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Defamiliarizing the Foreigner

Sima Qian's Ethnography and Han-Xiongnu Marriage Diplomacy

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DURING THE HAN DYNASTY (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), relations between China and the Xiongnu confederacy to the north permanently transformed the politics and the cultural poetics of China's imperial frontiers. Following the defeat of the Han imperial army in 200 B.C.E., marriage diplomacy (*heqin* 和親, literally, “peace through kinship”) with the Xiongnu introduced a new form of non-tributary imperial relations that later dynasties continued to use with foreign peoples. Instead of foreign subjects paying annual tribute at the imperial court, the *heqin* agreement used an egalitarian language of “brotherly” relations and called for the marriage of a Han princess to the Xiongnu leader, annual payments to the Xiongnu, and the opening of border markets. Later, Emperor Wu 武帝 (r. 141–87 B.C.E.), having ambitions to conquer the Xiongnu, instigated the largest-scale territorial expansion in Chinese history; his incursions into modern-day Inner and Outer Mongolia, Xinjiang, Yunnan, Guangzhou, Vietnam, Korea, and eastern

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Central Asia permanently enlarged China's frontiers.¹ During this era of expansion, Han-dynasty officials began to record and rationalize the information they gathered from imperial envoys or first-hand observation in new ways. In so doing, they initiated a Chinese tradition of empirical ethnography that is still recalled in modern Chinese ethnic histories, or "histories of nationalities" (*minzu shi* 民族史).²

This article reexamines the cultural poetics of the Han dynasty frontier. Thus far, studies of the representation of the northern frontier have focused exclusively on the symbolic relations between the Han and the Xiongnu. Some writers have analyzed Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (?145–?86 B.C.E.) innovative use of empirical ethnography, geography, cosmology, and historiography; others have highlighted Ban Gu's 班固 (32–92 C.E.) introduction of a new rhetoric emphasizing the immutable cultural differences of the enemy. These innovations have been interpreted by modern scholars as developments within a continuous, evolutionary history of Chinese writings about its enemy Other. I build on and revise these analyses in two ways. First, I emphasize the literary peculiarities of Sima Qian's and Ban Gu's respective historiographic works. I argue that, in the "Xiongnu liezhuan" 匈奴列傳 (Memoir of the Xiongnu) of Sima Qian's *Shiji* 史記 (The Grand Scribe's records), the estranged object of empirical scrutiny was not the Xiongnu population itself, but, rather, Han-dynasty ethnographic reports about them.³ This self-reflexivity about the politics and processes of ethnographic representation has been overlooked by scholars. It does not appear in Sima Qian's accounts of other foreigners or in the subsequent historiographic tradition that self-consciously took the *Shiji* as

¹ See Chun-shu Chang, *Frontier, Immigration, and Empire in Han China, 130 B.C.–A.D. 157*, vol. 2 of *The Rise of Chinese Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), pp. 173–77.

² See Nicola Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies: The Rise of Nomadic Power in East Asian History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 255–56; Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 80; Wang Shoukuan 汪受寬, "Zhongguo shaoshu minzu shixue de chansheng yu chubu fazhan" 中国少数民族史学的产生与初步发展, *Shixue shi yanjiu* 史学史研究 129.1 (2008): 54–63; Chi Wanxing 池万兴, *Sima Qian minzu sixiang chanshi* 司马迁民族思想阐释 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), pp. 95, 205–37. For an overview of Chinese scholarship on the importance of Sima Qian to the modern fields of ethnology and geography within China, see Zhang Xinke 张新科, *Shiji xue gailun* 史记学概论 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2003), pp. 230–33.

³ *Shiji* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1959). For convenience, I refer to Sima Qian, rather than to the father-son team of Grand Scribes.

its model. As such, it offers a rare example of Chinese resistance to the kind of ubiquitous ethnographic tradition that either commemorates political domination or facilitates conquest by creating as its epistemological object an inferior Other awaiting civilization. Edward Said and Mary Louise Pratt have influentially outlined this latter model in analyzing European writings about the non-West, and scholars have since applied it to non-European ethnographic traditions, including the Chinese.⁴

The second way in which I revise past analyses of the poetics of the frontier is by looking beyond representations of self and other and examining the symbolic patterning of oppositional relations within Han political culture. I argue that Han-dynasty officials debated the *heqin* not only as a diplomatic contract, but also as a new term and ritual. Through differing metaphorical interpretations of the eponymous kinship (*qin* 親) of the *heqin*—as an opportunity for self-advancement within the Han court, as economic and tributary subordination to the uncivilized, or as the filial subordination of sons to fathers—officials and writers redefined the stakes in frontier politics. It is as part of the rhetorical playfulness of *heqin* marriage diplomacy—and within this enlarged poetics of the frontier—that I resituate and explain Sima Qian's unique challenge to the use of ethnography in the construction of conceptual frontiers.

Defamiliarizing the Foreigner

In contrast to the Greco-Roman tradition, descriptions of foreign customs were uncommon and generally brief in the early Chinese tradition—until Sima Qian.⁵ The innovative literary format of the *Shiji*, and the lengthy empirical observations of the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” profoundly influenced subsequent Chinese anthropological writing. The *Shiji* dedicated six chapters to regions or populations that had not been fully politically unified as part of the Central States (“China”) by the beginning of the Han dynasty: Xiongnu, Southern Yue 南越, Eastern Yue 東越, Chaoxian 朝鮮, Southwestern Yi 西南夷, and the western

⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵ For an exploration of this specific comparison, see Hyun Jin Kim, *Ethnicity and Foreigners in Ancient Greece and China* (London: Duckworth 2009), esp. pp. 72–124.

region of Dayuan 大宛.⁶ Each of these six chapters chronicles the Han-dynasty conquest and subjection of, or (in the case of the Xiongnu) the ongoing warring with, the people or region named in the title of that chapter. The subsequent dynastic histories that later came to form the canonical twenty-four Standard Histories (*zheng shi* 正史) patterned themselves on the *Shiji*, devoting chapters to foreigners at or beyond the frontiers of the Central States.⁷

The *Shiji* disperses these chapters on foreigners within the seventy chapters of its largest category, the “Memoirs” (列傳 *liezhuan*).⁸ The majority of these *liezhuan* were biographies of important individuals and social groups, and readers of these biographies have long discussed the kinds of questions about literary form that I pursue in the context of the “Xiongnu *liezhuan*.” As Nicola Di Cosmo has recently argued, Sima Qian’s radical introduction of empirical ethnography was accompanied by certain recognizably traditional rationalizations. While consciously rejecting mythological geography, Sima Qian organized his new data according to familiar literary and conceptual patterns. For example, his narrative inserted the more recent Xiongnu into a much longer historiography of China’s northern frontier, and his correlative yin-yang cosmology mapped the Xiongnu onto an oppositional region of the heavens from China.

Sima Qian’s self-reflexive relation to competing traditions of representation is made explicit at various points in the *Shiji*.⁹ One such significant moment occurs in the authorial comment appended to the “Xiongnu *liezhuan*.” Each chapter of the *Shiji* ends with an authorial comment, prefaced by “The Grand Scribe says.” Subsequent *Standard Histories* continued to append authorial comments, and these comments often shed light on how the respective authors evaluated or found historical meaning in their own narratives. The first three

⁶ See, respectively, *Shiji*, *juan* 110, 113, 114, 115, 116, 123.

⁷ For a comprehensive compilation of passages on foreign peoples in the *Standard Histories*, see Rui Yifu 芮逸夫 et al., *Niansan zhong zhengshi ji Qingshi zhong ge zu shiliao huibian* 廿三種正史及清史中各族史料彙編, 5 vols. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiusuo, 1973). For references to the Xiongnu, see 4:772–864.

⁸ On the meaning and origins of Sima Qian’s *liezhuan*, see Burton Watson, *Ssu-ma Ch’ien: Grand Historian of China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 120–30; Zhang Dake 张大可 et al., *Shiji yanjiu jicheng* 史記研究集成 (Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2005), 3:181–82; William H. Nienhauser Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, Vol. 7: *The Memoirs of Pre-Han China* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. v–viii.

⁹ Compare *Shiji*, 1.46, 123, 3179.

books in this tradition, the *Shiji*, *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Former Han), and *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han), each include a chapter on the Xiongnu (or, in the lattermost case, the Southern Xiongnu). Together, these three accounts chronicle the agonistic relations between the Han dynasty and its single most important enemy.¹⁰ The *Shiji* covers the pre-imperial history of the northern frontier and the rise of the Xiongnu; the First Qin Emperor's 秦始皇 (r. 221–210 B.C.E.) consolidation of parts of the Great Wall in creating China's first empire; the Xiongnu's catastrophic defeat of the first Han emperor Gaozu 高祖 (r. 202–195 B.C.E.) in 200 B.C.E.; the precarious *heqin* "peace through kinship" treaties; and ends in the midst of Emperor Wu's ruthless military campaigns.¹¹ The *Hanshu* includes an almost identical version of this account, but it omits the end-comment while extending the narrative to cover the fragile diplomacy at the end of the Former Han dynasty (that is, until 25 C.E.), including the (non-tributary) political submission of the main Xiongnu leader, Chieftain Huhanye (Huhanye shanyu 呼韓邪單于), to Emperor Xuan 宣帝 (r. 74–49 B.C.E.) in 51 B.C.E. The *Hou Hanshu* begins where the *Hanshu* ends, covering the internal divisions of the Xiongnu confederacy and the final defeat and dispersal of the northern and southern Xiongnu states by the final decade of the Later Han dynasty (25–220 C.E.).

Although each of these three histories covers a different chronological period of a single frontier narrative, the end-comments suggest that each history is taking a profoundly different approach. Sima Qian's

¹⁰ For the rich historical scholarship on the relation of the *heqin* to other foreign policy initiatives throughout the Han period, see, for example, Sophia-Karin Psarras, "Han and Xiongnu: a reexamination of cultural and political relations," *MS* 51 (2003): 55–236; Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, chapters 5–6; Lin Gan 林幹, *Xiongnu shi* 匈奴史 (rev. ed., Hohhot: Neimenggu renmin chubanshe, 2007), pp. 44–116; Ellis Tinios, "'Loose Rein' in Han Relations with Foreign Peoples" (University of Leeds: Leeds East Asia Papers, 2000), no. 61. On the Later Han period, see Rafe de Crespigny, *Northern Frontier: The Policies and Strategy of the Later Han Empire* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1984), pp. 173–354.

¹¹ One should note that comparative philological analysis of the two accounts has raised the possibility that at least parts of the extant *Shiji* "Account of the Xiongnu" were actually reconstituted from the *Hanshu* version. On this problem, see David Honey, "The *Han-Shu*, Manuscript Evidence, and the Textual Criticism of the *Shih-chi*: The Case of the 'Hsiung-nu lieh-chuan,'" *CLEAR* 21 (1999): 67–97. Honey argues that the opening ethnography of the *Hanshu* predates that of the received *Shiji*. See William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Vol. 2: *The Basic Annals of Han China* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. xiii–xxxii, for a cautionary introduction to the relation between the *Hanshu* and *Shiji* texts.

end-comment addresses the political sensitivity and biases of contemporary discussions about the Xiongnu, and the need to improve the selection of military leaders:

The Grand Scribe remarks: Confucius, in composing the *Chunqiu* [Spring and Autumn annals], wrote openly about the periods of Dukes Yin and Huan. But when he came to the eras of Dukes Ding and Ai, he [wrote with] subtlety. Because he was writing about his own times he did not give praise [or blame], and his words [observed political] taboos. As for those who talk about the Xiongnu according to contemporary customs, the trouble is that they pursue the expediency of the moment; they are engaged in offering flattery in their persuasions, in order to gain advantage for their partial claims, and they do not compare their strength with ours. Generals consider that the Central States is broad and vast, and their spirits are aroused, and the ruler of the people thereupon relies [on their views] to decide his strategy. Consequently, our accomplishments lack depth. Although Yao was worthy, he did not achieve his [governmental] tasks; only when he attained Yu were the Nine Provinces stabilized. Moreover, if one desires to resurrect sagely rule, one must select and employ responsible generals and advisers! One must select and employ responsible generals and advisers!¹²

Ban Gu's comment, or "appraisal" (*zan* 贊), to the "Xiongnu zhuan" 匈奴傳 (M memoir of the Xiongnu), the longest comment in his entire work, offers an evaluative historical summary of Han-dynasty policies toward the Xiongnu. He distinguishes two main approaches used thus far during the Han dynasty—the *heqin* peace treaty and punitive military expeditions—and argues that both are doomed to failure. In the following portions, taken from the appraisal's beginning and end, Ban Gu blames the inevitability of failure on the Xiongnu's inveterate deceptiveness. He supports a third approach, hostile vigilance, which is called the "loose rein" approach (*jimi* 羈靡) and involves neither military aggression nor political concession:

The appraisal says: The *Shu* [Classic of documents] in warning that "the Man 蠻 and the Yi disrupt the Central States," the *Shi* [Classic of odes] in speaking of "smiting the Rong 戎 and Di 狄," and the *Chunqiu* [Spring and Autumn annals] in saying, "[If the Prince] possesses virtue, it is observed

¹² *Shiji*, 110.2919.

among the four Yi," [demonstrated that] the Yi and Di have long been the cause of disaster. From the rise of the Han dynasty, when were officials with sincere remonstrances and excellent plans ever not planning strategies, and presenting and debating many proposals in court? . . . According to the *Chunqiu*, those living inside [the Central States] are the Xia, and those living outside are the Yi and the Di. The Yi and the Di people are greedy and desirous of gain; they wear their hair down their backs and fasten their garments on the left; they have human faces but the hearts of wild beasts. Their ceremonial garments differ from those worn in the Central States; their customs and diet differ from ours; and our languages are mutually unintelligible. They dwell far away, in the cold, on the bare lands of the north, driving their herds in pursuit of pasture, and hunting with the bow and arrow in order to sustain themselves. They are separated from us by mountains and valleys and cut off by the desert. By these means did Heaven and Earth divide inner from outer. Therefore the Sage Kings treated them like birds and beasts, neither concluding treaties with them, nor going forth and attacking them. To conclude agreements with them is to waste gifts and suffer deception. To attack them is to exhaust our armies and provoke raids. Their land cannot be cultivated so as to produce food; their people cannot be made subjects and tamed. For these reasons they are kept outside and not taken as relatives, they are kept distant and not accepted as kin. Official exhortations do not reach their people; the official calendar is not observed in their land. When they come, we must chastise them and oversee their behavior, when they go, we must be prepared and on our guard against them. If they are moved to admire righteousness and wish to present tribute, then we should receive them courteously. We must keep them under loose rein and not cut them off, allowing any wrong course to come from them. This is the constant way of the Sage Kings for regulating the Man and the Yi.¹³

Ban Gu's moral contempt is reiterated by Fan Ye 范曄 (398–445 C.E.), the author of the *Hou Hanshu*. His brief appraisal, in verse, to his "Nan Xiongnu liezhuan" 南匈奴列傳 (Memoir of the Southern Xiongnu) says:

¹³ *Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1962), 94B.3830. Following the translation of Ellis Tinios, "Sure Guidance for One's Own Time: Pan Ku and the Tsan to *Han Shu* 94," *Early China* 9–10 (1983–85): 184–203, with minor changes. Tinios's analysis emphasizes the importance of this appraisal within the book as a whole. For convenience, I refer to Ban Gu, rather than to the team of *Hanshu* compilers, which included Ban Gu's father and sister.

When the Xiongnu split [into northern and southern courts],
 Feather-marked [i.e., urgent] documents were rarely heeded,
 Their minds are savage, they are loathe to show remorse,
 In the end they also scattered in confusion.¹⁴

The *Shiji*'s end-comment stands out in three significant ways. First, it lacks the phobic anthropological rhetoric found in the appraisals from the *Hanshu* ("They have faces of humans but the minds of beasts" 人面獸心) and *Hou Hanshu* ("Their minds are savage" 野心). Second, Sima Qian alone addresses the politics of representation, in terms of both the general dangers of writing about one's own era and of the specific distortions in contemporary discussions of Xiongnu affairs. Third, where the others summarize aspects of Xiongnu history and culture, Sima Qian turns his attention only to the Central States.

The phobic anthropological rhetoric of the appraisals from the *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu* draws from traditional norms of representing foreigners in classical Chinese philosophy, poetry, and historiography.¹⁵ These texts often referred to foreigners with generalizing ethnonyms that were not necessarily their own (such as Yi, Di, Rong, Man, Hu 胡, Fan 蕃) or with collective names such as Four Yi (*si yi* 四夷) or Nine Yi (*jiu yi* 九夷), and generally, but not always, described them as militarily agonistic and morally inferior to the Central States (or the Hua 華, Xia 夏, Zhou 周). Applying an ethical paradigm that divided the world into the civilized and uncivilized, these texts typically stated that the Yi and Di were ignorant of ritual (*li* 禮) and propriety (*yi* 儀), but that they could be enlightened through military force or persuasive example. Chinese geopolitical accounts defined the foreigner as the perennial military adversary invading the historical frontiers, or the de facto outsider to the idealized symbolic space of a morally and politically superior Central States. They upheld a vision in which foreigners, inhabiting the "four directions" (*sifang* 四方), the "four seas" (*sihai* 四海), the concentric "five-zones" (*wu fu* 五服) of the "Tribute of Yu" (Yu *gong* 禹貢), or the "nine zones" (*jiu fu* 九服) outside the Zhou tributary center, ideally joined the "inner subjects"

¹⁴ *Hou Hanshu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1965), 89.2971.

¹⁵ On these competing models, see Yuri Pines, "Beasts or Humans: Pre-Imperial Origins of the 'Sino-Barbarian' Dichotomy," in Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran, eds., *Mongols, Turks, and Others: Eurasian Nomads and the Sedentary World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 59–102.

(*nei chen* 內臣) of the Central States as its tribute-bearing “outer subjects” (*wai chen* 外臣).¹⁶ There were important exceptions to these norms: these same texts cast foreign women as a familiar species who, as silent objects of exchange or as harbingers of moral and political decline, resembled their Central States counterparts; they recorded occasional political alliances binding enemies in the egalitarian language of brotherhood (*xiongdi* 兄弟, *kundi* 昆弟);¹⁷ and they included a minor tradition of alien wisdom, exemplified by Confucius’s claim that foreigners stored ritual knowledge when the Central States fell into moral decay.¹⁸ However, despite these exceptional instances in which the pre-Han-dynasty foreigner was represented as a commensurable equal or even superior to the self, there is no extant textual precedent for Sima Qian’s transformation of anthropological discourse itself into the object of scrutiny or doubt.

Ban Gu’s appraisal returns to the pre-imperial model of an ethico-political hierarchy of the Central States over the Yi, Di, and Man and assimilates the Xiongnu within that model. Intractable cultural and geographical differences, and his assumption that the Xiongnu are predisposed to such immoral behavior as deception and greed, shape his political strategy. His advice is ultimately practical—the Xiongnu will never be the conquered subjects (*chen* 臣) or diplomatic relatives (*qi* 戚) of the Chinese, but the Han government should nevertheless vigilantly treat them like subjects and accept any of their gestures of submission (for example, if the Xiongnu should “desire righteousness and present tribute”). At the same time, his xenophobic rhetoric

¹⁶ On *sifang* cosmology as a political discourse, see Aihe Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 23–74. For the “Tribute of Yu,” see James Legge, trans., *The Shoo King*, vol. 3 of *The Chinese Classics* (1871; rpt., Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 2000), pp. 92–151, esp. 147–44; *Shiji*, 2.75. On Han dynasty resistance to, and historiographic problems with, the “Tribute of Yu” world order, see *Shiji*, 74.2344; Wang Liqi 王利器, ed., *Yantielun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注 (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1983), rev. and enlarged ed., 53.564; Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, “Qin Han tongyi de youlai he Zhanguo ren duiyu shijie de xiangxiang” 秦漢統一的由來和戰國人對於世界的想像, Gu Jiegang, ed., *Gu shi bian* 古史辨 (1927; Haikou: Hainan chubanshe, 2003), 2:1–6.

¹⁷ For the diplomatic metaphor of brotherhood, see Yang Bojun 楊柏峻, ed., *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注 (rev. ed., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 2000), Xi 2.4.2, Wen 15.4, and especially David Schaberg, *A Patterned Past: Form and Thought in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 137, 142–48.

¹⁸ *Zuozhuan*, Zhao 17.3, p. 1389. See David Schaberg, “Travel, Geography, and the Imperial Imagination in Fifth-Century Athens and Han China,” *Comparative Literature* 51.2 (Spring 1999): 152–91 on this classical figure of the virtuous barbarian ruler.

of hierarchical statuses exceeds anything within the chapter itself, or in the appraisals of his two other accounts on foreign places and peoples.¹⁹ Writing by imperial order about the Former Han dynasty just when the Later Han dynasty was resuming hostilities, Ban Gu appraises the past with a view to an ongoing war in which he, unlike Sima Qian, would participate as an Army Commissioner.²⁰ By Fan Ye's time the term Xiongnu no longer referred to a living enemy. Nonetheless, in his evocation of the "savage minds" of the Xiongnu, Fan Ye echoes Ban Gu's talk of "the minds of beasts," and in subsequent dynasties Han-Xiongnu relations remained a familiar rhetorical template in the political discourse about the northern frontier. Fan Ye's comment on the "Xiyu zhuan" 西域傳 (Memoir of the western regions) in the *Hou Hanshu* is even more explicit than the "Nan Xiongnu liezhuan" in grounding military success in an ethnographic claim that the western foreigners were morally inferior.²¹ By comparison, Sima Qian's end-comment to the "Xiongnu liezhuan"—and to the other five chapters on foreigners and foreign places—avoid anthropological rhetoric. In these other memoirs of Han-dynasty conquests and in his brief chapter summaries listed in the autobiographical postface to the *Shiji*, Sima Qian highlights the political intrigues that led to conquest and finds narrative closure in geopolitical submission. However, unlike Ban Gu and Fan Ye, he fails to embed the conquest in a narrative of cultural or moral superiority.

The second way in which Sima Qian's end-comment differs from the comments of Ban Gu and Fan Ye is that it addresses a bias in reports

¹⁹ See *Hanshu*, 95.3837, 96B.3928.

²⁰ Ban Gu later took part in the campaigns of 89–91 C.E. against the Xiongnu. Sima Qian, by contrast, records his own visit to the northern frontier in his critique of the builder of Qin-dynasty sections of the Great Wall, Meng Tian 蒙恬 (d. 240 B.C.E.). See *Shiji*, 88.2570.

²¹ *Hou Hanshu*, 88.2909: "The appraisal says: The Western Hu are far away. / They live in an outer zone. / Their countries' products are beautiful and precious, / But their character is debauched and frivolous. / They do not follow the rites of the Hua [Central States] / They do not have the canonical books. / If they do not obey the Way of the spirits / Why should they care? What can control them?" Translation adapted from John E. Hill, *Through the Jade Gate to Rome: A Study of the Silk Routes during the Later Han Dynasty 1st to 2nd Centuries CE. An Annotated Translation of the Chronicle on the 'Western Regions' in the Hou Hanshu* (Charleston: Booksurge Publishing, 2009), p. 59. The brief appraisals of the remaining four chapters on foreign peoples in the *Hou Hanshu* attend more to events and are less explicitly xenophobic. See *Hou Hanshu*, 85.2823, 86.2861, 87.2902, 90.2994.

about the Xiongnu. Sima Qian's condemnation of those who pursue "the expediency of the moment" (*yi shi zhi quan* 一時之權) draws from a classical conundrum concerning whether to reward the strategic adviser who brings immediate but ill-gotten and unsustainable benefits to the state, or the ethical adviser whose aid to the state will be slower in coming but more enduring.²² This explicit concern with the politics of representation—with reporters who "offer flattery in their persuasions" in pursuit of personal advantage—does not appear in any other end-comment to chapters on foreigners in the *Shiji*, *Hanshu*, and *Hou hanshu*, or indeed, in chapters on foreigners in subsequent *Standard Histories* (through to the Qing Dynasty).

During imperial times, Sima Qian's concern with the politics of language drew the attention of traditional Chinese commentators on the *Shiji*, but it has not attracted the notice of modern scholars of frontier history and anthropology.²³ In his canonical commentary, *Zhengyi* 正義, Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (fl. 725–735) argues that the Grand Scribe uses the final anecdote about the dependence of legendary sage Yao on the wise sage Yu in order to criticize Emperor Wu for his inability to choose worthy advisers, his attention to "the flattery of petty men with empty words," and his aggression against the Xiongnu. Many later commentators echo Zhang's points about the rise of sycophantic verbiage under Emperor Wu and Sima Qian's allegorical use of language.²⁴ For example, Jiao Hong 焦宏 (1541–1620) wrote that the Grand Scribe

²² See *Huainanzi*, 18.191, and *Hanfeizi*, 15:36.348. Cf. *Lüshi chunqiu*, 14.4. This phrase is also used in charges against envoys who fabricate their reports about the western regions in *Yantielun*, 46.511.

²³ Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and Its Enemies*, p. 271, addresses the politics of Sima Qian's self-censorship, but does not pursue its possible literary implications. Di Cosmo offers four interconnecting "contexts" of the frontier, each of which produces a set of interconnected narratives: archaeology; pre-Han written sources; Qin-Han political history; Sima Qian's historiography. I seek to extend the attention Di Cosmo pays to rhetorical contexts of anthropological expression in pre-Han sources (his second context) to the history of the *heqin* (his third context) and Sima Qian's historiography (his fourth context).

²⁴ Ye Shi 葉適 (Song dynasty), Mao Kun 茅坤 and Yu Youding 余有丁 (Ming dynasty), and He Zhuo 何焯 and Yang Qiguang 楊琪光 (Qing dynasty) either ponder what Sima Qian was really criticizing (was it Emperor Wu's Xiongnu policy, his choice of ministers, or his neglect of the common people?) or emphasize that Sima Qian used the term "subtle" (*wei* 微) when referring to writing. See Zhang Dake, *Shiji yanjiu*, 6:560–62. Nakai Riken 中井積德 (即中井履軒) (1732–1817) views the need for worthy advisers as central to Sima Qian's unclarified message. See Takigawa Kametarō 瀧川龜太郎, *Shiki kaichū kōshō* [*Shiji huizhu kaozheng*] 史記會注考證 (Tōhō Bunka gakuin Tōkyō kenkyūjo, 1932–34), 9:70.

was “deeply dissatisfied with [Emperor Wu], but there were difficulties in speaking openly, and therefore he composed these two lines [about Confucius’s writing]. This can be said to be [speaking] ‘subtly’ [wei 微] but ‘openly’ [zhang 章].” The various interpretive traditions of Confucius’s *Chunqiu* presented it as a text full of subtle moral meanings that readers had to decode or historicize.²⁵ Sima Qian’s autobiographical postface to the *Shiji* modestly distinguishes his mere transmission (*shu* 述) of the *Shiji* from Confucius’s creation (*zuo* 作) of the *Chunqiu*, but in so doing he echoes Confucius’s representation of his own teachings as historical transmission and not creation.²⁶ Thus in the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” when Sima Qian invokes Confucius’s composition of the *Chunqiu* and the paradigm of the misunderstood sage, he draws attention to the complexity of his own mode of transmitting meaning through “events and actions” (*xing shi* 行事) that underlies his own use of indirect critique, or what the modern scholar Chen Xi subsumes under the rubric of the implicit (*yinhan* 隱含).²⁷

The conception of the *Shiji* as the work of someone who was artfully encoding frustration and critique in historical narrative has a particular resonance with the “Xiongnu liezhuan.” Sima Qian famously faced execution for his “inability fully to clarify [himself]” (*wei neng jin ming* 未能盡明) to Emperor Wu in the case of the disgraced mili-

²⁵ On Dong Zhongshu, whom Sima Qian presents as the leading authority on the *Chunqiu*, see *Shiji*, 121.3128, 130.3297; Sarah Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn Annals According to Tung Chung-shu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 124–26. On Sima Qian’s departure from Dong Zhongshu’s anti-historical method, his relation to competing traditions of *Chunqiu* exegesis, and his novel pursuit of meaning in human choices as well as in the moral-political verities patterned in the Heavens, see Wai-yee Li, “The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi* (*Records of the Historian*),” *HJAS* 54.2 (1994): 345–405. Cf. Wai-yee Li, *The Readability of the Past in Early Chinese Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 34–48; Stephen W. Durrant, *The Cloudy Mirror: Tension and Conflict in the Writings of Sima Qian* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 1–27.

²⁶ See Michael Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation: Debates Concerning Innovation and Artifice in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 177–212.

²⁷ On this passage, and on the *Shiji*’s use of parable-style narration and shifting perspective, see Chen Xi 陈曦, *Shiji yu Zhou Han wenhua tansuo* 史记与周汉文化探索 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007), pp. 25–67. David Schaberg’s examination of the literary development by men of service (*shi* 士) of legends of “indirect remonstrance” (*fengjian* 諷諫) as an idealized means of challenging imperial power (when direct remonstrance is prohibited) through tales of jesters, might also be pursued in relation to Sima Qian’s self-presentation. See David Schaberg, “Playing at Critique: Indirect Remonstrance and the Formation of *Shi* Identity,” in Martin Kern, ed., *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 194–225.

tary general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 B.C.E.).²⁸ After a series of military victories over the Xiongnu during the period of hostilities that followed the breakdown of *heqin* relations, Li Ling chose to surrender to the Xiongnu rather than commit suicide. Sima Qian failed to join the chorus of denunciations of Li Ling and was himself condemned. Without sufficient funds or support to fully commute his death sentence, but wishing to complete the *Shiji* so as to fulfill his filial duty to his father, he accepted castration. The shame of these events—being misunderstood, being politically isolated, and facing the “silkworm chamber”—though detailed in a letter recorded in the *Hanshu*, is referred to with noticeable brevity by Sima Qian in his autobiographical postface to the *Shiji*.²⁹ Thus when Sima Qian's end-comment to the “Xiongnu zhuan” invokes Confucius's need for self-censorship and then addresses the extreme politicization of Han discourse about the Xiongnu, we are reminded of his own historic miscommunication. The politics of talking about the Xiongnu and of choosing the right generals—the two concerns of the end-comment—thus bind the “Xiongnu liezhuan” to the unusual circumstances in which the *Shiji* was completed.³⁰

Sima Qian's self-reflexive attention in the “Xiongnu liezhuan” to “those who talk about the Xiongnu” (*yan Xiongnu zhe* 言匈奴者) raises the third unique feature of Sima Qian's end-comment within the *Standard Histories* tradition—namely, its failure to address the account's titular foreigners at all. Sima Qian does not summarize, assess, or even mention any aspect of the Xiongnu's history, rulers, or culture. Instead, he turns his gaze to the Central States, past and present: to Confucius, to Sima Qian's power-seeking contemporaries, to Han generals, and to the sages of remote antiquity, Yao and Yu. Although he opens the “Xiongnu liezhuan” with a description of Xiongnu customs, the end-comment reveals that what is at stake are the “contemporary customs”

²⁸ *Hanshu*, 62.2730. This is found in a letter to Sima Qian's friend Ren An 任安, which is preserved in the *Hanshu*'s chapter-length biography of Sima Qian.

²⁹ *Shiji*, 130.3300. On the likelihood that Sima Qian completed the chapters involving Han-dynasty events (including the “Xiongnu liezhuan”) after his castration, see William H. Nienhauser, “A Note on a Textual Problem in the ‘Shih chi’ and Some Speculations concerning the Compilation of the Hereditary Houses,” *TP* 89.1–3 (2003): 39–58.

³⁰ Ban Gu's end-comment excludes this. Ban Gu again dissociates the problem of the politics of representation from his geographical account of the western regions, moving the *Shiji*'s invocation of the problem of envoys' exaggerated speech in the “Dayuan Liezhuan” (*Shiji*, 123.3171) to the biographies of Zhang Qian and Li Guangli (*Hanshu*, 61.2695).

(*shi su* 世俗) not of the ethnographic object but of the ethnographer—of “those who talk about the Xiongnu.” Commentators have observed Sima Qian’s oblique warning against political self-censorship but have generally ignored his shifting of the reader’s attention from the Xiongnu to the Central States. And while Ban Gu’s and Fan Ye’s criticisms of the Xiongnu as innately greedy and deceptive pervade the archive of received and excavated Han-dynasty texts, Sima Qian’s disquiet about Han bias and his self-censorship in representing the Xiongnu does not.³¹

The comparison of the three end-comments brings out the uniqueness of Sima Qian’s perspective, which is further illustrated by a strange anecdote contained within the *Shiji*’s “Xiongnu liezhuan,” about a Han defector who explicitly turns the gaze of Han ethnographers back toward the Central States. This episode provides a context for the end-comment’s otherwise anomalous shift from frontier history to the domestic politics of representation. It recounts Emperor Wen’s 文帝 (r. 180–157 B.C.E.) renewal of the *heqin* early in the Han dynasty, when the Xiongnu confederacy was still militarily dominant but border raids by renegade Xiongnu and Han defectors continued to threaten the treaty. The Han princess was accompanied by her reluctant tutor, Zhonghang Yue 中行說, who was a “eunuch from the state of Yan.” Upon his arrival at the frontier, Zhonghang Yue defected and became personal political adviser to two successive Xiongnu leaders. His conversations with the Xiongnu leader and with an anonymous Han envoy (or envoys) are recorded as dialogue—a form used in philosophical traditions, and throughout the *Shiji*, often when creatively expanding upon historical sources or heightening dramatic tension.

Zhonghang Yue’s dialogue with the envoy occurs halfway through

³¹ The Xiongnu’s greed (*tan* 貪) is a recurring claim in the *Yantielun*. See, for example, the statement “The Xiongnu made the *heqin* alliance several times, but regularly were the first to violate the contract, in their greed (*tan*) invading and plundering by horseback; they are a state that always deceives,” at *Yantielun*, 48.525. See also a Han wooden document dating to the late first century B.C.E. that was excavated from Ulan-durbeljin (地灣), as transcribed in *Juyan Hanjian: Jia yi bian* 居延漢簡: 甲乙編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1980), 2:233, strip 387.7, which states: “The Yi and Di are greedy (*tan*), and without benevolence harbor boldness, requesting with insincerity to make” [strip broken] 夷狄貪而不仁懷俠二心請為. For a discussion of this strip, see Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration: Volume 2, Documents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 245–49. Jia Yi 賈誼 uses similar language in the *Xinshu* 新書. See Yan Zhenyi 閻振益, ed., *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), pp. 137–38. For Dong Zhongshu’s memorial on Xiongnu greed, see *Hanshu*, 94.3831.

the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” but its parallels with the opening passage of the chapter illustrate Sima Qian’s more complex literary method. In the excerpts taken from the opening and the dialogue I have marked out three claims about Xiongnu that appear in both passages (with the letters a, b, and c) and used italics to highlight some of the parallel language. The “Xiongnu liezhuan” opens with the longest description of foreign customs found in any *Shiji* chapter, or indeed in Chinese literature to that point.

The first ancestor of the Xiongnu, called Chunwei, was a descendent of the ruling lineage of the Xia state. . . . [The Xiongnu] have no walled cities, fixed abodes, or agricultural occupations. . . . They have no written documents, and they use spoken words to seal pacts. . . . During crises their men practice warfare and invade and plunder. This is their inborn nature. . . . They do not understand ritual propriety and benevolence. . . . They wear skins and hide. . . . (a) The strong eat the richest and finest food, while the elderly eat their leftovers. They honor the strong and vigorous, and dishonor the elderly and weak. (b) When fathers die, [the sons] marry the stepmothers. (c) When brothers die, they take their [brothers’] wives and marry them. According to their customs, they have personal names but do not observe taboos on them, and they have no surnames or polite names.³²

The narrative of Han-Xiongnu relations that follows this passage continues to supply anthropological information; but it is only in the lengthy debate between Zhonghang Yue and the Han envoy over Xiongnu customs that the status and origin of this information come into question:

One of the Han envoys said: “According to Xiongnu customs, (a) *they dishonor the elderly.*”

Zhonghang Yue interrogated the Han envoy: “But according to Han customs, when those joining the military are sent out to be stationed in garrisons, *do they not have their elderly kin set aside their own warmest layers and richest and finest [food]* in order to send food and drink to those working in the garrisons?”

The Han envoy said: “It is so.”

Zhonghang Yue said: “The Xiongnu make it clear that they take warfare and attack as their business. *Their elderly and weak are unable to fight,*

³² *Shiji*, 110.2879.

and therefore they give their richest and finest food and drink to the strong and vigorous. And because [the strong] make themselves the protectors and defenders so fathers and sons both protect each other in the long term. How can you say the Xiongnu dishonor the elderly?"

The Han envoy said: "Amongst the Xiongnu, fathers and sons bed together in the same tent. (b) *When fathers die, [the sons] marry their step-mothers.* (c) *When brothers die they take all the [brothers'] wives and marry them.*"³³

The opening passage of the "Xiongnu liezhuan" in the *Shiji* anticipates the rhetoric of alien customs that is found in Ban Gu's and Fan Ye's end-comments. The ethnography unfolds as a litany of lack. The Xiongnu have no written documents, no agriculture, no ritual propriety, and no proper naming practices. Their kinship violations (in marrying stepmothers) and maltreatment of the elderly (in feeding them leftovers) require no explicit condemnation. The anonymous, panoptical observer and the generalization of the ethnographic object echo the pre-imperial moral discourse of hierarchy and difference between the Yi and Hua. The opening genealogy traces Xiongnu ancestry back to the descendents of the rulers of the ancient Xia state. This strategy of creative ethnogenealogy, which was applied to other foreigners in early Chinese texts, locates and fixes the Xiongnu as political subordinates to the generationally senior Central States.³⁴ The opening portrait of Xiongnu customs and character parallels many individual propositions found elsewhere, especially in the political rhetoric preserved in the *Xinshu*, by the Han official Jia Yi (201–169 B.C.E.); in edicts and correspondence excavated at the frontier or preserved in the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*; and in the *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論 (The discourses on salt and iron),

³³ *Shiji*, 110.2899–900.

³⁴ Di Cosmo historicizes Sima Qian's ethnogenealogy as a traditional Chinese method of assimilating the Xiongnu into a politically, culturally, and astrologically subordinate position that had previously been occupied by other foreigners. See Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, pp. 294–304. Cui Mingde 崔明德 similarly uses this passage to show continuities with the *Zuozhuan* tradition; he traces the stance in the *Shiji* of cultural superiority to the Xiongnu back to common attitudes toward foreigners found in earlier historiography. See his *Liang Han minzu guanxi sixiangshi* 两汉民族关系思想史 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2007), pp. 122–34, esp. 132. On the processes of constructing a "fictive genealogy" in the formation of the ever-shifting temporal, geographical, ecological, and identificatory borders of the Huaxia, see Wang Ming-ke 王明珂, *Huaxia bianyuan: lishi jiyi yu zuqun rentong* 华夏边缘: 历史记忆与族群认同 (Beijing: shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006).

an account of an imperial debate convened in 81 B.C.E., and ascribed to Huan Kuan 桓寬 during the subsequent reign of Emperor Xuan.³⁵ Historians and archaeologists commonly excerpt the *Shiji*'s more sustained descriptions of Xiongnu norms, presenting them either as empirical data or as flawed constructions resulting from traditional Chinese cultural biases.³⁶

Unlike the ethnographic passage with which the *Shiji* opens, Zhonghang Yue challenges the ethnographic assumptions and practice of Han envoys. In so doing, he anticipates the criticism of "those who talk about the Xiongnu" that Sima Qian voices in his end-comment to the chapter. Zhonghang Yue treasonably sympathizes with Xiongnu practices ("How can you say the Xiongnu dishonor their elderly?"), and through his reinterpretation of social acts, he undermines the moral authority of the Han envoy. After demonstrating that the wartime sacrifices of the Han elderly to the young manifest a lack of filiality, he revalues the sacrifices of Xiongnu elderly to their young as part of a military system designed to protect their elderly. Zhonghang Yue reverses the ethnographic gaze with the rare phrase, "Han customs" (*Han su* 漢俗). Elsewhere in the *Shiji*, the term *su* 俗 is used in relation to outsider groups or to connote negative practices, such

³⁵ For a Han imperial edict alleging that Xiongnu abuse their elderly and transgress proper human relations, see *Shiji*, 111.2923. On the governmental preoccupation during this period over Han treatment of their own elderly, see A. F. P. Hulswé, "Han Chin—A Proto 'Welfare State'? Fragments of Han Law Discovered in North-West China," *TP* 73.4–5 (1987): 265–85. For descriptions of Xiongnu clothes and customs, and their lack of city walls, righteousness, and various forms of propriety, see *Yantielun*, 38.453, 52.555. A wooden strip found at Tuyin 土垠 near Lop Nor, Xinjiang, has a fragment of text resembling a line from the ethnographic opening: 人利則進不利: "If the people have the advantage, they will advance; if they do not have the advantage . . ." [strip broken]. As transcribed by Huang Wenbi 黃文弼, *Luobunaer kaogu ji* 羅布淖爾考古記 (Peiping: National Peking University, 1948), p. 211. Chen Zhi 陳直 argues that this fragment, written by a frontier official, derived from a separate circulating portion of the *Shiji* rather than from a full manuscript; see his *Shiji xinzheng* 史記新證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), p. 165; *Hanshu xinzheng* 漢書新證 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), p. 421.

³⁶ See, for example, Wu Mu 武沐, *Xiongnu shi yanjiu* 匈奴史研究 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2005), pp. 111–15; Chen Xujing 陳序經, *Xiongnu shi gao* 匈奴史稿 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), pp. 84–94. On the continuing usefulness of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu* for frontier archaeologists, see William Honeychurch and Chunag Amartuvshin, "States on Horseback: The Rise of Inner Asian Confederations and Empires," in Miriam T. Stark, ed., *Archaeology of Asia* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 262–68. For the differentiation between the "empirical" and "normative" aspects of the *Shiji* as a mode of representation, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, chapters 7, 8.

as Qin-dynasty norms or misguided popular conventions). The specific term *Han su* occurs only twice in early Chinese texts, once within this strange dialogue between a Han envoy and Zhonghang Yue in the “Xiongnu liezhuan” in the *Shiji*, and once as it is preserved in the parallel dialogue in the “Xiongnu zhuan” in the *Hanshu*.³⁷ According to modern historians, it was only after the Han dynasty that the meaning of the term Han changed from a political one (in reference to the state of Han or the Han dynasty) to an ethnic one.³⁸ Therefore it is strange that the term *Han su* here appears not simply in the context of anti-Han political sentiment, but also as a sustained critique of Han ethnographic representations of the Xiongnu.

Traditional and modern scholars have interpreted Zhonghang Yue in three main ways: as a historical traitor (an object of blame), as a Chinese civilizer of foreigners (an object of praise), and as a vehicle of Chinese self-critique (a literary device). In the first instance, as an object of blame, Zhonghang Yue illustrates the widespread problem of Han defections to the Xiongnu; and his traitorous speeches are analyzed as oral history, whose inclusion yields insights into the fraught historical politics of the *heqin* treaty and into Sima Qian’s own political ambivalence.³⁹ In the second instance, as an object of praise, Zhonghang Yue has been read by historians of Chinese “ethnic unification” as an agent of positive cultural influence: the defector teaches

³⁷ Sima Qian generally uses *su* in reference to a foreign culture or negative domestic practices (e.g., *Shiji*, 6.278) that may change according to the dynasty or to specific influences, or that resists positive change (e.g., *Shiji*, 82.1424). See Mark Edward Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), pp. 192–212.

³⁸ See Mark Elliott, “Hushuo 胡說: The Northern Other and Han Ethnogenesis,” paper presented at the Conference on Critical Han Studies, Stanford University, April 2008. Wang Liqi explicitly translates the term *Hansu* here as Han-dynasty customs in Wang Liqi 王利器, ed., *Shiji zhuyi* 史記注譯 (Xi’an: San Qin chubanshe, 1988), 4:2341.

³⁹ Song Chao 宋超, “Han-Xiong zhanzheng dui liang Han shehui xintai de yingxiang” 汉匈战争对两汉社会心态的影响, *Shixue lilun yanjiu* 史学理论研究 (1997.4): 61–71, esp. 64; Thomas J. Barfield, *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1989), pp. 50–53. For Zhonghang Yue’s dialogue as an example of one of the *Shiji*’s oral sources, whose inclusion enabled Sima Qian to communicate his “barbarophile” sympathies, see Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, p. 269. On Jia Yi’s condemnation of Zhonghang Yue as someone to be flogged, see *Hanshu*, 48.2241–42; Ying-shih Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, pp. 11, 37. According to Tu Long 屠隆 (1541–1605), Zhonghang Yue’s eunuch status helps to explain his carefree treachery. See Ling Zhilong 凌稚隆, ed., *Shiji pinglin* 史記評林 (1576; Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe 1998), 6:312–13.

the Xiongnu accounting, military strategy, and modes of official letter-writing, thus becoming a vehicle of “sinification” (and thus, from this perspective, a positive influence).⁴⁰ In the third instance, as a literary device, scholars have interpreted Zhonghang Yue as holding up a kind of Chinese ethnographic mirror. His reversal of hierarchies serves to represent the Chinese self through the oppositional foreigner, rather than to depict the Xiongnu from a Xiongnu perspective. As some modern scholars have pointed out, the Zhonghang Yue dialogue recalls a classical use of the wisdom of foreigners to indirectly critique the self, especially during times of political decadence.⁴¹

My own reading builds on Zhonghang Yue's relation to a literary tradition rather than to the history of the frontier. However, where

⁴⁰ Cui Mingde, “Zhongguo gudai heqin de wenhua yingxiang” 中国古代和亲的文化影响, *Minzu yanjiu* 民族研究 (2003.3): 59–68; Ma Liqing 马利清 and Song Yuanru 宋远茹, “Guanyu Xiongnu wenzi de xin xiansuo” 关于匈奴文字的新线索, *Kaogu yu wenwu* 考古与文物 (2004.2): 49–53. Ma Chiyang comments on the civilizing role of the encounter for the Xiongnu, as recipients of a superior Chinese culture. See Ma Chiyang 馬持盈, *Shiji jinzhushu* 史記今註 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1979), 6:2914. Cf. Lü Simian 呂思勉, *Zhongguo minzu shi* 中國民族史 (Shanghai: Shijie shujū, 1934), pp. 35–52.

⁴¹ David Schaberg, “Travel, Geography, and the Imperial Imagination,” pp. 180–89, situates Zhonghang Yue's dialogue within two longstanding classical traditions: that of remonstrance; and that of the delineation of Chinese civilization based on a watery metaphor of circulating words, goods, and structures of knowledge. The forms that Zhonghang Yue's rejection of Chinese culture takes—his rhetorical focus on Chinese hypocrisy and on blocking the circulation of Chinese words and silks (both classical tropes)—thus betray his simultaneously “sinifying influence.” As Schaberg argues, Zhonghang Yue's transmission of Chinese modes of ordering the world (through census-taking, taxation, rhetoric) implicitly explains to the Chinese reader how the Xiongnu became such a powerful threat. Where Schaberg elucidates the continuities between Zhonghang Yue and the pre-imperial poetics of the frontier (the water metaphor, the trope of the sinifying traitor), I emphasize those aspects of Zhonghang Yue's rhetoric that remain bound to their place within the *Shiji*, and to the specific uses of the kinship metaphor in the Han dynasty. See also Paul Rouzer, *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), pp. 168–71; Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 135; Claudius C. Müller, “Die Herausbildung der Gegensätze: Chinesen und Barbaren in der frühen Zeit (1. Jahrtausend v. Chr. bis 220 n. Chr.),” in Wolfgang Bauer, ed., *China und die Fremden: 3000 Jahre Auseinandersetzung in Krieg und Frieden* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1980), pp. 43–76, esp. 71–72. Amidst the Anglo-Chinese hostilities leading up to the Opium Wars, Guan Tong 管同 (1780–1831), an advocate of bans on foreign imports, cites Zhonghang Yue as a parable for his own times. Just as Zhonghang Yue instructed the Xiongnu to ride Han silks through brambles to show their inferiority to Xiongnu leathers, so Guan Tong called for the imposition of punitive measures to ban foreign imports into China. In applying Zhonghang Yue's advice to his own times, Guan implicitly aligned himself with the Xiongnu, not the Han-dynasty Han. See Guan Tong, “Jin yong yang huo yi” 禁用洋貨議, in *Huangchao jingshi wenbian* 皇朝經世文編 (Taipei: Shijie shujū, 1964), ed. He Changling 賀長齡, 2:26.15–16.

others emphasize the parallels between Zhonghang Yue's rhetoric and precedents found in classical texts, I focus on the striking resonances between his dialogues and the framing passages of the "Xiongnu zhuan" (the opening and the end-comment), which together serve to defamiliarize anthropological discourse in an unprecedented way. As the juxtaposition of the passages above demonstrates, Zhonghang Yue engages the claims not only of his immediate interlocutor, but also of the panoptic opening ethnographic passage. The dialogue elaborates on the opening's theme of Xiongnu cultural failures, echoing its language, and it also duplicates the topic order in the opening passage. Both passages proceed from the Xiongnu's disrespect for the elderly symbolized by the offering of leftover food (a), to Xiongnu sons marrying their stepmothers (b), to brothers marrying their dead brothers' wives (c). The parallels in vocabulary (for example, the phrases "they dishonor the elderly" and "richest and finest food" [a]), and in entire statements in (b) and (c), compel the reader to draw a comparison. The exchange between the Han envoy and the Han traitor becomes more legible when read not simply as part of the chronological narrative of the northern frontier that follows the chapter's opening account of Xiongnu customs, but also as a response to those opening claims. Through it, the panoptical eye of the opening passage, whose authority depends upon the invisibility of the ethnographer, becomes embodied in a stock-figure who is worsted in argument with Zhonghang Yue. To use the vocabulary of modern anthropology, one might say that Sima Qian illumines the dialogic processes of "participant observation," or ethnographic fieldwork, by juxtaposing the claims of the informant with the interventions and cultural assumptions of the ethnographer.⁴² In Sima Qian's case, however, there is no Xiongnu informant; it is rather the Han discourse about the Xiongnu, in the chapter's opening and in the figure of the envoy, that comes under scrutiny.

The most striking indictment of the Han envoy and the opening ethnography comes in Zhonghang Yue's ensuing comparison of kinship practices (topics b and c):

⁴² See James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 14–15.

When fathers, sons, and brothers die, [the Xiongnu] take [the widowed] wives and marry them, as they hate having the surname group die out. Therefore even when the Xiongnu face political turmoil, the ancestral group is [firmly] established. Now in the Central States although a man clearly would not marry his father's or brother's wife, family members have become so estranged that they kill each other until the dynastic line is changed, and everyone follows this pattern.⁴³

Pitting Xiongnu against Han practices, Zhonghang Yue refuses even to use the same terminology. Instead he introduces the new and unfamiliar terms “surname group” (*zhong xing* 種姓) and “ancestral group” (*zong zhong* 宗種) in advocating the Xiongnu system.⁴⁴ He directly contrasts the Xiongnu lineage and ancestral groups with the Central States “family” (*qin shu* 親屬)—a term that the *Shiji* generally uses to refer to the imperial family. His new terms also indirectly counter the vocabulary of descent (*xian zu* 先祖, *miao yi* 苗裔) used in the opening ethnographic statement—vocabulary that would otherwise politically subordinate the Xiongnu within the broader Central States family system. Zhonghang Yue's insult of comparison climaxes when he makes the kinship practices of the Central States appear strange and violent. In distinguishing the two systems, he recasts the Central States' “family” (*qin shu*) as the source of its cultural inferiority. Because the Central States have a *qin shu* and not a *zhong xing* or *zong zhong* blessed with the levirate, they, unlike the Xiongnu, are unstable and estranged to the point of dynastic upheaval. The phrase “to change surnames” (*yi xing* 易姓) occurs elsewhere in the *Shiji*, in Confucius's report of the traditional procedure of changing surnames in becoming ruler.⁴⁵ But here, in light of the Xiongnu's alternate kinship values (feeding well the young, marrying stepmothers), which enable the young to defend the old and make generational succession smooth, what appears strange and savage are the traditional cycles of dynastic change in the Central States.

⁴³ *Shiji*, 110.2900.

⁴⁴ On the translation of “clan,” “lineage,” and “surname,” see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): The Archaeological Evidence* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, 2006), pp. 23–24, 164–65. On the problem that that translation of kinship terminology poses for cultural comparison and comprehension, see David Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), pp. 3, 38.

⁴⁵ *Shiji*, 28.1363.

Zhonghang Yue's refutations of the opening passage are, in part, an instance of the *Shiji*'s common use of narrative contradiction or, to use Wai-ye Li's phrase, "ironic disjunction."⁴⁶ As in the *Chunqiu* tradition, scholars have long sought clues to meaning or indirect criticism through these contradictions or ellipses. A common form this contradiction takes in the *Shiji* occurs when a bald moral statement or character sketch, often at the opening of a chapter, is undermined or proved inaccurate through ensuing events. So, the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor Qin" juxtaposes the official self-celebrating, epigraphic histories of the Qin dynasty with a narrative of the cruelties and failures of the regime. And in the chapter on families related to the emperor by marriage, Sima Qian pronounces that "amongst ritual practices only marriage demands complete rigor" before detailing the dramas of ritually incorrect Han consorts.⁴⁷ Likewise, in the case of the "Xiongnu liezhuan," several of the introductory ethnographic statements are contradicted by the ensuing narrative. Although the Xiongnu "have no written documents," Sima Qian includes two written letters from the Xiongnu leader to the Han Emperor. Zhonghang Yue instructs the Xiongnu subversively to embellish their salutations to the emperor and to use writing materials longer than the one-foot standard,⁴⁸ but he does not need to teach them how to write. The observation that they use these written letters to formalize the peace treaty with the Han also contradicts the opening claim that they only "use spoken words to seal pacts." Although the Xiongnu are introduced as having "no surnames," the narrative later gives surnames for the three families comprising the Xiongnu aristocracy. And when Zhonghang Yue later complains that the Xiongnu are wearing not "skins and hides . . . fur and felt," but imported Han silk, the timeless ethnographic portrait of the Xiongnu

⁴⁶ In "The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi*," Wai-ye Li shows how Sima Qian establishes his moral authority by promoting the task of memorializing human affairs alongside that of elucidating transcendental patterns, and by mediating between a wide spectrum of attitudes in his narrative and commentary, "ranging from ironic detachment to sympathetic identification, from verification to skepticism."

⁴⁷ *Shiji*, 6.243, 49.1967. Puett, *The Ambivalence of Creation*, p. 179, makes the point that Sima Qian sometimes used his nuanced narratives as veiled critiques of his own simplistic final statements.

⁴⁸ Michael Loewe suggests that this might explain why a large number of writing strips excavated at Juyan (at the Han-Xiongnu frontier) exceeded the standard length. Michael Loewe, *Records of Han Administration: Vol. 1, Historical Assessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 32.

is proved outdated.⁴⁹ Historians have pointed out that later texts and archaeological finds disprove many of the claims made at the opening of the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” but my point here is that the account itself provides contradictory or historically nuanced information.

The ironic relation between the opening passage and the later dialogue in the “Xiongnu liezhuan” thus aligns Sima Qian’s end-comments with those of Zhonghang Yue, and the opening claims with those of the Han envoy. Like Zhonghang Yue, Sima Qian reverses the focus from the Xiongnu to the Central States. Like Zhonghang Yue, Sima Qian draws attention to the politics of ethnographic representation itself. Where Zhonghang Yue attacks the biases of the Han envoys and (implicitly) of the chapter’s opening, Sima Qian attacks self-serving politicians who talk about the Xiongnu and (implicitly) compares Confucius’s self-censorship to his own predicament. In this light, the dialogue both unsettles the confident ethnography of the chapter’s opening and serves as preface to the Grand Scribe’s radical defamiliarization of the foreigner. The Zhonghang Yue episode, more than any place else in the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” recalls the problems raised by the end-comment: of writing openly about one’s own times, of political bias in Xiongnu reportage, and of choosing the right advisers. Through the resonances of these three sections (the beginning, the end-comment, and the most extended dialogue), it emerges that the problem posed by the Xiongnu is one of representation, not of anthropological difference.

The depiction of Zhonghang Yue as a good adviser gives credence to Sima Qian’s sympathy with the traitor and not the Han envoy. Narrative form and diction mark Zhonghang Yue as the possessor of superior knowledge. His debate with the envoy appropriates—parodies even—the dialogues of classical philosophers.⁵⁰ On the perennial classical topic of filial piety, Zhonghang Yue has become the speaking master, and the Han envoy the humble student interlocutor whose leading questions or propositions (such as “According to Xiongnu customs, they dishonor the elderly”) result in lengthy responses, followed by the envoy’s prompt concession of defeat—“It is so” (*ran* 然). Originally

⁴⁹ *Shiji*, 110.2899.

⁵⁰ On Han classicists’ use of the dialogue form of Confucius’s *Analects*, see Michael Nylan, “Han Classicists Writing in Dialogue About Their Own Tradition,” *Philosophy East and West* 47.2 (1996): 133–88.

sent as tutor to the Han princess, Zhonghang Yue redirects his lessons at those sent to educate the Xiongnu in the ways of the Central States. He teaches them accounting and taxation. In demanding silence, he characterizes the envoy's speech as "twittering and chattering" (*die die er zhan zhan* 喋喋而佔佔), an accusation with a parallel elsewhere in the *Shiji*. In a debate over the proper choice of ministers, the wise adviser Zhang Shizhi 張釋之 condemns the twittering (*die die* 喋喋) workman at the imperial Shanglin Park who once so impressed the visiting Emperor Wen by naming its exotic animals that the emperor ordered his promotion to the director of the park. If the emperor should choose the workman over the worthy official, Zhang warns, people "will compete in verbal disputation that has nothing to do with reality."⁵¹ Here and in the "Xiongnu liezhuan," the kind of empirical truth-claims represented by the workman's and the Han envoy's oral reports are dismissed as mere verbosity. Elsewhere, the *Shiji* critically presents Han envoys in distant lands using exaggeration and misrepresentation for profit and power, a worry that recurs in other literary documents.⁵²

Zhonghang Yue's language also closely parallels that of two model advisers, You Yu 由余 and Jia Yi. The *Shiji*'s "Qin benji" 秦本紀 (Basic annals of the Qin) narrates how the ancient king of the Rong sent his envoy You Yu to Duke Mu of Qin 秦繆公 (r. 659–621 B.C.E.). As in other versions of this parable in the received tradition, You Yu is the sage foreign adviser who criticizes the moral decline of the Central States and who, after Duke Mu sends female musicians to corrupt the Rong, switches his political loyalty to the Qin.⁵³ The *Shiji*'s rendition of this story departs from other accounts in three ways that emphasize a closer parallel to the Zhonghang Yue dialogue. First, in other versions, Duke Mu or his advisers isolate the Rong's lack of (corrupting) music as the main difference between Qin and Rong. Sima Qian's Duke Mu, by con-

⁵¹ *Shiji*, 102.2752, and its parallel account in the *Hanshu*, 50.2307.

⁵² The scholars representing local interests in the *Yantielun* echo the end-comment in *Shiji*, *juan* 110, in accusing the officers reporting on affairs of the western regions of "seeking after momentary power." See *Yantielun*, 46.511. *Shiji*, 123.3171 also portrays the envoys in the western region as "unbalancing their tales."

⁵³ *Shiji*, 5.192–93; *Hanfeizi*, 3.10.70–72; *Lüshi chunqiu*, 2.4.1.3. Cf. *Hanshi waizhuan*, 9.2.4; *Shuo yuan*, 20.9a–10b. These latter versions frame the dialogue as a moral-political parable about pleasure (the danger of female musicians) or about the danger posed by the presence of a sage in an enemy state (*lin guo you sheng ren, di guo zhi you ye* 鄰國有聖人, 敵國之憂也).

trast, opens the conversation by pointing out that the Rong lack rites, classics, and laws. Zhonghang Yue likewise begins his comparison of Xiongnu and Central States with the Han envoys' (far more critical) claim that the Xiongnu lack ritual proprieties. Second, unlike in other versions, Sima Qian's You Yu elaborates why the Rong are a superior state. He celebrates the harmonious relations between rulers and subjects, and asserts that "the governance of the state resembles that of the self" 一國之政猶一身也. Zhonghang Yue makes a similar claim and utters this exact phrase in defending Xiongnu superiority.⁵⁴ Finally, Sima Qian alone introduces You Yu as having ancestors from the state of Jin and as a native speaker of its language. Since Zhonghang Yue originally served as tutor to the Han princess, both he and You Yu defend the foreigner as a bicultural adviser. In one respect, You Yu serves as a foil, rather than an analogue, to Zhonghang Yue, however: his subsequent political transgression works in favor of the Central States, and he is briefly commemorated in the "Xiongnu liezhuan" for having helped Emperor Mu in defeating the eight states of the western Rong.⁵⁵

Zhonghang Yue's political diagnosis of Han-Xiongnu relations under Emperor Wen also bears uncanny resemblance to that of his eminent contemporary Jia Yi. Where Jia Yi, as recounted by the *Hanshu*, argues that "the [size of the] population of the Xiongnu does not exceed that of a large prefecture" and elsewhere lays out a program for using Han material goods as the "five baits" (*wu er* 五餌) with which to weaken the Xiongnu,⁵⁶ Zhonghang Yue warns the chieftan (*shanyu* 單于): "The Xiongnu population cannot equal one Han commandery. So what makes them strong is that, because their clothing and food differ from ours, they do not depend on the Han. Now the *shanyu* is changing the customs in his fondness for Han commodities, so, although Han material goods do not exceed one fifth [of Han production], the Xiongnu ultimately will revert to being under Han control."⁵⁷ While the patriotic adviser Jia Yi embraces this possibility,

⁵⁴ *Shiji*, 110.2900. Li Si's 李斯 famous memorial to the First Emperor of Qin against the expulsion of foreign advisers opens with the example of You Yu of the Rong giving sage advice that subsequently benefited Duke Mu of Qin. See *Shiji*, 87.2541. On the implicit or explicit worthiness of You Yu as an adviser, see also *Shiji*, 68.2234, 83.2473; Ying Shao's comment at *Hanshu*, 22.1043.

⁵⁵ *Shiji*, 110.2881.

⁵⁶ *Hanshu*, 48.2241.

⁵⁷ *Shiji*, 110.2899.

the traitor Zhonghang Yue exhorts the Xiongnu to reject Han silks and foods in favor of animal hides and nutritious kumiss. At the same time, Jia Yi and Zhonghang Yue's share an ethical conception of the corrupting power of material wealth, and valorize the "primary" (*ben* 本) economy based on agriculture over the "secondary" (*mo* 末) economy based on commerce.⁵⁸

Unlike You Yu and Jia Yi, however, the figure of Zhonghang Yue serves as a literary device rather than as a paradigm of the good adviser. The *Shiji* never explicitly recognizes him as a model to emulate, as it does the other two. How, after all, could Sima Qian present a voluntary traitor as an object of praise? Although Sima Qian famously risked his life for defending the reputation of another purported traitor, Li Ling, Zhonghang Yue was not a celebrated general cornered into surrender. The resonance between Sima Qian's own comments and those of Zhonghang Yue does not resolve into simple praise of the historical figure. Differences between the *Hanshu* and the *Shiji* illustrate Zhonghang Yue's ambivalent status. Although the parallel *Hanshu* chapter includes both the opening ethnographic passage and the Zhonghang Yue dialogue, Ban Gu's appraisal transforms their value. Ban Gu echoes the phobic anthropological discourse of the opening, realigning himself not with Zhonghang Yue, but with the Han envoy. Moreover, the *Hanshu* biography of Jia Yi includes Jia Yi's memorial to the emperor, which calls for Zhonghang Yue's flogging, even though that memorial is not found in the *Shiji*.⁵⁹ Ban Gu's realignment of authorial sympathies, along with Jia Yi's open condemnation, helps to stabilize the Zhonghang Yue of the *Hanshu* as a historical exemplar of the traitor. Lost in the *Hanshu*'s rewriting of the *Shiji*'s chapter is Sima Qian's implicit affirmation of Zhonghang Yue. Where Sima Qian's end-comment echoes Zhonghang Yue's critique of both the Han envoy and the chapter's opening passage, Ban Gu's end-comment simply reaffirms the authority of the envoy and the ethnography. No other account of foreigners in the historiographic tradition—including Ban Gu's parallel chapter—self-reflexively defamiliarizes anthropological discourse itself.

⁵⁸ *Shiji*, 30.1442, 129.3272.

⁵⁹ *Hanshu*, 48.2242, and in a parallel passage in Jia Yi, *Xinshu*. Zhonghang Yue also figures briefly in the *Xin xu* 新序, a collection of anecdotes drawn from the *Shiji* and other early texts, and reputedly compiled by Liu Xiang 劉向 (79–8 B.C.E.).

Kinship in the “Peace through Kinship” (*heqin*) Treaty

Sima Qian's defamiliarization of ethnography belongs to a broader shift in the early Han-dynasty construction of frontier relations. Zhonghang Yue's reversal of the Han envoy's gaze to court politics resonates not only with Sima Qian's end-comment on biases in reports on the Xiongnu, but also with debates over the new *heqin* treaty found elsewhere in the *Shiji* and other Han-dynasty texts. The establishment of imperial China's earliest form of non-tributary diplomacy and its centrality to Han-Xiongnu relations from 198 to 133 B.C.E. invited debate about the symbolic, as well as the contractual, aspects of the treaty. First found in the *Shiji* and on tile-ends inscribed with “*Heqin* with the *shanyu*” (*shanyu heqin* 單于和親) excavated at the Han-Xiongnu frontier, the *heqin* was discussed and narrated in the *Shiji*, the *Hanshu*, the *Yantie lun*, and Jia Yi's *Xinshu*, in ways that *heqin* treaties of subsequent dynasties were not.⁶⁰ There is a unique rhetorical playfulness in these early Han-dynasty uses of the term, as officials and rulers disputed the metaphorical meanings of the eponymous kinship (*qin*) of the *heqin* and its diplomatic ritual.

Although histories of Chinese foreign affairs often begin with the Han-dynasty *heqin*, the Han-dynasty use of the term has itself received little attention. Prior to the *Shiji*, the uncommon term *heqin* referred to the achievement of harmonious relations—in music and war, amongst the general population, or within the traditional bonds, such as those between father and son, between ruler and subject, or between brothers.⁶¹ On the rare occasions when the term *heqin* was used to describe peace agreements between clans of the same state, or between states, the texts did not specify any ritual or contractual elements. Furthermore, although some of these same texts did record

⁶⁰ Tile-ends were excavated in 1953–54 and 1981 from Han tombs dating from the mid- to late western Han period in Baotou, Inner Mongolia. See He Lin 何林, “Guanyu ‘shanyu heqin’ wa” 关于“单于和亲”瓦, in *Baotou wenwu ziliao* 包头文物资料 (Baotou: Baotoushi wenwu guanlisuo, 1986), 1:74–86. According to He Lin, the tile-ends with the “shanyu heqin” inscription have been found only in the Baotou region, were derived from a single mold, and probably commemorate Emperor Wen's renewal of the *heqin*. The precise phrase *Shanyu heqin* does not appear in the received tradition.

⁶¹ See, for example, Guanzi 管子, “Fa jin” 法禁, in *Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 2004), 1:282; *Liji* 禮記, “Yue ji” 樂記, and “Yan yi” 燕義.

instances where leaders of warring factions gave daughters to opposing leaders as tokens of peace or used an egalitarian diplomatic rhetoric of “brotherhood,” they did not use the term *heqin*.⁶² The association of these signifying practices with the actual term *heqin* first appears with the Han-Xiongnu treaty, and only Han-dynasty texts elaborate the term’s various interpretive possibilities.⁶³

Modern scholars have extensively researched the contractual terms of the early *heqin*. The first *heqin* treaty was brokered after the Xiongnu had surrounded and forced into surrender the founding emperor of the Han dynasty, Emperor Gaozu. From this position of inferiority, the Han government eventually agreed to send fixed annual payments in silk floss, cloth, and grains to the Xiongnu, and to grant the privilege of trade at the border markets.⁶⁴ It was phrased in an egalitarian language of brotherly relations and it used the Great Wall to demarcate the geopolitical border between “those who draw bows” to its north, and those who wear “caps and sashes” to the south. Sima Qian’s

⁶² I argue here against Zhang Zhengming’s 张正明 otherwise very useful account of the *heqin*, which tries to trace the *heqin* back through pre-imperial texts. The passages Zheng cites from the *Zuozhuan* and *Guoyu* do record diplomatic marriages, but do not use the term *heqin*. When the term *heqin* occurs in a pre-Han text (in reference to a peace agreement between clans from the state of Jin), there is no mention of a marriage ritual. See *Zuozhuan*, Xiang 23.3, p. 1074. Likewise, the *Shiji*’s record of a *heqin* between King Qing Xiang of Chu and King Zhao of Qin in 285 B.C.E. does not actually mention a marriage ritual. See *Shiji*, 40.1729. Zhang’s single example of a *heqin* with foreigners, from the Qiugong Sikou 秋官司寇 chapter of the *Zhouli* 周禮—a pre-Han text that first became known in the early Han dynasty—does not clarify this use of the term. See Zhang Zhengming, “Heqin tong lun” 和亲通论, in *Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan minzu yanjiusuo*, ed., *Minzu shi lun cong* 民族史论丛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 3–24. For a chronological chart of so-called mixed marriages in the ancient period, see Wang Tongling 王桐齡, *Zhongguo minzu shi* 中國民族史 (Taipei: Hua shi chubanshe, 1977), pp. 36–54. The “Xiongnu liezhuan” foreshadows the Han dynasty *heqin* with two political “inter-marriages,” both of which involve the state represented by the wife or female lover subsequently defeating the enemy state of the husband or male lover. The discussion of the political use of marriage (*qin*) to politically pacify (*he*) the Western Rong during the reign of King Xiao of Zhou 周孝王 (r. 872–866 B.C.E.) in the *Shiji*’s “Qin benji” offers a very schematic precedent for the *heqin* debates, although the symbolic meanings of the terms are not questioned. See *Shiji*, 5.177.

⁶³ The *Hanshu* uses the term *heqin* in describing later agreements with the Nanyue and the Wusun. See *Hanshu*, 64B.2821, 96B.3927.

⁶⁴ Such commercial borders of empire are articulated elsewhere in the *Shiji*, when the King of the Nanyue complains that in breaking off trade privileges in iron vessels and goods, Empress Dowager Lü is effectively treating them like Man and Yi. See *Shiji*, 113.2969. The *Shiji* also compares China’s regional cultural identities and customs (*su*) by describing their local economic resources and relations in the “Huozhi liezhuan” 貨殖列傳; see *juan* 129.

“Xiongnu liezhuan” narrates the first seven successive breakdowns and renewals of the treaty until 133 B.C.E., when Emperor Wu launched his controversial and expensive military campaign to reassert control over the northern frontiers.⁶⁵ In the aftermath of Emperor Wu’s successes, the Han government continued to follow the *heqin* treaty, but alongside other policies that reflected a shift in power relations—such as the exchange of hostages, “loose rein” disengagement, and further military expeditions.

Economic analyses of the breakdown of the Han-Xiongnu *heqin* have tended to blame the failure of the annual payments and border-market exchange to satisfy the material demands of the Xiongnu, resulting in their disruptive cross-border raids.⁶⁶ According to this interpretation, the *heqin* marriage ritual is seen as instrumental, as the political *trompe l’oeil* with which the Han government represented their annual payments not as a reverse tribute to the victor, but as a ritual dowry to an equal. Political analyses of Han-Xiongnu relations have emphasized the *heqin* as a peace (*he*) contract that was repeatedly broken and ultimately abandoned due to political misunderstanding and independent military violence by generals on both sides.⁶⁷ Such analyses reduce the ritual aspects of the *heqin* to being merely symbolic, the continuation of the benign protocols of pre-imperial marriage diplomacy, and they understand the *heqin* contract as the application of traditional marriage diplomacy to an unprecedented situation of imperial defeat. Both of these approaches, then, have, rightly, paid more heed to the quantitative or contractual terms of the *heqin*—such as the value of the gifts or the violation of borders—than to the ritual itself.

Han-dynasty officials, however, paid more attention to the actual symbolic practice and meaning of the *heqin* than such historical analyses would suggest.⁶⁸ Since the observance of ritual propriety in

⁶⁵ See Ying-shih Yü, *Trade and Expansion in Han China*, pp. 40–64, for an economic assessment. Marriages did not follow every renewal of the *heqin*; see Psarras, “Han and Xiongnu,” p. 142.

⁶⁶ E.g. Lin Gan, *Xiongnu shi*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ In analyzing the *heqin*’s breakdown, Di Cosmo critiques the strictly economic approach. He argues that the Han failed to grasp fundamental differences in notions of sovereignty. The persistence of independent Xiongnu raids contributed in particular to that political misunderstanding. See Di Cosmo, *Ancient China and its Enemies*, pp. 215–27.

⁶⁸ For an exceptional literary approach to the *heqin*, see Uradyn E. Bulag, *The Mongols*

interstate relations features prominently in the *Chunqiu*, one can read the Han-dynasty *heqin* debates about propriety in terms of the conscious appropriation of *Chunqiu* historiography by the *Shiji*. The *Shiji* itself presents another history of the *heqin* outside that of the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” in its biography of Emperor Gaozu’s most brilliant minister, Liu Jing 劉敬. After the successful Xiongnu ambush of Emperor Gaozu and his army at Pingcheng 平城 in 200 B.C.E., Liu Jing devises the “peace through kinship” treaty that will both satisfy the victorious Xiongnu in the present but somehow make the *shanyu*’s future “sons and grandsons [Han] subjects.” Liu Jing prefaces his innovative plan with the problem of Xiongnu kinship impropriety, exemplified by the present *shanyu*’s murder of his father and marriage to his stepmother. This resonates with the ethnography of Xiongnu kinship norms in the “Xiongnu liezhuan,” and an immediate attack on Liu Jing’s plan by Emperor Gaozu’s wife anticipates the contrast that Zhonghang Yue draws between the internecine Han court and the (idealized) Xiongnu levirate:

[Liu Jing:] “If your Honor is sincerely able to have the eldest princess (*di zhang gong zhu* 適長公主) marry [the *shanyu*], and to send lavish gifts along with her, he will know that the Han [Empress’s] eldest daughter (*di nü* 適女)⁶⁹ is being sent with material generosity, and, like the Man and the Yi, he will inevitably desire her and regard her as his consort (*yan-shi* 閼氏). When she has a son, he will inevitably make him his heir, who will in time become the *shanyu*. Why? Because [the *shanyu*] will be greedy for Han replenishments of wealth. Your Honor should each year present quantities of the goods that they lack and of which the Han have a surplus, and, by sending rhetoricians, cajole them to use ritual propriety. While [the *Shanyu*] Maodun [r. 209–? B.C.E.] is alive he will already be established as your son-in-law. When he dies your grandson will become *shanyu*. And who indeed has heard of a grandson who has dared to defy the propriety owed to his grandfather? Without a battle our army will be able to use this gradual

at *China’s Edge: History and the Politics of National Unity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002). Bulag critiques Han-centered approaches in frontier historiography, and he provides a genealogy of the *heqin* “marriage-alliance” through Chinese literary history, and its conceptual influence even to the present. Unlike Bulag, who emphasizes enduring symbolic value of the *heqin* as a sign of Chinese self-feminization in the face of “masculine” Inner Asians, I focus on contestation within the Han dynasty archive over the symbolic value of the *heqin*.

⁶⁹ On the three different terms for the princess used in this passage, see William H. Nienhauser, Jr., ed., *The Grand Scribe’s Records*, Vol. 8: *The Memoirs of Han China*, Pt. 1 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 285 n. 41.

method to subject them. But if Your Honor is unable to dispatch the eldest princess, and orders the imperial household to approach a palace woman and deceptively name her the princess, they will know and will be unwilling to honor or approach her, and we will reap no benefits." Emperor Gaozu said, "Good," wishing to send the eldest princess. But Empress Lü wept day and night, saying, "I only have the heir apparent and one daughter. How can you cast her off to the Xiongnu?" The Emperor in the end was unable to send his eldest princess but took the daughter of a commoner, giving her the name of the "eldest princess" and she married the *shanyu*.⁷⁰

According to Ban Gu, "Arguments for the *heqin* began with Liu Jing."⁷¹ Here, in the *Shiji*'s biographical account, also found in the *Hanshu*, Liu Jing's anxiety about the felicity of the *heqin* lies not in its contractual terms (giving annual payments, respecting borders), but in the actual marriage ritual that seals it. Ritually correct, procreative marriage will reverse Han-Xiongnu power relations "without a battle." According to the ideals of kinship subordination, the Xiongnu leader, in marrying the Han princess, would be compelled to defer to the Han emperor. As a son-in-law, the Xiongnu leader would be placed in a subordinate kinship position to the Han emperor, and would therefore be submissive. The son of the union between the enemy leader and the Han princess in turn would be grandson to the Han emperor, and as Liu Jing rhetorically asks: "Who has ever heard of a grandson daring to defy the ritual propriety (*li*) owed to his grandfather"?

The resonances between this etiology of the *heqin* ritual and the Zhonghang Yue dialogues exemplify what critics have called the *Shiji*'s "principle of mutual illumination" (*hujian fa* 互見法), "whereby an event or character is presented from different perspectives in different parts of the book."⁷² First, the two accounts redirect the politics of the *heqin* from Han-Xiongnu rivalry to Han court rivalry. After Liu Jing warns the emperor against "deceptively" sending someone other than his eldest daughter, the infamous Empress Lü 呂后 (d. 180 B.C.E.) successfully requests Emperor Gaozu to dispatch a substitute princess. Her appeal to the mother-daughter kinship bond is already improper

⁷⁰ *Shiji*, 99.2719.

⁷¹ *Hanshu*, 94B.3830.

⁷² Wai-yee Li, "The Idea of Authority in the *Shih chi*," pp. 395–400, elucidates this as a method of literary indirection and example of Sima Qian's impartiality. Cf. Zhang Dake, *Shiji yanjiu*, 3:102–7.

within an androcentric ethical tradition, but even more so when placed above the diplomatic marriage. In mentioning her “[weeping] day and night,” the text emphasizes the marital basis of her relation with the emperor. But it is her invocation of having “only the heir apparent and one daughter” that foreshadows for the reader her reign of impropriety that is to come. As the *Shiji* elsewhere chronicles, it is precisely through her kinship network, anchored in the Lü clan, that she orchestrates her bloody rise to power. Indeed, by the time of this *heqin* debate, Empress Lü’s only daughter, Princess Lu Yuan (Lu Yuan *Gongzhu* 魯元公主), was already wedded to the King of Zhao, Zhang Ao 張敖.⁷³ Their daughter in turn would marry Empress Lü’s son, the heir-apparent. After her husband’s death, Empress Dowager Lü so dominated political affairs that the *Shiji* includes her biography, but not her son’s (Emperor Hui 惠帝 r. 195–188), amongst its Basic Annals, which is otherwise reserved for emperors.⁷⁴ Just as Empress Lü obstructs Liu Jing’s plans for the *heqin* treaty with her bid to keep close her own daughter, so does Zhonghang Yue two decades later upset the envoy’s pedagogy about kinship by unfavorably contrasting the *qin shu* struggles of the imperial court. His indictment of the imperial court’s “change of surnames” finds its closest historical referent in the violent interlude of Lü ascendancy in Liu clan rule, foreshadowed here in Empress Lü’s activist tears.

Qin 親 and its antonym *shu* 疏 were key terms in traditional political discourse, applicable both to affective relations with the ruler and

⁷³ Emperor Gaozu stayed at the home of this daughter and her husband, the King of Zhao, on his way back from the very military defeat at Pingcheng that initiated the *heqin* treaty. The King of Zhao demonstrates precisely the “ritual propriety of a son-in-law” that Liu Jing will predict of the *shanyu*. See *Shiji*, 89.2582–83. Note that the “Xiongnu liezhuan” reveals the meaning of *yanshi* as mere consort when Maodun kills his “beloved wife” (*ai qi* 愛妻) and gives away “one of his *yanshi*.” See *Shiji*, 110.2888–89. Han legal texts excavated at Zhangjiashan also attest to the privileges bestowed upon Empress Lü’s son-in-law. See *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian [er si qi hao mu]* 张家山汉墓竹简 [二四七号墓] (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2001), “Jin guan ling” 津關令 (article 22, slips 520–22), p. 210. On Empress Lü and the Han dynasty use of the term for the renewal of marriage ties between affinal relatives (*chongqin* 重親), see *Shiji*, 49.1969; *Hanshu*, 96B.3905; Yang Shuda 杨树达, *Han dai hun sang li su kao* 汉代婚丧礼俗考 (1933; Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000), pp. 20–27.

⁷⁴ *Shiji*, 9.395–422. The *Hanshu* gives Emperor Hui his own chapter. In his comparison of the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, Hans van Ess argues that, whereas the *Hanshu* emphasizes Empress Lü’s cruelty as part of her personal character, the *Shiji* presents it more within the Liu versus Lü political rivalry. See Hans van Ess, “Praise and Slander: The Evocation of Empress Lü in the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu*,” *Nan Nü* 8.2 (2006): 221–54.

to filiation within a clan. Han Feizi once warned: "A minister's relationship with his ruler does not have the kinship of flesh and bones (*gu rou zhi qin* 骨肉之親); he is bound by contingent bonds without which he would not serve."⁷⁵ Elsewhere the minister and ruler are said to lack "the kinship of father and son" (*fu zi zhi qin* 父子之親), "the kinship of mother and son" (*zi mu zhi qin* 子母之親), and "the kinship of brothers" (*xiong di zhi qin* 兄弟之親). Similarly, "A wife does not have the blessing of flesh and bones; if she is loved there is intimacy (*qin*), if she is not loved there is estrangement (*shu*)." Political contingency and love's fickleness make the alliance or intimacy (*qin*) of ministers and women dangerously untrustworthy. A ruler must instead anchor his trust in those considered "flesh-and-bones" (*gu rou*) kin.⁷⁶ The priority of clan kinship also had its counter-tradition, for example in the famous passage from the *Zuozhuan* in which a minister murders his own son out of duty to his state. The commentator figure (*junzi* 君子) cites an ancient saying: "For the sake of a greater righteousness, he destroyed his kin (*qin*)." ⁷⁷ As Jia Yi argued, both the emperor's *qin* and *shu* had brought chaos at the outset of the Han dynasty and would continue to do so.⁷⁸

When Sima Qian was writing, the debate about imperial court alliances and the structure of government had intensified.⁷⁹ While Emperor Gaozu had declared that only members of the Liu clan could inherit the empire and encouraged those of the "same surname to act as one family," his nephew Liu Pi was wielding the same rhetoric of "flesh and bones Liu clan" against powerful Han ministers to legitimate his revolt.⁸⁰ The priority of kinship between blood relations was increasingly challenged with the emergence of imperial China, as evidenced

⁷⁵ *Han Feizi jijie* 韓非子集解, ed. Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju chubanshe, 1998), "Bei nei" 備內, p. 115. Wang suggests in the case of the wife, below, that 恩 "blessing" should actually be *qin*.

⁷⁶ Compare Yang Xiong's reading of the *Yijing's* hexagram for *qin* 親: "Trusting flesh and blood / No one can come between them." See Michael Nylan, trans., *The Elemental Changes: The Ancient Companion to the I Ching: The T'ai Hsuan Ching* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 160–61.

⁷⁷ *Zuozhuan*, Yin 4.5, p. 38.

⁷⁸ Jia Yi, *Xinshu*, "Qinshu weiluan" 親疏危亂, pp. 119–20.

⁷⁹ See Michael Loewe, "The Former Han Dynasty," in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 1: *The Ch'in and Han Empires 221 B.C.–A.D. 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 103–222.

⁸⁰ *Shiji*, 106.2821, 2828.

not only within historiography, but also from the location of tombs and the rewriting of laws.⁸¹ The *Shiji* portrays Liu Jing himself as a master manipulator of distance and proximity, of *qin* and *shu*. It is he who re-centers the empire, shifting the capital westward to Changan; it is he who transports dangerously powerful clans from the periphery and resettles them at the center. Having begun life as a humble sheepskin-clad “Lou Jing” 婁敬, he is even rewarded for his uncompromising political advice with the imperial surname Liu 劉.⁸² And now, having been grafted onto the very bloodline of the emperor, his *heqin* seeks to draw the unwitting Xiongnu into a marriage that will supposedly lead to their subordination, and to relocate Empress Lü’s kin safely beyond the frontiers.

In terms of frontier history, the dispatch of an alternate princess is simply a colorful anecdotal detail of little real political import. In symbolic terms, however, ritual impropriety has domestic consequences.⁸³ The problem of kinship and imperial succession in the *heqin* debate is not simply between Xiongnu and Han, but also between the Lius and the Lüs at the political center of the empire. The dispute over the *heqin* ritual dramatizes an ominous failure of the emperor to ally with his wise minister instead of his wife in talking about the Xiongnu. Zhonghang Yue recasts Liu Jing’s problematization of the *heqin*’s kinship (sending the true princess, teaching the Xiongnu kinship propriety) in two ways. In attacking the Han imperial family, he reverses the Han envoy’s ethnographic gaze back toward a divisive Central States political culture conceived in the traditional vernacular of *qin* and *shu*; and, in so doing, he recalls the Han *heqin*’s very specific struggle between Lius and Lüs that led to the treaty’s founding kinship transgression.

Within Sima Qian’s narrative Zhonghang Yue effectively becomes

⁸¹ See Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 162, on the relocation of ministers’ tombs beside that of the emperor. On legal support for adoptive relations, and for family relations that are not blood relations but socially constructed, see Queen, *From Chronicle to Canon*, pp. 143–44; Michael Nylan, “Notes on a Case of Illicit Sex from Zhangjiashan: A Translation and Commentary,” *Early China* 30 (2005–6): 25–45.

⁸² *Shiji*, 99.2717.

⁸³ As Wang Zijin 王子今 points out, where the *Shiji*’s “Xiongnu liezhuan” recounts Emperor Gaozu dispatching “the princess” (*gongzhu* 公主) to be the *shanyu*’s consort, the parallel passage in the *Hanshu* version substitutes her with “a royal daughter” (*wengzhu* 翁主). The canonical *Hanshu* commentator Yan Shigu (581–645) also notices this substitution of terms by glossing *wengzhu* as “the daughters of various kings.” See Wang Zijin, “Nan gong gongzhu de hun shi” 南宮公主的婚事, *Du shu* 读书 (2006.3): 127–33.

the substitute for the princess as the symbolic center of the *heqin* treaty. For when Zhonghang Yue first accompanies the Han princess to the frontier in the renewal of the *heqin* under Emperor Wen, we hear nothing about the *shanyu*'s kinship with the princess, or of their subsequent offspring; by contrast, the Xiongnu leader establishes an intimate alliance with Zhonghang Yue, whose influence over Xiongnu policy-making is recorded at length: "When Zhonghang Yue arrived, he defected to the *shanyu*, and the *shanyu* greatly favored him."⁸⁴ The term "favored" (*qin xing* 親幸) often conveys an excessive or unwarranted trust of a subordinate. The *Shiji* introduces Zhonghang Yue as "a eunuch from the state of Yan," and Sima Qian's distrust of imperial male favorites (some of whom are eunuchs) is implicit elsewhere in the *Shiji*.⁸⁵ Zhonghang Yue's origins in the northern state of Yan, which bordered the Xiongnu and had formed alliances with the Xiongnu in the past, is the only potential clue to his original resistance to going and his betrayal.⁸⁶ Even before Zhonghang Yue criticizes Han kinship, he has already disrupted the *heqin* through a transgressive act of alliance (*qin*) with the *shanyu*. The court debate over the substitution of the first *heqin* princess, Zhonghang Yue's substitution of a subsequent *heqin* princess, and the comparison of Xiongnu and Han kinship practices in both episodes, together illumine the *Shiji*'s rhetorical interest in the *heqin*'s symbolic kinship, and not just its terms of peace.

Zhonghang Yue's ethnographic debate resonates with two additional anxieties about the ritual or symbolic content of *heqin* that are expressed in the broader Han-dynasty archive. The first concerns the political importance of reproduction in the marriage binding the *heqin* treaty; the second concerns the symbolic value of the treaty's annual payments. In Liu Jing's design, the *heqin*'s reversal of Han-Xiongnu power relations depends not on future military action, but on the Han princess giving birth to the next Xiongnu leader who would defer to his imperial Han "father-in-law." To ensure that the *heqin*'s marriage would reverse power relations, the *heqin* would send rhetoricians

⁸⁴ *Shiji*, 110.2898.

⁸⁵ *Shiji*, 125.3191–96.

⁸⁶ On the disruptions to the first *heqin* caused by the surrender of Lu Wan 盧綰, the King of Yan, to the Xiongnu, see *Shiji*, 110.2895. On the low socio-cultural status of the state of Yan relative to other states in the *Shiji*, see Grant R. Hardy, "The Interpretive Function of Shih Chi 14, 'The Table by Years of the Twelve Feudal Lords,'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133.1 (1993): 14–24.

(*bian shi* 辯士) to persuade (*feng yu* 風諭) the Xiongnu into adopting the rules of the Central States for ritual conduct (*lijie* 禮節). That the rites in question for Liu Jing concern kinship propriety is clear from the example, given in that same passage, of the grandson's proper conduct (*li* 禮) owed to his grandfather. The pedagogic frame of Zhonghang Yue's dialogue with envoys, his focus on their "twittering" speech, and the Xiongnu's later insistence on silencing classical scholars makes more sense in this light.

At first glance, Liu Jing's plan to use the *heqin* to proselytize Chinese forms of ritual conduct amongst the Xiongnu fits the strategy of civilizing foreigners, which historians have commonly called sinification or sinicization. The discussion of the *heqin* in the *Yantielun* illustrates the principle at stake.⁸⁷ This discussion was—at least in Huan Kuan's later account of it—part of the imperial court debate, which Emperor Zhao 昭帝 (r. 87–74 B.C.E.) convened in 81 B.C.E., ostensibly to discuss the government's salt and iron monopolies. The imperial counselor and renowned economist Sang Hongyang 桑弘羊 (152–80 B.C.E.) led the side representing the central government in debating a much wider range of political and economic topics against a team of scholars selected by officials. Since this debate occurred decades after Emperor Wu had overturned the initial *heqin* and begun the reversal of power relations that would lead to the political submission of the Xiongnu leader to Emperor Xuan in 51 B.C.E., the *heqin* (with its gifts and egalitarian rhetoric of brotherhood) was now pursued by the Xiongnu rather than by the Han.

In the debate, each side presents competing meanings of the *heqin* by aligning it with classical models. Sang Hongyang (whom commentators identify as the 大夫 *Dafu* in the text) invokes the *Chunqiu* and the need for military knowledge in presenting the Xiongnu as unchangeable beasts who need to be militarily crushed. The scholars draw on the *Shijing* and other texts to argue that the Xiongnu can be civilized into forming an alliance through the more cost-effective, educative practices enabled by the *heqin*. In implicit defense of the former *heqin*, the scholars argue: "The Duke of Zhou cultivated virtue and the Yue and Shang clans came. They followed goodness like shadows or echoes. If in government one is devoted to using virtue to make

⁸⁷ See, esp., *Yantielun*, 48.524–29, 38.453–63, 43.488–96, 52.555–63.

close alliances, what does one have to worry about the other not being transformed?"⁸⁸ The scholars situate Liu Jing's proselytizing *heqin* policies within a traditional narrative of the humanist sage's transformation of the morally benighted. As the sage's shadow and echo, the foreigner can cross into the ethical geography of the Central States, but he cannot do so in the polarized ethnic geography that Sang Hongyang (or, later, Ban Gu) takes for granted. The scholars' ethical model of making close alliances (*qin jin* 親近) militates against the ethnographic claims of "inborn nature" and unchanging customs, but it is not as radical as the map imagined by Zhonghang Yue, which posits a (superior) ethical domain outside the Central States. All three of these models—ranging from Zhonghang Yue's model of alien wisdom, the scholars' model of sinification, and Ban Gu's and Sang Hongyang's model of an immoral, immutable enemy "beast"—can also be found within the historiographic and philosophical traditions out of which the *Shiji* emerged.⁸⁹

However, Liu Jing's definition of *heqin*, which focuses on the kinship propriety of father and son, is also far more specific than the cultural imperialism model of the scholars featured in the *Yantielun*. When the Han envoys begin with their leading questions about filial relations amongst the Xiongnu, their choice of topic is not random. When Zhonghang Yue defends the principles of Xiongnu kinship, he defends the Xiongnu against the political threat of Liu Jing's *heqin* ritual and not simply against ethnographic slander. That is, one can read the Zhonghang Yue debate not only as a Chinese example of (resistance to) an ethnography that paves the way for political domination (as a mirror version of the modern European epistemological production of the Orient in Edward Said's model), but also as a historically specific engagement with a new diplomatic idiom.

Zhonghang Yue ultimately sabotages Liu Jing's program to instruct the Xiongnu in kinship propriety. By the time of Emperor Wu, according to the *Shiji*, his repeated commands that Han visitors stop speaking to the Xiongnu had become "Xiongnu custom."⁹⁰ Indeed, the failure of the Han to re-educate the Xiongnu in kinship ritual provides the very idiom of diplomatic insult in an epistolary exchange between

⁸⁸ *Yantielun*, 48.525.

⁸⁹ See, for example, *Zuozhuan* Zhao 17.3; *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan*, Ding 4.14–16; *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan*, Wen 1.4; *Mencius* 3A4.

⁹⁰ *Shiji*, 110.2901, 2913.

the *shanyu* and the Empress Dowager Lü. The *Shiji* refers to “a letter with insulting language” from the *shanyu* after the death of Emperor Gaozu, and the *Hanshu* includes this letter (and the Empress Dowager’s response) in full.⁹¹ “Your Majesty has taken the throne alone, and I reside unsteadily alone. We two rulers do not have pleasure and we lack the means to make ourselves happy. I would like to take what I have and exchange it for what I lack.”⁹² The irony of the *shanyu*’s proposition exceeds its indecency. On the one hand, he is pressing the symbolic kinship of the *heqin* to its logical extreme: the marital union of two rulers. On the other, his scandalous proposal redresses the schemes of power reversal, kinship pedagogy, and princess substitution through which the Han court had originally sought to deceive the Xiongnu. As the figurative “brother” to the deceased Emperor Gaozu in the egalitarian rhetoric accompanying the treaty, the *shanyu* effectively proposes to enact the Xiongnu custom of “brothers marrying their [deceased] brothers’ wives.” As the son-in-law (although not son) of the deceased emperor, the *shanyu* also implicitly recalls the custom of sons marrying their deceased father’s wives. In this light, his marriage to the Empress Dowager would impose Xiongnu kinship practices onto Han ones, and cause Liu Jing’s plans for prosylectizing to backfire. At the same time the *shanyu*’s use of the language of market commerce—“exchanging what I have for what I lack” (*yi qi suo wu* 易其所無), which the *Shiji* uses elsewhere to describe activities in the border markets opened up by the *heqin* treaty—offsets the scandal of his proposal by implicitly reminding Empress Dowager Lü of her part in taking away what he lacks, namely her only daughter, who was to have been his *heqin* wife.

Improper kinship metaphors join improper kinship acts, forming new symbolic practices accompanying the Han-dynasty *heqin*. Xiongnu and Han leaders appropriated the pre-imperial diplomatic metaphor of brotherhood to “bind themselves as brothers through the *heqin*” or to serve as “parents to all under Heaven.”⁹³ Nonetheless, other Han dynasty officials exploited the kinship metaphor in new

⁹¹ This is the most significant difference between the parallel sections of the *Hanshu* and *Shiji* accounts. Compare also the two tales of pre-imperial intercultural marriage that preface the Han-Xiongnu *heqin* in both accounts.

⁹² *Hanshu*, 94.3755. Compare *Yantielun*, 48.534, for the language of market exchange.

⁹³ *Shiji*, 110.2896, 2897, 2903, 2914.

ways. As we have seen, Liu Jing focused on the *heqin*'s hidden father-son (and grandfather-grandson) metaphor that would govern future Han-Xiongnu relations. In the reign immediately following Empress Dowager Lü's, Jia Yi uses the image of deceptive motherhood in outlining to Emperor Wen his Three Principles for defeating the Xiongnu: "Even if [the Xiongnu] have the faces of Hu and the forms of Rong, they will consider themselves loved by the emperor, like children coming upon their loving mother (*ci mu* 慈母)."⁹⁴ Twice in his chapter on the Xiongnu Jia Yi uses the simile of infantilized Xiongnu who are dependent upon the maternal Han.⁹⁵ The term *ci* denotes affection for someone of a lower status, and Jia Yi's feminized analogy is unusual, especially given his generally patrilineal discussions of kinship. He calls upon the emperor to "compete with the *shanyu*" for the Xiongnu people through affection and material rewards. He must win their trust by showing his intimacy (*qin*) with Xiongnu children, personally playing with and feeding them. To this simile of the deceptive mother, Jia Yi added the paradigm of the unfaithful wife. The Han princess and her staff could, Jia Yi argued, serve as spies for the Han government at the frontier and in the border markets.⁹⁶ This figure of the *heqin* Han princess who remained politically faithful to her homeland while giving lyric voice to life amongst the northern nomads became a well-known topos in later Chinese literature and historiography. In the *Shiji* and *Xinshu*, however, she was still a silent strategic device for competing political designs: Liu Jing required the *heqin* princess to produce a submissive Xiongnu "son" for the Han "father"; Empress Lü needed to substitute the *heqin* princess in order to assert her own political proximity

⁹⁴ *Xinshu*, p. 135. On the hierarchical connotations of the term *ci* in Jia Yi and elsewhere, see Rune Svarverud, *Methods of the Way: Early Chinese Ethical Thought* (Boston: Brill, 1998), pp. 199–200, 257–59. The authenticity of the chapter on the Xiongnu in *Xinshu* (4.1) is under debate, but Svarverud argues that its material was probably compiled from an original memorial of Jia Yi to Emperor Wen. On thinking outside the fatherhood metaphor, see Miranda Brown, *The Politics of Mourning in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 5, 68.

⁹⁵ *Xinshu*, "Xiongnu" 匈奴, pp. 132–52.

⁹⁶ Jia Yi offers a three-pronged approach. First, his "Three Principles" (*san biao* 三表) aim to convince the Xiongnu of Han trustworthiness (*xin* 信), affection (*ai* 愛) and fondness (*hao* 好), as we saw in his metaphor of false maternal affection. Second, he suggests "Five Baits" (*wu er* 五餌) with which to corrupt Xiongnu senses and desires. Third, he suggests that the Han government use the high status of the *heqin* princess for strategic purposes. They should increase her staff and through them keep watch on frontier affairs. The *Hanshu* biography of Jia Yi discusses the first two approaches.

to the emperor; and Jia Yi wanted the princess to relay secret information about her husband's world that would undermine the *heqin*. Thus, although the kinship rhetoric of the *heqin* ostensibly extended that of pre-imperial diplomacy, these distinct kinship models and metaphors betray the unbrotherly designs of their proposals.

The final important resonance between Zhonghang Yue's rhetoric and the general discourse on the early version of *heqin* concerns the annual payments to the Xiongnu. Pre-imperial accounts of marriage diplomacy do not mention payments; and the Han government ostensibly used the marriage ritual to transform them into symbolic dowry payments so that they would not be interpreted as tribute. However, Liu Jing's dowry metaphor, which dominates both Han-dynasty and modern analyses of the *heqin*, deserves historical scrutiny. For, contrary to his insistence that the *heqin* propagate ritual propriety, the accompanying gifts go in a direction that does not accord with classical nuptial ideals. His *heqin* transgresses most, if not all, of the six ritual steps of marriage outlined in the canonical *Yi li* 儀禮 (Book of ceremonies and rites), most significantly in its focus on the dowry.⁹⁷ Even with the gap between prescriptive ideals and historical practice, "presenting the betrothal presents" (*na zheng* 納徵) was the most valued and common step in Han-dynasty practice.⁹⁸ Although modern scholars have followed Liu Jing's lead in reading *heqin* gifts as happily fulfilling the role of the dowry, betrothal gifts were supposed to go from groom to bride. Reciprocation in the form of a dowry could be practiced, but failure to reciprocate a dowry would have been a notable impropriety.⁹⁹ When, for example, the Wusun people requested a

⁹⁷ The *Yi li* did not acquire this name until after the Han dynasty, and addresses the lower-ranked aristocracy rather than the imperial court. See *Shiji*, 121.3126; Jack Dull, "Marriage and Divorce in Han China: A Glimpse at 'Pre-Confucian' Society," in David C. Buxbaum, ed., *Chinese Family Law and Social Change in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), pp. 23–74, for a discussion of the six steps.

⁹⁸ Dull, "Marriage and Divorce in Han China," p. 48.

⁹⁹ The phrase used by Liu Jing, *hou feng* 厚奉, appears in one other context in the *Shiji*, in which a rich woman breaks off her first marriage to marry Zhang Er, who receives lavish gifts or dowry (which are apparently unreciprocated); *Shiji*, 89.2571. Sima Xiangru offers a parallel case of a transgressive marriage in which the groom receives a large dowry and does not humble himself toward his father-in-law. The importance of the groom's betrothal gifts (*na zheng* or *pin*) is illustrated in the case of the Han minister Chen Ping. According to *Shiji*, 56.2052, the bride's wealthy grandmother "lent him money to use for the betrothal gifts (*pin*)."⁹⁹ On the dowry, betrothal gifts, and the levirate, see Christian de

princess from Emperor Wu, his Han ministers advised: "There must first be a presentation of betrothal gifts (*na pin* 納聘), and only then should we send a daughter."¹⁰⁰ The Wusun, after having sent an envoy bearing a gift of horses with the marriage proposal, additionally gave four thousand horses, which were not reciprocated, to the Han. In the Han-Wusun alliance, the gifts flowed in the proper direction, and the presentation of betrothal gifts (*na zheng*) clearly symbolized the giving of tribute (*na gong* 納貢). Thus while Empress Lü transgressed the *heqin* marriage in having a false princess sent, Liu Jing's wedding design was already marked as ritually incorrect.

Officials who opposed the *heqin* strategy rhetorically exploited the improper direction of gifts, interpreting them either as tribute or as betrothal gifts. Jia Yi famously excoriates the Han government's annual gifts of gold, silk, and silk floss as "presenting tribute to the Man and Yi" and becoming the "vassals of the Rong," and he does not use the term *heqin*.¹⁰¹ The figure of improper betrothal gifts becomes most explicit in a heated dispute over the *heqin* in the *Yantielun*. Sang Hongyang begins:

From the rise of the Han dynasty to the present, we formed friendly relations by binding the *heqin* agreement, and what we sent to the *shanyu* as betrothal gifts (*pin* 聘) was extremely lavish. In this way (*ran* 然) they did not take the rich gifts and lavish bribes as a reason to change and to adopt moderation, and their violent attacks multiplied.¹⁰²

In using the term "betrothal gifts" (*pin*), a designation for the groom's offering, rather than using Liu Jing's term for bridal "gifts" or dowry (*feng* 奉), the speaker highlights the flaw of the *heqin*'s marriage

Pee, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth through Fourteenth Centuries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 114–16, 218.

¹⁰⁰ *Shiji*, 123, 3170.

¹⁰¹ *Xinshu*, "Shi bei" 勢卑, p. 153. Cf. *Hanshu*, 48.2240. Ying-shih Yü has influentially adopted Jia Yi's argument and rhetoric of reversed tribute. Compare the insistence of the scholars featured in the *Yantielun* on reading the *heqin* and tribute distinct. See *Yantielun*, 43.488.

¹⁰² *Yantielun*, 43.488. For the clause 然不紀重質厚賂之故改節, Wang Liqi glosses the character *ji* 紀 as *ji* 記 (to record), whereas Yang Shuda 楊樹達 rejects 紀 as transcription error for *yi* 以 (to take as, to use). See Yang Shuda, *Yantielun yao shi* 鹽鐵論要釋 (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1963), p. 57. I use Yang's interpretation here, but Wang's would not detract from my argument.

metaphor and rite. It is as a result (*ran*) of this improper and excessive flow of gifts, and not contrary to expectation, that the Xiongnu become more violent. Sang Hongyang practically shifts the blame of Xiongnu savagery onto the Han. The Xiongnu's lack of moderation in ritual is merely a response to the Han lack of moderation. As we have seen, Zhonghang Yue, Jia Yi, and many modern historians thereafter, assessed the *heqin* through the logic of accounting (of such factors as population size and gift quantities). Indeed, the economist Sang Hongyang must have too. But what matters here is that the speaker could articulate the problem as, and draw moral authority from, the symbolic content of the *heqin* institution.

Zhonghang Yue's advice—that the Han envoys limit their role to checking on the annual *heqin* payments, and that the Xiongnu accept but discard them (in favor of leather and kumiss)—can be read within the idiom of these economic debates on the *heqin*. His reduction of the *heqin's qin* to an economic relation is echoed elsewhere: “When the present emperor [Wu] was established, the next *heqin* treaty was sealed, and he treated [the Xiongnu] generously, opened up the border-markets, and sent lavish gifts to them. From the *shanyu* down, all the Xiongnu allied (*qin*) with the Han, coming and going beneath the Great Wall.”¹⁰³ A political discourse of amity has been transformed into an economic one as the *heqin's* act of *qin* comes to signify the market exchanges between congenial Xiongnu and Han traders at the border passes. This association of the *heqin's* alliance (*qin*) with commerce appears both here in the *Shiji* and in the scholars' defense of the *heqin* in the *Yantielun*. When Emperor Wu renewed war in 133 B.C.E., ending the *heqin's* thirty-year dominance within Han foreign relations, he targeted these border-market communities at Mayi 馬邑.

In light of these comparisons, Zhonghang Yue's critique of the Central States (for estranged relations in the imperial court) and of the Han envoys (for their senseless chatter) needs to be understood not simply as a reversal of the ethnographic gaze from Xiongnu to Han customs, but also as an intervention in the historical politics and poetics of *heqin* diplomacy.

¹⁰³ *Shiji*, 110.2904. For a similar formulation, see *Yantielun*, 48.524.

Conclusion

Sima Qian's portrait of the Xiongnu resembles those of the other hundred or so individuals of his *liezhuan*. The *Shiji* presents and re-presents its subjects across multiple chapters, across narrative and explicit commentary, and across irreconcilable perspectives. As a self-consciously literary artifact it persistently draws attention to both the political and mimetic difficulties of memorializing its subjects in all their complexity. The "Xiongnu *liezhuan*" does so by shifting attention from the conflicts between Han and Xiongnu to antagonisms within the Central States. As expressed in the authorial end-comment, this reversal from Xiongnu customs to "contemporary customs" (*shi su*) of politically biased reportage on Xiongnu affairs echoed a dialogue earlier in the chapter, in which a Han defector, Zhonghang Yue, parodied "Han customs" (*Han su*). In so doing, Zhonghang Yue refuted both the biases of his interlocutor—the Han envoy—and some of the empirical claims of the chapter's opening. Through this unsettling interplay between different parts of the chapter—characteristic of the literary method of the *Shiji*—Sima Qian presents the Xiongnu as a problem of politicized representation, not of anthropological difference. This strange defamiliarization of anthropological discourse is deemphasized in Ban Gu's parallel chapter, and was overlooked in the subsequent tradition of the *Standard Histories*.

Sima Qian's critique of ethnographic knowledge and practice drew its rhetorical ironies not so much from the traditional moral discourses of the Central States and its Other, as from the primary diplomatic metaphor of the Han-Xiongnu frontier: the *heqin*. Zhonghang Yue's dialogue belonged to (and illumined) a pattern within the broader Han archive, in which politicians debated the symbolic "kinship" (*qin*) of the *heqin*, as well as its contractual terms. Although marriage diplomacy was used in pre-imperial and post-Han Chinese history, only when the *heqin* was first applied to foreign relations during the early Han dynasty did writers and officials exploit the metaphorical possibilities of its kinship ritual. In replacing the *heqin* princess, in defending Xiongnu kinship practices, in reversing Liu Jing's plan to teach the Xiongnu kinship propriety, and in presenting the internecine struggles for imperial favor as part of a broader account of "Han customs,"

Zhonghang Yue participated in a broader conflict over the value and meaning of Han-Xiongnu partnership.

Sima Qian's critique of ethnography and the Han *heqin* debates pose a problem for the narration of frontiers. In narrating China's conceptual frontiers, we seek out those discourses and metaphors that once functioned as the building blocks of the imagination as well as of lived experience. We recover expressions such as "using foreigners to attack foreigners" (*yi yi zheng yi* 以夷政夷) and "sinify" (*hua Hua* 化華), or shifts in cartography and cosmology, for their part in constructing new meanings of the frontier. Sima Qian introduced empirical ethnography, but at the same time cast (immediately forgotten) doubts on its epistemological status. The *heqin* introduced kinship as a new metaphor for the frontier, but the Han dynasty debates reveal the appropriation of that metaphor to address the domestic political and economic divisions exacerbated by frontier politics. The recovery of these short-lived, unfamiliar ways of representing the early Han-dynasty frontier is important for two reasons. First, it shows the need to include amongst the "cultural artifacts" of the Chinese frontier, cases of its own conceptual undoing, as well as the broader symbolic dynamics of China's internal politics that modern historians have long recognized as intrinsic to frontier history. Second, it calls attention to the relatively neglected "minor history" of political dissidence, ambivalence, self-critique, and cross-cultural sympathy in narratives of Chinese imperial expansion. Early Han conflicts over how to represent frontier relations offer a potential resource for a more complex, less familiar, history of Han resistance to Han imperialism.