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From Aggregation to Architecture: A Digital Analysis of *Zhouli* 周禮 as Framed by Mid-to-Late-Western Han Writings

ABSTRACT:
The *Zhouli* text has remained one of the most enigmatic yet important Chinese written works since its late-Western Han emergence. This study, instead of devoting attention to dating its individual components, basically analyzes it as a meticulously structured whole with remarkable internal coherence. Utilizing digital tools, I reveal its intricate combination of dichotomous and trichotomous frameworks, cross-referencing mechanisms, and use of repetition to create a tightly interwoven textual network. *Zhouli* presents an unprecedented degree of architectural design, making it probably one of the first Chinese works that can be called a "book." I argue that this sophistication points to compilation in the mid-to-late-Western Han, when written culture had matured enough to support such an ambitious textual design. Furthermore, I contextualize it within the intellectual and political milieu of emperors Yuan and Cheng, a period marked by administrative and ritual reforms and the increasing integration of binary and ternary systems in philosophical thought. While Wang Mang and Liu Xin later appropriated *Zhouli* themes for their political agendas, I argue that the text is unlikely to have been their fabrication.

KEYWORDS:
Zhouli, *textual structure, digital analysis, Western Han intellectual history, book culture*

INTRODUCTION

Zhouli 周禮 (or, *Rites of Zhou*) is entangled with numerous conundrums, making it one of the most controversial early Chinese texts since its emergence at the end of the Western Han, roughly 30 BC to 20 AD. For example, within its conceptual framework, any authoritative king remains largely invisible: only one sentence at the beginning of each chapter refers to his establishment of a bureaucratic system. Yet, every official is expected to obey and implement the king's decrees, not to mention the large number of officials who are mere servants of the king and his family. Some scholars, therefore, interpret such a king as a nominal monarch,[1] linking this depiction either with the trend of sepa-

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[1] E.g., see Jin Chunfeng 金春峰, *Zhouguan zhi chengshu jiqi fanying de wenhua yu shidai xinkao* 周官之成書及其反映的文化與時代新考 (Taipei: Dong da tushu gongsi, 1994), p. 7.

rating the king from the bureaucratic system during the Warring States period,[2] or with a certain philosophy of non-action governance that was popular in the early Western Han.[3] In contrast, others argue that the *Zhouli* king is an absolute autocrat who concentrates unto himself all supreme powers.[4] Also, this text only gained prominence and was later elevated to the status of a classic under the promotion of Wang Mang 王莽 (45 BC–23 AD) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (d. 23 AD).[5] However, few of Wang Mang's innovations were actually implemented according to *Zhouli*'s prescriptions.[6] As a result, some scholars view *Zhouli* as a creation of Wang Mang and Liu Xin, through which they expressed their political ideals,[7] while others argue that Wang Mang would not have forged a text that provided little practical support for his enterprise, an opinion that suggests instead the work must predate Wang and Liu.[8] Interestingly, despite the fact that *Zhouli* makes no reference to any par-

2 See Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: SUNY P., 1999), pp. 42–48.

3 See David Schaberg, "The *Zhouli* as Constitutional Text," in Benjamin A. Elman and Martin Kern, eds., *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 33–63, esp. 36. Schaberg, aligning with Jin Chunfeng, dates *Zhouli* to the Qin dynasty and suggests that in the early Han the text may have been perceived as an example of Huang-Lao statecraft.

4 See Liu Huaze 劉華澤, *Zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshi ji* 中國政治思想史集, Vol. 1: *Xian Qin zhengzhi sixiangshi* 先秦政治思想史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2008), pp. 307–9.

5 Timothy Baker observes that references to *Zhouli* predominantly appear late in the Western Han, during the Wang Mang period or the two preceding decades, and are almost exclusively linked to Liu Xin or Wang Mang. This, he argues, clearly indicates that the text's popularity was concentrated within that political faction. See Baker, "The Imperial Ancestral Temple in China's Western Han Dynasty: Institutional Tradition and Personal Belief," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 2006), p. 163.

6 Liu Qiyu 劉起釪, "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhi zheng ji qi shu xiecheng de zhenshi yiju" 周禮真僞之爭及其書寫成的真實依據, in his *Gushi xubian* 古史續辨 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), pp. 619–53, esp. 624–25. Although Liu Xin and over seventy scholars are said to have praised Wang Mang for "discovering" *Zhouli*, the official system Wang Mang implemented was a haphazard patchwork, distorted and drawn from various sources. In practice, he did not fully implement it. Scholars have noted that Wang Mang's reforms differed from *Zhouli* more than they resembled it. E.g., see Hou Jiaju 侯家駒, *Zhouli yanjiu* 周禮研究 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1987), p. 285; and Jin, *Zhouguan zhi chengshu*, p. 239.

7 The theory that Liu Xin forged *Zhouli* originated with Song scholars, notably Hu Anguo 胡安國 (1074–1138) and his son, Hu Hong 胡宏 (1102–1161). In 1891, Kang Youwei 康有爲 vehemently denounced *Zhouli* as the core of Liu Xin's alleged forgery of various classics in ancient script. For scholars who support this view, see Kang, *Xinxue weijing kao* 新學僞經考 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010); Hu Shi 胡適, "Lun Qin zhi ji *Zhouguan* shu" 論秦時及周官書, in Chen Qitai 陳其泰 et al., eds., *Ershi shiji Zhongguo lixue yanjiu lunji* 二十世紀中國禮學研究論集 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1998), pp. 303–5; and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, *Zhongguo jingxueshi de jichui*; *Zhouguan chengli zhi shidai jiqi sixiang xingge* 中國經學史的基礎; 周官成立之時代及其思想性格 (Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2014), p. 236.

8 E.g., see Liu, "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhizheng," p. 650; and Qian Mu 錢穆, "Self-preface," in *Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu* 劉向歆父子年譜 (Shanghai: Zhongguo wenhua fuwushe, 1948), pp. 1–6.

ticular historical events and does not claim authorship or circumstances of composition, the majority of research and discussion on it, from the early Eastern Han to the present, has focused on its date and authorship, spanning a thousand years from the Duke of Zhou to Wang and Liu.[9] No other Chinese text has sparked such prolonged debates about its date of composition across such a wide temporal span.

One reason for these endless disputes is the complexity of *Zhouli* materials and ideas, which seem to originate from different historical periods and are open to varying interpretations depending on scholars' preconceptions. For example, *Zhouli*'s correspondence with Western Zhou bronze inscriptions can either be seen as evidence of its intimacy with the Western Zhou official system or, conversely, as an indication of the author's ignorance of the actual circumstances of the Western Zhou.[10] Moreover, adopting an accumulative mode of formation leads

[9] For discussions in English scholarship on *Zhouli* dating and authorship, see William Boltz, "*Chou-li*," in Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, U. California, 1993), pp. 24–32; Bernhard Karlgren, "The Early History of the *Chou li* and *Tso chuan* Texts," *BMFEA* 3 (1931), pp. 1–59; and David Schaberg, "*Zhouli* as Constitutional Text," pp. 36–39. Schaberg reviews several theories on the dating, including 1) written by the Duke of Zhou; 2) by Liu Xin and Wang Mang; 3) during the Warring States period; and 4) during the Qin dynasty. But he omits others, such as theories dating it to Western Zhou, the Spring and Autumn period, or early Han. For a thorough introduction, see Yang Tianyu 楊天宇, "Lüeshu *Zhouli* de chengshu shidai yu zhenwei" 略述周禮的成書時代與真僞, *Zhengzhou daxue xuebao* (*Shehui kexue ban*) 鄭州大學學報 (社會科學版) 4 (2000), pp. 71–77. For the Western Zhou theory, see Hayashi Taisuke 林泰輔, "*Shūkan* seisaku jidai kō" 周官制作時代考, in *Shūkō to sono jidai* 周公と其時代 (Tokyo: Ōkuraya shoten, 1915), pp. 784–824, and Meng Wentong 蒙文通, "Cong shehui zhidu ji zhengzhi zhidu lun *Zhouguan* chengshu niandai" 從社會制度及政治制度論周官成書年代, in idem, *Meng Wentong quanji* 蒙文通全集 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2015) 3, pp. 360–68. For the Spring and Autumn period theory, see Liu, "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhizheng." For the Warring States theory (the most influential), see Qian Mu, "*Zhouguan* zhuzuo shidai kao" 周官著作時代考, in *Liang Han jingxue jinguwen pingyi* 兩漢經學今古文平議 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2015), pp. 319–493; Guo Moruo 郭沫若, "*Zhouguan* zhiyi" 周官質疑, in idem, *Jinwen congkao* 金文叢考 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1954), pp. 49–81; Yang Xiangkui 楊向奎, "*Zhouli* de neirong fenxi jiqi zhuzuo shidai" 周禮的內容分析及其著作時代, in idem, *Yishizhai xueshu wenji* 繹史齋學術文集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 228–76; Qian Xuan 錢玄, *Sanli tonglun* 三禮通論 (Nanjing: Nanjing shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996); and Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "'Zhougong zhili' de chuanshuo he *Zhouguan* yishu de chuxian" "周公制禮"的傳說和周官一書的出現, in *Gu Jiegang ji* 顧頡剛集 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001), pp. 172–242. For the theory dating it to the early Han, see Peng Lin 彭林, Zhouli *zhuti sixiang yu chengshu niandai yanjiu* 周禮主體思想與成書年代研究 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991).

[10] Several studies have compared *Zhouli* with Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, yet their conclusions vary significantly. Guo Moruo argues that *Zhouli* was not a Western Zhou text but composed during the Warring States period, because many official positions in *Zhouli* either lack counterparts in the bronze inscriptions or serve different functions. In contrast, Zhang Yachu 張亞初 and Liu Yu 劉雨 find that more than a quarter of the official titles in *Zhouli* can also be found in the bronze inscriptions. Similarly, Chen Hanping 陳漢平 asserts that *Zhouli* is a reliable historical text from Western Zhou. See Guo, "*Zhouguan* zhiyi," pp. 49–81; Zhang

to distinct conclusions:[11] it could be seen as either a predominantly Western Zhou text with later additions or a Western Han text incorporating earlier elements.[12] Although many early-Chinese texts can be understood through an accumulative mode, the text of *Zhouli* stands apart. It is a work of profound conception and meticulous organization, far from being a random accumulation of official positions.[13] The text demonstrates internal coherence within chapters and recurring patterns across them, suggesting that its author was not merely compiling disparate materials but rather employing various literary techniques to create a cohesive, self-contained text that cannot be easily modified. Therefore, I argue that simply determining the date of individual words or identifying specific intellectual trends within the *Zhouli* does little to establish the date of its overall structure. This structure, I contend, could only have been conceived by a single author or a closely connected group at a specific time. Thus, it is perhaps the first Chinese text to successfully develop a structure that qualifies as a real "book." Not only are the chapters organized in a specific way, but sections within chapters are also carefully arranged to prevent deletions and external insertions, and to ensure their sequences and significance are correctly perceived by readers. Such structural rigor is absent in works such as *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals*) and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (*Master of Huainan*), a fact that suggests this degree of textual design only emerged once a mature writing culture had developed. I

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and Liu, *Xi Zhou jinwen guanzhi yanjiu* 西周金文官制研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1986), p. 112; and Chen, *Xi Zhou ceming zhidu yanjiu* 西周冊命制度研究 (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1986), pp. 216–17.

11 The view that *Zhouli* was not the work of a single person or a single period is widely held. For instance, Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–1085) argued that it was not entirely the work of the Duke of Zhou, but that additions were made over time, with some parts even inserted by Han scholars. Similarly, *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* 四庫全書總目提要 notes that while *Zhouli* was originally composed in early Western Zhou, it was later altered, making it a heterogenous text. See Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107) and Cheng Hao, *Er Cheng ji* 二程集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), p. 404.

12 E.g., Liu Qiyu argues that the entire *Zhouli* was composed during the Warring States period and later reorganized in the Han, with only a small amount of Han-era material added. He maintains that this does not alter its status as an ancient text. In contrast, Hou Jiaju contends that *Zhouli* was compiled by Liu Xin and others, using earlier fragments and related materials. See Liu, "*Zhouli* zhenwei zhizheng," p. 650; and Hou, *Zhouli yanjiu*, p. 3.

13 Peng Lin notes that *Zhouli* possesses an internal structure, though he does not elaborate on what that structure entails. He emphasizes the importance of assessing its date based on overall structure rather than isolated phrases. However, in his analysis, he still largely focuses on intellectual trends drawn from specific lines, offering little examination of the broader structure. See Peng, "*Zhouli* chengshu yu Han chu shuo" 周禮成書于漢初說, *Shixueshi yanjiu* 史學史研究 3 (1989), pp. 15–20, esp. 14, and *Zhouli zhuti sixiang*, pp. 14–16.

argue, therefore, that *Zhouli*'s main body, especially its overall structure, was produced during the mid-to-late-Western Han period.

In the following sections, I first demonstrate how the combination of dichotomy and trichotomy serves as one of the primary features of the *Zhouli*'s overarching design. I then illustrate how the repetitions across sections and chapters bind disparate materials together. By comparing its structure with other Han compilations, I suggest that this highly developed textual design is unlikely to have appeared before the early Western Han. Furthermore, I examine the intellectual context from the reign of emperor Yuan 元帝 (r. 49–33 BC), particularly during the reign of emperor Cheng 成帝 (r. 33–7 BC), when the proliferation of written texts, calls for reform of the official system, and the emergence of dichotomous and trichotomous frameworks in philosophical thought all suggest that this period both required and was well-suited for the creation of such a text. I then briefly discuss why it is unlikely that Wang Mang and Liu Xin forged this work and propose an alternative theory for how this text was incorporated into the imperial library. Finally, I argue that the *Zhouli* writing is a fully realized "book": a large-scale composition whose textual boundaries are demarcated and whose internal structures are integrated. This heralds the nascent ascendancy of a sophisticated writing culture. At the same time, *Zhouli* adopts a timeless posture that could resist the centuries of constant revisions in royal court ritual and music systems, thereby avoiding potential obsolescence. By erasing historical time, the *Zhouli* achieves a form of textual eternality, offering an alternative way to attain "ever-newness."

RECONCILING CONTRADICTIONS: INSIGHTS INTO THE *ZHOULI* STRUCTURE

In this section I highlight some previously overlooked structural characteristics of the *Zhouli*. Although the date of the work has been debated extensively by scholars from various perspectives, the discourse has largely focused on isolating specific markers, such as the appearance of certain official titles within specific historical periods, particular words and ideas from the standpoint of intellectual history, or the presence or absence of systems, artifacts, and proper nouns. However, determining the date of a particular building block does not necessarily reveal the date of the entire building. I propose that any investigation into the date of *Zhouli* should begin with an examination of its intricate structural integration, which appears to be the product of a particular time and specific individual or group. Unlike most early-Chinese texts,

which are essentially aggregates of separate materials and lack a coherent structure,[14] the *Zhouli* is an exception. Its first notable formal feature is the synthesis of two-part and three-part divisions at both the chapter and section levels. Second, many literary techniques, such as the placement of identical characters in parallel positions across adjacent lists, are employed to forge links between disparate numerical figurations. Third, repetition functions as a tool to create cross-references between seemingly isolated descriptions of official titles, thereby constructing an interconnected web of the official system. I will demonstrate the pattern of these repetitions and analyze how they contribute to building connections both within and across chapters. Such a carefully designed, self-contained textual network is absent from early-Han compilations, making it more likely to be a later development.

A Synthesis of Two-Tier and Three-Tier Divisions

Scholars have long recognized the importance of the number "six" in the text of *Zhouli*. The most obvious usage is the division of the six "offices" (*guan* 官) – namely, Heaven, Earth, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter – into six chapters. Furthermore, according to Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, the number six is the most frequently used number in *Zhouli*, appearing in approximately fifty different instances. He notes that, although the text does not always explicitly state the number six in some cases related to the organization of the state and government, enumerations of such structures tend to total six.[15] Based on my own calculations, which cover ninety-seven numerical lists from the first five chapters,[16] lists of six items appear most frequently (29 instances), greatly surpassing the second most common number, five, which appears only 17 times. However, different scholars have various interpretations of the preference for the number six.[17] For instance, Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 sug-

[14] The composite nature of early Chinese texts is a well-established subject of scholarly inquiry. For foundational discussions on this phenomenon, see Li Ling 李零, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008), pp. 209–16; William G. Boltz, "The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts," in Martin Kern, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2005), pp. 50–78; Matthias L. Richter, *The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 65–72.

[15] Xu, *Zhouguan chengli zhi shidai*, pp. 266–67.

[16] Since the current final chapter of *Zhouli*, the "Artificer's Record" ("Kaogong ji" 考工記), differs significantly from the previous chapters in both structure and content, the following examination of *Zhouli* will focus exclusively on the first five chapters unless otherwise noted.

[17] One common interpretation is that the division into six reflects the actual official systems of the pre-Qin period. E.g., see Jin, *Zhouguan zhi chengshu*, p. 8. It is true that *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Tradition*) mentions "six ministers 六卿" in the states of Jin 晉, Zheng 鄭, and Song 宋, and this might account for the design of the six overall offices. It does not, however, account for the frequent use of the number six in various enumerations. The preference for six ap-

gests that the frequent appearance of six in both *Zhouli* and *Guanzi* 管子 (*Master Guan*) indicates that both texts revealed systems designed by Legalists in the state of Qi 齊 during the Warring States period to function as preparations for unifying the world.[18] In contrast, Xu Fuguan shows that the number six held special importance in Jia Yi's 賈誼 (ca. 200–169 BC) writings, especially in the chapter "Six Techniques" 六術 from Jia's *Xinshu* 新書 (*New Writings*). He further suggests that this line of thought was later incorporated into *Zhouli*.[19] Hou Jiaju 侯家駒 speculates that this preference for six might be linked to Liu Xin's usages of such phrases as "six inches 六寸" and "six lines 六爻."[20] However, these comparisons overlook a crucial aspect of *Zhouli*'s reliance on the number six: in the overall design of the highest positions, the number six is represented not merely as an even distribution of six items, but as an integration of a two-tier and three-tier structure. This suggests that the preference for six is not necessarily due to any inherent significance of the number itself, but from its composition as the product of one, two, and three.

The following two figures show the numerological structure (basically dyadic and triadic) not only within each chapter, but as integrated into the whole book. Each *Zhouli* chapter opens by introducing a set of three topmost official positions within each office. Among these three, there is always a pair consisting of higher and lower corresponding ranks (*da* 大 and *xiao* 小), along with a third, subordinate position that sometimes involves more than one individual. I illustrate this hierarchy and relationship in figure 1. It is important to note that figure 1 presents no sixth office – Office of Winter. This is because the chapter for that has long been lost, and the later-inserted "Kaogong ji" 考工記 ("Artificer's Record") does not conform to the format of the other offices. Consequently, this seasonal office is omitted throughout the discussion, except in figure 2, below, where its office name is analyzed to help reveal the overarching design.

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pears to reflect a normative or cosmological ordering principle rather than a straightforward representation of historical administrative practice.

[18] Gu, "'Zhougong zhili' de chuanshuo he *Zhouguan* yishu de chuxian," pp. 1–40.

[19] Xu, "Jia Yi sixiang de zai faxian" 賈誼思想的再發現, in idem, *Liang Han sixiangshi* 兩漢思想史(Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001) 2, p. 72.

[20] Hou, *Zhouli yanjiu*, p. 278.

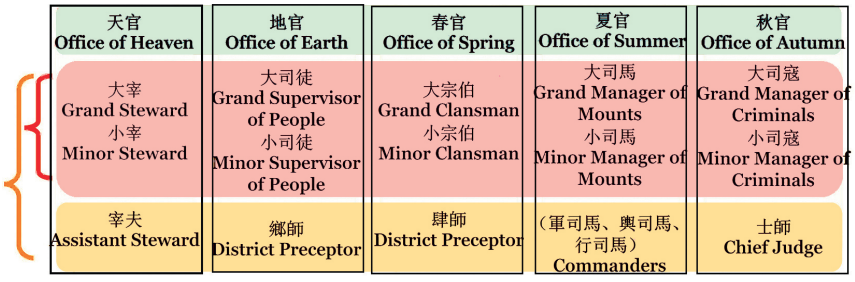


Figure 1. Verticality in Each Chapter: Two Tiers of Officials in a Three-Tier Structure [21]

As shown in the figure, within each of the five offices (bounded by the vertical boxes), the highest-ranking official is always designated with the character "grand 大," while the deputy holds an identical title except for the replacement of "grand" with "minor 小." These two officials (the pink band) share many responsibilities and powers, reflecting a complementary relationship modeled after the pairing of Heaven and Earth. More noteworthy is the third level, highlighted in yellow. Unlike other subordinate officials, this third official is grouped directly with the primary pair (the grand and minor officials), forming a cohesive institutional unit. Such cohesiveness is pointed out by the two imbricated braces on the left (one red and one orange). They indicate vertical integration occurring inside each chapter. As I will demonstrate in the following section through an examination of parallels, these third-level offices are designed to share the same discourse as the grand and minor ones, indicating that they are meant to function not only as subordinates to those grand/minor pairs but also as intermediaries capable of linking them together

This structural arrangement recalls the early Chinese philosophical concept of the trinity of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity.[22] There,

[21] The translation of official titles in this study generally adopts the terminology established in Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford U.P., 1985), which offers systematic renderings of the obscure offices unique to *Zhouli*. For an exhaustive functional analysis of these titles and their respective purports, see Sven Broman, "Studies on the *Chou li*," *BMFEA* 33 (1961), pp. 1–89.

[22] One of the most well-known claims appears in the "Shuo gua" 說卦 ("Discussion of the Trigrams") chap. of *Yijing* 易經, where the ways of Heaven, Earth and Human are referred to as the "three powers" (*sancai* 三才): "[the sages] exhibited the Way of Heaven and called it *yin* and *yang*. They exhibited the Way of the Earth and called it the yielding and the firm. They exhibited the Way of Human and called it benevolence and righteousness 立天之道曰陰與陽, 立地之道曰柔與剛, 立人之道曰仁與義." According to this theory, each trigram in the *Yijing* consists of six lines, with every two lines forming a unit representing Heaven, Earth, and Human; see Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), p. 383.

the dyad of Heaven and Earth is fully realized only through the mediation of Humanity. While *Zhouli* does not explicitly accord "Humanity" a formal place within its hierarchy, it features a conceptually parallel layer: the four seasons 四時 operating between Heaven and Earth.[23] Thus, by integrating this metaphysical framework, we gain a necessary heuristic that helps to explain the text's underlying organization. This same triadic logic governs the relationship between the six offices (when we now add in the Office of Winter). Rather than being six equals, or five offices subordinated to the Office of Heaven, the first two offices (Heaven and Earth) form a foundational pair, while the others (the seasonals) serve as the third component, as illustrated in figure 2, below, which takes up the numerological structure of *Zhouli* as a whole.



Figure 2. Horizontality in the Whole Book: Heaven and Earth Dominating the Four Seasons

Figure 1 illustrated the verticality of the triadic structure, with each chapter giving hierarchic relationships through the major/minors, which are simultaneously integrated with the third-level below them. We can turn to figure 2, which shows a horizontal dyadic structure that integrates the entire *Zhouli*. The Office of Heaven, unsurprisingly, wields the most extensive authority among the six offices. It formulates the principles of administration and oversees the other five offices (the seasons plus Earth), while these latter five implement specific aspects of governance. However, the Office of Earth is not considered to be on the same metaphysical level as the offices of the four seasons. Thus, Heaven and Earth occupy their own red-highlighted horizontal band. The intimacy between Heaven and Earth is evidenced by a high frequency of textual parallels,[24] some of which are exclusive to these two

[23] "Heaven and Earth" and the "four seasons" are frequently correlated in early Chinese cosmological discourse, wherein the myriad things, including human beings, generate and decay in accordance with the seasonal cycles beneath Heaven; see, e.g., *Lunyu* 17/19.

[24] To calculate the frequency of repetitions, I employ the "similarity tool" used in the Chinese Text Project website. See <http://ctext.org/plugins/texttools/#similarity>, accessed Oc-

chapters.[25] Finally, we see the dyadic, horizontal integration (again indicated by red and orange braces on the left) throughout the book, working in tandem with triadic structure.

The combination of a supreme one, followed by two, and then a subsequent three is further encoded in the numerical distribution of personnel at the beginning of each chapter. Except for the Office of Summer, which is exceptional in several respects,[26] all other highest offices at the beginning of each chapter follow a similar numerical pattern: one grand official, two minor officials, and a set of third-tier officials, following a geometric progression with a common ratio of two (4, 8, 16, 32). The highest office also contains a set of lower-level clerks and servants without official ranks, listed in a sequence of 6, 12, 12, and 120, which comprises multiples of two multiplied by three. In this two-tiered system composed of officials holding formal rank and assistants without rank, the designers of the *Zhouli* system not only arranged the ranked officials into a threefold hierarchy, but also intro-

tober 1, 2024. This tool identifies all recurrent strings of n characters (n-grams) between two textual units, A and B. Intertextual similarity is then defined as the number of n-grams divided by the total length of A and B. This definition also applies to two identical textual units (i.e., A and B are the same), resulting in intratextual similarity. Since *Zhouli* contains a significant amount of formulaic language, a lower n-value would yield a very high repetition rate. Therefore, for all calculations below, I set n to 5, counting only five-character repeated sequences in the descriptive sections of *Zhouli*, while excluding the numerical lists of official positions and their numbers at the beginning of each chapter. As my textual basis, I use the high-quality edited versions from the CHANT (Chinese Ancient Texts) database. The similarity rate between the Offices of Heaven and Earth is the highest, at around 7%, while the lowest, between the Offices of Spring and Summer, is about 3%.

25 E.g., at the end of both the "Minor Steward" 小宰 section in the Office of Heaven and the "Grand Supervisor of People" 大司徒 section in the Office of Earth, the text presents a striking parallel. In each case, during the first month of the year, the official proclaims: "You must each diligently perform your duties, observe the statutes, and attend to your assigned tasks, awaiting the king's commands. Any failure to comply will incur severe punishment from the regional state 各修乃職, 考乃法, 待乃事, 以聽王命. 其有不共, 則國有大刑 [小宰]/各共爾職, 修乃事, 以聽王命. 其有不正, 則國有常刑 [大司徒]." See Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015; hereafter *ZLZY*), pp. 230, 932. While a similar directive also appears in the "Overseer of Feudatories 職方氏" section of the Office of Summer, it is untethered from the first month, appearing instead within the context of the king's royal inspection tour.

26 As Yang Tianyu points out, among the six *Zhouli* offices, the Office of Summer has the most complex and intricate responsibilities. Xu Fuguan further argues that the "Grand Manager of Mounts" in the Office of Summer is given disproportionately large authority, while the "Minor Manager of Mounts" lacks any description of duties, unlike other minor officials. Additionally, the three commanders mentioned in the third tier are omitted from the subsequent detailed descriptions, a unique case across all six offices. Xu attributes these anomalies to Wang Mang, who, as "Grand Manager of Mounts," sought to centralize power. See Yang, "*Zhouli* de neirong xingwen tedian jiqi shiliao jiazhi" 周禮的內容行文特點及其史料價值, *Shixue yuekan* 史學月刊 6 (2001), pp. 44–50, esp. 46; and Xu, *Zhouguan chengli zhi shidai*, p. 325.

duced the factor of three into the numerical organization of the lower, unranked service staff. It is difficult not to see in this a deliberate numerical design, one that artfully embeds a three-tiered structure within a two-tiered framework.

Even at the level of the smallest textual units, where a short list of six items might appear evenly distributed, we can still find the combination of a two-tier and three-tier structure. For example, in the Office of Earth, the Palace Master's 師氏 primary duty involves instructing young nobles in the Three Virtues 三德, including Utmost Virtue 至德, Diligent Virtue 敏德, and Filial Virtue 孝德, and the Three Conducts 三行, including Filial Conduct 孝行, Fraternal Conduct 友行, and Compliant Conduct 順行. As Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 AD) acutely observed in his annotation, "Filiality stands below the Three Virtues yet above the Three Conducts. Virtue extends more broadly than filiality, yet among forms of conduct, none is more exalted than it 孝在三德之下、三行之上, 德有廣於孝, 而行莫尊焉."[27] Within the overarching binary hierarchy of inner virtue and outer conduct, each category is further divided into three graded sublevels. Thus, these six items are not parallel elements of equal standing, but rather the product of a structural combination of bifurcation and tripartition.

It appears that the *Zhouli* author's preference for six is at least partially explained by the synthesis of two and three. As I discuss in the section regarding historical context, this theoretical scheme did not emerge naturally nor reflect a preexisting administrative reality. Instead, it represented an innovative concept that gained prominence since the late Western Han, reflecting the evolving political and intellectual landscape of the period.

Division and Union: The Textual Web within One Section

The *Zhouli* takes the form of an institutional catalog. Each chapter begins with a section listing official titles, ranks, and the number of positions, followed by a second section that provides detailed explanations of each role in the same sequence, albeit with occasional omissions. Moreover, the text frequently includes shorter numerical lists, presenting composites of several items typically expressed with consistent syntax.[28] Similar short numerical lists can also be found in

[27] *ZLZY*, p. 1200.

[28] Some premodern annotators sought to imbue these lists with a rigorous internal logic, treating the individual items within as both indispensable and non-interchangeable components of a sequential argument. A notable example is Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021–1086) treatment of "eight threads 八統" in *Zhouguan xinyi* 周官新義 (*New Exegesis of the Zhouguan*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 14. However, such connections often appear to be hermeneutically imposed by the annotator rather than inherent to the original textual layer.

the "Hongfan" 洪範 ("Great Plan") chapter of *Shangshu* 尙書 (*Classic of Documents*) and throughout various chapters of *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 (*Remnant Zhou Documents*).[29] Some scholars have noted that catalogs were a common literary device in Warring States-era texts.[30] However, the catalogs in *Zhouli*, "Hongfan," and *Yi Zhoushu* differ significantly from those in the contemporaneous so-called Master Writings. In the latter, catalogs often serve as outlines to organize arguments or marshal evidence.[31] By contrast, the catalogs in the former three texts present series of seemingly disjointed items, contributing to the content rather than structuring the argument. Moreover, these catalogs do not exhibit a consistent, overarching logic that ties them together.[32] For example, in "Hongfan," the catalogs are listed in the following manner:

[29] According to Pang Pu's 龐樸 calculation, of the 59 chapters in the current *Yi Zhoushu*, 27 clearly organize their subjects using numerical classifications. See Pang, *Jimen sansi* 蔪門散思 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1996), p. 358. For an analysis of this phenomenon in *Yi Zhoushu*, see Yegor Grebnev, "Numerical Lists of Foundational Knowledge in Early Chinese and Early Buddhist Traditions," *Asiatische Studien - Études Asiatiques* 74.3 (2020), pp. 453–84.

[30] See Zhao Boxiong 趙伯雄, "Xian Qin wenxian zhong de yi shu wei ji" 先秦文獻中的以數爲紀, *Wenxian* 文獻 4 (1999), pp. 25–32, Dirk Meyer, *Documentation and Argument in Early China: The Shàngshū* 尙書 *(Venerated Documents) and the Shū Traditions* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2021), p. 126, and Joachim Gentz, "Defining Boundaries and Relations of Textual Units: Examples from the Literary Toolkit of Early Chinese Argumentation," in Joachim Gentz and Dirk Meyer, eds., *Literary Forms of Argument in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 112–57.

[31] The *Han Feizi* 韓非子 (*Master Han Fei*) is an exemplary text in this regard. For an analysis of the branching catalogs in Masters' writings, see Heng Du, "The Author's Two Bodies: Paratext in Early Chinese Textual Culture," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 2018), pp. 164–67. Du notes that these catalogs function similarly to modern tables of contents, helping to prevent the insertion or deletion of text.

[32] Zhang Jinfeng 張勁鋒 also has a similar observation. See Zhang, "*Yi Zhoushu* zhong 'yi shu weiji' yu 'Zhougong xundian' de leiji huiji" 逸周書中 "以數爲紀" 與 "周公訓典" 的累積彙集, *Xueshu jiaoliu* 學術交流 1 (2019), pp. 137–47, esp. 138.

Table 1. The Overall Structure of Catalogs in "Hongfan" [33]

THE "GREAT PLAN" WITH NINE DIVISIONS 洪範九疇	The first is called "Five phases" 初一曰五行,	First, of the five phases. The first is… 一、五行: 一曰… …
	The second, "Reverent attention to the five matters" 次二曰敬用五事,	Second, of the five matters. The first is… 二、五事: 一曰… …
	The third, "Earnest devotion to the eight [objects of] government" 次三曰農用八政,	Third, of the eight [objects of] government. The first is… 三、八政 : 一曰… …
	The fourth, "Harmonious use of the five dividers of time" 次四曰協用五紀,	Fourth, of the five dividers of time. The first is… 四、五紀: 一曰… …
	The fifth, "Establishment and use of royal perfection" 次五曰建用皇極,	Fifth…
	The sixth, "Discriminating use of the three virtues" 次六曰乂用三德,	Sixth, of the three virtues. The first is … 六、三德: 一曰… …
	The seventh, "Intelligent use of [the means for] the examination of doubts" 次七曰明用稽疑,	Seventh…
	The eighth, "Thoughtful use of the various verifications" 次八曰念用庶徵,	Eighth…
	The ninth, "Hortatory use of the five [sources of] happiness, and the awing use of the six [occasions of] suffering" 次九曰嚮用五福, 威用六極 .	Ninth, of the five [sources of] happiness. The first is… 九、五福: 一曰… … Of the six extreme evils, the first is… 六極: 一曰… …

In these multi-layered enumerations, several items are grouped under the term "nine divisions" of the "Great Plan," and each item may further consist of subitems. One advantage of this construction is that it helps prevent additions or deletions. However, it does not prevent the replacement of individual items within the list, as the items them-

[33] Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), pp. 355–83.

selves are essentially unconnected. Simply putting "five matters," "three virtues," and "six sufferings" together does not inherently generate a meaningful correlation across them. If any of the nine divisions were altered, readers would be unaware. In other words, the numerical lists in "Hongfan" and *Yi Zhoushu* seem to show little evidence of intrinsic connections among the items.

While this lack of cohesion may be acceptable in a short text, it becomes problematic in larger textual units, such as long chapters or entire books, where the mere accumulation of lists leads to a disorganized presentation. A branching structure alone is insufficient to manage the complexity. For example, if the "Great Plan" contained one hundred divisions, each with twenty subitems, the text would resemble a monotonous inventory. Thus, an alternative strategy is needed to organize enumerations in a coherent and meaningful way.

This issue is particularly pertinent to the *Zhouli*, where the entire text is essentially a list, making it vulnerable to alteration. Just as readers would not know if an item in the nine divisions had been substituted, this vulnerability is even more pronounced in *Zhouli*, whose author appears to have been aware of this risk. To mitigate it, two cross-referenced lists were established within one chapter, so that readers could immediately recognize discrepancies if a change occurred. Additionally, it is explicitly stated that every office should have exactly sixty subordinates.[34] Despite these precautions, inconsistencies still arise: some positions appear in only one list, such as the three commanders in the Office of Summer, and there are apparently more than sixty offices in each chapter.[35] This could mean either that the author did

[34] "Minor Steward in the Office of Heaven 天官小宰" in *ZLZY*, pp. 197–98. Archeological evidence suggests that the practice of appending precise number of chapters or characters to ensure textual integrity was well-established by the early-Han dynasty. A notable example is found in the excavated *Shijing* 詩經 bamboo strips from the tomb of Liu He 劉賀 (92–59 BC), which conclude with a formal tally: "The *Shi* comprises 305 poems, totaling 1,076 stanzas and 7,274 characters 詩三百五篇、凡千七十六章, 七千二百七十四言." Similarly, in the *Laozi* silk manuscript from Mawangdui 馬王堆, the "De" 德 and "Dao" 道 sections are followed by character counts of 3,041 and 2,426, respectively. Such meticulous notation indicates a burgeoning bibliographical concern for preserving the fixity of classical texts and safeguarding them against subsequent interpolation or loss.

[35] In the "Minor Steward," it is clearly stated that each office should have 60 subordinates. However, the Office of Heaven has 63 positions, the Office of Earth 77, the Office of Spring 70, the Office of Summer 69, and the Office of Autumn 66. See Xu, *Zhouguan chengli zhi shidai*, p. 286. A similar argument is presented by Yang, "*Zhouli* de neirong." Yu Tingchun 俞廷椿 (b. ca. 1142), in his *Zhouli fugu bian* 周禮復古編, contended that the offices of the Office of Winter were not lost to history, but were instead redistributed among the other five offices. This redistribution, according to Yu, accounts for why the number of positions in each of the remaining offices exceeds the expected count of sixty. For a rebuttal, see Hou, *Zhouli yanjiu*, p. 24.

not adhere strictly to the organizing principle or that the text was later altered. Regardless, it is clear that merely relying on external regulations is insufficient to protect the integrity of the text. Therefore, the author also sought to create connections both within individual lists and among dispersed numerical lists, weaving them into an internal textual network. This architecture resists interpolation and rearrangement, elevating the *Zhouli* beyond a mere register of official positions and transforming it into a cohesive, self-contained work with intricate interconnections.

One way to connect different numerical lists is through literary techniques, such as creating an opening and closing echo, using an interlocking, chain-like structure, and maintaining a symmetrical format. These strategies are exemplified in the description of the first official position, "Grand Steward 大宰" in the Office of Heaven, which follows.

The duty of the Grand Steward is to manage the six authorities for founding a state and assisting the king in governing the regional states: The first is the X Authority, through which one X the regional states, X the government offices, and X the myriad people …
He manages government offices using eight methods: The first is Official X …
He manages lesser towns and rural areas using eight principles: The first is XX, which is used to manage X…

He assists the king in managing the officials through eight handles: The first is X, which is used to manage X…
He assists the king in managing the myriad people through eight threads: The first is XX…

He employs the myriad people with the nine occupations: The first is XX…

He collects wealth through nine types of taxes: The first is the tax from XX…
He regulates expenditures with nine protocols: The first is XX expenses…

He supplies the regional states through nine types of tributes: The first is the tributes of X…
He connects the people of the regional states through nine ties: The first is X, who gains the support of the people through X…

On the first day of the first month, the governance canons are announced to the regional states, the lesser towns and rural areas. The regulations are hung on the palace gate for the myriad people to see. After ten days, they are taken down and stored.

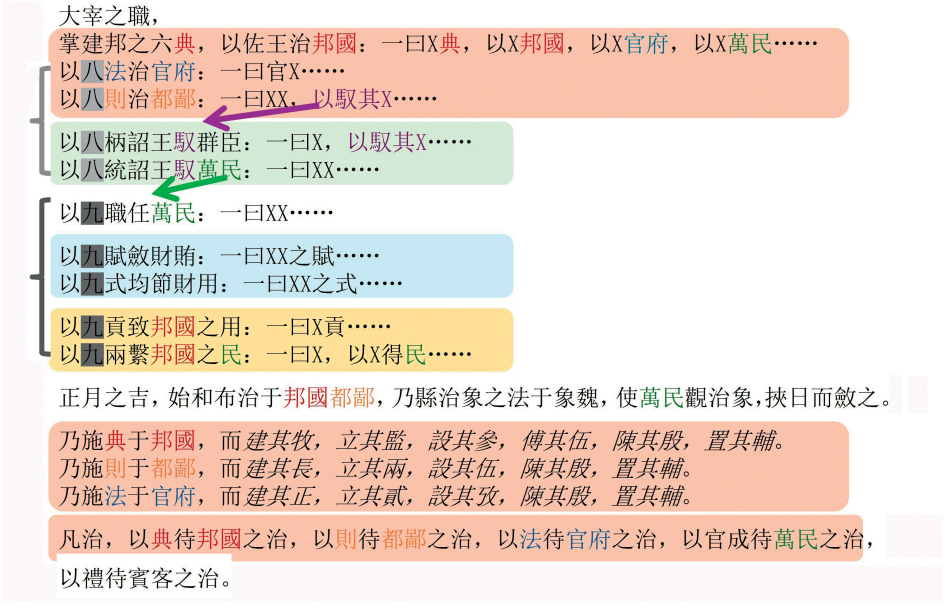
He then implements the authorities across the regional states, *appoints local governors, establishes inspectors, sets up three ministers, appoints five officials, displays many agents, and installs assistants.*
He then applies the principles in the lesser towns and rural areas, *appoints leaders, establishes two officials, sets up five ministers, displays many agents, and installs assistants.*
He then applies the methods in government offices, *appoints chief officials, establishes two deputies, sets up investigators, displays many agents, and installs assistants.*

In all matters of governance, he uses the authorities to manage the regional states, the principles to govern the lesser towns and rural areas, the methods to manage government offices, the official regulations to manage the myriad people, and the rituals to manage guests.[A]

[A] "Grand Steward in the Office of Heaven 天官大宰," in *ZLZY*, pp. 71–164.

This section of *Zhouli* demonstrates a carefully constructed design that uses several methods to build connections across short numerical lists. These are, in a sense, those just-mentioned literary methods of echoing, interlocking, and symmetry.

First, we see the overall three-tier structure, comprising: 1) the regional states (shown in red-color typeface; for both English and Chinese), 2) lesser towns and rural areas (shown in orange-color typeface), and 3) the government offices (blue typeface). This structure is emphasized three times, at both the beginning and the end of the excerpt (these three paragraphs are highlighted with a pink background). Even more intricately designed is the specific pairing of "authorities" (*dian* 典) (thus



correspondingly a red typeface) with the regional states; "methods" (*fa* 法) (blue) with the government offices; and "principles" (*ze* 則) (orange) with lesser towns and rural areas. As a result, what could initially seem like a mere collection of three lists in the first pink-highlighted paragraph is transformed into a coherent, three-layered construction that reverberates throughout the text. The italicized sentences in the second pink-highlighted paragraph further reinforce the unity across these three layers, because they represent fundamentally the same set of regulations applied in parallel to the different levels of governance.

Second, the author employs parallel structures to link two lists, as seen in the paragraphs highlighted in light green, light blue, and tannish-yellow backgrounds. I will treat them as list-clusters (see below). In the green-highlighted clusters, eight "handles" and "threads" are used to manage officials and the people separately. The blue-highlighted clusters respectively identify the sources of royal revenue and expenditure, while the tannish-yellow-highlighted clusters describe how tributes and the population across a state are organized. By maintaining consistent sentence structures, these parallel lists form tightly connected clusters, making them more likely to remain intact through reception and transmission.

Third, the text exhibits a chain-like structure that links separate clusters.[36] For example, not only does the keyword "to manage 馭"

[36] Gentz defines a "parallelism of identical members" as a literary form in which one or several identical graphs take a parallel position in two adjacent lines or stanzas. The two keywords discuss below, *yu* 馭 and *wan min* 萬民, function as these parallel graphs, anchoring a

(given in purple typeface), found in the last list of the first cluster, reappear in the second cluster, but the phrase "which is used to manage X... 以馭其X" in the final list of the first cluster also mirrors the wording in the first list of the second cluster (marked by the purple arrow). Additionally, the term "myriad people 萬民" (given in green typeface) connects the second cluster to a subsequent cluster (indicated by the green arrow), where several consecutive lists all contain nine items (marked by the dark-grey braces), while all the previous lists contain eight items (marked by the light-grey braces). In comparison to the simple accumulation of equally ranked lists and the basic branching structure that was seen in "Hongfan," this excerpt from *Zhouli* reveals a complex web of interconnected numerical lists. Such an intricate structural design is difficult to find in pre-Qin, even in early-imperial texts.[37] The deliberate linking of smaller textual units to create a larger, cohesive

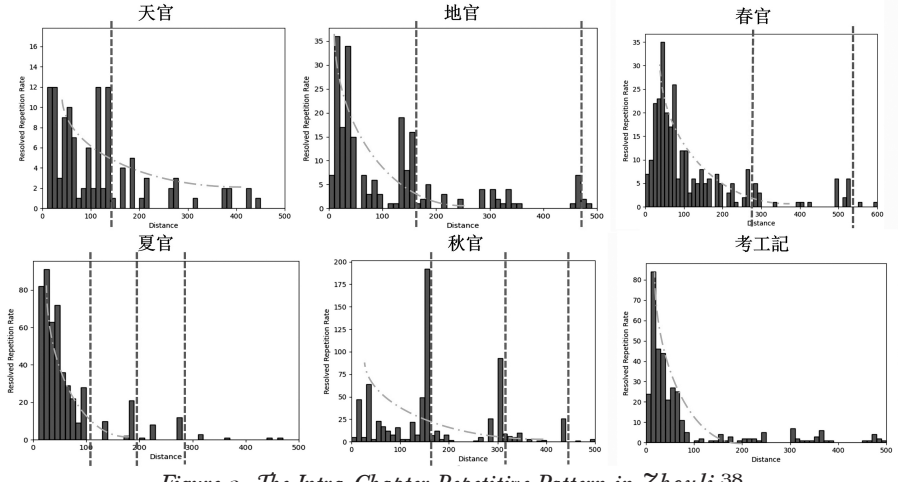


Figure 3. The Intra-Chapter Repetitive Pattern in Zhouli [38]

structural link between two separate emulative catalogs. See Gentz, "Defining Boundaries and Relations of Textual Units," p. 117, n. 18.

[37] Michael Nylan notes that Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–18 AD), probably impressed by the staggering volume of discarded or emended manuscripts he encountered while collating texts in the imperial libraries, took various strategies to forestall misunderstanding and interpolation. She further argues that Yang and his contemporaries at the court of emperor Cheng proposed unprecedented reforms in reading and writing. I concur with Nylan's assessment regarding the heightened usages of literary devices in Yang's corpus, and I contend that similar impulses toward structural integrity are evident in the text of *Zhouli*. See Nylan, "Manuscript Culture in Late Western Han, and the Implications for Authors and Authority," *Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture* 1 (2014), pp. 155–85.

[38] To reveal the pattern of repetitions within each chapter, I employ the "Distance Resolved Repetition Rate" tool. See Distance Resolved Repetition Rate <pyscriptapps.com>, accessed October 10, 2024. This tool shows how repetitions are distributed across the text by calcu-

section or chapter becomes even more apparent when we consider the repetitions found within and across the chapters of *Zhouli*, which will be discussed in the following section.

Repetition as the Adhesive in Intra- and Inter-Chapter Structures

It is not surprising that the *Zhouli* exhibits high rates of similarity both within and between chapters, given the abundance of formulaic expressions throughout the text. What is particularly intriguing, however, is the repetitive pattern of intra-chapter similarities, as illustrated in figure 3.

As shown in the figure, all five chapters, excluding "Kaogong ji" 考工記 ("Artificer's Record"), display at least two distinct peaks of the repetition.[39] "Kaogong ji" was later inserted in place of the lost chapter for the Office of Winter. Therefore, I assume that it lacks the complex structural design found in the other chapters and could serve as a control. The digital analysis, above, confirms this expectation: it does not exhibit a discernible repetitive pattern, registering only one peak occurring at a short distance (around twenty characters), which likely represents a literary technique used to emphasize a topic within a section, leading to a rapid decline in repetition as the distance increases, as illustrated by the downward curves drawn with a dot-dash line. In contrast, the other five chapters show several significant spikes along the overall downward trend, marked by the regular dashed lines. These spikes suggest sharp increases in repetition over relatively long distances. For most of these chapters, the first peak occurs within 50 characters, while the second peak ranges from 100 to 300 characters. Notably, the Offices of Summer and Autumn even exhibit four spikes, and the longest repetition spans approximately 500 characters in the Offices of Earth and Spring. This means that some parallels extending beyond 5 characters occur across a distance of 500 characters in these chapters.

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lating the distances between repeated phrases (from the first character of the first repeated phrase to the first character of the second). It then groups these repetitions into specific distance ranges (bin sizes), such as 0–10 characters, 11–20 characters, and so on. The number of repetitions within each distance range is displayed. Since repetitions rarely exceed 500 characters, I set 500 characters as the maximum distance shown, except for the Office of Spring, where the maximum distance is extended to 600 so that the peak around 500 characters can be fully displayed. In the "Minor Steward" section of the Office of Heaven, there is a paragraph of about 140 characters discussing the "six departments 六屬" of government offices. In this paragraph, the same sentence, longer than ten characters, is repeated six times. This passage strongly skews the data and disrupts the generation of repetition patterns, so I have excluded it from the statistics related to the Office of Heaven.

39 Aside from the first peak, any peak that noticeably exceeds the dashed-line decay curve I fitted is also considered a peak.

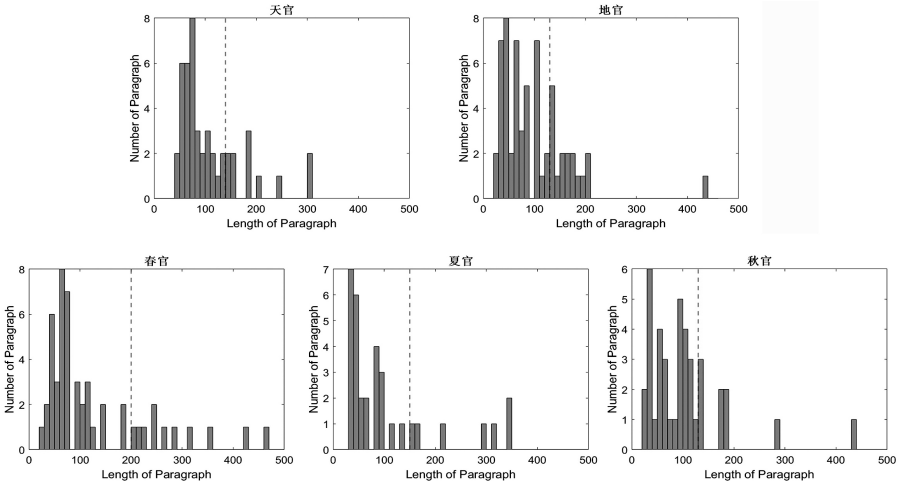


Figure 4. Paragraph Lengths and Their Frequency in the Five Chapters[40]

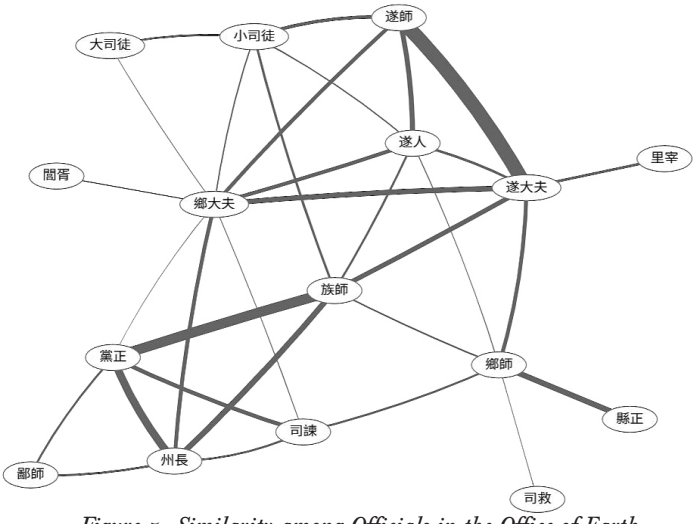


Figure 5. Similarity among Officials in the Office of Earth
Generated by the "Similarity tool": Chinese Text Project website.

The significance of these repetitive patterns must be understood in conjunction with the distribution of paragraph lengths within the five chapters. For this analysis, I treat each description of an official position as a paragraph.

[40] First, the word count of each paragraph is calculated and grouped into intervals with a bin size of ten. The horizontal axis represents paragraph length, while the vertical axis shows the number of paragraphs within each length range. The length of the first paragraph, which describes the initial official position in each office, is a significant outlier, sometimes exceeding 1,000 words. Due to this, only paragraphs with lengths under 500 words are included in the visualization.

In these five statistical graphs (figure 4), the dashed line indicates the 80th percentile of paragraph lengths, arranged from shortest to longest. In other words, the majority of paragraphs are shorter than the x-axis value marked by the dashed line, which is roughly between 100–200 characters. Interestingly, as shown in figure 3, the second peak in repetitions often occurs at a distance slightly longer than the typical paragraph length,[41] with some repetition spikes extending much further. This means that many of the repetitions span beyond the confines of a single section or official position, indicating cross-sectional repetition rather than intra-sectional repetition.

In other texts before the late Western Han that discuss bureaucratic systems, such as those seen in *Guanzi*, *Liji* 禮記 (*Records of Ritual*), and *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*Luxuriant Dew of the Springs and Autumns Annals*), we typically encounter only short lists of a few top positions, without elaboration on their duties or relationships.[42] *Zhouli*, by contrast, presents an unprecedentedly extensive list of detailed descriptions for a wide array of officials. This expansion presents new challenges for the author: how could such a variety of official positions be linked to form a cohesive system, rather than appearing as scattered, disjointed texts? It is evident that many of the descriptions in *Zhouli* were not original to the author but were collected from various sources.[43] Since these texts were originally isolated and no prior work had attempted such an ambitious structural design, the task of connecting these disparate texts into an integrated whole was one of the author's key achievements. One of the methods used to accomplish this is the similarity across officials, creating a sense of continuity and unity. To illustrate this process, I use

[41] Except for the Office of Summer. However, the third and fourth peaks of repetition in this chapter (at roughly 200 and 300 characters) appear at intervals far exceeding the chapter's typical 150-character paragraph length.

[42] For example, see "Five Phases" 五行 chap. in *Guanzi*; "Various Rites" 曲禮, "Wangzhi" 王制 ("Regulations of the King") and "Yueling" 月令 ("Monthly Ordinance") chaps. in *Liji*; and "Guanzhi xiang tian" 官制象天 ("Regulations on Officialdom Reflect Heaven") chap. in *Chunqiu fanlu*. The date of these essays has long been controversial. *Guanzi* and *Liji* reached their compiled forms by the late Western Han: written by Liu Xiang and Dai Sheng 戴聖, respectively, both of whom were active during the reigns of emperors Yuan and Cheng. The individual chapters within these corpora likely predate this period of final compilation. For a discussion regarding the composition and dating of *Liji*, see n. 68, below. For the "Guanzhi xiang tian" (chap. 24) in *Chunqiu fanlu*, Sarah Queen and John Major contend that it was authored by Western Han writers who were not directly associated with Dong Zhongshu. See Queen and Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn* (NYC: Columbia U.P., 2016), p. 28.

[43] Wang Guowei 王國維 points out that certain sections of *Zhouli* resemble ones found in *Da Dai Liji*, *Liji*, and Jia Yi's *Xin shu* 新書 (*New Writings*). Peng Lin further identifies parallels in the *Yi Zhoushu*. Given that the *Zhouli* remained largely unknown until the end of the Western Han, it is unlikely that these texts copied from *Zhouli*. I suggest that either *Zhouli* copied from these texts or that they all drew from common sources. See Peng, *Zhouli zhuti sixiang*, p. 8.

the Office of Earth as an example that can show how parallels between different officials create an interwoven web of texts.

The visualization of similarities among several officials in this chapter is shown in figure 5. Here each section (which deals with an official) is represented by a circle, and the thickness of the lines connecting the circles reflects the degree of similarity between them, with thicker lines indicating higher similarity. The analysis utilizes a 5-gram parameter-setting to capture five-character repeated sequences. To enhance legibility, the diagram retains only those connections with a similarity rate exceeding 0.2%.[44] While this visualization provides insights into the level of inter-sectional unity, it may overlook some of the more subtle parallels, which I will discuss further below. Contrary to the common misconception that the *Zhouli* is merely a list of isolated official positions, we can now consider that these sections are interconnected to some extent. The network mapping reveals at least two primary clusters: the first, located in the upper-right, comprises the "Supervisor of Exterior Districts 遂人," "Exterior District Preceptor 遂師," and "Exterior District Grand Master 遂大夫"; the second, in the lower-left, includes "District Grand Master 鄉大夫," "Township Head 州長," "Head of the Ward 黨正," and "Precinct Mentor 族師." These two clusters correspond precisely to the officials positioned at the beginning of the Office of Earth immediately following the grand/minor pair, as well as those occupying high-ranking positions in the middle of the official lists. The only two intermediaries flanking these two clusters are "District Preceptor 鄉師" and "Minor Supervisor of People 小司徒," respectively the third- and second-ranking officials in the Office of Earth. Since the "Minor Supervisor of People" not only maintains a strong link with the "Grand Supervisor 大司徒," to whom it serves as a deputy, but also has relationships with many other subordinate positions, I will use this official as a focal point to explore its parallels with other officials in the chapter, as we see in table 2 (see the next page-spread).

This section concerning the "Minor Supervisor of People" (the left-hand column) also features a clear structural design, with an opening and closing that echo each other. The first part discusses the major census conducted every three years, outlining his responsibility for surveying the number of households and the population. He also instructs local officials to register and regularly report on the population, livestock, and carriages. Correspondingly, the end of this section revisits the major

[44] For these technical concepts and terms, see n. 24, above.

census, during which the Minor Supervisor reviews the local officials' reports. His duties thus begin with overseeing the compilation of statistics and conclude with reviewing them, clearly reflecting the *Zhouli* author's careful arrangement. Additionally, there are many loose parallels (bolded passages) that link this section to other official positions in the Office of Earth. Among these, several positions show particularly strong connections to the Minor Supervisor, namely in the right-hand column the Grand Supervisor, the District Preceptor 鄉師, and the Supervisor of Exterior Districts 遂人.[45] The close relationship between the first two positions is expected, as they form part of the trinity of the highest offices within the chapter. Notably, a recurring "5-5-4-5-5-5" pattern appears in the Grand Supervisor, Minor Supervisor, and Supervisor of Exterior Districts. In the case of the Grand Supervisor, this pattern is used to establish a mutual aid system based on kinship and neighboring households; for the Minor Supervisor, it structures a taxation and labor service system rooted in military units; and for the Supervisor of Exterior Districts, it delineates the administrative districts.[46] While the content and application of the pattern differ for each role, their shared numerical composition suggests a deliberate design to link these three highest-ranking positions. Beyond these high-ranking roles, several lower-ranking positions also exhibit loose parallels with the Minor Supervisor section, including the "District Elder 鄉老," "Township Head 州長," "Precinct Mentor 族師," "Exterior District Preceptor 遂師," and "Exterior District Grand Master 遂大夫." Moreover, phrases such as "bestowing the king's benevolence 以王命施惠" and "[reporting to the higher authorities] for decisions on appointments and dismissals 以詔廢置" echo similar descriptions found in the roles

[45] It is likely that the District Preceptor oversees local officials in the central domain, while the Supervisor of Exterior Districts leads the local officials in the outskirts. Yang Kuan 楊寬 uses the concept of "state and countryside 國野" to explain the terms *xiang* 鄉 and *sui* 遂. In this interpretation, the people in the *xiang* are "state people 國人", while those in the *sui* are "countryside people 野人." Yu Shengwu 于省吾 argues that the *xiang* and *sui* system was introduced after Guan Zhong's 管仲 (d. 645 BC) reforms and did not exist during the Western Zhou period. For an introduction to the debate between Yang and Yu, see Chen Guangxin 陳光鑫, "'Tuntian' yu 'xiangsui': shi shu Yu Xingwu, Yang Kuan de shixue lunbian" "屯田"與"鄉遂," 試述于省吾、楊寬的史學論辯, *Shixue lilun yu shixueshi xuekan* 史學理論與史學史學刊 16 (2017), pp. 260–73, esp. 263–66. Although the Supervisor of Exterior Districts appears later in the list, it holds the same high rank as the Minor Supervisor. This follows a template found in all five offices: a high-ranking position is inserted midway through the list to serve as a structural anchor. Frequently, the descriptions of these mid-list officials are tied back to the initial triad of the chapter.

[46] "Grand Supervisor of People in the Office of Earth 地官大司徒" in *ZLZY*, p. 909; "Minor Supervisor of People in the Office of Earth 地官小司徒," p. 938; "Supervisor of Exterior Districts in the Office of Earth 地官遂人," p. 1349.

Table 2. Examples of Parallels between the "Minor Supervisor of People" and Other Positions under Office of Earth

MINOR SUPERVISOR OF PEOPLE 小司徒	PARALLELS IN OTHER OFFICE OF EARTH POSITIONS
The duty of the Minor Supervisor is to manage the principle of instructions for founding a state. **He is responsible for surveying the number of households and population in the royal domain, the four outskirts, lesser towns and rural areas, distinguishing between their ranks, ages, and disabilities. He oversees exemptions [from taxes and corvée labor]**, as well as prohibitions related to the sacrifices, food, and funerary practices. He issues census regulations to the grand masters of the six districts, **instructing them to register the population, livestock, and carriages in their jurisdictions**, and to report these numbers seasonally each year to implement governance and cultivating practices, as well as to enforce regulations, tax, and labor levies. Every three years, a major census is conducted, during which he receives the registered records from the regional states. 小司徒之職, 掌建邦之教法, **以稽國中及四郊都鄙之夫家人民之數, 以辨其貴賤、老幼、癈疾, 凡征役之施舍**, 與其祭祀、飲食、喪紀之禁令. 乃頒比法于六鄉之大夫, **使各登其鄉之眾寡、六畜、車輦, 辨其物**, 以歲時入其數, 以施政教, 行徵令. 及三年, 則大比, 大比則受邦國之比要.	District Preceptor: The duty of the District Preceptor is to oversee the cultivation within their respective districts and administer it. In accordance with the regional states' census regulations, **they regularly inspect the population of each household, distinguishing between the elderly, the young, the noble, the common, and those with disabilities, as well as recording the numbers of cattle, horses, and other assets. They assess which individuals are eligible [for military and labor service] and which should be exempted and supported through relief.** 鄉師: 鄉師之職, 各掌其所治鄉之教, 而聽其治. 以國比之法, **以時稽其夫家眾寡, 辨其老幼、貴賤、癈疾、馬牛之物, 辨其可任者與其施舍者.** (Also in "Supervisor of Exterior Districts 遂人")
… Five people form a unit, five units form a section, four sections form a company, five companies form a regiment, five regiments form a division, and five divisions form an army… … …**五人為伍, 五伍為兩, 四兩為卒, 五卒為旅, 五旅為師, 五師為軍.** … …	Supervisor of Exterior Districts: **Five households form a neighborhood, five neighborhoods form a village, four villages form a cluster, five clusters form a district, five districts form a county, and five counties form a region.** 遂人: **五家為鄰, 五鄰為里, 四里為酇, 五酇為鄙, 五鄙為縣, 五縣為遂.** (The 5-5-4-5-5-5 pattern also seen in "Grand Supervisor of People")
He distributes the land equally and verifies the population to maintain accurate census records. Families of seven people are granted **upper-grade land**, which can support one household with three individuals eligible [for military and labor service]. Families of six receive **middle-grade land**, supporting two households with five individuals eligible [for service]. Families of five receive **lower-grade land**, supporting one household with two individuals eligible [for service]. 乃均土地以稽其人民而周知其數. **上地**家七人, 可任也者家三人; **中地**家六人, 可任也者二家五人; **下地**家五人, 可任也者家二人.	Supervisor of Exterior Districts: The fields are assessed and categorized into **upper-grade, middle-grade, and lower-grade lands**, to divide the boundaries of fields and residential areas. 遂人: 辨其野之土, **上地, 中地, 下地**, 以頒田里.

… In all matters involving the conscription of the populace, he **oversees governance and cultivating practices, enforces restrictions on those conscripted, arbitrates their disputes,** administers rewards and punishments, and penalizes those who violate regulations.

… …凡用眾庶, **則掌其政教與其戒禁, 聽其辭訟,** 施其賞罰, 誅其犯命者.

District Preceptor: **He issues the prohibitions, enforces restrictions, and arbitrates the legal disputes.**

鄉師: **掌其戒令糾禁, 聽其獄訟.**

… For minor sacrifices, he **presents offerings of cattle and provides pre-cut portions of the sacrificial animals. He, when receiving minor guests, commands the repair of roads in the countryside, and arranges for the stockpiling of grain and fodder.**

… …凡小祭祀, **奉牛牲, 羞其肆. 小賓客, 令野脩道委積.**

Grand Supervisor of People: For the sacrifices of Five Emperors, **he presents offerings of cattle and provides pre-cut portions of the sacrificial animals.** The same is done when offering sacrifices to the former kings. **When receiving important guests, he commands the repair of roads in the countryside and arranges for the stockpiling of grain and fodder.**

大司徒: 祀五帝, **奉牛牲, 羞其肆,** 享先王亦如之. **大賓客, 令野脩道委積.**

(Also in "Supervisor of Exterior Districts" 遂人)

At the end of the year, he evaluates the achievements of subordinate officials and administers punishments or rewards accordingly. He orders the officials to organize the year's accounting records and submit them. On the first day of the first month, he leads his subordinates to observe the laws posted at the palace gate, **shaking a wooden clapper as they walk,** declaring: "Those who fail to enforce the laws will be punished according to the regional state's constant penalties." … During the major census, he assesses the officials of the six districts and the four outskirts, evaluating their instruction and governance practices, correcting their administrative affairs, and reviewing the numbers of households, people, livestock, weapons, and equipment, in preparation for the issuance of policies.

歲終, 則攷其屬官之治成而誅賞, 令群吏正要會而致事. 正歲, 則帥其屬而觀教法之象, **徇以木鐸曰:** "不用法者, 國有常刑."… …及大比六鄉四郊之吏, 平教治, 正政事, 攷夫屋及其眾寡、六畜、兵、器, 以待政令.[47]

District Preceptor: For the regulations, tax, and labor levies that routinely announced in the four seasons, he **walks through the markets and gathering places while shaking a wooden clapper.** Each year, a regular inspection of the people in the regional states and surrounding areas is conducted, providing relief to those who are hungry or in need, bestowing the king's benevolence upon them. **At the end of the year, he assesses the governance of the local district, and [reports to the higher authorities] for decisions on appointments and dismissals.**

鄉師: 凡四時之徵令有常者, **以木鐸徇於市朝.** 以歲時巡國及野, 而賙萬民之闕阨, 以王命施惠. **歲終, 則攷行鄉之治, 以詔廢置.**[48]

[47] "Minor Supervisor of People in the Office of Earth 地官小司徒" in *ZLZY*, pp. 933–85.

[48] "District Preceptor in the Office of Earth 地官鄉師" in *ZLZY*, p. 989; " Supervisor of Exterior Districts in the Office of Earth 地官遂人," pp. 1349, 1356; "District Preceptor in the Office of Earth 地官鄉師," p. 989; "Grand Supervisor of People in the Office of Earth 地官大司徒," pp. 924–27; "District Preceptor in the Office of Earth 地官鄉師," pp. 1007–8.

of the "Welfare Supervisor 司救" and "Remonstrator 司諫" within the same office respectively. As figure 5 has shown, many positions in the Office of Earth are interwoven, not through an external framework as seen in "Hongfan," but through internal associations, parallels, and allusions between the roles themselves.

This intricate network of connections is not limited to sections within one chapter; it also extends across chapters. The most obvious pattern is the general arrangement of positions: each chapter begins with a trio of the highest-ranking officials, followed by one or two additional high-ranking positions in the middle of the list.[49] Furthermore, there are clear parallels in the descriptions of Grand and Minor officials across different chapters. For example, the first positions in the Offices of Heaven, Earth, Summer, and Autumn share a recurring pattern: "On the first day of the first month, he harmonizes and promulgates X to the regional states, lesser towns and rural areas. The regulations of Y are hung on the palace gate for the myriad people to see. After ten days, they are taken down and stored," with X and Y varying according to the administrative domain (governance, instruction, campaign, or punishments).[50] This reminds readers of the six authorities of the "Grand Steward": the Governmental, Instruction, Ritual, Administrative, Punishment, and Undertakings Authorities. Although not being expressed explicitly, the six authorities seem to serve as an implicit index for the six offices. The parallels between the highest-ranking officials across these offices further reinforce the interconnected structure.

Similarly, the Minor positions in the trinity from the Offices of Heaven, Earth, and Autumn also share a formula: "On the first day of the first month, he leads his subordinates to observe the Y posted at the palace gate, shaking a wooden clapper as they walk, declaring: 'Those who fail to enforce the regulations will be punished according to the regional state's constant penalties.'"[51] Again, there is not only internal

[49] In the Office of Heaven, this middle position is "Accountant 司會"; in the Office of Earth, they are "Palace Master 師氏" and "Supervisor of Exterior Districts 遂人"; in the Office of Spring, they are "Musician-in-chief 大司樂" and "Royal Secretary 內史"; in the Office of Summer, it is "Overseer of Feudatories 職方氏"; and in the Office of Autumn, it is "Grand Messenger 大行人."

[50] 正月之吉, 始和布X于邦國都鄙, 乃縣Y象之法于象魏, 使萬民觀Y象, 挾日而斂之. "Grand Steward in the Office of Heaven 天官大宰" in *ZLZY*, p. 143; "Grand Supervisor of People in the Office of Earth 地官大司徒," p. 908; "Grand Manager of Mounts in the Office of Summer 夏官大司馬," p. 2758; "Grand Manager of Criminals in the Office of Autumn 秋官大司寇," p. 3320. I understand the character *zheng* 政 in the Office of Summer as a loan character for *zheng* 征 (go on a punitive expedition), because the "Grand Manager of Mounts" is responsible for warfare.

[51] 正歲, 則帥其屬而觀Y象, 徇以木鐸曰: "不用法者, 國有常刑." "Minor Steward in the Of-

correspondence within each office, where Grand Officials announce the canons and Minor Officials observe and promulgate them, but also between different offices. This suggests that the author of the *Zhouli* probably had a preexisting structural design that spanned multiple chapters. The use of these parallels acts as a binding mechanism that reinforces the interconnectedness of the different positions and offices.

Sometimes, the *Zhouli*'s use of parallels is more implicit. For example, consider the following description of the "Royal Secretary 內史" in the Office of Spring:

> The Royal Secretary is in charge of the king's eight handles, through which he assists the king's rule. The first is orders of honor, the second is emoluments, the third is dismissal, the fourth is appointments, the fifth is execution, the sixth is pardon, the seventh is rewards, and the eighth is confiscation. 內史掌王之八枋之法, 以詔王治. 一曰爵, 二曰祿, 三曰廢, 四曰置, 五曰殺, 六曰生, 七曰予, 八曰奪.[52]

These "eight handles" clearly allude to the same concept described in the "Grand Steward" in the Office of Heaven:

> He assists the king in managing the officials through eight handles: The first is to grant orders of honor, making the recipient distinguished. The second is to bestow emoluments, making the recipient wealthy. The third is to give rewards, making the recipient favored. The fourth is to appoint officials, [encouraging the appointed] to cultivate virtuous conduct. The fifth is to pardon capital offenses, granting the pardoned the blessing of life. The sixth is to confiscate property, reducing the punished to poverty. The seventh is to dismiss, punishing the dismissed for their crimes. The eighth is to execute, punishing the executed for their offenses. 以八柄詔王馭群臣: 一曰爵, 以馭其貴; 二曰祿, 以馭其富; 三曰予, 以馭其幸; 四曰置, 以馭其行; 五曰生, 以馭其福; 六曰奪, 以馭其貧; 七曰廢, 以馭其罪; 八曰誅, 以馭其過.[53]

Although the sequence of the eight handles differs between the two descriptions, it is clear they refer to the same concept. These parallels not only help preserve the integrity of the content but also highlight

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fice of Heaven 天官小宰" in *ZLZY*, p. 227; "Minor Supervisor of People in the Office of Earth 地官小司徒," p. 983; "Minor Manager of Criminals in the Office of Autumn 秋官小司寇," pp. 3350–51. There are slight differences between these three parallels, and I use the version from the Office of Earth as the primary reference here.

[52] "Royal Secretary in the Office of Spring 春官內史" in *ZLZY*, p. 2561.

[53] "Grand Steward in the Office of Heaven 天官大宰" in *ZLZY*, p. 87.

the close connection between the roles of the "Grand Steward" and the "Royal Secretary."[54] Similarly, the "Overseer of Feudatories 職方氏" in the Office of Summer has loose parallels not only with the Grand position in the same office but also with positions in the Offices of Heaven and Earth. See the following excerpt of its duties:

> Thus, [the Overseer of Feudatories] distinguishes the nine regions. A square of 1,000 *li* forms the royal domain. Beyond that, a square of 500 *li* is the marquis domain (*houfu*). Further beyond, a square of 500 *li* is the provincial domain (*dianfu*). Beyond that, a square of 500 *li* is the baron domain (*nanfu*). Further beyond, a square of 500 *li* is the tribute domain (*caifu*), and beyond that, a square of 500 *li* is the defensive domain (*weifu*)…. When the king is about to conduct an inspection tour, the Overseer issues a warning to the four quarters, saying: "Each of you must diligently maintain your posts, review your duties, and ensure no one dares to neglect caution, for the regional state's severe punishments will follow." 乃辨九服之邦國, 方千里曰王畿, 其外方五百里曰侯服, 又其外方五百里曰甸服, 又其外方五百里曰男服, 又其外方五百里曰采服, 又其外方五百里曰衛服… …王將巡守, 則戒于四方, 曰: "各脩平乃守, 攷乃職事, 無敢不敬戒, 國有大刑."[55]

The "nine regions 九服" closely resemble the "nine domains 九畿" described in the role of the "Grand Manager of Mounts," the highest-ranking official in the same chapter. Again, we see the connection between the trinity and the high-ranking position in the middle. Moreover, the admonition at the end of this excerpt recalls similar directives issued by the "Minor Steward" in the Office of Heaven and the "Grand Supervisor of People" in the Office of Earth, who likewise deliver such warnings to their subordinates at the start of each year. As these are the only three instances of such directive in the *Zhouli* text, they create an exclusive structural echo across the major positions in the middle and the trinity of the other offices.[56]

[54] The "Royal Secretary" is depicted as a high-ranking position in *Zhouli*, which aligns with the available Western Zhou sources. For a discussion of the two types of *shi* 史 (scribes) in *Zhouli*, minor scribes in lower-ranking offices and high-ranking scribes, see Martin Kern, "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," pp. 64–93, esp. 68–87.

[55] "Overseer of Feudatories in the Office of Summer 夏官職方氏" in *ZLZY*, pp. 3235–45. The "nine regions 九服" schema also appears in a parallel passage within the "Overseer of Feudatories 職方氏" section of *Yi Zhoushu*. This nine-fold arrangement stands in contrast to the more common "five regions 五服" model prominent in pre-Qin thought. This five-fold construction is the standard framework seen in *Shangshu*, *Xunzi* 荀子, and *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of the States*) to define the administrative tiers of the realm.

[56] Aside from the "Overseer of Feudatories," the Grand and Minor positions in the four of-

The description of "nine regions" further appears in the duties of the "Grand Messenger 大行人," a major position in the middle of the Office of Autumn.

> **In the spring, the feudal lords pay an audience to the king** to plan major affairs of the realm. **In the autumn, they visit the king** to assess the achievements of regional states. **In the summer, the lords present themselves to the king** to propose strategies for governing the realm. **In the winter, they meet with the king** to coordinate mutual concerns. **During regular assemblies**, the king issues decrees to the four regions, and **through the grand council**, governance for the realm are implemented. **Diplomatic missions are sent regularly** to maintain good relations with the lords, and **during the grand inspections**, the misconduct of regional states is addressed. Every other year, envoys are dispatched to understand the lord's intentions. **Sacrificial meat is distributed** as a blessing to the lords. When the lords experience joyful events, **envoys are sent to offer congratulations,** adding to their joy. In times of disaster, relief is provided to aid the lords.
>
> **春朝**諸侯而圖天下之事, **秋覲**以比邦國之功, **夏宗**以陳天下之謨, **冬遇**以協諸侯之慮, **時會**以發四方之禁, **殷同**以施天下之政, **時聘**以結諸侯之好, **殷覜**以除邦國之慝, 間問以諭諸侯之志, **歸脤**以交諸侯之福, **賀慶**以贊諸侯之喜, 致禬以補諸侯之災.

> The Nine Protocols are used to distinguish the ranks of the feudal lords …. For the highest-ranking dukes, the ritual involves holding a nine-inch-long jade tablet (*huan gui*)…. For the marquises, a seven-inch-long jade tablet (*xin gui*) is held…. The earls hold a jade tablet (*gong gui*), following the same rituals as the marquises. The viscounts hold a five-inch-wide round jade tablet (*gu bi*), … and the barons hold a round jade tablet (*pu bi*), following the same rites as the viscounts … .
>
> 以九儀辨諸侯之命 ……上公之禮, 執桓圭九寸……諸侯之禮, 執信圭七寸……諸伯執躬圭, 其他皆如諸侯之禮. 諸子執穀璧五寸……諸男執蒲璧, 其他皆如諸子之禮. … …

> The royal domain squares 1,000 *li*. Beyond that, a square of 500 *li* is the marquis domain, and they pay an audience to the king every year…. Further beyond, a square of 500 *li* is the provincial domain, visiting every two years…. Beyond that, a square of

fices (excluding the Office of Spring) are the only positions in *Zhouli* explicitly give the making of announcements as part of their duties.

> 500 *li* is the baron domain, visiting every three years… . Further beyond, a square of 500 *li* is the tribute domain, visiting every four years… and beyond that, a square of 500 *li* is the defensive domain, visiting every five years. 邦畿方千里, 其外方五百里謂之侯服, 歲壹見… …又其外方五百里謂之甸服, 二歲壹見… …又其外方五百里謂之男服, 三歲壹見… …又其外方五百里謂之采服, 四歲壹見… …又其外方五百里謂之衛服, 五歲壹見.[57]

Beyond reiterating the "nine regions," the account of various visits between the king and the lords echoes the descriptions of rites, protocols, and jade tokens found in the "Grand Clansman 大宗伯" in the Office of Spring:

> [The "Grand Clansman"] uses the rites of guest to strengthen the relationship between the king and the regional states: **in spring, the audience is called *chao*; in summer, *zong*; in autumn, *jin*; in winter, *yu*; for occasional meetings, it is called *hui*; and for grand meetings, *tong*. Regular diplomatic missions are called *wen*, while grand inspections are called *shi*.**… . He applies the auspicious rites to strengthens relations with the myriad people: … **offerings of sacrificial meat are given to states of the same surname; congratulatory ceremonies strengthen ties with states of different surnames**.
>
> 以賓禮親邦國: **春見曰朝, 夏見曰宗, 秋見曰覲, 冬見曰遇, 時見曰會, 殷見曰同. 時聘曰問, 殷覜曰視**… …以嘉禮親萬民: … … **以脤膰之禮, 親兄弟之國; 以賀慶之禮, 親異姓之國**.

> The Nine Protocols are used to rectify the positions of the states… . The six jade tokens are used to distinguish the ranks of the regional states: the king holds *zhen gui*, the dukes hold *huan gui*, the marquises hold *xin gui*, the earls hold *gong gui*, the viscounts hold *gu bi*, and the barons hold *pu bi*.
>
> 以九儀之命, 正邦國之位, … …以玉作六瑞, 以等邦國, 王執鎮圭, 公執桓圭, 侯執信圭, 伯執躬圭, 子執穀璧, 男執蒲璧.[58]

The first eight rites overseen by the "Grand Messenger" employ the same proper nouns as those in the eight rites of guest recorded in the section of "Grand Clansman." The rites of offering sacrificial meat and conducting congratulatory ceremonies also align with the two rites in the

[57] "Grand Messenger in the Office of Autumn 秋官大行人" in *ZLZY*, pp. 3548–83.
[58] "Grand Clansman in the Office of Spring 春官大宗伯" in *ZLZY*, pp. 1623–66.

"auspicious rites 嘉禮." Moreover, not only do the content of the rites and the types of jade ritual objects correspond perfectly between the two texts, but the sequence (rites first, highlighted in bold; followed by nine protocols highlighted by a wavy underscore; and then six jade objects highlighted by a straight underscore), is also identical. This indicates that these texts are not random compilations of numerical lists. Once the author established a sequence, it remained relatively stable and was repeated, with only minor variations to maintain its integrity.

In summary, an analysis of the three high-ranking positions in the middle of official lists, the "Royal Secretary," the "Overseer of Feudatories," and the "Grand Messenger," reveals parallels and strong relationships with the Grand and Minor positions in other offices. If we were to diagram the textual network within and across the *Zhouli* chapters, it would resemble the following figure 6.

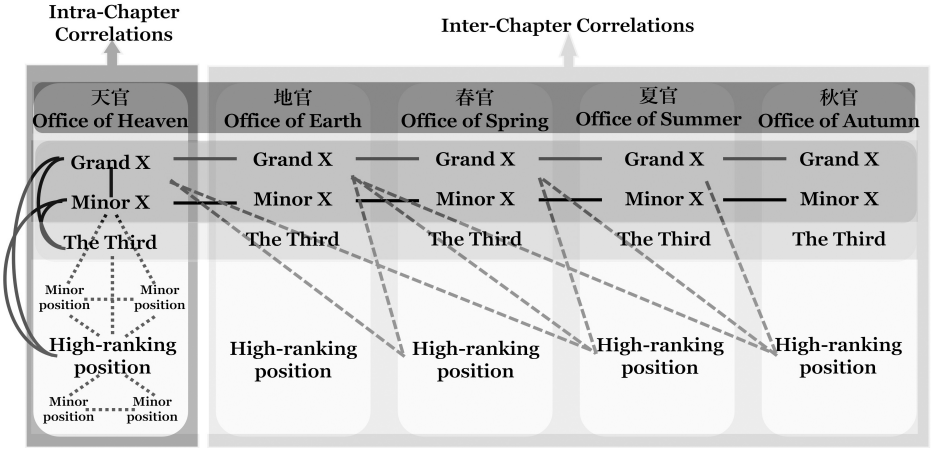


Figure 6. Zhouli's Intra- and Inter-Chapter Relationships

Although this illustration is not constructed with total precision in such a complex of interwoven links, it still reveals several essential features of *Zhouli*'s internal structure. As previously shown in the discussion of "Grand Steward" and illustrated in figure 5, the text exhibits both an organized structure within individual sections describing one official position and a broader, interconnected network of official roles within a chapter. Beyond the tightly bounded trinity of officials, that is the grand/minor pair and the third subordinate shown in figure 1, parallels exist among the mid-list, high-ranking positions, the bounded trinity, and other low-ranking officials responsible for minor affairs, as

represented by the dotted lines and curved lines in the Office of Heaven. Across chapters, there also is a consistent pattern in the arrangement: each list begins with the trinity and includes a high-ranking position in the middle. The Grand and Minor positions reflect similar parallels across the various offices (represented by the horizontal lines), with central positions referring back to earlier Grand or Minor roles from different chapters (represented by the dashed line across offices).

It is clear that *Zhouli*'s framework was established based on several structural principles, which shaped how various materials were assigned and revised to fit within the structure. First, at the most granular level, numerical lists within a section should be interconnected and maintain a stable sequence across references. Second, moving up the hierarchy, different sections within a chapter, representing different officials within one office, should be linked by more than mere juxtaposition or a basic branching framework; rather, they constitute an intricately interwoven network, as demonstrated by the Office of Earth in figure 5. Third, the format and structure of chapters should remain consistent, and their contents should also show relatedness. Fourth, an overarching design must exist to interweave every individual chapter into a unified whole, as figure 2 has shown. Fifth, some structural principles should be applied consistently across every level of the text (such as the combination of two-tier and three-tier systems in *Zhouli*). Sixth, a text, whether a section or a chapter, should have defined boundaries to prevent endless expansion. These principles together suggest a novel and sophisticated concept of a "book" in early China, one that was unprecedented in its systematic approach.

When compared to other compilations such as *Lüshi Chunqiu* and *Huainanzi*, the *Zhouli* represents a far more advanced understanding of what constitutes a book. While the other two early works arrange their chapters in a particular manner, they lack consistent structural patterns across chapters.[59] More importantly, the internal arrangement of sections within these chapters is less systematically developed. In *Lüshi Chunqiu*, arguments and anecdotes within a chapter often lack clear internal connections, allowing for easy alteration, addition, or removal without disrupting the overall flow. In *Huainanzi*, particularly in the

[59] Andrew Meyer demonstrates how the normative metaphors of roots and branches (*benmo* 本末) serve as conceptual templates that organize the *Huainanzi*'s doctrines and composition. However, the mere recurrence of a single metaphor is insufficient to sustain the entire structural architecture of a work. For Meyer's analysis, see "Root-Branches Structuralism in the *Huainanzi*," in Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett, eds., *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 21–39.

"Terrestrial Forms 墜形" and "Seasonal Rules 時則" chapters, arguably the two most organized, there is still only a rudimentary structure. In the former, some sections are grouped based on shared syntax or by fitting into a general catalog of numerical lists. However, there is little continuity between these groups to bind them into a unified chapter. In the latter, the twelve sections describing the twelve months do follow a consistent sequence and format, but the final three sections, unrelated to specific months, seem isolated and disconnected from the rest of the chapter.

That is to say, down to the early Western Han, even those works that most closely approximate the later notion of a coherent book exhibit ordered design only in limited portions of individual chapters. The compilers had not yet developed the concept of applying a unified structure across multiple chapters to create an integrated whole. The *Zhouli*, by contrast, presents a fully realized book, one that is well-organized, self-contained, and interconnected throughout. Such a conception could not have emerged during the Warring States period, when most texts were circulated at the level of individual *pian* 篇 rather than as unified multi-chapter works.[60] It is more plausible that this model of textual integration took shape after the creation of *Huainanzi*. I suggest that the *Zhouli* is most likely a product of the mid-to-late Western Han, created in response to contemporary intellectual and political needs, but it is unlikely to be the forgery of Wang Mang and Liu Xin.

SPECULATIONS ABOUT THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *ZHOULI*

Why Mid-to-late Western Han?

As discussed above, the sophisticated concept of a book seen in the *Zhouli* represents a structural advancement that necessarily postdates the creation of *Huainanzi*, and since *Zhouli* was "discovered" and elevated at the end of the Western Han, its composition must be situated within this specific chronological window. I believe that the historical context from emperor Yuan's reign, and particularly during emperor Cheng's reign, provides the most fitting background for the emergence of the *Zhouli* as a book. This can be explored through three key factors: the flourishing of written texts, reforms in ritual and

60 See Yu Jiaxi 余嘉錫, *Gushu tongli* 古書通例 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1985), pp. 93–96.

official systems, and the combination of dichotomy and trichotomy in philosophical writings.

There exists a clear shift from a dominant oral tradition to the rise of written culture in the mid-to-late Western Han. Since emperor Yuan's reign, it became common for texts, whether commentaries on classics, such as Hou Cang's 后倉 (fl. emperor Xuan's 宣 reign, 74–49 BC) interpretations of ritual texts, or compilations of materials, such as *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論 (*Discourse on Salt and Iron*),[61] and Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BC) *Shuoyuan* 說苑 and *Xinxu* 新序, to extend to tens of thousands of words. *Zhouli* itself is a massive undertaking, averaging nearly 9,000 characters per chapter. The intricate planning required for such large-scale texts, with their multi-layered internal structures, points toward a highly mature written culture. Previously, texts typically relied on relatively straightforward branching structures or enumerations rooted in chronological or geographical sequences, as seen in *Lüshi Chunqiu*, *Huainanzi*, and *Shiji* 史記. Even when there is an overarching design for the entire work, it is usually imposed on chapters with minimal internal connections across them, let alone across individual sections. The *Zhouli*'s meticulous calibration of the relationships among smaller textual units suggests a level of structural density that likely only emerges after a written culture has gained extensive experience in synthesizing and managing comprehensive, large-scale corpora.

Scholarly attention has long centered on the reforms of ancestral temples and suburban sacrifices beginning late in the reign of emperor Yuan.[62] Figures such as Wei Xuancheng 韋玄成 (d. 41 BC) and Kuang Heng 匡衡 (chancellor, 36–30/29 BC) drew upon newly compiled ritual texts, including the *Liji* 禮記, to authorize their proposals of reform.[63]

[61] Although *Hanshu* 漢書 clearly states that *Yantielun* was written in the reign of emperor Xuan, Michael Loewe proposes that it was written after emperor Yuan's accession, since emperor Yuan had attempted to abolish the state monopolies on salt and iron. See Loewe, "'Confucian' Values and Practices in Han China," *TP* 98 (2012), pp. 1–30, esp. 26. Even if *Yantielun* was compiled in the early years of emperor Xuan's reign, there would be a decade gap from the actual court debate it discusses, and the gap would become over thirty years if it was compiled under emperor Yuan. For the dating of *Yantielun*, see Anatoly Polnarov, "Looking beyond Dichotomies: Hidden Diversity of Voices in the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論," *TP* 104.5–6 (2018), pp. 465–95, esp. 466, and Wang Yong 王永, *Yantielun yanjiu* 鹽鐵論研究 (Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 2009), pp. 20–23.

[62] For discussions on the late Western Han debates regarding ancestral temples (referred to as "shrines" by Michael Loewe), see Loewe, *Problems of Han Administration: Ancestral Rites, Weights and Measures, and the Means of Protest* (Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 46–56, and Tian Tian 田天, "The Suburban Sacrifice Reforms and the Evolution of the Imperial Sacrifices," in Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen, eds., *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2015), pp. 263–92.

[63] E.g., while *Liji* cites a system of five temples, the Zhou dynasty is traditionally believed

The political urgency of these ritual debates likely accelerated the assembly and refinement of such texts. However, few scholars have linked these ritual reforms to the concurrent reforms in the official system during emperor Cheng's reign. In 8 BC, just one year before emperor Cheng's death, he established the "three excellencies 三公" as the highest central officials. The triad comprised the already existing "chancellor 丞相," the "commander-in-chief 大司馬," and the "grand minister of works 大司空," derived from the "imperial counselor 御史大夫." Following a brief restoration of traditional titles under emperor Ai 哀帝 (r. 7–1 BC), the three excellencies were reinstated, renaming "chancellor" as "grand minister over the masses 大司徒."[64] Additionally, emperor Cheng replaced "regional inspector 刺史" with the newly established "regional commissioner 州牧" at the local level.[65] Similar to the concurrent ritual reforms, these administrative upheavals were not without controversy.[66] Key officials who proposed or supported the reforms,

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to have upheld a structure of seven temples. Wei favored *Liji*'s record and endeavored to interpret the seven temples of the Zhou dynasty as a variant of the five-temple system. Similarly, in his memorial to the throne arguing for the revisions of suburban sacrifice, Kuang implicitly quoted two lines from the "The Standard of Sacrifices 祭法" chap. in *Liji*. See Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu*, annot. Yan Shigu 顏師古 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962) 25B, chap. "Jiaosi zhi" 郊祀志, p. 1254. *Liji* was an amalgamation of various ritual materials, and its compilation was somewhat eclectic. Dai De 戴德, Dai Sheng 戴聖, and Liu Xiang each crafted their versions of *Liji*, with the current one being a compilation by Dai Sheng. For a discussion of the three versions, see Wang Baoxuan 王葆玹, *Xi Han jingxue yuanliu* 西漢經學源流 (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1994), pp. 266–71.

64 See *Hanshu* 83, chap. "Xue Xuan Zhu Bo zhuan" 薛宣朱博傳, pp. 3404–5. For a detailed discussion on the background and emergence of the three excellencies, see Bu Xianqun 卜憲群, "Qin Han sangong zhidu yuanyuan lun" 秦漢三公制度淵源論, *Anhui shixue* 安徽史學 4 (1994), pp. 11–15, and Wang Chao 汪超, "Sangong shuo yu liang Han sangong zhidu" 三公說與兩漢三公制度, *Qin Han yanjiu* 秦漢研究 1 (2011), pp. 260–67.

65 Also, he changed the title of "Metropolitan Superintendent 內史," a chief executive official of a princedom or marquisate, to "Commandant of the Capital 中尉"; and changed "Prefect of the Palace Writers and Internuncios 中書謁者令" to "Prefect of the Palace Internuncios 中謁者令." For a detailed account of all the reforms of the official system during this period, see Jiang Lianshan 江連山, "Shilun Xi Han guanzhi gaige (si): Yuan Cheng shiqi de guanzhi gaige" 試論西漢官制改革 (四), 元成時期的官制改革, *Suihua shizhuan xuebao* 綏化師專學報 4 (1988), pp. 92–97.

66 See *Hanshu* 83, chap. "Xue Xuan Zhu Bo zhuan," p. 3405: "Many critics argued that the systems of antiquity and the present were different, as the Han dynasty differed from ancient times in everything from the title of the empire to the assistants and scribes. Changing only the titles of Three Excellencies while leaving other positions untouched would blur the division of duties and bring no benefit to governance 議者多以爲古今異制, 漢自天下之號下至佐史皆不同於古, 而獨改三公, 職事難分明, 無益於治亂." Also, in Ban Gu's father, Ban Biao's 班彪 (3–54 AD), comments, these three reforms (ancestral temples, suburban sacrifices, and official systems), are juxtaposed to highlight that "the systems of antiquity and the present were different, and it is difficult to reach a definitive settlement 禮文缺微, 古今異制, 各爲一家, 未易可偏定也." See *Hanshu* 73, chap. "Wei Xian zhuan" 韋賢傳, pp. 3130–31.

such as He Wu 何武 (d. 3 AD), Zhai Fangjin 翟方進 (d. 7 BC), and Zhang Yu 張禹 (d. 5 BC), were all prominent Ru 儒 (classicist) scholars known for their skills in the Confucian texts.[67] The drive to reform the state bureaucracy likely acted as a powerful catalyst for the production of texts that focused on the administrative system, like *Zhouli*. Conversely, the emergence of such meticulously structured works provided the "canonical" scaffolding necessary to justify radical shifts.

Since the proliferation of ritual texts during this period may shed light on the development of texts concerning the official system, I will first briefly introduce the ritual texts. From the memorials presented by Wei and Kuang to the throne, it is clear that certain newly-arranged ritual texts, especially *Liji*, were initially unrecognized and undervalued, but gradually gained influence during this period.[68] Notably, two extant versions of such ritual compilations, namely, *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 and *Liji*, are extensive texts without clear authorship.[69] Zheng Xuan was the first scholar to attribute these works to Dai De 戴德 and Dai Sheng 戴聖, respectively, but this was over 200 years after their supposed composition.[70] In the "Treatise on Arts and Letters" 藝文志 and the "Biographies of the Ru" 儒林傳 chapters in *Hanshu* 漢書, neither Liu

[67] He Wu is renowned for his studies on the *Yijing*, Zhai is known for his expertise on *Chunqiu*, and Zhang is celebrated for his *Lunyu* commentary.

[68] In 40 BC, emperor Yuan initiated discussions amongst his subordinates regarding the discontinuation of ancestral temples within the local prefectures and feudal states. Wei, accompanied by seventy other scholars, submitted a memorial endorsing the idea. In their memorial, they alluded to *Liji* twice, yet they couched these references in a hearsay formula ("we heard that … 臣聞"). By contrast, they quoted *Shijing* and *Chunqiu* with explicit attribution. This suggests that those ritual texts had not yet achieved the same level of recognition as the well-established classics. Only one month later, when Wei and forty-four others presented another memorial, they cited the "Meaning of Sacrifices" 祭義 chapter of *Liji* by name, followed by an exegesis to the excerpt. This transition from vague allusion to explicit, titled citation marks the rapid elevation of specific ritual chapters to a canonical status equivalent to that of the classics. See *Hanshu* 73, chap. "Wei Xian zhuan" 韋賢傳, pp. 3117–18.

[69] The current *Da Dai Liji* is incomplete, making it difficult to estimate the original number of characters. However, the original text is said to have had 85 chapters, suggesting that it likely contained significantly more characters than *Liji*, which has slightly fewer than 100,000 characters and includes only about half as many chapters. Additionally, Liu Xiang compiled a collection of ritual records reportedly consisting of 131 chapters, as mentioned in *Hanshu* 30, chap. "Yiwen zhi" 藝文志, p. 1709. Such a large number of chapters within a single text is unprecedented.

[70] See Zheng Xuan's comment on the "Grand Steward in the Office of Heaven 天官大宰" in *ZLZY*, p. 10: "The Duke of Zhou, during his regency, established the Offices of the six Authorities, calling it *Zhouli* 周公居攝而作六典之職, 謂之周禮." It is commonly agreed that Dai De and Dai Sheng were primarily active during the reigns of emperors Yuan and Cheng. For further discussion on the authorship of these two texts and the dating of the two Dais, see Shen Wenzhuo 沈文倬, "Cong Hanchu jinwenjing de xingcheng shuo dao liang Han jinwen '*li*' de chuanshou" 從漢初今文經的形成說到兩漢今文 "禮" 的傳授, in *Zong Zhou liyue wenming kaolun* 宗周禮樂文明考論 (Zhejiang: Hangzhou daxue chubanshe, 1999) 2, pp. 503–58, and

Xiang nor Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 AD) mentioned Dai De or Dai Sheng as authors.[71] When Western Han scholars cited the *Liji*, the compilers were never named, and it is also unclear whether they referred to the specific text we know today or used the term more generally to describe any ritual records. This uncertainty has led some scholars to question whether *Liji* and *Da Dai Liji* existed as complete books by the end of the Western Han.[72] The *Zhouli* follows a similar pattern. Zheng Xuan was also the first to attribute its authorship to the Duke of Zhou, but the actual compiler remains unknown. Like those two ritual texts, *Zhouli* is an extensive compilation that integrates various received materials. It is unlikely that such a large-scale project could have been completed during the Warring States period without state sponsorship. If a later ruler, for example a Qin or Han emperor, had sponsored this project, it would have been closely associated with his reign and widely publicized, which historical records do not reflect. Therefore, if *Zhouli* was not directly supported by political sponsorship, it could only have emerged in an era when the scholarly community had flourished, with sufficient resources and manpower to compile such a large work. The mid-to-late Western Han was such an environment, where a leading scholar could gather the necessary resources to produce a large-scale book, such as those records related to court rites. Thus, the *Zhouli* text is likely a product of this same scholarly environment, which was shaped by the political trend toward debating and enacting reforms during this period.

Xu Yaohuan 徐耀環, "Dai De, Dai Sheng shengzu niandai de tuice" 戴德、戴聖生卒年代的推測, in Lin Qingzhang 林慶彰, ed., *Jingxue yanjiu luncong* 經學研究論叢 (Taipei: Shenghuan tushu gongsi, 1994) 1, pp. 17–26.

71 Ma Xiaoling 馬曉玲 provides evidence suggesting that Liu Xiang had access to the *Da Dai Liji*, since "Liu Xiang's *Qi lüe* 七略 (*Seven Summaries*) states, 'Kongzi met Duke Ai three times and composed the *San chao ji* 三朝記 (*Records of Three Audiences*) with seven chapters. Now these texts are in the *Da Dai Li*.' 孔子三見哀公, 作 '三朝記' 七篇, 今在 '大戴禮.' " However, it remains unclear whether the final line was part of the original *Qi lüe* or later added by the quoter. See Ma, "*Da Dai Liji* wei Xi Han Dai De suobian xinzheng: yi xian Qin Xi Han chutu wenxian wei canzhao" 大戴禮記爲西漢戴德所編新證, 以先秦西漢出土文獻爲參照, *Guoxue xuekan* 國學學刊 1 (2017), pp. 66–90, esp. 71–72.

72 E.g, see Hong Ye 洪業, "*Yili* yinde xu" 儀禮引得序, and "*Liji* yinde xu" 禮記引得序, in *Hong Ye lunxue ji* 洪業論學集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), pp. 41–50, pp. 197–220; Wang Pinzhen 王聘珍, *Da Dai Liji jiegu* 大戴禮記解詁 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 6; and Qian, *Sanli tonglun*, p. 55. While the complete redaction of the two *Liji*s remains a matter of historical uncertainty for this period, it is evident that a vast corpus of ritual records was already in circulation and under systematic compilation by the late Western Han, especially since Dai De and Dai Sheng were appointed as Erudites during the reign of Emperor Yuan.

Finally, it is important to consider one key aspect of the *Zhouli*'s structural design: the combination of two-tier and three-tier divisions. Earlier texts on official systems typically presented either a simple list of five or six equal-ranking positions[73] or a hierarchical system based on groups of three.[74] For example, in *Chunqiu fanlu*, we find the following hierarchy:

> The king regulates the offices. With the three dukes, nine ministers, twenty-seven grand masters, and eighty-one senior functionaries, a total of 120, his hierarchy of officials is complete. 王者制官, 三公、九卿、二十七大夫、八十一元士, 凡百二十人, 而列臣備矣.[75]

This three-tier hierarchy reappears in several texts, including some chapters of the *Liji*, *Shuoyuan*, and *Huainanzi*, indicating that this model of an official system was widely accepted. Another passage from *Chunqiu fanlu* elaborates on this system:

> Why do the assistants consist of three groups of three and then repeat? The answer is: Each season is completed in three months, and the great Chronogram constellation consists of three stars. 佐之必三三而相復, 何? 曰: 時三月而成大, 辰三而成象.[76]

Whether this explanation was universally accepted, it is clear that the number three played a significant role in the arrangement of official positions. However, as seen in *Zhouli*, the number two is equally important, likely reflecting the dualistic transformations found in the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*).[77] The question remains: when were the two- and three-tier systems combined?

[73] Such as six officials in the "Five Phases" chap. of *Guanzi*, and the six "grand" positions and five officials in "Various Rites" chap. of *Liji*.

[74] The most sophisticated administrative design predating the late Western Han appears in the second half of the "Jueguo" 爵國 ("Ranking States") chap. of *Chunqiu fanlu* (sects. 8A–8E in Queen and Major's translation, and this part is attributed to Western Han writers not directly associated with Dong). This text only contains official titles, ranks, and numbers of positions and is limited to approximately 1,300 characters.

[75] Zhong Zhe 鍾哲, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng* 春秋繁露義證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992), p. 214. Translation adopted from Queen and Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, p. 257, who attribute this section to Western Han scholars (ibid., p. 28). It is noteworthy that the same organization of offices can be seen in the "Wangzhi" and "Hunyi" 昏義 ("Meaning of the Marriage Ceremony") chaps. of *Liji*; "Taizu" 泰族 ("Exalted Lineage") chap. of *Huainanzi*; and in a dialogue between Tang 湯, the first ruler of Shang, and his minister Yiyin 伊尹 in the "Jundao" 君道 ("Way of the Lord") chap. of *Shuoyuan*.

[76] Zhong, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, p. 238. Queen and Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, p. 278. According to Queen and Major, this section was written by Dong or members of his immediate circle, including first-generation disciples (ca. 130–100 BC); see ibid., p. 27.

[77] See the "Xi ci" chap. in the *Yijing*: "One *yin* and one *yang* form the Way 一陰一陽之謂道"; "The Yi contains the Supreme Ultimate, which gives rise to the Two Forms [*yin* and *yang*].

In the *Chunqiu fanlu* chapter "Reform of Institutions in the Three Dynasties; and Substance and Refinement" 三代改制質文, we already see a juxtaposition of dichotomy and trichotomy in the discussion of past dynastic changes. The author first explains the theory of the "Three Rectifications 三正" (or "Three Dispensations 三統"),[78] where the Dispensations of Black, White, and Red correspond to the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, respectively. He then presents a dichotomy: the Shang dynasty is linked to Heaven, *yang*, and substance (*zhi* 質), while the Xia dynasty is associated with Earth, *yin*, and refinement (*wen* 文).[79] However, the author struggles to fully integrate the dichotomy of Shang and Xia with the tripartite succession of Xia, Shang, and Zhou. The only attempt to reconcile these two ideas appears in a short passage:

> Why does the *Chunqiu* have three ranks? In the institutions for kings there is one occasion for Shang, one for Xia, one for substance, and one for refinement. Shang, with substance, looked to heaven as the master; Xia, with refinement, looked to earth as the master; the *Chunqiu* looked to man as the master. Hence there were the three grades. 春秋何三等? 曰: 王者以制, 一商一夏, 一質一文. 商質者主天, 夏文者主地, 春秋者主人, 故三等也.[80]

As Xu Fuguan points out, Dong Zhongshu's 董仲舒 (ca. 195–105 BC) attempt to integrate substance and refinement with the theory of "Three Dispensations" is conceptually weak and unconvincing. The

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The Two Forms generate the Four Symbols, and the Four Symbols produce the Eight Trigrams 易有太極, 是生兩儀, 兩儀生四象, 四象生八卦." *Zhouyi zhengyi*, pp. 315, 340. As Liu Xiang points out, "the art of prognosticating change lies simply in duality. This duality lies in the calculation of *yin* and *yang* 夫占變之道, 二而已矣. 二者, 陰陽之數也." See Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校正 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), p. 443. Translation adopted from Eric Henry, *Garden of Eloquence* (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2021), p. 1043.

78 The Three Dispensations theory was mentioned by certain prominent scholars, including Liu Xiang, Gu Yong 谷永 (d. 8 BC), and Liu Xin, during emperor Cheng's reign and shortly afterward. For a detailed introduction, see Loewe, "Chengdi's Reign, Problems and Controversies," in Nylan and Vankeerberghen, eds., *Chang'an 26 BCE*, pp. 221–38, esp. 227.

79 In the "Hereditary House of Kongzi" 孔子世家 chap. of *Shiji*, Sima Qian 司馬遷 (d. ca. 85 BC) attributes this statement to Kongzi, explicitly associating the Xia and Shang dynasties with the virtues of *zhi* and *wen*, respectively. This represents the earliest reliable textual link between these two dynasties and their corresponding qualities. For a comprehensive study of the usage of *wen* and *zhi* throughout the two Han dynasties, see Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a "Confucian" Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 275–86.

80 Zhong, *Chunqiu fanlu yizheng*, p. 204. Translation adopted from Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu*, p. 328. Queen and Major note that "the emphasis in 23.13 on 'simplicity and refinement' is consistent with Dong's known opinions." See Queen and Major, *Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, p. 237. The discussion of the three ranks in the *Chunqiu* in this excerpt can also be seen at the beginning of chap. 28, which is considered a relatively reliable work by Dong or members of his immediate circle. Hence, I view the date of this excerpt as no later than late Western Han.

two models, dichotomy and trichotomy, are presented without a coherent link between them.[81] It was not until Liu Xiang's *Shuoyuan* that a more deliberate attempt to harmonize these systems emerged. Liu Xiang wrote:

> Thus, the rulers of the state passed through a Shang phase and a Xia phase: a two-stage cycle. The emblematic color changes thrice and then returns to what it was originally. Among flavors, sweetness is regarded as the foremost, and, among tones, *gong* is regarded as the foremost; these two are primary and [not] cyclical in nature. Thus, the governing arts of the Three Kings accorded with a recurring cycle. 故王者一商一夏, 再而復者也, 正色三而復者也. 味尙甘, 聲尙宮, 一而復者, 故三王術如循環.[82]

Though Liu Xiang does not explicitly state it, this passage suggests a grand cycle that integrates dichotomy and trichotomy, forming a complete cycle of six units. After six transitions between dynasties, the seventh cycle returns to the pairing of substance and refinement with the three sequential colors. This marks the first clear synthesis of the dichotomy and trichotomy frameworks within surviving texts. Such a conceptual structure can also be seen in the writings of Liu Xin and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BC–18 AD).

> [Liu Xin:] The primordial *qi* of the Supreme Ultimate encompasses three and functions as one.... The Classic [i.e., *Chunqiu*] begins with the "first [year]" to signify the beginning, corresponding to *Yijing*'s concept of the Supreme Ultimate. The *Chunqiu* uses the two [seasons of spring and autumn] to designate the year, corresponding to the *Yijing*'s concept of the Two Forms [*yin* and *yang*]. By recording "the King" in every month of spring [i.e., the first three months], it corresponds to the Three Extremes in the *Yijing*. Even when no events occur, the *Chunqiu* notes the four seasons and months, representing the Four Symbols in the *Yijing*. 劉歆: 太

[81] Xu, *Liang Han sixiangshi* 2, p. 216.

[82] Xiang, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng*, p. 477. Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, p. 1115. This excerpt comes from the beginning of this chapter, a preface that was very likely composed by Liu himself. Both theories regarding the dual cycle of *wen* and *zhi* as well as the tripartite cycle of the Three Kings were prevalent during the two Han dynasties. The former is well-attested in *Chunqiu fanlu* 7.3 and *Baihu tong* 白虎通 (*Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall*) 28; while the latter appears in *Liji* 32, *Shiji* 8, *Baihu tong* 28, and *Lunheng* 論衡 (*Discourses Weighed in the Balance*) 56. However, an explicit integration of these two distinct cyclical models is exceedingly rare in extant literature. A singular Han-era instance occurs in *Baihu tong* 27, which quotes the otherwise lost *Lisan zhengji* 禮三正記: "The first month of the year is changed after three [successions], while *wen* and *zhi* return after two 正朔三而改, 文質再而復也." For further analysis, see Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, p. 1114, nn. 14 and 15.

> 極元氣, 函三爲一. … …經元一以統始, 易太極之首也. 春秋二以目歲, 易兩儀之中也. 於春每月書王, 《易》三極之統也. 於四時雖亡事必書時月, 易四象之節也.[83]
>
> [Yang Xiong:] Heaven operates by thirds, culminating in the completion of six. 揚雄: 天以三分, 終於六成.[84]

Liu Xin's introduction of the number three in the cosmology of the Supreme Ultimate 太極 marked a significant departure from tradition. The "Xi ci" 繫辭 ("Appended Statements") chapter in *Yijing* outlines the progression from the Supreme Ultimate to the Two Forms, Four Symbols, and Eight Trigrams. Liu Xin was likely the first scholar to propose that the Supreme Ultimate encompasses three elements, suggesting that the Supreme Ultimate inherently contains a triadic potential rather than a purely dualistic one.[85] In this scheme deeply influenced by *Chunqiu* and *Yijing*, the numbers one, two, and three are synthesized into a unified ontological system. Similarly, Yang Xiong adopted this framework in his *Taixuan* 太玄 (*Supreme Mystery*), which employs both two-tier and three-tier systems. As Shen Xianghui 沈相輝 notes, although trichotomy is often seen as the defining feature of Yang's *Taixuan*, its structure also incorporates the *yin-yang* dichotomy. Yang divides *Taixuan*'s eighty-one chapters into two halves: in the first half, *yang* energy transitions from decline to growth, and in the second, *yang* energy reaches its peak and begins to decline. In this way, the *Taixuan* is a conceptual pyramid, with trichotomy symbolizing vertical hierarchy (space) and dichotomy representing horizontal cycle of Yin and Yang (time).[86] It seems that this trend of integrating dichotomy and trichotomy became increasingly influential in the intellectual climate of the period. Given this widespread adoption, it is likely that the *Zhouli* text was composed during the same period, reflecting this intellectual movement.

83 *Hanshu* 21A, chap. "Lüli zhi" 律曆志, pp. 964–81.

84 Sima Guang 司馬光, *Taixuan jizhu* 太玄集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998), p. 193.

85 Zhang Tao 張濤 also notices that two major systems regarding the cosmos and the origin of the myriad things have long existed: the dichotomy and the trichotomy. It was Liu Xin who innovatively combined these two systems. See Zhang, "Lüelun Liu Xiang Liu Xin fuzi de Yixue sixiang yu chengjiu" 略論劉向劉歆父子的易學思想與成就, *Wenxian* 文獻 2 (1998), pp. 79–92, esp. 89.

86 Shen Xianghui 沈相輝, "Yinyang wuxing yu *Taixuan* zhi shengcheng" 陰陽五行與太玄之生成, *Zhouyi yanjiu* 周易研究 5 (2021), pp. 65–74, esp. 66–67.

Why Not a Forgery by Wang Mang and Liu Xin?

If *Zhouli* was indeed compiled during the mid-to-late Western Han period, a critical question arises: was it created under the direction of Wang Mang or Liu Xin? I find this possibility unlikely. Qian Mu 錢穆 has examined this issue thoroughly and argues that this assumption leads to too many inconsistencies. His conclusion is that neither Liu nor Wang had sufficient time or compelling motivation to forge the text. The *Zhouli* arguably offered little practical support for Wang's usurpation or Liu's promotion of ancient-script classics. Furthermore, Qian argued that its authenticity went unchallenged by Liu's contemporaries and Eastern Han scholars, even by their fierce opponents like Shi Dan 師丹 (d. 3 AD).[87] For Liu Xin, when he debated with the Erudites about establishing crucial texts presumably written in ancient scripts in the reign of emperor Ai, the *Zhouli* was never mentioned. This suggests that he either had never heard of it or had not considered it important at that time. It was only after Wang Mang referenced the text in 4 and 5 AD to support his political reforms that Liu Xin seemed to take note of it. In 8 AD, Liu and other scholars presented a memorial praising Wang Mang for "discovering 發得" the *Zhouli*.[88] It appears that Liu Xin elevated *Zhouli* to the status of a classic only because of Wang Mang's interest in it. For Wang Mang, though he quoted *Zhouli* several times to justify his reforms, his engagement with the text was superficial. He often misinterpreted it or treated it as a secondary source compared to other classics. For example, when he first referred to *Zhouli* to justify the conferring of the "Nine Bestowments 九錫," he actually relied on the nine categories found in the controversial apocrypha that were associated with the ritual classics, not the *Zhouli* itself.[89] Even in his reforms of the official system, where the *Zhouli* might have been most relevant, Wang Mang rarely invoked it.

> Wang Mang, based on the *Zhouli* and the "Wangzhi" chapter [of the *Liji*], established new official titles of *zuzheng*, *lianshuai*, and *dayin*,

87 Qian Mu presented twenty-eight distinct arguments to refute the theory that the *Zhouli* was forged by Wang and Liu. These arguments are not immune to challenge. For example, Qian identified some *Zhouli* features previously dismissed as unprecedented and therefore fabricated, and located parallels in the pre-Qin texts to assert the work's authenticity. However, these parallels could just as easily be interpreted as the hallmarks of a learned Han compiler skillfully synthesizing existing sources. Nevertheless, when taken cumulatively, Qian's defense remains substantial in my view. See Qian, "Self-preface," in *Liu Xiang Xin fuzi nianpu*, pp. 1–6.

88 *Hanshu* 99A, chap. "Wang Mang zhuan" 王莽傳, p. 4091.

89 Zhang Houzhi 張厚知, "*Zhouguan* gaiming *Zhouli* kao" 周官改名周禮考, *Sichuan shifan daxue xuebao* (*shehui kexue ban*) 四川師範大學學報 (社會科學版) 48 (2021), pp. 29–32, esp. 31.

> with duties equivalent to those of a Grand Administrator; as well as *shuling* and *shuzhang*, with duties equivalent to those of a Commandant. He also appointed twenty-five Regional Commissioners and Section Supervisors, who were accorded the same honors as the Three Excellencies. 莽以周官王制之文,置卒正、連率、大尹, 職如太守; 屬令、屬長, 職如都尉. 置州牧、部監二十五人, 見禮如三公.[90]

None of the new official positions mentioned above can be found in the current version of *Zhouli*. It is possible that the *Zhouli* Wang referenced differed from the version we have today, but even so, the positions he mentioned were only minor compared to the more than 360 positions listed in the work. Furthermore, he only made slight adjustments to existing titles rather than creating an entirely new administrative system based on the text. This indicates that Wang Mang's engagement with the work was cursory at best, and the text did not play a central role in his reforms. According to Yang Tianyu's 楊天宇 research, Wang Mang's reforms drew on three main sources: the existing Han system with minor adjustments; names borrowed from the classics but with different assignments; and entirely new creations of his own.[91] If the *Zhouli* text had been created at Wang Mang's request, one would expect its content to align much more closely with his reforms, and for him to have fully exploited the text. The fact that he did not suggests that *Zhouli* was probably not a product of his administration.

Moreover, Liu Xin's interpretation of the work differs significantly from the original text's intent. In the memorial where Liu Xin changed the name of the text from *Zhouguan* to *Zhouli*, he wrote:

> The acting emperor opened the imperial archives, convened Ru, and formulated rituals and music.... He discovered the *Zhouli* to clarify what has been passed down, modeling his actions on Heaven and investigating antiquity, then making adjustments accordingly. 攝皇帝遂開祕府, 會群儒, 制禮作樂, ……發得周禮, 以明因監, 則天稽古, 而損益焉.[92]

In this brief excerpt, the concept of "rituals must change with the times" appears twice. First, Liu Xin indicates that the *Zhouli* is a Zhou-dynasty text from which contemporary readers could still learn, but not to be applied wholesale 因監.[93] Second, he uses the term *sunyi* 損

[90] *Hanshu* 99B, chap. "Wang Mang zhuan," p. 4136.

[91] Yang, *Jingxue tanyan lu* 經學探研錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), p. 139.

[92] *Hanshu* 99A, chap. "Wang Mang zhuan," p. 4091.

[93] The term *yinjian* refers to *Lunyu* 2/23: "The Yin dynasty followed the rites of the Xia; and whatever [Yin] subtracted from or added to [Xia's rites] can be known. The Zhou dynasty

益 (to add or subtract), echoing Kongzi's comments on how the rites of Xia and Shang dynasties were adjusted by the following dynasties. As Martin Kern has observed, the idea of changing with the times was primarily concerned with ritual and music, and it was not confined to the so-called "Legalists" but was widespread in Qin and Han court debates.[94] Liu Xin's interpretation aligns with this view, suggesting that the *Zhouli* should be adapted to suit contemporary needs.

This understanding, however, is fundamentally different from the perspective of the compiler of the *Zhouli*. As many scholars have noted, *Zhouli* "makes no reference to history, to changing circumstances, or to responding to new situations."[95] It presents itself as a timeless, unchanging blueprint for governance, applicable in any era. Unlike other ritual texts, such as the "Wangzhi" chapter in *Liji* or certain chapters in *Da Dai Liji*, the *Zhouli* avoids mentioning the past and erases temporal markers, transforming it into an ahistorical text. In other words, the author of *Zhouli* did not view the text as a historical record of Zhou rites but as a permanent, immutable guide for governance. This sharply contrasts with the time-bound interpretation offered by Liu Xin. If Liu Xin had forged the work, it is unlikely he would have interpreted it in such an opposing manner. Therefore, although *Zhouli* only became widely known through the promotion of Wang and Liu, the evident distance and misunderstandings these two figures display toward the text make the claim that they themselves forged it difficult to sustain. A more plausible explanation is that the work likely entered the imperial collection during the large-scale bibliographic project initiated under emperor Cheng, when he dispatched the receptionist Chen Nong 陳農 to seek out surviving writings throughout the realm,[96] and the *Zhouli* was subsequently rediscovered and appropriated by Wang Mang, Liu Xin, and their contemporaries.

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has followed the rites of Yin; and whatever [Zhou] subtracted from or added to [Yin's rites] can be known 殷因於夏禮, 所損益可知也; 周因於殷禮, 所損益可知也"; and *Lunyu* 3.14: "Zhou had the advantage of viewing the two past dynasties 周監於二代." Clearly, this term refers to how a subsequent dynasty learns lessons from its predecessors. See Liu Baonan 劉寶楠, *Lunyu zhengyi* 論語正義 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), pp. 71, 103.

94 See Martin Kern, "'Changing with the Times': The 'Confucian' Career of a 'Legalist' Dogma in Western Han Ritualism," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, San Diego, March 10, 2000.

95 Michael Puett, "Centering the Realm: Wang Mang, the *Zhouli*, and Early Chinese Statecraft," in Elman and Kern, eds., *Statecraft and Classical Learning*, pp. 129–54, esp. 144.

96 *Hanshu* 30, chap. "Yiwen zhi," p. 1701.

CONCLUSION

The *Zhouli* has long been treated as a fractured mirror, reflecting either the distant echoes of Western Zhou bureaucracy or the ambitious enterprise of the Xin usurpers. However, as this study has demonstrated through digital structural analysis, the text is neither a passive accumulation of materials nor a hurried political fabrication. Instead, it represents a watershed moment in the history of the Chinese "book," the emergence of a self-contained and well-organized textual system with clear boundaries. By moving beyond the hunt for anachronisms to an appreciation of the text's overarching architecture, we find a work revealing persistent patterns. Its interplay of dichotomous and trichotomous schemes, dense web of cross-references, and strategic repetitions are not mere stylistic flourishes. They are the very mechanisms that generate its unprecedented internal coherence. The *Zhouli* text, thus, is better understood not as an accretion, but as a system.

These structural features point to a moment when such large-scale textual design had become both conceivable and practicable, the mid-to-late Western Han. Situated within the intellectual and political milieu of the reigns of emperors Yuan and Cheng, the text's formal properties align with broader developments: the expansion of written culture, intensified debates over administrative reform, and the rising philosophical synthesis of binary and ternary frameworks. The *Zhouli* thus emerges less as a retrospective reconstruction of antiquity than as a product of, and intervention in, its own historical moment.

Yet the text is also a deliberate transcendence of that moment. By effacing historical markers and adopting a timeless voice, it articulates a model of unchanging institutional order that is at once fixed and perpetually applicable. In this respect, the *Zhouli* claims the status of a *jing* 經 in the fullest sense: timeless, authoritative, and always relevant. This notion of "ever-newness" is grounded not in continuous innovation but in the refusal to acknowledge the need for innovation at all. As such, *Zhouli* marks a critical juncture in the evolution of Chinese intellectual history: the point at which writings cease to function as a record of the empirical world and become an autonomous architecture, a self-sufficient textual reality detached from the vicissitudes of time and space.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ZLZY Sun Yirang 孫詒讓, *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義