

Paper submitted to the IJSCS Conference
“Thought, Body, Culture: New Approaches to Chinese Historical Studies”
to be held at the National Ts'ing-hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan, Nov 12-14, 2004
This is only a preliminary draft – please don't quote!

司馬貞爲何要補正《史記》的上古觀？ Why did Sima Zhen want to correct the *Shiji's* account of High Antiquity?

Dorothee Schaab-Hanke 沙敦如 (Hamburg University 漢堡大學)

Content 目錄

Introduction [前言]

1 The man and author Sima Zhen

一、略談司馬貞及其作品

2 Sima Zhen's “Sanhuang benji” as the document of a scholarly dispute

二、司馬貞的「三皇本紀」作爲不同學術派看法的驗證

2.1 The object of Sima Zhen's criticism: The “Wudi benji” chapter of the *Shiji*

1、司馬貞所批評的對象《史記》·「五帝本紀」

2.2 The “Sanhuang benji” and its scholarly background

2、「三皇本紀」的學術背景

2.3 The implication of Sima Zhen's account of antiquity for the theory of dynastic cycles

3、司馬貞的上古觀對於五運說的後果

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

三、司馬貞爲何要補正《史記》的上古觀？

Concluding remarks [結語]

[論文摘要]

司馬貞（約 679–732）爲《史記》的注釋者之一。其《史記索隱》與南朝劉宋裴駙的《史記集解》及唐代張守節的《史記正義》在宋代被合入《史記》正文，通曰《史記三家注》。但司馬貞並沒有將自己局限於單純的注釋，而是對《史記》進行了補充。在《史記索隱後序》中司馬貞闡明其決心爲《史記》作注的因由：“初以殘闕處多，兼鄙褚少孫誣謬，因憤發而補史記(...)。”

司馬貞在《補史記序》中又指出：司馬遷在《史記》開篇的〈五帝本紀〉僅從五帝的黃帝述起，而未涉及三皇，而三皇的歷史已散見於儒家經典之中。司馬貞把這一點看作《史記》的一個缺陷，因而他補寫了《三皇本紀》，以補正《史記》的上古觀。明版《史記評林》便把這一補卷排在了〈五帝本紀〉之前。

本文研究探討作爲注家與作者的司馬貞的思想背景根源。爲此，仔細分析了《三皇本紀》及司馬貞引用的文本，並與司馬遷的描述進行了比較。另外，還試述了西元八世紀的學術討論中司馬貞的立場。本文作者認爲：司馬貞在《三皇本紀》中體現的並不完全是當時流行的儒家思想，他所推崇的似乎略含「自成一家」的意味。

[Summary]

Sima Zhen (c. 679 – c.732) was one of the main commentators of the *Shiji*. His *Shiji Suoyin*, “Explorations into What is Hidden,” was added during the Song dynasty to the main text of the *Shiji*, together with the *Shiji jijie* by Pei Yin (Nanbei chao/ Liusong) and the *Zhengyi* commentary by Zhang Shoujie (Tang), commonly called the “*Shiji* edition with the Three Commentaries” (*Shiji sanjia zhu*). But Sima Zhen did not confine himself to merely writing a simple comment on the *Shiji*, but he wrote in fact a supplement to the *Shiji*. In his “Postface to the *Suoyin* Commentary” Sima Zhen explains why he decided to write these supplements saying: “In the beginning I started to supplement the *Shiji* out of anger, due to the many lacunae or even deficiencies (in the *Shiji*) including the vulgarities caused by Chu Shaosun (...)”

In his “Preface to the Supplemented *Shiji*” (*Bu Shiji xu*), Sima Zhen maintains that one of the deficiencies of the *Shiji* was that the first chapter of the *Shiji*, the “Basic Annals of the Five God-Emperors (*Wudi benji*)” only tells about Chinese history starting with the Yellow Emperor as the first of the Five God-Emperors (*Wudi*), but lacked an account of the Three Exalted (*sanhuang*) evidence for whom would be supported by the Classics. Sima Zhen thus wrote his “Basic Annals of the Three Exalted” (*Sanhuang benji*) in order to correct the view of antiquity represented by the *Shiji*. This supplement has later been placed, e.g. in the Ming edition *Shiji pinglin*,¹ right before the first chapter of the *Shiji*.

In my paper, I shall investigate the ideological roots of the “commentator” and author Sima Zhen. To do this, the main focus will be laid on a closer analysis of his “*Sanhuang benji*” and its exegetical background as compared with that of the *Shiji* account. Besides, I shall try and explain Sima Zhen’s initiative within the scholarly disputes during his own lifetime. As will be argued, Sima Zhen in his account of the Three Exalted did not simply represent “main stream” *Ru* thought as it was current during his own lifetime but seems to have favored a special faction among the scholarly approaches of eighth century Confucianism.

1 The man and author Sima Zhen

Not very much is known about the life and career of Sima Zhen. Neither *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 nor *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 devoted a biographical account to him. Sima Zhen is mentioned twice in the *Xin Tangshu*: in the biography of the famous historian and history critic Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) where he is said to have been involved in a scholarly dispute between Liu Zhiji and Song Jing² and in the bibliographical chapter where his work, the *Shiji Suoyin*, is recorded as comprising 30 *juan*.³

From the few data to be gained on Sima Zhen’s life it can be concluded that he was born during the era Yifeng of Emperor Gaozong, i.e. between 676 and 679, and that he died in

¹ *Shiji pinglin* 史記評林, compiled by Ling Zhilong 凌稚隆, with additional notes by Li Guangjin 李光縉 (Ming, ca. 1574). Facsimile edition: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1998, 6 vols.

² *Xin Tangshu* (*Zhonghua shuju* edition) 132/4522.

³ *Xin Tangshu* 58/1457.

the latter half of the Kaiyuan era (721-741) of Emperor Xuanzong.⁴ He made a career during the reigns of Zhongzong, Ruizong and Xuanzong, holding for some time the title of a *guozi boshi* 國子博士 (Doctor of the National University) and also that of a *guozhi jijiu* 國子祭酒 (Chancellor of the National University) and as a *hongwenguan xueshi* 弘文館學士 (Academician in the Institute for the Advancement of Literature), an institution which originally was a center for important government-sponsored scholarship, but under emperor Xuanzong lost its importance, its place being taken by a new academy established by the emperor in 718.⁵ But Sima Zhen finally ended up in the comparably low post as Runzhou biejia 潤州別駕 (Administrative Aide in Runzhou)⁶ during the era Kaiyuan.⁷

Although it is not clear, whether Sima Zhen wrote his comments and supplements as part of his official duty or privately, it may be suggested from some of his own remarks that at least the main bulk of the work was done by him in his later years, after his retreat from office. This can be suggested from the statement in his postface to the *Suoyin* commentary that he, Zhen, learned in his youth from Zhang Jiahui 張嘉會, an academician affiliated to the Institute for the Advancement of Literature (*hongwenguan*). Of him Sima Zhen states that he was the only one who was thoroughly familiar with the *Shiji*, but did not compile a commentary of his own and that it was only in his later years that he intensified his own studies on the *Shiji*.⁸ Besides, it may be of interest that Sima Zhen mentions in his preface to the supplemented *Shiji* that scholarship on the *Shiji* was transmitted within his family.⁹ If one considers that Sima Qian denoted himself to be the “Little Sima” (*xiao Sima* 小司馬) it is perhaps not too farfetched to assume that he might even have felt some family-related obligations towards Sima Qian and his father Tan with whom he shared the family name.

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

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

In the beginning I started, due to the many lacunae or even deficiencies (in the *Shiji*) including the vulgarities caused by Chu Shaosun to supplement the *Shiji* out of anger; in consequence, I wrote an overall commentary to it, but its merits were only half, and so I said to myself: A historical work of a thousand years cannot so easily be restored in its (former) beauty. After this I have also compiled the *Yinyi* (commentary) and besides, I have rewritten the rhymed eulogies, in the hope I might be able to eradicate all the wrong parts by turning

⁴ A careful study in which the few available data have been collected in order to reconstruct the life data of Sima Zhen has been made by Li Meixun 李梅訓: “Sima Zhen shengping zhushu kao 司馬貞生平著述考,” in: *Anhui shifan daxue xuebao: Renwen shehui kexue ban* 安徽師範大學學報。人文社會科學版 28,1 (2000), pp. 109-111.

⁵ Cf. Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 24; for details on the *hongwenguan* see, e.g., *Tang huiyao* (Shijie shuju edition) 64/1114. According to Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*. Stanford Cal.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1985, no. 2911, the institute was staffed with various academicians (*xueshi*) under administrative leadership of a Supervising Secretary of the Chancellery.

⁶ Cf. Charles O. Hucker, no. 4623.

⁷ For this title see the mentioned bibliographical entry in *Xin Tangshu*.

⁸ 崇文館學士張嘉會，會獨善此書，而無注義。貞少從張學，晚更研尋，(...)

⁹ (...) 而家傳是學 (...)

the Northern axis to the Southern pole. I (thus) wrote altogether thirty *juan*, giving it the title *Shiji Suoyin*.¹⁰

From these words the reader not only gains the impression that Sima Zhen was, as far as his own effort is concerned, even somewhat self-critical, but also that his initial ambition to make an all-encompassing commentary in the course of his work became more and more replaced by a more modest attitude toward the *Shiji*.

2 The “Sanhuang benji” as the document of a scholarly dispute

As for the reasons for Sima Zhen to write the “Sanhuang benji,” twice in his introductory remarks he expresses his dissatisfaction with the “Wudi benji” chapter of the *Shiji*. In his preface to the “Supplemented *Shiji*” he criticizes the *Shiji*'s account of the “Wudi” (Five God-Emperors) and the lack of the “Sanhuang” (Three Exalted) as examples for the deficiencies of the “benji” 本紀 (Basic Annals) part of the *Shiji*.¹¹ In the introductory remarks to his “Sanhuang benji” he writes:

太史公作《史記》，古今君臣宜應上自開闢，下迄當代，以爲一家之首尾。今闕三皇，而以五帝爲首者。正以《大戴禮》有〈五帝德篇〉。又〈帝世〉，皆敘自黃帝已下，故因以《五帝本紀》爲首。其實三皇已還，載籍罕備，然君臣之始，教化之先，既論古史，不合全闕。近代皇甫謐作《帝王代紀》。徐整作《三五曆》，皆論三皇已來事，斯亦近古之一證。今並採而集之，作《三皇本紀》。雖復淺近，聊補闕云。

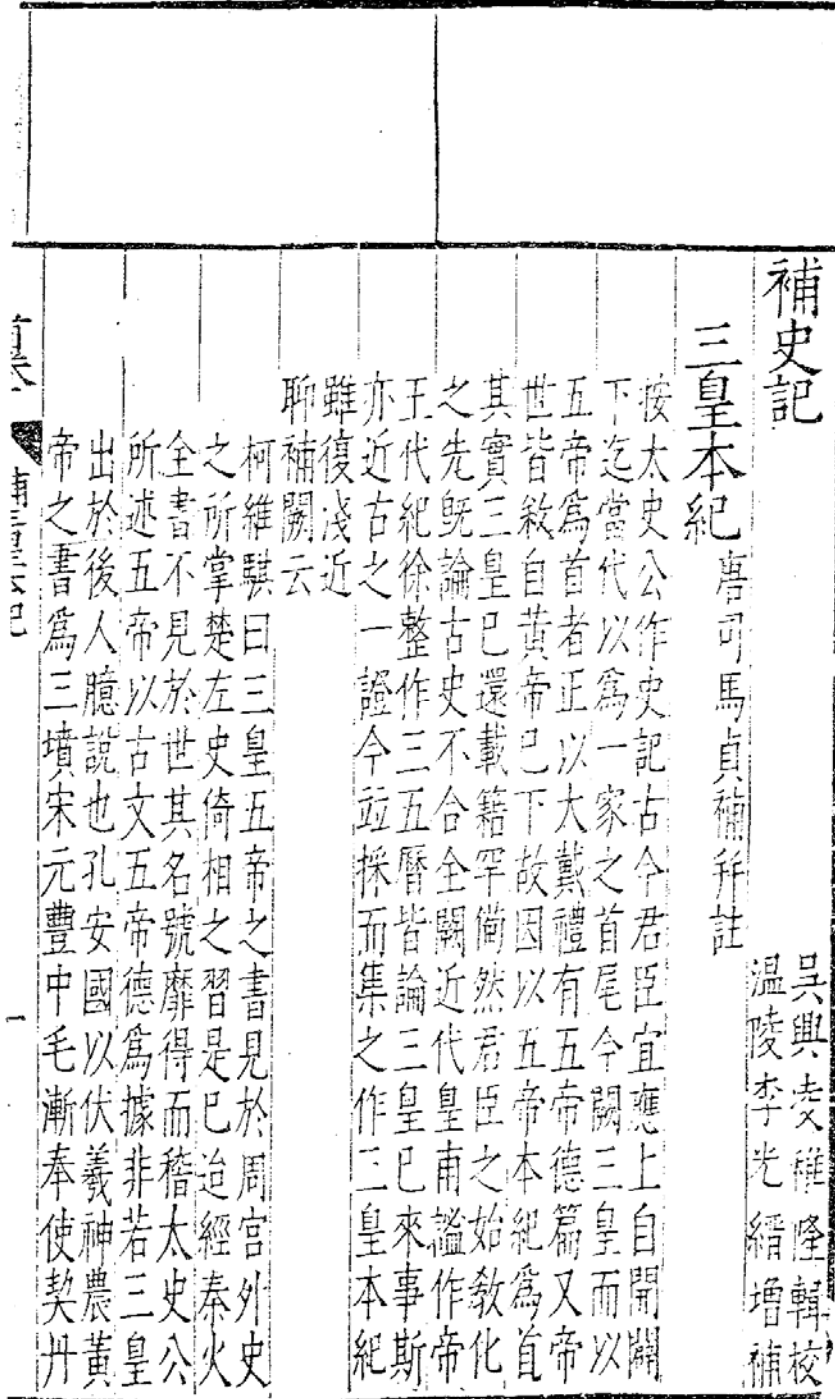
When the Lord the Grand Scribe wrote the “Scribe’s Records,” rulers and ministers of old and of the present were rendered from the very beginning of time up to (the scribe’s) own lifetime, and he [the Grand Scribe] thought that this would be head and tail of one family line. In the now (available) edition, however, the Three Exalted lack,¹² and it is the Five God-Emperors with whom the work sets out; this was correct on the basis of “The Virtues of the Five God-Emperors” in the *Da Dai Liji*. Besides, the “Generations of Emperors” all enumerate the generations beginning with Huangdi, and this was the reason for setting out with the “Basic Annals of the Five God-Emperors.” In reality, the Three Exalted are even more remote, but only few records contain these. But already at the beginning of rulers and ministers and among the ancestors of educational change the old history is discussed, and it would not be correct to wholly neglect it. Recently, Huangfu Mi wrote “Records of Generations of Emperors and Kings,” and Xu Zheng wrote “The Calendar of Three and Five,” and they both discussed the matter of the origin of the Three Exalted. This is almost equivalent with a piece of evidence of old. So today I have selected (sources such as) these and, putting them together, wrote the “Basic Annals of

¹⁰ *Shiji Suoyin houxu* (*Quan Tangwen* 402/6b).

¹¹ “Bu *Shiji xu*” (*Quan Tangwen* 402/7b): 借如本紀敘五帝而闕三皇。 ”For example, in the Basic Annals mention is made of the Five God-Emperors, but no mention is made of the Three Exalted.”

¹² By mentioning the received *Shiji* edition as the “now (available) one” it even seems that Sima Zhen left it open to speculation whether or not there might have existed an original edition which, different from the received one, even may have contained a different account of antiquity.

the “Three Exalted.” Although it is an even more recent (production), I have (thereby) supplemented what had been lacking (in the *Shiji*).¹³



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

¹³ “Bu *Shiji*: Sanhuang benji,” Sima Zhen zhu (*Shiji pinglin*, p.1).

To conclude from these notes, Sima Zhen distinguishes between a “wrong” and a “correct” account of history. The “wrong” one, i.e. the one traced in the “Wudi benji” of the *Shiji*, was made according to Zhen on the basis of the “Wudi de 五帝德” (Virtues of the Five Emperors), a chapter in the received version of the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記, “Rites of Dai The Elder, as well as on the basis of what he calls “Dishi” 帝世 (Generations of God-Emperors), probably the “Dixi” 帝繫 chapter contained in the same source. As for the “correct” succession of God-Emperors, Sima Zhen continues, documents of evidence would be few, but support could be gained from the *Diwang Daiji* 帝王代紀 (i.e. the *Diwang shiji* 帝王世紀), by Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐 (Jin). and from the *Sanwu li* 三五曆, a text credited to Xu Zheng 徐整.¹⁴

Although Sima Zhen apparently does not feel quite satisfied with the sources he could quote as a support for his account of China’s most ancient history, he emphasizes the need for such an alternative account of history, because, as he is convinced, the Three Exalted were prior to the Five God-Emperors and this, he argues, should not be neglected in any further historical account. In what follows, the content of both texts at issue here as well as the scholarly traditions in which these texts are embedded will have to be more closely scrutinized.

2.1 The object of Sima Zhen’s criticism: The “Wudi benji” chapter of the *Shiji*

In the first chapter of the *Shiji*, the “Wudi benji,” the Five God-Emperors starting out with Huangdi, the Yellow God-Emperor, and followed by Zhuangxi, Di Ku, Yao and Shun are depicted, each embellished with some legends concerning the life and activities ascribed to these mythical heroes. In his final remark at the end of the chapter Sima Qian writes:

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

The Lord the Grand Scribe said: Scholars often claim that the Five Emperors were of high antiquity. But the *Shangshu* only records Yao and [the rulers] thereafter, whereas the master of the Hundred Schools talk about the Yellow God-Emperor, but their texts are not (acknowledged) as elegant and fitting. Even civil officials or old masters would have trouble explaining [the history of this period]. What Confucius transmitted in his answer to Zai Yu’s question in the “Wudi de” (Virtues of the Five Emperors) and the “Dixi xing” (Cognomens of the Successive Emperors), some Confucian scholars do not transmit.¹⁵

It is precisely where Sima Qian makes mention of the Confucian scholars of Han times that Sima Zhen in his *Suoyin* commentary adds the following, quite critically, remarks:

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

The “Virtues of the Five Emperors” and the “Cognomens of the Successive Emperors” are both the names of chapters in the *Da Dai Li* and in the *Kongzi*

¹⁴ The *Sanwu li ji* 三五曆記 compiled by Xu Zheng 徐整 in 2 *juan* is recorded in the bibliographical chapter of *Jiu Tangshu* (*Zhonghua shuju* edition 26/1996), section “zashi” 雜史.

¹⁵ *Shiji* 1/46.

jiayu. As these two do not belong to the orthodox canon, the Confucian scholars of Han times did not regard them as the words of the sages, and in consequence, most of them did not transmit these teachings.¹⁶

What is called a “comment” here should in fact be called a personal statement, as it can quite easily be seen which group Sima Zhen in fact sides more: certainly not with the Grand Scribe, Sima Qian, but rather with those Confucian scholars of Han times. – But let’s see how the Grand Scribe continues in his final remarks on this chapter:

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

(...) On a whole [those accounts of the elders] which were not far from the texts of old and thus come close to the truth. I have read the *Spring and Autumn* and the *Lessons of the States* and it is obvious that they shed light on the “Virtues of the Five God-Emperors” and the “Clan-names of the Successive Emperors.” Even though their investigation does not reach very deeply, what they want to reveal is no empty talk. The *Documents* lacks some things and has certain deficiencies. What is still extant, can be seen, from time to time, in other teachings. Only if one carefully and deeply ponders over these, one will know their meaning in one’s heart. It is certainly difficult to make people who have only superficial knowledge realize the way of which one scarcely hears. I have collected these teachings and have discussed them one after another, selecting among them only the most elegant words; and this is why I have put [Huangdi] on top of the Basic Annals.¹⁷

In clear opposition to the conception traced by the *Shiji*, Sima Zhen right after the third character of the chapter – Huangdi zhe 黃帝者 – adds the following remark:

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

He is called Huangdi (Yellow God-Emperor) because he had the portents of the virtue of Earth, and the color corresponding with Earth is Yellow. This is comparable with the fact that Shennong is the king whose virtue is Fire and that he is thus called Yandi (Flaming God-Emperor). The reason that Huangdi is taken here as the head of the Five Emperors is probably based on the “Chapter on the Virtues of the Five God-Emperors” of the *Da Dai Liji*. Besides, Qiao Zhou¹⁸ and Song Jun¹⁹ both represent the same tradition. Contrarily, Kong

¹⁶ *Shiji* commentary 1/47.

¹⁷ *Shiji* 1/46. Cf. the translation by William H. Nienhauser Jr., *The Grand Scribe's Records, vol.1: The Basic Annals of Pre-Han China by Su-ma Ch'ien*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University, 1994, p. 17.

¹⁸ Qiao Zhou 譙周 (199–270) was the compiler of *Faxun* 法訓, *Wujing lun* 五經論 and *Gushi kao* 古史考.

¹⁹ Song Jun 宋均 (Sanguo/ Wei) wrote commentaries to many of the so-called “apocryphal” scriptures, as e.g., the *Shiwei xu* 詩緯序 and the *Chunqiu wei* 春秋緯, sources which are both mentioned in Sima Zhen’s deliberations on the comments to the classics on Filial Piety (*Xiaoqing*) and *Laizi* and the transmission of the *Yi(jing)* 孝經老子注 易傳議 (*Quan Tangwen* 402/2a-4a).

Anguo,²⁰ Huangfu Mi in his *Diwang Daiji* and Master Sun (?) in his commentary to the *Xiben*²¹ unanimously maintain that Fuxi, Shennong and Huangdi are the Three Exalted, and that Shaohao, Gaoyang²², Gaoxin,²³ Tang²⁴ and Yu²⁵ are the Five God-Emperors.²⁶

This is fairly much initiative for a commentary – but let’s go on with the *Shiji* main text: The most remarkable aspect of this essay seems to me that the Grand Scribe in fact reflects on the problem of textual evidence for the earliest rulers of Chinese history. It is thus plain that he as the reflecting historian is much aware of the fact that those sources which were accepted by the *Ru* scholars scarcely talked about Huangdi or one of the other four God-Rulers, whereas those sources in which these were mentioned were not taken seriously by the *Ru*. Sima Qian then proceeds to mention the sources which he draw support from for his decision to put the Five-Emperors and in the first place Huangdi at the beginning of his work and argues that these sources – in his view at least – came close to what would be called “elegant and tame” (*yaxun* 雅馴): the “Wudi de” (Virtues of the Five God-Emperors) and the “Dixi [xing]” (Genealogies of the Emperors), both of which are the titles of chapters in the received text of the *Da Dai Liji*.²⁷ In fact, the “Wudi de” chapter of the *Da Dai Liji* contains a conversation between Zai Wo and Confucius in which Confucius claims that Huangdi was the first ruler of high antiquity, followed by Zhuanxu, Di Gu, Yao and Shun, the “Dixi” chapter of *Da Dai Liji* starting with Shaodian, followed by Huangdi. Although the *Da Dai Liji* was not reckoned among the “Classics” by the Han *Ru* scholars, the *Shiji* author can point at a tradition according to which Confucius taught a succession of rulers in antiquity starting with Huangdi, and this is what he seems to have had meant when talking of texts “which were not far from the texts of old and thus come close to the truth.”

2.2 The “Sanhuang benji” and its scholarly background

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

The “Sanhuang benji” has been transmitted in several editions.²⁸ The text roughly falls into three parts. Whereas the first and second part render different versions concerning what

²⁰ Cf. Kong Anguo’s *Shangshu xu* (尚書序 (Preface to *Shangshu*)). Cf. *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (p. 2064b). As for the term “sanfen wudian 三墳五典”: 正義曰。孔安國尚書序云伏犧神農黃帝之書謂之三墳。言大道也。少昊，顓頊，高辛，唐，虞謂之五典。言長道也。

²¹ This probably refers to a commentary of the *Shiben* 世本。

²² Gaoyang 高陽 is a cognomen of Zhuanxu 顓頊。

²³ Gaoxin 高辛 is a cognomen of Di Ku 帝嚳。

²⁴ Tang 唐 is the clan name of Yao 堯。

²⁵ Yu 虞 is the clan name of Shun 舜。

²⁶ *Suoyin* (*Shiji* commentary 1/1-2). Cf. the almost parallel statement of Zhang Shoujie’s *Zhengyi* commentary.

²⁷ For the “Wudi de 五帝德” see *Da Dai Liji* (ICS: 7.1/40/20–43/3.); for the “Dixi 帝繫” see *Da Dai Liji* (ICS: 7.2/43/5–44/7).

²⁸ My analysis is primarily based on the *Shiji pinglin* edition, bibliographical data for which are given above, and secondarily on the slightly differing version provided by Takigawa Kametarô: 瀧川資言 (1932): *Shiki kaichû kôshô* 史記會註考證. Prefaced dated 1932. Reprint in: *Shiji huizhu kaozheng xin jiaoben* 史記會註考證新校本. Taipei: Tiangong, 1993, p. 11a-13a. A translation of the essay into French has been made by E. Chavannes in his: *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts’ien*, Paris: Angers. First published 1895-1905, vol.1, p. 3-22.

is meant by the Three Exalted (*sanhuang* 三皇), a short third part reflects on the question how many rulers of old went to mount Tai in order to perform the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices and ends with some calculations concerning the amount of periods and of years that had gone by from the very beginning of time up to the end of the Chunqiu period.

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

Of Baoxi we learn that it was him who ruled in the ancient time as a king over all beyond heaven. Next we are told the name of his mother and some other details. Then Fuxi's rulership is characterized as one which considers the structures of Heaven as well as that of Earth and takes both as his model for rule. We also read that Taihao had the body of a snail and the head of a human being, that he invented the eight diagrams used for divination and that he made nets and taught people how to use them for fishing and also that he made the first lute with 25 strings.

As for Nügua, Sima Zhen writes that she had the same cognomen as Huangdi and that she also had the body of a snail and the head of human being, that she invented the first mouth-organ, and he retells the famous myth according to which a certain Gonggong had a struggle with Zhurong, and that Gonggong after having lost the struggle angrily knocked his head against mount Buzhou whereupon one of the heavenly pillars broke, but Nügua took some colored stones and repaired the pillar so that the world could be preserved from damage. That Nügua does not have a position of her own is made plain by the remark that both Fuci and Nügua were equally supported by the element of Wood.

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

Only a short remark is devoted to Huangdi, here called by his cognomen Xuanyuan. Most importantly, we learn that he arose 530 years after Shennong, and we read about the clan names of all the feudal lords during the time of Huangdi.

Sima Zhen then proceeds by adducing an alternative explanation of the Three Exalted, namely: the Exalted of Heaven (*tianhuang* 天皇), the Exalted of Earth (*dihuang* 地皇) and the Exalted of Man (*renhuang* 人皇). It seems that these three also constituted whole dynasties rather than that they were to be regarded as single rulers, because the account goes on to say that the Exalted of Heaven had twelve representatives, the Exalted of Earth eleven, and the Exalted of Man nine. Once again, the correlation of these rulers with the theory of dynastic cycles is indicated by saying that the representatives of the Exalted of Heaven were supported by Wood and that of Earth by Fire, the succession in the cycle thus being the same as stated before with respect to Fuxi-Shennong-Huangdi. The number of the reigning years of all these rulers is given by Sima Zhen as altogether 150 generations, totaling in an amount of 45 600 years.

After a short record of the descendants of these three ages of reigns – there was a dynasty of dragons after the Exalted of Man, followed by several clans whose names are accurately enumerated – Sima Zhen turns to the question of how many rulers had been proceeding to mount Tai and performing the solemn *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices. Here as well he includes different traditions which are at variance with each other, and finally he counts

the years back from the great beginning up to the time when the unicorn was caught which comprised, according to Sima Zhen, all in all 3 276 000 years, consisting of altogether 10 periods (*ji* 紀) consisting each of 17600 years. He concludes by claiming that Huangdi merely reigned during the last of these periods and that the major reason for making his supplements was to add these data to the basic annals.

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

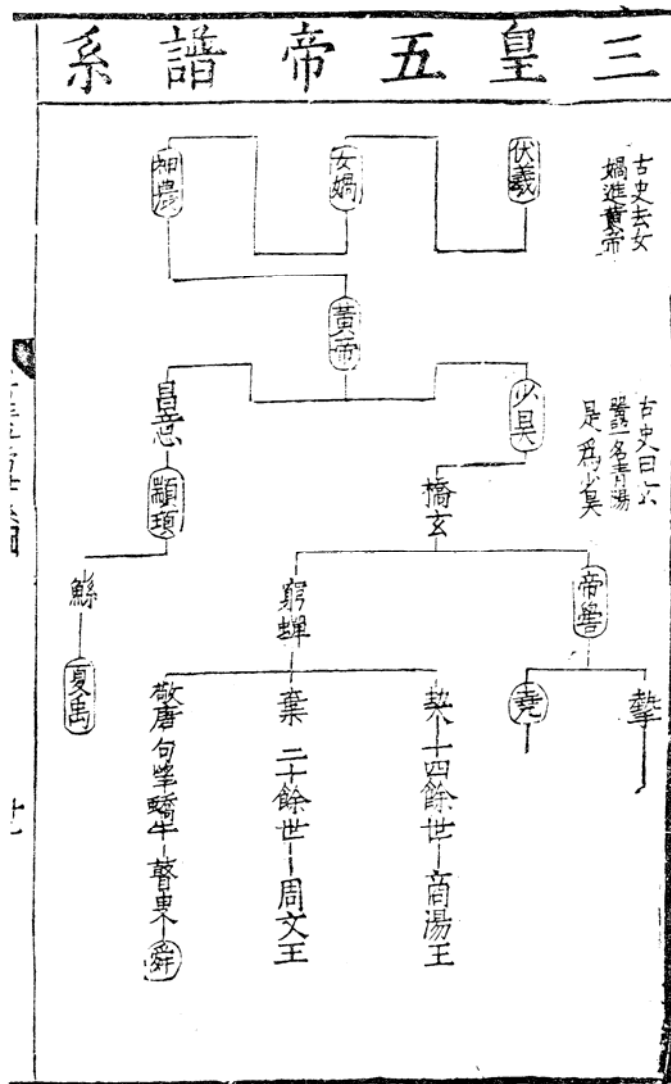


Chart with graphical representation of Sima Zhen's version of the Three Exalted and the Five God-Emperors (*Sanhuang wudi puxi* 三皇五帝譜系) as reproduced in *Shiji pinglin xu*.

(未獲得作者書面同意前，請勿引用。)

We shall now try and find out which sources Sima Zhen referred to by proposing these concepts whose primary purpose must have been: to compete with those by which Sima Zhen in his first chapter had justified his decision for Huangdi.

Only once in his essay on the Three Exalted Sima Zhen explicitly refers to the *Yijing* 易經 as source. But the first part of his essay is in fact based much on the *Yijing*'s “Xici zhuan 繫辭傳,” authorship of which has traditionally been credited to Confucius. There we find the enumeration of Baoxi (Fuxi), Shennong as well as Huangdi, followed by Yao and Shun as the three first rulers in Chinese history, the account of the way in which Baoxi organized his reign by adapting to the cosmos, considering the structures of Heaven as well as that of Earth and taking both as his model for rule. He is described as the inventor of the eight diagrams used for divination and that he made nets and taught people how to use them for fishing. As for Shennong, his function as a teacher for the people how to carve wood, catch fish in nets establish day markets is mentioned, whereas Huangdi is only mentioned briefly, together with Yao and Shun.²⁹ (Cf. also the table in the appendix, column 1.) It thus seems as if the overall structure of the first part of the “Sanhuang benji” was taken from the “Xici zhuan.”

The next source in which material similar to that represented in Sima Zhen's essay can be found is the *Shijing* 世經 (Classic of Generations), an abbreviated version of which is contained in the “Lüli zhi” 律曆志 (Pitch Pipes and Calendar) chapter of the *Hanshu*.³⁰ The passage taken from the *Shijing* starts with a reference to the *Zuozhuan*³¹ and discusses the succession of rulers stated there with the succession of rulers enumerated in the above adduced “Xici zhuan” passage. Then the *Shijing* is quoted with the words:

稽之於易，炮犧、神農、黃帝相繼之世可知。

If one consults the [Book of] Changes, one can know that it were the generations of Baoxi, Shennong and Huangdi who had replaced each other.³²

Apart from confirming the succession Baoxi, Shennong, Huangdi the *Shijing* also refers to the theory of cycles, correlating Fuxi again with Wood, Shennong with Fire and Huangdi with Earth. (Cf. also the table in the appendix, column 2.) Briefly speaking, the *Hanshu* here transmits an earlier text ascribed to the Han scholar Liu Xin in which not only the idea of the Three Exalted Fuxi, Shennong and Huangdi is propagated but also their correlation with the elements is formulated, perhaps even as the earliest evidence for this faction of the ideology of dynastic cycles.

The source which comes closest to Sima Zhen's essay is, however, not the *Shijing*, but the *Diwang shiji* 帝王世紀 (Records of the Generations of Emperors and Kings), a text of which only fragments survived, mostly in encyclopedias and commentaries. Sima Zhen mentions this source, calling it *Diwang Daiji* 帝王代紀, (Records of the Epochs of Emperors and Kings), due to a taboo prescription during his lifetime. Other than the two sources analyzed above, the *Diwang shiji* also contains the concept of the succession of Fuxi, Nügua and Huangdi, as it is propagated by Sima Zhen in his “Sanhuang benji.” (Cf. also the table in the appendix, column 3.)

²⁹ *Yijing*, “Xici zhuan,” xia 繫辭傳下 (ICS: 66/81/19–82/5); cf. *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏, p. 86b-c.

³⁰ *Hanshu* 21B/1011-1013. Ban Gu, the author of the *Hanshu*, writes at the beginning of this chapter that he took over most of the material of this chapter from Liu Xin. See *Hanshu* 21A/955. The title “*Shijing*” 世經 is mentioned at the beginning of the second part of the chapter.

³¹ Cf. *Zuo*, “Zhao” 17, the famous passage where Zou (Yan's) attending the court of the duke of Lu is reported.

³² *Hanshu* 21B/1011.

A detail which deserves special interest here with regard to the relationship between the “Xici zhuan” and the *Diwang shiji* is that in the *Shisanjing zhushu* edition of the *Yijing* it is precisely after the passage on Baoxi (Fuxi) as rendered in the “Xici zhuan” that the commentary provided by Kong Yingda adds the quotation from the *Diwang shiji* in which Nügua is introduced as an additional person or goddess, before the main text proceeds to Shennong.³³ In other words, Sima Zhen in his account of the Three Exalted probably simply took over the “Classic” together with its exegetical tradition.

Interestingly enough, the *Hanshu* also contains a historical survey in which Nügua is given a place of her own. It is in *Hanshu* chapter 20 entitled “Gujin renbiao” 古今人表 (Tables of people of old up to the present). Here we find Taihao (Baoxi, Fuxi) in the first and best-ranked position, the first of altogether nine which means that he was regarded as one of the “wise” (*shengren* 上上聖人). After him follows Nügua, although only ranked in the second-best category, the “humane” (*renren* 仁人). The third person in this succession is Shennong, followed by Huangdi on fourth place, both again being placed on the highest-ranked position.³⁴ Whoever wrote this chapter of the *Hanshu* or, more precisely, the original account on which this chapter is based, the only systematic account of history preceding the Han dynasty which the *Hanshu* contains, must have followed the succession Fuxi/ Nügua, Shennong, Huangdi which Sima Zhen adopted in his “Sanhuang benji.”

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

Sima Zhen mentions the names of some of these apocryphal sources which he explicitly refers to in his account. For example, in his introductory remarks to his “Sanhuang benji” he adduces the *Sanwu li* 三五曆 (Calendar of the Three and the Five) by Xu Zheng 徐整 as one of the sources as support of his theory that the Three Exalted were still more remote than the Five God-Emperors. If one consults the section “Huangdi bu” 黃帝部 (Emperors and Kings), one finds several quotations from this source, mostly concentrating on the concept of the Emperors of Heaven, Earth and Men, explaining e.g. that the Emperor of Earth had nine heads, and there is additional comment saying that all three emperors together reigned 45760 years, an information which is wholly parallel with the information given in the “Sanhuang benji.”³⁵

In his “Sanhuang benji,” Sima Zhen makes mention of two further apocryphal texts, the *Tuwei* 圖緯 and the *Chunqiu wei* 春秋緯. The *Tuwei* he adduces as a piece of evidence for the Tianhuang (Exalted of Heaven) – Dihuang (Exalted of Earth) – Renhuang (Exalted of Man) triade, adding the remark which seems as if he wants to apologize for his choice that because this succession is documented in sources such as this one he simply could not wholly dispense with it and this is why he decided to include this second version as well.³⁶

³³ Cf. “*Diwang shiji*” as quoted in *Shisanjing zhushu*, p. 86c. Another *Diwang shiji* fragment treating Nügua very much parallel with the “Sanhuang benji” account is contained in *Taiping yulan* 78/4b and in *Yiwen leiju* 11/208.

³⁴ *Hanshu* 20/863-867.

³⁵ Cf. *Sanwu li* (*ji*), here probably falsely written with an “er” 二, as quoted in *Taiping yulan* 78/2a: 《二五歷紀》曰：有神聖人九頭，號人皇。（馬摠云：一百六十五代合四萬五千六百年。）天皇、地皇、人皇爲太古。

³⁶ 既是開闢之初。君臣之始圖緯所載。不可全棄。故兼序之。天地初立。

As for the *Chunqiu wei*, Sima Zhen quotes this source at the end of his essay with a computation from the beginning of time up to the caught of the unicorn, comprising a span of altogether 3 276 000 years.³⁷ There is another apocryphal text related to the *Chunqiu*, the *Chunqiu yundou shu* 春秋運斗樞, of which fragments are transmitted in which the triade Fuxi-Nügua-Shennong is confirmed.³⁸ As the Qing scholar Zhao Yi maintains, this text was used as an important source by the Han scholar Zheng Xuan in his comment on the *Shangshu zhonghou* 尚書中候. Zhao Yi maintains that Sima Zhen in his account mainly sought support by Zheng Xuan's comments.³⁹ He also argues that Kong Yingda in his comment on the *Shangshu* honors Zheng Xuan and at the same time refutes Kong Anguo and from his comments the conclusion can be drawn that Sima Zhen by his decision to include Nügua took sides with Zheng Xuan and against Kong Yingda.⁴⁰

Sumarizing the main results of the above analysis, we may say that Sima Zhen based his account of antiquity primarily upon the *Diwang shiji*, a text of which we know that it was still extant at Sima Zhen's lifetime.⁴¹ Not only the many adorning details concerning the person of the Three Exalted but also the mentioning of Nügua among the earliest rulers suggest that this text among the parallels found comes closest to the "Sanhuang benji" version.

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

As for the relationship between the *Diwang shiji* and the "Xici zhuan," a further interesting result was that firstly, the basic structure of the "Sanhuang benji" seems to be based upon the cosmogony rendered in the "Xici zhuan," and secondly, a closer look into the *Shisanjing zhushu* edition of the *Yijing* revealed that it is precisely attached to where this cosmogony is stated in the main text, the *Zhengyi* commentator Kong Yingda had already enriched this account by quoting additional details from the *Diwang shiji*. By including the "Xici zhuan" account as well as that of the *Diwang shiji* into his "Sanhuang benji" Sima

³⁷ A fragment of a *Chunqiu wei* containing this computation is not contained in the *Weishu jicheng*.

³⁸ See the quotation from the *Chunqiu yundou shu* collected in *Weishu jicheng* 緯書集成, 3 vols. (Renmin chubanshe edition), xia, p. 710): 伏犧、女媧、神農，是三皇也。

³⁹ 趙翼曰(...)鄭康成依運斗樞註尚書中候。乃以伏犧女媧神農爲三皇。帝鴻金天高陽高辛唐虞爲五帝。司馬貞因之作三皇本紀。亦以伏犧女媧神農爲三皇。 Cf. Takigawa, *Shiki kaichû kôshô*, p. 12b.

⁴⁰ 孔穎達註尚書最尊安國。故其駁鄭注。謂女媧但修伏犧之道。無所改作。不得列三皇。既不數女媧。則不可不取黃帝爲三皇。 Cf. Takigawa, *Shiki kaichû kôshô*, *ibid.* As for the passage in Kong Anguo's comment which Takiagwa is here referring to, see his "Preface to the *Shangshu*" (*Shangshu xu* 尚書序): 正義曰。孔安國尚書序云伏犧神農黃帝之書謂之三墳。言大道也。少昊，顓頊，高辛，唐，虞謂之五典。言長道也。 See *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (p. 2064b). The comment is added here to the famous *Zuo zhuan* passage, Zhao 12.9 (Yang S. 1340) in which the term sanfen wudian 三墳五典 is explained.

⁴¹ A *Diwang shiji* in 16 juan is recorded in the bibliographical chapters of both, *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*. Cf. *Tangshu jingji yiwèn hezhi*. Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1956, p. 84.

Zhen may thus be described as having melted together a commentary with a sub-commentary, or perhaps for him it was even regarded as “classic and commentary” to make up an all-encompassing account of China’s most ancient history.

A further important source to be mentioned here are the apocryphal texts which Sima Zhen seems to have especially favored. It seems that much of the material both the *Shijing* and the *Diwang shiji* contain already had been taken from the so-called apocryphal texts, as we saw it was not only that Sima Zhen already explicitly mentioned texts such as the *Tuwei* or the *Chunqiu wei* as additional sources but even in the now still available host of fragments from these source one easily finds further parallels with details rendered in the “Sanhuang benji” which neither the still extant fragments of the *Shijing* nor of the *Diwang shiji* contain.

As it became plain from the above said, Sima Zhen’s essay on the Three Exalted is a highly complex patchwork fabric which seems to have been drawn from a variety of sources, the most important of them should have been found and analysed here. If one compares it with the “Wudi benji,” one has the impression that Sima Zhen’s ambition was to conceive an alternative version not only with giving the bare succession of these alternative or additional rulers of antiquity but also by adding as much narrative elements as possible to this version in order to match with the *Shiji*’s depiction of the first five God-Rulers which is, however, in fact still more adorned with legendary material than the “Sanhuang benji.”

2.3 The implication of Sima Zhen’s account of antiquity for the theory of dynastic cycles

That Sima Zhen must have been very much aware of the importance that the theory of dynastic cycles had within the *Shiji* is mirrored not only by his plain attacks on the *Shiji*’s conception both in his comments on the *Shiji* and in his own alternative essay, the “Sanhuang benji,” but also by the fact that twice in his reflections he mentioned that the theory of cycles comprising five hundred years was transmitted in the *Shiji*.⁴²

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

⁴² See his statement at the beginning of his preface to the supplemented *Shiji*: “ren dang wubai zhi yun 人當五百之運” as well as at the beginning of his *Suoyin xu*: Qian zi yi cheng wubai zhi yun 遷自承五百之運).

Table:



- a) The succession of the Five God Emperors and of the dynasties down to Han according to the “theory of mutual conquest”
- b) The succession of the Three Exalted, the Five God Emperors and of the dynasties down to Tang according to the “theory of mutual generation”⁴³
- c) The succession of the Three Exalted according to Sima Zhen’s “Sanhuang benji”

As the above graphic shows, the most important difference between the two competing concepts is their impact on the position of Huangdi and the remaining four God-Emperors. Whereas according to the “mutual conquest” model Huangdi as well his four successors all belong to the element of Earth, according to the “mutual generation” model each of the Five Emperors has a position of his own within the cycle, and the first of them is not Huangdi but Shaohao, preceded by the Three Exalted: Fuxi (Nügua), Shennong and Huangdi.

The fact that the two concepts of succession of elements correlated to the succession of rulers and dynasties were indeed part of competing groups of intellectuals is expressed in the “Jiaosi zhi” 郊祀志 (state ceremonies) chapter of the *Hanshu*. In Ban Gu’s praising

⁴³ Cf. the two competing models as depicted by Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛: “Wude zhongshi shuo xia de zhengshi he lishi” 五德終始說下的政治和歷史, in: *Gu Jiegang gushi lunwen ji* 顧頡剛古史論文集, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1996, S. 302.

words at the end of the chapter the history of the continuing misinterpretations of these cycles from the beginning of the Han dynasty is depicted. Starting with Zhang Cang who maintained the view that the dynasty was still, since the times of the Qin dynasty, supported by the element of Water, continued by scholars such as Gongsun Chen and Jia Yi who were convinced that the dynasty was in reality supported by the element of Earth, a misunderstanding which was still shared, according to the words of Ban Gu, by Ni Kuan and Sima Qian. Whereas these scholars all believed in the succession of the elements in the “mutual conquest” order it was only with Liu Xiang and his son Xin that the new, correct succession was found, the mutual generating sequence, and it was them, Ban Gu concludes, who were the first to correctly attribute the element of Fire to the Han dynasty.⁴⁴

As I have argued in a previous study, the question of the position of the Han dynasty in the cycle was not at all a trivial question for the author of the *Shiji*.⁴⁵ Sima Qian as well as his father Sima Tan 司馬談 before him who served emperor Wu in the position of Grand Scribe were personally much involved in the question of court ceremonial and calendar and especially in the preparation of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices which emperor Wu had decided to perform on mount Tai for the first time after the First Emperor of the Qin dynasty. Both the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* unanimously record that Sima Tan in his function as the emperor’s advisor in the question of ritual, recommend him to choose the color Yellow as the correct color for the ceremonial vestments. Yellow is the color of Earth and thus correlated with Huangdi who was, according to their theory, at the beginning of history and now for the first time recurring as the sixth element in the cycle since the beginning of time.

Seen from this perspective, the correction of the *Shiji*’s view of antiquity becomes all the more recognizable as a serious manipulation Sima Zhen undertook by writing his account of the Three Exalted. Although we do not know whether he originally planned to really rewrite the *Shiji* itself or whether he merely planned to write this essay as a first attempt of contributing to a new, future book of history in which this part of the *Shiji*’s view would be replaced by one which would be more compatible with the Han Confucian view of the world— at any rate, his act of correction was not at all a trivial act.

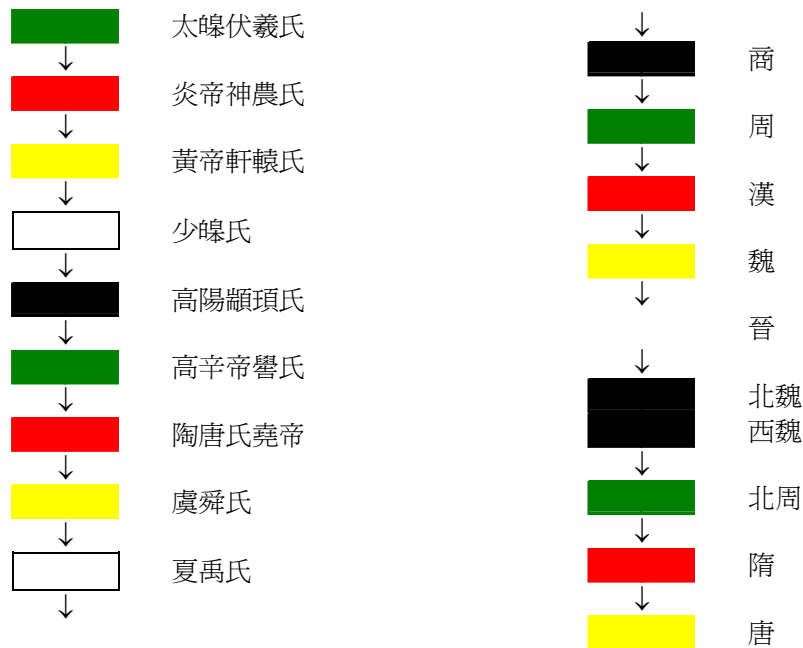
Last but not least, it will be made an attempt at explaining which concrete implication the shift from the model of mutual conquest as laid down in the *Shiji* to the model of mutual generation as laid down by Liu Xin and his followers had for Tang dynasty *Ru* scholars and their needs. It seems that in the Tang dynasty the latter model was used again for purposes of dynastic legitimation. As the scholar Wang Yuqing could show in a study on vestments used for ceremonial purposes, it was supposed by Tang scholars that this dynasty was thought to be supported again by the element of Earth and thus the ceremonial vestment had the color Yellow.⁴⁶

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

⁴⁴ *Hanshu* 25B/1270-1. For Liu Xin’s theory and its basic similarity with the concept represented by Sima Qian see also the study by Wang Gaoxin 汪高鑫: “Lun Liu Xin de xin wude zhongshi lishi xueshuo 論劉歆的新五德終始歷史學說,” in: *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu* 中國文化研究 2(2002), p. 85-94.

⁴⁵ See my study “The power of an alleged tradition: a prophecy flattering Han Emperor Wu and its relation to the Sima clan,” in: *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern antiquities* 74 (2002): 251-300.

⁴⁶ Wang Yuqing 王宇清: *Guofu shixue gouchen* 國服史學鉤沉. 2 Bde. Taipei: Furen, 2000, p. 143-148 (“Sui Tang Wudai jibei xiangsheng” 隨唐五代繼北相生) and the color diagram between pp. 160 and 161.



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

It is now time to turn to the question raised in the beginning of this paper, namely, why Sima Zhen intended to correct the *Shiji's* account of high antiquity. On a surface level we already have an answer to this question, namely the one which Sima Zhen gave himself in his “Postface to the *Suoyin* commentary.” He did it out of anger, but still we do not know what precisely made him so angry when reading the *Shiji's* account on the Five God-Emperors that he had decided to make his comments on and supplements to the *Shiji*.

From the above analysis we now can quite easily assume why Sima Zhen felt the need to replace the Five God-Emperors with Huangdi as their head by the Three Exalted: Sima Zhen as a representative of the Han *Ru* scholarly community simply wanted to adapt the concept of China's most ancient history to the basic tenets of the Confucian community. But if this was the case, why then did Sima Zhen not entirely adopt the Fuxi-Shennong-Huangdi concept of the Three Exalted but instead preferred the somehow strange compromise of the Fuxi-Nügua construction? And a second question which arises is: Why did Sima Zhen contribute to a new historical account in which the concept of the Three Exalted was made part of the history of the most remote antiquity but instead laid hand at an already existing historical account trying to “correct” those parts which seemed to be “wrong” or “outdated” to him?

As for the first part of the question, namely, why Sima Zhen did not adopt that conception of the Three Exalted which would probably have been much more compatible with the view maintained by other Tang Confucians, we are lucky to have evidence of a scholarly dispute between Liu Zhiji and a competing group of *Ru* scholars headed by Sima Zhen, a debate the documents contributing to which have been transmitted in several

sources.⁴⁷ The debate was encouraged by emperor Xuanzong who wanted the scholars to discuss the reliability of certain commentarial traditions to the *Xiaojing* (Classic of Filial Piety), to the *Laozi* and to the *Yijing*. As for the *Xiaojing*, he wanted to know whether the comment by Kong Anguo or rather the one credited to Zheng Xuan should be given priority and which should be neglected, pointing towards the fact that both commentaries sometimes were in variance with each other. Liu Zhiji in his response argued very much in favor of Kong Anguo's commentary, downplaying the importance of Zheng Xuan's work and even doubting the authenticity of this text. Sima Zhen for his part challenged the view that Kong Anguo's commentary to the *Xiaojing* was authentic and defending the Zheng Xuan commentary which in his view even if it should not be authentically written by Zheng Xuan himself had nothing which would wholly run counter the classics. On a whole, Sima Zhen argued in favor of giving both commentaries official approval.⁴⁸

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

As for the second part of the above raised question, namely why Sima Zhen did not leave the former conception of history laid down in the *Shiji* as it was but had the ambition at all to "correct" it, although the answer to this question is up to speculation it is perhaps not too farfetched to assume that the key for the understanding Sima Zhen's intention will lie in his relationship toward the *Hanshu*. As we can conclude from Sima Zhen's "Postface to his *Suoyin* commentary," he considered the *Hanshu* to be the ideologically more reliable work.⁴⁹ This claim is, however, looking back on a long history itself. The reproach was first made by Ban Biao, the father of Ban Gu, repeated by the Han philosopher Yang Xiong and echoed by many scholars who by doing so demonstrated whom they sided with down to Tang times. If one compares the amount of commentaries written for the *Hanshu* with those written for the *Shiji* during Tang times one can easily see how much more appreciated the *Hanshu* must have been as a text. But Sima Zhen was, as we saw, a specialist for the *Shiji*, and it would be plausible to assume that he cherished the hope that by changing only some parts of the *Shiji* he might be able to help this work to gain more importance than it hitherto had.

⁴⁷ For the documents submitted to the throne by Liu Zhiji and Sima Zhen see: *Cefu yuangui* 604/9a-11b; *Wenyuan yinghua* 604/9a-11b; *Tang huiyao* 77/1408-9; *Quan Tangwen* 402/2a-4a. Both documents have been translated into English by William Hong. See his study: "A bibliographical controversy at the Tang court, A.D. 719," in: *HJAS* 23 (1960-61): 93-197.

⁴⁸ David McMullen mentions this debate in his study on scholarship in Tang China judging it as "invaluable ... in showing the sophistication of early eighth century view of textual transmission." See David McMullen: *State and Scholars in Tang China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 86.

⁴⁹ (...)其班氏之書，成於後漢，彪既依遷而述，所以條流更明，且又兼採眾賢，群理畢備，故其旨富，其詞文，是以近代諸儒，共所鑽仰。其訓詁蓋亦多門，蔡謨集解之時，已有二十四家之說，所以於文無所滯，於理無所遺。而太史公之書，既上序軒黃，中述戰國，或得之於名山壞宅，或取之以舊俗風謠，故其殘文斷句，難究詳矣。 See *Quan Tangwen* 402/5b-6b; *Shi pinglin*, p. 37.

The reason why especially the concept of the Three Exalted as represented in the first chapter of the *Shiji* was regarded by Sima Zhen as a part of the *Shiji* which urgently needed a correcting hand can be easily imagined if one only takes a closer look at the role the Three Exalted play both in official documents as well as in theoretical essays written during the eighth century.

Liu Zhiji in the section “Gujin zhengshi” 古今正史 (correct histories past and modern) of his *Shitong* 史通 treats the question of the correct view of antiquity. Based on quotations from the *Yijing*, *Liji* and *Chunqiu* he confirms the concept of Huangdi, Shennong and Fuxi as the Three Exalted and rejects the Five God-Emperors as the most remote of Chinese history. Interestingly enough, he even criticizes both Sima Qian and Ban Gu for their reluctance not to go far enough back in history in their accounts of history.⁵⁰

Both in *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu* we find records concerning the establishment of temples in Luoyang and Chang'an during the reign of emperor Xuanzong which should be dedicated to the Three Exalted.⁵¹

At the beginning of the bibliographical chapter of *Jiu Tangshu* the “Three Exalted and the Five God-Emperors” are mentioned in the introductory remarks to this chapter.⁵² It seems that the term here already had become almost a commonplace statement.

Finally, it should be added that the question of the correct succession of the early God-Emperors regained importance in the Tang dynasty in the context of the *Feng* and *Shan* sacrifices, especially during the reign of emperor Xuanzong. Zhang Yue 張說 (667–730), the “chief-ideologue” among Xuanzong’s officials who was responsible for the ceremonial reforms not only urged the emperor to perform sacrifices which should be even more splendid than those during the time of emperor Wu of the Han.⁵³

Concluding remarks

If one takes a glimpse at the reception of Sima Zhen’s ideas in later sources one finds quite critical voices concerning his attempt at correcting the *Shiji*’s view of the world. The *Shiji* commentator Takigawa Kametarô in his *Shiki kaichû kôshô* 史記會註考證 remarked on Sima Zhen’s essay:

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

As for the names of the Three Exalted, there is no safe tradition, so what sense does it make to scrutinize whether these had existed or not. Sima Zhen should not have written his supplementary basic annal. Now I have put it after the

⁵⁰ He quotes Sima Qian with the words that about the time of Shennong and earlier nothing could be known. See *Shiji* 129/3253, and Ban Gu with the statement one could not know any details about the matters of Huangdi and Zhuanxu (cf. *Hanshu* 62/2737) See *Shitong* (Shitong tongshi edition), 12/329.

⁵¹ See e.g. *Jiu Tangshu* 24/915; 130/3619; cf. *Tang huiyao* 22/430; as for emperor Xuanzong’s edict initiating the construction of these temples, see *Quan Tangwen* 31/13a-b.

⁵² *Xin Tangshu* 57/1421: (...) 至於上古三皇五帝以來世次，國家興滅終始，僭竊僞亂，史官備矣。

⁵³ As for the texts of the hymns sung during the ceremony and which were composed by Zhang Yue, see *Yuefu shiji* (Zhonghua shuju edition), 5/67-69; cf. *Jiu Tangshu* 30/1097-1099. A more detailed study on Zhang Yue and his influence on Emperor Xuanzong is presently in progress.

prefaces of the *Suoyin* (commentary) in order to separate it from the historiographical text proper.⁵⁴

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

Dans sa double tentative pour compléter l’oeuvre de Se-ma Ts’ien soit par les trois souverains Fou-hi, Niu-koa et Chen-nong, soit par les dynasties surnaturelles du Ciel, de la Terre et de l’homme, Se-ma Tcheng n’a rien ajouté de positif à l’histoire de Chine.⁵⁵

Even if one is not convinced, however, that Sima Zhen’s corrected draft of history is more successful than the former effort done by Sima Qian was, one should, however, be cautious with judging whether or not Sima Zhen’s contribution was positive or not for China’s history. The essay is, as should have become plain from the above analysis, an important document for the scholarly debates during the eighth century in China and offers an valuable insight into the motives for Tang scholars to rethink history within the frame of classical scholarship of that time.

⁵⁴ *Shiki kaichû kôshô* 史記會註考證, p. 13a.

⁵⁵ Édouard Chavannes: *Les Mémoires Historiques de Se-ma Ts’ien*, Paris: Angers. First published 1895-1905, vol. 1, Introduction, CCXVI.

Appendix : Table on the “Sanhuang benji” and its parallels in earlier texts

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Yijing, Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀 1
<p>[1]太皞庖犧氏。 風姓代燧人氏繼天而王。 母曰華胥。 履大人跡於雷澤而生庖犧於成紀。蛇身人首。 2a 有聖德。</p> <p>仰則觀象於天。俯則觀法於地。旁觀鳥獸之文與地之宜。 。近取諸身遠取諸物。始畫八卦以通神明之德。以類萬物之情。</p> <p>造書契以代結繩之政。於是始制嫁娶以儷皮為禮。</p> <p>結網罟以教佃漁。 故曰宓犧氏。 養犧牲以庖廚。故曰庖犧。</p> <p>有龍瑞。以龍紀官。號曰龍師。</p> <p>作三十五弦之瑟。 木德王。</p> <p>注春令故易稱帝出乎震。月令孟春其帝太皞是也。 都於陳。東封太山。立一十一年崩。 其後裔當春秋時。有任。宿須 2b 句顛矣。皆風姓之胤也。</p>	<p>古者包犧氏之王天下也。</p> <p>仰則觀象於天。俯則觀法於地。觀鳥獸之文。與地之宜。近取諸身。遠取諸物。於是始作八卦。以通神明之德。以類萬物之情。</p> <p>作結繩而為罔罟。以佃以漁。蓋取諸離。</p>	<p>太昊帝 易曰：「炮犧氏之王天下也。」言炮犧繼天而王，為百王先，...</p> <p>首德始於木，故為帝太昊。作罔罟以田漁，取犧牲，故天下號曰炮犧氏。</p>	<p>[十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c] 包犧者，案《帝王世紀》云:大□帝包犧氏，風姓也。母曰華胥，燧人之世，有大人跡出於雷澤，華胥履之而生包犧。長於成紀，蛇身人首，有聖德， ... [太平御覽721/2b,帝王世紀] 伏羲氏仰觀象於天，俯觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文，與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是造書契以代結繩之政，畫八卦以通神明之德，以類萬物之情， ... [初學記9/196,帝王世紀] 炮犧氏，...制嫁娶之禮，取犧牲以充庖廚，故號庖犧氏，是為犧皇。後世音謬，故謂之伏犧，或謂之密犧。</p> <p>[十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c] 取犧牲以充包廚，故號曰“包犧氏”</p> <p>[初學記30/730,皇甫謐帝王世紀] 太昊庖犧氏，風姓，有景龍之瑞，故以龍紀官。</p> <p>[路史後紀,世紀] 伏犧作瑟三十五弦。 木德王。</p> <p>[初學記9/196,帝王世紀] 炮犧氏，風姓也。蛇身人首，有聖德。燧人氏沒，庖犧代之，繼天而王。首德于木，為百王先。帝出于震，未有所因，故位在東方。主春，象日之明，是稱太昊。都陳， ... [十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c] 在位一百一十年。</p>

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Yijing, Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀 2
<p>女媧氏亦風姓。蛇身人首。有神聖之德。代宓犧立。號曰女希氏。無革造。惟作笙簧。故易不載。不承五運。</p> <p>一曰。女媧亦木德王。蓋宓犧之後。已經數世。金木輪環。周而復始。特舉女媧以其功高而充三皇。故頻木王也。</p> <p>當其末年也。諸侯有共工氏。任智刑以強霸而不王。以水乘木。乃與祝融戰。不勝而怒。乃頭觸不周山。崩。天柱折。地維缺。女媧乃鍊五色石以補天。斷鼈足以立四極。聚蘆灰以止滔水。以濟冀州。於是地平天成不改萬物。</p> <p>女媧氏沒。神[3a]農氏作。炎帝神農氏。姜姓。母曰女登。有女媧氏之女。為少典妃。感神龍而生炎帝。人身牛首。長於姜水。因以為姓。</p> <p>火德王故曰炎帝。以火名官。斲木為耜。揉木為耒。耒耨之用以教萬人。始教耕故號神農氏。於是作蜡祭。以楮鞭鞭草木。始嘗百草。始有醫藥。</p>	<p>包犧氏沒。神農氏作。</p> <p>斲木為耜。揉木為耒。耒耨之利。</p>	<p>祭典曰：「共工氏伯九域。」言雖有水德，在火木之間，非其序也。任知刑以彊，故伯而不王。秦以水德，在周、漢木火之間。周人?其行序，故易不載。</p> <p>炎帝易曰：「炮犧氏沒，神農氏作。」言共工伯而不王，雖有水德，非其序也。以火承木，故為炎帝。</p> <p>教民耕農，故天下號曰神農氏。</p>	<p>[十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c] 包犧氏沒，女媧氏代立為女皇，亦風姓也。</p> <p>[太平御覽78/4b,帝王世紀] 女媧氏，亦風姓也。承庖羲制度，亦蛇身人首，一號女希，是為女皇。未有諸侯，有共工氏，任智刑以強，伯而不王，以水承木，非行次，故《易》不載。</p> <p>[藝文類聚11/208,帝王世紀] 帝女媧氏。亦風姓也。作笙簧。亦蛇身人首。一曰女希。是為女皇。其末諸侯共工氏。任知刑以強。伯而不王。</p> <p>[十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c] 女媧氏沒，次有大庭氏、柏黃氏、中央氏、栗陸氏、驪連氏、赫胥氏、尊盧氏、混沌氏、□英氏、有巢氏、朱襄氏、葛天氏、陰康氏、無懷氏，凡十五世，皆習包犧氏之號也。</p> <p>[十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c] 神農者，案《帝王世紀》云：炎帝神農氏，姜姓也。母曰任己，有□喬氏女，名曰女登。為少典正妃，游華山之陽，有神龍首感女登於尚羊，生炎帝，人身牛首，長於姜水，有聖德，繼無懷之後，本起烈山，或稱烈山氏，在位一百二十年而崩。納奔水氏，女曰聽談，生帝臨魁，次帝承，次帝明，次帝直，次帝□，次帝哀，次帝榆罔，凡八代及軒轅氏也。</p>

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Yijing, Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀 3
<p>又作五弦之瑟。 教人日中爲市。交易而退。各 3b 得其所。遂重八卦爲六十四爻。初都陳。後居曲阜。</p> <p>立一百二十年崩。葬長沙。 神農本起烈山。故左氏稱烈山氏之子曰桂。亦曰厲山氏。 禮曰。厲山氏之有天下。是也。 神農納奔水氏之女曰聽訖爲妃。 生帝哀。哀生帝克。克生帝榆罔。 凡八代。五百三十年而軒轅氏興焉。</p> <p>其後有州。甫。甘。許。戲。露。齊。紀。怡。向。申。呂皆姜姓之後。並爲諸侯。或分四岳 4a 當周室甫侯申伯爲王賢相。齊許列爲諸侯霸於中國蓋聖人德澤廣大。故其祚胤繁昌久長云。</p> <p>一說三皇謂天皇。地皇。人皇爲三皇。既是開闢之初。君臣之始圖緯所載。不可全棄。故兼序之。天地初立。有天皇氏。十二頭。澹泊無所施爲。而俗自化。木德王歲起攝提兄弟十二人。立各一萬八千歲。 地皇十一頭。火德王。姓十一人。興於熊耳龍門等山。亦各萬八千歲。</p> <p>人皇九頭。乘雲車駕六羽。出谷口。兄弟九人。分長九州。各立城邑。凡一百 4b 五十世。合四萬五千六百年。</p> <p>自人皇已後有五龍氏。大庭氏柏皇氏。中央氏。卷須氏栗陸氏。驪連氏赫胥氏。尊盧氏。渾沌氏。昊英氏有巢氏朱襄氏。葛天氏。陰康氏。無懷氏斯蓋三皇已來有天下者之號。但載籍不紀莫知姓王年代所都之處。</p>	<p>以教天下。蓋取諸益。日中爲市。致天下之民。聚天下之貨。交易而退。各得其所。蓋取諸噬嗑。</p> <p>神農氏沒。黃帝堯舜氏作。</p>	<p>黃帝易曰：「神農氏沒，黃帝氏作。」火生土，故爲土德。與炎帝之後戰於阪泉，遂王天下。始垂衣裳，有軒冕之服，故天下號曰軒轅氏。</p>	<p>[十三經注疏,周易,繫辭傳正義,p.86c,帝王世紀] 神農...有聖德，繼無懷之後，本起烈山，或稱烈山氏，在位一百二十年而崩。納奔水氏，女曰聽訖，生帝臨魁，次帝承，次帝明，次帝直，次帝釐，次帝哀，次帝榆罔，凡八代及軒轅氏也。 [初學記9/196,帝王世紀] 神農氏，...有聖德；以火承木，位在南方，主夏，故謂之炎帝。都于陳，在位百二十年而崩。至榆罔，凡八世，合五百三十年。</p> <p>[北堂書鈔158/3a] 帝王世說曰天地開闢有天皇氏，地皇氏，人皇氏，或冬穴夏巢或食鳥獸之肉。</p>

Sanhuang benji 三皇本紀	Yijing, Xici zhuan 繫辭傳	Shijing 世經	Diwang shiji 帝王世紀 4
<p>而韓詩以爲自古封太山禪梁甫者萬有餘家。仲尼觀之不能盡識管子亦曰古封太山七十二家。夷吾[5a]所識。十有二焉。首有無懷氏。然則無懷之前天皇已後年紀悠邈。皇王何昇而告。但古書亡矣不可備論。豈得謂無帝王邪。故春秋緯。稱自開闢。至于獲麟。凡三百二十七萬六千歲。分爲十紀。凡世七萬六百年。一曰九頭紀。二曰五龍紀。三曰攝提紀。四曰合雒紀。五曰連通紀。六曰序命紀。七曰修飛紀。八曰回提紀。九曰禪通紀。十曰流訖紀。蓋流訖當黃帝時制九紀之間。是以錄於此補紀之也。</p>			