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Scribes in Early Imperial China

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

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Scribes in Early Imperial China

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ABSTRACT

Scribes in Early Imperial China

by

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Scribes were the writing specialists of the ancient world. The study of scribes in ancient China appears to be less developed than those in other ancient civilizations due to the scarcity of the evidence. A group of highly educated intellectuals dominated the transmitted textual tradition in ancient China, and they portrayed scribes as corrupt officials manipulating the laws and documents to their own benefit. This situation has changed dramatically in recent years because of the modern excavation of administrative and legal texts from the workplaces and tombs of scribes in mainland China. These excavated texts allow for the recovery of the scribes' world, which was previously overshadowed by that of intellectuals.

This dissertation presents a social, institutional, and material history of scribes in early imperial China (221 BCE—220 CE). By utilizing both the transmitted and excavated texts, the author argues against the stereotypical descriptions of scribes in current scholarship. Specifically, he examines how scribes evolved from a caste of hereditary specialists to a type of imperial officials during the political and social transitions from the Zhou to the Qin and Han periods; how scribes actually carried out the many administrative tasks under the

unified empire and the problems and difficulties they encountered during their official service; and, finally, how the materiality of writing surfaces in early imperial China influenced the administrative work and qualifications of scribes.

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INTRODUCTION

Unearthing the World of Scribes

Scribes were writing specialists in the ancient world. They not only composed and made copies of texts, but also carried out most of the daily administrative tasks which ensured the proper functioning of a state. The study of scribes and scribal culture in ancient civilizations, such as ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, is well established, but for ancient China, this remains an underexplored topic due to the limited evidence.[1] China does not have the abundant scribal literature and remains of scribal practices as in Middle and New Kingdom Egypt (2055—1069 BCE) and Old Babylonia (1900—1595 BCE).[2] A group of highly educated intellectuals dominated the transmitted textual tradition in ancient China, and they portrayed scribes as corrupt officials manipulating the laws and documents to their own benefit. Except for a few exceptionally renowned scribal figures, such as Sima Qian 司馬遷, we do not know much about the life and career of scribes. Fortunately, this situation has

[1] For scribes and scribal cultures in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, see H. te Velde, "Scribes and Literacy in Ancient Egypt," in *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies about Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes, and Languages in the Near East, Presented to J.H. Hospers by His Pupils, Colleagues, and Friends*, ed. H. L. Vansitphout et al. (Groningen : E. Forsten, 1986), 253-64; Edward F. Wente, "The Scribes of Ancient Egypt," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (New York: Scribner, 1995), 4: 2211-21; Laurie E. Pearce, "The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia," in ibid., 2265-78; Niv Allon and Hana Navratilova, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes: A Cultural Exploration* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). See also Wang Haicheng, *Writing and the Ancient State: Early China in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 241-74.

[2] See William Kelly Simpson ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 429-42; Dominique Charpin, *Reading and Writing in Babylon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 178-214.

changed dramatically in recent years due to the large amount of bamboo and wooden texts excavated from archaeological sites in mainland China. Some of these bamboo and wooden texts were found in the workplaces and tombs of the low-ranked scribes, who constituted the largest number of scribes. These findings, for the first time, unearth the world of scribes which had been overshadowed by that of intellectuals.[3]

This dissertation presents a social, institutional, and material history of scribes in early imperial China (221 BCE—220 CE). The reasons for focusing on the early imperial period are twofold. First, most of the recently excavated texts with regard to early Chinese administration are from this period, which is a strong advantage. Second, and more importantly, the success of the Qin and Han empires was based on the routinized written administration managed by the scribes. This dissertation aims to argue against the stereotypical descriptions of scribes in current scholarship. It utilizes both the transmitted and excavated texts to examines how did scribes evolve from a caste of hereditary specialists to become a type of imperial officials during the political and social transition from the Zhou to the Qin and Han periods; how did scribes actually carry out the many administrative tasks under the unified empire and what problems and difficulties did they encounter during their official service; and, finally, how did the materiality of writing surfaces in early imperial China influence the administrative work and the qualifications of scribes.

[3] For surveys on the excavated texts in China since the early 20th century, see Li Junming 李均明, *Gudai jiandu* 古代簡牘 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2003), 7-133; Li Ling 李零, *Jianbo gushu yu xueshu yuanliu* 簡帛古書與學術源流 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008), 72-114; Hu Pingsheng 胡平生 and Li Tianhong 李天虹, *Changjiangliuyu chutu jiandu yu yanjiu* 長江流域出土簡牘與研究 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004).

The Chinese graph for scribes is *shi* 史. *Shi* as knowledge specialist can be seen in Shang oracle bone and Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. Scholars have been divided on whether the *shi* during the late Shang (1200—1045 BCE) and Western Zhou (1045—771 BCE) periods were clerical officials responsible for processing documents, or ritual specialists in charge of religious practices. Furthermore, although recognizing that the Zhou *shi* were the ancestors of the Qin and Han *shi*, scholars do not pay enough attention to the evolution of *shi* from the Zhou to the Qin and Han periods.[4] While Chapter 1 will respond to the contradictory opinions on the origin and early development of the scribal profession, Chapter 2 will use the example of Sima Qian and his family to illustrate the historical changes in the scribal profession. Most scholars acknowledge the contribution of Sima Qian in Chinese historiography, but few of them notice that Sima Qian's narration of his family history preserves the most complete account of the evolution of scribes during the political and social transition from the Zhou to the Qin and Han periods. As for Sima Qian's official position, *taishi ling* 太史令 (Director of the Grand Scribes), a legal text from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 reveals its administrative role in appointing, evaluating, and managing the low-ranked scribes, which can help resolve the long-term debate about whether the position-holder was a scribe, historian, archivist or astrologer. By contextualizing Sima Qian into Han institutional history, Chapter 2 will show the ways in which a hereditary scribe was depersonalized under the unified empire.

[4] Note that the two most comprehensive monographs on scribes in early China only focus on the pre-Qin periods. See Xi Hanjing 席涵靜, *Zhou dai shiguan yanjiu* 周代史官研究 (Taipei: Fuji wenhua tushu, 1983); Xu Zhaochang 許兆昌, *Xian Qin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua* 先秦史官的制度與文化 (Haerbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 2006).

Another issue regarding the development of scribes in early China is the opening up of the scribal profession to non-hereditary aspirants. Scribes during the Western Zhou period appeared to belong to a hereditary occupational caste.[5] Their status in the kin-based hierarchy and their succession to their family occupation were both regulated by the "lineage law" (*zongfa* 宗法).[6] Scribe Qiang 史墻 of the Wei 微 family is a representative figure (See Chapter 2). The conservative Qin and early Han laws, on the one hand, preserved part of the scribal system and continued to lay emphasis on the family ties of scribes; on the other hand, these laws had also been modified in response to contemporary concerns. Since the rise of the regional states during the Eastern Zhou period (770—256 BCE), the limited number of scribes from hereditary families apparently could not meet the increasing administrative needs. As revealed in the legal regulations, assistants (*zuo* 佐) were another group of officials who were also entrusted with administrative work. Based on excavated legal texts from Shuihudi 睡虎地 and Zhangjiashan, and administrative texts from Liye 里耶, Chapter 3 will explore the complementary nature of scribes and assistants to understand the opening up of the scribal profession in early imperial China.

Scholars have rightly argued that scribes were indispensable for running the imperial administrative system.[7] When commenting on their position in Qin and Han history,

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[5] For using the term "caste" in referring to social groups in ancient China, see Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, *Artisans in Early Imperial China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 56-63.

[6] For "lineage law," see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000-250 BC): The Archaeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, 2006), 67; Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 248.

[7] See, for example, Robin D. S. Yates, "Introduction: The Empire of the Scribes," in *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin Revisited*, ed. Yuri Pines et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 144.

however, most scholars follow the stereotypical portrayals in Han transmitted texts. The scribes are discussed in the contexts of the Qin versus the Han, the Confucian school (*rujia* 儒家) versus the Legalist school (*fajia* 法家).[8] This sort of discussion does not help understand, but rather oversimplifies the realities of living and working as a scribe during early imperial China. Chapters 3 and 4 will respectively examine one specific administrative task carried out by the scribes. Chapter 3 will analyze the checking tallies (*jiaoquan* 校券) from Liye to examine the task of grain disbursement. Chapter 4 will employ the newly excavated documents from Liye, Songbai 松柏, Tianchang 天長 and Yinwan 尹灣 in mainland China, and Chŏngbaek-tong 貞柏洞 in Pyongyang 平壤, North Korea to examine the multiple processes prepared by the scribes for the annual forwarding of accounts (*shangji* 上計). Such an approach will reveal the situations that the scribes would have faced at work and the anxiety of being a scribe in the Qin and Han bureaucratic hierarchy.

Given that scribes specialized in writing, scholars emphasize the reading and writing abilities of the scribes when examining their literacy, and focus on the composition of the texts when discussing their assigned tasks. This dissertation suggests taking the material context into account when examining the scribal tasks and the literacy required for carrying them out. As noted by some scholars, bamboo and wood in China had been employed in everyday writing as early as the late Shang period (See Chapter 1). Bamboo and wooden boards and slips were made in different shapes, lengths, and widths to accommodate different administrative demands. The use of wood as a writing material continued even

[8] See, for example, Yan Buke 閻步克, *Shidafu zhengzhi yansheng shigao* 士大夫政治演生史稿 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996); idem, *Yueshi yu shiguan: Chuantong zhengzhi wenhua yu zhengzhi zhidu lunji* 樂師與史官：傳統政治文化與政治制度論集 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001).

until the Tang dynasty (618—907) and was widespread in the East Asian World.[9] The fact that bamboo and wood continued to be used as writing surfaces after the invention of the far superior writing surface, paper, suggests that the materiality of bamboo and wood is as valuable as the text in transmitting information.[10] On the other hand, the material restrictions of bamboo and wood, such as the weight and size, caused difficulties in processing administrative tasks. Taking the material context into full consideration, Chapter 3 will coin a new concept "administrative literacy" to understand the scribal qualifications during the early imperial period. The chapter argues that the knowledge and skills of modifying the material features of a bamboo or wooden document in transmitting information was a crucial aspect of this administrative literacy. Chapter 4 will examine how the material confines of bamboo and wood would complicate the work of scribes.

[9] A comparative example is the long-lasting and widespread use of clay tablets in the Near East: "It prevailed from the end of the fourth millennium BC until the days of the Achaemenids," and "embraced the lands of the Euphrates and Tigris and nearby territories, such as Elam, Urartu, the Hittite Empire, Phoenicia, and the Aegean cultures of Knossos, Pylos, Mycenae and Thebes." Ernst Posner therefore argues for the concept of a "clay tablet civilization," within which "the physical nature of the writing medium is the fundamental element that determines the genesis, the organization, and the preservation of archival material." See Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 18-26. In fact, Posner's suggestion corresponds well to that by scholars with regard to the use of bamboo and wooden slips in the East Asian World. There are at least two edited volumes which advocate the study of the bamboo and wooden slips in an East Asian context. See Kwŏn In-han 權仁瀚 et al., eds., *Dong ya ziliaoxue de kenengxing tansuo* 東亞資料學的可能性探索 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010); Sumiya Tsuneko 角谷常子 ed., *Higashiajia mokkangaku no tame ni* 東アジア木簡学のために (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2014).

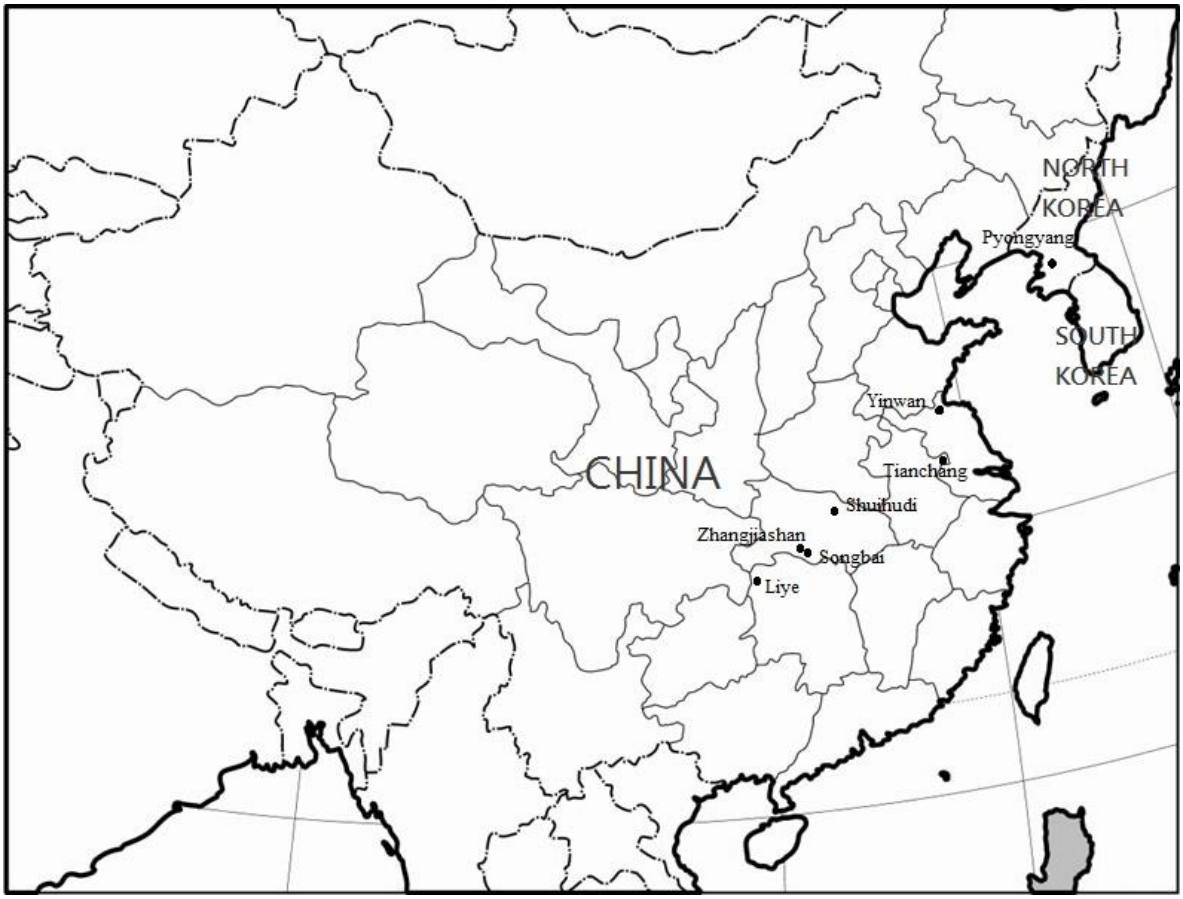
[10] Similarly, clay tablets coexisted in the Near East with other types of writing surfaces, such as waxed wooden boards, papyri, and parchments, for a long period of time.

Excavated Administrative and Legal Texts

While the transmitted texts provide a historical background and inform us of the opinions among intellectuals, the excavated legal and administrative texts reveal both the regulated and actual judicial and administrative processes, and uncover the world of scribes that had been buried underground.[11] Before entering into my discussion of scribes, I will briefly introduce these excavated texts by sites, and explain the way in which they are relevant to the concern of this study. Chronologically, these excavated texts span from the third century BCE to early first century CE, and geographically, they were found at the sites from the northeast to the southwest of the Qin and Han empires (Map 1).[12]

[11] A detailed introduction to the major transmitted texts of early China is now available in a collaborative work edited by the renowned scholar Michael Loewe. See his *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, UC Berkeley, 1993).

[12] Two groups of looted and unprovenanced slips are relevant to this study. One is now held by the Tsinghua University 清華大學, which preserves an account about the early history of Qin. Another one is held by the Yuelu Academy 嶽麓書院, and is the most valuable Qin legal material since the discovery of the Shuihudi Qin documents in the 1970s. Unfortunately, because they were illegally looted in mainland China and then bought back on the antique market in Hong Kong, the archaeological context including the location of the site is lost. This dissertation discusses them separately in footnotes. For the problems of studying unprovenanced texts, see Paul R. Goldin, "*Heng Xian* and the Problem of Studying Looted Artifacts," *Dao* (2013) 12.2, 156-58.



Map 1: The geographical locations of the excavated administrative and legal texts

1. Tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi, Hubei

The tomb was excavated in Yunmeng County 雲夢縣 in 1975. The tomb occupant was a scribe named Xi 喜 in the Qin state and empire. He was born in 262 BCE, and the last recorded date of his activities is 217 BCE. Buried along with Xi's body are 1,155 bamboo slips. They include a chronicle with dates from 306 to 217 BCE, a command order issued by Governor (*shou* 守) of Nan Commardery 南郡 Teng 騰 in 227 BCE, a selection of eighteen categories of Qin laws, a selection of Qin legal model forms (*shi* 式), a selection of commentaries on the Qin laws, a book about the ethics of officials, and two versions of

daybooks (*rishu* 日書).[13] Scholars believe that Xi had used some of these texts during his official service. Particularly important to this study are the chronicle, which specifies the important events of Xi's life, and the legal documents dated from the late Warring States to the Qin empire, which regulate the institutional roles of scribes and other administrative officials. The Shuihudi materials are the foundation of our knowledge of the early imperial laws, and they allow a reconstruction of the life and career of a low-ranked scribe in the Qin state and empire (See Chapter 3).

2. Liye site, Hunan

The Liye materials contain the largest amount of Qin slips that ever found. Discovered from well no. 1 at the site in 2002, the total number of the Qin wooden boards and slips exceeds 30,000, about half of them inscribed with characters. Most of them were the actual administrative documents managed by the scribes between 222 BCE and 208 BCE in the office of Qianling County 遷陵縣, which was a newly conquered area on the Qin southwestern frontier.[14] The materials excavated from the well no. 1 also contain some

[13] See Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian zhenglixiaozu 睡虎地秦墓竹簡整理小組, *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), hereafter referred to as *SHD.* For a complete English translation of the Shuihudi legal texts, A. F. P. Hulsewé, *Remnants of Ch'in Law: An Annotated Translation of the Ch'in Legal and Administrative Rules of the 3rd Century B.C., Discovered in Yün-meng Prefecture, Hu-pei Province, in 1975* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), hereafter referred to as *RCL*.

[14] For the archaeological data on the Liye site, see Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所, *Liye fajue baogao* 里耶發掘報告 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2007). Liu Rui 劉瑞 has a critical review demonstrating the inconsistency of the published archaeological data; unfortunately, scholars do not pay enough attention to this review, however. See Liu Rui, "Liye gucheng J1 maicang guocheng shitan" 里耶古城J1埋藏過程試探, in *Liye gucheng: Qin jian yu Qin wenhua yanjiu* 里耶古城・秦簡與秦文化研究, ed. Zhonggou shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiu suo 中國社會科學院考古研究所 (Beijing: Kexue chuban she, 2009), 84-97. For the transcription of slips and the association of fragments, unless otherwise stated, I follow Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所, *Liye Qin jian (yi)* 里耶秦簡(壹) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2012); Chen Wei 陳偉, *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (diyi juan)* 里耶秦簡牘校釋(第一卷) (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2012). Note that the excavator is currently using two types of slip numbers: a transcription number and an archaeological number. This dissertation mainly uses the transcription number

personal letters of officials. As Takamura Takeyuki 高村武幸 argues, these "official document-like letters" were complementary to the official documents in nature, as they could express and convey private thoughts which writers felt unable to include in their official documents.[15] In addition, fifty-one fragments of the Qin wooden registers were found from pit no. 11, located in the north of the site in 2005.[16] These household documents are the earliest physical evidence of the household system in China. Above all, the Liye materials for the first time reveal the operation of a Qin local administration, and inform us how the officials, including the scribes, achieved their assigned tasks (See Chapters 3).

3. Tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan, Hubei

The tomb was excavated in Jiangling County 江陵縣 in 1983. The types of bamboo texts excavated from the tomb are similar to those from the Shuihudi tomb. In addition to an inventory of the tomb's contents found near the west wall, the majority of the texts, consisting of 1,195 bamboo slips, were found near the south wall of the tomb. They include a calendar with dates from 202 to 186 BCE, two medical texts, a mathematical primer, and a military-political treatise. Especially important are the two legal texts: a selection of statutes and ordinances compiled in 186 BCE, titled *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* (Ernian lüling 二年律令), and a legal case book, titled *Book of Submitted Doubtful Cases*

except in cases when there is no transcription number provided by the excavator. In such cases, I will use brackets [ ] to distinguish the archaeological number from the transcription number. Also note that the graph + between two slip numbers is not part of the original transcription or archaeological numbers, but employed by Chen Wei and his research team to associate fragmentary slips.

[15] See Takamura Takeyuki, *Shin Kan kandoku shiryō kenkyū* 秦漢簡牘史料研究 (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2015).

[16] See *Liye fajue baogao*, 203-10.

(Zouyan shu 奏讞書), which not only demonstrate the Han inheritance of Qin legislation, but also provide unprecedented rich information on the laws, state, and society in early imperial China.[17] Similar to the Shuihudi Qin tomb, it has been suggested that the occupant of the Zhangjiashan tomb was a judiciary scribe who had been responsible for dealing with legal and administrative processes.[18] An examination on the related entries in the Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan legal texts shall illustrate the ways in which the life and career of scribes were regulated by the laws (See Chapters 2, 3, and 4).

4. Tomb no. 1 at Songbai, Hubei

The tomb was excavated in Jingzhou City 荊州市 in 2004. Although the full content of the texts discovered from the tomb is yet to be announced, the excavators report that the occupant of the tomb was a low-ranking official named Zhou Yan 周偃.[19] Among the sixty-three wooden boards and ten wooden slips, the various types of account books (*bu* 簿) specifically attract scholars' attention. As a Bailiff (*sefu* 嗇夫) of the Western District 西鄉 in Jiangling County, it is not surprising that Zhou Yan had access to all these account books, as we believe that the district (*xiang* 鄉) was the administrative unit responsible for

[17] There are various transcriptions of these legal texts. Unless otherwise stated, I follow Peng Hao 彭浩, Chen Wei, and Kudō Motoo 工藤元男, *Ernian lüling yu zouyanshu: Zhangjiashan er si qi hao Han mu chutu falü wenxian shidu* 二年律令與奏讞書：張家山二四七號漢墓出土法律文獻釋讀 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), hereafter referred to as *ENLL*. For a complete English translation of these legal texts, see Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb no. 247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 62-64, hereafter referred to as *LSS*.

[18] See *LSS*, 105-6.

[19] Jingzhou bowu guan 荊州博物館, "Hubei Jingzhou Jinan Songbai Han mu fajue jianbao" 湖北荊州紀南松柏漢墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu* 文物 2008.4: 32.

compiling the household registers (*huji* 戶籍) each year.[20] Relevant to this study is a district-level household account book (*hukou bu* 戶口簿) dated to 139 BCE from the tomb, which was a primary source for a county to compile its annual household account book (See Chapter 4).[21]

5. Tomb no. 19 at Tianchang, Anhui

The tomb was excavated in Tianchang City 天長市 in 2004. Thirty-four wooden boards were excavated from the tomb. They include various types of account books and personal letters of the tomb occupant, which are of great value to the administrative practices and official communications during the Han period. Although the identity of the tomb occupant is still under dispute, it is believed that he was an official who had worked in Dongyang County 東陽縣 of Linhuai Commandery 臨淮郡 during the middle or late Western Han. The texts buried with his body include a household account book of Dongyang County, which is in line with that from the Songbai tomb in terms of the material features and written formats (See Chapter 4).[22]

[20] See Hsing I-tien 邢義田, "Han dai anbi zai xian huo zai xiang" 漢代案比在縣或在鄉, in his *Zhiguo anbang: Fazhi, xingzheng yu junshi* 治國安邦：法制、行政與軍事 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 211-48.

[21] Zhu Jiangsong 朱江松, "Hanjian de songbai Han dai mudu" 罕見的松柏漢代木牘, in Jingzhou bowu guan, *Jingzhou zhongyao kaogu faxian* 荊州重要考古發現 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2008), 211.

[22] Tianchang shi wenwu guanli suo 天長市文物管理所 and Tianchang shi bowuguan 天長市博物館, "Anhui Tianchang Xi Han mu fajue jianbao" 安徽天長西漢墓發掘簡報, *Wenwu* 2006.11: 11.

6. Tomb no. 6 at Yinwan, Jiangsu

The tomb was excavated in Lianyungang City 連雲港 in 1993. The tomb occupant, Shi Rao 師饒, was a scribe in the Bureau of Merit (*gongcao* 功曹) in Donghai Commandery 東海郡 during the late Western Han. Twenty-four wooden boards and one hundred and thirty-three bamboo slips were found in his tomb, which include a variety of texts. Particular attention should be paid to the various types of account books and registers (*ji* 籍) of Donghai Commandary between the reign periods of Yongshi 永始 (16—13 BCE) and Yuanyan 元延 (12—9 BCE) of Emperor Cheng 成. The collected account book (*jibu* 集簿) of Donghai Commandery was a draft or a copy of the summary account that would be forwarded to the central government for annual evaluation (See Chapter 4).[23]

7. Tomb no. 364 at Chŏngbaek-tong, Pyongyang, North Korea

The tomb was excavated in Pyongyang 平壤 between 1990 and 1992, but the information about the documents excavated from the tomb was not released until 2006. In 2009, an image of three wooden boards, titled "Collected Account Book on the Numbers of Households in Lelang Commandery's Counties in the Fourth Year of Chu Yuan (45 BCE)" (*Lelang jun chuyuan sinian xianbie hukou duoshao jibu* 樂浪郡初元四年縣別戶口多少集簿),[24] was published on the back cover of a North Korean archaeological journal. Little

[23] Lianyungang shi bowuguan 連雲港市博物館 et al., *Yinwan Han mu jiandu* 尹灣漢墓簡牘 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 77-78.

[24] Transcription after Yun Jaeseug 尹在碩, "Qin Han hukou tongji zhidu yu hukou bu" 秦漢戶口統計制度與戶口簿, in *Han diguo de zhidu yu shehui zhixu* 漢帝國的制度與社會秩序, ed. Lai Ming Chiu 黎明釗 (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91.

information about the tomb has been released so far. According to South Korean scholar Yun Yong-gu 尹龍九, the tomb occupant was an official who had worked in the office of Lelang Commandery 樂浪郡, which was located on the northeastern border of the Han Empire.[25] The account book is comparable to those household documents from Liye, Songbai, Tianchang, and Yinwan, each of which represents a stage in the process of the forwarding of accounts carried out from the district- to the commandary-level at the end of each year (See Chapter 4).

[25] See Yun Yong-gu 尹龍九, "Heijō shutsudo 'Rakurō-gun shogen yonen kenbetsu toguchi-bo' kenkyū" 平壤出土「樂浪郡初元四年縣別戶口簿」研究, trans. Hashimoto Shigeru 橋本繁, *Chūgoku shutsudo shiryō kenkyū* 中國出土資料研究 13 (2009): 208.

CHAPTER ONE

Clerical or Ritualistic?

The Origin and Early Development of the Scribal Profession in China

Introduction

The origin of the Qin and Han scribes can be traced back to the late Shang (1200-1045 BCE) and Western Zhou (1045—771 BCE) periods. Scholars have been divided on whether the primary role of scribes in the early Chinese states was clerical or ritualistic. This chapter is therefore devoted to a close examination on the major theories considering the roles of scribes in the early Chinese states, so as to provide a context from which the Qin and Han scribes originated. This chapter rejects a common approach which attempts to trace the origin of the scribal profession by a graphic analysis of the Chinese character *shi* 史. Rather, it contends that we should focus on the roles of scribes in early Chinese inscriptions. Although both late Shang oracle bone and Western Zhou bronze inscriptions attest that scribes during those times had been involved in religious matters, the nature of scribes should be defined by their association with writing, irrespective of whether the prior function of writing was religious or administrative. Furthermore, Western Zhou bronze inscriptions also reveal that there had been a hierarchy among scribes established during the Western Zhou period. The existence of such a hierarchy implies that there had been a division of labor between the high- and low-ranking scribes.

The Ambiguity of the Chinese Graph *Shi*

The current views on the origin and early development of the scribal profession in the early Chinese states spilt into two major camps: one upholds the view that scribes were clerical officials whose primary duties were to produce and process documents and the other argues that they were ritual specialists who played a significant role in religious practices. The debate began with Wang Guowei's 王國維 influential interpretation of the graph *shi*.[26] Following the lead of Qing scholars Jiang Yong 江永 and Wu Dacheng 吳大澂, Wang Guowei's discussion is essentially an elaboration of Xu Shen's 許慎 graphic analysis in the *Explaining the Graphs and Analyzing the Characters* (Shuowen jiezi 說文解字):[27]

> 史，記事者也。从又持中。中，正也。
> *Shi*, the person who records matters. It is classified as a hand holding a *zhong*. *Zhong*, means rightness.[28]

Wang Guowei argues that the graphic element *zhong* 中 refers to the container for carrying *suan* 筭—the bamboo slips used for scorekeeping in archery ritual (*sheli* 射禮) in the Western Zhou.[29] Because such bamboo slips could also be used as written materials (known

[26] Wang Guowei, "Shi shi" 釋史, in Wang Guowei, *Guantang jilin* 觀堂集林, in *Wang Guowei yishu* 王國維遺書 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), 6.1a-6b.

[27] For a study of Xu Shen's graphic analysis, see Françoise Bottéro, "Lun Xu Shen zixing fenxi de yixie tedian" 論許慎字形分析的一些特點, *Hanja gongbu* 漢字研究 8 (2013.6): 1-28.

[28] *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, annotated by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), 3b.20b.

[29] Coincidently, Japanese sinologist Naitō Konan 內藤湖南 had argued for a similar view, with an emphasis on the military context of the archery ritual. See Naitō Konan, *Shina shigakushi* 支那史學史 (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 1992), 21-24. For a recent elaboration of this view, see Kominami Ichirō 小南一郎, Fumihito no

as *jian* 簡) and calculation is part of scribal tasks, Wang Guowei infers that the graph *shi* could represent a person who is holding a bamboo manuscript (*chi shu zhi ren* 持書之人). Despite disagreeing with Wang Guowei's interpretation, his critics did not deviate from his approach to trace the origin of the scribal profession. They sought to identify the object held by a hand as depicted in the ancient form of the graph *shi* in a religious or military context (Table 1), among which Japanese scholar Shirakawa Shizuka's 白川靜 discussion deserves our special attention.[30] Shirakawa argues that the graph *shi* in Shang oracle bone inscriptions is originally the name of a sacrificial ritual, and that the graphic element  represents a container used for holding a statement written on bamboo or wooden slips to be presented to the ancestral spirits.[31] In contrast to Wang Guowei, Shirakawa's interpretation attributes a religious origin to the scribal profession, and it is widely adopted or cited among leading scholars in the west.[32]

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kigen to sono shokunō 史の起源とその職能, *Tōhō gaku* 東方学 98 (1998): 1-13, in which the author associates the origin of scribes with their duties of calculation and making numerical records.

[30] On religious context, see Shirakawa Shizuka, "Shaku shi" 釋史, in Shirakawa Shizuka, *Kōkotsu kinbungaku ronshū* 甲骨金文学論集 (Kyoto: Hōyū shoten, 1974), 1-68; Chen Mengjia 陳夢家, "Shi zi xin shi" 史字新釋, in his *Chen Mengjia xueshu lunwenji* 陳夢家學術論文集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 135-37; Lao Gan 勞榦, "Shi zi de jiegou ji shuguan de yuanshi zhiwu" 史字的結構及史官的原始職務, in *Zhongguo shixueshi lunwen xuanji (yi)* 中國史學史論文選集(一), ed. Du Weiyun 杜維運 and Huang Jinxing 黃進興 (Taibei: Huashi, 1976), 30-40. On military context, see Hu Huoxuan 胡厚宣, "Yin dai de shiguan wei wuguan shuo" 殷代的史官為武官說, in *Quanguo Shang shi xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* 全國商史學術討論會論文集, ed. Hu Huoxuan (Zhengzhou: Yindu xuekan bianjibu, 1985), 183-97.

[31] Shirakawa, "Shaku shi," 13-17.

[32] Donald Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century B. C.," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45.2 (1985): 472-4; Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies: A Review Article," *Early China* 18 (1993): 162; Luo Tai 羅泰 (Lothar von Falkenhausen), "Xi Zhou tongqi mingwen di xingzhi" 西周銅器銘文的性質, in *Kaoguxue yanjiu (liu)* 考古學研究(六), ed. Beijing daxue kaogu wenbo xueyuan 北京大學考古文博學院 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2006), 350; Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 17.

Shang oracle bone inscription[33]	Western Zhou bronze inscription[34]	*Xiaozhuan* script in the *Shuowen jiezi*[35]	Modern form
			史

Table 1: The Chinese character *shi* in different graphic forms

Yet it is truly doubtful if the approach of graphic analysis can adequately trace the origin of the scribal profession, irrespective of what definition of writing one would adopt.[36] In the traditional classification of Chinese characters,[37] the character *shi* is considered a *huiyi* 會意 (lit. conjoining meanings) graph, which combines two or more semantic elements. William Boltz's research points to an alternative direction suggesting that writing is the graphic representation of speech, which must contain both ***sound*** and ***meaning***. A graph is qualified as writing because it represents a ***word*** rather than a ***thing***.[38] In other words, no graph contains only semantic elements. Accepting such a definition of writing,

[33] Li Zongkun 李宗焜 ed., *Jiagu wenzi bian* 甲骨文字编 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 1166 and 1169.

[34] Dong Lianchi 董蓮池 ed., *Xin jinwen bian* 新金文编 (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 2011), 348.

[35] *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 3b.20b.

[36] A number of scholars have already expressed doubt in this approach, see Herrlee G. Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 110, n. 35; Constance A. Cook, "Scribes, Cooks, and Artisans: Breaking Zhou Tradition," *Early China* 20 (1995): 252; Xu, *Xian Qin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 6; Wolfgang Behr, "Language Change in Premodern China: Notes on Its Perception and Impact on the Idea of a 'Constant Way,'" in *Historical Truth, Historical Criticism and Ideology: Chinese Historiography and Historical Culture from a New Comparative Perspective*, ed. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 17-8; Martin Kern, "The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China," in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Porta S. La and D. Shulman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 120-1; Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 55, n. 25.

[37] Qiu Xigui, *Chinese Writing*, translated by Gilbert L. Mattos and Jerry Norman (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2000), 151-63; see also Qiu Xigui, *Wenzi xue gaiyao* 文字學概要 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1988), 97-104.

[38] William Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1994), 16-22.

David N. Keightley suggests that those graphs which have traditionally been identified as *huiyi* graphs might in fact be no different from the *xingsheng* 形聲 (lit. form and sound) graphs, which combine phonetic and semantic components.[39] From this perspective, any attempt to analyze the graphic component held by a hand as represented in the ancient form of the character *shi* would seem meaningless, because it could represent only a phonetic value.

If we accept that there are some Chinese characters which do not bear any phonetic element within their graphic structure,[40] we still need to be aware of three problems of using graphic form to explicate the original meaning of a word. As Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 reminds us, firstly, "the original sense of a graph is not equivalent to a word's original sense," secondly, "one cannot casually insert an equal sign between the meaning expressed by a graphic from and a graph's basic sense," and thirdly, "one should not be led astray by characters whose basic sense is the extension of a loangraph meaning."[41] Regarding the first problem, Qiu notes that there is always a gap between the appearance of a word and the creation of a graph to represent it. In most cases, "when a graph is created for a certain word, the meaning of the word at that point is quite possibly already somewhat distant from its primitive meaning."[42] Indeed, we have no idea whether the scribal profession had undergone any changes before the graph *shi* was created to represent it. As for the second problem, one must be aware that the meaning represented by a graphic form is often

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[39] David N. Keightley, "The Origins of Writing in China: Scripts and Cultural Contexts," in *The Origins of Writing,* ed. Wayne M. Senner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 190-91.

[40] Françoise Bottéro, "Writing on Shell and Bone in Shang China," in *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process*, ed. Stephen D. Houston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 253.

[41] Qiu, *Chinese Writing*, 214-19; *Wenzi xue gaiyao*, 146-49.

[42] Qiu, *Chinese Writing*, 215; *Wenzi xue gaiyao*, 147.

narrower than the basic sense of the graph. A useful example is the character *xiang* 相 (to examine), which is represented by the graphic elements "eye" and "tree." It is apparently problematic if one literally understands its original sense as the action of observing a tree.[43] As Wolfgang Behr says, "a word is always much more than the sum of its morphosemantic components."[44] Equally important is the third problem. When the graph *shi* 史 appears in Shang oracle bone inscriptions, it can also mean matter (*shi* 事), official (*li* 吏), and envoy (*shi* 使). It is possible that, as some scholars suggest, the graph *shi* was first created to represent the meaning "matter" and the meaning "scribe" was one of the later extensions.[45]

In fact, Wang Guowei's analysis of the semantic origin of the character *shi* has no significant difference from that of his Qing predecessors. The reason that his interpretation gained widespread attention beyond the circle of Chinese paleographers is largely due to his observation on the *shi* office-holders in ancient China. He claims that, "Official titles of ancient times mostly originated from the scribal profession" 古之官名多由史出.[46] Scholars who argue for a clerical origin of the scribal profession might disagree with Wang Guowei's interpretation of the graph *shi*, but most of them would admit that the high frequency of appearance of *shi* office-holders in Western Zhou sources shows that the scribal profession might have been closely related to the early development of bureaucracy in China. This argument is fully elaborated upon by historian Yan Buke who suggests that

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[43] Qiu, *Chinese Writing*, 215-16; *Wenzi xue gaiyao*, 147.

[44] Behr, "Language Change in Premodern China," 17.

[45] See Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, 110; Wang Guimin 王貴民, "Shuo yushi" 說御史, in Hu Huoxuan el at., *Jiagu tanshi lu* 甲骨探史錄 (Beijing, sanlian shudian, 1982), 324-33; Xu, *Xian Qin shiguan*, 6.

[46] Wang, "Shi shi," 6.4a.

the bureaucracy in China originated from the scribal profession.[47] In a recent study of the Western Zhou government, Li Feng also indicates that the salience of *shi* offices in the early Western Zhou is one of the major features of a bureaucracy that underlines a fundamental departure from the Shang government, which is commonly believed to be of a religious nature.[48]

Similarly, the inspiration that Shirakawa's interpretation brought to his Western colleagues was not confined to graphic analysis. The nature of early Chinese writing has been the center of concern among scholars in the field of early China (see below). Shirakawa's discussion on the use of writing in communicating messages to the spirits in Shang China provides important reference for arguing for a religious nature of early writing in China. For example, by incorporating Shirakawa's interpretation and the related studies by other scholars, Mark Edward Lewis has argued for a religious origin of the written administration in early imperial China.[49] It has become clear that the origin of the scribal profession in China cannot be sought by a graphic analysis of the graph *shi*, and that the reason for the widespread attention given to the two most influential theories go well beyond their literal "decipherment" of the graph. To understand the early development of the scribal profession in China, we should look at the context in which it appears in early inscriptions.

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[47] Yan Buke, "Shiguan zhushu zhufa zhi ze yu guanliao zhengzhi zhi yansheng" 史官主書主法之責與官僚政治之演生, in his *Yueshi yu shiguan*, 33-82.

[48] Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 61-2. A similar view had already been argued, though not fully developed in Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn M. Linduff, *Western Chou Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 245-6, 249.

[49] Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, chap. 1.

Scribes in Late Shang Writing

After many years of discussion, the debate concerning the origin of the Chinese writing remains unresolved among scholars.[50] The earliest evidence of writing we have is the divination inscriptions carved on scapula and plastron from the late Shang period, what are called "oracle bone inscriptions" in Western scholarship. Dating from around 1200 to 1045 BCE, corresponding to the reigns of the last nine Shang kings, the oracle bone inscriptions were mainly discovered from the last capital of the Shang dynasty, at modern Anyang 安陽 in northern Henan.[51] Many studies have already pointed out the religious character of Shang oracle bone inscriptions[52] and acknowledged their maturity as a full writing system.[53] The debate now lies in whether or not Shang writing had been used beyond a religious context and what roles the scribes played in it.

In a co-authored article, drawing comparison with other early states including Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Mesoamerica, Nicholas Postgate, Tao Wang and Toby Wilkinson

[50] Although it is believed that the origin of Chinese writing is earlier than Shang oracle bone inscriptions, we cannot know exactly when and where it originated given the extant evidence. Some scholars have suggested that the marks and signs carved on pottery fragments from Neolithic sites in China were the origin of Chinese writing, which has been convincingly criticized by William Boltz. See his *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*, 35-52. With regard to the debate of the origin of Chinese writing, see Xia Hanyi 夏含夷 (Edward L. Shaughnessy), "Xifang Hanxue jia Zhongguo guwenzi yanjiu gaiyao" 西方漢學家中國古文字研究概要, *Jianbo* 簡帛 9 (2014): 369-94.

[51] For an introduction to Shang oracle bone inscriptions, see David N. Keightley, *Sources of Shang history: The Oracle-bone Inscriptions of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[52] K.C. Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual: The Path to Political Authority in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 90-4; David N. Keightley, "Art, Ancestors, and the Origins of Writing in China," *Representations* 56 (1996): 68-95; "Marks and Labels: Early Writing in Neolithic and Shang China" in Keightley, *These Bones Shall Rise Again: Selected Writings on Early China* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014), 246-7; Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 14-17.

[53] Boltz, *The Origin and Early Development of the Chinese Writing System*, 29-126; Robert W. Bagley, "Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System," in *The First Writing*, 198, 225-26; Bottéro, "Writing on Shell and Bone in Shang China," 250-9.

claim that "the early scripts must in fact have had a much wider range of uses which are now hidden from us because of the loss of perishable materials from the archaeological record."[54] They notice that there had been a tendency in the ancient world that "scribes chose relatively perishable substances for utilitarian texts, and more permanent vehicles for more formal ones."[55] Postgate, Wang and Wilkinson are not the first scholars to suggest that the Shang people or their contemporaries would have used perishable materials in recording everyday writings. Chinese paleographers have already stressed the existence of the graphs *ce* 冊 and *dian* 典 in Shang oracle bone inscriptions.[56] The pictographic elements preserved in the graphic form of these characters show a bundle of bamboo or wooden slips tied together with string, which is considered the everyday writing surface in the Shang (Figure 1-2).[57] A number of scholars also note that a few oracle bone inscriptions were actually written by a brush in red or black ink.[58] Modern scholars refer them to as *shuci* 書辭 (written inscriptions), in contrast to *keci* 刻辭 (carved inscriptions), which were done by a knife. These *shuci* were generally not intended for later carving.[59] The fact that a number of these brush written inscriptions were used to keep track of animals and

[54] Nicholas Postgate, Tao Wang and Toby Wilkinson, "The Evidence for Early Writing: Utilitarian or Ceremonial?" *Antiquity* 69 (1995): 464.

[55] Ibid., 472.

[56] For example, Qiu, *Wenzi xue gaiyao*, 42.

[57] For more on bamboo and wood as writing materials in early China, see Tsuen-hsuin Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 90-113; and my discussion in Chapter 3.

[58] Chen Mengjia, *Yinxu buci zongshu* 殷虛卜辭綜述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 14-5; Keightley, *Sources of Shang history*, 46.

[59] See Liu Yiman 劉一曼, "Shilun Yinxu jiagu shuci" 試論殷墟甲骨書辭, *Kaogu* 考古 1991.6: 546-72.

turtle shells that would be consumed in ancestral sacrifice and divination is in line with David N. Keightley's suggestion that there had been a routinized record-keeping system.

After decades of research on Shang oracle bone inscriptions, Keightley concludes that the inscriptions alone show that writing in the Shang had been employed in keeping numerical records of (1) military conscription, (2) casualties suffered by the Qiang or other enemies, (3) animals offered in sacrifice, (4) animals caught in the hunt, (5) tribute offerings of turtle shells and scapulas, (6) numbers of days, (7) strings of cowries, (8) measures of wine, and (9) other miscellaneous counts.[60] This evidence points to the possibility that Shang writing could have been used in non-religious contexts.

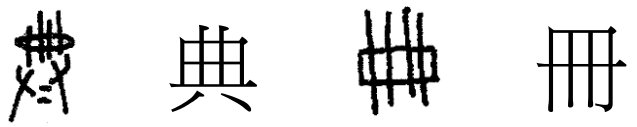

Figure 1: The Chinese characters *dian* and *ce* in oracle bone and modern scripts. After *Jiagu wenzi bian*, 1172 and 1176.

[60] Keightley, *Working for His Majesty* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 231. See also Keightley, "The Shang: China's First Historical Dynasty," in *The Cambridge History of Ancient China: From the Origins of Civilization to 221 BC*, ed. Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 287; "Marks and Labels," 235.

Figure 2: An account book composed of 77 wooden slips recording the weapons held by the southern Headquarters (*bu* 部) of Guangdi 廣地 from 93 CE to 95 CE, excavated from Juyan. After Hsing I-tien 邢義田, "Handai jiandu de tiji, zhongliang he shiyong: yi zhongyanyuan shiyusuo cang juyan hanjian wei li" 漢代簡牘的體積、重量和使用──以中研院史語所藏居延漢簡為例, in Hsing I-tien, *Di bu ai bao: Handaijiandu* 地不愛寶：漢代簡牘 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 67-8.

In addition to the oracle bones, Robert W. Bagley looks at other writing surfaces, including bronze, jade and pottery, excavated at Anyang. The fact that some bone and bronze inscriptions happened to imitate brush writing allows for an assumption that brush writing might have been the regular form of writing at that time.[61] Drawing light from the comparative evidence in Mesopotamia, Bagley infers that Shang writing should have been employed in a wide range of uses, including administrative control, economic activities, ancestral sacrifice, military campaigns, and so on, and have spread beyond the area of Anyang.[62] Critics argue that Bagley's comparative approach leads to a conclusion that literacy was fairly widespread with a population of more than a thousand literate individuals. Adam Smith argues that the divination records on the oracle bone inscriptions were the only text genre produced on a daily basis in Shang China and that literacy was limited to this context. His examination of the *xike* 習刻 (lit. practice engraving) inscriptions suggests that "the divination workshops at Anyang would have been capable of

[61] Bagley, "Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System," 218-20.

[62] Ibid., 222-6. Bagley's view of early Chinese writing has been more thoroughly elaborated in Wang, *Writing and the Ancient State*.

sustaining transmission of the script between generations, whether or not there were any other frequent and routine uses of writing in the Late Shang world."[63] It has to be noted that despite holding the view that Shang writing had been used on a very minimal scale, arguably confined to less than a dozen individuals at Anyang, Smith does admit the existence of brush writing and some precursor to the wood or bamboo documents of later periods. He notes that these perishable surfaces could have been used in keeping track of livestock awaiting sacrifice.[64]

The evidence of Shang writing allow a glimpse into the role of scribes. The oracle bone and bronze inscriptions provide us the earliest records of *zuoce* 作冊 (Document Maker) and various types of *shi*-office holders.[65] The scribes during the Western Zhou period were their successors. A famous example is the Wei 微 family which was a prominent hereditary scribal family of Shang origin at the Western Zhou court.[66] Due to the fact that the extant evidence of late Shang writing is mainly of a religious nature, it is natural that one would argue that most scribal activities at that time were restricted to the divination workshop.[67] It

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[63] Adam Smith, "The Evidence for Scribal Training at Anyang," in *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, ed. Li Feng and David Prager Branner (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press), 204.

[64] Ibid.

[65] See Chen, *Yinxu buci zongshu*, 518-20; Wang Guimin, "Shang chao guanzhi ji qi lishi tedian" 商朝官制及其歷史特點, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 1984.4: 112; Zhang Yachu 張亞初, "Shang dai zhiguan yanjiu" 商代職官研究, *Guwenzi yanjiu* 古文字研究 13 (1986): 89-90. Note that although the title *zuoce* does not contain the graph *shi*, its literal meaning suggests that it is an official in charge of making document. In fact, the *zuoce* held almost the same duties as the *shi* in the Shang and Western Zhou sources. More importantly, a scribal official in Western Zhou bronze inscription can be interchangeably referred to as *shi* or *zuoce*. See Shirakawa Shizuka, "Sakusatsu kō" 作冊考, in his *Kōkotsu kinbungaku ronshū*, 157.

[66] See Shanxi Zhouyuan kaogudui 陝西周原考古隊 el at., eds., *Xi Zhou Wei shi jiazu qingtongqi qun yanjiu* 西周微氏家族青銅器群研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1992), 58-79; Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History: Inscribed Bronze Vessels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 167-8; von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 56-73; Constance A. Cook, "Shi Qiang *Pan*" and "Xing *Zhong*" in *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions*, ed. Constance A. Cook and Paul R. Goldin (Berkeley : The Society for the Study of Early China, 2016), 93-100 and 115-25. See also Chapter 2.

would seem hard to distinguish the role of scribes from that of diviners.[68] K.C. Chang has boldly treated the Shang scribes (which he refers to as "historiographers") as shamanistic figures who preserve the past.[69] As Li Feng says that, "specific administrative offices had not been differentiated in the Shang government or separated from the religious roles of the royal diviners who staffed the royal court and transmitted royal commands to the targeted groups of officials."[70] But if we consider the evidence presented above, it would seem unwise to presume that the role of scribes in the late Shang was ***purely*** religious. It is dangerous to make such a claim with "the bias of the sample."[71] A study by Hu Huoxuan 胡厚宣 suggests that the scribes in Shang oracle bone inscriptions also participated in military and diplomatic affairs.[72] These duties were succeeded by the scribes in the Zhou as revealed in bronze inscriptions.[73] It has been clear that religion alone cannot fully define the role of scribes during the late Shang.

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[67] See Smith, "The Evidence for Scribal Training at Anyang," 180-202.

[68] Chen Mengjia, "Shangdai de shenhua yu wushu" 商代的神話與巫術, in his *Chen Mengjia xueshu lunwenji*, 91.

[69] Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 90-4. See also an elaboration of this theory in Li Ling 李零. *Zhongguo fangshu zhengkao* 中國方術正考 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2006), 10-11.

[70] Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 29.

[71] See Bagley, "Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System," 217-22.

[72] See Hu, "Yin dai de shiguan wei wuguan shuo," 183-97.

[73] See Shirakawa, "Shaku shi," 62; Li Ling, "Xi Zhou jinwen zhong de zhiguan xitong" 西周金文中的職官系統, in Li Ling, *Li Ling zi xuanji* 李零自選集 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1998), 117-8.

Scribes in Western Zhou Writing

Some of the *shi*-titles during the Qin and Han periods were in fact descended from the Western Zhou period, yet their role at the Zhou court is debated among scholars. The largest group of extant Western Zhou writing is the inscriptions cast on bronze vessels, mainly for commemorative purposes. Although the practice of casting bronze inscriptions can be traced back to the reign of Wu Ding 武丁 (the 21st king) in the late Shang,[74] it was not until the Western Zhou that there are a large number of bronze inscriptions available to us. Especially from the Middle Western Zhou period (ca. 956—858 BCE) onward, a large number of long inscriptions regarding an appointment ceremony enable a more systematic and meaningful analysis.[75] Scholars hold different views on the nature of bronze inscriptions, and the differences of views affect the interpretation on the role of scribes as reflected in the bronze inscriptions.

While Edward L. Shaughnessy follows most Chinese scholars who recognize the historical value of bronze inscriptions,[76] Lothar von Falkenhausen, in contrast, contends that they were primarily for communication with the ancestral spirits. Von Falkenhausen claims that "The bronze inscriptions are not accurate historical records, or are only incidentally so: they must be understood primarily as relics of ritual activity."[77] He sees

[74] See Bagley, "Anyang Writing and the Origin of the Chinese Writing System," 200.

[75] See Virginia C. Kane, "Aspects of Western Chou Appointment Inscriptions: The Charge, the Gifts, and the Response," *Early China* 8 (1982-3): 14-28; Chen Hanping 陳漢平, *Xi Zhou ceming zhidu yan jiu* 西周冊命制度研究 (Shanghai : Xuelin chubanshe, 1986); von Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies," 152-61; Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 103-14; Martin Kern, "The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China," in *The Poetics of Grammar and the Metaphysics of Sound and Sign*, ed. Porta S. La and D. Shulman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 127-57.

[76] Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, 175-82.

these inscriptions as a non-essential addition to the fully functional ritual vessels. The fact that the inscriptions were mostly placed at the bottom or on the inside wall of the objects suggests that the intended audience were not the descendants, but the ancestral spirits. In his opinion, the verbatim quotes from actual administrative documents preserved in the inscriptions appear to be selective and incomplete, so that their historical accuracy is certainly in question.[78] Von Falkenhausen's stress on the ritual context in understanding Western Zhou bronze inscriptions invoked new thoughts on the scribal profession during the Western Zhou. Observing that most scribes appear as a high ranking gift-recipient in bronze inscriptions, Constance A. Cook argues that, "a scribe was a ritualist, an official whose 'service' was essentially of a religious nature." She associates the ritual role of the Zhou scribes with K.C. Chang's famous theory on the shamanistic role of the Shang scribes, suggesting the continuity of the ritual role of scribes from the Shang to the Zhou.[79]

A careful reader would immediately notice that such a hypothesis emphasizing the ritual role of the Zhou scribes almost entirely sets apart the *Rituals of the Zhou* (Zhouli 周禮) from discussion. Martin Kern is wise to bring it back to our attention. Although the

[77] Von Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies," 167. See also von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 53-6. This view has been recently restated in Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Review of Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China: Governing the Western Zhou*," *Zhejiang daxue yishu yu kaogu yanjiu* 浙江大學藝術與考古研究 1 (2014): 261.

[78] Von Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou Studies," 146-68.

[79] Cook, "Scribes, Cooks, and Artisans," 252-3; Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, 90-4. Note that Cook seems to have changed her view on the *shi*-office holders in the Western Zhou. In a newly published collection of translations of selected Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, she frequently translates the title *shi* as "Archivist." On one occasion, she states that the *shi* was "a position that included divinatory arts and star-reading, the recording of lineage narratives and songs, as well as being transmitter of the kings' commands." Since Cook does not provide any explanation on her change of view, my discussion of her studies of *shi* will only refer to her earlier view. See Cook, "Shi Qiang *Pan*," 94.

Rituals of the Zhou is quite clearly a product of the Warring States period,[80] Zhang Yachu 張亞初, Liu Yu 劉雨 and Chen Hanping 陳漢平 have demonstrated that it does preserve some elements corresponding to Western Zhou bronze inscriptions.[81] Kern correctly observes that:

> [T]he *Rituals of Zhou* is a text of at least two very distinct layers: composed in Warring States/early imperial language, it conforms to early imperial ideals of universal order and matches accounts of scribal culture of that time, ***but the text also reveals a profound knowledge of far older—indeed, Western Zhou—administrative units and their titles that by Warring States times had long been discontinued and replaced.***"[82]

In the idealized bureaucracy portrayed in the *Rituals of the Zhou*, in addition to the high-ranking scribes—the "Five Scribes" (*dashi* 大史 [*taishi* 太史], *xiaoshi* 小史, *neishi* 內史, *waishi* 外史 and *yushi* 御史) under the Ministry of Ritual (*chunguan* 春官) —at the court, there were a large number of low-ranking scribes (*shi* 史) along with storehouse keepers (*fu* 府), aides (*xu* 胥) and runners (*tu* 徒) working in each of the offices.[83] Kern notes that the appearance of the high-ranking scribes, including *taishi*, *neishi*, *waishi*, *yushi* and *zuoce*, as chief ritualists and royal representatives in bronze inscriptions coheres with the descriptions

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[80] See Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, "Zhou Gong zhi li de chuanshuo he Zhouguan yi shu de chuxian" 周公制禮的傳說和周官一書的出現, *Wenshi* 文史 6 (1979): 1-40. See also Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Reflections on the Political Role of Spirit Mediums in Early China: The *Wu* Officials in the *Zhou li*," *Early China* 20 (1995): 279-300; Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 42-48.

[81] See Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu, *Xi Zhou jinwen guanzhi yanjiu* 西周金文官制研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 111-44; Chen, *Xi Zhou ceming zhidu yan jiu*, 175-219.

[82] Martin Kern, "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," in *Statecraft and Classical Learning: The Rituals of Zhou in East Asian History*, ed. Benjamin A. Elman and Martin Kern (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 68.

[83] *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義, commentary by Sun Yirang 孫詒讓 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987), 51.2079-141 and 1.20-21.

of the duties of the "Five Scribes" in the *Rituals of the Zhou*. In his opinion, the low-ranking scribes and storehouse keepers mentioned in the *Rituals of the Zhou* should be the ones who actually carried out administrative work on perishable media, but unfortunately no direct evidence has been left to us.[84] To distinguish these two types of scribes, Kern follows Herrlee G. Creel in referring to the high-ranking scribes as "secretaries," which represents "a class of officials in charge and in control of the written word who ranked among the highest dignitaries at the Zhou royal court."[85] He emphasizes that these secretaries were not engaged in any actual clerical work as seen in bronze inscriptions. Kern's differentiation of the high-ranking and low-ranking scribes, albeit not new in Chinese scholarship,[86] demonstrates to us that there had been a hierarchical structure of scribes during the Western Zhou. However, it is doubtful if the *waishi* and *yushi*, as he claims, can be considered as important as the *dashi*, *neishi* and *zuoce*. In fact, I cannot find any reference to the *waishi* in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. As for the *yushi*, it only shows up once in the inscription on the Jing *gui* 競簋.[87] More importantly, his analysis of the high-ranking scribes—the secretaries—is not significantly different than Cook's, and it seems to be wrong to say that "the low-level governmental clerks do not appear in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions."[88]

Li Feng holds a very different view concerning the Western Zhou inscriptions than von Falkenhausen, stressing that they were cast for various reasons in various social contexts,

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[84] Kern, "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," 88.

[85] Kern, "The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China," 117; Creel, *The Origins of Statecraft in China*, 110.

[86] This has been pointed out by late Qing scholar Zhang Xuecheng 章學誠. See his *Wenshi tongyi jiaozhu* 文史通義校注, annotated by Ye Ying 葉瑛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994), 3.230-36.

[87] See Shirakawa Shizuka, *Kinbun tsūshaku* 金文通釈 (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2004), 2: 162-66.

[88] Kern, "The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China," 116-7.

not just ancestral communication. His recent studies of Western Zhou inscriptions show that writing was used for a wide range of purposes, including appointment of officials, land transaction and settlement, legal affairs, military campaigns and so on.[89] The evidence in bronze inscriptions reveals that various types of *shi*, accompanied by various prefixes, such as Book Scribe (*shushi* 書史) in the inscription on the Pengsheng *gui* 倗生簋[90] and Central Scribe (*zhongshi* 中史) in the inscription on the Shi Qi *ding* 師旂鼎,[91] had actually produced written records on perishable surfaces. Particularly of concern to us is the example of the Sanshi *pan* 散氏盤, which demarcates the settlement of a new border between the states of San 散 and Ze 矢.[92] The last line of the inscription reads: "Its [His] Left Contract-Keeping Scribe verified; [signed] Zhong Nong" 厥左執^綬史正，中農. Li Feng identifies that it was "the signature line of the Contract-Keeping Scribe who had apparently certified the written text that was cast on the bronze later."[93] If Li Feng's reading is correct, it demonstrates to us that the signing practice witnessed during the Qin and Han periods, in fact, originated during the Western Zhou.[94] These various types of *shi* mentioned in bronze inscriptions could be the low-ranking scribes described in the *Rituals of the Zhou*.

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[89] Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 11-20; more explicitly in "Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou," in *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, 271-301.

[90] See Shirakawa, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, 2: 423-41. See also Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 17; "Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou," 284.

[91] See Shirakawa, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, 1: 752-64. See also Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 17; "Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou," 286.

[92] See Shirakawa, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, 3: 191-228.

[93] Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 113; "Literacy and the Social Contexts of Writing in the Western Zhou," 291. See also Robert Eno, "Sanshi *Pan*," in *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions*, 168-71.

It remains a question whether or not those high-ranking scribes at the Zhou court who have been considered to be ritual specialists by Cook and Kern were engaged in any clerical work. It is true that we do not have direct evidence showing that these high-ranking scribes had prepared the written charge that they would read out loud (*ceming* 冊命) during the appointment ceremony,[95] but their close association with writing at the Zhou court is undeniable. And if we consider that there had been a hierarchy among scribes during the Western Zhou, it seems unnecessary to verify whether or not the high-ranking scribes were engaged in actual clerical work: The superior scribes did not need to prepare all the written records on every occasion while their subordinate scribes could serve that function.

It is believed that the Grand Scribe (*taishi* 太史) was the chief of the Office of the Grand Scribe (*taishi liao* 太史寮), and was in charge of other scribes.[96] From the middle Western Zhou period onward, due to the growth of household administration, the institution of Interior Scribe (*neishi* 內史) was separated from the Office of the Grand Scribe and merged with that of Document Maker (*zuoce*), as represented by the combined title "Document Maker and Interior Scribe" (*zuoce neishi* 作冊內史).[97] The appearance of the Chief of the Interior Scribes (*neishi yin* 內史尹) and Chief of the Document Makers (*zuoce*

[94] For the signing practice in the Qin and Han periods, see Enno Giele, "Signatures of 'Scribes' in Early Imperial China," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 59 (2005): 365-84; Hsing I-tien 邢義田, "Han zhi Sanguo gongwenshu zhong de qianshu" 漢至三國公文書中的簽署, *Wenshi* 100 (2012): 166-88.

[95] This is a crucial part of the ceremony. The written charge was prepared on perishable material and would then become the basis for the inscription on bronze vessel. For the phrase *ceming*, See Kern, "The Performance of Writing in Western Zhou China," 152-7; Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Royal Audience and Its Reflections in Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions," in *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, 249-50.

[96] See Zhang and Liu, *Xi Zhou jinwen guanzhi yanjiu*, 26-27; Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 56.

[97] See Zhang and Liu, *Xi Zhou jinwen guanzhi yanjiu*, 30; Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 76.

yin 作冊尹) and their staff (*you* 友) in bronze inscriptions suggests that there had been a hierarchy among the Interior Scribes and Document Makers.[98] In the inscription on the Ke *xu* 克盨, a scribe named Jin 趛 who was a staff of the Chief of the Interior Scribes or Chief of the Document Makers, was commanded by the king to document the field workers given to Food Steward (*shanfu* 膳夫) Ke 克.[99] It is reasonable to expect that the actual duties of the superior scribes would be more focused on managing and supervising the subordinate scribes who were responsible for much of the clerical work. As in early imperial China, despite not actually involving in the production of administrative documents, the Director of the Grand Scribe (*taishi ling*) was the one who appointed, evaluated and managed the administrative scribes.[100]

Conclusion

There is no doubt that writing played a significant role in early Chinese religions. Shang oracle bone inscriptions are perhaps the best physical evidence showing how writing had been employed in religious practices. The highly formulaic style of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions also suggests that they were closely associated with the ritual ceremonies at the

[98] See Zhang and Liu, *Xi Zhou jinwen guanzhi yanjiu*, 28-30; Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 75-7. For the term *you*, I follow Cho-yun Hsu and Katheryn M. Linduff who translate it into "staff." See *Western Chou Civilization*, 251-52.

[99] See Shirakawa, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, 3: 485-9. See also Constance A. Cook, "Da Ke *Ding* and Related Inscriptions," in *A Source Book of Ancient Chinese Bronze Inscriptions*, 176-77. Scribe Jin is mentioned as *yinshi you* 尹氏友 in the inscriptions. In middle and late Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, the titles *yin* 尹 or *yinshi* 尹氏 always refer to Chief of the Interior Scribes or Chief of the Document Makers. See Zhang and Liu, *Xi Zhou jinwen guanzhi yanjiu*, 57.

[100] See Chapter 2.

Zhou court. Scholars of these two types of inscriptions share the same concern over whether or not religious or ritualistic writing can tell us something beyond its original context. The answer to this question affects our understanding about what role the scribes played at that time. Although it is still too soon to reach a final conclusion on all the related issues, there are at least three points we could agree upon.

First, methodologically, the origin of the scribal profession cannot, and should not, be sought through a graphic analysis of the Chinese graph *shi*. Previous studies on the early development of the scribal profession commit a fallacy by associating the literal meaning represented by the graphic structure of the character *shi* with the origin of the scribal profession. This sort of attempt is based on an assumption that the graphic composition of a Chinese character can accurately reveal the original meaning of the word it represents. However, regardless of what definition of writing one would adopt—whether or not sound could be considered an indispensable element of writing—such an assumption has been made without solid linguistic foundation. The best way to consider the role of scribes in the early Chinese states is to look at the context in which they appear in early inscriptions.

Second, acknowledgedly, the religious function of scribes does not deny their role as the functionaries of writing. While the religious character of Shang oracle bone inscriptions is well acknowledged among scholars, the evidence from the inscriptions also reveal that the success of sacrificial activities in the late Shang required a routinized record-keeping system operated by the scribes. It is also evident that this record-keeping system had been employed in another important state affair, warfare.[101] Despite their importance in this early state, neither religion nor warfare alone can fully define Shang writing. The nature of scribes

[101] As a famous quote from the *Zuo Tradition* reads: "The great affairs of a state are sacrifice and warfare" 國之大事，在祀在戎. See *Chun qiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 861.

during the late Shang should be defined by their association with writing, regardless of what functions writing had served. It is also true that while scribes during the Western Zhou were indispensable in court rituals, this does not deny their role as the functionaries of writing.

Third, an identifiable hierarchy of scribes is first seen during the Western Zhou period during which time the subordinate scribes bore much of the responsibility for producing and processing documents. Although the official titles *shi* and *zuoce* are already seen in Shang oracle bone and bronze inscriptions, they tell us little about the organization of scribes. The sources of the Western Zhou period enable a recovery of the scribal organization. Most of the scribes that appear in the appointment inscriptions were those who held prominent positions at the Zhou court. During the appointment ceremony, they would be commanded by the king to read out loud the appointment on the bamboo or wooden documents in the middle of the ceremony and hand over it to the appointee at the end.[102] The role that the high status scribes played in the ceremony shows that they were the officials in charge of written words at court. But they need not be the ones who actually produced the documents. Both the *Rituals of the Zhou* and bronze inscriptions suggest that there were a number of subordinate scribes who could serve that function. Such a hierarchy suggests that there was a division of labor between high- and low-ranking scribes. Due to lack of evidence, however, it is still uncertain if there was upward mobility within the hierarchy of scribes during the Western Zhou as there was in later periods.[103]

[102] See Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 107-10.

[103] Li Feng suggests that there was upward mobility within the bureaucratic hierarchy in the Western Zhou. However, we do not have enough evidence to argue that it had existed among scribes. See ibid., 217-29.

CHAPTER TWO

The Evolution of Scribes in Early China:

Case Study of the Sima Family

Introduction

The death of King You 幽 in 771 BCE and the relocation of the Zhou political center from the capitals Feng 豐 and Hao 鎬 on the Wei 渭 River plain to the capital Luoyi 雒邑 at Luoyang in the next year signify the end of the Western Zhou period (1045—771 BCE) and the beginning of the Eastern Zhou period (770—256 BCE).[104] Following the collapse of the Western Zhou, there was a significant decline of the hereditary scribal profession. The Zhou scribes lost their prominent status during the crisis of the late Western Zhou. Many of them moved to different regional states. This change is best preserved in Sima Qian's narration of his family history. Regardless of which approach scholars have adopted, previous studies on Sima Qian place overarching emphasis on his writing of the *Historical Records* (Shiji 史記).[105] However, few scholars recognize that the biographical materials about Sima Qian

[104] For a study of the fall of the Western Zhou in a geopolitical perspective, see Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou, 1045-771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[105] Michael Nylan summarizes the most common approaches to the *Historical Records* into two types: 1. The "social scientific" reading which identifies that "Sima Qian as a 'true' historian because of his scrupulous care and apparent objectivity in handling the source materials that he had at his disposal to transmit" and 2. The "lyric/romantic" reading which stresses "the individual motivations prompting Sima Qian's compilation of the

preserved in his own writings and other transmitted texts give us the most comprehensive account about the family, career, and personal struggle of a hereditary scribe and help us to understand the social and institutional changes from the Zhou to the Qin and Han periods.

While the governmental structure had undergone significant changes from the Zhou to the Qin and Han periods, the office of *shi* demonstrated a persistant continuity during the transition. Of these, the position of *taishi ling* (Director of the Grand Scribes), which had been held by Sima Qian and his father Sima Tan 司馬談 illustrates, on the one hand, the continuation of the religious function of scribes over hundreds of years, while on the other hand, also demonstrates to us the decline of the scribal profession itself. The newly excavated legal texts from tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan add to our knowledge about the administrative role of the Director of the Grand Scribes in evaluating, appointing, and managing the low-ranked scribes in the empire. This evidence might help resolve the long-term debate about whether the *taishi ling* was a scribe, historian, archivist or astrologer.[106] By situating Sima Qian and his family in a larger institutional and social context, this chapter takes them as a case study in understanding the evolution of scribes in early China.

work." In contrast, she characterizes her own approach as the "religious" reading, which highlights the religious vocabulary and religious impulses in the *Historical Records*. See Michael Nylan, "Sima Qian: A True Historian," *Early China* 23/24 (1998-99): 203-46. For a review on the studies of the *Historical Records* in the West, see Esther Sunkyung Klein, *The History of a Historian: Perspectives on the Authorial Roles of Sima Qian* (PhD Dissertation: Princeton University, 2010), 4-30.

[106] For *taishi ling* as a scribe, see William H. Nienhauser, Jr. ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); as a historian, see Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); as an archivist, see Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li, Michael Nylan and Hans van Ess, *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 18-21; as an astrologer, see Hans Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 19. Some scholars try to reconcile the various interpretations of *taishi ling*. See, for example, David W. Pankenier, *Astrology and Cosmology in Early China: Conforming Earth to Heaven* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11, in which the author translates *taishi ling* into "Prefect Grand Scribe-Astrologer."

In the following, I shall first illustrate the major historical changes of the scribal profession during the Eastern Zhou period, then examine the family history of Sima Qian, and finally contextualize Sima Qian's personal experience into the institutional history of early imperial China.

The Evolution of Scribes during the Eastern Zhou Period

As discussed in Chapter 1, high-level scribes at the Western Zhou court including the Grand Scribe (*taishi*), Interior Scribe (*neishi*) and Document Maker (*zuoce*) were in charge of the written documents and served as the representatives of the Zhou King on many occasions, such as in the appointment ceremony. Some of the high-ranking scribes could even acquire the status of *gong* 公 (Duke), as suggested by the title *gong taishi* 公太史 (Duke Grand Scribe) in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. In the inscription on the Zuoce Hu *you* 作冊[鬼+虎]卣, a Duke Grand Scribe was received by the Zhou King at the capital Hao. After being sent back by the Zhou King to his residence at the capital Feng, the Duke Grand Scribe granted Document Maker You, the donor of the bronze vessel, a horse, implying that he was of a superior position.[107] The title *gong taishi* can also be seen in the inscriptions on a number of bronze vessels excavated in tomb no. 30 at Lutaishan 魯台山, Hubei, in 1977-8. The Duke Grand Scribe appears as the donor of these bronze vessels in the inscriptions, reflecting the wealth he had obtained.[108] Scholars believe that the Duke Grand Scribes in

[107] See Chen Mengjia, *Xi Zhou tongqi duandai* 西周銅器斷代 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004), 56-7; Shirakawa, *Kinbun tsūshaku*, 1: 589-96.

[108] Huangpi xian wenhuaguan 黃陂縣文化館 et al., "Hubei huangpi lutaishan liang Zhou yizhi yu muzang" 湖北黃陂魯台山兩周遺址與墓葬, *Jianghan kaogu* 江漢考古 1982.2: 44.

Western Zhou inscriptions could be Duke of Bi 畢公 and his descendants, a branch of the Royal Zhou House that might hereditarily hold the position of the Grand Scribe.[109]

Transmitted texts frequently mention that *gong* was the highest rank among the "Five Noble Ranks" (the other four include *hou* 侯 [Marquis], *bo* 伯 [Earl], *zi* 子 [Viscount] and *nan* 男 [Baron]) during the Western Zhou period.[110] Although recent studies suggest that these titles did not appear as a cohesive system during the Western Zhou and such a system was probably a recreation of the Eastern Zhou period, the evidence in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions confirm that the title of Duke could only be acquired by the most powerful officials at court. Prominent figures include Duke of Zhou 周公, Duke of Shao 召公, and Duke of Mao 毛公, all of whom had achieved an extremely high status that stood between the King and the entire bureaucracy.[111]

The best example to illustrate the status and wealth that a high-ranking scribe could have acquired during the Western Zhou is the Wei family. In 1976, a cache of 103 bronze vessels was excavated at Zhuangbai 莊白, in Shaanxi, which had been the heartland of the Western Zhou realm. The majority of the bronze vessels belonged to the members of the Wei lineage. While the number of the bronze vessels itself gives us an idea of the vast wealth the Wei lineage had obtained, the inscriptions on the Shi Qiang *pan* 史墻盤 and

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[109] See Chen, *Xi Zhou tongqi duan dai*, 56-7; Zhang Yachu, "Lun lutaishan Xi Zhou mu de niandai he zushu" 論魯台山西周墓的年代和族屬, *Jianghan kaogu* 1984.2: 24.

[110] See, for example, *Liji jijie* 禮記集解, commentary by Sun Xidan 孫希旦 (Beijing: Zhonghua shujiu, 1989), 12.309.

[111] See Li Feng, "'Feudalism' and Western Zhou China: A Criticism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63.1 (2003): 132-5; "Transmitting Antiquity: The Origin and Paradigmization of the 'Five Ranks,'" in *Perceptions of Antiquity in Chinese Civilization*, ed. Dieter Kuhn and Helga Stahl (Heidelberg: Edition Forum, 2008), 103-34.

Xing *zhong* 㺜鐘 tell us the glorious family history of this lineage. The founder of the Wei lineage was a Shang scribe who defected to the Zhou after the conquest of the Shang. King Wu of Zhou granted him land at the place called Wei, where the members of the lineage resided for at least six generations.[112] In the inscription on Shi Qiang *pan*, the donor Scribe Qiang lists the heads of the Wei lineage in parallel to the Zhou Kings (Figure 3).[113] As von Falkenhausen rightly points out, "this may be read as an expression of loyalty to the royal house, but it also implies that the donors regarded the importance of their own Wei lineage and their own moral virtue as in some ways comparable to those of the Zhou kings."[114] Such a comparison would be considered an act of overstepping (*jianyue* 僭越) the authority of the emperor during imperial China.[115]

[112] Von Falkenhausen argues that the listing of Wei ancestors on the Shi Qiang *pan* is incomplete. Several generations are skipped in the text. See his *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 62.

[113] See *Xi Zhou Wei shi jiazu qingtongqi qun yanjiu*, 58-79; Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou History*, 183-92; Cook, "Shi Qiang *Pan*" and "Xing *Zhong*," 93-100 and 115-25.

[114] Von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 71. Martin Kern also comments that, "This text is the most powerful self-representation of an early Chinese functionary of writing known so far, testifying to the mature ritual institutions of the Western Zhou court as well as to the donor's self-awareness as the heir to a lineage of royal secretaries." See his "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings through Western Han," in *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, ed. Stephen Owen and Kang-i Sun Chang (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

[115] Only the writing format itself would seem unacceptable in imperial China. As revealed in Han stele inscriptions, a text had to be indented on the top in order to accommodate the phrases indicating an imperial answer and appellations identifying the emperor as recipient of the document or just referring to him. The principal is that no one can be presented in parallel to the emperor. See Enno Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong's* Duduan (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 100-1. For more on the authority of the emperor in imperial China, see Hsing I-tien 邢義田, "Zhongguo huangdi zhidu de jianli yu fazhan" 中國皇帝制度的建立與發展, in his *Tianxia yijia: Huangdi, guanliao yu shehui* 天下一家：皇帝、官僚與社會 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 1-49.

Figure 3: A rubbing of the inscription on the Shi Qiang *pan*. The achievements of the Zhou kings (right) and the heads of the Wei lineages (left) are listed in parallel in the inscription. After *Xi Zhou Wei shi jiazu qingtongqi qun yanjiu*, 396.

Following the fall of the Zhou House, however, the scribes lost their prominent status at court. While the description of the duties of the "Five Scribes" (*dashi* [Grand Scribe], *xiaoshi* [Minor Scribe], *neishi* [Interior Scribe], *waishi* [Exterior Scribe] and *yushi* [Attendance Scribe]) in the *Rituals of Zhou* mostly coheres with the records of the high-ranking scribes in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions,[116] the ranking of the "Five Scribes" in the *Rituals of Zhou* does not match the high status that the high-ranking scribes had acquired in bronze inscriptions. The *Rituals of Zhou* gives an explicit list of the number of the officials in each of the offices. The officials are all ranked in the order of *qing* 卿 (Minster), *dafu* 大夫 (Grandee) and *shi* 士 (Gentlemen). Of these the *dafu* and *shi* ranks

[116] See Kern, "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," 77-87. See also Chapter 1.

are more specifically divided into three subranks (*shang* 上 [Upper], *zhong* 中 [Middle], *Xia* 下 [Lower]). However, no officials from the offices of the "Five Scribes" were ranked above the grade of *zhong dafu* 中大夫 (Middle Grandee) (Table 2).[117]

	Qing 卿	*Shang dafu* 上大夫	*Zhong dafu* 中大夫	*Xia dafu* 下大夫	*Shang shi* 上士	*Zhong shi* 中士	*Xia shi* 下士
Dashi 大史				2	4		
Xiaoshi 小史						8	16
Neishi 内史			1	2	4	8	16
Waishi 外史					4	8	16
Yushi 御史						8	16

Table 2: The ranking of the officials of the "Five Scribes" in the *Rituals of Zhou*

The inconsistency between the ranking of the high-level scribes in the *Rituals of Zhou* versus Western Zhou inscriptions shows that the text of the *Rituals of Zhou* might contain multiple layers of content that could be dated to different periods.[118] Mark Edward Lewis has argued that the *Rituals of Zhou* "shows how the apparatus of the Warring States bureaucracy could be portrayed as a formal structure based on cosmology and numerology, a structure systematically calqued onto the cultic practices and ritual theories of the periods."[119] As a product of the Warring States period, the ranking of the scribes mentioned in the *Rituals of Zhou* might not exactly reflect reality, but it could at least show us the trends of the development of the scribal profession during that time. Noticeably, it

[117] *Zhou li zheng yi* 32.1286

[118] See Kern, "Offices of Writing and Reading in the *Rituals of Zhou*," 68. See also Chapter 1.

[119] Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 42.

corresponds to the later development in early imperial China, during which time most of the scribes were ranked at or below the middle level of the official system. As will be addressed in the next two sections of this chapter, while the office of the Grand Scribe during the Han inherited some of the functions from the same title in the Western Zhou, the Director of that office was only ranked at 600 bushels (*shi* 石), a salary grade that Sima Qian had referred to as *xia dafu* (Lower Grandee) in the Eastern Zhou term.[120]

A passage in the "Treatise on Calendrics" (Lishu 曆書) in the *Historical Records* more specifically links the decline of the Zhou scribes to the fall of the Zhou House:

> 幽、厲之後，周室微，陪臣執政，史不記時，君不告朔，故疇人子弟分散，或在諸夏，或在夷狄，是以其禨祥廢而不統。
> After Kings You and Li, the House of Zhou fell into decay, retainers usurped the government; scribes did not maintain a record of the correct times; the ruler did not announce the day of the new moon. As a consequence of that, the hereditary specialists were dispersed; some remained in the various [Hua-]Xia [States], others went to the Yi and Di (tribes). This is also why their prognostications were interrupted, and why there was no further transmission.[121]

The downfall of the Zhou House caused disorder in the Bronze Age East Asian world. The retainers were now taking control of the Zhou state; the ruler and scribes both failed to fulfil their duties in keeping correct calendrical records.[122] The hereditary specialists lost their positions at the Zhou court and many of them fled to different regional states, including

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[120] *Hanshu*, 62.2727-8. See also the last section in this Chapter.

[121] *Shiji*, 26.1258-9. Translation after Dorothee Schaab-Hanke, "Crisis and Reform of the Calendar as Reflected in *Shiji* 26," *Oriens Extremus* 45 (2005/06): 41, with modifications.

[122] The scribal duty of keeping calendrical records is not mentioned in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, but it is frequently emphasized in the *Zuo Tradition* (Zuozhuan 左傳) and Han transmitted texts. See also Christopher Cullen, "Numbers, Numeracy and the Cosmos," in *China's Early Empires: A Re-appraisal*, ed. Michael Nylan and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 325 and my discussion in later sections.

those states which were considered the "barbarians" (Yi 夷 and Di 狄). The passage cited here was to emphasize "the close relationship between the correct establishing of the calendar and good and successful government,"[123] but it coheres well with Sima Qian's narration of his own family history. During the reigns of King Hui 惠 and King Xiang 襄, the Sima family left the Zhou and moved to the State of Jin 晉. The Sima family was then divided into three branches, which respectively moved to the State of Wei 衛, the State of Zhao 趙 and the State of Qin.[124] The Sima family is not the only example that attests to this change. Another well-known example is the Dong scribes (*dong shi* 董史) in the State of Jin. During the late Western Zhou, the second son of the Zhou scribe Xin You 辛有, Dong 董, moved to the Jin. Dong and his descendants then replaced the Ji 籍 family and became in charge of the archival materials.[125] It has been suggested that the legendary scribe in Chinese historiography, Dong Hu 董狐, was also a descendent of this lineage.[126]

Li Feng's recent study shows that the Western Zhou state maintained a bifurcated structure, which was "a division between the conquered east, placed under the authority of the many regional rulers, and the west, mainly the Wei River valley in central Shaanxi and the small area surrounding Luoyang, over which the Zhou royal court exercised direct

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[123] Schaab-Hanke, "Crisis and Reform of the Calendar," 39.

[124] *Shiji*, 130.3285. See also my discussion in the next section.

[125] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, annotated by Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju. 1990), 1473. See also Stephen Durrant, Wai-yee Li and David Schaberg trans., *Zuo Tradition/Zuozhuan: Commentary on the "Spring and Autumn Annals"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 1526-7.

[126] Confucius had called Dong Hu "a worthy scribe of ancient times" (古之良史). See *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 663; *Zuo Tradition/Zuozhuan*, 596-7. In addition to Dong Hu, scholars also consider Dong Yin 董因 and Dong Anyu 董安于 the descendants of Xin You. See Xu, *Xian Qin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 321 and 328-9.

administrative control."[127] Albeit less bureaucratized, the regional governments shared a strong structural similarity with the central government during the Western Zhou period. As the significant part of the Western Zhou central government, the scribal office was also established in many regional governments.[128] The collapse of the Western Zhou caused a shift of power from the royal Zhou House to the regional states. Correspondingly, compared to a few mentions of scribes in the regional states in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, many records about them can be found in the *Zuo Tradition* (Zuozhuan 左傳).[129] The scribes in the old regional states in the east maintained their active role in state affairs, though they did not achieve the high status that the Western Zhou scribes did. At the same time, the newly rising Qin in the west began to establish the scribal office for administrating the state (Figure 4).

[127] See Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 43-9.

[128] Ibid., 248-57.

[129] See Xi Hanjing 席涵靜, *Zhou dai shiguan yanjiu* 周代史官研究 (Taipei: Fuji wenhua tushu, 1983), 69-95; Xu, *Xian Qin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 142-56; David Schaberg, "Functionary Speech: On the Work of *Shi* 使 and *Shi* 史," in *Facing the Monarch: Modes of Advice in the Early Chinese Court*, ed. Garret P. S. Olberding (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 25-31.

Figure 4: Qin terracotta scribes excavated from pit K0006 at the mausoleum site of the First Emperor of Qin. After Qin Shihuang ling kaogudui秦始皇陵考古隊, "Qin Shihuang lingyuan K0006 peizangkeng di yi ci fajue jianbao" 秦始皇陵園K0006陪葬坑第一次發掘簡報, *Wenwu* 2002.3, 10-11, figs. 8 and 10.

Although the origin of the Qin remains debated under the current evidence,[130] it is commonly agreed that Qin became one of the "regional lords" (*zhuhou* 諸侯) during the crisis of the late Western Zhou in 771 BCE. When the Quanrong 犬戎 invaded the Zhou,

[130] Scholars are divided into two groups, arguing whether Qin originated in the East or the West. See Yuri Pines et al., "General Introduction: Qin History Revisited," in *Birth of an Empire: The State of Qin revisited*, 11-3. The collection of the looted and unprovenanced bamboo slips held by the Tsinghua University includes a text with the title *Xinian* 繫年, which preserves an account about the early history of Qin. The text mentions that Qin's ancestors were originally Shang subjects who resided in the East. They were relocated to the West as a result of the failure of an anti-Zhou rebellion during the reign of King Cheng. See Yuri Pines, "Zhou History and Historiography: Introducing the Bamboo manuscript *Xinian*," *T'oung Pao* 100 (2014): 299-303.

Duke Xiang 襄 of Qin provided crucial military support to the Zhou. It was under Qin protection that King Ping 平 of Zhou could successfully relocate his capital to Luoyi in the East. In return for the support of the Qin, the Zhou enfeoffed Duke Xiang as a regional lord and granted him the land to the west of Mount Qi 岐 (in modern Shaanxi). Qin now became a "state" (*guo* 國).[131] However, during the early years of the Spring and Autumn period (770—481 BCE), because Qin was remote in the west and did not participate in covenants with the regional lords of the Central States (*zhongguo* 中國), it was treated like the Yi and Di barbarians.[132]

The *Historical Records* mentions two events which are directly relevant to the development of the scribal profession in the Qin, both of which should be understood in the context of Qin state-building process.

> 文公十三年，初有史以紀事，民多化者。
> In the thirteenth year of Duke Wen (753 BCE), [Qin] for the first time had scribes to record matters. Most people became civilized.[133]

> (孝公)十三年，初為縣，有秩史。
> In the thirteenth year [of Duke Xiao] (349 BCE), [Qin] for the first time established counties and appointed scribes with a salary grade in these counties.[134]

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131 *Shiji*, 5.178-9.

132 Ibid., 5.202. Melvin P. Thactcher has argued that the Qin governmental structure during the Spring and Autumn period appeared to be less advanced compared to other states like Chu, Qi, and Jin. See his "Central Government of the State of Ch'in in the Spring and Autumn Period," *Journal of Oriental Studies* 23.1 (1985): 29-53.

133 *Shiji*, 5.179.

134 Ibid., 15.723. The phrase *chu wei xian* 初為縣 (for the first time established counties) refers to a policy of combining villages into counties carried out the previous year (350 BCE). See also my discussion below.

Duke Xiang died five years after the relocation of the Zhou capital in Luoyi. His successor, Duke Wen (765—716 BCE), was aggressive in expanding Qin territory eastward. In 750 BCE, Duke Wen's army defeated the Rong in the Wei River plain. Qin gathered the remaining Zhou people (*Zhou yumin* 周餘民) in the area that previously had been occupied by the Rong and made them Qin subjects, and extended Qin territory to Mount Qi.[135] It was probably during Duke Wen's eastward campaign that he realized the needs of establishing a record-keeping system in ruling his new subjects.

Another event happened during a reform led by Shang Yang 商鞅 under the reign of Duke Xiao (c. 361—338 BCE). Most of the regional states were eliminated in frequent warfare during the Spring and Autumn period and their territories were now incorporated into the seven strong states: Qi 齊, Chu 楚, Yan 燕, Han 韓, Zhao, Wei 魏 and Qin. Many of these states underwent reforms in order to win the inter-state competition.[136] To respond to a call by Duke Xiao in searching for qualified personnel in strengthening the Qin state, Shang Yang arrived in Qin in 361 BCE and his reform proposal was accepted two years later.[137] In 350 BCE, Qin combined small villages into forty-one large counties, each governed by a Magistrate (*ling* 令); the next year, Qin incorporated scribes with a salary grade (*zhi* 秩) into the newly established counties.[138]

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[135] *Shiji*, 5.179. See also Li, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 275-6.

[136] See Cho-yun Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition: An Analysis of Social Mobility, 722-222 B.C.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), chap. 4.

[137] *Shiji*, 5.202-3. See also Yuri Pines, *The Book of Lord Shang: Apologetics of State Power in Early China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 16-20.

[138] *Shiji*, 5.203; 15.723.

Xian 縣 (county) was a new invention during the Spring and Autumn period. A new strategy during that period was that when a state conquered and occupied a new area, instead of granting the area to a member of the royal family, it would establish a county to consolidate the area.[139] Although *xian* as an institution that probably did not originate in the Qin,[140] it was the Qin which reorganized and unified the system of *xian*, which became the basic administrative unit throughout the history of imperial China. During Shang Yang's reform, the Qin centrally regulated the county system and enforced it in all the local administration.[141] Each of the counties was governed by a Magistrate with the assistance of a number of scribes and other officials. It was under such a policy that the Qin successfully enforced its written administration within its territory. In the twenty-six year of his reign (221 BCE), the First Emperor of Qin conquered the last rival state, Qi, and achieved his final unification of China. In a court debate, the First Emperor approved the proposal by Li Si 李斯 to completely replace the so-called *fengjian* 封建 system with the *junxian* 郡縣 (commandery-county) system.[142] Noticeably, the scribes were now all ranked on a scale of

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[139] See H. G. Creel, "The Beginnings of Bureaucracy in China: The Origin of the Hsien," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23.2 (1964): 170-83; Cheng-sheng Tu 杜正勝, *Bianhu qimin: Chuantong zhengzhi shehui jiegou zhi xingcheng* 編戶齊民：傳統政治社會結構之形成 (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1990), 119-23; Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴, "xian zhi qiyuan sanjieduan shuo" 縣制起源三階段說, *Zhongguo lishi dili luncong* 中國歷史地理論叢 1997.3: 23-38.

[140] Creel argues that the institution of *xian* originated in the State of Chu. See Creel, "The Beginnings of Bureaucracy in China," 170-83.

[141] The earliest record of *xian* in Qin history can be dated back to as early as 688 BCE when the Qin attacked Gui 邽 and Jirong 冀戎. See *Shiji* 5.182. However, most scholars consider that it only points to the fact that the Qin incorporated the land of Gui and Jirong into its territory, but not necessarily means that *xian* as an institution had already been established in the Qin at that time. See Creel, "The Beginnings of Bureaucracy in China," 172; Tu, *Bianhu qimin*, 120; Zhou, "xian zhi qiyuan sanjieduan shuo," 25.

[142] Transmitted texts tend to use the term *fengjian* to describe the establishment of the Zhou regional states. Li Feng has convincingly demonstrated that it is misleading to refer it to as "Feudalism" as in medieval Europe. See Li, "'Feudalism' and Western Zhou China: A Criticism," 143. For the debate about whether to resume the Zhou *fengjian* system or replace it with the *junxian* system at the Qin court, see *Shiji* 6.238-9. See also Li, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 282-83.

salary grades and received salary based on their grade. Yan Buke has rightly commented that the employment of salary grades impersonalized the officials.[143] The officials provided service in exchange for their salaries and their status was no longer defined by their position within the kin-based hierarchy according to the "lineage law" (*zongfa*).[144]

Throughout the history of Qin and Han China, we no longer encounter any instance like Scribe Qiang of the Wei family at the Western Zhou court, who was so proud of his hereditary occupation. Instead, as Sima Qian informs us, being a hereditary scribe in the Han was no longer a prestigious job as during the Western Zhou. They were the subjects of the Emperor and their rise and fall at the court could be determined by the Emperor's will. The next section specifically looks at the family history of Sima Qian to explore this change.

The Family History of Sima Qian

As one of the two most important sources in studying the life of Sima Qian,[145] the "Self-Narration of the Honorable Grand Scribe" (taishigong zixu 太史公自序)[146] included in the

[143] Yan Buke, *Cong juebenwei dao guanbenwei: Qin Han guanliao pinwei jiegou yanjiu* 從爵本位到官本位：秦漢官僚品位結構研究 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2009), 49.

[144] Under the system of the "lineage law," the head of a branch lineage was inferior by one rank to the contemporaneous head of the trunk lineage. Von Falkenhausen argues that such a system "created a hierarchy based on kin seniority and genealogical distance from the focal ancestors, thereby establishing clear differences in access to prerogatives of status." See his *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 67. See also Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 248.

[145] The other source is "The Letter to Ren An" (Bao Ren An shu 報任安書) included in the "Biography of Sima Qian" (Sima Qian zhuan 司馬遷傳) of the *History of the Han*. See *Hanshu* 62.2725-36. For a recent collaborative study of "The Letter to Ren An," see Stephen Durrant et al., *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy*. Some contributors in that volume question if "The Letter to Ren An" was Sima Qian's own writing. Such a doubt, however, does not have any concrete textual support. I follow the conventional view seeing "The Letter to Ren An" as Sima Qian's own writing. On the conventional view, see Durrant, "Seeking Answers, Finding More Questions" in that volume, and Klein, *The History of a Historian*, 446-52.

Historical Records begins with a detailed account about the genealogy of the Sima lineage. Probably like the case of the Wei lineage of the Western Zhou,[147] the genealogy of the Sima lineage was kept at their family archive and transmitted generation after generation. According to this account, we can divide Sima Qian's family history into three parts: 1. Remote ancestors (*yuanzu* 遠祖) of the Sima lineage; 2. Recent ancestors (*jinzu* 近祖) of the Sima lineage;[148] and 3. Sima Qian's father Sima Tan 司馬談. Whereas the first part of the account suggests the religious character of the scribes, the second and third parts show the decline of the Sima lineage within a political context from the Eastern Zhou to the Han periods. I shall examine Sima Qian's family history based on this division.

Remote Ancestors of the Sima Lineage:

From the Origin of the Lineage to the Western Zhou Period

Sima Qian begins the "Self-Narration" with a famous myth about the "severance of heaven-earth communication" (*jue di tian tong* 絕地天通) in early Chinese religion.[149] According to Sima Qian, the history of the Sima lineage can be traced far back to the reign of the

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[146] As the postface to the *Historical Records*, the "Self-Narration of the Honorable Grand Scribe" is often treated as Sima Qian's autobiography. See Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1.

[147] See von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius*, 56.

[148] I use the terms "remote ancestor" and "recent ancestor" as a pair of relative concepts in referring to the ancestors of the Sima lineage. They refer not to the specific generations of a lineage stated in some transmitted texts.

[149] The myth has generated many discussions among scholars in both the East and the West. See, for example, Derk Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China," in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, ed. Samuel Noah Kramer (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 389-94; Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, chap. 3; Li, *Zhongguo fangshu zhengkao*, 10-11; Xu, *Xian Qin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 7-16; Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center for the Harvard-Yenching Institute, 2002), 104-9.

legendary King Zhuanxu 顓頊, during which time Governor of the South (*nanzheng* 南正) Zhong 重 and Governor of the North (*beizheng* 北正) Li 黎[150] were ordered to separately take charge of the affairs of heaven and earth. The Earl of Cheng 程 Xiufu 休甫 during the Western Zhou was the descendant of Zhong and Li. In the time of King Xuan of Zhou,[151] the family lost its position of being in charge of the affairs of heaven and earth and became the Sima family hereditarily in charge of the historical records of the Zhou (*shi dian Zhou shi* 世典周史).[152] The fact that the story appears in a number of early Chinese texts suggests that it was well received in the early Chinese textual tradition.[153] The "Discourses of Chu" (Chuyu 楚語) in the *Discourses of the States* (Guoyu 國語) preserves the most complete account of this story, which can fill the gap that left in the "Self-Narration."[154]

In contrast to the "Self-Narration" in which Sima Qian attributes the origin of his hereditary scribal occupation to Zhong and Li, the "Discourses of Chu" links Zhong and Li to the *wu* 巫 tradition. The parallel passage in the "Discourses of Chu" is preserved within

[150] In the "Treatise on Calendrics" in the *Historical Records*, Sima Qian calls Li the Governor of Fire (*huozheng* 火正). See *Shiji*, 26.1257.

[151] King Xuan was established with support from the Duke of Shao and the Duke of Zhou after the death of King Li in 828 BCE. Traditional historical narratives consider the reign of King Xuan as the restoration of the Zhou authority during the late Western Zhou. See Li, *Landscape and Power in Early China*, 134-39.

[152] *Shiji*, 130.3285. See also Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien: Grand Historian of China*, 42.

[153] In addition to the *Discourses of the States*, parallel passages can also be seen in the *Classic of Documents* (Shangshu 尚書), the *Sayings of a Hermit* (Qianfu lun 潛夫論), and the *Rituals of Han Offices* (Hanguan yi 漢官儀). See *Shangshu zhengyi* 尚書正義 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2000), 19.634; *Qianfu lun jian jiaozheng* 潛夫論箋校正 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), 35.411-12; *Han guan liuzhong* 漢官六種, compiled by Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 11-12.

[154] Qing scholar Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 suggests that Sima Qian adopted the story of Zhong and Li from the "Discourses of Chu." See Liang Yusheng, *Shiji zhiyi* 史記志疑 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 1463. I would rather suggest that the parallel passages about the story of Zhong and Li in the "Discourses of Chu" and "Self-Narration" were from the same source that had already been widely received in the textual tradition.

a conversation between King Zhao 昭 of Chu and his minister Guan Yifu 觀射父. After reading the record about Zhong's and Li's severance of heaven-earth communication in the *Classic of Documents* (Shangshu 尚書),[155] King Zhao asked Guan Yifu whether or not common people could ascend to heaven if such an event did not happen. Guan Yifu's answer is negative. He responded, the communication between heaven and earth in ancient times was monopolized by the religious specialists, if men, called *xi* 覡, and if women, called *wu* 巫. The order of heaven and earth had been destroyed during the fall of Shaohao 少皞 and it was King Zhuanxu who commanded Zhong and Li to restore order.[156] Considering the parallel passages in the "Self-Narration" and "Discourses of Chu" together, some scholars have attributed the origin of the scribes to the *wu*,[157] in K.C. Chang's terminology, the shaman.[158]

Needless to say, the story about the legendary figures Zhong and Li, and King Zhuanxu was most likely invented, and modified over a long period of time to reflect contemporary concerns within both the oral and textual traditions.[159] Even Sima Qian himself could not clarify if Zhong and Li were the same person or two separate persons.[160] It is also not

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[155] *Shangshu zhengyi*, 19.634.

[156] *Guoyu jijie* 國語集解, commentary by Xu Yuangao 徐元誥 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 18.512-16.

[157] See, for example, Xu, *Xian Qin shiguan de zhidu yu wenhua*, 7-16.

[158] Chang, *Art, Myth, and Ritual*, chap. 3, and more explicitly in his "Shang Shamans," in *The Power of Culture: Studies in Chinese Cultural History*, ed. Willard J. Peterson et al. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1994), 10-36.

[159] Scholars are well aware of the limitations of mythical sources. The late prominent Chinese historian Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛 was the strongest advocate of rejecting mythical sources in historical studies. His view can be seen in his debates with contemporary scholars, which are now included in his *Gu shi bian* 古史辨 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982). For more on using mythical sources in reconstructing the past, see Mark Edward Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 1-4.

uncommon in the history of China that people would attribute their ancestors to legendary figures to exaggerate the status and history of their lineage.[161] But there is indeed a strong textual basis suggesting the close relationship between scribes and hereditary religious specialists in early China.[162] As discussed in Chapter 1, many studies have already demonstrated the religious function of scribes during the late Shang and Western Zhou periods. The close relationship between them continued through the Eastern Zhou, to the imperial period. The official titles *zhushi* 祝史 (Invocator Scribe), *shishi* 筮史 (Divination Scribe), and *jishi* 祭史 (Sacrificial Scribe) seen in the *Zuo Tradition* show the continuity of this tradition during the Spring and Autumn period.[163] Noticeably, the "Statute on Scribes" (Shilü 史律) in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* (Ernian lüling 二年律令) from the Zhangjiashan tomb contains regulations on scribes, diviners (*bu* 卜) and invocators (*zhu* 祝), which suggests that they were all included in the general category of "scribe" in the early Han.[164] Throughout the history of the Han dynasty, the chiefs of these specialists, *taishi ling* (Director of the Grand Scribes), *taibu ling* 太卜 (Director of the

[160] On the one hand, Sima Qian says that Zhong and Li were two persons who were respectively in charge of heaven and earth, on the other hand, he tells us that his ancestor in the Western Zhou was the descendant of the Zhongli family (*zhongli shi* 重黎氏). See *Shiji* 130.3285.

[161] See Ming-Ke Wang 王明珂, "Lun panfu: Jindai yanhuang zisun guozu jiangou de gudai jichu" 論攀附：近代炎黃子孫國族建構的古代基礎, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院歷史語言研究所集刊 73.3 (2002): 583-624.

[162] Chen, "Shangdai de shenhua yu wushu," 91.

[163] *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 111, 474, and 1390.

[164] See *LSS*, 1086.

Grand Diviners) and *taizhu ling* 太祝 (Director of the Grand Invocators) were all managed by the Minister of Ceremonial (*taichang* 太常).[165]

To sum up, the story about Zhong and Li included in Sima Qian's "Self-Narration" by no means suggests that the scribes were the direct successors to the *wu*, but rather provide another important reference to the close relationship between scribes and hereditary ritual specialists.

Recent Ancestors of the Sima Lineage: From the Eastern Zhou to the Qin and Early Han Periods

After tracing the origin of the Sima lineage and its hereditary occupation, Sima Qian proceeds to narrate the splitting of his lineage from the Eastern Zhou to the Qin and Han periods. As he tells us, the Sima family left the Zhou during the time of Kings Hui (676—652 BCE) and Xiang (651—619 BCE) in the Eastern Zhou and went to Jin.[166] The Sima lineage then became fragmented and split into three branches, respectively living in Wei 衛, Zhao and Qin (Figure 5).[167]

[165] See *Hanshu*, 19a.726. See also Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Time*, 17-23.

[166] According to Sima Qian, during the reigns of Kings Hui and Xiang, the royal Zhou House suffered from internal crisis. See *Shiji*, 4.151-52.

[167] *Shiji* 130.3286. See also Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 42-43.

A. The branch in Wei
(An unknown person who had been "Chancellor of the State of Zhongshan" 相中山)----**?**

B. The branch in Zhao
(An unknown person who had been "famous with transmitting the art of swordsmanship" 以傳劍論顯)—Kuaikui 蒯聵----**Yang 卬**

C. The branch in Qin
Cuo 錯—(unknown)—Jin 靳—(unknown)—Chang 昌—Wuze 無澤—**Xi 喜—Tan 談—Qian 遷**

Figure 5: Members of the Sima Lineage in the Wei, Zhao, and Qin during the Eastern Zhou Period. Note that the bold ones were the members of that branch that lived under the Qin and Han empires. Yet, Sima Qian does not tell us whether or not the Wei branch had continued into the Qin and Han periods.

As a descendant of the Qin branch, Sima Qian give us the most detailed account of his own branch. This suggests that such a record might have been stored in his family archive. It is noteworthy that from Sima Cuo to Sima Xi, altogether seven generations, no representative figure of the branch had succeeded to the family hereditary occupation (Table 3).[168]

Sima members of the Qin branch	**Sima Qian's remarks in the "Self-Narration"**
Sima Cuo (fl. 316—280 BCE)	Cuo argued with Zhang Yi 張儀 at the court of King Weiwen on whether to attack Han or Shu. He convinced the King and was sent to conquer Shu in 316 BCE. He was then made the Governor of Shu.
Sima Jin (fl. 260—257 BCE)	Jin served the Lord of Wu'an 武安君 (Bai Qi 白起). They massacred the defeated army of Zhao at Changping 長平 in 260 BCE and were both sentenced to death in 257 BCE.
Sima Chang (c. 221—210 BCE)	Chang was Head of the Office of Iron (*zhu tieguan* 主鐵官) in the time of the First Emperor.
Sima Wuze (??—??)	Wuze was Chief of the Marketplace (*shizhang* 市長) under the Han.
Sima Xi (??—??)	Xi held Fifth Grandee (*wudafu* 五大夫) under the Han.

Table 3: Biographical information on the Qin branch of the Sima family

[168] Ibid. See also the discussion of the Sima members of the Qin branch in He Bingdi 何炳棣, "Sima Tan, Qian yu Laozi niandai" 司馬談、遷與老子年代, in his *You guan* Sunzi Laozi *de sanpian kaozheng* 有關《孫子》《老子》的三篇考證 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2002), 72-79.

This is not to suggest that the Qin branch of the Sima lineage had stopped its hereditary occupation, because it is entirely possible that the other members of the branch had succeeded to the position of scribes.[169] As in the Western Zhou period, under the system of the lineage law, the younger sons of aristocratic families were allowed an alternative path to status and privilege.[170] What should be highlighted here is that, the members of the Sima lineage no longer gained their reputations by their hereditary scribal occupation. As far as Sima Qian was concerned, the other paths to success were more remarkable to be recorded as part of Sima family history. It appears that military achievement was the most important one to the members of the Sima lineage.[171] Both Sima Cuo and Sima Jin were known by their participation in military affairs. Initiated in the Qin under the Shang Yang's reform, meritocratic rank became another symbol of one's social status in addition to governmental appointment. Military merit was considered the crucial factor in the conferral of rank in the Qin and early Han periods.[172] It is noteworthy that Sima Qian considered the rank of his grandfather to be as remarkable as any of his other ancestors' achievements. The way in which Sima Qian narrates the history of his recent ancestors provides further evidence showing the decline of the scribal profession.

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[169] It would also be hard to understand why Sima Tan was so certain that his son Sima Qian could succeed to his scribal position if his family had stopped succeeding to the position for seven generations.

[170] Li Feng first proposes that there was a flexibility in the hereditary succession of offices during the Western Zhou, as there are examples in bronze inscriptions that the sons did not always succeed the office of their fathers. Such an argument has been modified by von Falkenhausen, who argues that these officeholders might not be the heads of their respective lineage. These examples only show that "the bureaucracy provided opportunities for some of the younger sons of aristocratic families, giving them an alternative path to status and privilege." See Li, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*, 192-99; von Falkenhausen, "Review of Li Feng, *Bureaucracy and the State in Early China*," 265.

[171] This is perhaps also true to most of the people during the entire Eastern Zhou period. For a historical background, see Chu, *Ancient China in Transition*, chap. 3.

[172] See *LSS*, 873-76.

Sima Tan: A Hereditary Scribe in the Reign of Emperor Wu

Sima Tan, son of Sima Xi and father of Sima Qian, was the key figure in the family history of Sima Qian. Sima Tan had been the Director of the Grand Scribes and served in the government between the reign periods of Jianyuan 建元 (140—135 BCE) and Yuanfeng 元封 (110—105 BCE) of Emperor Wu.[173] In his conversation with Sima Qian on his deathbed, he expressed his deep regret in not being able to attend the Feng 封 Sacrifice at Mount Tai 泰 in 110 BCE, and reminded his son of the mission of being a hereditary scribe. Most scholars consider that Sima Qian's commitment to Sima Tan was central to his compilation of the *Historical Records*.[174] In response to his father's final instruction, Sima Qian says that, "This young man is not clever, but with your permission, he shall compile all the old traditions which you, his ancestor, have delineated, and would not venture to be remiss" 小子不敏，請悉論先人所次舊聞，弗敢闕.[175] Sima Qian should have incorporated the materials which had been stored in his family archive and passed by his father into the *Historical Records*.[176]

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[173] We are not entirely sure if Sima Tan had served in any positions other than Director of the Grand Scribes during his thirty years of service. He died in the first year of Yuanfeng (110 BCE). For a biography, see Michael Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods, 221 BC - AD 24* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000), 486-87.

[174] See, for example, Li Changzhi 李長之, *Sima Qian zhi renge yu fengge* 司馬遷之人格與風格 (Taipei: Taiwan kaiming shudian, 1976), 39-41; Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror*, chap. 1.

[175] *Shiji*, 130.3295. Translation after William H. Nienhauser, Jr. ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 1: ix.

[176] There is a long-term debate about whether Sima Tan had actually finished some of the chapters of the *Historical Records* before his death. For a review, see Zhang Dake 張大可, "Sima Tan zuoshi kaolun shuping" 司馬談作史考論述評, in his *Shiji yanjiu* 史記研究 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuju, 2011), 71-84.

Two things are noteworthy in Sima Qian's recount of his father. First, despite the glorious history of his remote ancestors during the Western Zhou, Sima Tan only obtained a relatively humble status at the court of Emperor Wu of the Han. Sima Qian quotes his father's own words saying that their ancestors had been the Grand Scribe for the Zhou House, hereditarily. Their family had once been eminent and renowned, but had undergone a significant decline in later years. As the Director of Grand Scribes to the Emperor, Sima Tan was not able to attend the Feng Sacrifice,[177] which became his deepest regret in his life. It is a sharp contrast to his ancestors who were the prominent officials being in charge of written commands and serving as the Zhou kings' representative during many rituals and ceremonies at the Western Zhou court.

Second, Sima Tan's educational background was closely related to his official service. Sima Tan had studied with three prominent scholars of his times: with Tang Du 唐都, Sima Tan learned celestial knowledge (*tianguan* 天官); with Yang He 楊何, he received the teaching of the *Classic of Changes* (Yi 易); and with Master Huang 黃子, he studied the theories of Dao. It is probably with this background that Sima Tan, in his famous essay on the "Essential Teachings of the Six Schools" (Liujia zhi yaozhi 六家之要旨), emphasizes the superiority of the School of Dao over other schools. This exceptionally strong educational background also prepared him to serve in the position of Director of the Grand Scribes.[178] Sima Qian describes his father's official service: "Since the Honorable Grand Scribe was put in charge of the Celestial Office, he was not responsible for governing

[177] See Lu Yaodong 逯耀東, *Yiyu yu chaoyue : Sima Qian yu Han Wudi shidai* 抑鬱與超越：司馬遷與漢武帝時代 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008), 151-56.

[178] See Zhang Dake, "Sima Qian pingzhuan" 司馬遷評傳, in his *Shiji yanjiu*, 7-8.

people" 太史公既掌天官，不治民.[179] Some scholars thus consider that the position of the Director of the Grand Scribes was completely free from the actual administration under the Han Empire and only focused on astrological and ritual matters.[180] By placing Sima Qian into the broader context of the Han official system, however, we can discern that such an assumption is only partly justified.

Contextualizing Sima Qian into Han Institutional History

Sima Qian was born in Longmen 龍門, Xiayang 夏陽 County (in modern Hancheng 韓城, Shanxi) in 145 or 135 BCE.[181] Like his father, Sima Qian's educational background and experience in his early years prepared him well for serving in the position of the Director of Grand Scribes. Both of them had acquired "high cultural literacy" in contrast to the low-ranking scribes.[182] At the age of ten, he was able to recite the old writings; at twenty he travelled from south to north within the Han Empire. He had learned from two of the greatest scholars in his times, Kong Anguo 孔安國 and Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒.[183] Sima Qian secured his first appointment as a Gentleman of the Palace Interior (*langzhong* 郎中)

[179] *Shiji*, 130.3293. Sima Qian again confuses his readers about his ancestors' hereditary duties. Whereas his ancestors Zhong and Li were described separately managing the affairs of heaven and earth, his father was not involved in governing people.

[180] See, for example, Li, *Zhongguo fangshu zhengkao*, 10-11.

[181] The birth year of Sima Qian is one of the unresolved problems in the studies of the life of Sima Qian. For a review, see Zhang Dake, "*Sima Qian shengzu niankao bian* bian" 〈司馬遷生卒年考辨〉辨, in his *Shiji yanjiu*, 85-117. Unless otherwise stated, my discussion on Sima Qian's life is based on his "Self-Narration."

[182] See Durrant et al., *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy*, 19. Sima Qian was also known with his literary talent among his contemporaries. See *Hanshu* 65.2863.

[183] *Hanshu*, 88.3607; *Shiji*, 130.3297.

through his family ties.[184] In 108 BCE, three years after the death of his father, he inherited the position of the Director of the Grand Scribes. He served in the position until 98 BCE when being charged with "falsely accusing the Highest (i.e. the Emperor)" (*wushang* 誣上). Emperor Wu felt offended by Sima Qian's defense for his former colleague Li Ling 李陵 in a court discussion. In order to accomplish the writing project of the *Historical Records*, Sima Qian chose to undergo castration (*fuxing* 腐刑) as an substitute for the death penalty for his crime.[185] After his castration, he served as a eunuch in the position of Director of the Palace Secretaries (*zhongshu ling* 中書令), which is also his last known position, responsible for handling imperial documents in the inner court of Emperor Wu. Except for the uncertainty of some specific dates, such a biographical sketch of Sima Qian should not be unfamiliar to any students of Chinese history. It only becomes meaningful to our discussion of the change of the scribal profession when we contextualize it into the institutional history of the Han dynasty.

Throughout Sima Qian's official service, the appointment of Director of the Grand Scribe was the longest and most important one. An official record of the appointment is fortunate enough to be preserved in a quotation from the *Records of Myriad Things* (Bowu zi 博物志) in Sima Zhen's 司馬貞 annotation to the *Historical Records*.

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[184] The *lang*-title holders were considered candidates of regular offices in the Han bureaucracy. See Keng-wang Yen 嚴耕望, "Qin Han langli zhidu kao" 秦漢郎吏制度考, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 23 (1951): 89-143; Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 24; Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), 131-32.

[185] *Hanshu*, 36.2455-56; 62.2729-30. In his letter to Ren An, Sima Qian emphasizes that he would rather to die if he was not committed to the writing of the *Historical Records*. See also my discussion below.

> 太史令茂陵顯武里大夫司馬遷，年二十八，三年六月乙卯除，六百石。
> Director of the Grand Scribes Sima Qian, of the rank Grandee, from Xianwu Village, Maoling [County], who is at the age of twenty-eight, is appointed on the Yimao day of the sixth month in the third year [of Yuanfeng] (July 5, 108 BCE), holding a salary grade of six-hundred bushels.[186]

Both the format and language of the record are in line with those of the "Registers of Officials" (*li mingji* 吏名籍) found on the Han western frontier, suggesting its authenticity as the original official register of Sima Qian.[187] Such a record must have been kept in the office of the Minister of Ceremonial.[188] It provides a first-hand record showing Sima Qian as an official in the Han bureaucracy in contrast to his role as the author of the *Historical Records*. Corresponding to those registers excavated on the Han frontier, Sima Qian's official register includes seven elements (position, residential information, rank, name, age, start date of appointment and salary grade) which show the ways in which the Han Empire managed and depersonalized its officials. By incorporating the excavated legal regulations from the tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi and tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan,[189] and other

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[186] *Shiji*, 130.3296. Wang Guowei has suggested that the record of age twenty-eight must have been mistaken with age thirty-eight, as Zhang Shoujie 張守節, another Tang annotator to the *Historical Records*, notes that Sima Qian was at forty-two years old in 104 BCE. See Wang Guowei, "Taishi gong xingnian kao" 太史公行年考, in his *Guantang jilin*, 11.2a. Whether or not Wang Guowei is correct will not essentially affect my argument. I will not engage in the discussion of this issue here.

[187] See Wang, "Taishi gong xingnian kao," 6b; Li Junming and Liu Jun 劉軍, *Jiandu wenshuxue* 簡牘文書學 (Nanning: Guangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 335-36.

[188] See Lai Ming Chiu 黎明釗 and Ma Tsang Wing 馬增榮, "Han jian buji zaitan: Yi 'zu yongzuo mingji' wei li" 漢簡簿籍再探：以「卒傭作名籍」為例, *Journal of Chinese Studies* 53 (2011): 42.

[189] The exact dating of these two groups of materials is arguable. Although the latest year in the *Chronicle* (Biannian ji 編年記) from the Shuihudi tomb is the thirtieth year of the First Emperor (217 BCE), suggesting that the tomb occupant must have been buried after this year, some of the legal regulations found in the tomb could be dated back to the late Warring State period. Similarly, most scholars believe that the "second year" (*ernian* 二年) mentioned in the title of the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* (Ernian lüling 二年律令) from the Zhangjiashan tomb refers to the second year of the Empress Lü (186 BCE), which indicates the year of the final compilation of the text. However, particular statutes and ordinances were inherited from the Qin with only minor revisions or created during the early years of the Han. The collections of the Shuihudi and

transmitted institutional sources, the following discussion of these elements contextualizes Sima Qian in his term of the Director of the Grand Scribes. It aims to illustrate that Sima Qian's unfortunate experience was not especially unusual among the officials under the Han Empire.

Position—*Director of the Grand Scribes*

This defined the duties of an official. The duties of the *taishi ling* are ambiguous in Han transmitted texts. Scholars have been debating whether the position-holder was a scribe, historian, archivist or astrologer.[190] Although being considered as one of the "Standard Histories" in imperial China, the writing of the *Historical Records* was not part of Sima Qian's official duties in the position of the *taishi ling*. In fact, a specific office for writing official history in imperial China did not exist until the Tang dynasty.[191] As a private work of Sima Qian, the *Historical Records* was first titled *Book of the Honorable Grand Scribe* (Taishi gong shu 太史公書) and its interpretation of history did not always correspond with the imperial interest. Concerning his criticism on contemporary affairs in the *Historical Records*, Ban Gu 班固 had commented that Sima Qian was not a *yishi* 誼士 (righteous man); Wang Yun 王允 had called the *Historical Records* the *bangshu* 謗書 (book of slander).[192] This is part of the reason why the *Historical Records* did not get wide

Zhangjiashan legal regulations both include entries that had been composed or revised over a long period of time. For the dating of these two groups of materials, see *SHD*, 1; *LSS*, 62-4.

[190] For summaries of the various views, see Durrant et al., *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy*, 18-21; Klein, *The History of a Historian*, 30-34. See also note 106.

[191] See Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the Tang* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[192] *Hou Hanshu*, 60b.2006.

acceptance in the early phase of its transmission.[193] Apparently, the graph *shi* contained in the official title *taishi ling* cannot be understood as *lishi* 歷史 (history), and the person who held the position was not necessarily a historian.

Although managing the governmental archives[194] and being in charge of astrological affairs were part of his duties,[195] the institutional role of *taishi ling* in the Western Han bureaucracy should be defined by his specialty in writing. The "Statutes on Scribes" in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* well attests to this point. The "Statute on Scribes" specifies a system of training, evaluating and promoting scribes, diviners and invocators. Although it attests to the close relation between the scribes, diviners and invocators, these knowledge specialists were clearly in different career tracks and were trained with different curricula. The *taishi, taibu* 太卜 (Grand Diviner) and *taizhu* 太祝 (Grand Invocator), respectively, evaluated, appointed and managed the scribes, diviners and invocators, acting like the "chiefs" of these groups. Relevant to our discussion here is the role of the *taishi* (*taishi ling* in full title) in the system. After their three years of learning with the study mentor (*xue'er* 學佴), the *taishi* would personally test the student scribes in the central government with the *Fifteen Wooden-Prism Bundles* (Shiwu pian 十五篇)[196]

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[193] For the transmission of the *Historical Records*, see Chen Zhi 陳直, "Han Jin ren dui *Shiji* de chuanbo ji qi pingjia" 漢晉人對史記的傳播及其評價, *Sichuan daxue xuebao* 四川大學學報 3 (1957): 41-57.

[194] In addition to the imperial archive, a passage of the *Seven Epitomes* (Qilüe 七略) preserved in Ru Chun's 如淳 annotation to the *History of the Han* shows that the *taishi ling* also managed an archive of his own office (*taishi zhi cang* 太史之藏). See *Hanshu* 30.1701.

[195] This includes keeping records of astrological changes, making annual calendar and selecting auspicious days for imperial rituals and ceremonies. See *Han guan liuzhong*, 1-2, 88-89, and 127-28; *Xu Hanshu* 25. 3572. These astrological duties could be seen as an inheritance of religious functions from the scribes in the earlier periods. As we know, a Shang scribe would have to interpret the divine signs on an oracle bone. See also Chapter 1.

and eight forms of written graphs (*bati* 八體),[197] while the Governors (*shou* 守) would test the student scribes (*shi xuetong* 史學童) in the commanderies (*jun* 郡). The *taishi* would then read out loud the evaluation of the two examinations and select the student scribes with the best result from the examinations in the central government and commanderies to be a Scribe Director (*lingshi* 令史) in a county. Once each three years, he would combine the evaluations of the examinations, then take the best individual and appoint him to the position of Accessory Scribe (*zushi* 卒史) in the Imperial Secretariat (*shangshu* 尚書).[198]

Such a well-documented system testifies that the Han scribes continued the tradition of scribes as writing specialist, and the Han *taishi* succeeded a partial role of the same title, from the Western Zhou. This system must have been inherited through the Qin, as we know that a Qin *taishi ling*, Hu Mujing 胡母敬, had composed a scribal primer, the *Extensive Learning* (Boxue 博學),[199] which might have been included in the Qin scribal curriculum. The records about the Han scribal system also provide the strongest evidence against the claim that the *taishi ling* was a purely astrological or ritual official and completely cut off from actual administration. As the "Statutes on Scribes" clearly states that:

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[196] Most scholars agree that the *Shiwu pian* refers to the *Shi Zhou pian* 史籀篇, which was a scribal primer possibly written in large-seal-script form (*dazhuan* 大篆). See *LSS*, 1101-2, n.11.

[197] Xu Shen refers these eight forms of graphs to as "large-seal-script," "small-seal script" (*xiaozhuan* 小篆), "script for incised authorization tallies" (*kefu* 刻符), "bug script" (*chongshu* 蟲書), "script for official seals" (*moyin* 摹印), "script large name boards" (*shushu* 署書), "script for weapon inscriptions" (*shushu* 殳書), and "clerical script" (*lishu* 隸書). See *LSS*, 1103-4, n. 14.

[198] *ENLL*, 296-97; *LSS*, 1092-93. For a more detailed discussion on the official scribal system, see Chapter 3.

[199] *Hanshu*, 30.1719 and 1721.

大(太)史、大(太)卜謹以吏員調官史、卜縣道官。
[The Director of] the Grand Scribes and [the Director of] the Grand Diviners are to carefully transfer and appoint scribes and diviners to offices in the counties and marches according to the established number of official personnel [for that office].[200]

The *taishi (ling)* in the Han might have taken over the duty of managing the low-ranked scribes from the same title in the Western Zhou.[201] But such a succession was incomplete, as the Han *taishi ling* had to share his power of testing and appointing scribes in commanderies with the Governor.[202] Also, the "established number of official personnel" (*liyuan* 吏員) was decided by the central government to manage the officials. It could only be put into practice under a unified empire and clearly a new invention during the Qin and Han periods. Furthermore, the "Statutes on Scribes" does not include every scribal position in the bureaucracy, but only the low-ranked scribes in the central and local governments, implying that the authority of the *taishi (ling)* as the "chief" of scribes was very circumscribed. Sima Qian had once commented on his father's official service in the reign of Emperor Wu:

[200] *ENLL*, 302. Translation after *LSS*, 1096-97.

[201] Three recently-announced Qin slips (1807, 1810 and 1859) from the looted Yuelu hoard further testify the administrative role of the *taishi (ling)* in managing the low-ranked scribes. A memorial submitted from an unknown official shows that, in 218 BCE, more than a hundred student scribes in the Qin heartland conspired with the examiners in the scribal exam in order to be exempt from service. The official suggested to have the *taishi* send the student scribes to be assistants in the counties of Liaodong 遼東 Commandery for four years as punishment for their crime. See Yu Zhenbo 于振波, "'Fuzhi' zhi zui yu Qin zhi lifa jingshen"「負志」之罪與秦之立法精神, *Hunan daxue xuebao* 湖南大學學報 2015.3: 23.

[202] *ENLL*, 302; *LSS*, 1096-97. See also You Yi-fei 游逸飛, "Taishi, neishi, jun: Zhangjiashan *Ernian lüling Shilü* suojian Han chu zhengqu guanxi" 太史、內史、郡：張家山《二年律令・史律》所見漢初政區關係, *Lishi dili* 歷史地理 26 (2012): 256-58.

> 僕之先人非有剖符丹書之功，文史星曆近乎卜祝之間，固主上所戲弄，倡優畜之，流俗之所輕也。
> My late father had no great deeds that entitled him to receive the split tallies or the red charter. He dealt with affairs of writing, astronomy and calendar, which are close to the jobs of diviners and invocators. He was kept for the amusement of the Emperor, treated the same as the musicians and jesters, and made light by the vulgar men of his day.[203]

Such a comment accurately describes the decline of the scribes as one of the ancient knowledge specialists and corresponds well to the trends of their development outlined in the earlier sections of this chapter.

Residential information—*Xianwu Village, Maoling County*

This provided a way for the ruler to control the movement of officials. Sima Qian was born in Xiayang County, which had been named Shaoliang 少梁 until 314 BCE. The members of the Sima lineage had resided there since the late Western Zhou period. Sima Qian's official register, however, shows that he was registered in Xianwu Village, Maoling County (in modern Xingping 興平, Shanxi) on his appointment to the position of the Director of the Grand Scribes. This could have resulted from the policy of coerced migration carried out in the reign of Emperor Wu. As a convention of Han emperors, Emperor Wu began the construction of his imperial tomb in Maoling in the second year of his accession to the throne (139 BCE). During his reign, Emperor Wu at least three times (138, 127, and 96 BCE) moved commoners and officials from other areas to the area surrounding the tomb in the formation of a new county.[204] Sima Qian and his family therefore must have moved from

[203] *Hanshu*, 62.2732. Translation after Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch'ien*, 63, with modifications.

[204] *Hanshu*, 6.158-205. For the construction of imperial tombs under the Han, see Michael Loewe, "The Tombs Built for Han Chengdi and Migrations of the Population," in *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*, ed. Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 201-17.

Xiayang to Maoling in 138 or 127 BCE. Like the Qin, by registering the residential information of the commoners and officials, the Han was able to keep track of their location and move them from one end of the empire to another in favor of the empire's interest.[205] Under such measure, the same as other officials in the empire, Sima Qian's movement was under the government's surveillance and subject to imperial policy.

Rank—*Grandee*

This determined the privileges that a rank-holder could have enjoyed. Grandee (*dafu* 大夫) was rank no. 5 on the Han ranking scale. Sima Qian should have attained the rank through inheritance. According to the "Statutes on Establishment of Heirs" of the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year*, for establishing an heir to a rank when a person has died of illness, the successor-son of one holding Fifth Grandee (*wudafu* 五大夫, rank no. 9) rank attains Grandee of the Realm (*gongdafu* 公大夫, rank no. 7) rank; the successor-son of one holding Grandee of the Realm rank attains Grandee rank.[206] As mentioned in the earlier section, Sima Qian's grandfather, Sima Xi, had held Fifth Grandee rank. As the heir to Sima family, Sima Qian attained the Grandee rank, which is four ranks downgraded compared to his grandfather's rank and two ranks to his father's rank. This is exactly the same as specified in the statutes. This suggests that the heirs of the Sima family did not acquire any additional rank in three generations. With the Grandee rank, Sima Qian was only allowed to inherit and possess five out of nine *qing* of land for fields and five out of nine plots for a

[205] For Qin coerced migration and resettlement, see Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, "Coerced Migration and Resettlement in the Qin Imperial Expansion," unpublished manuscript.

[206] *ENLL*, 235; *LSS*, 854-55.

homestead from his father.[207] This might attest to Sima Qian's saying in his letter to Ren An that, his family was poor and could not afford the funding to redeem his crime (see also my discussion of Sima Qian's salary grade below).[208] Sima Qian might use his rank to redeem certain punishment. Yet for the crime of falsely accusing the emperor, he might not be allowed to redeem it with his rank at all.[209]

Name—*Sima Qian*

The family ties of an official reflected in his family name determined his inheritance right to a hereditary office. As will be fully addressed in Chapter 3, family ties and hereditary status still played a significant part in the Qin and early Han official system. Almost no one would doubt that Sima Qian inherited the Director of the Grand Scribes because of his family ties. I would further suggest that his appointment to the position of Director of the Palace Secretaries might be also due to, or at least related to his specialty acquired through his family ties. After undergoing castration, Sima Qian was appointed to be the Director of the Palace Secretaries.[210] An entry in the *Answers to Questions on Legal Principles and Statutes* (Falü dawen 法律答問) text from Shuihudi shows that the status of a scribe would continue even if he had committed crimes and had been sentenced to undergoing mutilating punishment.[211] As for the position *zhongshu ling*, the full title is *zhongshu yezhe ling* 中書

[207] *ENLL*, 216-18; *LSS*, 790-93.

[208] *Hanshu*, 62.2730.

[209] See *LSS*, 207.

[210] *Hanshu*, 62.2725.

[211] *SHD*, 139; *RCL*, 176-77. See also Chapter 3.

謁者令 (Director of the Palace Secretaries and Receptionists), which was held by a eunuch in charge of the secretarial services to the emperor. Such a position was specially designed to take care the imperial documents in the inner court of Emperor Wu. It shared most of the functions of the Imperial Secretariat and took over its place in the reign of Emperor Wu.[212] Although its title did not contain the graph *shi*, the position of Director of the Palace Secretaries was not different from other scribal positions in nature.

Age—*Twenty-eight*

This defined the life stage of most of the hereditary scribes. Under the scribal system regulated by the "Statute on Scribes," a son of scribe entered the official scribal school at the age of seventeen. At twenty, he was supposed to pass the scribal exam and to become a Scribe. After thirty-six years of service, at fifty-six, he would begin to serve in a part-time schedule, one month in every eight months; at sixty, one month in every twelve months. But the "Statutes on Scribes" also permits a son of scribe to study outside the scribal school by making an official request,[213] suggesting that some scribes could be exempt from part of the system on certain conditions. Given the strong educational background of his family, Sima Qian most likely acquired his basic literacy at home. Since the "Statutes on Scribes" does not regulate the appointment of the Director of the Grand Scribes, we are not entirely sure how age could affect the appointment of the position. But as will be addressed in Chapter 3, age in Qin and Han China was considered a criterion in determining if an official was physically and mentally mature enough to hold an office.

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[212] See Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 49; Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China*, 59.

[213] *ENLL*, 303; *LSS*, 1098-99.

Start Date of appointment—*July 5, 108 BCE*

This helped calculate the "labor" (*lao* 勞) of an official, which was an important factor in determining his promotion. In his letter to Ren An, Sima Qian specifies four ways of making achievement as an official, though he was not able to succeed in any of those. The most inferior way he considers is "to acquire a high position or large salary by piling up the days and sticking to his labors" 累日積勞，取尊官厚祿.[214] In fact, it was also the most common way among the Han officials to receive a promotion. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the Qin had a type of document named *fayue* 伐閱 (registers of merits and days of service), which specifies the length of service in each of the positions that an official had served. Superior officials would consult such documents when considering subordinates for promotion or transfer. As seen in the official registers excavated on the Han northwestern frontier, the Han had clearly inherited this system, under which one day of service counts for one "labor."[215] Sima Qian served in the position of the Director of the Grand Scribes for almost ten years. If he was not sentenced to undergo castration, he could have been promoted to a higher position just based on his days of service without making any remarkable achievement. He considered it a way to "bring glory and favor to his family and friends" 以為宗族交遊光寵. After the castration, however, he could only serve as a eunuch. Although he received the imperial favor during his term of Director of the Palace Secretaries, from his perspective, the position did not bring any glory and respect but only shame to his family and friends.[216]

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[214] *Hanshu*, 62. 2727.

[215] See Zhao Chongliang 趙寵亮, *Xingyi shubei: Hexi Han sai lizu de tunshu shenghuo* 行役戍備：河西漢塞吏卒的屯戍生活 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2012), 116-18.

Salary grade—*600 bushels*

This represented the ranking of an official according to his position and determined the salary he could have earned for his official service in that position. Both the Han transmitted and excavated texts are quite consistent about the salary grade of Director of the Grand Scribes.[217] An official of 600 bushels was considered a mid-level official while the "Nine Ministers of State" (*jiuqing* 九卿) were ranked fully 2,000 bushels (*zhong erqian shi* 中二千石).[218] On several occasions in his own writings, Sima Qian calls the Han officials in the Eastern Zhou terms. In his letter to Ren An, he calls himself the *xia dafu* (Lower Grandee); in the "Self-Narration," he calls Hu Sui 壺遂, who was in the position of Grand Master of the Palace (*taizhong dafu* 太中大夫), ranked equivalent to 1000 bushels (*bi qianshi* 比千石), the *shang dafu* (Upper Grandee).[219] Such kind of analogy attests to Sima Qian's description that his father and he himself only held a fairly humble status in the Han.

Given the extant evidence, we are not entirely sure the exact amount of salary Sima Qian had earned during his term of Director of the Grand Scribes. A comparable figure is from the wooden slips excavated at Juyan. For a 600-bushel Commander (*hou* 候), a

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[216] Despite his menial status, Director of the Palace Secretaries could hold the real power depended on his closeness to the emperor and his access to the imperial documents. Hong Gong 弘恭 and Shi Xian 石顯 in the reigns of Emperors Xuan and Yuan were the most notorious ones.

[217] See *ENLL*, 235; *LSS*, 974-75; *Xu Hanzhi*, 25.3572.

[218] Above the Nine Ministers of State (basically more than nine) were the Chief Minister, Chief Commander and Chief Prosecutor, namely the "Three Excellences." Except for the Chief Prosecutor, who had once held a 2,000 bushels in the early Han and a fully 2,000 bushels in the reign of Emperor Wu, the ranking of the Three Excellences in the Western Han was usually not represented by a salary grade but rather their position itself. By the late Western Han, the Three Excellences namely held a salary grade of 10,000 bushels. See Yan, *Cong juebenwei dao guanbenwei*, 313-17.

[219] In 104 BCE, Sima Qian had worked closely with Hu Sui in making a new Han calendar. See *Hanshu* 21a.874.

military position parallel to the Magistrate (*ling* 令) of a county, he could receive 3,000 or 6,000 cash per month in the mid-Western Han.[220] For the crime of falsely accusing the emperor, one should be sentenced to death penalty. To redeem the death penalty, one might choose to pay 500,000 cash[221] or undergo castration.[222] With a monthly salary of 3,000 or 6,000 cash (and the income gained from the land inherited from his father),[223] it is not surprising that Sima Qian could only choose to undergo castration in order to avoid death penalty.

Conclusion

This chapter examines the change of the scribal profession from the Eastern Zhou to the Qin and Han periods. Following the decline of the Western Zhou, the hereditary scribes had undergone a significant decline in both political and social statuses. The sharp contrast

[220] See Zhao, *Xingyi shubei*, 264-65. Chen Mengjia has indicated that the salary system of Han officials had changed over time from the Western Han to the East Han. The salary of the officials was paid first out in cash in the Western Han, then changed to grain in the reign of Wang Mang, and finally half in cash and half in grain in the Eastern Han. See Chen Mengjia, *Han jian zhuishu* 漢簡綴述 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 135-47. See also Moonsil Lee Kim, *Food Redistribution during China's Qin and Han Periods: Accordance and discordance among Idelogies, Policies, and Their implementation* (PhD Dissertation: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2014), chap. 2.

[221] In 97 BCE, a year after Sima Qian's defense of Li Ling at the court, Emperor Wu issued a decree allowing those who had committed a crime that matched the death penalty to redeem 500,000 cash for a reduction of their punishment by one degree (令死罪人入贖錢五十萬減死一等). See *Hanshu*, 6.205. The judicial process of Sima Qian's case might have lasted until 97 BCE.

[222] Early in 146 BCE, Emperor Jing announced an amnesty to pardon the death penalty of the convicted laborers in Yangling 陽陵. The amnesty permits the convicted laborers to undergo castration as a substitute of their death penalty (赦徒作陽陵者死罪；欲腐者，許之). See *Hanshu*, 5.147. Judging from the case of Sima Qian, such a practice might have been later applied to the officials who committed a crime matching the death penalty in the reign of Emperor Wu.

[223] Han officials might also receive imperial bestowals and gifts irregularly during their official service, but such kind of irregular income probably would not help Sima Qian much. See Kim, *Food Redistribution during China's Qin and Han Periods*, 83-97.

between Scribe Qiang of the Western Zhou and Sima Qian of the Western Han well attests to this change. Both Qiang and Sima Qian were conscious of their identity as hereditary scribes, but their attitudes towards their occupation were quite different. Whereas Qiang was proud of being a descendant of his lineage, Sima Qian was depressed with the fall of his family. A contextualized discussion of Sima Qian's appointment of the Director of the Grand Scribes further illustrates the ways in which a hereditary scribe was depersonalized under the Han Empire. The duties, geographical and social mobility, privileges, life stages, career prospect, ranking and income of every official were all carefully defined and regulated by laws. In imperial China, the supreme purpose of the laws, however, was to protect and maintain the imperial authority and ruling. Despite his pioneering achievement in Chinese historiography, Sima Qian was just one among the many officials in the Han Empire. From this perspective, when we reread Sima Qian's comment on his father's service at the court of Emperor Wu, we would notice that it not only can be taken as the self-statement of Sima Qian himself, but also those of the hereditary scribes of his times.

CHAPTER THREE

Family Ties or Age?

Scribes and Assistants in Qin and Early Han China

Introduction

In light of recently excavated legal and administrative documents, this chapter reconstructs the institutional roles of scribes (*shi* 史) and assistants (*zuo* 佐) as two groups of low-ranked administrative officials in Qin and early Han China. As examined in Chapters 1 and 2, the Western Zhou scribes were hereditary writing specialists. Based on the legal regulations excavated from the tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi and tomb no. 247 at Zhangjiashan, both in Hubei, most scholars consider the profession of scribes in the Qin and early Han remained hereditary and thus confined to a limited number of families.[224] However, how could such a limited number of scribes satisfy the increasing administrative needs of the expanding state and empire?[225] Japanese scholars, such as Takamura Takeyuki, Miyake Kiyoshi 宮宅潔, and Tomiya Itaru 冨谷至, suggest that the profession of scribes in early

[224] See, for example, Li Xueqin 李學勤, "Shishuo Zhangjiashan Han jian Shi lü" 試說張家山漢簡《史律》, *Wenwu* 2002.4: 69-72; Cao Lüning 曹旅寧, *Zhangjiashan Han lü yanjiu* 張家山漢律研究 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005), 175-83.

[225] For a background of this increasing administrative needs, see Hsu, *Ancient China in Transition*, chap. 4.

imperial China may not have been confined to hereditary writing specialists.[226] Judging from the early Han statutes found at Zhangjiashan, Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates notice that the scribes appeared to be a "hereditary occupational caste," but they also realize that "a system of hereditary selection certainly would be insufficient to train the many thousands of scribes needed for the enormous mature imperial bureaucracy."[227] As revealed in the legal regulations, assistants were another group of officials who were also entrusted with administrative work. This chapter explores the complementary nature of the scribes and assistants in order to understand the opening up of the scribal profession.

While the legal regulations show what the ruler intended to enforce upon the people, the administrative documents reveal what adjustments were accommodated during the enforcement of the laws. A large number of Qin slips and boards were excavated from well no. 1 at Liye, Hunan, in 2002. Dating between the twenty-fifth year of the First Emperor of Qin (222 BCE) and the second year of the Second Emperor (208 BCE), most of the Liye slips and boards were the actual administrative documents kept in the office of Qianling 遷陵 County until discarded in a well. A multi-slip document from Liye shows that Qianling County was established in 222 BCE, just a year before the Qin final unification.[228] Therefore, the Liye documents can shed light on how the Qin enforced its administrative

[226] Takamura Takeyuki, *Kandai no chihō kanri to chiiki shakai* 漢代の地方官吏と地域社会 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 2008), 88-111; Miyake Kiyoshi, "Shinkan jidai no moji to shikiji: chikukan mokkan kara mita" 秦漢時代の文字と識字－竹簡・木簡からみた－, in *Kanji no Chūgoku bunka* 漢字の中国文化, ed. Tomiya Itaru 冨谷至 (Kyoto: Shōwadō, 2009), 191-223; Tomiya Itaru, *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku: mokkan, chikukan no jidai* 文書行政の漢帝国－木簡・竹簡の時代－ (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2010), 106-40

[227] *LSS*, 1085-86.

[228] For an examination on this document, see Tsang Wing Ma, "Qin Management of Human Resources in Light of an Administrative Document from Liye, Hunan Province," paper presented at the 19th Annual Southeast Early China Roundtable, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, October 30-Novemeber 1, 2015.

system in a newly conquered area (*xindi* 新地). The evidence in the Liye documents shows that there had been an observable parallel between the scribes and assistants in Qianling County's administration, but the constant problem of the shortage of officials might have led to the obscuration of these two tracks of administrative officials.

This chapter ends with a discussion of the administrative literacy of scribes and assistants, which suggests that scholars should take the materiality of bamboo and wood into consideration when examining the literacy of administrative officials in early imperial China.

Scribes and Assistants in Qin and Early Han Legal Regulations

The excavated Qin and Han legal regulations on scribes and assistants indicate for us what institutional roles the ruler tried to impose on these two groups of administrative specialists. Of these the most important ones with a clear archaeological context are those excavated from the tombs at Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan. The "Statute on Scribes" in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* from the Zhangjiashan Han tomb provides us the most detailed information on the system of training, evaluating and promoting scribes in early imperial China, which largely complements the fragmentary statutes preserved in the *Explaining the Graphs and Analyzing the Characters* and the "Treatise on Literature" (Yiwen zhi 藝文志) in the *History of the Han*.[229]

The "Statute on Scribes" states that the sons of scribes (*shizi* 史子) started to learn at the age of seventeen under the mentorship of the study mentor. After three years of study,

[229] *Shuowen jiezi zhu*, 15a.11a-13a; *Hanshu*, 30.1720.

the student scribes[230] would be evaluated by the Director of the Grand Scribes in the central government or the Governor in the commanderies. Only those who could recite and write out more than five thousands graphs from the book *Fifteen Wooden-Prism Bundles* could become a scribe. They would also be tested on eight different forms of written graphs. The student with the best result would be appointed as Scribe Director in a county, while the students with the poorest result would not be allowed to become a scribe. The evaluations of their examinations for each three years would be combined for selecting the best scribe for the position of Accessory Scribe in the Imperial Secretariat.[231] In addition, it is also stated in the "Statutes on Enrollment" (Fu lü 傅律) that, for those who held a hereditary office (*chouguan* 疇官), their sons should follow their occupation and study under a study master (*xueshi* 學師).[232]

As Barbieri-Low and Yates have argued, the consistency between the Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan legal texts demonstrates "a nearly comprehensive continuation of Qin legal

[230] The collection of the looted Yuelu legal documents contains a set of legal cases titled *Weiyu deng zhuang sizhong* 為獄等狀四種. Case no. 14 records that a scribal student (*xueshi* 學史), named Xue 學, was accused of making a forged letter. Xue was fifteen years old at the time, two years younger than the admission age of student scribes stated in the "Statutes on Scribes." See Zhu Hanmin 朱漢民 and Chen Songchang 陳松長, *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (san)* 嶽麓書院藏秦簡(叁) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2013), 223-35; for an English translation of this case, see Ulrich Lau and Thies Staack, *Legal Practice in the Formative Stages of the Chinese Empire: An Annotated Translation of the Exemplary Qin Criminal Cases from the Yuelu Academy Collection* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 276-94. Note that a newly published Yuelu Qin slip (1236) reveals that the sons of scribes were allowed to learn in the study room before being enrolled for service (*fu* 傅). It might explain why Xue was slightly younger than the admission age in the "Statutes on Scribes." See Chen Songchang, *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)* 嶽麓書院藏秦簡(肆) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2015), 120.

[231] *ENLL*, 296-97; *LSS*, 1092-93.

[232] *ENLL*, 234; *LSS*, 840-41. For more details regarding hereditary occupations in the Qin and Han societies, see Hsing I-tien 邢義田, "Cong Zhanguo zhi Xi Han de zuju, zuzang, shiye lun Zhongguo gudai zongzu shehui de yanxu 從戰國至西漢的族居、族葬、世業論中國古代宗族社會的延續," in Hsing I-tien, *Tianxia yijia: Huangdi, guanliao yu shehui* 天下一家：皇帝、官僚與社會 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 412-32.

norms and procedures into the early Han, with only minor modifications and innovations."[233] Details regarding the hereditary role of scribes mentioned in the "Statute on Scribes" cohere with the related regulations seen in the Shuihudi Qin legal documents. Three regulations from the "Miscellanies of the Governor of the Capital Area" (Neishi za 內史雜) are of special importance:[234]

> 非史子毆（也），毋敢學學室，犯令者有罪。
> If [a person] is not the son of a scribe, he must not dare to study in the study room. The one who violates the ordinance is guilty of a crime.[235]

> 下吏能書者，毋敢從史之事。
> Persons in detention who are able to write must not dare to engage in the work of scribes.[236]

> 侯（候）、司寇及羣下吏毋敢為官府佐、史及禁苑憲盜。
> Watchmen, robber-guards, and the multitude of persons in detention must not dare to act as assistants and scribes in government offices nor as guards of the Forbidden Parks.[237]

We are told that the official scribal training was held in a place called the "study room,"[238]

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[233] *LSS*, 219-24.

[234] The title itself does not tell us which form of legislations they are. New evidence from the looted Yuelu Academy's collection seems to suggest that these legal regulations are statutes (*lü* 律). The *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)* includes some statutes named "Miscellaneous Statutes of the Governor of the Capital Area" (Neishi za lü 內史雜律). See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 124.

[235] *SHD*, 63. Translation after *LSS,* 1085. See also *RCL*, 87-88.

[236] *SHD*, 63. Translation after Robin D. S. Yates, "Soldiers, Scribes, and Women: Literacy among the Lower Orders in Early China," in *Writing and Literacy in Early China*, ed. Li Feng and David Prager Branner (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2011), 348, with modifications. See also *RCL*, 88.

[237] *SHD*, 63. Translation after Yates, "Soldiers, Scribes, and Women," 348, with modifications. See also *RCL*, 88.

[238] For the "study room," see also *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 120. The record of a study room reminds me that the transmission of scribal knowledge in the Middle and New Kingdom Egypt (2055—1069 BCE) and

and only the sons of scribes were permitted to study there. While watchmen and robber-guards were criminals sentenced to different types of hard labor,[239] persons in detention were those who were being sent down to judicial officials for trial, but not yet sentenced.[240] Even if they had acquired a certain level of literacy, they were not permitted to become scribes or assistants in government offices. This suggests that the acquisition of writing ability alone did not guarantee a person the status of scribes.

On the contrary, for a scribe, his status would continue even if he had committed crimes. As seen in an entry in the *Answers to Questions on Legal Principles and Statutes* (Falü dawen 法律答問) text from Shuihudi, the Qin had once regulated that if the hereditary scribes were punished by undergoing shaving (*nai* 耐), they would be specifically classified to the group of shaved scribal servant (*nai shili* 耐史隸).[241] It could be expected that they would be separated from other forced laborers, and continued to be assigned tasks based on their hereditary specialties. These regulations correspond to the description of scribes in the *Records of Rituals* (Liji 禮記), "a ritualist's anthology of ancient usages, prescriptions, definitions and anecdotes,"[242] in which the scribes were categorized into the group of specialists who possessed specific skills for serving their

Old Babylonia (1900—1595 BCE) were also conducted in a physical construction, literally translated as "room of teaching" and "tablet-house." See T. G. H. James, *Pharaoh's People: Scenes from Life in Imperial Egypt* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2007), 140; C. B. F. Walker, *Cuneiform* (Berkeley: University of California Press; London: British Museum, 1987), 33.

[239] For a discussion on different types of hard labor punishment, see *LSS*, 193-201.

[240] See *SHD*, 45; *RCL*, 61, n. 1.

[241] Unfortunately, no evidence suggests why and when the regulation had been changed. See *SHD*, 139; *RCL*, 176-77. For more details on mutilating punishments, see *LSS*, 200.

[242] Jeffrey K. Riegel, "Li Chi," in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, UC Berkeley, 1993), 293.

superiors (*zhi ji yi shi shang zhe* 執技以事上者). They were not allowed to provide other service and change their offices (*bu ershi*, *bu yiguan* 不貳事，不移官).[243]

On the other hand, the Qin and Han legal regulations also inform us that along with the hereditary scribe, another group of administrative specialists titled "assistant" (*zuo* 佐) was also entrusted with writing and processing documents. The above-quoted Qin regulation shows that watchmen, robber-guards, and persons in detention were not only prohibited from becoming scribes, but also from becoming assistants. A Qin regulation from Shuihudi tells us more about the appointment of assistants.

> 除佐必當壯以上，毋除士五（伍）新傅。
> When appointing assistants, they must match the age of maturity and above. Do not appoint persons who are newly enrolled as members of the rank and file.[244]

The status of assistant was not entitled through family ties, and their appointment was confined to those who had reached the age of maturity (*zhuang* 壯). It is noteworthy that the Qin regulation excludes those newly enrolled members of the rank and file (*shiwu* 士伍) from becoming assistants. Since the discovery of the Shuihudi legal documents in the 1970s, scholars have been divided on whether *shiwu* specifically refers to the people who had been deprived of rank (*jue* 爵) as punishment for crimes or broadly to the commoners who held no rank.[245] It was not until the discovery of the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year*

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[243] *Liji jijie*, 13.368.

[244] *SHD*, 62. See also Robin D. S. Yates, "Social Status in the Ch'in: Evidence from the Yün-meng Legal Documents. Part One: Commoners," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.1 (1987): 205; *RCL*, 87.

[245] See Liu Hainian 劉海年, "Qin Han 'shi wu' de shenfen yu jieji diwei 秦漢「士伍」的身份與階級地位, *Wenwu* 1978.2: 58-62; Yates, "Social Status in the Ch'in," 201-3.

that we have a clear picture about this problem. In the "Statutes on Households" (Hu lü 戶律), *shiwu* appears as a category of commoners whose legal status was between the categories of *gongzu* 公卒 (Soldier of the Realm) and *shuren* 庶人 (freedman).[246] The "Statutes on Enrollment" further suggests that the legal status of *shiwu* could be acquired by the sons of a father holding Knight of the Realm rank or Soldier of the Realm rank, as well as sons of a member of the rank and file, a robber-guard, or a person of hidden-office (*yinguan* 隱官) status when they were enrolled for service.[247] It indicates that *shiwu* did not only include the people who had been deprived of rank as punishment for crimes, but could represent the unranked commoners in general.

As for the age of maturity, both the *Records of Rituals* and *Explaining the Names* (Shi ming 釋名) suggest that it was at thirty.[248] It is crucial to our understanding of the appointment of the assistants. To consider what it might refer to in the Qin legal regulations, let us return to the "Statute on Scribes," in which three passages are directly relevant to our discussion.

> 史、人（卜）不足，乃除佐。
> When there is an insufficiency of scribes or diviners, then appoint assistants [to these positions].

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[246] *ENLL*, 216; *LSS*, 790-91. Tomiya Itaru has referred *shiwu* to as a "zero rank" below the first rank *gongshi* 公士 (Knight of the Realm) within the official system of ranking. It seems that the description of "zero rank" is more applicable to *gongcu*, which was above the unranked commoner *shiwu* but below the first rank *gongshi* in the Zhangjiashan legal texts. See Tomiya Itaru, "Shin Kan ni okeru shonin to shigo: oboegaki" 秦漢における庶人と士伍・覚書, in Tanigawa Michio 谷川道雄 et al., *Chūgoku shitaifu kaikyū to chiiki shakai to no kankei ni tsuite no sōgōteki kenkyū* 中国士大夫階級と地域社会との関係についての総合的研究 (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku, 1983), 35-7.

[247] *ENLL*, 234; *LSS*, 841.

[248] See *Liji jijie*, 1.12; *Shi ming shuzheng bu* 釋名疏證補, complemented by Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (Taibei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1968), 146.

吏備（憊）罷、佐勞少者：毋敢亶（擅）史、卜。
For an official who is decrepit, or for an assistant whose length of service is too short: do not dare, without authority, [to make him] a scribe or a diviner.

史、卜年五十六，佐為吏盈廿歲，年五十六，皆為八更。
Scribes and diviners who are fifty-six years old, and assistants who have been officials for a full twenty years and are fifty-six years old, in every case, are to be considered [men in the category of a] one-month tour of periodic service every eight months.[249]

These three passages show that the assistants were allowed to fill the vacancy of scribes, and to work on a part-time schedule as the scribes did when they reached a senior age, but both of these could only be carried out under certain conditions. First, only when there was a shortage of hereditary scribes were the assistants allowed to take their position. It suggests that even though the scribal profession was no longer strictly confined to the hereditary families, these families still held the priority when filling the scribal positions. Second, the length of service was an important factor in appointing assistants to the position of scribes and considering under what category of service an assistant should serve, but such a requirement did not apply to scribes. Noticeably, in the third passage, a fifty-six year old assistant must have served for a full twenty years in order to be considered in the category of "a one-month tour of periodic service every eight months" (*bageng* 八更).[250] When did he

[249] *ENLL*, 302-3; Translation after *LSS*, 1099, with modifications. Barbieri-Low and Yates argue that *zuo* 佐 (assistant) could be an abbreviation for an official position either *guan zuo* 官佐 or *zuo shi* 佐史. See 1108-9, n. 35. I tend not to see *zuo shi* and *guan zuo* as specific official titles. I understand *zuo shi* (assistant-scribe) as a term representing the lowest salary grade under *baishi* 百石 (hundred-bushel) and *doushi* 斗食 (fed by the dou) in the Han official system, and *guan zuo* (Assistant of the Office) for loosely referring to assistants as a group of officials without specific emphasis on their office. The usage of *guan zuo* is very similar to *guan sefu* 官嗇夫 (Bailiff of the Office) in the Qin and Han official system. It is evident in slip 8-1555 from Liye that the term *guan zuo* is used to refer to a *xiang zuo* 鄉佐 (District Assistant).

[250] According to Hirose Kunio 廣瀨薰雄, the number of *geng* 更 indicates how many months are to pass between one's yearly tour of periodic service. The higher the number of *geng* means the lesser time one had to serve yearly. A scribe began to serve one month in every eight months when he reached fifty-six years old. Starting from the age of sixty, he only needed to serve one month per year. See Hirose Kunio, "Zhangjiashan Han jian suowei *Shi lü* zhong youguan jiangeng zhi guiding de tantao" 張家山漢簡所謂《史律》中有關踐

start to serve? It must be at around age thirty-six, sixteen years older than the age that the sons of scribes started to serve after passing their evaluation. If we take the age of thirty as the age of maturity as the *Records of Rituals* and *Explaining the Names* suggest, he should start to serve after he had reached the age of maturity a few years before, and that accords with the Shuihudi Qin regulation quoted above. Furthermore, the passage also suggests that some assistants might have served fewer than twenty years when they reached the age of fifty-five. These assistants would have to work under a regular schedule. Thus, we could infer that the assistants generally started their official career later than the sons of scribes.

The example of Liu Bang 劉邦 could tell us more about the significance of the age of maturity in the career and literacy acquisition of a non-hereditary official. In the "Biography of Han Xin and Lu Wan" (Han Xin Lu Wan liezhuan 韓信盧綰列傳) in the *Historical Records*, it is said that "when Emperor Gao and Lu Wan reached the age of maturity, they learned writing together" 及高祖、盧綰壯，俱學書.[251] Interestingly, in the "Annals of Emperor Gao" (Gaozu benji 高祖本紀), it is said that "when [Emperor Gao] reached the age of maturity, he was on probation to become an official" 及壯，試為吏.[252] Liu Bang was then appointed as a Constable (*tingzhang* 亭長) for the Si Shui 泗水 police station. Although we are not entirely sure through what medium Liu Bang and Lu Wan had acquired

更之規定的探討, in *Renwen luncong* 人文論叢, ed. Feng Tianyu 馮天瑜 (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 271-84. See also *LSS*, 1107, n. 25.

[251] *Shiji*, 93.2637.

[252] Ibid., 8.342. I follow Ying Shao 應劭, an annotator to the *History of the Han* in the 2nd century, who glossed the term *shi li* 試吏 as "on probation to fill an official vacancy" 試用補吏. See *Hanshu*, 1a.2. Another possible reading of the phrase "試補縣吏" is from William H. Nienhauser, Jr. and his co-workers who translate it into "was being tested in a [minor] county post." See Nienhauser ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records*, 8:181.

such knowledge and what level they had achieved,[253] it is important to note that Liu Bang began to learn writing and to serve when he reached the age of maturity. It is reasonable to infer that his acquisition of literacy was primarily for performing administrative tasks related to his service in government office,[254] and the age of maturity must have significant meaning to the career and literacy acquisition of a person like him who was not from a scribal or royal family.[255]

Career Paths of Scribes and Assistants in the Qin

Excavated documents regarding career paths of Qin officials show that the scribes and assistants occupied two tracks as administrative officials. The occupant of tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi, named Xi, is a well-studied scribal figure. His career path is detailed in the *Chronicle* (Biannian ji 編年記) found in his tomb,[256] which offers an opportunity to

[253] They might have learned from the village teachers (*lüli shushi* 閭里書師) in the local community. See *Hanshu*, 30.1721.

[254] Excavated documents from the sites at Juyan 居延 and Dunhuang 敦煌 show that important notices from the central and local governments would be copied and displayed in public areas such as marketplace (*shi* 市), village's gate (*li men* 里門) and police station (*ting* 亭). The officials, including Constables, would have to explain the content of the notice to the illiterate. This requires the Constable to have a certain level of literacy. For the oral transmission of such publicly displayed notices, see Tomiya, *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku*, 121-27.

[255] Note that Liu Bang's competitor, Xiang Yu 項羽 who was a descendant of Chu aristocratic family, was free to choose learning either writing, sword or military strategy when he was young. It is unimaginable that all these educational opportunities would be available for Liu Bang. The contrast between Liu Bang and Xiang Yu demonstrate the close relationship between blood ties and literacy acquisition in the late Qin period. See *Shiji*, 7. 295.

[256] *SHD*, 3-10. For a study on the *Chronicle*, see Achim Mittag, "The *Qin Bamboo Annals* of Shuihudi: A Random Note from the Perspective of Chinese Historiography," *Monumenta Serica* 51 (2003): 543-70.

examine the requirement of the age of scribes as stated in legal regulations (Table 4).[257]

Date[258]	Important events of Xi's life	Age[259]
Jan. 14, 262 BCE	Was born (生)	1
246 BCE	Was enrolled for service (傅)	17
Sept. 5—Oct. 3, 244 BCE	Was advanced to be a scribe (揄史)	19
Dec. 3-31, 244 BCE	Became [District?] Scribe of Anlu County (安陸□[260]史)	20
May 6—Jun. 4, 241 BCE	Became Scribe Director of Anlu County (安陸令史)	22
Feb. 7, 240 BCE	Became Scribe Director of Yan County (鄢令史)	23
May 11, 235 BCE	Prosecuted legal cases in Yan County (治獄鄢)	28
234 BCE	Joined the army (從軍)	29
232 BCE	Joined the army at Pingyang (從平陽軍)	31
231 BCE	Self-reported age (自占年)	32

[257] A comparable career path of a scribe is recorded on four Qin slips (0552, 0418, 0687 and 0625) in the Yuelu Academy's looted collection. A person named Shuang 爽 first self-reported his age when he was at thirteen in 231 BCE. He was appointed as Scribe of Convict Labor (*sikong shi* 司空史) at the age of twenty-one in 223 BCE, and next year, at twenty-two, was transferred to become a Scribe Director. See Chen Songchang, "Yuelu Shuyuan suo cang Qin jian zongshu" 嶽麓書院所藏秦簡綜述, *Wenwu* 2009.3: 77. For a recent examination of these slips, see Shi Da 史達 (Thies Staack), "Yuelu Qin jian *nianqi nian zhiri* suofu guanli lüli yu sanjuan *zhiri* yongyouzhe de shenfen" 嶽麓秦簡《廿七年質日》所附官吏履歷與三卷《質日》擁有者的身份, *Hunan daxue xuebao* 湖南大學學報 2016.7: 10-17.

[258] The conversion of Chinese lunar to Western corresponding dates follows Dong Zuobin 董作賓, *Zhongguo nianli zongpu* 中國年曆總譜 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), with modifications according to Zhang Peiyu 張培瑜, "Genju xinchu liri jiandu shi lun Qin he Han chu de lifa" 根據新出曆日簡牘試論秦和漢初的曆法, *Zhongyuan wenwu* 中原文物 2007.5: 72-76. Although Zhang's calendar does not include the excavated evidence after 2007, it matches all the dates we have seen from the Liye materials published so far. For a reconstruction of the Qin calendar based on the Liye materials, see Zhao Yan 趙岩, "Liye Qin jiri jiandu zhaji" 里耶秦紀日簡牘劄記, *Jianbo* 簡帛 8 (2013): 250.

[259] For the age of Xi, I refer to his nominal age (*xusui* 虛歲). For the various ways of calculating one's age in China, see Zhang Peiyu, "Guanyu lishi niandai jishu de guifanhua wenti" 關於歷史年代計數的規範化問題, *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究 1991.4: 151-52.

[260] The editors of *SHD* suspect the graph is *yu* 御, but it is almost impossible for this context since either Chief Prosecutor (*yushi dafu* 御史大夫) or his subordinate Censor (*yushi* 御史) both held higher position in the Qin bureaucratic hierarchy than Xi's next position, Scribe Director. Recently, Chen Kanli 陳侃理 transcribes the graph as *xiang* 鄉 (district), which seems more appropriate in this context. See Chen Kanli, "Shuihudi Qin jian *Biannian ji* zhong 'Xi' de huanli" 睡虎地秦簡《編年記》中「喜」的宦歷, *Guoxue xuekan* 國學學刊 2015.4: 48.

226 BCE	[Became] Attaché [to the Governor of Nan Commandery] (□[261]屬)	37

Table 4: Important events of Xi's life as seen in the *Chronicle*

Noticeably, Xi was enrolled at seventeen, which is the same age for the admission of student scribes into the official system specified in the "Statute on Scribes." He might be enrolled on a registry exclusively for the scribes.[262] This can be confirmed by two slips ([14-18] and [15-172]) from Liye regarding an absconding student scribe, in which the Magistrate of Qianling County requests the details of his name (*ming* 名), legal status (*shi* 事) and village (*li* 里) from the study mentor. It implies that the study mentor managed a specific type of registry for his students.[263] Two years after his enrollment, Xi was advanced (*yu* 揄) to be a scribe.[264] He could have spent the two years in the study room learning scribal knowledge under the supervision of the study mentors.

In addition, two registers of merits and days of service (*fayue* 伐閱),[265] one each for a scribe and an assistant found at Liye, contrast the career paths of these two groups of

[261] Chen Kanli transcribes the graph as *wei* 為. See Chen, "Shuihudi Qin jian *Biannian ji* zhong 'Xi' de huanli," 49.

[262] See Yates, "Social Status in the Ch'in," 216; Jin Ye (Kim Yop) 金燁, "Qin Han de shuji" 秦漢的書記, *Qin Han shi luncong* 秦漢史論叢 9 (2004): 295.

[263] See Zhang Chunlong 張春龍, "Liye Qin jian zhong Qianling xian xueguan he xianguan jilu" 里耶秦簡中遷陵縣學官和相關記錄, *Chutu wenxian* 出土文獻 1 (2010): 232.

[264] For the meaning of *yu*, see *SHD*, 9-10, n. 47.

[265] *Fa* 伐 and *yue* 閱 can respectively stand for "merits" (*gong* 功) and "days of service" (*lao* 勞). Hu Pingsheng 胡平生 has argued that the two were convertible in the Han—possibly 4 years of service can be converted to one merit. See Hu Pingsheng, "Juyan Han jian zhong de 'gong' yu 'lao'" 居延漢簡中的「功」與「勞」, *Wenwu* 1995.4: 54. The conversion rate between merits and days of service could be debatable, but two wooden boards (YM6D3-4) excavated from the tomb no. 6 at Yinwan demonstrate that merit was one of the criteria for considering official promotion in Han times. See *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 85-95.

administrative officials.

8-269
Row 1
資中令史陽里釦伐閱 [line 1]
Merits and days of service of Scribe Director Kou of Yang Village, Zizhong [County][266]
十一年九月隃為史 [line 2]
[He] was advanced to be a scribe in the eleventh year [of the First Emperor of Qin] (236 BCE), the ninth month;
為鄉史九歲一日 [line 3]
[He] has been the District Scribe for nine years and one day;
為田部史四歲三月十一日 [line 4]
[He] has been the Scribe of the Department of the Agricultural Fields[267] for four years, three months, and eleven days;
為令史二月 [line 5]
[He] has been the Scribe Director for two months.

Row 2
□計 [line 1]
…account
年卅六 [line 2]
Age thirty-six

Row 3
戶計 [on the right]
Household account

Row 4
可直（值）司空曹 [on the left]
[He] can work (lit. be on duty) in the Bureau of Convict Labor[268]

[266] Zizhong was a county of Jianwei 犍為 Commandery in the Han, but there is still no evidence indicating its location in the Qin. See *Hanshu*, 28a.1599. Zheng Wei 鄭威 put it under Shu 蜀 Commandery. See Zheng Wei, "Liye Qin jiandu suojian Ba-Shu shidi santi" 里耶秦簡牘所見巴蜀史地三題, *Sichuan shifan daxue xuebao* 四川師範大學學報 2015.2: 149.

[267] The term *tian bu* 田部 only appears once in the Liye materials published so far. Its relationship with the Office of Agricultural Fields (*tian guan* 田官) remains unclear. I tentatively translate it into "Department of the Agricultural Fields."

[268] See also Robin D. S. Yates, "Bureaucratic Organization of the Qin County of Qianling in the Light of the Newly Published *Liye Qin jian (yi)* and *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (diyi juan)*," paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Sinology, Institute for History and Philology, Academia Sinica June 20-22, 2012, 54.

8-1555
Recto side
Row 1
冗佐上造臨漢都里曰援，庫佐冗佐 [line 1]
Full-time non-staff assistant,[269] named Yuan, of Sovereign's Accomplished [rank], of Du Village, Linhan [County][270]; Assistant of the Armory; full-time non-staff assistant
為無陽衆陽鄉佐三月十二日 [line 2]
[He] has been the Assistant of Wuyang and Zhongyang Districts for three months and twelve days
凡為官佐三月十二日 [line 3]
In total, [he] has been the Assistant of the Office for three months and twelve days

Row 2
年卅七歲 [line 1]
Age thirty-seven
族王氏[line 2]
[He] is a member of the Wang family

Row 3
為縣買工用，端月行 [line 1]
[He] is to buy craft materials on behalf of the County, setting out in the first month

Verso side
庫六人[line 2]
Six persons in the Armory[271]

Scribe Director Kou had served as a scribe for thirteen years, five months and twelve days in total. He was thirty-six years old when his accumulated merits and days of service were filed. That is to say, he began to serve as a scribe at the age of approximately twenty-three, three to four years older than Xi, and two to three years older than the student scribes in the

[269] The term *rong* has been widely interpreted. In the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year*, it refers to the ones who worked on a full-time basis but were not considered regular staff (*yuan* 員) in the government. See *LSS*, 1108, n. 30.

[270] Linhan County is not known from any transmitted and excavated texts.

[271] See also Yates, "Bureaucratic Organization of the Qin County of Qianling," 55. There is another register of merits and days of service found from Liye, but some of the graphs are not recognizable. See Zheng Shubin 鄭曙斌 et al., *Hunan chutu jiandu xuanbian* 湖南出土簡牘選編 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2013), 115, slip [10-15].

"Statute on Scribes" in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year*. By the age of thirty-six, he had already served in three different scribal positions, including District Scribe, Scribe of the Department of Agricultural Fields and Scribe Director, and he was expecting his next appointment in the Bureau of Convict Labor. Compared with Kou, assistant Yuan started his career rather late. He had only served for three months and twelve days by the age of thirty-seven. He had been appointed to be an assistant in Wuyang and Zhongyang Districts, and was working as a full-time non-staff assistant at the time. Being assigned to the Armory, he was going to buy craft materials for the County in the coming first month (Table 5).

	Scribe Kou	**Assistant Yuan**
Current age	36	37
First appointment at age	22/23	36/37
Current position	Scribe Director	Full-time non-staff assistant
Positions held before	District Scribe, Scribe of the Department of Agricultural Fields	District Assistant
Length of service	13 years, 5 months and 12 days	3 months and 12 days

Table 5: Career paths of scribe Kou and assistant Yuan

The contrast between the career paths of Kou and Yuan accords with the legal regulations found at the tombs of Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan, even though the age of their first appointment was slightly different from those mentioned in the regulations. It indicates for us that while the scribes, who mostly came from hereditary families, entered the official system at a young age, the assistants normally began their service in the government at a relatively older age. Whether or not the age of maturity was exactly at thirty as suggested by the *Records of Rituals* and *Explaining the Names* texts would not significantly affect this

observation. In fact, slip 8-988 from Liye shows that a Judiciary Assistant (*yuzuo* 獄佐) named Xie 謝 was at twenty-eight when he self-reported his personal information to the government office. The age of maturity might refer to an age range within which one's physical and mental condition has reached a mature level, but not necessarily at a particular age.

The Qin and early Han legal regulations about hereditary scribes show that the ruler tended to entrust the administrative work to this group of traditional writing specialists.[272] However, the limited number of the hereditary scribes was not sufficient to satisfy the increasing administrative needs since the late Warring States period. To take Qianling County as an example, we are informed by two "Records on the Qianling officials" (Qianling lizhi 遷陵吏志) that the County maintained around a hundred registered officials, but in reality only about half of the officials were present. Many officials were sent to perform duties outside the County (*yaoshi* 繇使). In addition, the shortage of officials (*queli* 缺吏) was a constant problem.[273] Comparable figures from a wooden board (YM6D2) excavated from tomb no. 6 at Yinwan shows that the number of officials in the counties of Donghai 東海 Commandery in the reign of Emperor Cheng of Han (32—7 BCE) ranges from 22 to 107 officials.[274] Compared with the scale of administration in the counties of

[272] Robin D. S. Yates has recently argued, "the Qin continued to lay emphasis on family background and hereditary status: it was not a purely meritocratic state or social system." See his "Introduction: The Empire of the Scribes," 145.

[273] Slip 8-1137 is a fragmentary slip of a multi-slip document. It does not contain the title "Records on the Qianling officials" (Qianling lizhi) as slip [7-67]+[9-631] does. Yet judging from its content, it is conceivable that it is the same type of document. For slip [7-67]+[9-631], see Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi xiaozu 里耶秦簡牘校釋小組, "Xinjian Liye Qin jiandu zilao xuanjiao (yi)" 新見里耶秦簡牘資料選校（一）, *Jianbo wang*, accessed September 28, 2015. http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=2068

[274] *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 79-84. See also Michael Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China: Companion to A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), 48-49.

Donghai Commandery, one should be amazed by the scale that Qianling County had already achieved almost two hundred years ago. Yet these numbers also imply that while the scale of the Qin administration was expanding rapidly, the number of officials was not large enough to meet this expansion. It was possibly under such circumstance that the assistants were also entrusted with the administrative work. Assistants who had served for a long period of time could even be appointed to the position of scribe when there was an insufficiency. But the government obviously used a different method to manage the assistants.

The legal regulations on assistants emphasize length of service and age. In contrast to the hereditary scribes who could acquire literacy through their families and the official training system, the assistants might rely more on their practical experience.[275] Hence, it is not surprising that the laws emphasized the length of service of assistants, since it is the only way to guarantee that the assistants would have enough knowledge and skills for handling all the administrative tasks. On the other hand, age was often associated with morality in early China. Historical narratives often label the young (*shaonian* 少年) as the source of chaos or disorder in society. They are sometimes prefixed with the words "wicked" (*e* 惡) and "absconded" (*wangming* 亡命).[276] Many rebellions in the late Qin were actually initiated or supported by the young.[277] In contrast, the elders (*zhangzhe* 長者) are always

[275] The various types of model forms (*shi* 式) in the Qin and Han administrative system would allow an experienced assistant to accomplish numerous administrative tasks without receiving regular training in the scribal school. See Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, "Model Legal and Administrative Forms from the Qin, Han, and Tang and Their Role in the Facilitation of Bureaucracy and Literacy," *Oriens Extremus* 50 (2011): 125-56.

[276] For the examples of "wicked young" (*e shaonian* 惡少年), see *Shiji*, 122.3149; 123.3174 and 3176; for the examples of "absconded young" (*wangming shaonian* 亡命少年), see 58.2089. See also Wang Zijin 王子今, "Shuo Qin Han 'shaonian' yu 'e shaonian'" 說秦漢「少年」與「惡少年」, in his *Qin Han shehui shi lunkao* 秦漢社會史論考 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan, 2006), 19-40.

considered merciful and virtuous, and the term is even used to praise the person of morality in transmitted texts.[278] While the requirement on the length of service was to guarantee that the assistants had earned enough practical experience for handling administrative tasks, the requirement on age was to ensure that they were mature enough to hold a government office. Besides family ties, age was another way for an individual to gain recognition in society.

Parallelism between Scribes and Assistants in Qin Qianling County

The evidence in the Liye materials shows how the Qin incorporated the scribes and the assistants in a local administration. To analyze the administrative roles of scribes and assistants in Qianling county, this chapter adopts a theory regarding the relationship between Offices (*guan* 官) and Bureaus (*cao* 曹) in the Qin and Han county administration. It was first initiated by Japanese scholar Nakayama Shigeru 仲山茂 in 2001,[279] and then adopted and elaborated upon by a number of Japanese and Chinese scholars.[280]

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[277] When Chen She 陳涉 revolted, the young who suffered under Qin rule in the eastern region all killed their Governors (*shou* 守), Commandants (*wei* 尉), Magistrates (*ling*令) and Assistant Magistrates (*cheng* 丞) to echo his rebellion. See *Shiji*, 6.269.

[278] A good example is Liu Bang, who earned his fame as an "elder" during the civil war in the late Qin. See *Shiji*, 8.356-58.

[279] Nakayama Shigeru, "Shin Kan jidai no 'kan' to 'sō': ken no bukyoku soshiki" 秦漢時代の「官」と「曹」—県の部局組織—, *Tōyō gakuhō* 東洋学報, 82.4 (2001): 35-65.

[280] Aoki Shunsuke 青木俊介, "Riya Shin kan ni mieru ken no bukyoku soshiki ni tsuite" 里耶秦簡に見える県の部局組織について, *Chūgoku shutsudo shiryō kenkyū* 中國出土資料研究 9 (2005): 103-11; Tsuchiguchi Fuminori 土口史記, "Sengoku, Shin dai no ken: ken tei to 'kan' no kankei o meguru ichikōsatsu" 戦国・秦代の県—県廷と「官」の関係をめぐる一考察—, *Shirin* 史林 95.1 (2012): 5-37; "Riya Shin kan ni miru Shin dai kenka no kansei kōzō" 里耶秦簡にみる秦代県下の官制構造, *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 東洋史研究 73.4 (2015): 1-38; "Shin dai no reishi to sō" 秦代の令史と曹, *Tōhō gakubō* 東方學報 90 (2015.12): 1-47; Takamura Takeyuki, "Riya Shin kan dai hachi sō shutsudo kantoku no kisoteki kenkyū"

According to this theory, the county administration during the Qin and Western Han was composed of two portions: the Court (*ting* 廷) and the Offices (*guan*). Magistrate (*ling* 令) and Assistant Magistrate (*cheng* 丞) were the core of the Court. A number of Scribe Directors (*lingshi*) divided by Bureaus (*cao*) assisted them in order to supervise the Offices (*guan*), which were the agencies that actually carried out the daily routine of the county administration. Each Office was headed by a Bailiff (*sefu* 嗇夫) with the help of a group of Assistants (*zuo*) and Scribes (*shi*). This parallel structure dominated the county administration until the end of the Western Han period when the Bureaus eventually took over the place of the Offices and became responsible for the county administration. In the following, I focus on a group of documents named "checking tallies" (*jiaoquan* 校券) from Liye.[281] These documents are not only useful to understand the parallel structure of Qianling County, but also the parallel between the scribes and the assistants as two groups of administrative officials.

Many of the checking tallies published so far were issued by the Office of the Granaries (*cang* 倉) under the supervision of the Scribe Directors from the Court for disbursing grain. Slips 8-763, 8-1545, and 8-1551 are three examples:

里耶秦簡第八層出土簡牘の基礎的研究, *Miedai shigaku* 三重大史学, 14 (2014) 29-85; Sun Wenbo 孫聞博, "Qin xian de lie cao yu zhu guan: Cong *Hongfan wuxing zhuan* yize yiwen shuo qi" 秦縣的列曹與諸官──從《洪範五行傳》一則佚文說起, *Jianbo* 11 (2015): 75-87; Guo Hongbo 郭洪伯, "Bai guan yu zhu cao: Qin Han jiceng jigou de bumen shezhi" 稗官與諸曹：秦漢基層機構的部門設置, *Jian bo yanjiu er ling yi san* 簡帛研究二〇一三 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chu banshee, 2014), 101-27; Zou Shuijie 鄒水杰, "Ye lun Liye Qin jian zhi 'sikong'" 也論里耶秦簡之「司空」, *Nandu xuetan* 南都學壇 2014.5: 1-7; Lai Ming Chiu 黎明釗 and Tong Chun Fung 唐俊峰, "Liye Qin jian suojian Qin dai xian xingzheng zhong guan, cao zuzhi de zhineng fenye yu xingzheng hudong: yi jiaoji, dingke wei zhongxin" 里耶秦簡所見秦代縣行政中官、曹組織的職能分野與行政互動──以校計、定課為中心, *Jianbo* 13 (2016): 131-58.

[281] For a study on these documents, see Zhang Chunlong, Ohkawa Toshitaka 大川俊隆, and Momiyama Akira 籾山明, "Liye Qin jian kechi jian yanjiu: Jianlun Yuelu Qin jian *shu* zhong de wei jiedu jian" 里耶秦簡刻齒簡研究──兼論嶽麓秦簡《數》中的未解讀簡, *Wenwu* 2015.3: 53-69, 96.

Slip 8-763
粟米一石二斗半斗　・卅一年三月癸丑，倉守武、史感、稟(廩)人援出稟(廩)大隸妾并 [line 1]
One *shi* and two and a half *dou* of untreated grain. ・In the thirty-first year, on the day *guichou* of the third month, Probationary [Bailiff of the] Granaries Wu, Scribe Gan, and Disburser Yuan disbursed the grain supplies to adult bondwoman Bing.
令史犴視平　　感手 [line 2]
Scribe Director Yu oversaw the fairness [of the disbursement].
Gan handled [the document].

Slip 8-1545
丙廥粟米二石　　令史扁視平　[line 1]
Two *shi* of untreated grain of the Bing Granary. Scribe Director Bian oversaw the fairness [of the disbursement].
卅一年十月乙酉，倉守妃、佐富、稟(廩)人援出稟(廩)屯戍士五(伍)孱陵咸陰敝臣　　富手　[line 2]
In the thirty-first year, on the day *yiyou* (the first day)[282] of the tenth month, Probationary [Bailiff of the] Granaries Fei, Assistant Fu, and Disburser Yuan disbursed the grain supplies to garrison soldier Bichen who is a member of rank and file, from Xianyin District, Canling County. Fu handled [the document].

Slip 8-1551
粟米二斗。廿七年十二月丁酉，倉武、佐辰、稟(廩)人陵出以稟(廩)小隸臣益　[line 1]
Two *dou* of untreated grain. In the twenty-seventh year, on the day *dingyou* of the twelfth month, [Bailiff of the] Granaries Wu, Assistant Chen, and Disburser Ling disbursed the grain supplies to minor bond servant Yi.
令史戎夫監　[line 2]
Scribe Director Rongfu supervised [the disbursement]

The inscription of a checking tally includes seven elements: (1) the name of the granary; (2) the type and amount of the disbursed grain; (3) the date of the disbursement; (4) the personnel who were responsible for disbursing grain (*chu lin* 出廩 or *chu yilin* 出以廩); (5) the persons who received grain ration; (6) the person who handled (*shou* 手)[283] the

[282] See Zhao Yan, "Liye Qin jiri jiandu zhaji," 250.

[283] For the graph *shou*, see my discussion in the next section.

checking tally; and (7) the personnel who oversaw the fairness (*shi pin* 視平) of, or supervised (*jian* 監), the disbursement. The occasional absence of some elements from an inscription might be due to the carelessness of the person who handled the checking tally.[284] Nonetheless, most of these elements are consistent with the records in the Shuihudi Qin legal regulations. An entry under the title "Checking" (*xiao* 效) requires that for each entry of grain, the name of the granary, the amount of grain, and the name of the responsible personnel had to be properly registered (*ji* 籍):

> 入禾，萬【石一積而】比黎之為戶[285]，籍之曰：「其廥禾若干石，倉嗇夫某、佐某、史某、稟人某。」
> When grain is entered [in a granary], ten-thousand bushels make one pile; these are arranged to form a "house." This is to be registered as "So and so many bushels of grain in granary X; Bailiff of the Granaries X, Assistant X, Scribe X, Disburser X."[286]

As stated at the end of the same rule, the disbursement of grain has to follow the same process:

> 其出禾，有（又）書其出者，如入禾然。
> When grain is taken out, again note the persons who take it out, as is done in the case of entering grain.[287]

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[284] However, the omission of the name of granary in the inscriptions of some checking tallies might be intentional. The checking tallies could be classified by putting them into different bamboo containers (*si* 笥) with labels stating the granary they belonged to.

[285] There are various interpretations on the term *weihu* 為戶. A new interpretation reads it as the process of sealing (*fengjian* 封緘) the door of granary. See Zhongguo zhengfa daxue Zhongguo fazhi shi jichu shilao yandu hui 中國政法大學中國法制史基礎史料研讀會, "Shuihudi Qin jian falü wenshu jishi (san): *Qin lü shibazhong* (cang lü)" 睡虎地秦簡法律文書集釋(三)：《秦律十八種》(《倉律》), *Zhongguo gudai falü wenxian yanjiu* 中國古代法律文獻研究 8 (2014): 58.

[286] *SHD*, 58. Translation after *RCL*, 79-80, with modifications.

[287] Ibid.

It is obvious that the checking tallies of grain disbursement from Liye are the physical evidence of the granary register mentioned in the Shuihudi Qin rule. Regarding the personnel registered on the checking tallies, the Bailiff of the Granaries or Probationary Bailiff of the Granaries was the head of the Office of the Granaries in charge of disbursing grain, and the Scribe and Assistant were his staff to assist him during the process. The Disburser was not an official, but the person who physically carried out the task of disbursing. According to the Accounts of Laborers (*tubu* 徒簿) found from Liye, "disbursing grain for people" (*linren* 廩人) was assigned as one of the many manual tasks to the government-owned laborers (*tu* 徒).[288] As for the Scribe Director, an entry in the *Answers to Questions on Legal Principles and Statutes* shows that he held legal responsibility for being the supervisor of granaries:

> 空倉中有薦，薦下有稼一石以上，廷行【事】貲一甲，令史監者一盾。
> In an empty granary there is matting; when underneath the matting there is one bushel or more of grain, it is the precedent of the Court that this is fined with one suit of armor, and that the Scribe Director who supervises [this granary is fined] one shield.[289]

It is stated in the Qin "Statutes on the Establishment of Officials" (*Zhili lü* 置吏律) that when there was a vacancy of the Bailiff of the Office, the Scribe Directors could fill the office on probation (*shou* 守) whereas the Scribes and the Assistants were not allowed to do

[288] See Hunan sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 湖南省文物考古研究所, "Longshan Liye Qin jian zhi 'tubu'" 龍山里耶秦簡之「徒簿」, *Chutu wenxian yanjiu* 出土文獻研究 12 (2013): slips [9-37], [9-1779], [10-19] and [16-79].

[289] *SHD*, 128. Translation after *RCL*, 162, with modifications. It is also evident in a statute in Yuelu Academy's collection that Scribe Directors were responsible for overseeing the fairness (*shi pin*) of the disbursement. See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 122.

so.[290] This suggests that the Scribe Directors—the officials responsible for supervising the Offices—were in a higher position than the Scribes and the Assistants—the subordinates of the Offices—in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Furthermore, the Qin "Statutes on the Establishment of Officials" states that when a Bailiff of the Office was transferred to another office, he was not allowed to appoint his former Assistant and subordinate officials to the new office.[291] Considering these two rules together, the Qin dynasty, on the one hand, was to prevent the Bailiffs and their former subordinates (*guli* 故吏) from forming a long-term relationship beyond their original Office, and on the other hand, it was to keep an Office from falling into the hands of the officials that could have been connected by the superior-subordinate relationship.

Based on the Liye materials, we can make two additions to the current understanding of the Qin management of grain at the county level. First, among the personnel responsible for the grain disbursement, the Scribe and the Assistant never show up together in any single checking tally. Their names interchangeably appear between the positions of the Bailiff of the Granaries (or Probationary Bailiff of the Granaries) and the Disburser, suggesting that they were in the same position and held the same responsibility during the process of grain disbursement. Second, in other instances, the position of Scribe Director as the supervisor of grain disbursement can be replaced by another official—Assistant Director (*ling zuo* 令佐). Slip 8-1549 is one of the examples for arguing for this point:

[290] *SHD*, 161; *RCL*, 77-78.

[291] *SHD*, 159-60; *RCL*, 76-77.

錢十七　卅四年八月癸巳朔丙申，倉□、佐卻出買白翰羽九□長□□□□之□十七分，□□陽里小女子胡傷　[line 1]
Seventeen coins. In the thirty-fourth year, on the day *bingshen* (the fourth day) of the eighth month, of which the first day is *guisi*, [Bailiff of] the Granaries…and Assistant Que disbursed the coins to buy nine long white feathers…length…of…seventeenth (?) *fen*…minor girl Hutang from the District Yang.
□　令佐敬監□□□□　匜手　[line 2]
… Assistant Director Jing supervised [the disbursement]…
Yi handled [the document].

In addition to the checking tallies of grain disbursement, there are some other checking tallies regarding disbursement of coins or other types of goods, and the format of the written content of these checking tallies is basically the same. Slip 8-1549 is one of these examples.[292] Although there are some graphs not recognizable, it is clear that the position of Scribe Director as the supervisor was replaced by an Assistant Director named Jing.[293] It is significant to note that the parallels between Scribe and Assistant, Scribe Director and Assistant Director, respectively existed in the Office of the Granaries and at the Court.[294] Furthermore, by investigating the official titles which are composed of the graphs *shi* or *zuo* in the Liye materials, we can compile a more thorough list of the parallels between scribes and assistants that had existed in Qianling County:

[292] See also slips 8-891+8-933+8-2204 and 8-1751+8-2207. In these two examples, Assistant Director Ju 俱 supervised the disbursement of silk held by the Office of Revenue (*shaonei* 少內).

[293] Assistant Directors only appear in the Liye archive and Yuelu Academy's looted collection. Their official duties were almost the same as the Scribe Directors. See Zhao Yan, "Qin ling zuo kao" 秦令佐考, *Ludong daxue xuebao* 魯東大學學報 2014.1: 66-70.

[294] In the Liye materials, *ling shi* (Scribe Director) and *ling zuo* (Assistant Director) were occasionally simplified as *shi* and *zuo*. See Zhao Yan, "Qin ling zuo kao," 70. This largely complicates our work of tracking the career path of an official in the Liye materials. We have to be very cautious when interpreting whether the words *shi* and *zuo* really stand for the official titles Scribe and Assistant or they are just the simplified forms of Scribe Director and Assistant Director.

Scribes	**Assistants**
Scribe (*shi* 史)	Assistant (*zuo* 佐)
Scribe Director (*ling shi* 令史)	Assistant Director (*ling zuo* 令佐)
Judiciary Scribe (*yu shi* 獄史)	Judiciary Assistant (*yu zuo* 獄佐)
Scribe of the Commandant (*wei shi* 尉史)	[Assistant of the Commandant (*wei zuo* 尉佐)]
Minor Scribe (*xiao shi* 小史)	[Minor Assistant (*xiao zuo* 小佐)]

While the official titles Scribe and Assistant would be prefixed with the name of an Office, the titles Scribe Director and Assistant Director would be prefixed with the name of a Bureau, indicating their affiliation. They constitute the largest population of administrative officials in Qianling County. No mention of the official titles Assistant of the Commandant (*wei zuo*) and Minor Assistant (*xiao zuo*) is seen in the Liye materials published so far. Yet, for most of the scribal titles listed above, there is always an official title of assistant parallel to each of them. It is highly possible that there had been Assistant of the Commandant and Minor Assistant parallel to Scribe of the Commandant (*wei shi*) and Minor Scribe (*xiao shi*).[295] Noticeably, this parallelism also existed among the full-time non-staff (*rong* 冗) officials. The excavators have introduced the fact that there are unpublished registers (*mingji* 名籍) exclusively for full-time non-staff scribes (*rong shi* 冗史) and full-time non-staff assistants (*rong zuo* 冗佐) in the Liye materials.[296]

It is worth noting that there appears to be some overlap between the tracks of scribes and assistants. As demonstrated in the above section, in the early Western Han, when there were insufficient numbers of scribes, assistants who had served a long period of time could be appointed to be scribes as well. It is also evident in the Liye materials that some

[295] The official titles Assistant of the Commandant and Minor Assistant do appear in the collection of looted Yuelu Qin slips. See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 205, slip 0559; 137, slips 1396 and 1367.

[296] *Liye Qin jian (yi)*, 3.

individuals could cross between these two tracks of administrative officials. For example, in slip 8-1008+8-1461+8-1532, Assistant Director Hua 華 testifies that he had been the Scribe of the Commandant before. Not much is known about the conditions under which a scribe could be appointed to the position of assistant. The shortage of officials in Qianling County, as described in the above section, possibly was one of the reasons that gave rise to the overlap of these two tracks of officials. It could be expected that this overlap might not just happen in Qianling, but also existed in other local administrations.[297]

Administrative Literacy of Scribes and Assistants

The phrase X *shou* 手 at the end of each checking tally provides significant clues for understanding the roles of Scribe and Assistant in the production of administrative documents. As the editors of *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (diyi juan)* observe, the name of Scribe or Assistant registered on the checking tallies is always consistent with the name that preceded the graph *shou* at the end.[298] Hsing I-tien argues that the person whose name

[297] Two sets of the looted Yuelu Qin slips are relevant to this problem. The *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)* has recovered a lost Qin statute on the "Establishment of Officials" (*zhili lü* 置吏) from two slips (1396 and 1367), which states that, "When a county is appointing a Minor Assistant without a salary grade, in each case, appoint those who are from the county. In every case, select to appoint the scribes who hold the rank Service Rotation Exempt down to members of the rank and file to be assistant" 縣除小佐毋(無)秩者，各除其縣中，皆擇除不更以下到士五(伍)史者為佐. There was no any strict requirement on age when appointing scribes to the position of assistants. These scribes must have passed the scribal exam and verified their ability to carry out administrative work. See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 137-38. The three slips (1807, 1810 and 1859) that recently announced in an article by Yu Zhenbo more directly shed light on the problem. In 218 BCE, more than a hundred of student scribes in the Qin heartland conspired with the examiners in the scribal exam in order to be exempt from service. They were sent to be assistants in the counties of Liaodong 遼東 Commandery as punishment for their crime. The counties of Liaodong Commandery, which was located at the northeastern edge of the Empire (in modern Liaoning), might have suffered from the serious shortage of assistants. See Yu, "'Fuzhi' zhi zui yu Qin zhi lifa jingshen," 23.

[298] *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (diyi juan)*, 5, n. 12.

preceded the graph *shou* at the end of each document was the one who actually wrote it and the graph *shou* in the Liye materials can be best understood as *shuxie zhe* 書寫者 (writer).[299] This interpretation is widely adopted among scholars. I would like to propose another possible interpretation for understanding this phrase. By giving a new interpretation of this phrase, we could have a better sense of the administrative literacy that the scribes and assistants were expected to acquire in order to carry out their tasks.

The phrase X *shou* is composed of a personal name and the graph *shou* 手 (lit. hand).[300] Chinese and Japanese scholars commonly call this phrase *mou shou* 某手 (such-and-such handled).[301] A multi-slip document (slips 8-755, 8-756, 8-757, 8-758, 8-759 and 8-1523) from Liye clearly indicates that the Qin officials would use the record X *shou* for tracing one's accountability for processing a document.[302] The earliest record of this phrase within an administrative context can be dated back to the second year of King Wu of the Qin

[299] Hsing prefers to use the term "writer" rather than "scribe" (*shu shou* 書手). It is because there are instances that the person whose name preceded the graph *shou* was not in the position of scribe or assistant. They could be the head of an Office or his representative. See Hsing I-tien, "'Shou, ban,' 'yue wu yue jing' yu 'Qianling gong': Liye Qin jian chudu zhi yi" 「手、半」、「曰牾曰荊」與「遷陵公」：里耶秦簡初讀之一, *Jianbo wang* 簡帛網, accessed August 2, 2015. http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=1685.

[300] For a literature review on the phrase X *shou*, see Tsuchiguchi Fuminori, "Chūgoku kodai bunsho gyōsei seido: Sengoku Shin Kan ki shutsudo shiryō ni yoru kinnen no kenkyū dōkō" 中国古代文書行政制度─戦国秦漢期出土資料による近年の研究動向─, *Chūgoku shigaku* 中国史学 23 (2013.10), 114-16.

[301] Note that the term *mou shou* appears in a looted Qin slip (0798) held by the Yuelu Academy, which shows that people in the Qin also commonly referred the phrase X *shou* to as *mou shou*. See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 161.

[302] See Ma, "Qin Management of Human Resources," 5. In addition, a Qin legal case from the looted Yuelu Academy's collection records that Probationary Magistrate Wan 綰 and Assistant Magistrate Yue 越 of Zhouling 州陵 County failed to submit a doubtful case to the Commandant of the Court (*tingwei* 廷尉). Along with them, Huo 獲, the official who handled (*shou*) the submitted document, was also fined with the same charge, one shield (*dun* 盾). It is clear from the case that Huo shared the collective accountability with his superiors. See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (san)*, 104; see also Lau and Staack, *Legal Practice in the Formative Stages of the Chinese Empire*, 114-17.

(309 BCE).[303] It is recorded on a wooden board from a tomb discovered at Haojiaping 郝家坪, Sichuan in 1979.[304] In addition, the phrase also appears in three funerary documents addressed to the otherworld authorities (*gaodi shu* 告地書) dated between 183 BCE and 142 BCE.[305] These texts were made for reporting to the underworld officials the death of the tomb occupants. The highly formulaic language and the administrative process of transferring registries were modeled after Qin and Han local administrative documents.[306] However, since they were made exclusively for funerary purposes and no comparable administrative text has been found from the same period, it is uncertain to what degree that these texts can represent the administrative texts at that time. These texts might be produced in funerary workshops and lagged behind the development of real contemporaneous administrative documents. As such, the phrase X *shou* could be an administrative format exclusively for Qin administrative documents.[307]

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[303] This phrase might have an older origin. A clay tablet (*wa shu* 瓦書) dated to the fourth year of King Hui Wen of Qin (334 BCE) records a phrase composed of an official title *shi*, a personal name and the graph *shou*. The tablet acts as a certificate of granting land to a Qin official with the rank "Leader of the Masses of the Right" (*you shuzhang* 右庶長). According to the inscription, the tablet was supposed to be buried at the boundary of the granted territory. Unfortunately, the archaeological context is lost and we do not have enough comparable clay tablets written with the same format. Additionally, the accuracy of the transcription of the graph *shou* is in dispute. See Guo Zizhi 郭子直, "Zhanguo Qin feng zongyi washu mingwen xinshi" 戰國秦封宗邑瓦書銘文新釋, *Guwenzi yanjiu* 14 (1986): 177-96.

[304] Chen Wei, *Qin jian du heji (er)* 秦簡牘合集(貳) (Wuchang: Wuhan daxue chuban she, 2014), 190 and 349-50.

[305] These three documents addressed to the otherworld authorities were respectively found from the early Han tombs at Xiejiaqiao 謝家橋, Gaotai 高臺, and Kongjiapo 孔家坡, Hubei. See Yang Yong 楊勇, "Xiejiaqiao yi hao Han mu" 謝家橋1號漢墓, in Jingzhou bowu guan 荊州博物館, *Jingzhou zhongyao kaogu faxian* 荊州重要考古發現 (Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 2008), 191-94; Jingzhou bowu guan 荊州博物館, *Jingzhou Gaotai Qin Han mu* 荊州高臺秦漢墓 (Beijing: Kexue chuban she, 2000), 222; Hubei sheng wenwu kaogu yanjiu suo 湖北省文物考古研究所 and Suizhou shi kaogu dui 隨州市考古隊, *Suizhou Kongjia po Han mu jiandu* 隨州孔家坡漢墓簡牘 (Beijing: Wenwu chuban she, 2006), 197.

[306] See Guolong Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife: The Archaeology of Early Chinese Religion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 147.

The difficulties for understanding the exact meaning of this phrase are due to, firstly, the lack of further information such as official title and family name for tracing the identity of the person whose name preceded the graph *shou*, and secondly, the ambiguity of the graph *shou*. The *Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi (diyi juan)* along with other recently announced materials include many documents in which the person whose name preceded the graph *shou* appears in another position of the same document with their official title recorded. This provides us a way to identify the person whose name preceded the graph *shou*. Among all the Liye materials published so far, I found 56 instances that the name that preceded the graph *shou* coheres with the name of an official mentioned in the same document (Table 6).

Categories	**Official titles**	**Slip numbers**	**Percentage of officials**
Heads of the Offices	Probationary Bailiff of the Granaries (*cang shou* 倉守)	8-169+8-233+8-407+8-416+8-1185	10.5%
	Probationary Bailiff of Agricultural Fields (*tianguan shou* 田官守)	[9-1869][308]	
	Probationary Bailiff of Du District (*duxiang shou* 都鄉守)	8-1554	
	Probationary Bailiff of Erchun District (*erchunxiang shou* 貳春鄉守)	8-1527, [10-1157][309]	
	Probationary Bailiff of Qiling District (*qilingxiang shou* 啟陵鄉守)	8-769	
Scribes	Scribe (*shi* 史)	8-217, 8-645, 8-763, 8-766, 8-1153+8-1342, 8-1177, 8-1239+8-1334, 8-1345+8-2245, 8-1540, 8-1580, 8-1584, 8-2249	29.8%

[307] A phrase of similar function appears on the Han administrative documents excavated from Juyan 居延 and Dunhuang 敦煌, Gansu. It appears at the end of a document—normally at the left bottom of the recto or verso sides—for indicating who has participated in the production of that document. However, not only is the graph *shou* omitted, usually more than one person is listed and each of their names is preceded by an official title. See Giele, "Signatures of 'Scribes' in Early Imperial China," 365-84.

[308] Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi xiaozu, "Xinjian Liye Qin jiandu zilao xuanjiao (er)" 新見里耶秦簡牘資料選校（二）, *Jianbo wang*, accessed August 28, 2015. http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=2069.

[309] Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi xiaozu, "Xinjian Liye Qin jiandu zilao xuanjiao (yi)."

	Scribe Director (*ling shi* 令史)	8-487+8-2004, 8-1511, 8-1560	
	Judiciary Scribe (*yu shi* 獄史)	8-754+8-1007	
	Scribe of the Commandant (*wei shi* 尉史)	8-761	
Assistants	Assistant (*zuo* 佐)	8-75+8-166+8-485, 8-152, 8-163, 8-164+8-1475, 8-173, 8-175, 8-212+8-426+8-1632, 8-216+8-352, 8-764, 8-781+8-1102, 8-890+8-1583, 8-1002+8-1091, 8-1050, 8-1055+8-1579, 8-1069+8-1434+8-1520, 8-1443+8-1455, 8-1459+8-1293+8-1466, 8-1490+8-1518, 8-1545, 8-1550, 8-1559, 8-1574+8-1787, 8-1839, 8-2246, 8-2247, [9-981][310], [9-2350][311], [12-849][312], [14-649+14-679][313], [14-650+14-652][314]	57.9%
	Assistant Director (*ling zuo* 令佐)	8-1008+8-1461+8-1532, 8-1449+8-1484	
Others	Constable (*jiao zhang* 校長)	[9-1112][315]	1.8%

Table 6: Officials whose name preceded the graph *shou* in the Liye documents

Almost 90 percent of these officials are from the groups of scribes and assistants, which significantly shows that these two groups of officials together constitute the largest group of administrators responsible for processing most of the documents in Qianling County. Noticeably, the fact that the percentage of the group of assistants is even larger than the

[310] *Liye fajue baogao*, 190-1.

[311] Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi xiaozu, "Xinjian Liye Qin jiandu zilao xuanjiao (er)."

[312] Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi xiaozu, "Xinjian Liye Qin jiandu zilao xuanjiao (san)" 新見里耶秦簡牘資料選校（三）, *Jianbo wang*, accessed August 14, 2015. http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_article.php?id=2279.

[313] *Liye fajue baogao*, 195.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Liye Qin jiandu jiaoshi xiaozu, "Xinjian Liye Qin jiandu zilao xuanjiao (er)."

group of scribes suggests that the scribes might no longer be the major source of administrative officials.

The only problem that remains is how we should understand the graph *shou*. Hsing I-tien believes that *shou* refers to writer (*shuxie zhe*). I agree that writing a document was a significant part of processing a document, but I respectfully doubt that it was the only job the scribes or assistants would have to do with a document in the world where the major writing materials were made of bamboo and wood. Zhang Chunlong, Ohkawa Toshitaka, and Momiyama Akira have conducted a detailed investigation of the wooden checking tallies discovered from the Liye site. Their investigation reveals that the material features of wooden slips had been used to carry information and convey messages in addition to the texts.

The checking tallies were used for verifying the transfer of money or commodities between two or more different parties (Figure 6). They were usually made of a slip of wood that ranged from 36.5 to 37.2 cm long and 0.8 to 2.1 cm wide. One would cut the slip from the one end into two pieces but leave the other end held together. In addition to the inscriptions, these checking tallies were always shaped with a number of notches (*ke chi* 刻齒, lit. teeth) on one side.[316] These notches were made with different shapes representing a number (Figure 7). The number that the notches represented had to be consistent with the amount of coins or commodities inscribed on the checking tallies. After the inscriptions and

[316] The feature of notches also appears on the Han wooden slips excavated at Juyan and Dunhuang. See Momiyama Akira, "Kokushi kantoku shotan: Kan kan keitairon no tame-ni" 刻歯簡牘初探—漢簡形態論のために, in Momiyama Akira, *Shin kan shutsudo moji shiryō no kenkyū: keitai, seido, shakai* 秦漢出土文字史料の研究：形態・制度・社会 (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 2015), 17-61; Ji Annuo 紀安諾 (Enno Giele), "Han dai biansai beiyong shuxie cailiao ji qi shehui shi yiyi" 漢代邊塞備用書寫材料及其社會史意義, *Jianbo* 2 (2007): 488-92; Zhang Junmin 張俊民, "Xuanquan zhi chutu kechi jiandu gaishuo" 懸泉置出土刻齒簡牘概說, *Jianbo* 7 (2012): 235-56.

notches were made, the other end would be cut off so that the checking tallies would be completely split into two pieces. Each of the parties would keep one piece for their own record. While the one with notches on the right side is called “left tally” (*zuo quan* 左券), the one with notches on the left side is called “right tally” (*you quan* 右券).[317]

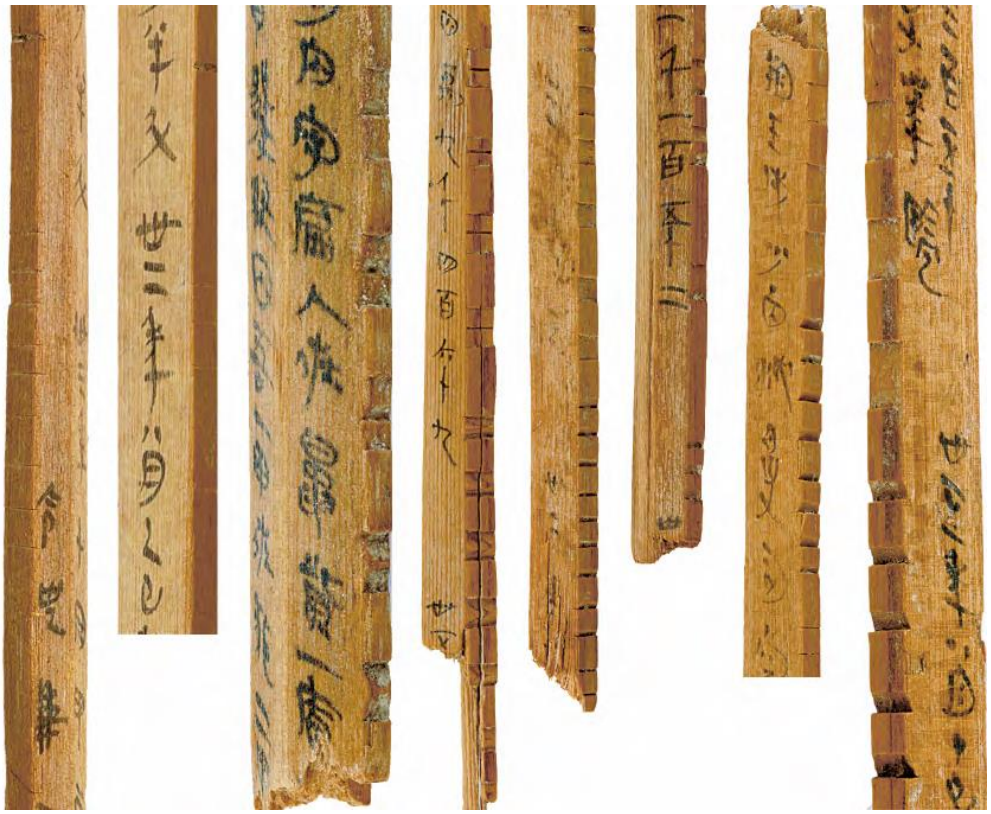

Figure 6: Checking tallies from the Liye site. After Zhang, Ohkawa, and Momiyama, “Liye Qin jian kechi jian yanjiu,” 57, fig. 1.

[317] Zhang, Ohkawa, and Momiyama, “Liye Qin jian kechi jian yanjiu,” 53-56.

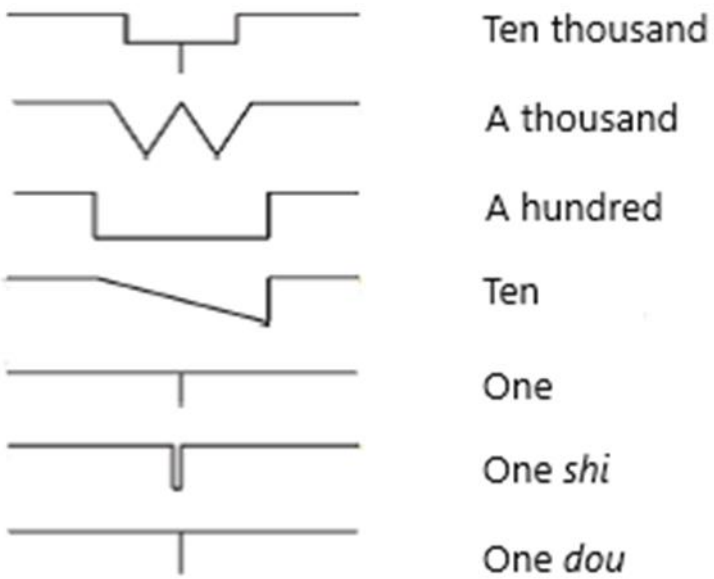

Figure 7: Different shapes of notches on the checking tallies from the Liye site. After Zhang, Ohkawa, and Momiyama, "Liye Qin jian kechi jian yanjiu," 54, with modifications.

Who would be responsible for making such notches? It is possible that the original shape of a wooden slip was mass-produced by government-owned laborers,[318] but the shaping of a pair of checking tallies certainly required special knowledge. In order to successfully make the notches match the number inscribed on the checking tallies, one needed to be able to use a "book knife" (*shu dao* 書刀)[319] skillfully and to have certain level of reading and accounting literacy (Figure 8). Again, let us look at the inscriptions of the checking tallies of grain disbursement introduced in the previous section. Among the

[318] Slip 8-2146 is a fragment of an Account of Laborers in which "cutting wooden slips" (*fa du* 伐牘) is recorded as one of the manual tasks of the laborers. It corresponds to a Qin statute on "Convict Labor" (*sikong* 司空) which regulates the production of wooden writing materials. See *SHD*, 55; *RCL*, 73-74. For a study of the mass-production of writing materials during the Han period, see Wang Guihai 汪桂海, "Handai guanfu jiandu de jiagong, gongying" 漢代官府簡牘的加工、供應, *Jianbo yanjiu 2009* 簡帛研究2009 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chuban she, 2010), 142-48.

[319] For more on the book knife, see Qian Cunxun 錢存訓 (Tsuen-hsuin Tsien), "Han dai shudao kao" 漢代書刀考, in Qian Cunxun, *Zhongguo shuji, zhimo ji yinshuashi lunwenji* 中國書籍、紙墨及印刷史論文集 (Shatian: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 1992), 43-56.

personnel who had participated in the grain disbursement—Bailiff of the Granaries, Scribe or Assistant and Disburser, the Bailiff of the Granaries was the head of the Office, so that he would not need to make the notches by himself even if he had all the required knowledge. It is also doubtful that a Disburser, who was just a government-owned laborer, could have achieved such literacy. Therefore, it was probably only the Scribe or Assistant who could have achieved both reading and accounting literacy and made the notches accurately match the number on the checking tallies.

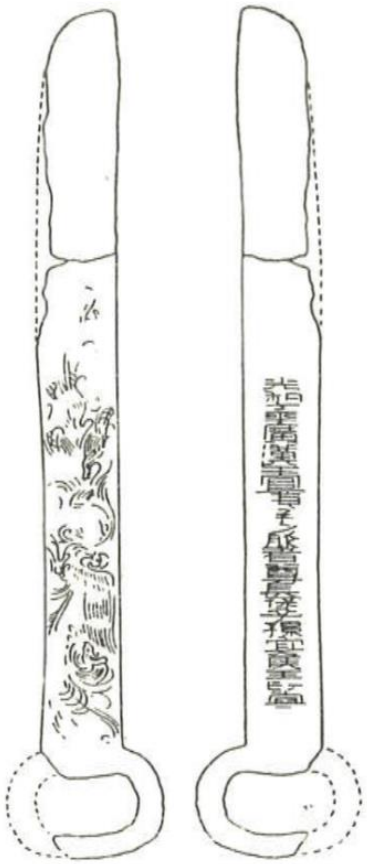

Figure 8: A book knife discovered from Chengdu, Sichuan. After Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 177, plate XXVIII.

Considering the notches as an indispensable part of a pair of checking tallies, the graph *shou* should indicate the accountability for more than merely writing. I would rather take the graph *shou* as a verb[320] and translate it into "to handle" (*jingshou* 經手),[321] which could better reflect that one's jobs of processing a document were not merely confined to writing graphs on it. This is particularly important in a world where bamboo and wood are the major writing materials. Japanese scholars have been intrigued by the continuity of the use of bamboo and wooden slips as writing material in Chinese history.[322] Although excavated evidence from northwestern China shows that while the earliest paper can be dated back to the second century BCE, it was not until the fourth century CE that paper fully replaced bamboo and wood to become the dominant writing material. Some particular forms of wooden slips (such as tags [*jie* 檄]) were still being used after the fourth century CE, and had great impact on the use of wooden slips in East Asia. Their legacy can be easily found in Korea and Japan, especially during the seventh and eighth centuries CE.[323]

An important question is: when paper became the most common writing material, what functions were left to these wooden slips? Tomiya Itaru suggests that we should look at the

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[320] In the Liye materials, there are two other phrases of similar structure. Scholars commonly refer them to as *mou fa* 某發 (such-and-such opened) and *mou ban* 某半 (such-and-such split [into two pieces]). The same as X *shou*, they are also composed of a personal name and a verb for indicating one's accountability for a specific administrative process. See Chen Jian 陳劍, "Du Qin Han jian zhaji sanpian" 讀秦漢簡札記三篇, *Chutu wenxian yu guwen zi yanjiu* 出土文獻與古文字研究 4 (2011): 370-76.

[321] Enno Giele is one of the few scholars that also translates this phrase in the same way. Unlike this chapter, he is more concerned with the problem of whether or not we can identify the phrase as a personal signature. See Giele, "Signatures of 'Scribes' in Early Imperial China," 363.

[322] Tomiya Itaru, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai: shoki no bunkashi* 木簡・竹簡の語る中国古代：書記の文化史 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 103-222; *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku*, 8-28; Momiyama Akira, *Shin kan shutsudo moji shiryō no kenkyū*, part 1.

[323] See Satō Makoto, "The Wooden Tablets (*mokkan*) of Ancient Japan," *Acta Asiatica* 69 (1995): 84-117; Kim Chang-Seok, "Ancient Koren Mokkan (Wooden slips): With a Special Focus on Their Features and Uses," *Acta Koreana* 17.1 (2014): 193-22.

functions of these wooden slips beyond the realm of writing.[324] To put it more accurately, it was their materiality that enabled them to carry and convey important messages that could not be completely replaced by paper or any other types of writing materials. In addition to the notches, which have been discussed in this chapter, material features including the shape, size, length and width of a bamboo or wooden slip could also carry information and convey messages as valuable as those through the writing itself.[325] Noticeably, the use of wooden slips (*mokkan*) in Japan was very much limited to administrative and economic affairs during the seventh and eighth centuries CE when paper was already in use.[326] This suggests that the materiality of wood was particularly suitable for carrying and conveying administrative messages.[327] In this regard, it is no wonder that scribes in the Qin and Han periods would always carry a book knife along with a brush, because using a book knife to modify the material features of a bamboo or wooden document was as important as using a brush to write graphs on it. And it could explain why they were called "knife-and-brush officials" (*daobi li* 刀筆吏) in transmitted texts. This scribal image is best portrayed on the west wall of the front chamber of the tomb excavated at Yinan 沂南 (Figure 9).

[324] Tomiya, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai*, 192.

[325] Bamboo and wooden slips of different shapes, lengths and widths were devoted to writing different types of documents. See ibid., 81-95; *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku*, 29-49.

[326] Satō, "The Wooden Tablets (*mokkan*) of Ancient Japan," 97-112; David B. Lurie, *Realms of Literacy: Early Japan and the History of Writing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 121-25.

[327] Tomiya suggests that wood is easier than bamboo to be shaped in different forms for administrative purposes, and this might be the reason that paper could not immediately replace the role of wood in China. See Tomiya, *Mokkan, chikukan no kataru Chūgoku kodai*, 98-102. In fact, wood as an early writing material is not confined to East Asia. For a brief survey of wood as an early writing material in a worldwide context, see Lajos Berkes, Enno Giele, Michael R. Ott and Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Holz," in Thomas Meier et al., *Materiale Textkulturen: Konzepte – Materialien – Praktiken* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 383-95.

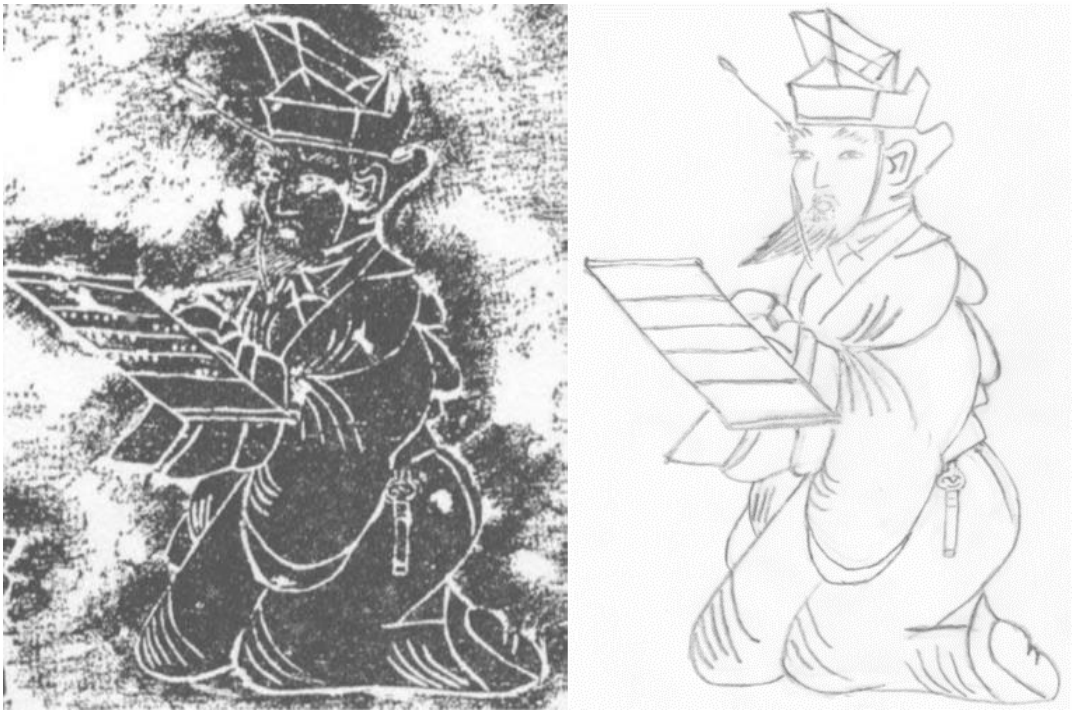

Figure 9: A scribal image in the tomb excavated at Yinan. The scribal official is carrying a book knife at his waist and a brush on his right ear while holding a document with his hands. Drawn by Tsang Wing Ma according to Zeng Zhaoyu 曾昭燏, Jiang Baogeng 蔣寶庚 and Li Zhongyi 黎忠義, *Yinan gu huaxiangshi mu fajue baogao* 沂南古畫像石墓發掘報告 (Beijing: Wenhuabu wenwu guanli ju, 1956), plate 28, no. 6.

By drawing new light from the studies of literacy in contemporary society,[328] historians of the ancient world recognize the significance of the context in which literacy was "employed" to achieve certain goals. Various types of literacy, such as name literacy, commercial literacy and list literacy, were coined to accommodate specific social, political and cultural contexts. As Rosalind Thomas puts it: "Rather than see 'literacy' as an independent, separable skill, researchers as well as teachers in the field tend to wish to see it

[328] See Brian Street, "What's 'New' in New Literacy Studies? Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice," *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 5.2 (2003), 77-91; David R. Olson, "Why Literacy Matters, Then and Now," in *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*, ed. William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 385-403; "Literacy for Life," *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006*, UNESCO, accessed May 11, 2017. http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001416/141639e.pdf

more as an embedded activity—or to see a tension between the social context and the potentialities of writing."[329] I suggest using "administrative literacy" to understand the literacy that the administrative officials like the scribes and assistants had to achieve in the world of bamboo and wooden documents. This "administrative literacy" does not merely represent one's reading, writing and accounting abilities, but also one's acquisition of a specific knowledge and skill set that were required for modifying the material features of a bamboo or wooden document in order to accurately record or convey important messages for administrative purposes. This specific knowledge and skill set included knowing the meaning of each material feature of a document and mastering the use of a book knife. For those who could acquire this administrative literacy, to use the words of Wang Chong 王充, an intellectual famous for his skepticism in the first century CE, they were the people with the capabilities of assistants and scribes (*zuoshizhicai* 佐史之材).[330]

[329] Rosalind Thomas, "Writing, Reading, Public and Private 'Literacies': Functional Literacy and Democratic Literacy in Greece," in *Ancient Literacies*, 14. For representative studies on literacy in early imperial China, see Tomiya, *Bunsho gyōsei no Kan teikoku*, 106-40; Eno Gīre エノ・ギーレ (Enno Giele), "Kodai no shikiji nōryoku o ikaga ni hantei suru: Kan dai gyōsei bunsho no jirei kenkyū" 古代の識字能力を如何に判定する－漢代行政文書の事例研究－, in *Kanji bunka sanzennen* 漢字文化三千年, ed. Takata Tokio 高田時雄 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2009), 133-154; Yates, "Soldiers, Scribes, and Women," 339-69; Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, "Craftsman's Literacy: Uses of Writing by Male and Female Artisans in Qin and Han China," in *Writing & Literacy in Early China*, 370-99; Hsing I-tien, "Qin Han pingmin de duxie nengli: Shiliao jiedu pian zhi yi" 秦漢平民的讀寫能力——史料解讀篇之一, *Di si jie guoji Han xue huiyi lunwenji: Gudai shumin shehui* 第四屆國際漢學會議論文集：古代庶民社會, ed. Hsing I-tien and Liu Tseng-kuei 劉增貴 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 2013), 241-88; "Han dai biansai suizhang de wenshu nengli yu jiaoyu: dui Zhongguo gudai jiceng shehui duxie nengli de fansi" 漢代邊塞隧長的文書能力與教育——對中國古代基層社會讀寫能力的反思, *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 88.1 (2017): 85-144.

[330] *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋, annotated by Huang Hui 黃暉 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990), 540. Note that excavated registers of officials from Juyan and Dunhuang on the Han frontier show that the Han government was well aware of the difference between being "[qualified as a] scribe" (*shi* 史) and being "able to write" (*nengshu* 能書). See Hsing, "Han dai biansai suizhang de wenshu nengli yu jiaoyu," 91-100.

Conclusion

This chapter studies the institutional roles of the scribes and assistants in Qin and early Han China. The excavated legal regulations from the tombs at Shuihudi and Zhangjiashan show that in addition to the hereditary scribes, the non-hereditary assistants were also entrusted with the administrative work. The assistants could fill the vacancy of scribes when there was an insufficiency of the hereditary scribes. The opening of the scribal profession could be considered a response to the increasing administrative needs since the Warring States period. The Liye materials suggest that although the Qin local administration had expanded to a large scale, the number of qualified administrative officials was not large enough to meet this expansion. It was probably under such circumstance that non-hereditary officials such as the assistants were entrusted with the work of scribes. The different requirements of the scribes and assistants also show that while hereditary status was still highly valued at the time, age was one of the very few ways for an individual without family ties to be able to gain recognition in society.

The scribes and assistants appeared in parallel in Qianling County's administration. These two groups of officials carried out the same type of administrative tasks and held the same position in specific administrative processes such as grain disbursement. While the Zhangjiashan legal texts show that the assistants who had accumulated enough practical experience could fill the vacancy of scribes, the Liye materials add to our knowledge that the scribes could also take over the assistant's position when necessary. The overlap of the tracks of the scribes and assistants might have obscured the differences between them, as suggested by the emergence of the combined title "assistant-scribe" (*zuoshi* 佐史) as a

salary grade in the Han official system.[331] Correspondingly, as the Eastern Han scholar Xu Shen 許慎 indicates, during his time, the statute regulating the scribal training system was no longer observed.[332]

This chapter also coins the concept of administrative literacy to understand the literacy that a scribe or an assistant had to achieve in early imperial China. Considering the fact that the material features of a bamboo or wooden document can carry or convey messages as valuable as those through the text itself, the acquisition of a specific knowledge and skill set required for modifying the material features of a bamboo or wooden document must be recognized as a crucial part for achieving this administrative literacy. One comparable example is the term "computer literacy," which is being broadly used to refer to the basic knowledge of using a computer in many disciplines nowadays. Besides the advancement of technology, in fact, there is not much difference between the actions of carving notches on a checking tally and typing numbers in a computer as a way of recording data. But if one insists on understanding literacy as a separable and independent skill that refers to the ability of reading and writing a certain number of graphs, he will not be able to show how the advancement of technology had transformed the way of writing and handling information.

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[331] *Hanshu*, 2.85.

[332] *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注, commentary by Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1988), 15.10a-13b. See also *LSS*, 1090-91.

CHAPTER FOUR

Between the State and His Superior: The Anxiety of Being a Scribe in the Qin and Han Bureaucratic Hierarchy

Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, scribes during the Qin and Han periods earned the name "knife-and-brush officials" (*daobi li*) by using a book knife and a brush in achieving their work. Although these knife-and-brush officials constituted the core of the imperial administration, Han historical narratives often associate them with the Qin and its fall. The fact that a few knife-and-brush officials made profound contributions to ruling the Han Empire did not significantly change their public image. Han intellectuals had categorized them into a group of "harsh officials" (*kuli* 酷吏) in contrast to a group of "reasonable officials" (*xunli* 循吏), and a group of "legal clerks" (*wenli* 文吏)[333] in contrast to a group of "Confucian scholars"

[333] Note that the term *wenli* could sometimes refer to a group of civil officials opposite to the *wuli* 武吏, a group of martial officials, in Han transmitted texts. For representative passages regarding this dichotomy, see *Hanshu* 77.3268; 90.3673; *Hou Hanshu* 1b.85; 5.227. However, the distinction between civil and martial officials in early imperial China was not as clear as in later periods. An ideal official in the Han was expected to be excellent in both civil and martial aspects (*yun wen yun wu* 允文允武). See Hsing I-tien, "Yun wen yun wu: Han dai guanli de yizhong dianxing" 允文允武：漢代官吏的一種典型, in *Tianxia yijia*, 224-84. Even though their major duties were to deal with administrative and legal processes, scribes were also expected to participate in military affairs when necessary. For example, the occupant of tomb no. 11 at Shuihudi, Xi, had joined the Qin army at least twice when he was serving in the position of Scribe Director. See Chapter 3, Table 4.

(*rushing* 儒生). Yet, the newly excavated documents suggest that these stereotypical portrayals fail to capture the real life of scribes, especially those who served at the bottom of the bureaucracy. This chapter questions the traditional portrayals of scribes in Han transmitted texts and explores the anxiety of being a low-ranked scribe in the Qin and Han bureaucratic hierarchy.

Most scholars in the field of early China agree that the job of scribes required special knowledge and skills to achieve, but few are concerned with the difficulties and complexities of the job itself. This chapter employs the newly unearthed evidence from the sites at Liye, Songbai, Tianchang and Yinwan in mainland China, and at Chŏngbaek-tong in Pyongyang, North Korea to examine the workload that would have been generated in a commandery for preparing an annual account book (*jìbù* 計簿) forwarded to the central government. In light of the document management system in Mesopotamia, I use the concept "hierarchy of documents" to analyze the multiple processes which the scribes had undertaken before producing the final version of the annual account book. In doing so, we can see how the task of preparing an annual account book could be a nightmare, even to these professionals.

In fact, the low-ranked scribes constituted the largest population of scribes during the Qin and Han periods. While struggling with their day-to-day paperwork at the bottom of the bureaucracy, these low-ranked scribes were facing pressure from two sides: the state and their superiors. Despite serving in a highly centralized empire, officials during the Qin and Han periods were independent actors whose pursuit of self-interest would often deviate from the state's interest. Corruption was endemic in the official system. In response, the Qin and Han governments had established severe laws to prevent such corruption from happening.

By looking at the legal regulations for monitoring administrative practices and the corruption cases in the forwarding of accounts, I demonstrate how the low-ranked scribes were placed in a dilemma, choosing between conforming to the state's legal regulations and following their superior's order.

Portrayals of Scribes in Han Transmitted Texts: Knife-and-Brush Officials, Harsh Officials and Legal Clerks

Scribes during the Qin and Han periods dealt with the documents generated by governmental routine with a book knife and a brush, by which they had earned the name "knife-and-brush officials." As argued in Chapter 3, this is a term that visually and vividly reflects how the scribes actually achieved their tasks with their administrative literacy, which not only represents their ability to use a brush for writing graphs, but also a book knife to modify the material features of a bamboo or wooden document, in order to convey messages for administrative purposes. Although the Qin state and empire had employed enormous number of scribes in administration, no reference to the term *daobi li* survives in Qin primary sources. All the accounts of *daobi li* in early imperial China were transmitted through the texts composed or compiled during the Han period,[334] in which these officials

[334] Prior to the recent excavation of Qin texts, most of the Qin sources were transmitted through Han texts. See Yuri Pines et al., "General Introduction: Qin History Revisited," in *Birth of an Empire*, 4-7. A passage regarding the conversation between King of Zhao and Sikong Ma 司空馬 is now preserved in the transmitted version of the *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策 in which Sikong Ma said that he had been a *Qin daobi* 秦刀筆. Although the *Zhanguo ce* contains sources from earlier periods, it was compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 between 26 and 8 BC. See *Zhanguo ce jizhu huikao (zengbu ben)* 戰國策集注匯考(增補本), annotated by Zhu Zugeng 諸祖耿 (Nanjing: Feng huang chu ban she, 2008), 450; Tsuen-hsuin Tsien, "Chan kuo ts'e," in *Early Chinese Texts*, 1-11.

are often associated with the Qin ruling and its fall. A representative passage can be found in the *Historical Records*.

It is said that Emperor Wen of Han summoned Zhang Shizhi 張釋之, the Chief Administrator of the Palace Receptionists (*yezhe puye* 謁者僕射), to appoint a Bailiff of the Tiger Enclosure (*huquan sefu* 虎圈嗇夫) to the position of Director of the Shanglin Park (*Shanglin ling* 上林令) for his excellent oral response to the Emperor's inquiries on the account books of the birds and animals (*qinshou bu* 禽獸簿). Instead of following the order, Zhang used the examples of Zhou Bo 周勃 and Zhang Xiangru 張相如, who were praised by Emperor Wen as the elders (*zhangzhe*) but were never good at oral expression, to convince the Emperor that a person who is merely good at talking should not be praised. He then drew on the experience of Qin and added:

> 秦以任刀筆之吏，吏爭以亟疾苛察相高，然其敝徒文具耳，無惻隱之實。以故不聞其過，陵遲而至於二世，天下土崩。
> Because the Qin relied on those officials who use knife and brush, the officials competed to outdo one another in urging bothersome inquiries. But the disadvantage of this was that they merely sought that the letter of the law was fulfilled completely, but did not have sincere compassion. Therefore, the [Qin] would hear nothing of their own excesses, and the situation deteriorated until the world collapsed like a mountain at the time of the Second Emperor.[335]

It was common for early Han court officials to use Qin as a negative example when advising their ruler.[336] This passage specifically attributes the fall of Qin to the employment of the

[335] *Shiji*, 102.2752. Translation after Hans van Ess trans., "Chang Shih-chih and Feng T'ang, Memoir 42," in Nienhauser ed., *The Grand Scribes' Records*, 8: 358-9, with modifications. Note that Wang Chong had quoted an excerpt of this passage in the *Lunheng*, which suggests that its view on Qin knife-and-brush officials might have been well received among Han intellectuals. See *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 12.534.

[336] For a typical example, see Jia Yi's 賈誼 "Essay on the Faults of Qin" (Gui Qin lun 過秦論) in the *Historical Records* (6.276-84). See also Charles Sanft's discussion on the Han portrayal of the Qin in his

knife-and-brush officials. It is worth noting that Zhang Shizhi used the example of the elder to justify that the Bailiff of the Tiger Enclosure should not be promoted. As analyzed in Chapter 3, the term "elder" in early imperial China was frequently used for praising those senior people who were considered merciful and virtuous in contrast to the young (*shaonian*), who would cause disorder and chaos in society. Here, however, the contrast to the elders was the Bailiff of the Tiger Enclosure who had demonstrated his excellence in responding to inquiries on clerical affairs just as those knife-and-brush officials did in the Qin.[337] We can take this passage as a reflection of the change in attitude towards the knife-and-brush officials in the early Han court.

The change of attitude in the early Han court did not lead to a complete exclusion of knife-and-brush officials from the bureaucracy. On the contrary, it was these officials who helped lay the foundation of the Han Empire. An important figure is Xiao He 蕭何, who used the legal and clerical knowledge gained from his scribal positions during the late Qin to contribute to the building of the new empire.

Being called by Sima Qian a knife-and-brush official, Xiao He was highly competent in the letter of the law (*wen wuhai* 文無害)[338] and was made a "Bureau Head in charge of the officials" (*zhuli yuan* 主吏掾)[339] in Pei County during the late Qin. He once left this

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Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 147-54.

[337] As shown in Chapter 3, Table 3, Bailiff (*sefu*) was one of the few officials other than Scribe (*shi*) and Assistant (*zuo*) in Qianling County that would handle administrative documents by himself.

[338] The word *wen* refers to *wen fa* 文法 (the letter of the law). For the term *wuhai*, see *LSS*, 1416, n. 66.

[339] The meaning of the term *zhuli yuan* is ambiguous. Sima Zhen, an annotator to the *Historical Reccords* in the Tang dynasty, argues that *zhuli yuan* was the Bureau Head of the Bureau of Merit (*gongcao yuan* 功曹掾). See *Shiji*, 53.2013. However, Xun Yue 荀悅, who compiled the *Qian Han ji* 前漢紀 mostly based on the *Hanshu* in 203 CE, says that Xiao He was an official in charge of judiciary affairs in Pei County (*Pei zhu yuli* 沛主獄吏). See *Liang Hanji*, 1.4. Newly excavated documents shed new light on the problem. Tsuchiguchi

position temporarily to work as an Accessory Scribe in Sishui Commandery (*gei sishui zushi shi* 給泗水卒史事),[340] and his performance was evaluated the best. When Liu Bang and his generals arrived in the Qin capital of Xianyang, Xiao He was the only one who realized the value of the statutes, ordinances, maps and documents stored in the offices of Chief Minister (*chengxiang* 丞相) and Chief Prosecutor (*yushi dafu* 御史大夫). Thanks to these materials, Liu Bang was able to know "all the strategic defense points of the empire, the population and relative strength of the various districts, and the ills and grievances of the people" 天下阨塞，戶口多少，彊弱之處，民所疾苦者.[341] Despite not physically taking part in any fighting in the civil war during the late Qin, his merit in the founding of the Han dynasty was considered the highest among Liu Bang's followers. He is also credited with compiling the *Statutes in Nine Fascicles* (*jiuzhang lü* 九章律) based on the Qin laws, which was considered a crucial part of Han legislation.[342] After Liu Bang's death in 195 BCE, Xiao

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Fuminori points out that the term *zhuli* in the Liye material (slip 8-272) could refer to the Scribe Director who was working in the Bureau of the Officials (*li cao* 吏曹) in Qianling. See Tsuchiguchi, "Shin dai no reishi to sō," 8 and 46-7, n. 101. As for the term *yuan*, Li Yingchun's 李迎春research on the excavated Han slips from Juyan shows that it was a position held by the scribes who were in charge of their affiliated Bureaus. See Li Yingchun, "Lun juyan Han jian 'zhuguan' chengwei: jiantan Han dai 'yuan' 'shi' chengwei zhi guanxi" 論居延漢簡「主官」稱謂：兼談漢代「掾」、「史」稱謂之關係, in Gansu jiandu bowuguan 甘肅簡牘博物館 et al., eds., *Jinta Juyan yizhi yu sichouzhilu lishi wenhua yanjiu* 金塔居延遺址與絲綢之路歷史文化研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2014), 318-21. Despite its ambiguity, it is safe to say that *zhuli yuan* was a position supposed to be held by scribes.

[340] Hou Xudong 侯旭東 argues that the term *jishi* 給事 could refer to the practice that an official temporarily leaves his current position to work at another office. See Hou Xudong, "Changsha zoumalou sanguo Wu jian suojian geili yu lizidi: Cong Han dai de 'geishi' shuoqi" 長沙走馬樓三國吳簡所見給吏與吏子弟：從漢代的「給事」說起, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 2011.3: 23.

[341] *Shiji*, 53.2014. Translation after Burton Watson trans., *Records of the Grand Historian of China: Translation from the* Shih Chi *of Ssu-ma Ch'ien* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), 1: 126.

[342] The title *jiuzhang* (nine fascicles) could be just a general indication of its size, meaning "many fascicles." No evidence suggests that it refers to nine specific statutes. See *LSS*, 80.

He continuously gained Empress Dowager Lü's trust and kept serving in the position of Chancellor of State (*xiangguo* 相國) until his death in 193 BCE.[343]

Xiao He was not the only late Qin knife-and-brush official who had contributed to the building of the Han dynasty. Some other well-known examples include: Zhang Cang 張蒼, who had been a Censor (*yushi* 御史) at the late Qin court, was enfeoffed as a Marquis (*liehou* 列侯) in charge of the forwarding of account books (*zhuji* 主計) for four years, and subsequently, served as a Chief Minister for more than ten years, in the early Han; Cao Shen 曹參, who had been a Bureau Head of the Bureau of Legal Cases in Pei (*Pei yuyuan* 沛獄掾) in the late Qin, succeeded Xiao He to become the Chief Minister under the reign of Emperor Hui; The Zhou brothers, Zhou Chang 周昌 and Zhou Ke 周苛, both had worked as Accessory Scribes in Qin Sishui Commandery, successively became the Chief Prosecutor under the reign of Emperor Gao.[344] It is without doubt that there had been many more late Qin knife-and-brush officials who had continually served in the early Han government but had never been named in any transmitted text. It was these officials who founded the Han administration.

The fact that a few knife-and-brush officials like Xiao He had earned reputations in the course of the building of the Han Empire did not significantly change the general impression of these officials during the Han. In Han transmitted texts, they mostly appear as a group of dishonorable officials who were notorious for manipulating the administrative and legal systems. A typical example is Zhang Tang 張湯, who was the son of Assistant Magistrate

[343] *Shiji*, 53.2013-20.

[344] Ibid., 54.2021; 96.2675-82.

of Chang'an. Zhang Tang was known for his familiarity with legal processes and documents since childhood. Zhang Tang's father once flogged him because of his negligence in letting a rat steal meat from their house when his father left for work. Zhang Tang then set up a trial to prosecute the rat and went through all the legal processes just as in a real trial. His familiarity with legal processes and documents greatly surprised his father who then entrusted him the task of writing judiciary documents (*shuyu* 書獄). After Zhang Tang grew up, he served in multiple scribal and judiciary positions in the local and central administrations. In 126 BCE, he was made Commandant of the Court (*tingwei* 廷尉), because of his work in recompiling the Han statutes and ordinances. Yet, in the meantime, his severity and harshness in dealing with legal matters raised serious criticism.[345] The most notable criticism was from Ji An 汲黯 who was known as a follower of the Huang-Lao tradition advocating a policy of "non-action" (*wuwei* 無為) in governing people.[346]

According to the *Historical Records*, Ji An debated with Zhang Tang on various issues at the imperial court. Being angry at Zhang Tang, who always strictly followed the letter of the law into the most trivial details, Ji An once cursed him:

> 天下謂刀筆吏不可以為公卿，果然。
> People in the world say that knife-and-brush officials have no business becoming high government officials. How right they are![347]

[345] Ibid., 122.3137-8.

[346] Ibid., 120.3105. For the Huang-Lao tradition in early Han China, see Hans van Ess, "The Meaning of Huang-Lao in 'Shi ji' and 'Han shu,'" *Etudes chinoises* 12.2 (1993): 161-77; Robin D. S. Yates, *Five lost classics: Tao, Huang-lao, and Yin-yang in Han China* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997), 3-46; Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 340-51.

[347] *Shiji*, 120.3108. Translation after Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 2: 347, with modifications.

On another occasion when Zhang Tang and other officials frequently submitted doubtful cases for imperial decision in order to seek favor,[348] Ji An strongly criticized this practice:

> 刀筆吏專深文巧詆，陷人於罪，使不得反其真，以勝為功。
> Knife-and-brush officials are intent only on making the laws more severe and thinking up clever ways to ruin people—trapping them into committing some offense, making it impossible for them to tell the truth, and then gloating over your victory!"[349]

Ironically, Zhang Tang's downfall was due to the manipulation of laws and documents by other knife-and-brush officials. It happened when Zhang Tang had been Chief Prosecutor for seven years. He committed suicide because of the charges brought against him by three Senior Scribes of the Chief Minister (*chengxiang zhangshi* 丞相長史).[350]

It is worth noting that Sima Qian places Zhang Tang along with ten other persons[351] under the title "Biography of Harsh Officials" (*kuli liezhuan* 酷吏列傳) in the *Historical Records*. As William H. Nienhauser Jr. indicates, these persons are thematically linked with a string of keywords such as *yanku* 嚴酷 (severe and harsh), *baoku* 暴酷 (fiercely severe), *wenshen* 文深 (to follow the letter of the law to the extreme), and *shenke* 深刻 (extremely brutal).[352] Moreover, it is worth emphasizing that three of these persons (Zhao Yu, Zhang

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[348] For submitting doubtful cases, see *LSS*, 171-80.

[349] *Shiji*, 120.3108. Translation after Watson, *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 2: 347, with modifications.

[350] *Shiji*, 122.3142-3.

[351] They are: Zhi Dou 郅都, Ning Cheng 寧成, Zhou Yangyou 周陽由, Zhao Yu 趙禹, Yi Zong 義縱, Wang Wenshu 王溫舒, Yin Qi 尹齊, Yang Pu 楊僕, Jian Xuan 減宣, and Du Zhou 杜周.

[352] William H. Nienhauser Jr., "A Reexamination of 'The Biographies of the Reasonable Officials' in the *Records of the Grand Historian*," *Early China* 16 (1991): 213.

Tang, Yin Qi) were called knife-and-brush officials by Sima Qian or other contemporaries; four of them (Zhao Yu, Zhang Tang, Jian Xuan, and Du Zhou) in the biography received recommendations for promotion because they were highly competent (*wuhai*) in their assigned duties; seven of them (Zhao Yu, Zhang Tang, Wang Wenshu, Yin Qi, Yang Pu, Jian Xuan and Du Zhou) began their career as scribal or judiciary officials in the local administration,[353] and eventually secured a higher position such as Commandant of the Court or Chief Prosecutor in the central government. I suggest that the "Biography of Harsh Officials" in the *Historical Records* not only initiated a genre of biographical writings in traditional Chinese historiography, but also created a notorious image of the scribes and knife-and-brush officials within the textual tradition.

Noticeably, Sima Qian also created another genre of biographical writings parallel to the "Biography of Harsh Officials"—the "Biography of Reasonable Officials" (*xunli liezhuan* 循吏列傳). In the preface to the "Biography of Reasonable Officials," Sima Qian empresses his view on these two types of officials: "As long as officials fulfill their duties and act according to reason, they can effect their rule. What need is there for severity?" 奉職循理，亦可以為治，何必威嚴哉.[354] As modern scholars observe, the persons included in the "Biography of Reasonable Officials" are all from the pre-Qin period, and the ways they adopted in governing people were in accordance to the Huang-Lao tradition. Indeed, the reasonable officials acted as a contrast to those harsh officials who were mostly active

[353] Zhi Dou, Ning Cheng, Zhou Yangyou, and Yi Zong began their career as Court Gentlemen (*lang* 郎) guarding within the palace compounds. For the *lang*-titles, see Yen, "Qin Han langli zhidu kao," 89-143; Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 24; Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China*, 131-32.

[354] Translation after Nienhauser, "A Reexamination of 'The Biographies of the Reasonable Officials,'" 216.

under the reign of Emperor Wu. It is considered a subtle way that Sima Qian had adopted to criticize Emperor Wu's policy of employing harsh officials.[355]

In fact, the portrayal of scribes in the Han textual tradition kept changing according to the transitions of political culture. As Confucian ideology became more influential among Han intellectuals after the reign of Emperor Wu,[356] the idea of "reasonable officials" changed accordingly. At the time when Ban Gu compiling the *History of the Han*, only those officials whose ways of governing people were in line with Confucian ideology were considered as reasonable officials.[357] In the meantime, the scribes fell into the dichotomy of legal clerks and Confucian scholars. The term *wenli* is first seen in the *Historical Records* in which Xiao He, Cao Shen and Chief Minister Wei 魏丞相 are considered the representatives.[358] Sima Qian comments that, "Xiao [He] and Cao [Shen] are both legal clerks and concerned only for themselves" 蕭、曹等皆文吏，自愛.[359] In an edict issued

[355] See Ying-shih Yu 余英時, "Han dai xunli yu wenhua chuanbo" 漢代循吏與文化傳播, in Yu Yingshi, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* 士與中國文化 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987), 151-55. One may also note that Sima Qian in his letter to Ren An has at least twice implied that he suffered from the torture by the judiciary officials when he was undergoing castration. This might explain his attitude towards the judiciary scribes. See *Hanshu* 62.2730-32.

[356] Scholars tend to call it the "triumph of Confucianism." Mark Edward Lewis explains that it was a result of long-term intellectual and social development. See Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, chap. 8. Liang Cai attributes it to the result of a political event. She argues that the "triumph of Confucianism" at the Han court did not happen after the occurrence of the witchcraft scandal (91—87 BCE) under the reign of Emperor Wu, which created a power vacuum for the rise of Confucian officials. See Liang Cai, *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 113-97. I follow the convention of translating *ru* as "Confucian." For a famous critique of this translation, see Michael Nylan, "A Problematic Model: The Han 'Orthodox Synthesis,' Then and Now,'" Kai-wing Chow, On-cho Ng, and John B. Henderson eds., *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1999), 17-56, in which the author refers *ru* to as "Classicist."

[357] *Hanshu*, 89.3623-43. See also Yu, "Han dai xunli yu wenhua chuanbo,"155-7.

[358] *Shiji*, 8.350; 96.2686.

[359] Ibid., 8.350.

in 64 BCE and now preserved in the *History of the Han*, Emperor Xuan tells us what qualified as a *wenli*:

> 獄者萬民之命，所以禁暴止邪，養育羣生也。能使生者不怨，死者不恨，則可謂文吏矣。
> Criminal trials are that [on which] the fate of the myriad common people [hangs]. They are the means of arresting violence and of stopping evil, of rearing and developing all living beings. If anyone can make the living be without cause of resentment [against him] and the dead [whom he has sentenced] be without hatred [for him], he may indeed be called a legal clerk.[360]

But the problem is that, as the edict continues, most *wenli* did not perform like the ruler expected. They manipulated the letter of the law with deceptive intentions. As a result, people could not receive a fair judgement and the ruler had no means of knowing the truth concealed by them.

The opposite group to the legal clerks was the Confucian scholars who were immersed in the Confucian Classics. A record in the *History of the Han* shows that under the reign of Emperor Cheng, the Confucian scholars and legal clerks had respectively formed their own factions (*pengdang* 朋黨) against each other.[361] The dichotomy of the Confucian scholars and legal clerks became one of the dominant political discourses at the Eastern Han court, which is evident in the writings of Han intellectuals like Wang Chong.[362] Noticeably, this dichotomy is even reflected at the institutional level. After the reform of the recommendation system (*chaju* 察舉) undertaken in 132 CE, Confucian scholars and legal

[360] *Hanshu*, 8. 255. Translation after Homer H. Dubs trans., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1938), 2: 231-2.

[361] *Hanshu*, 86.3485.

[362] See *Lunheng jiaoshi*, 12.533-78; 13.579-89.

clerks who were recommended under the title "Filial [Sons] and Incorrupt [Officials]" (*xiaolian* 孝廉) were mandated to take an exam on different subjects upon their arrival in the capital. While the Confucian scholars would be tested on knowledge of interpreting the Confucian Classics, the legal clerks would be evaluated on ability to write legal and administrative documents. Clearly, Confucian scholars and legal clerks now became two different tracks of official appointments.[363] The dichotomy of Confucian scholars and legal clerks in the Han textual tradition further strengthened the stereotypical image of the scribes and knife-and-brush officials.[364]

To what degree can the portrayals of scribes—knife-and-brush officials, harsh officials, and legal clerks—in Han transmitted texts help understand the real life of being a scribe in the Qin and Han bureaucracy? It is important to note that while criticizing the scribes manipulating the letter of the law, Han intellectuals had already noticed that the Han laws were too complicated to the extent that even a trained specialist would encounter difficulties when dealing with them. Ban Gu tells us that:

> 律令凡三百五十九章，大辟四百九條，千八百八十二事，死罪決事比萬三千四百七十二事。文書盈於几閣，典者不能徧睹。
> The total of statutes and ordinances have 359 sections: for the death penalty 409 articles (covering) 1882 cases, and 13,472 cases of judicial precedents for crimes (deserving) death. ***Writings and documents filled tables and shelves and the officials in charge were unable to look at them all.***[365]

[363] See Yan Buke, *Chaju zhidu bianqian shigao* 察舉制度變遷史稿 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2009), 57-65; Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 136.

[364] It is worth noting that the dichotomy of Confucian scholars and legal clerks cannot apply to every official in the empire. There were officials who were both immersed in the Confucian classics and competent in legal and administrative affairs during the Han period. For a representative study of the Confucian scholars and legal clerks in Han China, see Yan Buke, *Shidafu zhengzhi yansheng shigao*.

[365] *Hanshu*, 23.1101. Translation after *RCL*, 338, with modifications.

Ban Gu's observation is in accordance with the record in the *Discourses on Salt and Iron* (Yantielun 鹽鐵論) in which the "literati" (*wenxue* 文學) comments that even the officials who were familiar with Han statutes and ordinances would have found them confusing.[366] Thanks to the newly excavated legal and administrative documents, we are now able to know how scribes actually achieved their assigned tasks and what difficulties they encountered at work. In light of these new materials, I argue that the role of scribes in the Qin and Han empires cannot be merely subsumed into the stereotypes shown in Han transmitted texts. The following sections explore the anxiety of being a scribe in the Qin and Han empires by studying the preparing of an annual account book in a commandery.

The Nightmare of Scribes:

The Preparing of an Annual Account Book in a Commandery

When commenting on early Mesopotamian accounting, Marc Van De Mieroop, a specialist on the ancient Near East, remarks:

> The greatest challenge to the ancient accountants was not the recording of a single transfer, but the combination of a multitude of transfers into a summary. When information piles up and is not synthesized, it becomes useless: ***a good bureaucrat needs to be able to compress data***. The summary account requires that the scribe combine information from various records, and more important, that he excludes what is redundant or overly specific. He also has to organize the results in a

[366] *Yantielun jiaozhu (dingben)* 鹽鐵論校注(定本), collated and annotated by Wang Liqi 王利器 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuchu, 1992), 10. 566. Han Shufeng 韓樹峰 has discussed this problem in detail in a recently published article. See his "Han Jin falü de qingyuehua zhi lu" 漢晉法律的清約化之路, *Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 86.2 (2015): 272-80.

> systematic whole. In the end he must account for every unit for which he is responsible.[367]

Van De Mieroop then explains how the material restrictions of clay tablets in Mesopotamia would further complicate the work of the scribes: "[W]ith clay they could not build up a single account over time, cumulatively."[368] Because no record or change could be made after a clay tablet fully dried, the Mesopotamian scribes had to utilize the time to inscribe all the data on a clay tablet at a single moment. The job became even more challenging when compiling a summary account, since it would involve much more data which was extracted from numerous primary accounts. Given the tremendous amount of documents that the Mesopotamian scribes had to deal with, Van De Mieroop reminds his readers that we should not underestimate the complexity of their work, and should not deny them the respect they deserve (Figure 10).[369]

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[367] Marc Van De Mieroop, "Accounting in Early Mesopotamia: Some Remarks," in Michael Hudson et al., eds., *Creating Economic Order: Record-keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East: A Colloquium Held at the British Museum, November 2000* (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2004), 49.

[368] Ibid.

[369] Ibid., 54. In another article, Van De Mieroop has shown us the difficulty and complexity of drafting a year's summary in the Ur III period. The title of this section is modified from the title of that article. See Marc Van De Mieroop, "An Accountant's Nightmare: the Drafting of a Year's Summary," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 46/47 (1999/2000): 111-29. For a study of the Mesopotamian scribes, see Pearce, "The Scribes and Scholars of Ancient Mesopotamia," 2265-78.

Figure 10: Neo-Sumerian account concerning the labor performance of female workers in a mill. After Hans J. Nissen, Peter Damerow and Robert K. Englund, *Archaic Bookkeeping: Early Writing and Techniques of Economic Administration in the Ancient Near East*, translated by Paul Larsen (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 52, fig. 44.

The Qin and Han scribes were not more fortunate than the Mesopotamian scribes. Although the major writing materials—bamboo and wood—in the Qin and Han were more advanced, which allowed the scribes to make a cumulative record over time or correct errors by scraping off existing writing, they still had to face the problems caused by the material restrictions of bamboo and wood. Hsing I-tien has brought our attention to the problems caused by the weight and size of bamboo and wooden documents. To take the *Historical Records* as an example, which is composed of 130 chapters, 526,500 graphs, Hsing estimates that it would have used about 13,855 bamboo or wooden slips. Supposing that Sima Qian used bamboo to write the *Historical Records,* it would weigh about 58.33

kilograms![370] In addition to the weight of bamboo and wooden documents, their size was a real headache for scribes. Again, Hsing takes the *Historical Records* as an example. He estimates that it would occupy 284,310 cubic centimeters! It would require at least 225 times of space when compared to a modern edition of the *Historical Records*.[371] We can imagine that the Qin and Han scribes would have to overcome a series of problems, including the transportation, storing, filing and writing of documents, caused by the weight and size of bamboo and wooden documents.[372]

The Qin and Han scribes faced the same challenge as the Mesopotamian scribes: they had to compress tremendous data into a summary account under the physical constraints of the writing materials. Given the vast scale of the Qin and Han empires, their job might seem even more difficult. I argue that there was a hierarchy existing among the administrative documents parallel to the bureaucratic hierarchy during the Qin and Han periods. At the top of the bureaucratic hierarchy was the emperor. A famous portrayal of the First Emperor of Qin in the *Historical Records* reads:

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[370] Hsing I-tien, "Handai jiandu de tiji, zhongliang he shiyong: yi zhongyanyuan shiyusuo cang juyan hanjian wei li 漢代簡牘的體積、重量和使用──以中研院史語所藏居延漢簡為例," in Hsing I-tien, *Di bu ai bao: Handaijiandu* 地不愛寶：漢代簡牘 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2011), 12. For another attempt to calculate the number and the weight of the bamboo slips that had been used for the writing of the *Historical Records*, see Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 708.

[371] Hsing, "Handai jiandu de tiji, zhongliang he shiyong," 14.

[372] Ibid., 14-40. See also Han, "Han Jin falü de qingyuehua zhi lu," 275-80. It is highly possible that, as Wilkinson suggests, the limited circulation of the *Historical Records* in the Han was due to the physical constraints of the writing materials. See Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 708. Given the physical constraints of the *Shiji*, Nienhauser speculates that Sima Qian might have received assistance from his subordinates at the office of the Director of the Grand Scribes when composing the *Historical Records*. See William H. Nienhauser Jr., "A Note on a Textual Problem in the *Shih Chi* and Some Speculations Concerning the Compilation of the Hereditary Houses," *T'oung Pao* 89.3 (2003): 53-8.

> 天下之事無小大皆決於上，上至以衡石量書，日夜有呈，不中呈不得休息。
> Things in the world, great or small, are all decided by His Highness. His Highness even measures the weight of his paperwork by the *shi*. Every day and night he has an allotment of work. He does not rest until he meets the allotment.[373]

The passage tells us that the First Emperor would never entrust his power to others. In order to achieve that, he ruled over the world with documents, which allowed him to extend his power without the restriction of time and space. His ambition is reflected in the quantity of his daily paperwork. Ban Gu has added that, "[The First Emperor] decided on lawsuits in the day-time and put in order the writing during the night. He himself measured the decisions, daily weighing off one *shi*" 晝斷獄，夜理書，自程決事，日縣石之一.[374] One *shi* in the Qin is equivalent to 30.36 kilograms,[375] which is more than half of the weight of an ancient edition of the *Historical Records*!

It is important to note that the documents that the First Emperor read every day and night were those at the top of the hierarchy of documents. No matter how ambitious and energetic the First Emperor was, he would never be able to read every single document within the empire. All the information presented to him therefore had to be highly compressed; otherwise, in Van De Mieroop's words, it becomes useless.[376] It was the

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[373] *Shiji*, 6.258. Translation after Nienhauser ed., *The Grand Scribes' Records,* 1: 150, with modifications.

[374] *Hanshu*, 23.1096. Translation after *RCL*, 332, with modifications.

[375] Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風 chief ed., *Hanyu da zidian (fulu・suoyin)* 漢語大字典(附錄・索引) (Shanghai: Hanyu da zidian chubanshe, 1994), 16.

[376] In most cases, the First Emperor might have only skimmed through the document to look up for useful information. A story regarding Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 and Emperor Wu of Han tells us that it is nearly impossible for everyone to read a document in detail in such speed at that time. It is said that when Dongfang Shuo first reached Chang'an, he submitted an extraordinarily long memorial which was made of 3000 wooden boards, to the throne. Emperor Wu of Han, who was no less dedicated and enthusiastic than the First Emperor of Qin, spent two months to read it in detail. See *Shiji*, 126.3205. See also Wang Zijin 王子今, "Qin shihuang de yuedu sudu" 秦始皇的閱讀速度, *Bolan qunshu* 博覽群書 2008.1: 51-55.

scribes of different administrative levels who synthesized the data from numerous documents into concise reports for His Highness' reference. When cursing the scribes manipulating the administrative and legal systems, Han transmitted texts seldom mention the processes which the scribes would have undertaken to compress useful information to present to the higher authority in the bureaucratic hierarchy, and therefore, we do not realize how challenging the job could be. Fortunately, the newly unearthed evidence from Liye, Songbai, Tianchang and Yinwan in mainland China, and Chŏngbaek-tong in Pyongyang, North Korea shed lights on the processes of the forwarding of accounts undertaken from the district to the commandery-level administrations.

The forwarding of accounts was part of the Qin and Han supervision system, which was initiated during the Warring States period,[377] for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the officials in local governments. Each year, every county-level government[378] in the empire had to report on the numbers of households and opened-up fields, balances of coins and grain, numbers of thieves and robbers, and anything that related to the county administration, to the commandery-level government.[379] Upon receiving the data from its affiliated counties, each commandery-level government had to cross-check (*chou* 讎) all of them and confirm their accuracy, and compile an annual account book before the close of the fiscal year at the end of the ninth month, also the last month of the

[377] Apart from the Qin state, the states of Wei, Qi and Zhao also adopted the system of the forwarding of accounts. See Keng-wang Yen, *Zhongguo difang xingzheng zhidu shi jia bu: Qin Han difang xingzheng zhidu* 中國地方行政制度史甲部: 秦漢地方行政制度 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1961), 257-58; Gao Min 高敏, "Qin Han shangji zhidu shulüe" 秦漢上計制度述略, in Gao Min, *Qin Han shi tantao* 秦漢史探討 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998), 180-81.

[378] The county-level governments include county (*xian* 縣), march (*dao* 道), town (*yi* 邑) and fiefdom (*houguo* 侯國).

[379] The commandery-level governments include commandery (*jun* 郡) and kingdom (*wangguo* 王國).

calendar during the Qin and early Han periods.[380] An Assistant Governor of the Commandery (*jun cheng* 郡丞) or Senior Scribe of the Kingdom (*wangguo zhangshi* 王國長史)[381] would then carry the annual account book along with supplementary account books and registers (*jixie buji* 計偕簿籍)[382] and present them to the central government. During the Western Han, the Chief Minister and Chief Prosecutor and their offices were responsible for evaluating the performance of each commandery-level government, and to decide the reward and punishment of the officials based on the evaluation results. It finally became a regular practice in the Eastern Han that the emperor would personally receive the officials who were responsible for the forwarding of accounts at a ceremony on New Year's Day.[383]

The newly unearthed household registers (*huji* 戶籍) from Liye,[384] household account books (*hukou bu* 戶口簿) of different administrative levels from Songbai,[385] Tianchang[386]

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[380] See Zhang Rongqiang 張榮強, "Cong jiduan jiuyue dao suizhong weiduan: Han Tang jian caizheng niandu de yanbian" 從計斷九月到歲終為斷：漢唐間財政年度的演變, *Beijing shifan daxue xuebao* 北京師範大學學報 2005.1: 80-93.

[381] A personal letter excavated from tomb no. 19 at Tianchang shows that Assistant Governor of the Commandery and Senior Scribe of the Kingdom were the responsible official who forwarded account books from local to central governments. For a recent study of this letter, see Hirose Kunio, "Anhui Tianchang Jizhuang Han mu 'biqie' shudu jieshi" 安徽天長紀莊漢墓「賁且」書牘解釋, *Jianbo yanjiu 2011* 簡帛研究 2011 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 99-100.

[382] These supplementary account books and registers were the primary sources for compiling an annual account book. The central government would use them to cross-check the data on the annual account book. See Wang Guihai 汪桂海, "Han dai de xiaoji yu jixie buji" 漢代的校計與計偕簿籍, *Jianbo yanjiu 2008* 簡帛研究 2008 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2010), 200-2.

[383] See Hou Xudong, "Chengxiang, huangdi yu junguo ji li: Liang Han shangji zhidu bianqian tanwei" 丞相、皇帝與郡國計吏：兩漢上計制度變遷探微, *Zhongguo shi yanjiu* 2014.4: 99-120.

[384] *Liye fajue baogao*, 203-8, board nos. K1-51.

[385] Zhu, "Hanjian de songbai Han dai mudu," 211.

[386] "Anhui Tianchang xi Han mu fajue jianbao," board no. M19: 40-1.

and Chŏngbaek-tong,[387] and collected account book (*jíbù* 集簿) from Yinwan[388] respectively represent different stages in the process of the forwarding of accounts to the central government (Table 7).

locations	**Dating**	**Administrative Affiliations**	**Types of Documents**
Pit no. 11 at Liye, Hunan	222—208 BCE	An unknown district of Qianling County, Dongting Commandery	Household Register
Tomb no. 1 at Songbai, Hubei	139 BCE	Western District of Jiangling County, Nan Commandery	District Household Account Book
Tomb no. 19 at Tianchang, Anhui	120 BCE—9 CE	Dongyang County of Linhuai Commandery	County Household Account Book
Tomb no. 364 at Chŏngbaek-tong, Pyongyang	45 BCE	Lelang Commandery	Commandery Household Account Book
Tomb no. 6 at Yinwan, Jiangsu	c. 16—c. 9 BCE	Donghai Commandery	Commandery Collected Account Book

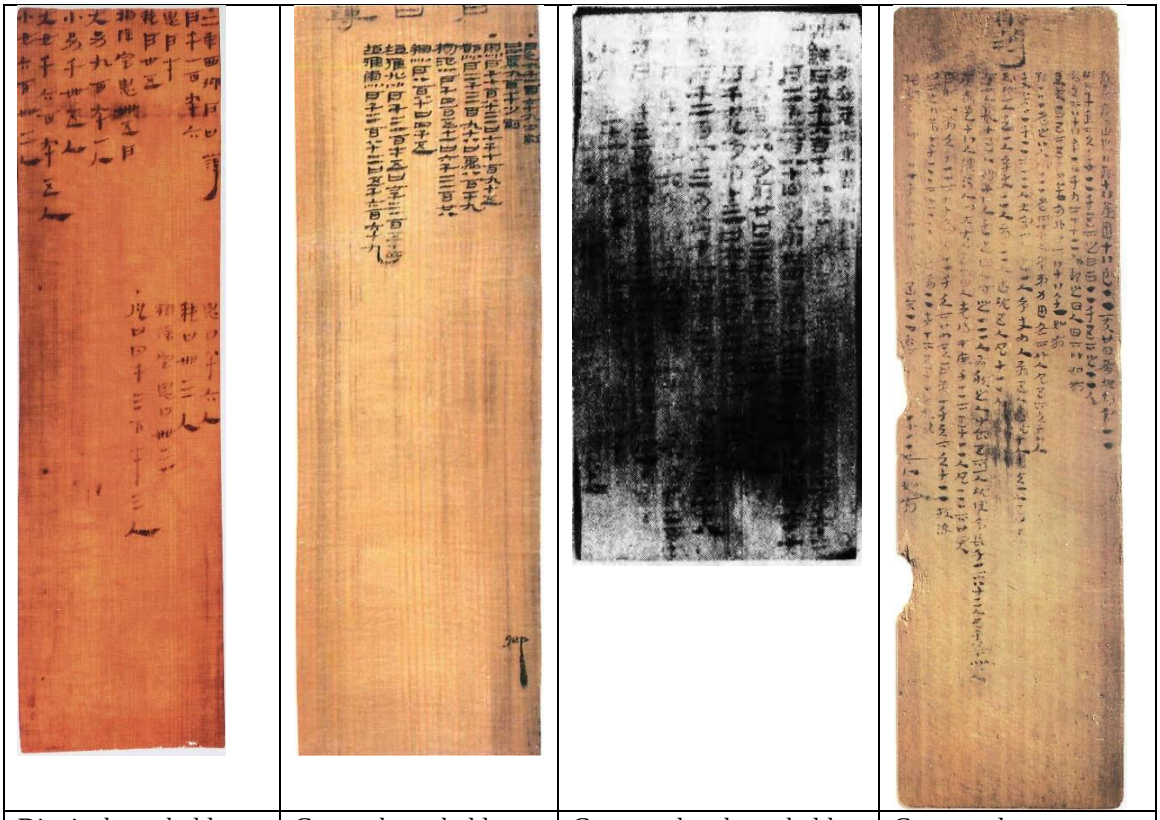
Table 7: Documents related to the forwarding of accounts from Liye, Songbai, Tianchang, Chŏngbaek-tong, and Yiwan

Although the dating of these documents spreads from the late third century BCE to the early first century CE and the geographical locations span from the northeast to the southwest of the Han empire, the consistent material features and similar written format of these documents suggest that the practice of the forwarding of accounts, at least on the material level, had become highly institutionalized during the Qin and Han periods. These documents are all written on a flat rectangular wooden board. The written formats of the documents from Songbai, Tianchang, Chŏngbaek-tong, and Yinwan are particularly similar, each of which is composed of a list of numbers under different names or titles (Figure 11). A hierarchy among these documents parallel to the bureaucratic hierarchy—from the district to

[387] Yun, "Heijō shutsudo 'Rakurō-gun shogen yonen kenbetsu toguchi-bo' kenkyū," 205-36.

[388] *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 77-8, board no.YM6D1.

the commandery-level—is identifiable.



District household account book from Songbai	County household account book from Tianchang	Commandery household account book from Chŏngbaek-tong	Commandery collected account book from Yinwan

Figure 11: Account books of different administrative levels from Songbai, Tianchang, Chŏngbaek-tong, and Yinwan. After Zhu, "Hanjian de songbai Han dai mudu," 211; "Anhui Tianchang xi Han mu fajue jianbao," board no. M19: 40-1; Yun, "Heijō shutsudo 'Rakurō-gun shogen yonen kenbetsu toguchi-bo' kenkyū," board no. 1; *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 77-8, board no.YM6D1.

The collected account book of Donghai Commandery discovered from Yinwan was on the top end of this hierarchy. On the term *jibu* seen on board 1, Hu Guang 胡廣, a specialist of Han rituals and institutions in the second century CE, informs us that:

> 秋冬歲盡，各計縣戶口墾田，錢穀入出，盜賊多少，上其集簿。
> Upon the end of each year, in fall and winter, each county calculates the numbers of households and opened-up fields, the receiving and disbursing of coins and grain, and numbers of thieves and robbers, and submits a ***collected account book*** on these matters.[389]

It was an account book summarizing every detail regarding to the governing of a local administrative unit during the Qin and Han periods.[390] Both the county- and commandery-level governments had to compile their own collected account book and submit to the higher authority. The collected account book of Donghai Commandery excavated from Yinwan was a draft or a copy of the summary account that had been forwarded to the central government for evaluation.[391] This is the kind of documents that would have been read by the Emperor and the highest officials at court. It summaries information of the following aspects with indications of their changes from the previous year:

1. The numbers of counties, towns, fiefdoms, districts, villages, police stations and courier stations;
2. The measured area of the Commandery;
3. The numbers of honorable title-holders including "Three Elders" (*sanlao* 三老), "Filial Son" (*xiao* 孝), "Fraternal Brother" (*di* 弟)[392], and "Diligent Farmer" (*litian* 力田);
4. The number of officials;

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389 *Xu Hanzhi*, 28.3623.

390 It is still in dispute that if we can treat the collected account book as the annual account book. As Xie Guihua 謝桂華 indicates, the term *jìbù* can refer to many different types of account books. But there is no doubt that the collected account book prepared by commandery's government would be forwarded to the central government for evaluation. See Xie Guihua, "Yinwan Han mu jiandu he Xi Han defang xingzheng zhidu" 尹灣漢墓簡牘和西漢地方行政制度, *Wenwu* 1997.1: 42. If the collected account book was not the annual account book, it probably was a type of supplementary account books that forwarded along with the annual account book.

391 Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄 tends to see it a draft of the summary account, since it could explain why there are mistakes recorded on it. See Ge Jianxiong chief ed., *Zhongguo renkou shi* 中國人口史 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2002), 1: 323-7.

392 It could be the variant of the graph *ti* 悌.

5. The numbers of households and individuals;
6. The extent of arable and orchard land;
7. The extent of the land for planting winter wheat (*sumai* 宿麥);
8. The population of different gender and age groups;
9. The extent of the land for planting trees in Spring (*chunzhongshu* 春種樹);
10. The number of households formed and the quantity of grain distributed in accordance with the Ordinance of Spring (*chunling* 春令); and
11. The amounts of the received and disbursed coins and grain.[393]

The information recorded in the collected account book appears to be highly compressed. No name of any individual is mentioned in the collected account book. All the individuals were depersonalized and turned into numbers.[394] What kinds of primary documents the scribes would have gone through in order to summarize the information into a number? The "Statutes on Households" of the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year* gives us some leads. Several types of registers are mentioned in it, including: household register, detailed age register (*nianxi ji* 年細籍), detailed rank register (*juexi* [*ji*] 爵細[籍]), household registers of homesteads and grounds (*zhaiyuan huji* 宅園戶籍), land register indicating neighboring fields (*tianbidi ji* 田比地籍), unified register of agricultural fields (*tianhe ji* 田合籍), and register of agricultural field taxes (*tianzu ji* 田租籍).[395] Despite not being mentioned in the "Statutes on Households," the officials, the honorable title-holders, and the households formed in accordance with the Ordinance of Spring must have had their specific registers. In the same tomb at Yinwan, there are other more detailed account books and

[393] *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 77-8, board no.YM6D1. See also the discussion of this board in Gao Heng 高恒, "Han dai shangji zhidu lunkao"漢代上計制度論考, in Gao Heng, Qin Han jiandu zhong fazhi wenshu jikao 秦漢簡牘中法制文書輯考 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2008), 330-40; Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China*, 60-1.

[394] Current studies reveal that the Qin and Han rulers governed their vast empire through numbers. See Wang, *Writing and the Ancient State*, 231-7; Barbieri-Low, "Coerced Migration and Resettlement in the Qin Imperial Expansion," 30.

[395] *ENLL*, 222-3; *LSS*, 798-9.

registers buried along with the collected account book regarding the officials of Donghai Commandery.[396] As for the transactions of coins and grain, the checking tallies examined in Chapter 3 could be the primary records. All of these documents could be the primary sources for compiling a collected account book. In the following I shall use the household documents excavated from Liye, Songbai, Tianchang and Chŏngbaek-tong to demonstrate how the numbers of households and individuals were calculated and finally became an entry in a collected account book that would be forwarded to the central government.

The Qin registers excavated from Liye give us some physical examples of the household registers in early imperial China.[397] As K27 reads:

Row 1 南陽戶人荊不更蠻強	Nanyang [village] householder Man Qiang, of Chu rank Service Rotation Exempt
Row 2 妻曰嗛	Wife called Xian
Row 3 子小上造□	Child, of Minor's Sovereign's Accomplished rank…
Row 4 子小女子駝	Child, minor female, Tuo
Row 5 臣曰聚	Slave called Ju
伍長	Chief of the Group of Five[398]

These Qin registers provide information about the size of the household, the legal status and gender of each member, and their relations to the householder. As for the age of each member, it was recorded in a separate "age register" (*nianji* 年籍) which is similar to the

[396] *Yinwan Han mu jiandu*, 79-102, board nos. YM6D2-5. For a brief introduction of these boards, see Loewe, *The Men Who Governed Han China*, 64-75.

[397] They are also the only physical example of household registers in early imperial China we have so far found, but there is no doubt that the format and content of Han registers might have changed at some point.

[398] *Liye fajue baogao*, 203. Translation after *LSS*, 785, with modifications.

"detailed age register" mentioned in the "Statutes on Households."[399] The collected account book from Yinwan records that Donghai Commandery had 266,290 households, which means there had been 266,290 household registers! The large number of household registers required a systematic management. According to the "Statutes on Households," the eighth month of each year was the month for household registration. Bailiff of the District, his subordinate officials, and Scribe Director of the county-level government would together examine the household registers.[400] After the household inspection was done, a copy of the registers would be sent to the county-level government for record. It is worth noting that between the eighth month and close of fiscal year there is only one month. We can imagine how stressful the work could have been.

Meanwhile, each district had to extract useful information from these household registers and compile a district household account book to submit to the county-level government. As revealed in the wooden board from Songbai, a district household account book included information on the number of households, the increased (*xi* 息) and reduced (*hao* 耗) numbers of households and individuals, and the population of different sex and age groups in the district. The first five lines of the inscription of this board read:

[399] *Liye fajue baogao*, 194, slip no. J1(16)9. Hsing I-tien argues that "household register" was a broad concept and a general term that covered a range of records with different content and designations. Information of a household such as the age of each household member could be separately recorded on different types of register. See Hsing I-tien, "Qin-Han Census, Tax and Corvée Administration," in *Birth of an Empire*, 160-1. See also Charles Sanft, "Population Records from Liye: Ideology in Practice," in *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China*, ed. Yuri Pines et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 255-8.

[400] *ENLL*, 222-7; *LSS*, 798-803. Yun Jaeseug suggests that the Scribe Director sent from the county-level government was the one who worked in the Bureau of Households. See Yun, "Qin Han hukou tongji zhidu yu hukou bu," 82. For a detailed research on the household inspection held in the eight month, see Hsing, "Han dai anbi zai xian huo zai xiang," 211-48.

・二年西鄉戶口薄(簿) [line 1]
・Household Account Book of Western District in the Second Year [of Jian Yuan]" (139 BCE)[401]
戶千一百九十六 [line 2]
Households: 1,196
息戶七十 [line 3]
Increased number of households: 70
耗戶三十五 [line 4]
Reduced number of households: 35
相除定息四十五戶 [line 5]
Subtract the reduced number of households from the increased number of households: 45[402]

A careful reader would immediately notice a calculation error on line 5. The increased number of households minus the reduced number of households should be thirty-five, which is ten households fewer than the number calculated by the responsible scribe. Although we do not know how such an error would be punished under the Han laws, as will be discussed in the next section, the Qin ruler apparently considered it a serious crime. Under the tight schedule, errors and mistakes easily occurred during the process of the forwarding of accounts.

Upon receiving the copy of the household registers and the district household account books, the county-level government had to cross-check all the data and compile another household account book. A physical example is the household account book discovered from Tianchang. The first two lines present the total numbers of the households and individuals in the subordinated districts of Dongyang County with indications of changes from the previous year:

[401] The dating of this household account book after Yun, "Qin Han hukou tongji zhidu yu hukou bu," 86.

[402] For the image of this board, see Zhu, "Hanjian de songbai Han dai mudu," 211. For transcription of this board, see Yun, "Qin Han hukou tongji zhidu yu hukou bu," 85.

・戶凡九千一百六十九少前 [line 1]
・Households in total: 9,169; less than the previous year.
口四萬九百七十少前 [line 2]
Population: 40,970; less than the previous year.[403]

Both the district and county-level government household account books then had to be forwarded to the commandery-level government along with the county's collected account book for inspection. The commandery-level government would then produce its own household account book listing the numbers of the households and individuals in each of its subordinated county-level governments with indications of changes from the previous year. The "Collected Account Book on the Numbers of Households in Lelang Commandery's Counties in the Fourth Year of Chu Yuan (45 BCE)" (*Lelang jun chuyuan sinian xianbie hukou duoshao jibu* 樂浪郡初元四年縣別戶口多少集 簿) discovered at Chŏngbaek-tong, in Pyongyang, North Korea, is a typical example. As the entry regarding Chaoxian 朝鮮 County reads:

・朝鮮戶九千六百七十八多前九十三口五萬六千八百九十多前千八百六十二[404]
・Chaoxian [County]: 9678 households; 93 more than the previous year. 56,890 individuals; 1,862 more than the previous year.[405]

[403] "Anhui Tianchang xi Han mu fajue jianbao," 11, board no. M19: 40-1.

[404] Transcription after Yun, "Qin Han hukou tongji zhidu yu hukou bu," 91.

[405] If we divide the number of increased individuals by the number of increased households, each household should have at least twenty persons, which is much larger than the size of a normal household—"five-person household" (*wu kou zhi jia* 五口之家)—during the Han. Would that be a careless written error, an exaggeration for a better result during the annual evaluation, or a true record reflecting a special household system on the frontier area? For household system during the Han, see Ming Chiu Lai, *Family Morphology in Han China: 206 B.C.—A.D. 220* (PhD Dissertation: University of Toronto, 1995).

Eventually, the sums of the numbers of the households and individuals would become one of the entries in a commandery's collected account book that would be forwarded to the central government. The hierarchy of these documents can be recovered in Figure 12.

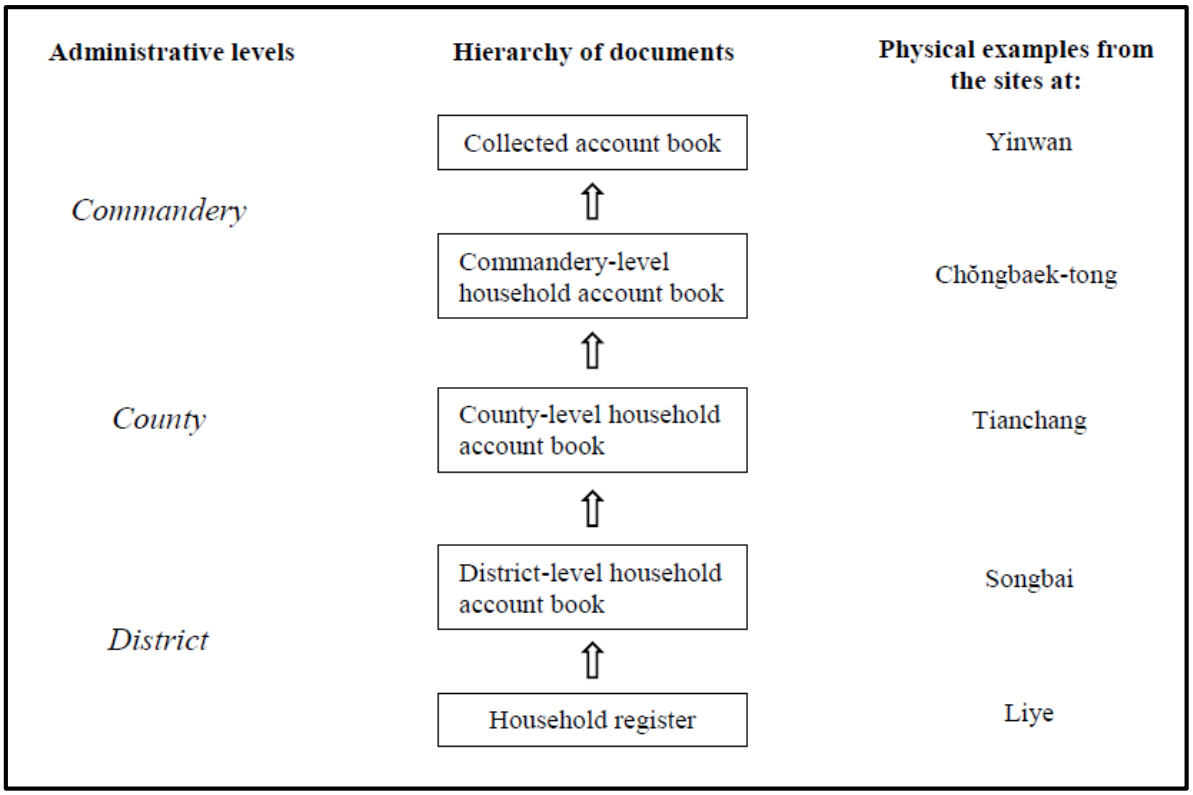

Figure 12: A hierarchy among household register, household account book, and collected account book

It is important to indicate that the numbers of the households and individuals in a commandery only constituted part of the information that would be forwarded to the central government. Each of the entries that appeared in a collected account book must have had undergone a similar process of extraction and compression of data. Besides, we should not forget that the scribes had to achieve this job with the physical constraints of bamboo and wooden documents and a tight schedule, which made it even more challenging. Although

we might never know the exact amount of work that would have been generated during the process of preparing an annual account book, the complexity and difficulty of the job should not be underestimated. Moreover, as will be discussed below, the Qin and Han governments had established severe legal regulations to make sure that it was achieved properly and satisfactorily.

In accordance with the records on the complexity of Han laws in the *History of the Han* and the *Discourses on Salt and Iron* mentioned in the first section, my recovery of a hierarchy of documents during the process of the forward of accounts in this section questions the assumption that a scribe in early imperial China could easily manipulate the laws and documents to their own benefit. The next section again takes the forwarding of accounts as an example and considers the anxiety of being a low-ranked scribe in the conflict between the state and his superior. I argue that he would have faced the dilemma of choosing to follow the state's laws and his superior's order on many occasions during his career.

The Anxiety of Being a Scribe in the Conflicts between the State and their Superior

Despite serving in a highly centralized empire, officials during the Qin and Han periods did not always act according to the state's interest. Corruption was endemic in the official system.[406] Since the annual evaluation based on the account books could directly affect the

[406] See Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, "Intransigent and Corrupt Officials in Early Imperial China," in *Behaving Badly in Early and Medieval China*, ed. N. Harry Rothschild and Leslie V. Wallace (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017).

career of the heads of local governments, corruption and cheating happened frequently during the process of the forwarding of accounts. A physical example is the collected account book discovered from Yinwan. Scholars like Gao Dalun 高大倫, Lee Sung-kyu 李成珪 and Hsing I-tien have questioned the authenticity of the statistics that were recorded in the collected account book, suspecting that some of them were made up by the officials in Donghai Commandery in order to receive a better result in the annual evaluation.[407] Evidence in Han transmitted texts well attests to their view. It was not uncommon among the heads of local governments to report forged data for the purposes of earning reputation, receiving a reward or avoiding punishment. In 107 BCE, Emperor Wu had already complained that the local governments did not update the increasing number of vagrants (*liumin* 流民) within their territory.[408] The following edict issued by Emperor Xuan in 49 BCE shows that the account books forwarded from the local governments at the time did not reflect reality:

> 方今天下少事，繇役省減，兵革不動，而民多貧，盜賊不止，其咎安在？上計簿，具文而已，務為欺謾，以避其課。
> Just now the empire has very little trouble, forced labor and military service have been dispensed with or lessened, and the armies are not in motion, yet there is much poverty among the common people and robberies and thefts have not stopped. Wherein lies the cause [for this situation? It lies] in sending [from the various parts of

[407] Gao Dalun, "Yinwan Han mu mudu jibu zhong hukou tongji ziliao yanjiu" 尹灣漢墓木牘《集簿》中戶口統計資料研究, Lishi yanjiu 歷史研究 1998.5: 110-23; Lee Sung-kyu, "Xuxiang de taiping: Han diguo zhi ruixiang yu shangji de zaozuo" 虛像的太平：漢帝國之符瑞與上計的造作, *Guoji jiandu xuehui huikan* 國際簡牘學會會刊 4 (2002): 279-315; Hsing, "Qin-Han Census, Tax and Corvée Administration," 182-4. Despite believing that the statistics on the collected account book from Yinwan are mostly reliable, Ge Jianxiong 葛劍雄 admits that the numbers of senior people over 70 years old are too large to the extent that cannot be true. See Ge Jianxiong, *Zhongguo renkou shi*, 1: 326.

[408] *Hanshu*, 46.2199. Movement of population was undesirable in an agricultural-based empire and considered a threat to social stability. See Hsing I-tien, "Cong antu chongqian lun Qin Han shidai de ximin yu qianxi xing" 從安土重遷論秦漢時代的徙民與遷徙刑, in *Zhiguo anbang*, 62-100. In this sense, the Donghai Commandery's government had enough motivation to falsify the number of population increased by settling vagrants (*huo liu* 獲流).

> the empire to the central government, yearly] account books which are merely padding and strive to deceive and lie [to Us], in order to avoid a trial for [blamable conduct].[409]

In a memorial submitted to Emperor Yuan in 44 BCE, Gong Yu 貢禹, the Chief Prosecutor at the court, criticizes that the commanderies and kingdoms "selected those who are skillful in administrative writings and familiar with [the writing of] account books and are able to deceive the superiors to serve in the higher position" 擇便巧史書習於計簿能欺上府者，以為右職.[410] There are some real cases of this corrupt practice recorded in Han transmitted texts. In 67 BCE, Chancellor (*xiang* 相) of Jiaodong 膠東 Kingdom Wang Cheng 王成 had claimed that eighty thousands vagrants self-registered under his governing. Yet it was later discovered that Wang Cheng had inflated the number so as to receive a reward from the emperor.[411] Another record concerns the Governor of Shanggu 上谷 Commandery Hao Xian 郝賢 who was held liable for falsifying the information about conscripted soldiers and government-owned properties in the annual account book that had been forwarded to the central government in 121 BCE.[412]

The Qin and Han rulers were well aware of the problem. To prevent such deception, they established severe laws to monitor the authenticity and accuracy of the data recorded in the account books. Two entries of the Qin "Statutes on Checking" state that:

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[409] *Hanshu*, 8.273; Translation after Dubs trans., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, 2: 262-3, with modifications.

[410] *Hanshu*, 72.3077.

[411] Ibid., 89.3627.

[412] *Shiji*, 20.1038.

計校相繆（謬）殿（也），自二百廿錢以下，誶官嗇夫；過二百廿錢以到二千二百錢，貲一盾；過二千二百錢以上，貲一甲。人戶、馬牛一，貲一盾；自二以上，貲一甲。
When in checking the accounts there are mistakes, for 220 coins and less the Bailiff of the Office is blamed; if [the mistake] exceeds 220 coins, up to 2200 coins, he is fined one shield; if it exceeds 2200 coins, he is fined one suit of armour. For one household, horse or ox he is fined one shield; for two or more he is fined one suit of armour.[413]

計脫實及出實多於律程，及不當出而出之，直（值）其賈（價），不盈廿二錢，除；廿二錢以到六百六十錢，貲官嗇夫一盾；過六百六十錢以上，貲官嗇夫一甲，而復責其出殿（也）。人戶、馬牛一以上為大誤。誤自重殿（也），減罪一等。
When in accounting stores are omitted, or when issuing stores one issues more than the norm [established by] the Statutes, as well as when one issues what should not be issued, the value is estimated. If it is not fully twenty-two coins, it is excused; from twenty-two coins up to 660 coins, the Bailiff of the office is fined one shield. If it exceeds 660 coins, the Bailiff of the Office is fined one suit of armour and he is furthermore charged with [the value of] what he had issued. One household, horse or ox, or more is a serious mistake; if he traces [the mistake] himself, the punishment is decreased by one degree.[414]

More extensive legal regulations on the authenticity of documents can be founded in the "Statutes on Assault" in the *Statutes and Ordinances of the Second Year*. These early Han regulations consider the punishments of submitting deceptive documents, making counterfeit documents, fraudulently adding to or subtracting from a written contract tally, destroying sealing clays and making mistakes in a document.[415]

Two entries of the Qin "Statutes on Checking" show that scribes held collective liability when the Bailiff of the Office or official in charge (*lizhuzhe* 吏主者) were accused

[413] *SHD*, 76; Translation after *RCL*, 100, with modifications.

[414] Ibid. A similar Qin regulation is seen in the newly published Yuelu Qin slip (1244 and 1246+1395). See *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (si)*, 142-3.

[415] *ENLL*, 95-7; *LSS*, 394-5.

with making mistakes in the accounts. One of the entries regulates that the Scribe Director who was responsible for examining accounts (*lingshi luji* 令史錄計)[416] held the same collective liability as the Magistrate and his Assistant when the Bailiff of the Office was charged with fines or the official in charge was held liable, charged fines and blamed. In another entry, the Scribe Director who had examined the "accounts of parks" (*yuanji* 苑計) held liability with the Overseer of Horse (*sima* 司馬) when an accusation was made against such accounts.[417]

To the concern of this chapter, how would scribes react if their superiors ordered them to intentionally falsify the data in an account book? We do not have direct evidence to answer this question, but fortunately, an entry in the *Answers to Questions on Legal Principles and Statutes* give us some hints:

> 贖罪不直，史不與嗇夫和，問史可（何）論？當貲一盾。
> When a redeemable crime [is found being tried] not uprightly, and the Scribe does not participate in the Bailiff [of the Office's conspiracy], one asks how the Scribe should be sentenced. He matches being fined one shield.[418]

Even though they did not participate in the conspiracy with their superior against the state's laws, the scribes would still hold collective liability for the crime. Should they still stick

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[416] *SHD* transcribes it as *lingshi yuanji* 令史掾計. Hulsewé has already pointed out that the graph between *lingshi* and *ji* must be a verb. Here I follow the new transcription proposed by Amd H. Hafner 陶安. See *RCL*, 99; *Yuelu shuyuan cang Qin jian (san)*, 125, n. 4. See also the discussion of the term *lu* 錄 in Lai and Tong, "Liye Qin jian suojian Qin dai xian xingzheng zhong guan, cao zuzhi de zhineng fenye yu xingzheng hudong," 10.

[417] *SHD* reads *sima* 司馬 and *lingshi* 令史 together as an official title in this statute. I follow Ulrich Lau and Thies Staack who read them as two separate titles. See Lau and Staack, *Legal Practice in the Formative Stages of the Chinese Empire*, 179, n. 863. As Hulsewé indicates, the *sima* mentioned in this statute is the official in charge of a stud-farm that different than the *sima* as a military officer in other texts. See *RCL*, 100.

[418] *SHD*, 115.

with the laws or just follow their superior's order? It is expected that the scribes in the Qin state and empire would have faced the dilemma of choosing between conforming to the state's laws and following their superior's order on many occasions.

Two legal cases from the *Book of Submitted Doubtful Cases* suggest that the other group of administrative officials—the assistant (*zuo*)—would have faced the same kind of dilemma at work.

> ●・蜀守灕(讞)：佐啟主徒。令史冰私使城旦環為家作。告啟=。(啟)詐(詐)簿曰：「治官府」。疑罪。・廷報：「啟為偽書也」。
> ● • The Governor of Shu [Commandery] forwards the following doubtful case: Assistant Qi was in charge of convict-laborers.
> Scribe Director Bing privately [and without authorization] employed the wall-builder, Huan, to perform work for [Bing's] family. [Bing] reported this to Qi. Qi committed fraud in the account book to say: "[Huan] was building or maintaining government storehouses." I am in doubt as to what crime [Qi] is guilty of.
> • The report of [the Commandant of] the Court [stated]:
> "It is the case that Qi 'made counterfeit documents.'"

> ●・蜀守灕(讞)：采鐵長山私使城旦田、舂女為薑(饘)，令內作。解書廷，佐悄(恬)等詐簿：「為徒養。」疑罪。・廷報：「悄(恬)為偽書也」。
> ● • The Governor of Shu [Commandery] forwards the following doubtful case: Chief of the Iron Mine Shan, privately [and without authorization], employed the wall-builder Tian and the grain-pounder Nü to make porridge, commanding them to work in his home. When he informed the [Commandery] Court [of this] in writing, Assistant Tian, and others, committed fraud in the account book [to say: "Tian and Nü] were cooking for convict-laborers." I am in doubt as to what crime [Tian] is guilty of.
> • The report of [the Commandant of] the Court [stated]:
> "It is the case that Tian 'made counterfeit documents.'"[419]

In both cases, the corrupt officials were the superior who instructed an Assistant to falsify the record on an account book of laborers in order to cover their corrupt use of convict labor for private purposes. The two unfortunate Assistants were finally charged making

[419] *ENLL*, 347-8; Translation after *LSS*, 1249 and 1253, with modifications.

counterfeit documents (*wei weishu* 為偽書). According to the "Statutes on Assault" mentioned above, they would be tattooed and made a wall-builder (*qing wei chengdanchong* 黥為城旦舂).[420] Interestingly, one of the superiors in these two cases was a Scribe Director. As discussed in Chapter 3, an assistant belonged to another group of officials who were also entrusted with processing administrative documents in Qin and early Han China. The list of parallels between scribes and assistants recovered in that chapter show that an Assistant was a parallel to a Scribe, who held a lower position than Scribe Director in the scribal hierarchy. We can infer that a Scribe would have been placed in a similar position, choosing between conforming to the state's laws and following his superior's order.

Athough some scribes could hold higher position in the Qin and Han bureaucratic hierarchy, the majority of them were just the subordinates to their superior. Throughout the history of the Han dynasty, the close bond between some officials and their immediate subordinates was a constant problem that had undermined the authority of the emperor. During the Han period, the heads of offices in central and local administrations could appoint their subordinated officials by themselves.[421] In a commandery's government, the Governor had the absolute authority.[422] He could issue his own ordinance, termed *jiao* 教, within the commandery.[423] The subordinates would even call their Governor the "Lord" (*jun* 君) and refer themselves the "Subject" (*chen* 臣). Qian Mu 錢穆 named this the

[420] *ENLL*, 95; *LSS*, 394-5.

[421] See Zhao Yi 趙翼, *Gaiyu congkao* 陔餘叢考 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 296-7; Huang Liuzhu 黃留珠, *Qin Han shijin zhidu* 秦漢仕進制度 (Xi'an: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 1985), 196-201.

[422] See Yen, *Qin Han difang xingzheng zhidu*, 77-9.

[423] See Yu, "Han dai xunli yu wenhua chuanbo," 200-11.

"concept of double monarch" (*erchong de junzhu guannian* 二重的君主觀念), which had profoundly shaped the ideology of officials in Han China.[424] The superior and his subordinates maintained a tight relationship even after they left the office, which is reflected in the subordinates' obligation to mourn for their dead former superior.[425] The close bond between the superior and subordinates placed the subordinates in an unfavorable position in which they could not reject their superior's order even it would be against the state's laws. A key phrase often seen in Han official accusations (*he* 劾) by low-ranked officials is "I make the official accusation because of personal knowledge of this [crime]. In no respect was I instigated by a senior official [to make this accusation]" 以此知而劾，無長吏使劾者.[426] Yet, evidence in both transmitted and excavated texts suggests that it had been common that a subordinate would bring charge against other officials at the behest of his superior. The phrase might only reflect the expectation and requirement of the ruler.[427]

In addition, the low salary would have made the life of low-ranked scribes even more difficult. The problems caused by the underpaid salary of the low-ranked officials in the Han were constantly troubling the ruler. In an edict issued in 59 BCE, Emperor Xuan tells us that the salary of the lower officials was too small that they could not avoid exploiting the commoners.

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[424] Qian Mu, *Guoshi dagang* 國史大綱 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yin shuguan, 1998), 217-8. See also Huai-chen Kan 甘懷真, *Huangquan, liyi yu jingdian quanshi: Zhongguo gudai zhengzhi shi yanjiu* 皇權、禮儀與經典詮釋：中國古代政治史研究 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue chuban zhongxin, 2004), 227-35.

[425] See Zhao Yi, *Nianershi zhaji jiao zheng* 廿二史箚記校證, collated and annotated by Wang Shumin 王樹民 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001), 102-3; Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 86-94.

[426] *LSS*, 140, n. 121.

[427] See Ibid. and Hsing I-tien, "Han Jin gongwenshu shang de 'jun jiao nuo'" 漢晉公文書上的「君教諾」, *Jianbo wang*, accessed December 20, 2016. http://www.bsm.org.cn/show_articreme.php?id=2638

> 吏不廉平則治道衰。今小吏皆勤事，而奉祿薄，欲其毋侵漁百姓，難矣。其益吏百石以下奉十五。
> If the officials are not incorrupt and just, then the way of ruling falls. At present the minor officials are all industrious in their work, yet their salaries are small, [so that although we] wish that they should not encroach upon or make demands upon the people, it is difficult [for them not to do so]. Let five-tenths [of their present salary be added to the salary of] officials [ranking at] one hundred bushels and [those of] lesser [ranks].[428]

It is questionable whether those officials who were ranked below one hundred bushels could survive with their small salary.[429] As in late imperial China, financial hardship of the low status clerks was always a factor that led to different forms of corruption.[430]

The evidence presented above questions the stereotypical image of scribes portrayed in Han transmitted texts. The low-ranked scribes did not appear as a group of corrupted officials manipulating the laws and documents to their own benefit, but rather as a group of low-ranked officials struggling with their tremendous "paperwork," with their underpaid salary, and with conflicts between the state and their superior. An imaginary picture of their working conditions might depict that they are buried under a mountain of documents accompanied by tremendous stress. In fact, this picture is also applicable to a clerk or secretary nowadays (Figure 13). In this regard, I suggest that the real life of being a low-

[428] *Hanshu*, 8. 2630; Translation after Dubs trans., *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, 2. 243-4, with minor modifications.

[429] See Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 129. See also See Kim, *Food Redistribution during China's Qin and Han Periods*, chap. 2.

[430] See Zhu Zongbin 祝總斌, "Shilun woguo gudai lixu de teshu zuoyong ji guan, li zhiheng jizhi" 試論我國古代吏胥的特殊作用及官、吏制衡機制, in his *Cai bu cai zhai wenji: Zhu Zongbin xueshu yanjiu lunwenji* 材不材齋文集：祝總斌學術研究論文集 (Xi'an: San Qin chubanshe, 2006), 2: 85-6; Bradly Ward Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 18-25.

ranked scribe in the Qin and Han bureaucratic hierarchy has been overshadowed by the stereotypical portrayals of scribes in Han transmitted texts.

Figure 13: A trained clerk in modern Tampa, Florida works in her way through a mountain of legal cases piling up around her desk. After "Foreclosures pounding court clerks with paperwork," *Tampa Bay Times*, April 17, 2009, accessed December 15, 2016. http://www.tampabay.com/news/courts/civil/foreclosures-pounding-court-clerks-with-paperwork/993055

Conclusion

This chapter is not intended to completely subvert the traditional view of the scribes, but rather to provide a perspective that has been neglected in Han transmitted texts when considering their position in the Qin and Han bureaucratic hierarchy. To end this chapter, I would like to take a closer look at a story narrating about the downfall of Kuang Heng 匡

衡, who was known as a reformist during the reigns of Emperor Yuan and Emperor Cheng in the Western Han.[431]

In 48 BCE, Linhuai 臨淮 Commandery made an error on the southern boundary of Le' an 樂安 District. As a result, when Kuang Heng was enfeoffed as Marquis of Le'an in 36 BCE, there were four hundred extra *qing* of land mistakenly added to his fiefdom. It was not until 32 BCE that the Commandery's government corrected the error and forwarded its corrected map along with the annual account book to the office of Chief Minister for annual evaluation. To avoid the profit gained from his extra land being taken away, Kuang Heng took advantage of being the Chief Minister at the time and assigned his Accountant (*zhubu* 主簿) Lu Ci 陸賜 the job of evaluating the annual account book. Lu Ci and his Attaché (*shu* 屬) Ming 明 then questioned the Commandery's government about the inconsistency of the records on the southern boundary of Le' an Marquisate and successfully had it return the extra land back to Kuang's fiefdom. When the crime was discovered, Kuang Heng, Lu Ci and his Attaché were all accused of being impious (*budao* 不道).[432]

Ban Gu does not give us much details about Lu Ci and his Attaché Ming, because they are not the focus of the story. We do not even know how they had been punished for the crime in the end. Their appearance in the story is to help explain how Kuang Heng could successfully deceive through the account book. They show up in the story as two typical knife-and-brush officials extremely familiar with administrative procedures as most readers would expect. The voice of the low-ranked scribes, as in the case of Lu Ci and his Attaché,

[431] See Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China, 104 BC to AD 9* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 154-9.

[432] *Hanshu*, 81.3346.

has long been neglected in Han transmitted texts. In the *History of the Han*, Ban Gu gives us a figure about the size of the Western Han bureaucracy including the numbers of the assistants and scribes at the bottom up to the Chief Minister at the top: 120,285 persons.[433] I would wonder, how many scribes could have risen up from the bottom to the top of the bureaucracy[434] and how many of their lives have been carefully recorded, as in the cases of Xiao He and Zhang Tang. Subject to the limitation of evidence, we might not be able to know much about how these low-ranked scribes identified themselves until more materials are excavated from the ground. The abundant scribal literature from Middle and New Kingdom Egypt (2055—1069 BCE) however give us some insights on this issue.

In a Middle Kingdom literary text titled *The Satire on the Trades*, the author Pseudo–Khety keeps reminding his son of the superiority of being a scribe over other manual laborers—"There is no office free from supervisors, except the scribe's. He is the supervisor."[435] Interestingly, he also repeatedly emphasizes the significance of obeying the words of the officials. In his depiction, the scribes in the Middle Kingdom Egypt appear to be a social class between the manual laborers and the officials. When criticizing the Qin and Han scribes manipulating the legal and administrative systems, one must not neglect the fact that most of them were the subordinates to a superior. To put it in the words of Pseudo–Khety, they were the "supervisor" but ***only*** when they were facing those people who were below them in the social hierarchy. Most of the times, they had to find a way to survive

[433] Ibid., 19a.743.

[434] If we consider those officials who were ranked at fully 2,000 bushels or above, such as "Three Excellencies of State" and "Nine Ministers of State," the highest officials in the empire, the number of the highest officials should not exceed twenty, which accounts for less than 1 percent of the total number of officials.

[435] Pseudo–Khety, "The Satire on the Trades: The Instructions of Dua-Khety," in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 435.

under the tension between the state and their superior, and this caused the anxiety of being a low-ranked scribe during the Qin and Han periods.

CONCLUSION

Scribes in China belonged to a profession of archaic origin. This dissertation examines how this ancient profession was incorporated into the Qin and Han administrative system. It argues against the stereotypical descriptions of scribes in Han transmitted texts and restores the realities of a scribe's life under the unified empires based on the newly excavated administrative and legal texts. It also urges scholars to take the material context into consideration when examining the administrative tasks and the literacy for carrying them out. This conclusion presents the major findings of each chapter and explains the ways in which they reshape our understanding of the scribal profession in early imperial China.

Chapter 1 addresses the long-debated issues on the origin and early development of the scribal profession, so as to provide a context from which the Qin and Han scribes originated. This chapter points out that the nature of scribes should be defined by their association with writing, regardless of what functions writing served. Whereas the organization of scribes during the late Shang period remains unclear, an identifiable hierarchy among scribes had already been established during the Western Zhou period. Such a hierarchy implies that there had been a division of labor between high- and low-ranked scribes. This hierarchy continued into the Qin and Han periods. While Chapter 2 illustrates the changes in the status of the high-ranked scribes, Chapters 3 and 4 examine the career and life of the low-ranked scribes.

Following the collapse of the Western Zhou, there was a significant decline of the scribal profession. The family history of Sima Qian well attests to this change. The members of Sima family had been the Grand Scribe of the Zhou House, hereditarily, and had once

secured a high status at court. This family, however, underwent a decline in both political and social status during the Eastern Zhou period. The way in which Sima Qian narrates his family history sharply contrasts with the case of Scribe Qiang of the Western Zhou. Placing Sima Qian into a broader institutional context, Chapter 2 shows that his unfortunate experience was not especially unique among the hereditary scribes of his times. The institutional role of scribes was carefully defined by laws and their rise and fall could be determined by the Emperor's will. The chapter indicates that despite his duties in astrological and ritual matters, the Director of the Grand Scribes was inevitably engaged in administrative work. He was responsible to evaluate, appoint, and manage the low-ranked scribes. This finding provides the strongest evidence against the claim that the Director of the Grand Scribes was a purely astrological or ritual official, and completely cut off from actual administration.

Legal regulations from the Qin and early Han tombs show that hereditary status was still a crucial factor in appointing scribes. But one would wonder how could such a limited number of hereditary scribes meet the administrative needs of the unified empires? Chapter 3 explores the complementary nature of scribes and assistants in order to understand the opening up of the scribal profession. Due to the continuing labor shortage of hereditary scribes, the non-hereditary assistants were also entrusted with administrative tasks and were allowed to fill the vacancy of scribes based on their length of service. The different requirements of the scribes and assistants show that, on the one hand, hereditary status was still highly valued at the time, on the other hand, age was one of very few ways for an individual without family ties to gain recognition in society. In Qin Qianling County, these two types of officials appeared in parallel in the administration, but the shortage of officials

might have finally resulted in the merging of these two types of officials. During the Han, the combined title "assistant-scribe" appeared as a salary grade referring to the lowest rank administrative officials in the empire.

This chapter develops a concept "administrative literacy" to understand the literacy of scribes and assistants. Considering the material features of a bamboo or wooden document can carry or convey messages as valuable as those through the text itself, such a concept represents not only one's reading, writing, and accounting abilities, but also one's acquisition of a specific knowledge and skill set for modifying the material features of a bamboo or wooden document for administrative purposes. It questions the common understanding of literacy which refers it to a separable or independent skill applicable to most contexts without any restrictions.

Han transmitted texts portray the scribes as the "knife-and-brush officials," "harsh officials" or "legal clerks," but are silent on the realities of living and working as a scribe under the unified empire. Chapter 4 argues against such stereotypical portrayals of scribes and explores the anxiety of being a low-ranked scribe in the Qin and Han bureaucratic hierarchy. This chapter uses the concept "hierarchy of documents" to analyze the multiple processes which the scribes in local administration had gone through before producing the final version of an annual account book forwarded to the central government for evaluation. Given its complexity, the tight schedule and material confines of writing surfaces, the task of preparing an annual account book could be a nightmare, even to these professionals. Furthermore, while struggling with their endless paperwork and their underpaid salary, the low-ranked scribes were facing pressure from two ends: the state and their superior. By examining the legal regulations for monitoring administrative practices and the corruption

cases of the forwarding of account books, this chapter shows that these low-ranked scribes were placed in a dilemma choosing between conforming to the state's legal regulations and following their superior's order.

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Abbreviations

ENLL *Ernian lüling yu zouyan shu*

LSS *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China*

RCL *Remnants of Ch'in Law*

SHD *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*

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