systems were structured forces us to be wary of applying Western theories and terminologies (theories and terminologies that grew out of a different set of assumptions) to the ancestral cult. It affects how we look at them. Third and most importantly, understanding the ideal of connectivity is a prerequisite to understanding how people in early China related one set of beliefs about the afterlife to another. It affects how they looked at themselves.

**Lineage as a Pervasive Structuring Principle**

Robin Horton defines religion as “the extension of the field of people’s social relationships beyond the confines of purely human society.” Building on Horton, Stewart Elliott Guthrie explains that “we typically scan the world with humanlike models” because human relationship networks are a complex structuring tool that we then apply to the non-empirical realm to get meaning out of it. That is, the world around us is full of complexities we don’t readily understand, but we do understand how humans interrelate, and so we take that human structure and project it onto the non-human world to see if we can make sense of what would otherwise remain frighteningly mysterious. Gods become father figures because father-child relationships are more tangible to us than are unseen,
nebulous gods. Catherine Bell has recognized a similar projection, particularly in Chinese ritual, when she writes, “It is a language of banking, bureaucratic hierarchy, and closed energy systems that enables human beings to influence the cosmos by extending the meaning and efficacy of those activities that seem to organize the human world most effectively.”

On the surface, projecting the “humanlike model” of lineage onto both early Chinese cosmological speculation and rituals surrounding post-mortem existence—onto both the Han tree of knowledge and the ancestral cult—would make sense. We extend the social relationship pattern we know best to impose order on worlds beyond our ken. Yet in terms of its application to early Chinese paradigms and rituals, projection theory by itself is unsatisfying or at least would require a great deal of modification. Otherwise, why does the ancestral cult not characterize all religion everywhere? And why does the structuring metaphor of lineage not characterize all interactions between differing idea systems? There must be other social, economic and historical reasons why lineage thinking was more pervasive in China than elsewhere and why it then influenced idea system structures beyond the family. Some of those reasons are explored in this study, but the prevalence of lineage logic in early China is in itself enough to justify the study of lineage.

Re-evaluating Our “Religious” Vocabulary

The people of early China had no ready word for “religion” as a *sui generis* discourse, but that of course does not mean they had no religion. They had many of the components that we might consider “religious”—spirits, prayers, sacrifices, afterlife and so forth—but they simply did not draw a circle around those components and then label that circle as we do. The same is true with many of our other umbrella words such as “economics,” “philosophy,” “politics” and “science.” Yet because we are looking at early China from a modern mindset using a Western language, we must at least be wary of what our words—our circles—imply, particularly as our circling and border drawing may be informed by a very different structuring metaphor.

Consider for example just one of those components of “religion,” namely the afterlife. As Clifford Geertz has argued, simply bandying about such a term presents danger on two sides. “To make the generalization about an afterlife stand up alike for the Confucians and the Calvinists,
the Zen Buddhists and the Tibetan Buddhists, one has to define it in the most general terms, indeed—so general, in fact, that whatever force it seems to have virtually evaporates,” he writes.\(^9\) In other words, the more general the term is, the less useful it becomes; the more specific the term is, the less accurate or applicable it becomes. Even writers in the Han dynasty frequently repeated the argument that what was fixed in the mind dissolved when consigned to the spoken word, and the spoken word dissolved when consigned to the written word. This book is guilty of adding further devolutions, translating that written word into a significantly different language and then presenting it to a much later culture on another continent. Can a Confucian conception of “afterlife” survive such a five-fold translation? And might we unknowingly infer certain meanings (and lose others) when using the English word “afterlife” for early Chinese postmortem existence?

Now reconsider the umbrella word “religion” and its relationship to Classicism. Opposing any Classicist claims of religiosity, Frederick Mote writes as follows with regard to Confucius, Mencius and Xunzi:

I have never been one who denied the large role of religious thought and attitude in the life of the Chinese people, past or present. Nonetheless, I have been quite satisfied with a perception of a Confucianism that can be a complete system of ideas and values, at the level of a philosophy that does not require one to admit any specifically religious content. . . . [T]he Confucian system was complete without admitting into it any role for the transcendent. By “transcendental” I mean that elements of what one regards as truth may not be fully comprehensible by purely rational means.\(^9\)

In sharp contrast, Rodney Taylor has argued that anyone who fails to see the religious dimensions of the Classicist “heaven” (\(\text{tian} \) 天) has missed Classicism’s quintessential feature and the full significance of the Classicist religious life:

It is time for Confucianism to assume its rightful place amongst the major religious traditions of East Asian cultures and, in turn, the religious traditions of the world. . . . The religious core itself is found in the relationship of humankind to Heaven. Heaven for the Confucian tradition is not thought of, as some have argued, as an abstract philosophical absolute devoid of religious meaning. In the Classical Confucian tradition Heaven functions as a religious authority or absolute often theistic in its portrayal. . . . Thus, in the relationship between Heaven as a religious absolute and the sage as a transformed person, we have the identifi-
cution of a soteriological process and, as a result, the identification of a religious core of the tradition.97

Because “religion” was not a recognized category in early China, it is not surprising that modern opinions on Classicist religiosity can be so split. Everything rests on how one defines it.

Thus modern scholars of early China are reduced to relying on their own understandings as to what religion entails or what components get circled, and there are now hundreds of published and extensively defended definitions of religion from which to choose. Yet a commonality emerges from many of the most famous explanations for religion, a commonality drawn from adversariality. In its simplest terms, religion is what is not profane. Western theorists would draw that circle with a firm and heavy hand, from Rudolf Otto’s ganz andere (“wholly other”) in which religion is separated off as the “ir-rational, not merely non-rational” numerous, to Mircea Eliade’s “first possible definition of the sacred” being that “it is the opposite of the profane,” from Émile Durkheim’s “negative cult” that enforces a discontinuity between the sacred and the profane to Victor Turner’s liminal phase as an explicit border-crossing moment between them. That is, much of religious theory in the twentieth century has been devoted to building the kingdoms recognized by Levi-Strauss, the kingdom on the hill as opposed to the secular lowlands. Perhaps we are now all the more conditioned to think this way as we struggle between the competing explanatory systems of science and religion. Such is not to argue that the theories of Otto, Eliade and the rest are wrong or even inapplicable to non-Western traditions, because distinctions between sacred and profane indeed existed in early China. Such is only to argue that emphasizing separation and ignoring what the sacred and profane have in common affirms the Western structuring metaphor of adversariality.

Unlike Mote and Taylor’s “Confucianism,” the ancestral cult with its sacrifices and spirits is of course less difficult to pigeonhole as “religion,” at least in popular parlance. Even the few early Chinese thinkers within the elitist genre of discourse who dared to question the existence of spirits still maintained ancestral shrines, spirit tablets and regular sacrifices to the dead because these things embodied other social values. In fact, the ancestral cult is a prime example of a discourse in which it is hard to draw thick lines between sacred and profane precisely because feeding the spirits and promoting social values were perceived as returning to the same root. The
Ritual records represents just one example among many of sacred matters rippling out into the profane; the royal ancestral cult is here treated as Classicism’s religious backbone:

親親故尊祖，
Being near to one’s parents results in honoring the progenitor;

尊祖故敬宗，
Honoring the progenitor results in respecting the trunk lineage;

敬宗故收族，
Respecting the trunk lineage results in gathering the collateral lineages;

收族故宗廟嚴，
Gathering the collateral lineages results in the lineage shrine becoming dignified;

宗廟嚴故重社稷，
The lineage shrine becoming dignified results in magnifying the altars of land and grain;

重社稷故愛百姓，
Magnifying the altars of land and grain results in showing affection for the hundred surnames;

愛百姓故刑罰中，
Showing affection for the hundred surnames results in punishments being on target;

刑罰中故庶民安，
Punishments being on target results in the masses being at peace;

庶民安故財用足，
The masses being at peace results in material goods being sufficient;

財用足故百志成，
Material goods being sufficient results in the hundred ambitions being achieved;

百志成故禮俗刑，
The hundred ambitions being achieved results in ritualizing customs and punishment.

禮俗刑然後樂。
If customs and punishment are ritualized, only then is there joy.98

Honoring one’s parentage at the lineage shrine is perceived as setting off a chain of behavior that becomes the Classicist program for the world at large. Drawing a line between two of the above steps to denote a shift between religious and secular considerations would be of little value.

This extension from ancestor to empire can similarly be expressed through the core concept of xiao 孝 (“filial piety”). In terms of the ancestral cult in particular, filial respect to one’s parents did not recognize death as a threshold at which to terminate one’s duties. In fact, in the early Zhou dynasty xiao was a concrete ancestral rite, namely a food sacrifice done out of filial respect.99 Over the course of the Zhou dynasty, xiao became an abstracted principle, but the ancestral hall was where that princi-
ple was taught. For example, a text excavated in 1995 from the Guodian tombs states, “In general when the sage... personally serves the ancestral shrine, he is teaching the people filial piety” (夫聖人...親事祖廟，牧民孝也), a statement frequently echoed in the received literature. By the beginning of Han times, the founding emperor’s sacrificial hymns commenced with the words “as great filial piety is perfected” (Daxiao bei yi 大孝備矣) because ancestral sacrifice was just that: the perfection of filial piety. The closing lines of the Xiaojing (Filial piety canon) are as follows:

He prepares the lineage shrine for them, receiving them in their ghostly state. In the spring and autumn he carries out sacrifices, thinking of them with each season. Affection and respect are the affairs of life; mourning and sorrow are the affairs of death. [By this,] the root of the people becomes manifested to the utmost, the meaning of the relationship between the living and the dead becomes perfected, and a filial son’s service to his parents is brought to completion.

The ancestral cult was thus idealized as the ongoing ritualized form of filial piety, a practice carried out throughout one’s life, and seasonal sacrifices to the dead reinforced filial indoctrination on a regular basis.

In terms of the Classicist vision of empire, filial piety had become a form of dogma by the time of Mencius. A son serving his parents was his most important duty, and his greatest possible infraction against filial piety was not to produce a grandson for them. Filial piety and fraternal respect were built into him without requiring his reasoning to attain them, and because these inherent qualities led to benevolence and propriety, Mencius argued that everything else was simply an extension of these into the world. This last assertion, that everything in the Classicist program was extrapolated from filial piety, is echoed in several subsequent texts, including the Filial piety canon, the Ritual records and the Spring and autumn annals of Mr. Lü. That is, the mechanics of the shrine exemplified by filial piety resonated with the mechanics of the state exemplified by loyalty in what has recently been dubbed the “lord-father analogy.”

The Huainanzi claims that everyone, no matter how foolish or wise, understands the correctness of “filial piety toward one’s parents within and loyalty toward one’s rulers without” (入孝於親，出忠於君).
Beyond the prescriptive texts, children probably memorized the *Filial piety canon* more than any other text in the Han, and to fill the court bureaucracy, the commanderies and kingdoms recommended two to three hundred officer candidates each year, their courtesy title being the “filially pious and incorrupt” (xiaolian 孝廉). Numerous imperial edicts were made on the pretense of filial piety, extravagant burials bankrupted families in the name of filial piety and acts of filial piety were commemorated on stelae and shrines. The Han emperors’ posthumous titles were all prefaced with “the Filial” because they continued the blood sacrifices in the Liu ancestral hall. Thus within the household, one grew up with filial respect for one’s forebears, both living and dead; beyond the household, one was intended to extend this filial respect to relationships with one’s community, state, and world. Although some of this filial pretence might be mere rhetorical gesture, at the risk of overstating filial piety’s influence, it nevertheless must be acknowledged that filial piety was the privileged vocabulary of the Han and that this filial piety found its most ritualized, tangible and longest enduring expression within the walls of the ancestral shrine. Even though that shrine was “sacred” and superior to the profane workaday world, the sacred and the profane were perceived as mechanically similar and jointly part of a larger system that could be traced back to a common root.

**Relativizing Different Beliefs about an Afterlife**

Adversariality is not limited to the manner in which Western theorists analyze religions; it is inherent within Western religions themselves. Particularly characteristic of post-Reformation Protestant traditions, the importance assigned to belief implicitly emphasizes distinctiveness and separation. Belief only becomes defined and focal if there is a distinct alternative to that belief, either belief in a different religious tradition or the option of not believing at all. The proclamation of “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty” only makes sense if there is also a real possibility of not believing in that god, a possibility that the religion itself can then tout as a danger. Historically, creeds indeed took shape to stave off variation and demarcate one “faith” against others. Thus belief is a characteristic of *exclusivist* religions, of religions in which “I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me” is the central command. This exclusivity manifests itself in the Western tradition by equating relig-
ions with separate communities of people, which means that, in general, one is not allowed to be an Islamic Jew or a Christian atheist.

Not only is it impossible to discuss belief in early China because we cannot determine what the early Chinese truly thought, but the role of belief itself and the exclusivity it entails seems relatively absent in the surviving texts that allude to early Chinese notions about the transcendental (as Mote defines it) or heaven (as Taylor defines it). Its absence may again be explained—at least in part—by how differing idea systems interacted with one another as sketched out above via the family tree metaphor. There clearly existed differing interpretations of the afterlife, and although most people probably did not bother comparing their own interpretation with that of others, when they did (and when they wrote about it), emphasis was not placed upon differing beliefs but upon shared origins and common practice. For example, early discussions on worshipping the ancestors often demarcate two levels of thinking that superficially divide into an elitist, Classicist discourse of the academies and courts on one side and a popular discourse of the people on the other. Texts such as the *Ritual records* privilege the elitist genre, often noting the necessity of manipulating the populace and ensuring obedience. Within this corpus, a mid-Warring States essay entitled the “Jiyi” ("Meanings of sacrifice") demarcates between the elite and popular branches of ancestral worship, claiming that the elite created the popular. According to this work, the living possess both corporeal and ethereal constituents that, at death, dissolve into earth and vapors respectively. The sages were content with understanding these two components in the abstract, but the benighted masses needed something more tangible, and so the passage continues:

By adhering to the quintessence of things and fixing a standard for them, [the sages] clearly identified “ghosts” and “spirits.” When this was made a model for the common people, then the multitudes were awed and the masses became subservient because of it. The sages still regarded this as insufficient, and so they built halls and established ancestral shrines, distinguishing between family near and far, between those distantly and closely related. This instructed the people to retreat to their beginnings, to return to the origin and never forget their progenitor. The obedience of the masses came from this, and so they listened and submitted.
The text continues with a brief description of two sacrifices in these shrines, one for ghosts and one for spirits, that taught the people to “return to their progenitor” (“fanshi 反始”) and to “love one another” (“xiang’ai 相愛”) respectively. The focal reason behind taking respect to the utmost, giving vent to one’s feelings and exhausting one’s strength is to look back. “The gentleman returns to antiquity and goes back to his progenitor, never forgetting whence he came” (“君子反古復始，不忘其所由生也”). Thus the sages pragmatically demarcated spirits and then established their shrines to teach hierarchy. Implicit within this defining process, the sages also distinguished themselves from the benighted masses; they understood the act of remembrance whereas the obedient multitudes only confronted the object of remembrance.

The Guanzi takes an almost identical stance and warns that if the state does not honor the spirits, then the people will lack filial piety, respect for elders and obedience to government:

不明鬼神則陋民不悟；不祗山川則威令不聞；不敬宗廟則民乃上校；不恭祖舊則孝悌不備。

If you do not define the ghosts and spirits, then the rustic people will not stay attentive. If you do not respect the mountains and rivers, then your important edicts will not be heeded. If you do not respect the ancestral hall, then the people will imitate the ruler [and not respect their own ancestors]. If you do not revere your fathers and your ancients, then filial piety and fraternity will not be fulfilled.

The author would go so far as to advocate putting a tax on sacrifices to the ghosts and spirits because, unlike building taxes, head taxes and livestock taxes, sacrifice is one area in which the people dare not skimp in their expenditures. In like manner, the Xunzi distinguishes between the gentleman who understood ancestral remembrance as “the Dao of humans” (“ren Dao 人道”) and the masses who were only concerned with sacrificing to ghosts.

The Ritual records, Guanzi, Xunzi and other sources thus distinguish elite from popular belief, but the nature of this distinction is not like what one might find between Western religious traditions. They do not delineate opposing perspectives via “I’m right; you’re wrong”; the sages here do not dismissively judge the masses as ignorant and misguided. On the contrary, the masses are ultimately doing the right things if for the wrong reasons. Here the decisive goal is a sense of hierarchy, filial piety and proper
obedience, a goal the sages themselves already recognize through their understanding of the cosmos. Thus these passages highlight the connections between the elitist and popular idea systems even if the trappings of those systems are different. They espouse the same destination via different roads. Furthermore, texts such as the “Meanings of sacrifice” introduce the temporal element that is characteristic of the Han tree of knowledge and describe a point at which a lesser tradition is branching off from the main trunk in the past. Yet unlike other departures from the privileged traditions described above, here the ancient sages willingly propagated the offshoot.

Many early texts treat divination, omens, immortals and other topics that touch upon the non-empirical realm similarly, endeavoring to demonstrate how elitist rationality and popular practice functioned in tandem with one another. To cite just one example, a small text dating from the early years of the Western Han entitled “Yao” 要 (“Essentials”) was excavated in 1973 at Mawangdui 馬王堆 in Hunan. In it, one of his disciples asks Confucius to explain his intense interest in the Changes canon. Confucius replies, “As to the Changes, I regard its prayers and divination as secondary, and I only observe its virtue and propriety” (易,我(復)〔後〕其祝卜矣,我觀其德義耳也). Using language now familiar, he states, “I only seek its virtue—I am on the same road with the clerks and shamans, but I am returning to a different point” (吾求其德而已,吾與史巫同涂而殊歸者也). Using language now familiar, he states, “I only seek its virtue—I am on the same road with the clerks and shamans, but I am returning to a different point” (吾求其德而已,吾與史巫同涂而殊歸者也).118 Again the esoteric approach is not condemned, although it is held out as inferior to Confucius’s own usage of divination. Other Han stories about divining echo the “Essentials” in describing the lettered and unlettered classes as ultimately sharing the same road.

Thus trunk-and-branch relationships trump adversarial relationships when relativizing elite and common “religions,” but here we should not be too quick to separate elites from commoners; it is more a matter of distinguishing an elitist discourse from a commoner discourse. A tree-like structure to knowledge in which the various branches all ultimately return to the same Dao in turn allows a greater degree of tolerance within one’s own personal practice. Speculatively, the Confucius of the Mawangdui text may have venerated the logic of the Changes but still resorted to divination for practical results when the need arose. The author of “Meanings of sacrifice” may have rationally explained the invention of ancestral spir-
its but still returned home to sacrifice to his own lineage ghosts. Because each genre ultimately returned to a common root, shifting among genres to suit one’s changing circumstances might not necessarily have been deemed hypocritical or contradictory as it would in the West.

Past students of Chinese religion have indeed taken notice of this ability of individuals to maintain simultaneously different idea systems; at the beginning of the last century, Max Weber observed:

There is an almost ineradicable vulgar error that the majority or even all of the Chinese are to be regarded as Buddhists in religion. The source of this misconception is the fact that many Chinese have been brought up in the Confucian ethic (which alone enjoys official approbation) yet still consult Taoist divining priests before building a house, and that Chinese will mourn deceased relatives according to the Confucian rule while also arranging for Buddhist masses to be performed in their memory.¹¹⁹

More recently, Nathan Sivin noted that such clichés of the gentleman acting as a Confucian at work and a Daoist at home still house a degree of truth that we ignore at our peril.¹²⁰

A tolerance of multiple and even inconsistent genres of discourse will be particularly relevant in this study when several interpretations of the afterlife are presented side by side in Part III. It cannot be assumed that these different interpretations represent different people; again, they might merely represent different genres of discourse within the same individuals. The genres may not be weighted equally, and they may they be consistent with one another; after all, humans then and now do not always live within a single, consistent perception of reality.¹²¹ A tolerance of such inconsistencies is particularly common when it comes to matters of the afterlife because reliable accounts of death’s experience are inherently impossible, or as Emily Vermeule explains in her work on death in early Greek art and poetry:

The manifold self-contradictions in Greek ideas and phrasing about death are not errors. They are styles of imagining the unimaginable, and are responsive both to personal needs and to old conventions. The same conflicts surge up in many cultures. They are necessary ambiguities in a realm of thinking where thinking cannot really be done, and where there is no experience. Logic is not fruitful in the sphere of death. . . .¹²²
In this study, knowledge about the ancestors will be anything but tidy. Even so, an understanding of the structuring metaphors behind that knowledge helps us at least partially explain how that untidiness could be readily tolerated within the early Chinese tradition.

The above discussion on the Han tree of knowledge concludes with a caveat that this tree-like metaphor was not alone in structuring knowledge, that adversariality and its metaphor of war also exerted at least a secondary influence. The same is true of religious idea systems in early China, where at times belief and exclusivity were indeed acknowledged. On one end of the period under study, a purely functionalist Guanzi author utterly dismissed the commoner genre of discourse as well as the commoners themselves: “Thus the wise employ and use the ghosts and spirits whereas the foolish believe in them” (故智者役使鬼神, 而愚者信之). On the other end of the period, the Xiang’er commentary advised its readers to vilify anything but the Celestial Masters’ trunk tradition:

勉信道真，棄邪知守本樸。無他思慮，心中曠曠但信道。

Constrain yourself to believe in the Dao’s genuineness. Cast aside heterodox knowledge and maintain the root simplicity. Have no other conceptions of thought; within your mind far and wide, believe only in the Dao.

Here “belief” explicitly functions in tandem with exclusivity, with pruning away any “heterodox knowledge” from the tree. This kind of mass religion is more indicative of how we understand Western institutional faiths, and the followers of its anthropomorphized Dao indeed saw themselves as a distinct people chosen to survive the end times. Here it is only necessary to note that, as with the family-tree metaphor interlacing idea systems and avoiding contention, tolerating differing genres of religious discourse was as much aspiration as it was actuality.

This speculative foray into how differing idea systems interacted with one another is intended as a contextual frame for the following study on early Chinese ancestral cults. Structuring metaphors affect not only how people in early China weighted the different descriptions of afterlife existence, but also how most of us—conditioned via religions born within the Western “argument is war” tradition—endeavor to understand their post-mortem pluralisms. For example, understanding how differing idea systems interrelate may help us nuance the relationship between tidy theory as preserved in the Classics and messy practice as evinced by archeology, a relationship with which we begin this study.
1. *Huainan bonglie jijie*, 678 (“Taizu” 泰族). See also p. 482 (“Quanyan” 詮言) for a similar comparison of duties carried out by the cook, the invocator and the idle-but-revered ancestral impersonator.

2. For the excavated legal codes from the early years of the Han dynasty on training and testing clerks, diviners and invocators, see *Zhangjiashan Han mu zhujian*, 204 (“Shi lü” 史律).

3. For example, see *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1535-42 (Ding 4); *jiao shi Yilin*, 23 (“Xu: kun” 需: 困).


8. *Hou Hanshu*, zhi 7.3157. Chai 貳 is tentatively translated as “wolf” here, although no one is certain as to which wild canine this term refers. “The birth of the people” probably alludes to the *Songs canon* poem by the same name, which also addresses the origins of ritual.

9. *Liji jijie*, 409, 477 (“Yueling” 月令); *Lü shi chunqiu jishi*, 1.1b (“Mengchun ji” 孟春紀), 9.1b (“Jiqiu ji” 季秋紀); *Da Dai liji jiegü*, 45 (“Xi-xiaozheng” 夏小正). See also *Huainan bonglie jijie*, 308 (“Zhushu” 主術).


14. *Xunzi jijie*, 393 (“Jiebi” 解蔽). Mark Edward Lewis has explored many examples of how expertise within delimited fields was regarded as inferior to an encompassing adaptive intelligence that sees the larger picture. See his *Writing and authority in early China*, 83-94, 289-97.

15. *Xunzi jijie*, 393 (“Jiebi” 解蔽); *Lü shi chunqiu jishi*, 3.17a (“Huan-dao” 圓道); *Huainan bonglie jijie*, 283-84 (“Zhushu” 主術), following the emen-

This metaphor of roundness grew in importance with the later introduction of Buddhism and its “round,” corner-free philosophies, and that roundness would even work its way into the titles of famous Buddhist scriptures such as the seventh-century *Yuanjuejing 圓覺經* (*Sutra of round enlightenment*). Peter Gregory well describes the program of the Chan master Zongmi 宗密 (780-841) in geometric terms that already existed in the Han:

Different teachings are not so much wrong as they are limited or partial. There is thus a gradient of truth along which all teachings can be arranged. And the way in which one supersedes the other is dialectical, each teaching overcoming in turn the particular limitation or partiality of the one that preceded it. The supreme teaching, of course, is the one that succeeds in offering the most comprehensive point of view in which all other teachings can be harmoniously sublated. The highest teaching was therefore often referred to as *yüan 圓* (literally, “round,” i.e., having no sides or partiality, not leaning in any direction), the perfect teaching in which all others were consummated.

See Gregory, *Inquiry into the origin of humanity*, 6-7 (parenthetical insert retained).


17. Sima Tan describes the discourse of “names” (*ming 名*) as the practice of precisely matching the words of what has been contracted with the substance of what was actually done. (For a full account of this practice, see Makeham, “The Legalist concept of hsing-ming.”) His discourse of “system” (*fa 法*) denotes an absolutely impartial government model devoid of kinship and honor considerations.

I translate the labels of these idea systems with great hesitation because each is today a minefield of problems in terms of how we draw a circle around it. The first translation option would be to retain the traditional renderings—still used by many—of schools devoted to Yinyang, Confucianism, Mohism, Logi-
cians, Legalism and Daoism, but these isms at times do not easily align with Sima Tan’s somewhat selective criteria for each. On one hand, some of these isms take shape only well after Sima Tan’s era. On the other, Sima Tan himself looks at these idea systems through the agenda-laden filter of his own Daoism. Even his description of Classicism only highlights the ritual aspects without any reference to humanity and propriety, as Smith (“Sima Tan and the invention of Daoism, 'Legalism, et cetera,” 139) points out. The second option would be to leave them all transliterated as *yinyang*, Ru, Mo, Ming, Fa and Dao, an option pursued by some modern scholarship that avoids the baggage of the old labels. Yet leaving them transliterated without adequate explanations of each would only continue to imply the existence of broadly accepted isms, and of course too many transliterations would be awkward for the non-specialist. Here I have instead opted to leave Classicism, Mohism and Daoism as isms (the first to be explained below) because by Sima Tan’s era they were fairly well defined as idea systems relative to one another, each associated with particular texts and (in the case of Classicism and Mohism) master-disciple schools in the past. (For how Sima Tan’s description of Daoism closely relates to other texts, namely the *Huainanzi*, the *Guanzi* and the syncretic chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, see Harold Roth, “Who compiled the Chuang Tzu?”). I translate only the other three labels relative to his essay’s explanation and keep the labels lowercase.

Regardless, my focus in this introduction is not on the full meaning of these labels or the content of these six idea systems but only on how diverse idea systems could be conceived as interrelated.


19. For salient discussions on *jia* in Sima Tan and the Han, see especially Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan, “Constructing lineages and inventing traditions”; Petersen, “Which books did the First Emperor of Ch’in burn?”; and Smith, “Sima Tan and the invention of Daoism, ‘Legalism, et cetera.”


22. Following the *Hanshu* version (62.2710), I take *dan* 胆 as *dan* 澹 or “tranquility,” better contrasting with “activity” in the previous clause.


24. The enigmatic term *wuwei* 無為 is usually rendered “inaction.” As seen in Section 29, there existed in the philosophy, religion and cosmology of early China a common paradigm in which one idea cluster of exemplary rulership,
ritual, cosmic harmony and spontaneity (i.e., A and B together resonate) was pitted against a second idea cluster of command-based rulership, laws, gods and external causation (i.e., A changes B). The variable separating these idea clusters seems to be the role that external agency plays, absent in the first cluster and dominant in the second.

Wuwei clearly belongs to the first cluster, and I believe it to mean this exemplary influence or resonance in which things are done through self-transformation and not through the direct causation of external agents of laws, rulers or gods. Here and throughout I thus regard the term as “absence of cause” or “causelessness,”  

wei  

literally meaning “cause” and not just “action” as it is normally rendered. In this particular passage, transformations are indeed not caused; in the “empty absence,” everything is resonant and self-transforms.

25. Shiji, 63.2156.
27. Fayan yishu, 114 (“Wendao” 問道). Yang Xiong is probably responding to statements in the Laozi such as “if one cuts short benevolence and removes propriety, the people will return to filial piety and kindness” (絕仁棄義，民復孝慈) and “if one cuts short scholarship, there will be no trouble” (絕學無憂). See Laozi jiaoshi, 74 (chap. 19); 76 (chap. 20) respectively.
29. This line is slightly different in the received Analects, which begins, “I hear much, select the good and follow it” (多聞，擇其善者而從之). Also, for “fix it in my mind” (shì 志) the received version has “retain” (shì 誠). See Lunyu jishi, 490 (“Shu’er 述而”).
30. Lunyu jishi, 1335 (“Zi Zhang 子張”).
31. Lunyu jishi, 578-79 (“Zi Han 子罕”)
32. Lunyu jishi, 465 (“Shu’er 述而”)
33. Baihutong shuzheng, 128 (“Liyue” 禮樂).
34. Elsewhere in the Analects (Lunyu jishi, 1055 [“Wei Ling gong” 衛靈公]), he similarly states that he does not simply retain all learning but seeks out the one continuous thread that binds his understanding together.
35. Lunyu jishi, 579 (“Zi Han”). Most translators take the second wen 文 as “culture,” and while I take wen here as meaning the same as the prior wen,
the general meaning of the passage is in fact no different no matter how you interpret the second wen. I would suggest Confucius intended the wordplay.


38. Inspired by Michael Puett, who in several articles and books urges us to think of early texts as arguments against something and not merely as descriptions of what is, I might suggest a more nuanced spectrum to identify idea types as follows:

1. Deutero-truth. The idea is so embedded, the possessors don’t know they have it. These are only excavated via cross-cultural comparisons (spatial or temporal).

2. Description. The idea is broadly accepted but, unlike the deutero-truth, is recognized (perhaps because of the existence of exceptions that help define the rule).

3. Paradigm. The idea is regularly adopted and regarded as authoritative when viable, an accepted model to utilize when circumstances permit.

4. Argument/prescription. The idea is consciously being inserted to compete in the marketplace of ideas, to serve as a model. Isms are arguments.

5. Ideal/dream. The idea is only an aspiration; what “ought” to be isn’t the same as what “is.”

Each idea type has its own implications, measures and methods of excavation, and so whenever we encounter an idea or object in early China, we perhaps ought to ask ourselves where it falls on this kind of spectrum.

39. For a good description of these three ritual texts, see Puett, “Combining the ghosts and spirits, centering the realm.”


41. Mozi jiaozhu, 705 (“Gong Meng” 公孟). For a similar statement, see the beginning of the Shenjian, 550 (“Zhengti” 政體).


43. Lloyd and Sivin, The Way and the Word, 127. In his Adversaries and authorities, Lloyd also writes (p. 13):
Ideally, to win the competition, you needed not just a theory you could claim as your own, but one you could present as true, better still as certain. Of course, you could proceed—the Greeks often did proceed—by eliminating rival theories, deploying destructive arguments to undermine the claims of the opposition. The hope was that that left only your preferred theory standing.

Like Lakoff and Johnson (see below), Lloyd argues that the competitiveness actually affected the discourse, placing intellectual progress on a particular path, although he argues less from the perspective of language and more from the perspective of how ideas were marketed.

As an aside, I see this competitiveness in my own work in which I often excessively quote evidence—in most cases translated primary sources—to back up my arguments. My style of inquiry has been permanently influenced by four years of high school debate long ago.

45. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors we live by*, 4 (emphasis theirs). Other structuring metaphors we heed are time as a commodity and language as a conduit.

46. *Hanshu*, 30.1746. The *Changes canon* citation is from an associated text known as the “Appended statements” (“Xici” 繫辭); cf. *Zhouyi jijie*, 633. For a discussion of this passage, see Lewis, *Writing and authority in early China*, 328-30.


48. For the “art of contextualization” in the Han, see Hall and Ames, *Thinking from the Han*, 39-43.

49. *Hou Hanshu*, 40.1330.
51. *Qianfulun jianjiaozheng*, 16 (“Wuben” 務本).
52. *Qianfulun jianjiaozheng*, 23 (“Wuben” 務本).

54. In the Han, a *zu*-ancestor (when juxtaposed with a *zong*-ancestor) was the ultimate lineage founder, usually the forebear who had won the territory from which the descendants garnered
their livelihood. In contrast, a zong-ancestor was the proximate lineage founder or a more recent exemplary forebear worthy of perpetual worship because of his great deeds that continued to influence those descendants. (The latter term can also mean “lineage” as a whole and will be explored below.) There was usually only one zu-ancestor, but there could be more than one zong-ancestor, the former outranking the latter. In terms of the Han imperial family, Gaozu (as the name denotes) was a zu-ancestor, and many of his descendants would become zong-ancestors (see Part II). Emperor Guangwu (r. 25-57), having received the zu-ancestor designation himself, is an exception, but this singular designation recognized his restoration of the Han, and so he was indeed the winner of Han’s territory. In practice, the Western and Eastern Han imperial ancestors were kept in separate temples with Gaozu leading the former and Guangwu (as Shizu 世祖) leading the latter.

55. Shiji, 47.1947.
56. Hanshu, 22.1034.
57. Hanshu, 27.1317.
58. Hanshu, 97.4002.
59. Laozi jiaoshi, 19 (chap. 4); Huainan honglie jijie, 28 (“Yuandao” 原道), 278 (“Zhushu” 主術). When emphasizing that dao is not a superordinated principle, Hall and Ames (Anticipating China, 186) write as follows:

All aspects of this order—yin and yang, time and space, heaven and earth—must be historicized as a contingent vocabulary for the world order as we know it. . . . The language is pervasively genealogical: ancestor (zong 宗), mother (mu 母), as well as “thearch” (di 帝) and tian 天.
60. Shiji, 129.3259.
62. For discussions, see Ikezawa, The philosophy of filiality in ancient China, 42-51.
63. Chunqiu Zuozbuan zhu, 1237 (Zhao 昭 3); Yanzi chunqiu jishi, 269 (“Neipianwen” 內篇問).


67. *Hanshu*, 62.2735. Lewis (*Writing and authority in early China*, 309, 479-80) has argued that *jia* here possibly refers to Sima Qian’s lineage that extends back to antiquity, thus implying a sense of comprehensiveness rather than specialization. He also provides a useful list for the various discussions on this passage. Arguing for the opposite reading, Petersen (“Which books did the First Emperor of Ch’in burn?”, 25-27) contends that the phrase should be rendered “the sayings of one person,” *jia* referring to the single individual of Sima Qian and no one else.

68. *Hanshu*, 88.3612. In both the Sima Qian and Yuan Gu example, *jia* might mean family or even individual, and the safer (and more literal) translation might thus be “household,” leaving the actual number of people unstated.

69. In terms of the river image, several early myths and theories describe how water runs under the earth, thus allowing the aboveground rivers to pursue a return journey. See Allan, *The shape of the turtle*, 28-30; Needham, *Science and civilisation in China* 3: 216-19.


72. *Cai zhonglang ji*, 5.3a (“Taiwei Runan Li gong bei” 太尉汝南李公碑).

73. Lewis, *Writing and authority in early China*, 129.

74. Ong, *Orality & Literacy*, 111.

75. Lloyd, *Adversaries and authorities*, 220. Similarly, Collingwood (The *idea of history*, 25) contends that “Greeks as a whole were skilled in the practice of the law courts” and that this skill influenced how history was recorded and perceived.


78. *Xunzi jijie*, 422 (“Zhengming” 正名); 127 (“Ruxiao” 儒效).

79. *Kong congzi*, 331 (“Jiayan” 嘉言); 342 (“Dui Wei wang” 對魏王).


82. *Hou Hanshu*, 76.2476.
83. *Laozi jiaoshi*, 274-75 (Chap. 68).
84. *Zhuangzi jishi*, 63 (“Qiwu lun” 齊物論).
85. For authorship and dating of the *Xiang'er* commentary, see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 58-62.
91. Guthrie, *Faces in the clouds*, 33; Horton, “A definition of religion, and its uses,” 211. Horton adds a rider that this extension must involve a dependency relationship of the microcosm on the macrocosm so as “to exclude pets from the pantheon of gods.”
92. Guthrie, *Faces in the clouds*, 90. Previous scholars recognizing the anthropomorphic leanings of religion range from Xenophanes and Plato in antiquity to Hegel and Schiller in more recent times. Robertson Smith, Émile Durkheim and Robert Bellah all recognize not just anthropomorphism but more specifically the system of human relationships being projected onto the non-empirical realm.
94. Nor can we simply ignore concepts such as “religion,” avoiding the term completely. Every word we use in English has its own extensions and implications, and as the mind is shaped by how words divide up the world, we are still inferring X as sacred and Y as profane, whether or not we use the word “religion.” Modern English (or any language from any era) is a filter between us and our subject matter.
97. Taylor, *The religious dimensions of Confucianism*, 2-3. Taylor is in strong (albeit strange) company as Kang Youwei also described Confucianism as China’s dominant salvific religion, comparable to Christianity in the West; see Nylan, *The five “Confucian” classics*, 66.

If forced to voice an opinion, I would favor Mote’s position because those modern scholars who dub Classicism “religious” must apply rather loose
definitions to religion, definitions that could equally cover philosophy, ideology or any practice that is seen as significantly modifying one's Weltanschauung. How loosely “religion” should be defined is an ongoing debate within comparative religions.

98. Liji jijie, 917 (“Da zhuan” 大傳).
101. Hanshu, 22.1046.
102. Xiaojing yizhu, 86-87 (“Sangqin” 哀親).
103. Mengzi zhengyi, 524 (“Li Lou” 離婁).
104. Mengzi zhengyi, 532 (“Li Lou” 離婁).
105. Mengzi zhengyi, 897-99 (“Jinxin” 尽心). Because honoring the aged and having affection for one’s kin are built into one’s own person, they cannot be influenced by government as if they were a calendar, a ritual or a length of measure. See Liji jijie, 907 (“Dazhuan” 大傳).
106. The entirety of the brief Xiaojing describes how filial piety is the root of all virtue and that no behavior is greater than filial piety. It becomes a norm for the people and a means of communicating with the spirits.
107. Liji jijie, 1214 (“Jiyi” 祭義).
108. Lü shi chunqiu jishi, 14.1a-b (“Xiaoxing” 孝行).
109. Brown, The politics of mourning in early China, 2. Brown problematizes the lord-father analogy because one component of filial piety, namely the call to leave office and mourn one’s father for just over two years, in fact impeded one’s service to the ruler. Furthermore, ties to local regions rather than to the central court could also water down devotion to the ruler. While not fully dissolving the lord-father analogy, her analysis highlights some of the tensions that arose because of it.
110. Huainan honglie jijie, 315 (“Zhushu” 主術).
111. As to the last, see Hanshu, 68.2938.
112. As Tu Wei-ming describes the family metaphor rippling out into the rest of the Confucian program (Centrality and commonality, 114-15):
<ext>That Confucians apply the family metaphor to the community, the country, and the universe is not that they lack non-ascriptive terms
to describe large-scale social and political organizations. Rather, they prefer to address the emperor as the son of Heaven, the king as ruler-father, and the magistrate as the “father-mother official” because of the transcending vision that is implicit in this family-centered nomenclature. The self is not egoistic, for the dynamic process of embodying the human-relatedness of the family for its own enrichment is inherent in the structure of the self. The family is not nepotistic, for the dynamic process of embodying the community, the country, and the universe as the continuum of an organismic unity is inherent in the structure of the family. When Confucius was criticized for not being directly involved in government service, he responded that taking care of family affairs is itself active participation in politics. The cultivation of the self and the regulation of the family are bases upon which the state is governed. They are not merely private affairs, for the public good is realized by them.

113. Liji jijie, 1220 (“Jiyi” 祭義). For similar statements, see Liji jijie, 1197 (“Jifa” 祭法) and Da Dai liji jiegu, 210 (“Yongbing” 用兵).

The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has recently hypothesized a Darwinian explanation for the manifestation of religions in all cultures, a hypothesis that echoes the Ritual records:

<ext>But, to say the least, there will be a selective advantage to child brains that possess the rule of thumb: believe, without question, whatever your grown-ups tell you. Obey your parents; obey the tribal elders, especially when they adopt a solemn, minatory tone. Trust your elders without question. This is a generally valuable rule for a child.

See Dawkins, The god delusion, 174. If we accept Dawkins’ argument, there may be some truth to this Ritual records’ claim that the sages invented religion to foster subservience and obedience among the masses.

114. Liji jijie, 1222 (“Jiyi” 祭義). For a discussion on the evolution of this phrase, see Ouyang Zhenren, “Cong ‘fangu fushi’ dao ‘fanshan fushi’,” 73-78.

115. Guanzi jiaozhu, 3 (“Mumin” 牧民).


117. Xunzi jijie, 376 (“Lilun” 禮論).

118. Shaughnessy, I ching, 2.41, 340-41. Following the transcription of Ikeda Tomohisa (“Maōtei Kan bo hakusho Shūeki Yō hen no shisō,” 12, 23),
Shaughnessy here substitutes hou 後 for fu 復. For a similar approach to divination, see Shiji, 127.3216-19.

119 Weber, The sociology of religion, 62; for a discussion on the term “syncretism” in later Chinese religions, see Timothy Brook, “Rethinking syncretism,” 13-44; for a discussion on how Confucianism, Daoism and so forth all draw from a common religious economy of myths, symbols and practices, thereby making religious pluralism within individuals possible, see Berling, “When they go their separate ways,” 210, as well as her A pilgrim in Chinese culture: Negotiating religious diversity.

Such a religious economy would be unmarketable within Western institutional faiths, but if we regard this economy as sustained by a tree-like structure of idea systems, these diffused religions make more sense. Much ink is currently being spilled on whether Asian religions, particularly Hinduism, are religions at all. In my opinion, the debate suffers because it utilizes Western theories mostly developed from assumptions of adversarility rather than assumptions of connectivity as found within the metaphors structuring Eastern idea systems.

120 Sivin, “Taoism and science,” 48. The only problem with that cliché, he notes, is that it haphazardly conflates the many different meanings of “Daoism,” from the gentleman who might read the Zhuangzi at his leisure to the initiate devotedly joining a religious order.

Developing a case study as to how inaccuracies arise when labeling an individual with just one idea system, Paul Goldin aptly notes that “one cannot simply record Han Fei’s various recommendations to rulers and relate these (as so many textbooks do) as Han Fei’s ‘political philosophy,’ because Han Fei himself tells us in ‘The difficulties of persuasion’ that a minister’s stated opinions need not—indeed, should not—reflect his innermost beliefs.” See Goldin, “The theme of the primacy of the situation,” 5. Citing a variety of texts from the Analects and the Yijing to Zhuangzi and Sunzi, Goldin in this article argues that there is a certain “primacy of the situation” in philosophy and rhetoric that prevents blanket judgments and universal models. In terms of religion, I think his “primacy of the situation” is a useful step toward understanding why the same individual can entertain multiple seemingly inconsistent genres of discourse at the same time.

Turning to the other end of the period under study, a thinker such as Cao Zhi could write essays logically dismissing the existence of immortals on one hand but also compose poetry glorifying them on the other. Some modern schol-
ars argue without evidence that the latter texts came from near the end of his life, but such speculations are not necessary.

121. I fully realize that this general statement is not intellectually satisfying, but it is still undeniably true. Most of us live in multiple inconsistent genres of discourse whether we choose to recognize them or not. A simple example is how we approach the eating of four-legged animals. We do not walk into a diner and ask to eat pig, deer, cow or calf but pork, venison, beef or veal. By changing the words, we remove the life of the animal and safely transform it into a simple product of consumption. More sharply still, we would never consider eating our dog Meghan or our cat Snitch; we cringe at the very thought of roasting a puppy or boiling a kitten. Close household pets fit into one of our genres of discourse whereas distant farmyard animals fit into another, even though biologically they are all just animals. For grander examples of our living in multiple inconsistent genres of discourse, see the conclusion to Part III.

