

The Most Venerable Book

Shang Shu

also known as the

Shu Jing

The Classic of Chronicles

尚書

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PENGUIN BOOKS

Yu is the title given to Shun when he became Emperor in around 2285 B.C.

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THE CHRONICLE OF SHUN

Long, long ago there lived the Emperor Shun. He was known as a person of great solemnity. Like the Emperor Yao who ruled before him, he was renowned for his wisdom, his culture, his intellect, his integrity and his virtue. It was clear from all these qualities that he had the Mandate of Heaven.

He was passionate about ensuring harmony and balance, through observing the five virtues of loyalty. He personally attended to the smooth running of every part of the bureaucracy on an annual basis. He entertained leaders from every corner of the Empire with great solemnity and once, even though he was caught in a terrifying storm, he nevertheless never gave up on his intention to visit and see for himself the vast flooded lands of the foothills.

Shun ascended to the throne because the old Emperor Yao had tested him and had said, 'Come, my dear Shun. For three years I have tested you, listened to you and seen that you do what you say. Now ascend the Imperial Throne.' Even so, Shun initially felt unworthy of such a position – so you can see how virtuous he was.

It was on New Year's Day that he was finally made Emperor,

THE CHRONICLE OF SHUN

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in a ritual in the Temple of the Ancestors. Here, using the glorious celestial instruments, he observed the Seven Heavenly Bodies* which influence events on earth. Through rituals he offered his respect to the Heavenly Emperor as well as to the six key elements of the cosmos, and he worshipped all the deities of nature through the medium of the mountains and the rivers. Having himself received the Five Tablets of Authority, he brought together at the auspicious time all those whom he appointed to govern the Empire and bestowed upon them their own Tablets of Authority.

It was in the second month that he began his official journeys of investigation by going east. He started at Mount Tai, where he offered sacrifices. And then he offered sacrifices in turn to all the auspicious mountains and rivers symbolizing the whole country. The rulers of the East came and offered homage. This made it possible for him to enforce the laws and make sure all the proper procedures were followed and get the calendar sorted out and agreed. He standardized the rituals associated with the tones of music and the proper weights for the chimes. He made sure the officials knew what was expected of them. Indeed, he regulated everything, from the number of colours to the correct numbers of sacrificial animals – two alive to one dead, for example. Only when he saw everything was going well did he confirm the key officials in their posts.

It was the fifth month when he went south on his official journey of investigation, conducting the proper sacrifices at the Southern Sacred Mountain [Southern Mount Heng] just as he had done at Mount Tai.

By the eighth month he was in the West on his official journey of investigation, travelling as far as the Western Sacred Mountain [Mount Hual], where once again he offered the proper sacrifices.

Finally, in the eleventh month, his official journeys of investigation took him to the Northern Sacred Mountain [Northern

* Thought to be the sun, moon and five planets known to ancient Chinese astronomy.

Mount Heng] and here he carried out the same ritual sacrifices as he had done in the West.

When he celebrated his return home, he offered a sacrifice to the Noble Ancestor.

It became his tradition that every five years he would set off on three of these official journeys of investigation. This involved the nobles and princes each reporting to him on the state of affairs in their own regions and it required them to come before him personally. Once he had studied these reports in detail and was satisfied, he rewarded the nobles and princes with appropriate gifts such as chariots and invested them with splendid robes. He created twelve regions and appointed to each a sacred mountain while also dredging the rivers to help them flow through their channels.

He took special interest and care in defining punishments. He ordered that mutilation or execution should be replaced by banishment, that offending officials should be whipped, that scholars who were unworthy should be caned and that fines should be brought in as compensation for crimes. If someone did something wrong by mistake or ignorance, they were to be pardoned, but anyone who abused their power, and did so constantly, was to suffer the most extreme punishment – execution. His watchwords were ‘Beware! Beware!’ and he attempted to moderate punishment with compassion.

There were four notorious villains and he dealt with them all. He exiled one to an island, sending another to a more remote island, despatching one chieftain and his whole tribe [Miao people] to a remote mountain fastness while one villain was kept as a prisoner until the day he died. And as a result, everyone was pleased.

After twenty-eight years, the old Emperor Yao died, his souls ascending and descending,* and his people mourned him as they would their parents. For three years all music was banned throughout the land.

* In traditional Chinese belief, a person has two souls. One, known as *bo*, is seen as yin and therefore earthly, to which it returns at death. The other soul is known as *hun* and is seen as yang – heavenly, which is where it ascends.

On New Year's Day, Shun processed to the Temple of the Ancestors. He consulted with the four guardians and discussed how to throw open the doors so that he could see and hear everything. In his quest for understanding he consulted the twelve judges and gave this advice: ‘Our supply of food depends upon the seasons; be thoughtful to those far away; take care of those close at hand; respect the virtuous; trust the generous; disregard the false. This is how the mob will be helped to accept your rule.’

‘Alas,’ said Shun, ‘you four great ones, can you name anyone who is so worthy that they can undertake the Emperor's plans? Anyone who I could name as the Prime Minister? Anyone who can help me to sort things out?’

‘There is the Lord Yu,’ said everybody. ‘He has been in charge of the Great Works [against the flood].’

‘Well now, Yu,’ said the Emperor, when Yu arrived. ‘You have triumphed over the waters of the flood and created dry land. Go and get on with all this.’

Yu bowed low but recommended that there were three others, Lords Qi, Xie and Gaoyao, who were better suited to this role. However, the Emperor replied: ‘That is all very well but it is you I have chosen to get on with this.’

Next the Emperor said to Qi: ‘Qi, the people are suffering for lack of food. I want you to go and run the Ministry of Agriculture and ensure the proper sowing of seeds.’

The Emperor turned to Xie and said: ‘The people are rebellious and the proper order of society is ignored. It will be your special role to be the Minister of Education and to teach them, and indeed encourage them, to observe the proper order of society according to our traditions. Engage with the people and encourage them to be kind.’

Turning to Gaoyao, the Emperor said: ‘The barbarians are attacking our lands, robbing, murdering, plundering and creating mayhem. I want you to become the Minister for Justice. Use the full force of punishments; restrain them according to the full force of the law and making public examples of them for major offences, or exile them to remote areas for lesser offences. Do this wisely and this will mean you are obeyed.’

Next the Emperor asked, 'Who can oversee the major Works and their workers?'

'Chu,' replied everyone.

The Emperor turned to Chui and said, 'Having discussed this, I have decided to appoint you as Minister of Works.'

Chui bowed low but did not want to accept. Instead he recommended three other people, but the Emperor said, 'Well, now! You see I have chosen you as I believe you can take charge.'

Turning to the Court, the Emperor said, 'Who is there that really knows this country from top to bottom? Who will care for the land from the plains to the forests; who will care for all nature?'

The court replied, 'Yi - that's the one.'

Turning to Yi, the Emperor said, 'I have decided to appoint you especially to take charge of my lands.' Yi bowed low but declined, saying that there were four others who were much better suited to this task.

'Well, that's as may be,' said the Emperor, 'but it is you that I want to do this.'

The Emperor one day said, 'So, my four great ones, is there anyone capable of undertaking the great rituals honouring Heaven, Earth and the deities?'

To which everyone replied, 'My Lord Yi.'

So the Emperor called the Lord Yi to him and said, 'You must be in charge of the Temple of the Ancestors. Day and night you must oversee that the offerings are made with due reverence. Be pure and honest.'

The Lord Yi bowed low but recommended that Kui or Long were much better suited. However, the Emperor replied, 'I want you to do this. Do as you are told.'

Then he turned to Kui and said:

'Destiny has chosen you
to facilitate the music
and train the young.

Teach them to be honest but also mindful
to be generous but also circumspect

to be strong but also receptive
to be firm - but not arrogant!

Show them that poetry is the way
to express their deepest feelings
shared also through its singing
where the notes can harmonize
with the feelings evoked

- just as the reed notates the voice -
and the eight instruments effect a harmony.

With this, harmony and balance
are brought both to the people
and the deities.'

Kui said, 'Of course. I will sound the finely tuned chime stone and all creation will be moved by this.'

Turning to Long, the Emperor said, 'I hate slanderous talk and evil behaviour. This disturbs the people. So you will be my Minister of Information and you will communicate night and day for me and brief me on the reality of what is happening.'

'So,' said the Emperor to all those whom he had appointed, 'do as commanded and undertake in conjunction with Heaven itself these responsibilities. Every three years I will test you and after three such examinations, the weak ones will be dismissed while the brightest ones will be promoted.' As a result of this, all the officials undertook their duties properly and the Miao people were exiled.

Rising to power at the age of thirty, for thirty years he was in power and for fifty years he was the Emperor. Then he died, his souls ascending and descending.

Yu the Great was the hero who defeated the Great Flood and is one of the most revered of ancient Chinese figures. As Emperor, he is traditionally the founder of the Xia Dynasty (2205 to 1766 BC).

3 THE COUNSELS OF YU THE GREAT

Long, long ago there lived the hero Yu the Great, known for his virtuous way of life. He was admired for this throughout the land, and in response he declared: 'If a ruler knows how to rule properly and if this is echoed in the conduct of the officials and the execution of their responsibilities, then the Affairs of State will run smoothly. This will encourage the people to be both keen and honest.'

'The fact is,' added the Emperor Shun, 'good ideas will never be lost. No one who is worthy and hard-working will be neglected and as a result everywhere in our vast country will be at peace. However. Pay attention to everything; put aside your own desires in order that you can serve others; do not oppress the poor and unfortunate. The Emperor is the one who ensures this happens.'

Yu replied to him:

'It is your virtue which makes this possible. It is your combination of wisdom, devotion, resoluteness and culture, which shows that Heaven has given you its Mandate. As a result you have authority over the Empire and everything under Heaven comes within your sphere of leadership.'

'Doing what is right brings its own blessings,' Yu added. 'If

you follow what is evil, disaster comes. It is the difference between the shadow and the echo.*'
The Emperor responded:

'But be on your guard! Especially when there doesn't seem any reason to be so. Never be deaf to the teachings of the law or waste your time on fruitless high living. Don't indulge yourself stupidly, or be loose and if you have good people in place don't let others come between you. Renouncing evil, don't be distracted by insubstantial and ego-driven plans. *Do what is right by your own light* never do what isn't just to win praise. Don't oppose the people's will, either just because you can. The result? Even those rough barbarians who surround us will agree to be ruled by you!'

'This is so, oh Emperor,' said Yu.

'And bear in mind that true virtue is the basis of good governance, and governance is deemed to be good if it contributes to the well-being of the people. See how the cosmos regulates the Five Elements of water, fire, metal, wood and earth in order that it functions properly. Therefore, uphold virtue and this will increase well-being; support creativity and this will help balance all life. And if everything goes well, celebrate! Have a festival! Guide the people wisely by using fear of the law; create odes and sagas and sing of these achievements so that they are never forgotten.'

The Emperor responded:

'When Heaven is in control and Earth obedient, then all creation will be in balance; all things will be in harmony. This will be the monument to your achievements.'

* The shadow is seen as more real because it comes directly from the physical body whereas the echo can fool you as it is often hard if not impossible to tell from where it really originates. Thus the shadow is seen as the virtuous path while the echo is not.

'Now pay attention dear Yu,' said the Emperor. 'I have been emperor for thirty-three years and age and time have affected me. In guiding the people, watch out for laziness in particular.'

Yu replied:

'I am not worthy of the people's trust. However, Gaoyao is a very virtuous man. Everything he does is worthy, which is why the people trust and respect him. My Emperor, why don't you consider him? For myself, I always think of him. Even if I try to think of someone else, I always come back to him. If I hear his name mentioned, then I think, "Oh yes, he's the one." He is constantly in my thoughts. I urge you, my Emperor, to consider him and his merit.'

Then, turning to Gaoyao, the Emperor said:

'Because you are the High Judge, I know that no one, neither my ministers nor my people, will break the law. Using the power of punishment, you have taught the people of all ages to honour and respect the True Law and so everyone is governed well. Because you used restraints, the people no longer need to be made to follow the Middle Path: they just will do so naturally. Just keep on like this.'

Gaoyao replied:

'Most revered emperor, you're truly admirable.

You consult but never condescend
you guide everyone generously. With you
wrongdoing doesn't descend to succeeding generations –
only the best that's been accomplished.

If failure was because of a genuine error
you pardon it however great
but however small a deliberate transgression
you penalize it.

Where there's doubt about a case, you're forgiving
where there's uncertainty about the clarity
you always err on the side of benevolence.

Instead of just killing someone who may be innocent

you will choose discretion, not the letter of the law
and because you love virtue that is life-affirming
this has touched the hearts of everyone
so that they no longer need to be controlled.'

The Emperor responded:

'You are like the wind that breathes across the land
touching everyone, so that what I want my government to
do you've already done by your example.'

Then, turning to Yu, the Emperor said:

'When the Great Flood threatened to overwhelm us
you did as you promised and showed us
just how dependable and capable you are!
It is clear you are uniquely suited to govern.
You were unending in your labours
for the country's benefit, barely giving a thought
to your own family, your own home.

And you managed this without puffing out your chest
and so it was you proved yourself
uniquely qualified to govern, free of all pride.
There's no one else under Heaven to compare with you
– no one can even try.

I can say in all honesty that no one under Heaven
can claim to be more honourable than you!

It's clear that Heaven means you to govern
and that you'll rise to the prime role of responsibility.

The heart and mind of the people is fickle.
So be careful: be constant, stay on the Middle Path.

Don't be seduced by false promises
or follow badly thought-out plans.

A leader should be loved. Who should be feared? *The people.*

If a country has no leader
then who can inspire respect?

And what about a leader who has no people?
Who will defend the country then?

Regard your position of authority
with respect and exquisite care.

Progress what is needed. And remember:
Heaven's blessing will cease for ever
if there's despair and poverty in your lands.

Remember: from the mouth comes both what is good
and what leads to wars. I won't say it again.*

Yu said, 'Let me seek advice through divination regarding
which are the worthy ministers, and follow its advice.'

The Emperor replied, 'Yu. The Diviner makes his decision
first, then he consults the Great Tortoise Shell in order to deter-
mine if this is the Will of Heaven. Likewise I make up my mind
and only then do I consult with everyone. They then agree that
this is what fate decrees and even the deities concur – indeed all
the forms of divination agree. When divination gives such a full
answer, you don't do it again.'

Yu bowed low, but he resolutely refused to accept.

'Do not refuse,' commanded the Emperor. 'It has to be you.'
So it was that on New Year's Day Yu embraced his fate
(the Mandate of Heaven) in the Temple of the Ancestors and
became chief amongst the ministers, as the Emperor himself
had insisted.

The Emperor said to Yu, 'Sadly, the leader of the Miao
people refuses to acknowledge me and submit. It is time for this
to end.'

Yu ordered the princes to assemble with their troops and he
addressed the army.

'Listen to me, my legions. The Miao Leader is stupid. He is
foolish, arrogant and rude! He is vicious and violent, but even
as he turns away from the proper path he pretends he is a man
of honour. He brings destruction through the rebellion he leads.
Virtuous men are driven away and petty men are promoted in
their place. The people have turned against him and will not
come to his defence. Heaven rains down disasters upon him. I
have summoned this mighty host in order to punish him. Let us
march forth, united in our strength, of one mind to triumph!'

The fight against the Miao went on for a very long time,
until Lord Yi came to Yu's assistance.

He said: 'Only virtue can inspire Heaven to come and noth-
ing can prevent it. Pride goes before a fall while humility brings
greatness. This is the Way (Dao) of Heaven.'*

The Emperor had been at Mount Lei and he went out into
the fields every day and wept. He called upon Compassionate
Heaven and upon his parents and took full responsibility and
blamed himself. He attended to his duties and showed such
respect to the captive leader of the Miao, and looked after him
so well, that the leader was reformed. This sort of sincerity is
capable of moving the deities themselves – so it is not surpris-
ing that it touched the leader of the Miao.

Yu honoured these wise decisions and said:

'Indeed this is so.'

And so saying, he led his army away. The Emperor set the
example of virtue and wisdom to the whole country. In celebra-
tion they performed the dance of the shields and feathers
between the two staircases in the Great Court of the Emperor
and within seventy days the Miao had surrendered.

* The term here refers to the Way (Dao) as a moral path in comparison to the
later Daoist understanding of the Way (Dao) as a spiritual truth about the
nature of existence.

'Likewise, Heaven has decreed the appropriate rewards to specific virtues and these we signify through the five different sets of official robes. Heaven has also decreed how punishments will be measured, and we must follow this pattern, for this is how government should be enacted. So let's get going!

'Heaven, like us, sees clearly and hears clearly. Heaven inspires awe and rewards accordingly and this the people can see clearly. Heaven and Earth, above and below, everything is linked. And as a result, wise men will take their responsibilities within this order very seriously.'

Finally Gaoyao said, 'What I say is true and this is how things are.'

Yu replied, 'Indeed, and when what you say is translated into action, all goes well.'

Gaoyao said modestly, 'I am not that wise, but by grace, every day I hope to be of assistance, and as a result the government will perform well.'

YI AND QI

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'Now Yu,' said the Emperor Shun. 'You have a lot to tell me, I think.'

Prime Minister Yu bowed to the Emperor and said, 'My dear Emperor, what can I say? As you know, I have always tried to work hard every day.'

To this Gaoyao responded, 'This has been a sad burden for you. How have you managed it?'

Yu replied:

'The Great Flood came from Heaven itself and threatened the very mountains and hills. The people were overwhelmed and very frightened. Travelling by whatever means I could, I traversed the hills, cutting down trees for defence with Yi, and teaching the people to make themselves stronger by eating meat. I drained the waters into nine channels and sent the waters towards the sea. I had drainage ditches and canals cleared so they could flow into the rivers.'

'Together with Lord Qi I taught the people how to grow crops to supplement their diet of meat. I encouraged trade and ensured the proper management of surplus so that everyone would have enough to eat. In these ways I ensured the country was once again well governed and was able to recover.'

'Excellent - this is indeed so,' Gaoyao exclaimed.

'Dear Emperor,' said Yu. 'I tell you truthfully, you must always ensure that you are careful in how you rule.'

'This is indeed true,' said the Emperor.

Reflecting, Yu advised him:

'Be at peace with yourself. Just be yourself and this will ensure unity. Surround yourself with good and wise people and

YU'S REPORT TO HEAVEN*

Yu set out and mapped the whole of his land and marked the territories. He noted all the details, from the high mountains and the rivers to the hills.

The detailed report is as follows:

Jizhou Area: initial focus – Hukou

Attention paid to Liang and Qi mountains.

Watercourse near Taiyuan restored.

Waters controlled south at Mount Yue.

In the north, focus on controlling the force of the Zhang river.

Soil: white clay – good.

Tax: highest of the top level.

Fields: average.

Note – Heng and Wei rivers are now cleared and flowing smoothly to the sea.

Dalu area now able to be cultivated.

Tribute: from the island-dwelling barbarians – fur.

Route: going to the right of Mount Jieshi, then up the Yellow River.

* We have translated this as a Report to Heaven based upon the use in the title of the character for 'Above'.

Yanzhou Area: between the Ji and Yellow River

Nine rivers returned to their proper way.

Leixia is an area of lake once again and functioning properly. Yong and Ju rivers flow into it. Mulberry bushes grow here now – people have settled here from the hills to cultivate the fields.

Soil: rich and dark. Grass – good; woodlands healthy.

Tax: middling.

Fields: upper middling.

Note – over the past thirteen years productivity has risen.

Tribute: dyes, silks – in special coloured containers.

Route: via the Ji and Ta rivers into the Yellow River.

Qingzhou Area: from Mount Tai to the sea

Waters around Yuyi have been controlled and the Wei and Zi rivers returned to their proper way.

Soil: white – along the coast, salty.

Fields: upper lower.

Tax: middle of top level on top quality.

Tribute: salt; matting; wide range of marine products; silks; hemp; lead; pine and rare jewels. From the tribe of the Laiyu comes silk in baskets.

Route: along the Wei and Ji rivers.

Xuzhou Area: between the seas, Mount Tai and the Huai River

Huai and Yi rivers controlled; land around the Meng and Yu mountains now arable. Flood waters drain on to the plain and into a lake – ensuring more cultivable land.

Soil: red clay and abundant flora.

Fields: upper middle.

Tax: middle of top level.

Tribute: five colours earth; bright feathers from the Yu area; special wood from Yi mountain; ritual chime stones from the Si river; pearls and fish from the Huai valley.

Route: via Huai and Si rivers to the Yellow River.

Yanzhou Area: from Huai River in the north to the southern sea

Flood waters now channelled into the Pengli lake. Islands of the south now habitable as a consequence. The three main rivers have been channelled to flow into the sea. Swamp land drained and now bamboo, grass and trees are abundant.

Soil: muddy.

Fields: poor.

Tax: middle.

Tribute: gold, silver and copper; gems; bamboo; ivory; skins; feathers; fur and timber. From the island people – matting; silk in baskets; varieties of organs.

Route: via Changjiang river to Huai and Si rivers or alternatively along the coast via the above rivers.

Jingzhou Area: from Jing mountains to the south of Heng mountain

Changjiang and Han rivers now controlled and flow like tribute-bearers into the sea. The many tributaries of the Changjiang have been channelled, resulting in prosperous land now around Yunmeng.

Soil: muddy.

Fields: upper middle level.

Tax: upper level.

Tribute: feathers; ox-tails; ivory; rhino hides; gold, silver and copper; various specialist woods; grindstones; flint arrowheads; cinnamon; bamboo and the rare Hu wood. These three areas also send a famous tribute of baskets of pandan, richly coloured silk, pearls and mother-of-pearl, while from the rivers come the giant tortoises.

Route: via Changjiang river and its outlets and the Han River, then by land to the Luo and the Yellow River.

Yuzhou Area: Jing mountain to the Yellow River

The rivers Yi, Chan and Jian now flow into Luo and on into the Yellow River. Yingbo lake along with Hoze and Mengzhu lakes all help regulate the waters.

Soil: Clay with loam in lower regions.

Fields: Middling.

Tax: Middle upper level.

Tribute: paint; hemp; good to poor quality matting; baskets of coloured silk; floss; ritual chime stones.

Route: Luo river into the Yellow River.

Liangzhou Area: South of Hua mountain to the Black River in the east

Arable land now on Min and Bozhong mountains due to the Tuo and Qian rivers being controlled. Cai and Meng mountains now cultivatable. The wild people of Heshui valley now working the land.

Soil: black.

Fields: upper middle.

Tax: highest.

Tribute: gems; iron; silver; steel; flint arrowheads; chime stones; bear, fox and other skins.

Route: from Xiqing mountains along the Heng, Qian and Mian Rivers into the Wei River and then into the Yellow River.

Yongzhou Area: between the Black and West Rivers

The Ruo River has been channelled west. The Jing and Wei Rivers are united to the north. Channels have been dug to link the Qi and Ju Rivers to the Wei from the north and the Feng River from the south. The Jing, Qi, Zhongnan, Chongwu and Niaoshu mountains were honoured and surveyed. By controlling the rivers and surveying the land around the mountains, scope was created for greater agricultural use. The Sanwei area was also made habitable and the Miao people settled there.

Soil: yellow.

Fields: the best possible.

Tax: lower middle level.

Tribute: precious jewels such as jade and pearl-like gems; fur and leather clothing from the barbaric tribes, Kunlun, Xizhi and Qusou.

Route: by land through the Jishi mountains, by boat along the Yellow River to the west of Longmen, gathering at the junction of the Wei.

Yu also undertook and achieved the following:

Studying and regulating the Qian and Qi mountains.

Travelling on inspection to the Jing mountain.

Crossing the Yellow River, Hukuo and Leishou to Mount Taiyue.

He went via the Wangun mountains to Dizhu and Xicheng, then via Taihang and Heng to Jieshi and thus arrived at the sea.

Yu studied and regulated all the rivers from the Xiqing, Zhuayu and Niaoshu to the Taihua mountains, and then to the Xiong'er, Waifang, Tongbai and Peiwui mountains.

He studied and regulated the channels along the Bozhong and Jing mountains and the Neifang and Dabie mountains;

He then channelled the rivers to the south of Min and Heng mountains via the Jiujiang River to Boyang lake;

He studied and regulated the Ruo River through the Heli channeling them into the area where the nine rivers flow and flood;

He studied and regulated the Black River to Sanwei and its waters now flow into the seas to the south.

He studied and regulated the Yellow River from the Jishi mountain to Longmen and on south, passing north of Hua mountain, then via the Dizhu mountain east to Mengjin. From there he went across the Luo to Dapei. Here he turned north to the area of the nine rivers where the flood waters of the Yellow River are poured into the sea.

From Bozhong mountain he studied and regulated the Yang River, which east of there becomes the Han and then even further east becomes the Canglang. Passing the Three Dykes, it reaches Dabei, where it turns south and into the Changjiang

River. Going even further east, the surging waters pour into the Pengli lake; then out, heading east as the Beijing River, it flows into the sea as the Changjiang River.

From the Min mountain, he studied and regulated the Changjiang River, which branching off eastwards becomes the Tuo. Further east the waters flow into the Li River, reaching the area of the nine rivers where it floods, where it flows east and bends north before wandering into the Huai River. From there it flows to the middle Changjiang River and then into the sea.

He studied and regulated the Yan River, calling it the Ji River, which flows east into the Yellow River with its flood plain known as the Ying marshland. Going on east and to the north of Taoqui to the marsh of Ho, it then turns north-east to join the Wen and from there, north, then east, it flows into the sea.

Yu studied and regulated the Huai River from the Tongbo mountains, ensuring it joins the Si and Yi Rivers and from there flows eastwards to the sea.

He studied and regulated the Wei River from the Niaoshu hill to flow into the Feng and then on to the Jing in the east. Further east the Wei passes the Qi and Ju Rivers and then flows into the Yellow River.

Yu studied and regulated the Luo River from Xiong'er, where it flows north-east to join the Jian and Chan Rivers. Here it turns east and flows into the Yi before entering the Yellow River in the north-east.

As a result of Yu's great labour, the waters were regulated throughout the land, making it possible for people to settle. The hills were cleared of scrub and established. The rivers were channelled and the marshes embanked to prevent flooding. It was now possible to reach the capital from anywhere in the land. Material wealth and production increased. The status of the land for taxation purposes was standardized and the exact level judged accordingly. The fields were properly classified with regard to the main types of soil and the tax was fixed.

He bestowed lands and titles, including surnames. Because virtue became the ruling discipline, no one dared to deviate from it.

The inner zone stretched five hundred *li* in each direction from the capital. Within the first one hundred *li*, the income was the entire plant of the grain; from the second, the ears; from the third, the straw; from the fourth, the husks; and from the fifth, the threshed grain.

The land beyond the five hundred *li* was the land of the Nobles. The income from the first hundred *li* in this zone were various types of labour; from the second, specific labour; from the third, military service.

Beyond the land of the Nobles was encompassed the zone of security. In the first three hundred *li* the locals were educated; in the outer two hundred *li* the people were under military rule.

The five hundred *li* area beyond this was the Forbidden Lands, where the first three hundred *li* were for non-Han people and the outer two hundred for convicted criminals.

The five hundred *li* beyond that were the barbaric lands where in the first three hundred *li* the barbarians lived and the two hundred *li* beyond that were where the worst criminals were sent.

From utmost east to the sea; from utmost west to the desert; from utmost north and from utmost south, his fame and power reached everyone. Yu was rewarded with the highest badge of honour – the jade plaque – and his task was over.

range from chronicles, such as chapters one and two; through counsels, such as chapters three and four; to speeches, such as chapter seven. Later we also meet announcements, such as chapter eleven; instructions, as in chapter thirteen; and charges, as in chapters twenty-one to twenty-three. In terms of actual style, we range from poetry, as in chapter five; to speeches – found pretty much throughout the book; to reporting, as in chapter six; and prose, in many different places. We also have wisdom sayings, such as this one from chapter three:

A leader should be loved. Who should be feared? *The people.*

The book contains a vivid picture of the diversity of literary styles and of the standard ways of recording 'history' in ancient China. As such, it shares many of these features with other ancient books such as the Old Testament or the *Iliad*.

The Book of Xia

The Book of Xia section of the *Shang Shu* comprises chapters six to nine. This very patchily covers the period of the Xia Dynasty, which traditionally is ascribed to the years 2205 to 1766 B.C. Yu the Great reigned from 2205 to 2197 and it is to his reign that chapter six – Yu's Report to Heaven – is dated.

Chapter six is one of the most complex chapters in terms of translation because it is in effect a compendium of place names and geographical, agricultural data from across ancient China. As such, it is a unique account of the China of perhaps three thousand years ago and from it scholars have been able to glean more about the nature of the landscape of ancient China than from any other document. I have translated it here as a bureaucratic report, following the pattern of each section, moving from the name of the region, through its physical description, type of soil and tax return, to the tributes it sends to the capital and the river system which it uses to send the tributes.

This model of a central ruler to whom tribute is sent establishes the pattern for all succeeding imperial systems throughout China's dynastic history. It also, in the extraordinary mapping out of the

zones of China at the end of the chapter, establishes the name of China. The Chinese name means the Middle Kingdom – the centre of the universe, in effect – and this sense of the central role of the Chinese Emperor and empire derives its strength in part from this chapter. Unlike ancient Muslim maps, where Makkah is the centre of the world even if the mapmaker lives in Indonesia, or medieval Christian maps, where Jerusalem is the centre even if, as with the Mappa Mundi, the mapmaker lives in Hereford, England, in China, the Emperor and his city are the centre – a point which is made later on in the book, in chapter forty, when the new Zhou dynasty decides to build a new capital.

By building this great city, he will be seen as a worthy counterpart of the Emperor of Heaven. He will make sacrifices to the spirits in Heaven and on Earth and then he will rule benevolently from this middle place. By the king ruling well and truly honouring and respecting the Mandate, the people will stay happy.

The quite astonishing map of the zones reflects the idea that the further you go away from the Emperor and the Han Chinese, the more barbaric and wild the people become. A notion which still finds a resonance in China today.

The Covenant at Gan – chapter seven – is believed to be one of the oldest documents, and describes a revolt against the next ruler of the Xia dynasty, Yu's son Qi. Qi dies, having suppressed the revolt, in the year 2189.

Chapter eight – the Lament of the Five Sons – is very similar in style to the contemporary book in the Five Classics, the Book of Songs. Through poetry it tells of the overthrow of one of the later Xia rulers, Dai Gong, around the year 2159. He is the first example of a 'bad ruler' and the lament highlights how through his 'outrageous' style of living, 'boozing, dancing and carousing the night away', he has lost the right to rule not least because his ancestors are appalled by his behaviour.

These verses, considered to be part of the later edition or version from the third to fourth century AD, are powerful in the evocation of a dynasty falling apart and the personal tragedy that comes through corruption at the highest level.

Zhong Kang was ruler between 2159 and 2146 B.C.

Joseph Overland THE PUNISHMENT OF YIN

When Zhong Kang became king, the Prince of Yin was ordered to take charge of the army hosts. The officials Xi and He had neglected their duties because they got drunk the whole time in their home towns and as a result the king ordered the Prince of Yin to punish them.

'Well now, my brave warriors,' the Prince told his assembled warriors. 'Our wise one of the past has spoken clearly to us, and so he has kept our land safe. Our illustrious forebears respected Heaven's decrees and were also wary of them. The ministers in those times did as they were expected and they were constant in the execution of their duties. The officials also did what was expected. Thus was the ruler able to be clear and thoughtful in all his actions.'

'Every year, in the first days of spring, someone travels abroad, banging a wooden board and announcing that officials should get ready and that workers should prepare their tools for the tasks ahead. If they weren't ready and prepared, then there was an appropriate punishment awaiting.'

'At this very moment the officials Xi and He are sunk deep in a drunken state. They have abandoned every vestige of virtue, have abused their office and have abandoned their responsibilities. As a result they have disturbed the Order of Heaven and this is down to their ignoring their duties.'

'For example, on the first day of the third month of autumn, there was a solar eclipse in the constellation of Fang. The blind musicians beat their drums to drive away evil forces while the petty officials rode off in great haste and the people panicked.'

Through all of this Xi and He sat like corpses, hearing nothing and understanding nothing. They were totally at a loss to explain what Heaven was doing and as a result they have been charged with the death penalty – which has been the consequence of this kind of behaviour from the earliest times. The regulations clearly state that if the eclipse comes after their prediction, then they must be executed. Likewise if the eclipse comes before their prediction, they must also be put to death. And there can be no exception in either case.

'As a consequence, my army and I have Heaven's authority to punish them. So, my warriors, let's be united on behalf of our Royal Regime. Together, you and I will carry out the Mandate of Heaven's Son. When a raging fire roars from the volcano of Mount Gun, it throws out jewels as well as burning stones, side by side. Likewise, when Heaven's decrees are executed with passion and dedication, the consequences are even more ferocious. Therefore, I will destroy the chief culprits, though I will leave their followers alone. Those who have become corrupted will be reformed. Well, indeed, when order is above compassion, then things can be sorted out. But if compassion is above order, then no good will come of any of it.'

'Now my warriors, forward. But take care.'

'As the old saying goes, "He who knows that he needs to learn from the wise will be successful. He who thinks that no one is his equal will fail. He who asks will be rewarded. He who relies on himself will lose."

'For goodness' sake! If you want a good ending, ensure a sound beginning. Promote the careful and reject the wastrels and you will be following the Way of Heaven. And as a result, you will be awarded the Mandate of Heaven.'

I 2 THE DECLARATION OF TANG

When King Tang came home after the conquest of the Xia, he came to Bo and there – before all the people – he made this declaration.

'My people,' said the king, 'All of you, from every region of the land, listen carefully to what I (a straightforward man) am about to say. The Emperor above all Emperors has endowed every person with a moral sense, and this is their essential, original nature. However, to ensure that they stay true to this essential nature, it is necessary to have rulers.'

'The King of Xia lost sight of virtue and became an oppressive dictator. He even oppressed you, my dear people from every region. And when you were no longer able to bear his bitter and poisonous ways, wrought through his cruel regime, you united to proclaim your innocence before everything in Heaven and everything on Earth. You know it is the Way of Heaven to bring good fortune to the good and to curse the wicked. This is why Heaven has brought disaster upon the Xia, making their terrible sins apparent to everyone.'

'This is why I, unimportant as I am, like a child have been granted the Mandate of Heaven which lights up the whole world with its authority. I cannot ignore it or stop doing what is asked of me. To prove this, I will now offer this dark-skinned sacrifice to highlight the Supreme Heavenly Sovereign Spirit and the depths of the crimes of the Xia!

I have asked the Supreme Heavenly Sovereign Spirit to
 join me
 combining our strengths, and to request from Heaven
 its authority to be granted to all of you men
 so that together we can vanquish the oppressor! Be assured.

The Mandate of Heaven cannot fail.

You, my people, are like the buds and the flowers –
 you have come forth. This is my cause, my reason.
 I must resolve this for once and for all
 simple man that I am, so that all will be well
 for you – and also your families.

And I worry that I might disturb anything in the cosmos,
 this makes me tremble with anticipation
 as if I was standing on the edge of a precipice . . .

In the new world I am creating
 rebellion and conspiracy will not be necessary.
 If everyone follows the laws as given
 then Heaven will bless us in what we do. It is simple.
 If you do what is right, I will know it too.
 And if I make mistakes, I won't try to exonerate them
 but instead search deeply within myself to make sure
 that all is done according to the heart and mind of Heaven.

If anyone anywhere does something wrong
 then the responsibility will lie with me
 – I say this again as a straight-talking man!
 And if I do something wrong, you may also be assured
 that no blame will fall on you.

Come now, let us all strive to be true to this
 and everything will go well!

*Yi Yin is respected alongside Gaoyao as a model of the
 Confucian-style official.*

13

THE TEACHINGS OF YI

It was in the first year, in the twelfth month and on the second
 day of that month that Yi made sacrifices to the Ancestor Kings
 and also presented the heir apparent to them. All the princes
 were there and the officials arrived in order to receive their
 duties and responsibilities from the king's minister.

'Come now,' Yi said, addressing them all. 'In the past the
 Xia started off by being worthy, so as a result no wrath
 descended upon them from Heaven. The spirits of the land and
 waters were at peace and all life on earth was united – all crea-
 tures. However, their descendants did not follow this model,
 and as a result the Emperor of Heaven sent disasters upon
 them, through our ruler whom Heaven chose to endow with its
 Mandate. The uprising started at Ming Tiao and our attack at
 Bo. Truly, our King of Shang displayed the holiness of his
 power by freeing the people from oppression and the people
 celebrated this generous action with joy.'

'Now then, arising from such reward for virtue, everything
 hangs on how you all begin. Start by showing true affection to
 your own family because if you can show it to them, then you
 can go on to show it to the State and then to everyone within
 the boundaries of our land.'

'Come now. Our Ancestor Kings reflected on what it is that