Signs of Authority and Sites of Spirits: Strange Trees in Early and Medieval China

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ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at representations of unusual trees in collections of accounts of anomalies in pre-Tang China. These texts were collected in various sources, including collections dedicated to anomalies, sections of official histories, incidentally mentioned in biographies of notable figures, and encyclopaedic compilations. By examining representations of anomalous natural phenomena in Classical Chinese texts, this study will attempt to reconstruct pre-modern Chinese knowledge of the natural world. In these texts, plant behaviour that would be regarded as impossible (or at least highly unlikely) in science signified something about the human world, such as proper or improper governance. They also were collected and recorded as part of larger regimes of knowledge, such as the political and spiritual power represented by the figure of the emperor and by religious traditions like Buddhism and Daoism. This connection between unusual plant behaviour and good human behaviour can also be seen in accounts of trees planted on tombs, which responded to the idealised qualities of their occupants. However, despite this connection to the human world, strange plants most commonly behaved in plant-like ways, and when depicted with human-like interiority, usually were described as being occupied by human or animal-like entities. This thesis shows that even when described as unusual, plants were still understood in relation to humans, but rather than therefore being regarded as essentially similar to humans, they nevertheless retained their distinctive plant-like qualities.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of William Gerard Hargrave (1930–2017), Richard Paul Hargrave (1951–2022), and Patricia Mary Frances Hargrave (1928–2024).

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Introduction

In a highly influential article of 1967, the American historian Lynn White Jr. claimed that the "historical roots of our ecological crisis" lay in medieval European attitudes towards nature, specifically those found in Christianity.[1] While White's thesis has been much debated, there persists a general assumption in much subsequent research that the destructive impact on the environment by humans is a particularly European ideological phenomenon. Moreover, many scholars have claimed East Asian religious and cultural traditions did not share this possessive and destructive attitude, and instead presupposed a harmony between human beings and the natural world, and thus natural resources were not objectified and exploited in the manner that they were in Europe and its colonies.

Over the years, this Eurocentric account has been challenged, with scholars of many different regions and time periods pointing out the environmental impact of non-European and/or non-Christian societies.[2] Moreover, as has been noted by scholars researching a wide variety of religious and cultural traditions, while many societies may have at different times been concerned with protecting and preserving the natural world, a truly "ecological" perspective does not seem to pre-date the industrial revolution and its attendant extreme and long-lasting impact of human activity on the environment.[3]

Back in 1970, the geographer Tuan Yi-Fu 段義孚 (1930–2022) cautioned against the tendency in White and others to over-exaggerate the influence of ideals and of the uniquely exploitative worldview of Christianity. Tuan spoke of the "overgenerous" tendency of Western intellectuals when evaluating Chinese culture, who in the tradition of the 18th century *philosophes*, compared the East's "quiescent and adaptive approach toward nature with the aggressive masculinity of

[1] White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis". See also the edited volume *Religion and Ecological Crisis*, specifically Elspeth Whitney's "'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis' after Fifty Years", 18-32.
[2] See for instance Davids, *Religion, Technology, and the Great and Little Divergences*; Morris-Suzuki, "Concepts of Nature". For a helpful outline of common "Eurocentric metanarratives", see Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics*, 1-31.
[3] This point has been reiterated in many studies of traditional China, see Schipper, "Daoist Ecology", 79-80; Kubin, "The Myriad Things"; Campany, "Ingesting the Marvelous", 125; Meyer, "Salvation in the Garden", 219-220; Goldin, "Why Daoism is Not Environmentalism"; Roetz, "On Nature and Culture in Zhou China". See also generally the edited volumes *Chinese Ideas About Nature and Society: Studies in Honour of Derk Bodde* and *Concepts of Nature: A Chinese-European Cross-cultural Perspective*.

Western man." It is not, as Tuan points out, that there was no such protective attitude towards nature in China's history – quite the contrary, as Tuan's references to Warring States texts illustrate. Rather, an account that only relates that concern is overly partial and distorted.[4] Even if one accepts that a concern for nature, whether aesthetic or religious or something else, is present in some texts, those texts were written and read by a thin strata at the top of society, often quite removed in their concerns from issues to do with the everyday interactions between most humans and the natural world.[5]

As Paul Goldin has put it, "we must avoid at all costs the myth that the ancients were somehow more in tune with nature, or that the deterioration of the environment is an exclusively modern phenomenon arising from the peculiar deficiencies of the modern outlook".[6] Goldin was talking about Daoism, but the same could be said for other traditions.[7] The Jain scholar John E. Cort has claimed that statements about the inherent environmentalism of Jainism "are largely untrue as statements about history".[8] In a volume from the same series on Hinduism, which otherwise is mostly positive on environmentalist Hinduism, Lance Nelson notes that nature is "irrelevant" to the "soteriological goals" of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which teaches that "our true self is outside the world of nature".[9]

Ideas that a Buddhist environmentalism may be seen in sutras and other pre-modern texts have been challenged by scholars like Ian Harris (1952–2014), Lambert Schmithausen, and Hakamaya Noriaki 袴谷憲昭.[10] More relevant perhaps to the present study are developments in Mahāyāna Buddhism and East Asian Buddhism more generally

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[4] Tuan, "Discrepancies Between Environmental Attitude and Behaviour", 176-183.
[5] Zhang, "Traditional Chinese and the Environment", 79-82.
[6] Goldin, "Why Daoism is Not Environmentalism", 76-77. See also Anderson, "Flowering Apricot", 167. For other views, see Nelson, "Responding with Dao", *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy*.; Miller, *China's Green Religion*.
[7] See also the recent article by Mark Meulenbeld, "Daoism and Landscape: Unruly Landmarks, Punitive Rituals, and Ecology."
[8] Cort, "Green Jainism?", 65.
[9] Nelson, "Reading the Bhagavadgita from an Ecological Perspective", 151.
[10] Harris, "How Environmentalist Is Buddhism?", "Buddhism and the Discourse of Environmental Concern", and "Buddhism and Ecology"; Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature*, "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics" and "Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature"; Hakayama, "Shizen hihan toshite no bukkyō". See the helpful and critical summary of some of these debates in Swearer, "The Hermeneutics of Buddhist Ecology in Contemporary Thailand: Buddhadasa and Dhammapitak", 37-40. See also Eckel, "Is There a Buddhist Philosophy of Nature?"; Sponberg, "Green Buddhism and the Hierarchy of Compassion"; Elverskog, *The Buddha's Footprint*, 50-62.

regarding the interpretation of the core Buddhist concept of pratītyasamutpāda or "origination by dependence" (*yuanqi* 緣起), especially in notions of Indra's Net as developed by the Huayan 華嚴 school that were so influential on modern eco-critical perspectives on religious environmentalism.[11] Some of these developments took hold at the tail-end of the timeframe of the present study, and do not necessarily represent a consensus view among Buddhists, let alone the lay population. Moreover, the extent to which origination by dependence implies an environmentalist attitude has been much debated.[12]

As may be gathered from the above, much of these debates on the relationship between religion, philosophy, and environmentalism can be contentious. Advocating for a historical approach when examining the past should not by necessity also imply rejecting the use of traditions from the past to respond to issues in the present.[13]

While it has sometimes been pointed out that pre-modern China lacked a word of exact equivalence to the English word "nature",[14] certain attitudes and perspectives towards nature can still be seen in the textual evidence.[15] This is not just because of the complexity of the English

[11] There are many other ways to translate pratītyasamutpāda into English and Chinese, including "dependent arising" (which is probably the most common in English), "dependent origination", "conditioned origination", and *yuanshen* 緣生 and *yinyuansheng* 因緣生, see Muller, "dependent arising" *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*; Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 669-670. For the relationship between pratītyasamutpāda and attitudes to nature, see Schmithausen, "Buddhism and the Ethics of Nature", 63-70; Ives, "In Search of a Green Dharma", 166-168 and "A Mixed Dharmic Bag", 44-45. For Huayan, see Plassen, "Is 'All-Unity' a Possibility in Mahāyāna Thought?"; Jones, "Dependent Arising and Mutual Identity in Fazang's Huayan Thought". For the development of Buddhist conceptions of space and place in China, see Robson, "Buddhist Sacred Geography" and Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 155-174.

[12] For a criticism of modern environmentalist borrowings of this concept, as well as that of "not-self" (anātman in Sanskrit, *feiwo* 非我 in Chinese) see Cooper and James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment*, 109-

[13] For different approaches to the use of religious traditions for environmentalist purposes (in this instance Buddhism) see Swearer, "An Assessment of Buddhist Eco-Philosophy", 124-125.

[14] Tu, "The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism"; Nelson, *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy*, 9-11; Weller, *Discovering Nature*, 20-23; Allan, *The Heir and the Sage*, 3-4; Nicolaisen, "Rethinking Ontology with Equality of Life", 48-55.

[15] While there is a growing literature that examines the concept of nature in Chinese history, literature, and philosophy, some important studies that have not already been mentioned include Aoki, "Shinajin no shizenkan"; Needham and Wang, *History of Scientific Thought*, 518-583; Obi, *Chūgoku bungaku ni arawareta shizen to shizenkan*; Rong, *Wei-Jin de ziran zhuyi*; Liu, *Renwen ziran yu tiandi ziran*; Stein, *The World in Miniature*, 1-113; Holzman, "Landscape Appreciation in Ancient and Early Medieval China"; Kubin, *Der Durchsichtige Berg*; Onozawa et al., *Ki no shisō*; Kern, *Zum Topos "Zimtbaum" in der chinesischen Literatur*; Wang, *Zhongguo shanshui yanjiu*; Weller and Bol, "From Heaven-and-Earth to Nature"; Roetz, "On Nature and Culture in Zhou China"; Van Houten, "Nature and Tzu-Jan in Early Chinese Philosophical Literature"; Kern, *Zum Topos "Zimtbaum" in der chinesischen Literatur*; Bodde, *Chinese Thought, Society, and Science*, 309-355; Uchiyama, *Chūgoku kodai shisōshi in okeru shizen ninshiki*; Lee, *Wei Jin xin wenhua yundang dong*; Hou, "Reflections on Chinese Traditional Ideas of Nature"; Chai, "Rethinking the Daoist Concept of Nature"; Wu, "Ziran de faxian". See also the overview of the field provided by Liu Yuan-ju in her introduction to the volume *Tixian ziran*, 2-23.

word. Christoph Harbsmeier has identified ten "basic syntactic functions" of the Chinese word *ziran* 自然, sometimes translated as "nature", which suggests some of the difficulties in pinning this concept down linguistically.[16] There are many other words in Chinese that get linked in translation to the English "nature", such as *tian* 天, usually understood as meaning "Heaven", *xing* 性, usually understood as referring to one's inborn qualities, and *wanwu* 萬物, usually understood to mean all things in existence. That these words with their quite different semantics can all be translated as "nature" illustrates some of the problem. Rather than impose a foreign (in place and time) concept onto my sources, this study will instead take a similar approach to other studies of the cultural meanings of plants, summed up in Maurice Bloch's oft-quoted observation that "trees, too, are good to think with".[17]

In recent years, the history of the environment in China has greatly expanded. Landmark studies have included volumes of Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* series, and Mark Elvin's *The Retreat of the Elephants*, the latter including Elvin's provocative observation that "classical Chinese culture was as hostile to forests as it was fond of individual trees".[18] A proper summary of this research is beyond the scope of the present study, but much of it focuses on history from the Song dynasty 宋 (960–1279), due to a combination of more available data and greater environmental impact. According to Edward Schafer, even as late as the Tang dynasty 唐 (618–907), natural forests were still regarded as being abundant enough that tree planting was seen as unnecessary.[19] This situation had changed by the Song, with overlogging causing crises in timber availability, and official restrictions on logging, importation drives, and the planting of trees all essential in the fight against resource depletion.[20]

Mark Elvin has defined environmental history as "the historically documented part of the story of the life and death not of human individuals but of societies, and of species, both others and

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[16] Harbsmeier, "Towards a Conceptual History of Some Concepts of Nature in Classical Chinese".
[17] Bloch is paraphrasing Claude Lévi-Strauss, see Bloch, "Why Trees, Too, Are Good to Think With".
[18] Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, xvii. A non-exhaustive list of other studies include Tuan, *China*; Marks, *Tigers, Rice, Silk, and Silt*; the volume *Sediments of Time* edited by Elvin and Liu Ts'ui-jung 劉翠溶; Bao, "Environmental History in China"; Zhang, *The River, the Plain, and the State*; Mostern, *The Yellow River*. See also the evaluation of Elvin in Fan, "A Reassessment of Source Citation Issues in *The Retreat of the Elephants*" and the overview in Mei, "The Past, Present, and Future of Environmental History in Contemporary China".
[19] Schafer, "The Conservation of Nature Under the T'ang Dynasty".
[20] Miller, *Fir and Empire*, 27. For prohibitions in earlier periods, see Rols, "Les interdits de destruction de la faune et de la flore de l'Antiquité tardive au haut Moyen-Âge chinois".

our own, in terms of their relationships with the world about them".[21] According to this definition, my research is not environmental history, but is instead an attempt to reconstruct how people understood the natural world at its strangest, and what this can tell us about conceptions of the differences between human and non-human beings.[22]

In short, this study will look at representations of natural phenomena in anomaly accounts – texts that record strange events of all kinds – to attempt to reconstruct Early and Early Medieval Chinese perspectives on the natural world.[23] By looking at how flora at its strangest was represented, the 'ordinary' behaviour of plants is implicitly suggested, and a picture of the natural world emerges.

Chapter outlines

The first chapter introduces three major methodological and theoretical issues that will animate the rest of the study: botany and identification, the strange, and theories of sacred trees. First, it lays out some theoretical assumptions regarding the difficulty of defining trees and of identifying species from descriptions (let alone mere word usage). The rise of modern botany has seen many attempts to identify the flora of China both today and in the past. The difficulty of identification is compounded by the fact that the modern biological concept of species was not available to anyone before the 19th century, and so the projection of such a concept onto the past should be avoided.

Anomalous phenomena were recorded throughout Chinese history for a variety of reasons. These records were sometimes collected in dedicated compilations, some of which only survive as quotations, some of which have been collected in encyclopaedic texts, and sometimes appear in official histories. This chapter will outline the available material and the categorisation of trees in encyclopaedic texts, building on the earlier discussion of the issue in defining and identifying

[21] See Elvin's introduction to the edited volume *Sediments of Time*, 1.
[22] Similar approaches to my own include the work of French scholars Georges Métailié and Li Guoqiang, see Métailié, *Traditional Botany*; Li, "L'homme et l'arbre dans la Chine antique"; Li, *Le mûrier dans la Chine antique*.
[23] This echoes an approach advocated by Brian Lander in his "Birds and Beasts Were Many", 212-213.

trees botanically. Finally, this chapter will look at previous scholarly interpretations of strange trees in Chinese texts that examined them from the perspective of comparative religion.

Chapter 2 will look at one specific type of strange tree behaviour, that of intertwining trees. The motif of intertwining trees can be found in tomb iconography and in numerous textual sources. This chapter looks at how this phenomenon was understood in the context of records of auspicious signs, and shows that they were often understood as appearing in response to proper rulership. A similar situation occurs when intertwined trees appear in Buddhist texts, although the authority that these texts claim is being responded to is the dharma and its major propagator, the Buddha himself. This is done in the main through use of Sanskrit-derived terminology and references to major events in the life of the Buddha that took place under or around trees.

Chapter 3 examines the relationship between filial piety and strange trees, with a particular focus on the behaviour of trees plants at tomb sites, which are most commonly pines and cypresses. Some of these trees were planted by hand by filial sons, and many of them are described as exhibiting strange behaviour in response to filial behaviour or more generally to the good qualities of the occupant. Like the strange trees looked at in Chapter 2, the strangeness of these tomb trees comes from a response to ideal human behaviour.

Finally, Chapter 4 takes as its theme the physical bodies of strange trees. This chapter examines the question of whether tree spirits inhabit trees or whether they are themselves trees. Complicating this is that some descriptions of strange trees depict them as having human-like physical characteristics. These accounts can deepen our understanding of pre-modern Chinese conceptions of nature, in particular general assumptions about the differences between humans and plants, and how those assumptions changed over time. These assumptions have implications for reconstructions and appropriations of pre-modern attitudes towards nature as they apply to environmentalism.

Chapter 1: The Classification of Trees and the Strange

1.1.1. Introduction

This chapter will provide a preliminary examination of some of the textual sources for what I will call "strange trees" in Early and Early Medieval China.[24] Some of the major sources for descriptions of strange trees are anomaly collections, where they are recorded anecdotally, and in records of auspicious events found in official histories, where they are regarded as instances of a type of sign.[25] The focus of this chapter will be on the former, and the latter will be dealt with in more depth in a later chapter.

Collections of anomalous events provide a glimpse into a worldview often regarded by the mainstream of pre-modern Chinese literate circles as being exaggerated or doubtful.[26] By taking a closer look at trees in these collections, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of Chinese conceptions of nature can be developed. This study will focus on plants in general and trees in particular. Trees are, like mountains, visually suggestive symbols of transference between the realm of humans (the earth, *di* 地) and the realm of the spirits (the sky/heaven, *tian* 天).[27] They are also visually analogous to the human body in a way that mountains may not be, thus they have the potential to both serve as sites of earthly/heavenly transcendence and of human-like agency. While there have been some standout contributions, the meaning(s) of strange trees has

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[24] "Strange trees" is my own term, following on from Robert Campany's landmark study of anomaly collections, *Strange Writing*. Related terms that appears especially in modern Chinese archaeological studies is "divine tree" (*shenmu* 神木 or *shenshu* 神樹, both of which derive from pre-modern sources), but in order to allow for the vagueness of the concept of the anomalous that serves as the cultural background to these collections, I will use the broader term "strange". "The strange" does not translate a single Chinese term, but refers to phenomena that were described by a loosely defined set of synonyms whose broad semantic field allowed them to refer to diverse phenomena. The strange could encompass everything from extreme deviations from the norm to the slightly unusual. As a concept, it overlaps with the term "extranormal" advocated by Poo Mu-chou 蒲慕州 in his *In Search of Personal Welfare*, 5-7. It also includes the idea of auspicious omens, for more on which see Tiziana Lippiello's *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China*. In Western sinology, the term "sacred trees" has been used, especially in the 20th century, but tended to refer mainly to trees in a mythological context. I follow Li Jianguo 李劍國 in regarding the Tang dynasty as a turning point in anomaly collections. See Li, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*.

[25] Another source is poetry, which due to reasons of space will not be part of the main focus of this study.

[26] While they remain somewhat marginal, these sources have been examined by many scholars, and providing a comprehensive summary would be beyond the scope of the present study. For a more detailed introduction to the concept of the strange and anomaly literature, see Campany, *Strange Writing*. It will also be discussed further below.

[27] For conceptions of mountains in China, see Robson, *Power of Place*; Kroll, "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High T'ang"; Chavannes, *Le T'ai chan*; Wei, *Shanzhong de Liuchao shi*. For a recent study based on Eliade, see Michael, "Mountains and Early Daoism in the Writings of Ge Hong".

in general been understudied in sinology, and it is hoped that this project can help remedy that situation. To provide a solid theoretical footing upon which to begin that task, as well as looking at some of the available sources for strange trees, the following chapter will examine some of the problems of definition and categorisation, as well as re-evaluating some of the existing theories of sacred or cosmic trees that have been utilised in sinology.

1.1.2. Defining trees in science

Currently, there are thought to be around three trillion trees on Earth, a number which was likely double that at the advent of agriculture, some 12,000 years ago.[28] While previously unknown trees continue to be discovered, as a rough estimate there are likely to be around 100,000 different species of trees in the world today.[29]

The sheer number and variety of trees causes some difficulties when it comes to definitions. Scientifically, trees do not form a single taxonomic group, but are divided across different taxa of vascular plants, most commonly angiosperms (flowering plants) and gymnosperms (which do not flower). The 2019 edition of *A Dictionary of Plant Sciences* defines a tree as,

> A woody plant that may grow more than 10 m tall. Characteristically it has 1 main stem, although many trees (e.g. oak and ash) may grow multi-stemmed forms.[30]

Even this rather broad definition would however exclude banana trees (which have no wood at all), bamboo trees (which are hardened grasses), and shrubs (which are usually shorter than ten metres). More strict definitions which specify the secondary wood growth that give some trees their characteristic rings would exclude monocotyledons like palm trees and dragon trees.[31] The problem is that while these plants are all at least sometimes called trees, they do not necessarily

[28] Crowther *et al.*, "Mapping Tree Density at a Global Scale".
[29] Raven and Crane, "Trees".
[30] *A Dictionary of Plant Sciences.*
[31] Thomas, *Trees: Their Natural History*, 1-3.

share much in common with each other from an evolutionary or botanical perspective. As Raven and Crane put it,

> The popular concept of a tree, which encompasses everything from tree-ferns and Joshua trees to coconut palms and oaks, confounds any simple botanical definition.[32]

At this point, coming to a botanical definition of trees that also includes cultural conceptions would seem to be an impossible task. This is only made clearer when examining historical, especially ancient, meanings of trees, as while delineations were made by different people at different times in the past, one does not find anything like the methodological rigour of modern taxonomic theories. However, even if scientific classifications are cast aside, a purely cultural definition remains difficult to pin down, as historical definitions and categorisations are also often similarly loose.

1.2.1. Classification of nature in China

In the case of China, early attempts at classification of nature can be seen in texts like the *Zhouli* 周禮 (*The Rites of Zhou*),[33] which describes the Head of the Ministry of Education (*diguan situ* 地官司徒)[34] presiding over plants and animals[35] which are divided into five categories based upon

[32] Raven and Crane, "Trees".
[33] This text contains idealised descriptions of the institutions of the Zhou dynasty which are not considered historically accurate. See Boltz, "Chou li"; Knechtges and Chang, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 2285-2288; and the edited volume on the text by Elman and Kern, *Statecraft and Classical Learning*.
[34] This official title is also the title of the chapter, the translation of which comes from Hucker, *Official Titles*, 485. Both Michael Carr and Métailié follow Édouard Biot's translation "Great Director of the Multitudes" ("A Linguistic Study of the Flora and Fauna Sections of the 'Erh-ya'", 48-49; *Traditional Botany*, 34). William Boltz translates it as "terrestrial offices, [domain of the] Overseer of Public Affairs (education)" ("Chou li", 24).
[35] The translation of "things that move" (*dongwu* 動物) as "animal" is not itself without problems, as the concept of a category of non-human, non-plant beings expressed by the English word "animal" does not appear to exist in Early China. A *dongwu* is, as Michael Carr points out, a loose category defined in opposition to "fixed things" (*zhiwu* 植物), that is, plants, and both *dongwu* and *zhiwu* are "things" (*wu* 物). See Carr, "A Linguistic Study of the Flora and Fauna Sections of the 'Erh-ya'", 48; Sterckx, *Animal and the Daemon*, 15-44; and Valenti, "Biological Classification in Early Chinese Dictionaries and Glossaries", 26-28. Federico Valenti also points out that we should not make the mistake of comparing the modern concept of an "animal" with categories from the ancient world as if they should be equivalent (ibid). Writing in the early 1950s, Yuen Ren Chao 趙元任 (1892–1982) noted that "[t]here is no popular word to cover all plants" and that *zhiwu* "sounds classroomish", Chao, "Popular Chinese Plant Words: A Descriptive Lexico-Grammatical Study", 385-386.

their presence on the five soils.[36] Thus, the mountains and forests (*shanlin* 山林) are suitable for plants "that stain things black" (*zaowu* 皂物), the rivers and marshes (*chuanze* 川澤) are suitable for plants "with receptacles" (*gaowu* 膏物),[37] hills and mounds (*qiuling* 丘陵) are suitable for plants "with stones" (*hewu* 核物), riverbanks and lowlands (*fenyan* 墳衍) are suitable for plants "with pods" (*jiawu* 莢物), and flat and low-lying land (*yuanxi* 原隰) is suitable for plants that are "bushy" (*congwu* 叢物).[38] Georges Métailié notes that the use of the number five is a commonality shared with later *materia medica* texts, starting from as early as the medical text *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (*Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor*),[39] and that this tendency to try and fit plant categories into pre-existing numerological patterns could cause a great deal of variation.[40]

Some of the problems of classification are illustrated by early dictionaries such as the *Erya* 爾雅.[41] The *Erya* is divided into sections, one of which explains herb-related words (*shicao* 釋草) and another explains tree-related words (*shimu* 釋木). Interestingly, the latter category appears to include shrubs, but clearly the main distinction is between terms for woody plants and terms for herbaceous plants. It even uses different words to refer to the flowers of each (*hua* 華 and *rong* 榮 respectively),[42] which strengthens the distinction between them even at points of apparent similarity. However, it would be a mistake to presume that the *Erya* provides a systematic lexical

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[36] As Robson notes in *Power of Place*, from the Warring States to the Han there was a general shift in numerological thinking away from the importance of the number four and towards the number five (p.38). See also Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy", 860-66; Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*; Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, 350-382.

[37] Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), quoting Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (d. 83), reads the term *gaowu* as referring to the white, fat-like pattern of trees in the category of poplars and willows (*gaowu wei yangliu zhi shu, lizhi qie bai ru gao* 膏物謂楊柳之屬，理致且白如膏) but also suggests *gao* is a variant of the homophonous *gao* 囊, meaning a kind of weapon case or bag, which is being used here to describe the sheaths of the seeds of lotuses and lilies (*lian qian zhi shi* 蓮芡之實). The translation "with receptacles" follows Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 35.

[38] *Zhouli zhushu* 10.284-285; Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 34-35; Carr, "Flora and Fauna Sections of the 'Erh-ya'", 48-51.

[39] This text is listed in the treatise on literature in the *Hanshu*, 30.1776. For the history of this text, see Sivin, "Huang ti nei ching"; Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 4-5; Unschuld, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen*; and Veith, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*.

[40] Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 35-37.

[41] This title means something like "Approaching [the] Refined". See Coblin, "Ěryǎ" for background on this text. The following discussion draws upon Roel Sterckx's work on the lexicographic bent of definitions of animals in Chinese texts. See Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, 15-44.

[42] *Erya zhushu* 8.296; Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 48.

taxonomy of flora (or anything else), which, even if such a thing ever existed,[43] the manner of the text's composition would likely have confused some parts of it beyond recognition.[44]

The dating of the *Erya* has long been debated. Traditionally it was considered to have been produced by the Duke of Zhou,[45] with other estimates putting its first appearance to around the third century BCE.[46] Many scholars today see the *Erya* as a multi-layered, heterogeneous text that was produced over many hundreds of years, with some strata probably dating to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE).[47] It is perhaps therefore not surprising in these circumstances to see differing conceptions of trees within a single text.[48] As has been shown above, there is a general difficulty, even today, in precise and common definitions of trees and other natural phenomena, thus the heterogeneity of tree semantics in texts like the *Erya* may at least partially arise from the disjuncture between human perceptions of similarity and evolutionary relationships hidden from the naked eye.

Another issue that the case of the *Erya* illustrates is that the definitions found there rarely describe the plants being glossed. Instead we have to rely on Guo Pu's 郭璞 (276–324) fourth century commentary, which due to his tendency to describe a plant through its resemblance to other plants, can make identification difficult. However, as Georges Métailié puts it, Guo Pu "is acting as a lexicographer, not a botanist",[49] thus we should not expect detailed botanical descriptions from him. Moreover, Guo Pu was writing centuries after the *Erya* was composed, and we cannot be certain that his understanding of a term would conform with that of the original composers, especially as their work of composition was itself staggered over centuries. All this means that any identification made by modern scholars between a word for a plant in the

[43] According to Métailié, there is no concept in China of botany "in the modern sense of the term" before the 19th century. See *Traditional Botany*, 3. Nicholas Menzies emphasises that, despite this, the development of modern botany in China represented a "epistemic transition" rather than a "decisive break" with the past. See Menzies, *Ordering the Myriad Things*, 27-42, 179-181.
[44] Nevertheless, there are some sections which seem internally consistent. See Coblin, "Ěryǎ".
[45] See for instance the account in the *Hanshu* 30:1718.
[46] For example, Karlgren, "The Early History of the Chou Li and Tso Chuan Texts", 1931.
[47] Bottéro, Xu and Behr, "Lexicographic Tradition"; Coblin, "Ěryǎ"; Valenti, "Biological Classification in Early Chinese Dictionaries and Glossaries".
[48] To paraphrase Métailié, there is not one conception, but several. See *Traditional Botany*, 113.
[49] Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 120.

Erya and a particular species as it is classified by modern science can only be tentative. Unfortunately, this is also true for practically all early texts.[50]

The broad categories into which the *Erya* divided the natural world would prove to be hugely influential on subsequent natural history, serving as a repository of terminology and a classical exemplar of natural order. A commentarial tradition of glosses on nature terms grew up around it, with later commentators like Xing Bing 邢昺 (932–1010) building on the ground-breaking work of Guo Pu.[51]

A constant in the compilation and categorization of natural phenomena in pre-modern China is the attention given to the names of flora and fauna. In an oft-quoted passage from the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), Confucius entreats his disciples to read the *Shi* 詩[52] – later canonised as the *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Poetry*) – in order to, among other things, increase their "knowledge of the names of birds and beasts, plants and trees".[53] Indeed, from the late 4th century BCE, Confucius was particularly associated with the *Shi*, an association which would later develop into the idea of him as the editor of the text.[54] From the Western Han 漢 (206 BCE–9 CE), interpretations of the *Shijing* as political allegory would become dominant, giving rise to a whole set of poetical meanings of flora and fauna.[55] However, while the *Shijing* and the *Erya* are clearly both hugely important for the development of conceptions of natural phenomena, their status as the two most important foundational texts in this regard owes much to the Ming naturalist Li Shizhen 李

[50] That is not to say that such identification is futile or unfounded, just that once a pre-modern flora term (in certain contexts) is identified with a modern scientific name, there is a danger of reification due to the authority that scientific terminology can hold. This issue will be discussed further below.
[51] Nappi, *Monkey and the Inkpot*, 22-23.
[52] Sometimes referred to in English as the *Odes* or the *Book of Songs*, this text is a collection of poems which may date from the 11th to the 7th centuries BCE. The transmitted text was compiled during the Han dynasty, and during this time Mao Heng's 毛亨 (fl. 220–150 BCE) commentarial edition (*Mao shi* 毛詩) became dominant. See Kern, "Early Chinese Literature," 17-27; Loewe, "Shih ching"; Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 72-119.
[53] *Lunyu* 17.9: *duo shi yu niaoshou caomu zhi ming* 多識於鳥獸草木之名. Métailié regards this passage and the *gewu* 格物 passage of the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) as constituting "the basis upon which, in ancient China, all thought on natural living objects was founded" (*Traditional Botany*, 4-5). The influence of this passage in particular on Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) was significant, and the influence of Zhu Xi's interpretation of *gewu* can be clearly seen on Li Shizhen 李世珍 (1518–1593). However, the importance of the concept of *gewu* for pre-Song China may be overstated. Unfortunately, this is a vast topic beyond the scope of the present study. For Zhu Xi and *gewu*, see Elman, "Investigation of Things" and *On Their Own Terms*, 3-9. For Li Shizhen and *gewu*, see Métailié, "The Bencao gangmu of Li Shizhen," 223-4 and Nappi, *Monkey and the Inkpot*, 26-7.
[54] See for instance *Shiji* 47.1936. See also Kern, "Lost in Tradition".
[55] This is particularly associated with the Mao commentary. When referring to the canonised *Shi*, I will call it the *Shijing*. For an analysis of some of this imagery relating to trees, see Li, *L'homme et l'arbre dans la Chine antique*, 81-150.

世珍 (1518–1593) and his *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (*Outline and Specifics of Materia Medica*), which would have a significant influence on subsequent generations up to the present day.[56]

This concern with the names of natural phenomena can also be seen in lexicographical compilations such as the *Cang Jie pian* 倉頡篇,[57] compendia of geographical items such as the *Shanhai jing* 山海經 (*Guideways to the Mountains and Seas*),[58] and texts concerned with apotropaic issues such as daybooks (*rishu* 日書)[59] and Ge Hong's *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (*The Master Who Embraces Simplicity*), where knowledge of the names of harmful entities is a crucial step in curing or avoiding the ailments caused by them.[60] Moreover, the influence of the proliferation of flora and fauna terms in the *Shi* can be seen in later *fu* 賦 ("rhapsody") poetry, which are themselves a valuable source of nature terminology and symbolism.[61]

When encountering trees that behave in atypical ways, these definitional problems are often present, and identification is sometimes made more difficult by the strangeness of these trees. However, as will be shown, the overlap between poetic meanings of certain trees and their behaviour, even when connected with anomalous events, makes their identification somewhat easier, as generic behaviour and associations can be seen in numerous sources. An example of the latter would be the strong association between pines and cypresses with loyalty, an

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[56] Both Métailié and Nappi follow Li Shizhen's emphasis on the *Shijing* and the *Erya*. On the influence of the *Shijing* on understandings of nature, see Mittag, "Becoming Acquainted with Nature from the *Odes*".
[57] See Foster, "Study of the Cang jie pian"; Liang, *Chutu Cang Jie pian yanjiu*.
[58] The *Shanhai jing* was likely compiled over many years, and many items not found in the received text – which was probably compiled some time before the first century BCE – can be found quoted in other sources. For general background of the text see Fracasso, "Shan hai ching"; Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary*; Mathieu, *Étude sur la mythologie et l'ethnologie de la Chine ancienne*; Campany, *Strange Writing*, 34-36. For examinations into the geographic aspect of the text, see Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "Mapping a 'Spiritual' Landscape" and "Mapless Mapping". The title of this text has conventionally been translated as the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, but, according Wang Chongqing 王崇慶 (1484–1565), the text was never canonised and was instead categorised as part of the "minor discourses" or "minor talk" (*xiaoshuo* 小說), and so the *jing* 經 (literally "warp") in the title probably does not mean "classic," but instead something like "route". This is corroborated by the graph *jing* being used not just in the title of the text, but in the titles of all its internal subdivisions. See Yuan Ke's 袁珂 (1916–2001) note in *Shanhai jing jiaozhu*, 171-172; Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary*, 229 (note 1); Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "Mapless Mapping," 253-59; Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, 297-302. For a dissenting voice on this point, see Tian, "Empire's Blue Highways: Li Daoyuan's Commentary on the River Classic", 77 n.3. For English translations, see Birrell, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, and (partially) Strassberg, *A Chinese Bestiary*.
[59] See the edited volume by Harper and Kalinowski, *Books of Fate and Popular Culture in Early China*.
[60] See for instance *Baopuzi neipian* 17.304 "Only if one knows the names of things, will they then be unable to harm one" (*dan zhi qi wu ming, ze bu neng wei hai ye* 但知其物名，則不能為害也). This statement in the "Climbing and wading" (*dengshe* 登涉) chapter closes an enumeration of the names and descriptions of strange things one might encounter in the mountains. See Rong, *Wei Jin de ziran zhuyi*, 162; Campany, "Ingesting the Marvellous".
[61] See Kwong, "Nature and Religion in Ancient Chinese Poetry".

association that is found not just in poetry, but also in anecdotal accounts, especially those that describe the behaviour of pine and cypress trees planted around the tombs of the loyal person in question.[62]

1.2.2. Identifying plants in textual sources

When identifying plants and their names in Chinese literature, including plants that behave in unusual ways, there exists a wealth of material accrued over millennia for the scholar to consult. The context in which this knowledge was produced is crucial for a proper historical understanding of it, a context which is not always available when consulting some modern dictionaries for the names of plants. This section will provide a necessarily brief overview of the some of the major trends in the historical production of Chinese plant knowledge, especially in relation to two major intellectual paradigms: the lexicographic and the scientific. The former dominated textual mentions of plants for much of Chinese history, with the latter slowly taking form out of other intellectual strands in the 19th century.[63]

When they appear in traditional Chinese literature, plants can come with descriptions of their behaviour, habitat, and appearance, or may only be mentioned by name. As noted in the previous section, a number of volumes in Joseph Needham's *Science and Civilisation in China* series have provided in-depth overviews of the history of the use, naming, and categorising of plants in China, as well as the history of technologies related to flora.[64] China has a tradition of flora identification, usually in the context of commentaries to classical texts, or in specialised treatises on agriculture or medicine. As mentioned above, much learned attention was dedicated to

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[62] This will be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.

[63] The rise of modern science globally and in Chinese history are huge topics beyond the limitations of this study. Some of the issues relating to these topics will be discussed below, where the reader will be directed to the relevant sources.

[64] This series has had a major impact on modern scholarship on the history of science and technology in China, as well as on the discipline of world history. For a background on the series and its scholarly impact, see Blue, "Joseph Needham: A Publication History"; Finlay, "China, the West, and World History in Joseph Needham's 'Science and Civilisation in China'," and the edited volume *Science and Technology in East Asia: The Legacy of Joseph Needham*. Needham is also known for the "Needham question," namely, why did modern science arise in Europe and not China? For further discussions of this issue, see Sivin, "Why the Scientific Revolution Did Not Take Place in China – or Did It?" and Zhang, "Discovering Chinese Science and Technology: A Critical Review". Of the volumes published in the series, particularly relevant for this section is the volume on botany, which has a chapter on "Botanical Linguistics", Needham, *Botany*, 117-181, as well as Francesca Bray's volume on agriculture, and Georges Métailié's recent volume on ethnobotany in China titled *Traditional Botany*.

identifying the plants and animals of the *Shijing*. Lu Ji's 陸璣 (ca. 222–280) early *Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 毛詩草木鳥獸蟲魚疏 (*Sub-Commentary on the Plants and Trees, Birds and Beasts, and Bugs and Fish in the Mao Poetry*) became a model for future works of this type, and texts with similar titles were published throughout Chinese history.[65] In his sub-commentary, Lu Ji examined the appearance of a plant or animal in the *Shijing*, gave alternative names and described it in detail, and provided citations of the graph in other texts.[66]

Texts like these can be valuable resources when identifying plants in the literature. The difficulty of identifying plants mentioned in texts like the *Shijing* is not solved merely by consulting commentaries, however, as graphic variants can be significant, as can regional and temporal variations, among other issues. The potential for major deviations in interpretations can be seen in some modern translations of the *Shijing* into English. Carla Nappi has for instance compared the translations of certain terms in the poems by James Legge (1815–1897), Bernhard Karlgren (1889–1978), and Arthur Waley (1889–1966), which sometimes agree with each other, such as on peach tree for *tao* in *Taoyao* 桃夭,[67] but at other times differ wildly, such as *juan'er* 卷耳,[68] which Legge translates as "mouse-ears", Karlgren as "*kuän-er* plant", and Waley as "cocklebur".[69] This problem is, naturally, not limited to interpretations of the *Shijing*.[70]

Specialised texts devoted to plants, especially outside of the lexicographic tradition, are rare. One notable medieval exception is the *Nanfang caomu zhuang* 南方草木狀 (*Description of the Plants of the Southern Region*), traditionally attributed to Xi Han 嵇含 (263–306).[71] As for agricultural treatises,

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[65] Needham, *Botany*, 182-470; Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon,* 23-24. For a list of similar texts, see Sterckx, ibid, 250 (note 39). The term *chong* 蟲 in the title, translated above as "bugs", is a broad category that could include insects, worms, and frogs. It essentially refers to invertebrate animals. See Fèvre, "Drôles de bestioles: qu'est-ce qu'un chong?"; Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot*, 96-97.
[66] Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot*, 24.
[67] *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 1.40-43.
[68] *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 1.23-31.
[69] Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot*, 168 (note 60); Legge, *She King*, 61; Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, 3; Waley, *Book of Songs*, 85.
[70] For an exploration of some of the issues in interpreting trees in Chinese literature and iconography, see Brashier, "Symbolic Discourse in Eastern Han Memorial Art: The Case of the Birchleaf Pear".
[71] His surname is also read Ji. For this text, see the study and translation by Li Hui-Lin 李惠林 (1911–2002), *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang: A Fourth Century Flora of Southeast Asia*. The title of this work does not appear in the treatise on classics and other texts (*jingji zhi* 經籍志) of the *Suishu* 隋書 (*Book of Sui*), which mentions that Xi Han's collected works have been lost, *Sui shu* 35.1063. While Li argues for its authenticity based on textual evidence, Ma Tai-Loi 馬泰來 (1945–2020) has shown that it contains quotations from Tang and early Song works, see also Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 11-13; Ma, "The Authenticity of the 'Nan-Fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang'".

early examples include the lost Western Han-era *Fan Shengzhi shu* 氾勝之書 (*Book of Fan Shengzhi*), which survives partially in quotations,[72] and the Eastern Wei 魏 (534–550) *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術 (*Essential Techniques for the Common People*) by Jia Sixie 賈思勰 (fl. ca. 530–544).[73] The contents of works of this type overlap with that of local histories and geographical texts, many of which have been lost.[74]

Medical texts are also a common source of plant knowledge. The tradition of "material medica" (*bencao* 本草),[75] or the name at least, arose with the Han-era *Shennong bencao* 神農本草 (*Shennong's Materia Medica*).[76] Texts of this type usually contain descriptions of plants and fungi, as well as bugs and fish, metals and minerals, and birds and beasts, their names, where they can be found, their cultivation, and what effects they have on humans.[77] In his *Bencao jing jizhu* 本草經集注 (*Collected Commentaries on the Compendium of Materia Medica*), Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) divided plants into five categories: herbs (*cao* 草), trees (*mu* 木), fruits (*guo* 果), vegetables (*cai* 菜) and staple food (*mishi* 米實), a division which was followed by many subsequent authors.[78] Some

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[72] See Shi, *On "Fan Shêng-chih Shu"*.

[73] For introductions to this text, see Bray, *Agriculture*, 55-59; Bray, "Qimin yaoshu," 232-241; Shi, *A Preliminary Survey of the Book Ch'i Min Yao Shu*. The *Qimin yaoshu* quotes extensively from a text with the name *Nanfang caomu zhuang*, but does not identify it as being by Xi Han; textual difficulties of this nature can make dating quotations somewhat perilous.

[74] See some of the texts studied in Milburn, *Urbanization in Early and Medieval China: Gazetteers for the City of Suzhou*; see also Hargett, "Song Dynasty Local Gazetteers and Their Place in the History of Difangzhi Writing", 407-412. For an overview of similar texts appearing from the late Tang, see Chen, *Animals and Plants*, 8-11.

[75] This is the conventional translation of the term, for background see Needham et al., *Botany*, 231-234. Reflecting his tendency to project a modern scientific perspective onto the past, Needham referred to *bencao* as "pharmaceutical natural history" and suggested "the fundamental simples" as a translation, Needham et al., *Medicine*, 55. Bray and Bian prefer the term "pharmacopoeia", Bray, *Agriculture*, 6; Bian, *Know Your Remedies*, 7. Zhao, Guo, and Brand claim that *bencao* "literally means 'rooted in herbs'" which "reflects the fact that most medicinal materials are derived from botanical sources". Unschuld also makes this suggestion, *Ben Cao Gang Mu. Volume IX*, 9 (This statement is the "Prolegomena" of each volume of this translation, but the ninth was published first). Another possibility is that, it means "roots" *ben* 本 and herbs *cao* 草, referring to the types of plants usually discussed in these texts. See Zhao, Guo, and Brand, "A Concise Classification of Bencao (materia Medica)"; Métailié, "The Bencao gangmu of Li Shizhen".

[76] The textual history of this work is obscure, although it has been claimed to have been lost sometime in the Tang dynasty and reconstructed through fragments in the Ming. For various attempts to date it, see Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, 17, 30; Sivin, *Traditional Medicine in Contemporary China*, 179; Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 34; Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine*, 80; Schmidt, "The Textual History of the Materia Medica in the Han Period," 294-295; Needham, *Botany*, 135.

[77] For overviews see Needham et al., *Botany*, 220-328; Needham et al., *Medicine*, 55-57. For later texts see Métailié, "Concepts of Nature in Traditional Chinese Materia Medica and Botany (Sixteenth to Seventeenth Century)". While it lacks more recent publications, for a guide to research resources on Chinese materia medica, see Sivin, "A Cornucopia of Reference Works for the History of Chinese Medicine".

[78] This text is lost, but has been partially reconstructed from quotations in other works. Métailié, "Concepts of Nature in Traditional Chinese Materia Medica and Botany," 347.

of these texts may have included illustrations[79] – certainly editions from the Ming dynasty onwards often did – and these illustrations have been used to identify plants. The earliest of these is probably a text known as the *Tang bencao* 唐本草 (*Materia Medica of the Tang*), or *Yinggong bencao* 英公本草 (*Duke Ying's Materia Medica*), or the *Xinxiu bencao* 新修本草 (*Newly Revised Materia Medica*), among other names, which was based on Tao Hongjing's earlier work and whose compilation was supervised by Su Jing 蘇靜 (599–674).[80] It only survives in quoted fragments, and the illustrated sections do not survive at all. Later materia medica include the Song-era *Zhenglei bencao* 證類本草 (*Materia Medica Evidenced by Type*), compiled by Tang Shenwei 唐慎微 (fl. ca. 1086–1108), which served as the standard until it was displaced in the Ming by Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu*.[81] In many of these texts, the lexicographical aspect often took precedence, resulting in, to use Benjamin Elman's phrase, a "textualized natural history".[82]

In probably the most well-known Chinese materia medica, the famous *Bencao gangmu*, Li Shizhen says he can fill the gaps in the *Er'ya* and *Classic of Poetry*.[83] Being from the Ming, it is a later text than those examined in this study, but it quotes extensively from earlier texts and has been highly influential on the identification of plant terms in earlier works.[84] Moreover, because of the connection this text has with what is known as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), it has attracted a great deal of both scholarly and popular attention.[85] While it is an important source for earlier material, caution should be taken not to project Ming and post-Ming perspectives onto the past while using it.

Chinese materia medica also had significant influence in Japan. After becoming a European-style imperial Great Power in the 19th century, Japan was a site of knowledge transference between the

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[79] See Sterckx, "The Limits of Illustration: Animalia and Pharmacopeia from Guo Pu to *Bencao Gangmu*"; Wang, "Tuxing yanzhen: Bencao tujing".
[80] The name of one of the compilers, Li Ji 李勣 (594–669) – who had the title the Duke of the State of Ying (*Yingguo gong* 英國公) – became associated with the text. See *Dictionary of the Ben cao gang mu*, vol. 3, 457.
[81] The above is not an exhaustive list of texts. Métailié notes that Li Shizhen lists 932 titles, "The *Bencao gangmu* of Li Shizhen", 222-223. Asaf Goldschmidt has claimed that the expansion in the number of drugs recorded in Song-era materia medica is related to the shift of the population southwards during that time, as well as a shift in usage of such texts as encyclopaedias to formularies. The latter trend also probably resulted in the growth of illustrated editions from the Song. See Goldschmidt, *The Evolution of Chinese Medicine: Song Dynasty, 960-1200*, 113-121 and also Hymes, "Not Quite Gentlemen? Doctors in Sung and Yuan".
[82] Elman, *On Their Own Terms*, 38. Elman was specifically talking about the situation by the 16th century, but as noted this emphasis on lexicographic knowledge can be seen from early texts.
[83] Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot*, 21.
[84] Métailié, "The Bencao gangmu of Li Shizhen."
[85] Paul Unschuld is currently translating and annotating the entire text.

West and the Far East, with modern scientific knowledge often entering China via Japan, filtered through Japanese learning that was itself partially built on older Chinese models. Moreover, Chinese knowledge itself was often filtered out to the West via Japan. Charles Darwin (1809–1882) for instance consulted an "ancient Japanese encyclopaedia" which was based on Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu*.[86]

Chinese materia medica texts were consulted and their remedies praised by European Jesuits like Matteo Ricci (1552–1610),[87] but other Chinese texts related to plants were not usually translated into Western languages at this time. One of the first examples of Western translations of Chinese materia medica is *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae*, a 1682 compilation of Latin translations of Chinese texts on the pulse that also occasionally mentions herbal remedies.[88] Some of that material was translated by the Polish Jesuit missionary Michał Boym (1612–1659), who also published an illustrated Latin natural history of China titled *Flora Sinensis* in 1656, excerpts of which were included by his fellow Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) in his 1667 *China Illustrata*.[89]

Western knowledge of the natural history of China was bolstered by James Cuninghame (ca. 1665–1709), who brought back specimens and illustrations to England from southern China for James Petiver (ca. 1665–ca. 1718) and Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), which served as the basis of many botanical descriptions and the development of binomial nomenclature for Chinese plants in the Linnaean manner.[90] Stationed in southern Vietnam, the Portuguese Jesuit João de Loureiro (1717–1791) also produced a botanical collection, as well as the study *Flora Cochinchinensis*, which

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[86] Darwin also cited the *Bencao gangmu* in translation, although did not mention it by name. See Pan, "Charles Darwin's Chinese Sources"; Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot*, 24, 166 (note 36). For the reception of the *Bencao gangmu* in Japan, see Marcon, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan*, 55-71.
[87] Barnes, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*, 47-55.
[88] These included Wang Shuhe's 王叔和 (fl. ca. 4th century) *Pulse Classic* (*Maijing* 脈經) and parts of the *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic*. The editor of this text, Andreas Cleyer (1615–1690), probably compiled several texts relating to Chinese sphygmology. See Marié, "Early Modern Reception in Europe," 553-556; Barnes, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*, 93, 358-359 n. 9.
[89] Despite the title, the book also contains some animals. Boym does not seem to have drawn heavily from Chinese written material when producing this work. See Walravens, "Flora Sinensis Revisited". Linda Barnes has suggested that Boym may have referred to Chinese materia medica when writing this text, *Needles, Herbs, Gods, and Ghosts*, 48. See also Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 593-607. For an overview of Jesuit botanical activities in China, see Ordering the Myriad, ch 2.
[90] Jarvis and Oswald, "The Collecting Activities of James Cuninghame FRS on the Voyage of Tuscan to China (Amoy) between 1697 and 1699". Bretschneider regards him as the first European to bring back such a collection, see "Early European Researches into the Flora of China", 37. Métailié provides an overview of European collections of Chinese plants in *Traditional Botany*, 632-637.

includes descriptions of many Chinese plants.[91] He named a number of genera, including *Osmanthus* (*muxi* 木樨 or *guihua* 桂花 in Chinese), which has become the standard English translation of those plants, even in poetry.[92] He also named the genus *Liriope*, probably, in an allusion to the Greek myth, due to the similarities of the Asian plants to European daffodils,[93] an example of how plants native to non-European areas can acquire scientific names of a misleadingly European flavour.[94]

During the transitionary phase in the 19th century between traditional natural history and modern science, a number of figures made use of networks of naturalists, merchants, and missionaries to broaden Western knowledge of Chinese botany. A representative example is Daniel Hanbury (1825–75), who was particularly focused on pharmaceuticals and had networks in the maritime trade, including a brother in Shanghai who sent him specimens.[95] As part of his research on Chinese materia medica, he attempted, with the assistance of Stanislas Julien (1797–1873), to translate parts of the *Bencao gangmu*. His articles on the subject were collected in his *Notes on Chinese Materia Medica* in 1862.[96]

A standout example of a modern, botanical approach to plants and plant knowledge in China was the work produced by the botanist and sinologist Emil Bretschneider (1833–1901), in particular his "Botanicon Sinicum" series, published in the *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* from 1882 to 1895, which also made copious references to Chinese documents, especially materia medica.[97] Bretschneider was not merely interested in classifying plants, but was especially concerned with human interactions with and understandings of plants,

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[91] Bretschneider provides an overview of his work, and also usefully gives a complete list of the plants studied along with their likely Chinese graphs, "Early European Researches into the Flora of China", 129-184. See also Merril, "A Commentary on Loureiro's 'Flora Cochinchinensis'"; Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 634-635.
[92] For a list see Bretschneider, "Early European Researches into the Flora of China", 134.
[93] Bernhardt, *Gods and Goddesses in the Garden: Greco-Roman Mythology and the Scientific Names of Plants*, 61.
[94] Bretschneider bemoans modern botanists who ignore "indigenous names" and "endeavour only to discover new species or to create new genera in order to introduce their name into the science or to call the newly discovered plants after the name of a friend", Bretschneider, *On the Study and Value of Chinese Botanical Works, with Notes on the History of Plants and Geographical Botany from Chinese Sources*, 20-21.
[95] For a brief biography, see Bretschneider, *History of European Botanical Discoveries in China*, vol. 2, 815-816.
[96] Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire, and Cultural Encounter*, 102; An, "Bringing Order from the Chaos of Names, Texts and Nature: Collection and Translation of Chinese Materia Medica in Nineteenth-Century Britain", "Daniel Hanbury's Study of Chinese Materia Medica: A British Network of Letters and Specimens During the Nineteenth Century", and "How Chinese Materia Medica Informed Nineteenth-Century British Pharmaceutical Knowledge: The Case of Daniel Hanbury's Reception and Translation of Bencao Literature".
[97] Lu, *The Global Circulation of Chinese Materia Medica, 1700-1949*, 147-148; Needham, *Botany*, 14-16, 20-23. For the life of Bretschneider, see Cordier, "Le Docteur Emile Vasilievitch Bretschneider" and "Obituary: Dr. Emil Bretschneider" in *The Geographical Journal*.

which accounts for the close attention he gave to literary sources.[98] Bretschneider's contributions, especially in nomenclature, are immense, but too often invisible in modern dictionaries.[99] Bretschneider's work was translated into Chinese by Shi Shenghan 石聲漢 (1907–1971), whom Needham wanted to collaborate with on his volume on botany, but this plan fell through due to the political situation in China at the time.[100]

One prevailing trend in much of this 19th century study of Chinese plants involved comparative botanical geography.[101] For instance, in his *Sino-Iranica*, Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) examined the movement of material culture, predominantly those related to botany, between Iran (including Western Asia) and China. Figures like E. H. Wilson (1876–1930) made many studies of plants in China and Japan, and sent many samples back to Europe, introducing many species in the process.[102] Many of these sources are still used today, or serve as the foundation of dictionaries and other material that scholars make use of when attempting to identify plants in Chinese texts.

The production of this knowledge of course did not occur in a vacuum. It came about in the context of European colonialism and imperialism, as well as being embedded in networks of trade and academic knowledge, resulting in a "hybrid discourse" between sinology and natural history.[103] According to Anna Tsing, botany is "perhaps the first science concerned with uniting knowledge from around the globe to create a singular global knowledge" and, historically, was directed first by European interests and cultural assumptions.[104] We are now on the other side of that grand project, where the intricacies of Nature are no longer is assumed to be proof of God's creation, but the universality of the concept still retains its explanatory power.

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[98] Fan Fa-ti notes that, in this regard, Bretschneider was representative of many of his foreign botanist colleagues working in China at that time, see Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China*, 103. Bretschneider initially looked down on Chinese materia medica texts, but after studying them for many years changed his mind. See Needham, *Botany*, 22-23.

[99] As Stephen Haw has noted, many of Bretschneider's identifications have been accepted uncritically, Haw, "Nutmeg and the Identity of Chinese Rou doukou", 374.

[100] Needham dedicated his volume on botany to Shi. See Wang, "Joseph Needham's Inspiration for Research on Agricultural History in China," 86-87. Shi also wrote a modern critical edition of the *Qimin yaoshu*.

[101] Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China*, 103-104.

[102] Howard, "E. H. Wilson as a Botanist".

[103] Fan, "Hybrid Discourse and Textual Practice: Sinology and Natural History in the Nineteenth Century". For some of the issues regarding the intersection of colonialism and plants, see Kumar, "Botanical Explorations and the East India Company: Revisiting 'Plant Colonialism'"; Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*.

[104] Tsing, *Frictions*, 90-95.

Different approaches can be used to identify plants in textual sources. Linguistic analysis will naturally take precedence, but comparisons with archaeological and iconographic material can also add detail to our picture of the textual evidence.[105] In their analysis, some scholars have attempted to apply modern scientific binomials to the names for plants in traditional Chinese literature.[106] There also exists a large body of literature devoted to identifying and classifying Chinese flora using modern scientific methods, the history of which has been described by Nicholas Menzies in *Ordering the Myriad Things* and Gabriele Tola in *John Fryer and The Translator's Vade-mecum*.[107]

As well as traditional works cited above, studies of plants continued to be produced in the modern era in China. Wu Qijun's 吳其濬 (1789–1847) *Zhiwu mingshi tukao* 植物名實圖考 (*An Illustrated Study of the Names and Realities of Plants*), published in 1848 with a posthumous revision by Lu Yinggu 陸應穀 (d. 1857), was based both on a diversity of textual sources and on Wu's observations of plants and discussions with local people, and was the first Chinese text on plants with the term *zhiwu* in the title.[108] Partly a translation of a set of Western botanical texts into Chinese, 1858 saw the publication of *Zhiwuxue* 植物學 (*Botany*) by Alexander Williamson (1829–1890), Joseph Edkins (1823–1905), and Li Shanlan 李善蘭 (1811–1882), which introduced a number of scientific terms into Chinese.[109] In the 20th century, these researches would be joined by projects like the *Zhiwu dacidian* 植物大辭典 (*Great Plant Dictionary*), published in 1930 and including Chinese, Latin, and Japanese names, Yang Kung-i's 楊恭毅 nine volume *Yangshi Yuanyi zhiwu damingdian* 楊氏園藝植物大名典 (*YC Hortus Dictionary*), published in 1984, which includes copious photographs by Chen Yun-tsao 陳運造 and has over 55,000 entries, the ten volume *Zhongguo bencao tulu* 中國本草圖錄 (*Illustrated Guide to Chinese Materia Medica*) edited by

[105] For an overview of how to combine evidence from different fields in examining plants of the ancient Mediterranean, see Day, "Botany Meets Archaeology".
[106] For instance, Kroll in his *Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* often provides scientific binomials when he can. This approach is also adopted by a number of dictionaries or dictionary-like texts, such as Fèvre and Métailié, *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine*; Pan, *Chuci zhiwu tujian*.
[107] John Fryer (1839–1928) aka Fu Lanya 傅蘭雅, was an English sinologist who produced a collection of English and Chinese glossaries of technical and scientific terminology titled *The Translator's Vade-mecum*. Tola's monograph examines the history of Fryer's influence on botany in China and on botanical terminology, as well as the context in which his work was produced.
[108] Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 659-669.
[109] Wright, "The Translation of Modern Western Science in Nineteenth-Century China, 1840-1895"; Lu, "Wanqing Zhiwuxue yishu de waiwen yuanben wenti".

Xiao Peigen 蕭培根 and published between 1988 and 1990, among others. The science of botany in China has of course continued to flourish, with major projects like the *Zhongguo zhiwu zhi* 中國植物誌 (*Flora Reipublicae Popularis Sinicae*), which attempts to scientifically catalogue and describe all the flora found in China.[110]

In the volume of his *Science and Civilisation in China* series on botany, Needham helpfully distinguishes between terminology and nomenclature, seeing the former as "phytographic" and the latter as "taxonomic".[111] In practice, Needham, like Bretschneider before him, attempted to assign scientific names to flora and fauna mentioned in Chinese literature.[112] He gives a succinct justification of this position in his discussion and translation of the "Tribute of Yu" (*Yu gong* 禹貢), which is found in the *Shangshu* 尚書 (*Venerable Documents*).[113] This text describes the culture hero Yu the Great 大禹 controlling the floods and tributary systems of the Nine Provinces (*jiuzhou* 九州), which were also established by Yu, and provides details on what can be found in each of the regions, including their flora and fauna.[114] When glossing the graph *yao* 繇, described as being in the province of Yan (*yanzhou* 兗州), Needham says, "Here is the first implementation of our view that the writer intended to refer to particular plants throughout his text, but that their names were blunted by centuries of literary, non-botanical, erudition into closely similar words denoting 'flourishing', 'abundance', etc. in general."[115] This supposes a distinction between the literary and botanical, which were blurred in the pre-modern world, and projects a modern, scientific conception of botany onto the past.[116]

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[110] See Ma and Clemants, "A History and Overview of the Flora Reipublicae Popularis Sinicae". A detailed history of botany in China is beyond the scope of this study. See Ma et al., *Zhongguo zhiwu fenleixue jishi* for a detailed overview from 1700 to 2017.

[111] Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* 6.1, 117.

[112] Although Bretschneider cautioned that "it is impossible to recognize and identify plants from descriptions only", see "Botanicon Sinicum", part one, 108; Haw, "Nutmeg and the Identity of Chinese Rou doukou", 374.

[113] The "Tribute of Yu" likely dates from the Warring States, see Lewis, *Construction of Space*, 249. For the textual history of the *Shangshu*, see Nylan, *The Five "Confucian" Classics*, 120-167; Liu, *Introduction to the Tsinghua Bamboo-Strip Manuscripts*, 99-120; Shaughnessy, "Shang shu". For overviews of scholarship on the text, see Liu, *Shangshu xueshi*; Cheng, *Shangshu xueshi*. For more recent scholarship in English see Meyer, *Documentation and Argument in Early China: The Shàngshū* 尚書 *(venerated documents) and the Shū Traditions* and the edited volume by Martin Kern and Dirk Meyer, *Origins of Chinese Political Philosophy: Studies in the Composition and Thought of the* Shangshu *(Classic of Documents).*

[114] For more information on the content of this text, see McNeal, "Spatial Models of the State in Early Chinese Texts Tribute Networks and the Articulation of Power and Authority in *Shangshu* 'Yu Gong' and *Yi Zhoushu* 'Wang Hui'."

[115] *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 6.1, 85. Needham translates *yao* as "milk-vetch", but it more likely means something like "flourishing", see the entries in Kroll and Ricci. Li Guoqiang regards it as meaning "long and thin", see "L'homme et l'arbre dans la Chine antique," 313-314.

[116] Li, "L'homme et l'arbre dans la Chine antique," 313; see also Métailié, "Needham's Vision of the Encounter of China and Europe the Case of the History of Botany". Harper also mentions the risks in precise scientific

Favouring the apparent accuracy of scientific terminology can sometimes result in an (unintentionally) humorous juxtaposition of modern botany and ancient poetry, such as when Karlgren translates the line *wanran zhi zhi* 芄蘭之支[117] from the *Shijing* as, "Oh, the branches of the Metaplexis!".[118] While there was of course an awareness in pre-modern China of different categories of flora and fauna, and some had sophisticated knowledge of plants and their cultivation, the modern concept of species was not available to them, and for that reason I will not use the term "species" when translating in this study to avoid anachronistically projecting modern concepts onto the past.[119] As Paul Unschuld notes in his translation of Li Shizhen's *Bencao gangmu*, we should not attempt to "make ancient views appear modern and agreeable with today's biomedical reality" and we risk disrespecting our sources by "telling them what they should have said" if they only had the knowledge available to us in the present.[120] A similar statement is made by Métailié, when he writes that traditional Chinese knowledge of the natural world should be understood on its own terms, not merely as a stage towards the development of modern botany.[121]

The difference between a traditional and post-scientific understanding can be illustrated by a famous anecdote about Yanzi 晏子 (aka Yan Ying 晏嬰, ca. 578–500 BCE).[122] In this anecdote, Yanzi is on a diplomatic visit to the state of Chu from the state of Qi and is attending a banquet held in his honour. Wishing to humiliate Yanzi, the king of Chu had arranged for a bound man to be brought before them. When the king asks where the bound man is from and what is his

identification of terms in historical material, citing Yoneda Kaisuke 米田該典 and Unschuld making a similar points. The issue of identification is not only one for modern researchers, as Harper also cites Tao Hongjing lamenting the lack of expertise of his contemporary physicians and drug merchants, Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 100-101.

117 This poem is in the "Airs of Wei" (*Weifeng* 魏風) section of the "Airs of the State" (*Guofeng* 國風) part of the *Shijing*, see *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 3B.302-3034.

118 Karlgren, *The Book of Odes*, 42. Karlgren's source appears to be Bretschneider, who notes that Lu Ji glosses *wanran* 芄蘭 as *luomo* 蘿摩 (*Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 1A.40), and then, based on Li Shizhen's description, Bretschneider identifies it as *Metaplexis*, see "Botanicon Sinicum" part 2, 289, also 60. Legge translates *wanran* as "sparrow-gourd". Kroll glosses *wanran* as "rough-potato, milkweed (*Metaplexis japonica*), a deciduous climbing vine" and *huan* 萑 or 萑 as "metaplexis (Metaplexis japonica, M. stauntonii), reed-like member of the milkweed family". The *Erya* glosses the graph *huan* 萑 as *wanran*, see *Erya zhushu* 13.272.

119 This issue is discussed in Métailié, "Plantes et noms, plantes sans nom dans le *Zhiwu Mingshi Tukao*". See also Needham's discussion of "hemp" *ma* 麻 in *Science and Civilisation in China* 6.1, 170-177.

120 Unschuld, *Ben Cao Gang Mu. Volume IX*, 48. This statement is the "Prolegomena" of each volume of this translation, but the ninth was published first.

121 Métailié, *Traditional Botany*, 6-7. Harper makes a similar point about animals (and also highlights some other issues regarding identification) in his "The Cultural History of the Giant Panda in Early China", 219-220 n. 86.

122 This anecdote is also discussed in Needham, *Botany*, 103-108.

crime, his captors reply that he is a thief from Yanzi's state of Qi. This gives the king of Chu an opportunity to mock the state of Qi by asking Yanzi if people from that state enjoy stealing things. Yanzi replies:

> 嬰聞之，橘生淮南則為橘，生於淮北則為枳。葉徒相似，其實味不同。所以然者何？水土異也。今民生長於齊不盜，入楚則盜，得無楚之水土使民善盜耶？[123]

> I have heard that when tangerine [trees][124] grow in the area south of the Huai River, then they become tangerines,[125] when they grow in the area north of the Huai River, then they become oranges. Only the leaves are the same, the flavour of their fruit is not the same. How can this be so? It is because of differences in water and earth. Now, this person grew up in Qi and was not a robber, but he comes to Chu and then becomes one – isn't it that the water and earth of Chu have made this person inclined to robbery?[126]

The use of two different plant names in this story could be explained by reference to the fact that environmental conditions can cause certain fruits to have different flavours, and so local names were used for the same plant in different locations. Olivia Milburn's translation reflects this kind of interpretation by translating *ju* as "oranges" and *zhi* as "bitter oranges",[127] thus emphasising that it is the flavour not the plant that changes. Supporting this is Xu Shen's 許慎 (c. 58 – c. 148) gloss of the graph *zhi* in his *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (*Discussion of Writing and Explanation of Graphs*), which says it is "a tree similar to a tangerine" (*mu, si ju* 木，似橘), although it does not say it is the same as a tangerine.[128] Another possibility is that this story reflected a belief, not necessarily universal but quite common, that plants and animals change according to their

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123 *Yanzi chunqiu jishi* 6.392.
124 Earlier I translated this graph as "sourpeel tangerine", but to preserve the simplicity of the original, I will use single-word terms to translate these plant names here.
125 In other parallels of this phrase, the graph *cheng* 橙 is used. For a useful overview of variants, see *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 1.63-64 n. 34.
126 For another translation see Milburn, *The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan*, 349-350.
127 Milburn cites the *Zhiwu gu Hanming tukao* in support of the latter interpretation, which is also supported in a number of other reference works.
128 *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 225. For the background of this text, see Bottéro and Harbsmeier, "The 'Shuowen Jiezi' Dictionary and the Human Sciences in China".

environment.[129] This interpretation is supported by the fact that, rather than modifying the word *ju* with other graphs to indicate a difference in flavour such as "sweet" or "sour", the text uses completely different graphs for the plants. It is also supported by the context of the anecdote as well as the point that Yanzi is trying to make, namely that living things can become quite different due to their location, such that a man from his home state of Qi would never steal while he remains in Qi, but when he is in the state of Chu he becomes a thief.

Another version of this anecdote appears in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Eloquence*), where the king is instead from Jing rather than Chu. In this version, Yanzi's response is more explicit on the issue:

> 江南有橘，齊王使人取之而樹之於江北，生不為橘，乃為枳。所以然者何？其土地使之然也。[130]

> South of the Jiang River[131] there are tangerine [trees], and when the King of Qi sends men to take them and plant then north of the Jiang, then what grows are not tangerines, but oranges. How can this be so? It is because its location makes it so.[132]

In this versions, the term I translate as "location" literally means "earth and location" *tudi* 土地, whereas the version in the *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Yan*) refers to the differences of "water and earth" *shuitu* 水土.[133] These terms are effectively synonymous and indicate that differences in the physical qualities of a region can result in differences in flora, something which would likely conform to observations of nature, even if a concept of species is absent.

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[129] See Sterckx, *Animal and Daemon*, 101-109. See also the discussion of the importance of "wind" *feng* 風 and its role in producing localised differences in Lewis, *Construction of Space*, 190.
[130] *Shuoyuan zhuzheng* 12.305.
[131] The graphs for the rivers Huai and Jiang are visually similar and so easily conflated.
[132] For another translation, see the study by Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, 725.
[133] *Yanzi chunqiu jishi* 6.392.

A similar story appears in the "Questions of Tang" (*Tang wen* 湯問) section of the *Liezi* 列子, which includes a discussion between King Tang of Shang 商湯 (r. began 1554 BCE), also known as Cheng Tang 成湯[134] and his minister Ge of Xia 夏革, a figure who also appears in a non-extant section of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, where he is simply called Ge.[135] As part of his answer to Cheng Tang's question, Ge says,

> 吳楚之國，有大木焉，其名為櫾，碧樹而冬生，實丹而味酸，食其皮汁，已憤厥之疾，齊州珍之，渡淮而北，化為枳焉。鸜鵒不踰濟，貉踰汶則死矣。地氣然也。[136]

> In the states of Wu and Chu there is a large tree whose name is *you*,[137] it is an emerald tree yet it flourishes in winter, its fruit is cinnabar-red yet sour flavoured, eating its peel and juice will end diseases of anger-swooning; it is treasured in the Qi region, and [when] it is taken north of the Huai River, it changes into an orange there. Crested myna birds will not cross the Ji River, and [if] badgers[138] cross the Min River[139] then they will die. This is due to the *qi* of the land.[140]

The text goes on to say that, despite differences between form and *qi*, the innate qualities (*xing* 性) of everything is the same, thus illustrating how distinction and difference can arise from an

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134 On dating the reign of Tang, see Keightley, "The Shang: China's First Historical Dynasty", 248.
135 For details, see Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi*, 9 n. 8. For a useful summary of the textual history of this text from the Han to Tang dynasties, see Yu, *Reading the Chuang-tzu in the T'ang Dynasty*, 7-42.
136 *Liezi jishi* 4.158-159.
137 This graph also appears in the *Shanhai jing*, where Guo Pu glosses it as "like a tangerine but bigger, thick of peel and sour to taste" (*si ju er da ye, pi hou, wei suan* 似橘而大也，皮厚，味酸), *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 5.140.
138 The identification of this animal is uncertain. Zheng Zhong 鄭眾 (aka Zheng Sinong 鄭司農) (d. 83) regarded the graph *he* 貉 as a kind of ape *yuan* 猨, see *Zhouli zhushu* 39.1243. See the discussion this graph, which is rendered *he* 貊, from a parallel passage in the *Huainanzi* in Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 57 n. 33.
139 See *Liezi jishi* 4.158-159 for reasons to read this graph as *min* rather than *wen*, the latter being the name of a river in Lu 魯. Zheng Zhong for one advocated the latter position, see *Zhouli zhushu* 39.1243.
140 For another translation, see Graham, *The Book of Lieh-Tzŭ*, 108.

essential similarity.[141] In the *Kaogong ji* ("Notes for Examining the Artisans") section of the *Zhouli*,[142] a similar line appears:

> 橘逾淮而北為枳，鴝鵒不逾濟，貉逾汶則死，此地氣然也。[143]

> [When] tangerines are taken across the Huai River to the north then they become oranges, crested myna birds will not cross the Ji River, and [if] badgers cross the Min River then they will die. This is due to the *qi* of the land.[144]

Versions in the *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (*Collection of Literature Arranged by Categories*)[145] and the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (*Imperial Reader of the Taiping Era*)[146] both have the graph *you* as *you* 柚 ("pomelo"), and according to the Song-era *Piya* 埤雅 (*Augmentation to the Erya*),[147] "[when] pomelo is taken across the Huai then it becomes an orange, and the plum changes and becomes an apricot" (*you du huai er wei zhi, mei bian er cheng xing* 柚渡淮而為枳，梅變而成杏).[148]

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[141] Sterckx, *Animal and Daemon*, 105-106. Sterckx also points out that related passages to the one in the *Liezi* appear in the *Zhouli* and the *Huainanzi*, see *Zhouli zhushu* 39.595; *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 1.53.

[142] This section of the *Zhouli* was inserted during the Han dynasty. It has been translated into English by Wenren Jun, see Wenren, *Ancient Chinese Encyclopedia of Technology: Translation and Annotation of the Kaogong Ji (the Articifers' Record)* and partially by Needham and Wang, *Mechanical Engineering*, 12-13, and into French by Édouard Biot, *Le Tcheou-li ou Rites des Tcheou*. The English translation of the title comes from Lothar von Falkenhausen's review of Wenren's book. See also Elman, "The Story of a Chapter: Changing Views of the "Artificer's Record" ("Kaogong ji") and the *Zhouli*"; Ding, *The Historical Roots of Technical Communication in the Chinese Tradition*, 147-181.

[143] *Zhouli zhushu* 39.1242-1243.

[144] See other translations by Wenren, *Ancient Chinese Encyclopedia of Technology*, 4; Needham and Wang, *Mechanical Engineering*, 12-13; Biot, *Le Tcheou-li ou Rites des Tcheou*, vol. 2, 650.

[145] An encyclopaedia or "category book" (see below) completed in 624 CE by a team headed by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557–641). It was initially produced and used as an aid for literary composition. See De Weerdt, "The Encyclopedia as Textbook," 77. For an overview, including its textual history, see Choo, "Yiwen leiju"; Hu, *Zhongguo gudai de leishu*, 77-83.

[146] An encyclopaedia compiled between 977–983, and was like the *Taiping guangji* under the supervision of Li Fang. It has long been consulted as a major reference work for scholars of pre-modern China. Due to the labour-intensive process of manuscript production (which still persisted even after the invention of block-printing) and the varied purposes different encyclopaedias were made to serve, duplication of content was common. See Haeger, "The Significance of Confusion: The Origins of The *T'ai-p'ing Yü-Lan*"; Kurz, "The Compilation and Publication of the Taiping Yulan and the Cefu Yuangui"; Hu, *Zhongguo gudai de leishu*, 117-133; Loewe, *The Origins and Development of Chinese Encyclopaedias*, 8-9. For the section on trees, see *Taiping yulan*, 952.4226-961.4268.

[147] Written as a supplement to the *Erya* by Lu Dian 陸佃 (1042–1102), who was also influenced by his teacher Wang Anshi's 王安石 (1021–1086) *Zishuo* 字說 (*Words Explained*), see Pease, *His Stubbornship: Prime Minister Wang Anshi (1021-1086), Reformer and Poet*, 416-417.

[148] *Yiwen leiju* 87.1492; *Taiping yulan* 93.4314, *Piya* 13.127-128.

Most descriptions of the tangerine and the orange are relatively stable, but there are some notable variants. The versions in the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, the *Bowu zhi* 博物志 (*Treatise on Extensive Things*),[149] and the *Piya* all use the word "transform" (*hua* 化) to refer to what happens to the plant when north of the river, which again suggests a difference more profound than flavour.[150] A parallel in the *Huainanzi* occurs in a discussion of differences according to geography, and summarises the situation by noting that, "Physical form and innate qualities cannot be changed, and circumstances and place cannot be shifted" (*xingxing buke yi, shiju buke yi ye* 形性不可易，勢居不可移也).[151] By "cannot be changed", the text must be referring to what is essential about form and innate qualities. Form and location are intimately related, such that when one moves a plant into a different region it is no longer the same, or even may die.

This belief that living things change (sometimes fundamentally) based on their location can be seen in a number of texts across a broad historical range. One such example is the story titled *Chengwu* 程寤 (The Awakening at Cheng), which was once part of the *Yi Zhou shu* but survived partially through quotations in medieval collections and is more extensively preserved in an unearthed Warring States manuscript that makes up part of the Tsinghua University collection. In this story, King Wen of Zhou's wife Tai Si 太姒 dreams that the Shang court is full of bushes and their young son Fa 發 takes a catalpa tree from the Zhou court and plants it amid the bushes, whereby it transforms into pine and cypress, white oak and sawtooth oak trees (*qu Zhouting xishu yu jue jian, huawei songbai yuzuo* 取周廷梓樹于厥間，化為松柏棫柞).[152] This is a dream, and so unusual things can occur, but the idea that trees planted in different places become different trees is present. Much later, in his *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 (*Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas*), the monk Yijing 義淨 (635–713) describes a plant he calls *manqing* 蔓菁 (a kind of turnip) thusly:

[149] For a translation of this text, see Greatrex, *Bowu Zhi*.
[150] *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 1.53; *Han shi waizhuan jishi* 10.356-357; *Bowu zhi jiaozheng* 4.46; *Piya*, 13.
[151] *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 1.53. For another translation see Major et al., *The Huainanzi*, 57.
[152] Shaughnessy, "Of Trees, a Son, and Kingship: Recovering an Ancient Chinese Dream"; Luo, "Omens and Politics: the Zhou Concept of the Mandate of Heaven as Seen in the Chengwu 程寤 Manuscript"; Liu, *Introduction to the Tsinghua Bamboo-Strip Manuscripts*, 181-202. Luo regards the catalpa as being multiple trees, but I agree with Shaughnessy that it is more likely singular. The *Yi Zhou shu* version, see *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 2.183-185.

然子有黑白。比來譯為芥子。壓油充食。諸國咸然。其菜食之。味與神州蔓菁無別。其根堅鞕復與蔓菁不同。結實粒麁復非芥子。其猶枳橘因地遷形。[153]

Of their seeds, some are black and some white, and they recently have become known as mustard seeds [in Chinese]. [The seeds] can be crushed into oil and eaten, which is done everywhere. When eaten, its leaves have a flavour the same as those of Chinese turnips (*manqing*), [although] its roots are hard and are indeed unlike Chinese turnips. When they produce seeds, the kernel is thick and unlike the mustard seed. This resembles oranges and tangerines that change form due to their location.

In his translation, Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 (1866–1945) renders this last line as "The change in the growth of this plant is considered to be some thing like the change of an orange-tree into a bramble when brought north of the Yang-tze River" and explains in a footnote that what Yijing means is "that Indian mustard seed (Sarshapa) is larger than the Chinese; its taste is like Chinese turnip, but the roots, being hard, are different from the Chinese; and that the difference may be accounted for by the difference of soil, just as an orange-tree becomes a thorn when it is removed from the Kiang-nan (south of the Yang-tze River) to the north of the river".[154] This is a clear reference to the Yanzi story, or at least to the idea contained within it.[155] In his *Sino-Iranica*, Laufer does not comprehend Takakusu's reference, and regards Takakusu's rendering of "the change of an orange-tree into a bramble" as being "nonsense in itself".[156] Laufer's error is to assume that Yijing must share his modern conception of plant biology, where such a transformation would be impossible. Yijing is a careful and often reliable observer, but he still, like all of us, at least partially understands the world through the cultural lenses that he was born into.

[153] T.54.2125.0210c03-0210c06.
[154] Takakusu, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago*, 44.
[155] Li Rongxi's 2000 translation also adds an interpolation about "the change of soil" for clarity, see Li, *A Record of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Seas*, 43.
[156] Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, 382. He also, citing Stuart's *Chinese Materia Medica*, misidentifies 枳橘 as *zhiju* 枳椇, which he refers to as *Hovenia dulcis*, and I translate below as "honey-tree".

Along with the belief that oranges can transform into tangerines, other cultural assumptions suggest that the modern conception of species does not fit our sources.[157] Certain glosses in the *Erya* illustrate this, for instance, such as when "momi-fir" *cong* 樅 is glossed as having "leaves of a pine and body of a cypress" (*songye baishen* 松葉柏身), and "Chinese juniper" *gui* or *kuai* 檜 is glossed as having "leaves of a cypress and body of a pine" (*baiye songshen* 柏葉松身).[158] One might be charitable and say that this merely means that these features resembled those of the pine and cypress, but words meaning resemble (such as *ru* 如, *ruo* 若, and *si* 似) were available and used by pre-modern authors to describe plants. As they were not used here, we must take the text on its own terms. Another example is when the *Erya* says that mulberries are divided into those that have mulberry fruit and gardenia (*sang bian you shen, zhi* 桑辨有葚，梔), which the commentary – from a figure known as Sheren 舍人[159] – glosses as, "Half of mulberry trees have mulberry fruit, and half without fruit are gardenia" (*sangshu ban you shen, ban wus hen wei zhi* 桑樹半有葚，半無葚為梔).[160] Regardless of whether this means they are gardenias or are called gardenias, the confusion between what we would call different species is apparent.[161]

While the emphasis on geographic and climactic influence on organisms is not completely alien to modern biology, the strong connection between location and behaviour insisted upon by some of these texts is an important distinction that must be taken into consideration when dealing with descriptions of Chinese plants in pre-modern sources. Suffice it to say, different words that modern readers might regard as referring to different species did not necessarily have such a stable semantic separation in pre-modern Chinese texts.

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157 Paul Goldin cautions against "overestimat[ing] the ancients' knowledge of nature and ecology", giving as an example the Song dynasty philosopher Cheng Yi's 程頤 (1033–1107) claim that fireflies were "born of decaying grass and that lice are born spontaneously in new clothes", Goldin, "A Mind-Body Problem in the *Zhuangzi*?", 240 n. 5; Graham, *Two Chinese Philosophers*, 36; *Henan Chengshi yishu* 18.198-199.

158 *Erya zhushu* 9.311. The identification of both *sui* and *gui* are uncertain. Momi-fir is native to Japan. Its modern Chinese name is "Japanese fir" (*Riben shuishan* 日本冷杉). See also *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine*, where it is described as a synonym of "Tianshan mountain spruce" (*tianshan yunshan* 天山雲杉), 71, 448.

159 This person is thought to have flourished during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han. He has sometimes been identified as Guo Sheren 郭舍人, although the latter's biography in the *Shiji* does not mention that he worked on the *Erya*, nor on lexicographic or even literary work of any kind (*Shiji* 126.3204). The earliest surviving quotes from this Sheren are found in Lu Ji's sub-commentary, although Sheren's work is not quoted by Guo Pu. Many have doubted the identification of this Sheren as Guo Sheren, and also have doubted the suggestion that Sheren is an official title. See Coblin, "An Introductory Study of Textual and Linguistic Problems in Erh-ya," 65-70, 513; Yang, *Jiwei ju xiaoxue shu lin*, 237-238; Wang, "Bian Sheren de jiguan, guancheng he xingming".

160 *Erya zhushu* 9.308.

161 To take another example, during the Tang, peaches were said to be bred by grafting them to persimmon, see Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 117.

These issues illustrate that what distinguishes a strange tree from a normal tree. It is not enough just to assume that a normal tree is one that conforms to our modern understanding of normal plant behaviour and a strange tree is one that does not. Under that assumption, the citrus trees that transform depending on where they are planted would count as a strange tree, when a careful reading of the textual sources suggests that that type of transformation was considered normal.

What is strange then is what was considered strange in the past, an understanding that may differ greatly with our own. The next section will provide a more in-depth definition of the concept of the strange that will be used in this study.

1.3.1. Strange trees

The plants that will be examined in this study are those that exhibit unusual behaviour to the degree that they were regarded as "strange". This concept of the strange and how it applies to certain plants will be briefly introduced in this section. The history of the collection of anecdotes of the strange will be dealt with in more detail in a later section. As noted above, I borrow the term "strange" from Robert Campany, who used it to refer to what he called a "genre"[162] of texts that collected accounts of unusual phenomena. The content of these texts was often controversial or at least contentious, which gave rise to a defensiveness among those who collected material for them and wrote prefaces justifying their existence.[163] Strange and unusual phenomena were often remarked and recorded throughout Chinese history, and while their conceptual validity was rarely outright rejected, they were nevertheless viewed with a mixture of fascination and suspicion by elites.

From at least as early as the Han dynasty, accounts of strange phenomena were circulated together in compilations, a trend that developed during the period of disunion after the collapse

[162] For his use of this term, see Campany, *Strange Writing*, 24-32.
[163] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 126-129.

of the Han.[164] As a concept, what counted as "strange" was often loosely defined. Indeed, different terms are used in Chinese, the most common being "unusual" *yi* 異, "marvellous" *qi* 奇, and "fantastic" *guai* 怪, all of which could be translated as "strange".[165] Other common linguistic features of these accounts are the terms "divine" *shen* 神, "elemental" *jing* 精, and "ghost(ly)/demon(ic)" *gui* 鬼, which are difficult to translate precisely into single English words. *Shen* in certain contexts could mean non-human "gods" or "spirits", but also generally refers to the power in humans that allows them to interact with the world around them. Related to *shen* is the word *jing*, which can refer to an animating essence in humans, but also to elemental spirits that live in or take the form of rocks, trees, animals and other things. Finally, *gui* can be understood as the spirits of humans returned from the dead, or as elemental spirits (a synonym for *jing*), or as a malevolent demonic entity.[166] All these terms can appear on their own, or can be combined to refer to the general concept of strangeness, e.g., *guishen* 鬼神, *qiguai* 奇怪, etc.[167]

Strange trees then could range from trees whose behaviour is anomalous in some broad and often unexplained way, to gods/elementals/demons that take the form of trees. References to strange trees can be found scattered throughout the extant corpus of Chinese writing, from philosophical texts to poetry to imperial histories, but they are especially prevalent in texts that collect anecdotes of anomalies.

This study will particularly focus on plant omens recorded in the imperial histories, and on anecdotes of plant anomalies recorded in anomaly collections. First I will provide an overview of anomaly collections and how plant-related material is categorised in the encyclopaedic texts that serves as some of our main sources of this material. In a later chapter I will deal with plant-

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[164] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 21.
[165] See Kroll, *Dictionary*, 550, 354, 142; Campany, *Strange Writing*, 28 n. 14; Chen, "Wei-Jin Nanbeichao zhiguai xiaoshuo 'yi' de xushu".
[166] See entries in Kroll's *Dictionary*, *shen*: 407, *jing*: 216-7, *gui*: 147-8. The explanation of *gui* as returned (*gui* 歸) spirits can be seen in the *Erya* and *Shuowen*, see *Erya zhushu* 4.128; *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 363. This is a possible folk etymology from phonetic similarities between the two graphs that may have not pre-dated the Han dynasty, see Baxter and Sagart, *Old Chinese*, 151, 391 n. 80.
[167] For some recent studies of these and related concepts, see Poo, *Ghosts and Religious Life in Early China*; Hu, *Believing in Ghosts and Spirits: The Concept of Gui in Ancient China*; ter Haar, "Harmful Ancestors or Friendly Ghosts: Looking at Our Early Evidence on the Chinese Notion of Gui"; and Yu, "'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!' Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction". See also the edited volume by Poo, *Guimei shenmo: Zhongguo tongsu wenhua cexie*.

related omens in the official histories with a particular focus on the phenomenon of interlocking trees.

1.4.1. An overview of anomaly accounts

The anecdote as a literary form was deployed throughout Chinese history in a wide range of texts, but anecdotes recording anomalous phenomena specifically were sometimes collected into specialised texts that are often referred to broadly in modern Chinese as *zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小說. This term is made up of *zhiguai* 志怪, which comes from the *Zhuangzi*, and the term *xiaoshuo* 小說, which was a loose bibliographic category that means "minor discourses".[168] The term *zhiguai* is used in the *Zhuangzi* to describe a certain Qi Xie 齊諧, who the text says is "a recorder of the strange" (*Qi Xie zhe, zhi guai zhe ye* 齊諧者，志怪者也),[169] hence why the term routinely translated as "records of the strange" is *zhiguai* and not *guaizhi* 怪志. As Cheng Xuanying's 成玄英 (ca. 601-604–690) sub-commentary to the *Zhuangzi* points out, some compilations of anomalies use the name of Qi Xie to refer to their works, such as the Liu-Song 劉宋 (420–479) author Dongyang Wuyi's 東陽無疑 *Qi Xie ji* 齊諧記 (*Qi Xie's Records*).[170] While previously scholars had thought that the use of the term *zhiguai* to refer to these kinds of texts originated with the Ming dynasty scholar Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), Campany has pointed out that it was occasionally used in that way before the Ming, citing the preface to Dai Fu's 戴孚 anomaly collection *Guangyiji* 廣異記 (*Record of Extensive Anomalies*) written by Gu Kuang 顧況 (c.725 – c.814).[171]

As noted, the most common term for anomaly texts in modern Chinese is *zhiguai xiaoshuo* 志怪小說, and the word *xiaoshuo* is a potentially misleading one. Until the 16th century, research on

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[168] Li, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*, 11-12.
[169] *Zhuangzi jishi* 1A.4-7.
[170] Cheng also notes that Qi Xie may be the name of a book (*Zhuangzi jishi* 1A.5). For a biography of Cheng, see Assandri, *The Daode Jing Commentary of Cheng Xuanying,* 1-3. See also Yu, *Reading the Chuang-tzu in the T'ang Dynasty*. For *Qi Xie's Records* and its author see Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 22; Li, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*, 387-389; Chou, *Liuchao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu*, 109-110; Campany, *Strange Writing*, 80-81, 87, 151-152.
[171] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 29. For the claim that the term *zhiguai* originated in the Ming, see DeWoskin, "The Six Dynasties *Chih-Kuai* and the Birth of Fiction," 22; Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural and the Fantastic*, 4. Gu's phrasing is "gentlemen who have recorded anomalies" (*zhiguai zhi shi* 志怪之士).

xiaoshuo as a genre was predominantly bibliographic, as it was used for the most part as a broad category when cataloguing texts.[172] According to early sources, the term was used to refer to stories that were trifling and unreliable, essentially amounting to gossip.[173] It was first used as a bibliographic category by Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) in his *Qilüe* 七略 ("Seven Epitomes").[174] In his treatise on literature (*Yiwen zhi* 藝文志) in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of the Han*),[175] Ban Gu 班固 (32 – 92) divides pre-Qin texts into six categories: the "Six Arts" (*liu yi* 六藝), "Masters" (*zhuzi* 諸子), "Poetic Compositions" (*shifu* 詩賦), "Military Writings" (*bingshu* 兵書), "Algorithmic and Technical Texts" (*shushu* 數術), and "[Medical] Recipes and Techniques" (*fangji* 方技),[176] and places *xiaoshuo* into the "Masters" category (*zhuzi* 諸子).[177] The "Masters" category is itself divided into ten sub-categories, with *xiaoshuo* hierarchically last, after "Classicists" (*rujia* 儒家), "Daoists" (*daojia* 道家), "yin-yang experts" (*yinyangjia* 陰陽家), "legalists" (*fajia* 法家), "terminologists" (*mingjia* 名家), Mohists (*Mojia* 墨家), "strategists" (*zonghengjia* 從橫家), "syncretists" (*zajia* 雜家), and "agriculturalists" (*nongjia* 農家).[178] Thus, *xiaoshuo* are grouped with texts usually regarded as philosophical.

Ban Gu characterises the *xiaoshuo* tradition (*xiaoshuo jia* 小說家)[179] as scraps of sayings and tales from overheard conversations, and views them as worth preserving despite their unreliability.[180] The term "minor discourses" then was used to label texts that were important enough to preserve for posterity but, for one reason or another, lacked the prestige of other textual categories.

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172 Wu, "From Xiaoshuo to Fiction," 339.
173 This usage can be seen in the *Zhuangzi*, see *Zhuangzi jishi* 26.925.
174 The *Qilüe* was itself based on Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) earlier *Bielu* 別錄 ("Separate Record"). See Nylan, "Early Bibliographies" for the state of the scholarship on these texts.
175 *Hanshu* 30.1701-1784. For the background of this text, see Hunter, "The 'Yiwen zhi' Bibliography in Its Own Context," 763-767.
176 *Hanshu* 30.1701. These translations are from Hunter, "The 'Yiwen zhi'", 765. Hunter notes that, even though Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645) glosses it as "Six Classics" (*liu jing* 六經) (*Hanshu* 30.1702), his translation of *liu yi* as "Six Arts" is intended to reflect the meaning of the title of the treatise: the "Treatise on Arts and Letters".
177 *Hanshu* 30.1745.
178 Translations slightly modified from Hunter, "The 'Yiwen zhi'", 765. Hunter translates *xiaoshuo* as "folklorists".
179 For the problems of this term *jia* 家, see Paul Goldin, "Persistent Misconceptions About Chinese 'Legalism'," 90. Goldin render's Sima Tan's 司馬談 use of this term as "house of thought", however, I follow Alexus McLeod's use of "tradition" in order to reflect the looseness of the groupings behind the term. See McLeod, *The Dao of Madness*, 22.
180 Campany, *Strange Writing*, 129-133.

Writing much later, Hu Yinglin understood "minor discourses" that focused on the strange as working within the tradition of the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi*:

> 古今志怪小說，率以祖夷堅、齊諧，然齊諧即莊，夷堅即列耳。[181]

> Ancient and modern *zhiguai xiaoshuo* took their models from the ancestors Yi Jian and Qi Xie, and Qi Xie is in the *Zhuang*[*zi*], Yi Jian in the *Lie*[*zi*].[182]

This served as a more value-neutral designation, although it neglects the historical mode in which many anomaly accounts are written.[183] Other terms for these texts include *zhiguai chuanqi* 志怪傳奇, and while some scholars in the past made a distinction between the mere recording of the strange (*zhiguai*) and more literary accounts (*chuanqi*), this distinction was later challenged for imposing too strict a boundary upon a rather heterogeneous genre.[184] The looseness of these categories is also illustrated by the overlap with other texts known as "brush jottings" (*biji* 筆記) or "miscellaneous records" (*zalu* 雜錄). They have their origins in the Han dynasty, but are particularly prevalent in the period after the collapse of the Han. They were produced throughout Chinese history, but from around the Tang dynasty onwards, they began to move away from being straightforward reports of strange events and started to become embellished and used as material for more self-consciously literary compositions.[185]

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[181] Hu, *Shaoshi shanfang bicong* 36.474.
[182] Yi Jian appears as a character in the *Liezi*, see *Liezi jishi* 5.157.
[183] Focusing on a much later era, Judith Zeitlin emphasises the historical aspect of anomaly tales in her study of Pu Songlin 蒲松齡 (1640–1715), see Zeitlin, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*. As Tak-hung Leo Chan has noted, readers of Qing writer Ji Yun's 紀昀 (1724–1805) collection of stories regarded them as reliable records, see Chan, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling*, 193-197; see also Allen, *Shifting Stories: History, Gossip, and Lore in Narratives from Tang Dynasty China*, 4-11; Inglis, *The Chinese Love Story from the Tenth to the Fourteenth Century*, 14-19.
[184] Hu Yinglin himself was a proponent of this distinction between *zhiguai* and *chuanqi*, see Campany, *Strange Writing*, 24-27.
[185] Although, as noted, the historical mode of these texts persisted and they continued to be seen as at least reliable narratives. For overviews of the history of these texts and a discussion of their contents, see Campany, *Strange Writing*; Li, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*; Wang, *Wei Jin nanbeichao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu*; Chou, *Liuchao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu*; Ouyang, *Zhongguo shenguai xioshuo tongshi*; Lin, *Shenguai xiaoshuo shihua* and *Shenguai xiaoshuo shi*. For examinations of the general use of anecdote in Chinese writing, see the edited volume by Hans van Els and Sarah A. Queen, *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China*, and the edited volume by Jack W. Chen and David Schaberg, *Idle Talk: Gossip and Anecdote in Traditional China*.

In these texts, scholars collected accounts of anomalous phenomena or events from across the empire, often taking pains to note the names of the relevant people and places, as well as when the events occurred. Texts of this type have long been seen to derive in part from earlier texts concerned with the relationship between the geographical landscape and spiritual power, such as the *Shanhai jing* and parts of the *Huainanzi*.[186] While it is difficult to make sweeping statements about a large body of texts, they have been understood by some scholars as representing attempts to bring the anomalous into the normal, and to provide normative accounts of the anomalous.[187]

There has been some debate about whether these texts should be regarded as history. Essentially, Hu Yinglin's position that (at least pre-Tang) *zhiguai* narratives were regarded as historical records is one shared by the majority of scholars, including Campany.[188] Another position, which only a minority of modern scholars like Kenneth DeWoskin have argued for, is that early medieval *zhiguai* were already regarded as fictional and were created as such. This view was first put forward in the Tang dynasty by Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721), which at the very least allows for the possibility of the fictionality of these narratives to be available to readers and writers at that time. Still another position is that writers of these texts used the veneer of historicity to talk about subjects that would otherwise face censure and even censorship. And, even if we do assume that some, especially early, *zhiguai* texts were written in a historical mode – or as, to use Glen Dudbridge's phrase, "a literature of record"[189] – it does not necessarily follow that we must assume a point in time where all historical *zhiguai* texts become fiction, rather than judging those texts on a case-by-case basis.[190]

Without relitigating the debate on *zhiguai* and fiction, I will operate on the assumption that these texts were written in an historical mode and, while they may have been read for pleasure and/or

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[186] According to Ding Yonghui 丁永輝, there are four categories of plants in the *Shanhai jing*. See Ding, "Shanhai jing yu gudai zhiwu fanlei", 276. The *Huainanzi* was presented to the Emperor Han Wudi 漢武帝 (156–87 BCE) by Liu An 劉安 (179–122 BCE), also known as the King of Huainan, circa 139 BCE. See Liu and Major, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*. The particularly relevant sections of the *Huainanzi* are the third and fourth chapters.

[187] See for instance Liu, S*henti, xingbie, jieji: Liuchao zhiguai de changyi lunshu yu xiaoshuo meixue*, 18-19, 195; "Xingjian yu mingbao: Liuchao zhiguai zhong guiguai xushu de fengyu—yi ge 'daoyi wei chang' moshi de kaocha", 1-3.

[188] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 177-179.

[189] Dudbridge, *Religious Experience and Lay Society in T'ang China*, 16.

[190] For this later observation, see Sheng Yang's review of Campany's *A Garden of Marvels*. See also Kao, *Classical Chinese Tales of the Supernatural*; Ma, "Fact and Fantasy in T'ang Tales".

for their literary qualities, they were at least presented as historical records. Individual sources will then be judged on their individual particularities.

Many anomaly collections only survive as quotations in other texts, especially encyclopaedic texts. These encyclopaedic texts often arrange quotations into thematic categories, and the way they categorise can be revealing. The following section will provide an overview of how plant-related anomaly material is categorised in these texts, and how these texts will be used as sources in the following study.

1.3.2. Intellectual background of the strange

A common citation in pre-modern discussions of the strange is a brief item in the *Lunyu* which claims that, "The Master did not speak of the strange, feats of strength, disorderly conduct, or spirits".[191] Just as Confucius' statement on learning the names of animals and plants from the *Poetry* provided a classical benchmark for studying the names of natural phenomena (*Lunyu* 17.9), this item (*Lunyu* 7.21) served as a check on curiosity about the strange. However, as Robert Campany notes, the attitude presented in this item is not one of indifference but of avoidance.[192] The *Lunyu* does not claim that such things do not exist, but rather that they were not the focus of Confucius' teaching. This avoidant attitude to the strange persisted, even (or perhaps especially) in anomaly collections. In an introduction to a chapter devoted to the strange in Ying Shao's 應劭 (140–206 CE) *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義 (*Comprehensive Discussion of Customs*), he justifies his collection of strange accounts by quoting *Lunyu* 7.21, and glosses the key terms in that item by referring to a vague "tradition" (*zhuan* 傳). He says that the word *shen* 神 means "to extend"

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[191] *Lunyu* 7.21 (*zi bu yu guaili luanshen* 子不語怪力亂神). Compare translation in Slingerland, *Essential Analects*, 71. Precisely what is being referred to in this list has been debated. A notable alternative reading to the above comes from the Jin-era scholar Li Chong 李充 (d. ca. 362), who understands the passage as saying that Confucius never spoke of "grotesque power" (*guaili* 怪力) and "disordered spirits" (*luanshen* 亂神). See *Lunyu jishi*, 14.480-482; for Li Chong see David Knechtges' entry in *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 477-480. For differing historical views of Confucius' position on spirits and similar matters, see Csikszentmihalyi, "Confucius and the Analects in the Han", 150-153.

[192] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 127. He also notes the relevance of *Lunyu* 3.12, which emphasises the importance of behaving *as if* the spirits existed when making sacrifices (*ji ru zai, ji shen ru shen zai* 祭如在，祭神如神在), *Lunyu jishi* 5.175.

shen 申 and the word *guai* 怪 means "to doubt" *yi* 疑.[193] In this way, Ying Shao is attempting to assimilate these disturbing terms into conventional, human-worldly concerns. As Roel Sterckx has pointed out, by emphasising the meaning of "extend", Ying Shao wants to encourage an association with the searching mind of the sage, and by emphasising "doubt", he wants to evoke the attitude of the common people towards the unfamiliar.[194] In this way, Ying Shao implies that the strangeness of the things Confucius does not speak about are only strange because they have not yet been understood, thus rhetorically creating legitimacy for investigations into these phenomena.

Another example occurs in the Jin-era 晉 (266–420 CE) collection *Shiyi ji* 拾遺記 (*Record of Reclaimed Omissions*) by Wang Jia 王嘉 (d. 390), which itself gives an account of the reception of another anomaly compendium, Zhang Hua's 張華 (232–300 CE) *Bowu zhi*.[195] Once Zhang Hua completed his erudite collection, the *Shiyi ji* records, he presented it to Emperor Wu of Jin 晉武帝 (236–290). Upon reading it, the emperor, despite praising him for his learning, chastised Zhang Hua for being in places "unsubstantial and exaggerated" *fuwang* 浮妄 and "unsubstantial and doubtful" *fuyi* 浮疑, which can only "frighten and confuse later generations" (*jiang kong huoluan yu hou* 將恐惑亂於後). The emperor also quotes *Lunyu* 7.21 and reminds Zhang Hua that when Confucius edited the *Shijing* and the *Shangshu* – as tradition had it – he did not include such matters. In the end the emperor demands that Zhang Hua must remove the most egregious material, but nevertheless rewards him with an inkstone, a brush, and fine paper. The anecdote relates that the emperor always had a copy of the book with him and often read it in his leisure time.[196]

As Campany points out, despite the apparent critical tone of this anecdote, it was likely meant to justify anomaly collections, as it appears in one itself.[197] It is also notable that the text never says

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[193] *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 9.386. Wang Chong makes a similar argument about the graph *shen*, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 20.871. See also the discussion in Li, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*, 14-15.
[194] Sterckx, *Animal and the Daemon*, 222-223.
[195] Zhang Hua was a noted scholar-official who wrote poetry and collected anecdotes. See Farmer, "Zhang Hua" and Straughair, *Chang Hua*.
[196] Preserved in the *Taiping guangji* 231.1768. For the *Shiyi ji*, see Campany, *Strange Writing*, 64–67, 306–318; Foster, "Wang Chia's Shij-i chi". For another translation, see Campany, *A Garden of Marvels: Tales of Wonder from Early Medieval China*, xxi-xxii.
[197] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 127-128.

that these strange phenomena are not real, but rather provides a rhetorical space for doubts and suspicions about the veracity of such materials. The anecdote admits that there is a point at which these anecdotes become unlikely, but also provides an example of a work that manages to stop short of such a point. That this demarcation line was determined by no less of an authority than the emperor himself adds to the persuasiveness of this anecdote.[198]

This defensive aspect of anomaly collections also partially accounts for their compilation in the first place. It appears that one likely motive for their collection and distribution was to convince others of the truth of these strange phenomena, and what their existence implied about the world. In his preface to his *Soushen ji* 搜神記 (*Record of the Search for the Supernatural*) for instance, Gan Bao 干寶 (d. 336 CE) says he wanted the anecdotes he collected to be "sufficient to make clear that the way of the spirits is not a fabrication" (*zu yi ming shendao zhi bu wu ye* 足以明神道之不誣也).[199] The phenomena recorded in these accounts, while contentious, were thus understood as being part of the natural world.

1.3.3. Categorisation of trees in encyclopaedias

Most surviving accounts of portents, including those that involve plants, are to be found in the official histories, and these sources will be introduced in a later section. Accounts of more general anomalous phenomena, that may or may not be regarded as portentous, can also be found in official histories or collected together in dedicated texts. Some of these texts, as mentioned above, come down to us more-or-less complete, but others only partially survive as quotations in other texts, and others still are completely lost. A major source of those quotations are texts that are usually broadly referred to in English by the term "encyclopaedia" and *leishu* (類書) in Chinese.[200] The term *leishu* itself did not appear until the Song dynasty, and was not clearly

[198] As this text was composed during the Jin, it is also significant that it is the founding Jin emperor who notes the acceptable limits of the strange and rewards the text's compiler, as well as enjoys reading its contents.
[199] Reproduced in Li, *Xinji Soushen ji Xinji Soushen houji*, vol. 1, 19. On this preface, see Zhang, "Soushen ji xu chutan". For some background on this text and its author, see Campany, *Strange Writing*, 55-62; Campany, "Two Religious Thinkers of the Early Eastern Jin: Gan Bao and Ge Hong in Multiple Contexts"; Li, "Gan Bao kao"; Wang, *Han-Wei Liuchao xiaoshuo shi*, 80-89. For a translation of the text, see DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*.
[200] The term *leishu* has been translated by Christopher Nugent as "writings arranged by category," See Nugent's introduction to the section on encyclopaedias in the volume edited by Jack W. Chen, et al., *Literary Information in*

defined.[201] Indeed, there continues to be much debate among scholars on how to categorise these "category books".[202]

Usually, *leishu* are made up of extracts from other texts arranged into categories. These collections were often intended to reflect the idealised order of the universe by systematically presenting knowledge, and also served as an attempt by imperial authorities to control that knowledge.[203] The material collected in these texts can include literary or biographical anecdotes as well as administrative documents or specifically Buddhist or Daoist material.[204] The material collected can be the only surviving versions of some texts, especially anomaly collections and so-called "weft" or "apocryphal" texts (*wei* 緯 or *chen* 讖, sometimes translated as "prophecy" texts), which like anomaly collections contained contentious material that made them less likely to survive.[205] An early example of these encyclopaedia is the *Huanglan* 皇覽 (*Imperial Reader*), which, according to tradition, was compiled for Cao Pi 曹丕 (187–226), later emperor of the Cao-Wei dynasty 曹魏 (220–265). It was organised by topic and, while it was once extensive, it now only survives in fragments.[206] An early surviving *leishu* is *Beitang shuchao* 北堂書鈔 (*Textual Extracts from the North Hall*), compiled by Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638) around 630.[207] Originally, it comprised 801 scrolls with its content divided into eighty main sections, but now only 160 scrolls are extant,

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China, 291-294, but is normally translated as "category writings" or "category text". Jessey Choo advocates "florilegia" as a less misleading translation than "encyclopaedia," see Choo, "Yiwen leiju," 455. They have sometimes been referred to in English by the term "collectanea", although this is more commonly used as a translation for the term *congshu* 叢書. For more background on these texts, see Bauer, "The Encyclopedia in China"; Hu, *Zhongguo gudai de leishu*.

[201] The first use of the term *leishu* appears in the *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (*New Book of the Tang*), 59.1509, 1564. As Nugent points out, the related term *leishi* 類事 appears in the *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (*Old Book of the Tang*), 47.2046. For a history of the categorisation of these texts in official histories, see Drège, "Des ouvrages classés par catégories", 21-24.

[202] Accord to Jean-Pierre Drège, two criteria for *leishu* is that they group material by subject and that the material serves as extracts suitable for citation. See Drège, "Des ouvrages classés par catégories".

[203] Tian, "Literary Learning: Encyclopedias and Epitomes".

[204] Drège, "Des ouvrages classés par catégories: les encyclopédies chinoises".

[205] While a distinction has been made between *wei* or weft texts, that is, expansions on the classics (*jing*), and *chen* texts, which are concerned with predictions, the terms were often used interchangeably by the Eastern Han, see Dull, "A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (Ch'an-Wei) Texts of the Han Dynasty", 485f; Nielson, "Hexagrams and Prognostication in the Weishu Literature", 47-48. Arising to prominence during the reign of Wang Mang, they became highly influential on classical exegesis, only to be ruthlessly repressed during the Sui dynasty, with the result that only the weft texts on the *Changes* survive intact, with the rest surviving in quotations in other texts. See Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments"; van Ess, "The Apocryphal Texts of the Han Dynasty"; Zhang, "The Influence of Chenwei on Han Dynasty Literature and Literary Theory".

[206] For overviews of this text, see Zhang, "Lun leishu zhi zu", 98-101; Tian, "Literary Learning", 133-134. Tian translates the title as "Imperial view".

[207] Yu was an assistant in the eponymous building of the Palace Library during the Sui 隋 (581–618). There are two major printed editions: the Ming edition of Chen Yumo 陳禹謨 (1548–1618) and the more reliable Qing edition of Kong Guangtao 孔廣陶 (1832–1890). See Chaussende, "Beitang shuchao," 24-27; Hu, *Zhongguo gudai de leishu*, 64-75.

which contain only nineteen sections, which are subdivided into 850 categories. None of the extant sections are directly related to plants.

With the exception of the *Textual Extracts from the North Hall*, most of the pre-Tang *leishu* texts whose titles are listed in imperial bibliographies have been lost, and of those that do, most survive only in fragments. Some have been discovered in manuscript, such as *Xiuwen dian yulan* 修文殿御覽 (*Imperial Reader of the Hall of Tending to Culture*), which survives in a fragment from Dunhuang (Pelliot 2626).[208]

Traditional categorisation schema tended to group trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants together under the generic heading "herbs and trees" (*caomu* 草木).[209] The *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (*Wide Gleanings from the Taiping Era*)[210] for instance has a section (*bu* 部) labelled "herbs and trees" which covers 12 *juan* 卷 or fascicles.[211] This umbrella heading is then split up into subcategories (see Appendix 1A), giving a total of 388 items. Each of these items is a stand-alone anecdote, named for the plant mentioned within.

However, some encyclopaedias arrange items by plant name, and do not restrict themselves to a specific type of writing, as the *Taiping guangji* does. From these we can get a general idea of the volume of available written material on trees. The Tang-era *Yiwen leiju*, for instance, has two fascicles devoted to trees. This section is subdivided into word headings, of which are 42, with a total of 722 individual items.[212] Of those word headings, 15 have more than ten items (see Appendix 1B).

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[208] Drège, "Des ouvrages classés par catégories", 25-26. Tian translates this title as "Imperial View at the Hall of Promoting Culture", "Literary Learning", 136. The name of the hall is likely a reference to the *Shangshu*, which says "desist from war and tend to culture" (*yanwu xiuwen* 偃武修文). "Culture" here includes governance. See *Shangshu zhengyi* 11.341; Zhou, *Taiping yulan yanjiu*, 19-20.

[209] This could also be translated as "plants", but as it includes mushrooms, lichens, etc, it is closer to Aristotle's conception than the modern, botanically informed English term, see the recent edited volume, *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Biology*. For problems encountered with categorisation in encyclopaedic texts, see Schafer, "The Table of Contents of the T'ai p'ing Kuang Chi'".

[210] The *Taiping guangji*, or *Wide Gleanings from the Taiping Era,* is a compilation of stories dating from the Han to the Five Dynasties. It was completed in 987 CE under the supervision of Li Fang 李昉 (925–996 CE). While woodblocks were cut for it upon completion, due to its content it was deemed unsuitable for publication and was not printed until the Ming dynasty.

[211] *Taiping guangji*, *juan* 406-417.

[212] *Yiwen leiyu* 88.1506-89.1554.

Repeating and adding to much of the content of *Yiwen leiju*, the section on trees in the *Taiping yulan* is comprised of ten fascicles, with a total of 884 items. Unlike the *Taiping guangji*, bamboo, fruits, vegetables, aromatics, medicines, and herbs are not collected in a single section together with trees.[213] Like the *Yiwen leiju*, items in the tree section are arranged by word, with a total of 127 different word headings, which function as subsections. However, while the two texts use some of the same tree terms as subcategories, there are many that are mentioned in the *Yiwen leiju* that do not appear in the later *Taiping yulan*.

Of the 884 items in the *Taiping yulan*, 51 are single item entries, that is, there is only one example of that tree term recorded in the *Taiping yulan*. Of the 127 subsections, only 17 have more than ten items. Strange grasses and trees also appear in a sub-section of the section on good omens (*xiuzheng bu* 休徵部).[214] These plants are not always easy to translate (for a translated list, see Appendix 1C). The section begins with items related to the earth *di* 地, then moves onto herbaceous plants.

1.4.1. Scope of primary source material

From these texts some of the difficulties in finding appropriate materials can be seen.[215] While the *Taiping guangji* has a subcategory that conforms with the object of this study ('strange trees') it only collects from certain types of writing. *Yiwen leiju* and *Taiping yulan* on the other hand, contain material from classical texts, official histories, dictionaries, as well as anecdote collections and weft texts. However, they do not differentiate the content of the material, mixing mundane mentions of the botanical properties of plants with strange occurrences of wood demons and everything in-between.

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[213] The specific terms used are *zhu* 竹 (*Taiping yulan* 962.4269-963.4296), *guo* 果 (964.4277-975.4323), *cai* 菜 (976.4324-980.4342), *xiang* 香 (981.4343-983.4354), *yao* 藥 (984.4355-993.4398), and *baihui* 百卉 (994.4399-1000.4399-4426).
[214] *Taiping yulan* 873.3871-3875.
[215] For a further discussion of these issues, see Bauer, "The Encyclopaedia in China", 670-676, 689-90.

Moreover, if one relies solely on encyclopaedic material, one is limited to the interpretations of past editors, meaning that some items relating to trees may not have been included. An example of this is in the *Taiping yulan*, where in the section on trees, the term *lang'gan* 琅玕 only appears in one item quoted from the *Shanhai jing*. Most other mentions of the term are to be found in the section on "precious jewels" *zhenbao* 珍寶 (which duplicates the quote from the *Shanhai jing* found in the tree section), even a quotation from the *Huainanzi* where, like in the *Shanhai jing*, it is appended with the word "tree" *shu* 樹.[216] While there is much textual evidence that *lang'gan* can in many contexts mean some kind of precious, jewel-like object,[217] this alone does not explain the absence of this passage from the tree section. Indeed, a number of strange trees are mentioned in this passage of the *Huainanzi*, but none appear in the tree section of the *Taiping yulan*. Thus, someone looking for trees will not necessarily find this source or the potential ambiguity in its meaning by looking at the tree section of encyclopaedias alone, as they have not been so thoroughly compiled as to exhaustively include all relevant material in every appropriate section.

This problem also occurs with some flowering trees, as both the *Yiwen leiju* and the *Taiping yulan* have different sections for trees and fruits, and so some flowering trees only be found only within the section on fruits. The *Yiwen leiju* divides the fruits into 38 subsections, and the *Taiping yulan* has 72, including the generic term "fruits" (*guo* 果) (see Appendix 2 for annotated and translated lists).

This does not imply that they were not considered to be trees, but rather their fruit was likely considered to be the most important marker. A similar separation can be seen in agricultural manuals, thus likely reflecting the importance of fruit as a food crop, and of an awareness the particular needs of fruit trees.[218] This distinction between fruit and non-fruit trees is also

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[216] The main text of the *Shanhai jing* does not provide a description of the *lang'gan shu* 琅玕樹, but Guo Pu's commentary informs us that its fruit are like gems (*lang'gan zi si zhu* 琅玕子似珠), which is likely an attempt to rationalise this passage with other instances of the word *lang'gan* where it appears to refer to some sort of gem, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 6.264. See also *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 4.450; for translations see Major, *Heaven and Earth in Han Thought*, 150, 164.

[217] In many contexts it appears to mean "coral". Schafer argues that it is "malachite," see Schafer, "The Transcendent Vitamin: Efflorescence of Lang-kan," and Liu and Major, *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, 156 note 6.

[218] The *Qinming yaoshu* for instance quotes the Han-era writer Cui Shi 崔寔 (d.170 CE), the author of the lost agricultural treatise *Siming yueling* 四民月令, saying, "During the first month, from first to the last day, various trees can be moved, except for those with fruit, which should not be moved after the full-moon day. The full-moon day is the 15th day. If [they are moved] past the fifteenth day, then the number of ripening fruit will be reduced" (*zhengyue,*

observable in poetry, with peaches and plums being mentioned for their fruits and flowers, which often symbolised life and longevity, whereas evergreens like pine and cypress served as a metaphor for steadfastness and loyalty.[219] As one of their major uses of encyclopaedias was as a reference for writing poetry,[220] this distinction and separation can also be observed in their arrangement of materials. Nevertheless, things are not always so straightforward, as the wood of peach trees for instance were long regarded as having apotropaic powers, thus in some instances the peach tree's status as a source of wood was more important than its fruit.[221] All of this illustrates that encyclopaedic texts were collections of written representations for the use of human writers, rather than attempts to describe the world as it is in all its details.[222]

Although there is a danger that, to use Mark Elvin's phrase, our picture will be "patchy because the sources are patchy",[223] cross-checking these early compilations of encyclopaedic materials with later ones can be useful. There is much overlapping material – as well as material well outside the time-frame of this particular study – but the broad scope of encyclopaedias may allow the reader to avoid being too hemmed-in by the biases, blind spots and categorical idiosyncrasies of Tang and Song editors and their masters.[224] However, one should not assume that these texts are simply as they present themselves: as a faithful archive of earlier material.[225]

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zi shuo ji hui, ke yi zhushu zamu, wei you guoshizhe, ji wang er zhi. Wang wei shiwu ri. Guo shiwu ri, ze guo shao shi 正月，自朔暨晦，可移諸樹雜木，唯有果實者，及望而止。望謂十五日。過十五日，則果少實).

[219] The Mao Commentary understood peaches in the *Classic of Poetry* as symbolising vigour and youth, glossing the line *tao zhi yaoyao* 桃之夭夭 thusly, "The peach is [a tree] with flourishing blossom, *yaoyao* refers to its youthful robustness" (*tao you hua zhi sheng zhe, yaoyao, qi shaozhuang ye* 桃有華之盛者，夭夭，其少壯也). As the poem then goes on to describe a woman going to her new bridal home, peaches were also associated with feminine beauty. Peach and plum blossom are also mentioned in the "Daya" 大雅 section of the *Shijing*, peach fruit in the "Weifeng" 魏風, and peach blossom in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 2.64, 15.887. For an overview of the peach in Chinese history, see Huang et. al, "History of Cultivation and Trends in China", 37-44.

[220] From the Tang onwards, they were also often used by and produced for examination candidates. See Bauer, "The Encyclopaedia in China", 666.

[221] See for instance Bodde, *Festivals in Classical China*, 127-38; Sou, "Living with Ghosts and Deities," 167-8; Kalinowski, "Hemerology and Prediction in the Daybooks," 230; Wang and Li, "Zhongguo gudai shu wenhua gaishuo," 55.

[222] In making this point about the *Yiwen leiju*, Jessey Choo notes that the only internal organ with its own subcategory in the "human" (*ren* 人) section of that text is the gallbladder (*gan* 膽), but this of course does not imply that the elites of the time were ignorant of the existence of other organs. Choo, "Yiwen leiju," 456; *Yiwen leiju* 17.323.

[223] Elvin, *Retreat of the Elephants*, 86. For a critique of Elvin's use of sources in this way, see Delphine Spicq's review, 600.

[224] On these biases, Buaer, following Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 (1866-1943), suggests that Song editors had a more inward-looking and "Neo-Confucian" agenda, which was to prove influential up to the late Qing. See Bauer, "The Encyclopaedia in China", 680-689. The Naitō hypothesis has been much debated; a proper discussion would exceed the bounds of the current study. For more see Miyakawa, "An Outline of the Naito Hypothesis" and Fogel, "Naitō Konan and Naitō's Historiography".

[225] See for instance the examples studied by Thomas Barbier in "L'assujettissement des textes: quelques réflexions sur le classement par catégories dans les 'encyclopédies' en Chine ancienne".

Susan Cherniack for instance has shown how the Song dynasty was a time of "remarkable textual volatility", where scepticism about the reliability of transmitted texts was widespread. Moreover, even though there was a strong cultural bias towards avoiding errors in transmission, this often resulted in creative amendments to texts.[226]

1.5.1. Theories of Sacred Trees

When looking at how trees and other plants are depicted in the kinds of sources examined in this study, it is inevitable that pre-existing theories of how natural phenomena are represented in human societies will make up part of the analysis. This is especially so as much of the primary sources examined in this study describes behaviour that is unusual and even fantastic, and so some explanatory model is necessary to make sense of it. This section will give a brief overview and evaluation of some of the relevant theoretical approaches, and will conclude with a discussion on how these will be applied in the present study.

Outside of anomaly collections, strange trees in Chinese sources have generally been studied as a mythological phenomenon, something which can particularly be seen in studies of early collections such as the *Shanhai jing* and of tomb murals.[227] Certain tomb goods, especially lamps and so-called "money trees" (lit. "shaking money trees" *yaoqianshu* 搖錢樹 in Chinese), have often been interpreted as representing "sacred" or "cosmic" trees that reach up into Heaven, providing a connecting point between Heaven and Earth.[228] These terms often come with references to earlier scholarship, particularly that of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986).[229] Eliade's approach and ideas have less purchase than they used to in academia, especially in the West, but as some of their related terminology persists, their background will be briefly dealt with below.[230]

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[226] Cherniack, "Book Culture and Textual Transmission in Sung China".
[227] An important and influential work in this mode is Sarah Allan's *Shape of the Turtle*, especially 19-56.
[228] See for instance He, *Han Wei yaoqianshu chubu yanjiu*, 258-61; Zhao and Yuan, "*Cong 'shenshu' dao* 'qianshu'", and Erickson, "Money Trees of the Eastern Han Dynasty", 18-19, 30.
[229] See for instance Ebner von Eschenbach, "Trees of Life and Trees of Death in China"; see also the summaries in Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, 37-48 and Puett, *To Become a God*, 32-36..
[230] Nicholas Morrow Williams, in a recent re-evaluating shamanism in Early China (an area on which Eliade has been very influential), put the discussion of Eliade's ideas to one side, Williams, "Shamans, Souls, and Soma: Comparative Religion and Early China", 153.

The work of Mircea Eliade has its roots in the comparative method of the nineteenth century, whereby cultures old and new were examined for similarities with the aim of uncovering the common origin of religion. The comparativists had an evolutionary understanding of religion, based on the Social Darwinism of their day; for them religious thought developed in stages of greater complexity and sophistication.[231] Sir James Frazer (1854-1941) for example claimed that humans began at a stage of "primitive magic", which as their societies progressed developed into organised religion, which in turn developed into science. Frazer and the anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) both saw religion in general as advancing from animism to polytheism and ideally towards monotheism, a view which some scholars have argued reflected a Protestant distaste for materiality.[232] They borrowed terms from Roman religion to describe diverse traditions, and were influenced by early Christian critiques of animism, such as tree worship.[233]

The comparativist approach fell out of favour in the early twentieth century, making way for more empirical ethnographic research. Frazer in particular was criticised for his tendency to develop *a priori* propositions which he would evidence by cherry-picking from an assortment of ethnographic material; if he could not find what he was looking for, he would make the sources fit his narrative.[234] This shift gave rise to new approaches, including the phenomenology of religion, which sought to add complexity and subjectivity to the streamlined theories of the comparativists. As Ivan Strenski notes, phenomenology of religion was synchronic and subjective, while the evolutionary comparativists were diachronic and reductionist.[235]

Mircea Eliade, a leading phenomenologist, rejected the evolutionist view of "primitive" inferiority, arguing that cosmic objects like trees manifest the sacred (a key term for Eliade) rather than being merely venerated for themselves.[236] He proposed that religious rituals and symbols reflect universal archetypes of the sacred, every instance of which being in effect imperfect copies of those original archetypes. His study of "cosmic tree pillars" for instance

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231 For an overview see Strenski, *Understanding Theories of Religion*, 31-64.
232 For an overview see Hunt, *Roman Religion*, 48-9; see also Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (vol II), 305-6; Frazer, *Golden Bough* (vol II), 45.
233 Hunt, *Roman Religion*, 55, 72-73.
234 Leach, "Kingship and Divinity".
235 Strenski, *Understanding Theories of Religion*, 78. It should be noted that, despite these differences, the phenomenologists of religion were still committed to cross-cultural and cross-temporal comparison.
236 Eliade, *The Quest*, 51-52. The sacred was, for Eliade, real; the profane, in contrast, was chaotic and unreal, see Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, 62-65; Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return*, 9-11.

frames them as "replicas" of "the same archaic image".[237] Another important Eliadean concept, the "axis mundi", often represented by mountains or trees, connects Heaven, Earth, and Hell, and serves as a "navel of the earth" or sacred centre. The "Cosmic Tree", a variation on the axis mundi, represents the universe's regeneration or creative potential.[238] For Eliade, such symbols are variations of a lost archaic archetype, originating from a single source of diffusion, and even when they manifest in ways that appear inconsistent, they still come "from one single centre of diffusion".[239]

1.5.2. Eliade in sinology

These ideas have been influential in sinology, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century. At times his ideas are directly engaged with by sinologists, at others his terminology is borrowed without much reference to his work.[240] As Eliadean concepts can have the effect of generalising similarities even at their points of apparent dissimilarity, there is a danger in work like this of producing what Campany has called a "composite myth," that is, the creation of a singular mythology as opposed to mythologies in the plural. For Eliade, this was precisely his project; he saw history of religions as playing a role in a humanist "*planétisation* of culture" or "universal type of culture".[241] However, the assumption of a universal distinction between the ordered realm of religion and the chaotic mundane world should not be taken for granted. As Michael Puett – one of the few sinologists to critically engage with Eliade – has pointed out, rather than being a realm of order, the cosmic realm in China was one always on the brink of getting out of control, with humans involved in "an endless domestication of the divine sphere".[242] Moreover, connection points between Heaven and Earth in Early China — usually identified as *axis mundi* by sinologists — are defined by the confusion of the two realms, most strikingly rendered in the

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[237] Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 41-42.
[238] Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 40.
[239] Quote from Eliade, "Methodological Remarks," 93. See also Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 39. For further work on Eliade, see Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 88-104; Smith, *To Take Place*, 13-23; Dadosky, *Structure of Religious Knowing*; Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion*;
[240] For the former, see for instance Needham et al., *SSC* vol.5 part 4, 223; Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*; Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters*, 414-418; Loewe, *Ways to Paradise*, 55; Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond*, 172-172; Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 214 and *Strange Writing*, 8-10. For the latter see Lewis, *Construction of Space in Early China*, 252, 260 and *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 318; Allan, *Buried Ideas*, 292.
[241] Eliade, *The Quest*, 69.
[242] Puett, "Social Order or Social Chaos," 124.

animalistic physical properties of otherwise human-like mythological figures.[243] These inconsistences can make it difficult to apply Eliadean terms with clarity to an analysis of Chinese sources. The academic field of religious studies has for the most part moved beyond Eliadean paradigms, but some of his concepts continue to be influential in sinology.[244] The next section will examine how a particular strange tree has been interpreted in an Eliadean framework in sinological studies.

1.5.3. The *fusang* tree as archetype

One example of how a reliance upon Eliadean archetypes has caused interpretative problems in sinology is the analysis of a tree called *fusang* 扶桑. The *fusang*, (which going by the second character is apparently a mulberry tree) is in many sources situated in the east and is connected to the myth of ten suns, one of which is carried to the *ruo* 若 tree in the west by a three-legged crow.[245] In tomb iconography, certain trees have been identified as representing the *fusang* due to the presence of a number of details associated with this myth: ten or nine mulberry fruit representing the suns (the missing one being currently in the sky), the aforementioned three-legged crow, a horse tied to the trunk,[246] or the presence of a human figure holding a bow and arrow. The latter is usually interpreted as being Archer Yi 羿, who was said to have shot nine of the suns out of the sky to avoid a conflagration.[247]

However, many textual references to a *fusang* tree do not appear to tally with the concept of the *axis mundi*. For instance, the *Huainanzi* refers to the likely-related *fu* 扶 tree as being in a place

[243] An example of this would be the snake-like lower bodies of Fuxi, Nüwa, Xiwangmu, and other personages connected to the celestial realm.
[244] Russel McCutcheon has argued that Eliade's influence persists in some of the major assumptions of religious studies as a discipline, see McCutcheon, "'The Field, at the Moment, Is Up for Redefinition': Twenty Five Years of Manufacturing Religion."
[245] The earliest references to it probably appear in the *Shanhai jing*, see *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 4.260-262, 12.437-438. Chow Tse-tsung 周策縱 has argued that it is a banyan tree, see Chow, "Fusang wei rongshu zongkao". For other early references, see *Chuci buzhu* 1.27, 2.74; *Zhuangzi jishi* 11.385-386; *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 19.1242, 22.1524.
[246] A textual reference to tying up a horse to a *fusang* tree can be found in the poem 'Encountering Sorrow' *Lisao* 離騷 from the *Chuci*. For translations see Hawkes, *Songs of the South*, 193-196; Williams, *Lyrics of Chu*.
[247] Allan hypothesises that the myth of ten suns developed during the Shang, but despite not being believed by the Zhou, the image persisted, and was rationalised through the Archer Yi story putting an end to the excess suns. See *Shape of the Turtle*, 25-26. For similar arguments, see Hayashi, "Kandai gazoishi no shinwateki jumoku ni tsuite".

called Yangzhou, "where the sun shines" (*ri zhi suo fei* 日之所曊).[248] It then goes on to say that it is in fact the *jian* 建 tree that is central, as it is the place where the sun is without shadow, as well as being the place where the various gods (*di* 帝) ascend and descend (*zhong di suo zi shangxia, ri zhong wu jing, hu er wu xiang, gai tiandi zhi zhong ye* 眾帝所自上下，日中無景，呼而無響，蓋天地之中也).[249] That the source explicitly says that a tree other than *fusang* as being the central point of Heaven/Earth connectivity, seems to challenge Eliade's conception of centrality. While admitting that the variation in "axial imagery" is "bewildering," John Major claims that what does not vary is the importance of the concept of centrality.[250] While that may be the case for the *Huainanzi*, in other texts centrality does not appear quite so important. In the *Shanhai jing* for instance, variations on *fumu* 扶木 and *fusang* appear in connection to the sun, a place called Yang (or sometimes Tang),[251] and sometimes birds, but the only directional concept noted is that of the east, as these items are collected in eastern sections of the text.[252]

Once constructed, composite myths then go on to play a strong role in interpreting the meaning(s) of trees or tree-like objects. For instance, the grave goods called "money trees" (mentioned above) are regularly identified in scholarship with the *fusang* and centrality. There are certainly connections to be made between these ideas – both Susan Erickson and He Zhiguo 何志國 regard money trees as *axis mundi*, by which they mean connection points between Heaven

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[248] This graph *fei* 曊 and its variant 曊 are uncommon. Rémi Mathieu regards the graph 扶 in the ninth section of the *Shanhai jing* as meaning "to carry", in reference to the suns, see Mathieu, *Étude sur la mythologie et l'ethnologie de la Chine ancienne*, 439, n. 6.

[249] See *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 4.451. For issues with translating the term *di*, see Dubs, "Chinese Imperial Designations" and Tjan, "On the Rendering of the Word Ti as 'Emperor'". Many translations follow Boodberg's neologism of "thearch", see Boodberg, *Selected Works*, 217-218; Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 18. Allan notes that the presence of the third tree and a collective of gods are both unusual, see *Shape of the Turtle*, 28-29. A stylistically similar version, mentioning the *jian* tree, centrality, and the lack of shadow, can be found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* (62.3). It does not however mention the "various gods". It reads: "South of Baimin, beneath the *jian* tree, the sun is in the centre and so there is no shadow, if one speaks there is no echo, it is the centre of Heaven and Earth" (*Baimin zhi nan, jianmu zhi xia, ri zhong wu ying, hu er wu xiang, gai tiandi zhong ye* 白民之南，建木之下，日中無影，呼而無响， 蓋天地中也). For difficulties these contradictions caused, see Nicol, "Daoxuan and the Creation of a Buddhist Sacred Geography of China: An Examination of the *Shijia Fangzhi* 釋迦方志", 37.

[250] Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 37.

[251] Allan develops this phonetic connection further, see *Shape of the Turtle*, 28.

[252] See *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 14.26 and 9.11. One item does locate the tree north of a place called Heichi 黑齒, but in the larger geographical schema of the text, both locations are not only easterly, but in the extreme east. There is a mention of a tree called *fuyao* 扶搖 in the *Zhuangzi*, and Lu Deming's commentary quotes Li Yi's 李頤 (482-520) claim that it is a divine tree that grows in the eastern sea (*donghai* 東海), *Zhuangzi jishi* 11.385-386. For a further discussion of *fusang* in relation to the terms *kongsang* 空桑 and *qiongsang* 窮桑, which both also contain the graph *sang* ("mulberry"), see Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*, 45, 68-69.

and Earth[253] – but there appears to be little to connect these trees to the concept of a pivot or world tree, ideas which come from other cultures and become insinuated into analysis of strange trees in China through the use of Eliadean archetype terms. Some scholars have even linked textual accounts of the *fusang* with the bronze tree-shaped object discovered in Sanxingdui 三星堆 (an archaeological site which has been dated to around the 12th to 11th centuries BCE) due to a number of similarities: the use of bronze as a material, birds on branches, and dragons curling round trunks.[254] While Sanxingdui culture was contemporary with the Shang 商 or Yin 殷 dynasty (ca. 1600–ca.1045 BCE),[255] they used different methods of metallurgy and no evidence of writing has been found at Sanxingdui, which has challenged attempts to regard them as related cultures.

Eliade's terminology and theories can be used to discover meaningful thematic connections, but they have also been used to make a coherent and unified collection of mythological archetypes out of diverse and sometimes inconsistent source material. Those terms and theories are however rarely critically examined. There is also a tendency, following Eliade, to talk of *the* axis mundi and *the* cosmic tree in the singular. It is clear why Eliade, who thinks of religious symbols as being poor copies of ancient archetypes, would refer to these things in the singular. However, if one does not accept Eliade's theory of primordial universal symbols, then the necessary simplification involved in constructing such archetypes – not to mention the neglect of difference in favour of similarity – may obscure more than it reveals.

1.5.4. Beyond archetypes

A benefit of the use of archetype theory is that one can use them in cross-cultural comparison. A danger however of the use of archetypes is that they can give the impression that religious phenomena or cultural phenomena in general are inherently one way or the other. This is often despite the sometimes confusing and contradictory complexity one finds in the source material.

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[253] Erickson, "Money Trees of the Eastern Han Dynasty", 18, 25, 36; He, *Han Wei yaoqianshu chubu yanjiu*, . Qian also connects them to trees mentioned in texts like the *Shanhai jing*, see Qian, "Shitan yaoqianshu de fuxing yu neihan".
[254] Sun, "Sanxingdui Culture of the Sichuan Basin," 197; Wang and Li, "Zhongguo gudai shu wenhua gaishuo," 54. Some also see this tree as a precursor to Han-era money trees, see Erickson, "Money Trees of the Eastern Han Dynasty", 27-28; Chen, "On the Designation 'Money Tree'", 68.
[255] For dates and issues with dating, see Keightley, "The Shang: China's First Historical Dynasty", 232-249.

As Puett points out, human relations between gods, ancestors and spirits are like human relations between each other, they "always veer between order and chaos".[256]

By using the Eliaden terminology one implicitly accepts his overall theory, or at least his theory of a particular archetype. Without explicitly refuting or reformulating aspects of that theory when making use of his terminology, the reader cannot be expected to know what of Eliade is being accepted and what is being rejected. More importantly perhaps, the uncritical use of his terminology is likely to incline one to notice and emphasise elements that fit with it, while ignoring and de-emphasising elements which do not. The similarities and differences generalised in Eliade's terminology must be put into the context of a theoretical framework, otherwise one cannot show that they are more than mere co-incidence.

Eliade's universals may not have explanatory meaning in isolated circumstances; that a mountain or tree happens to resemble Eliade's *axis mundi* is not necessarily significant. For one, Eliade's definition is vague enough that it would be surprising if no similarities were to be found. To call a tree an *axis mundi* without engaging with what this might mean in depth risks cherry-picking data that suits an already existing hypothesis and ignoring information that does not. This, as has been noted, is what Frazer was criticised for doing back in the 19th century.

The embodied aspect of human beings is likely to have an influence on how they view themselves and the world around them, and this embodied aspect could partially account for cross-cultural symbolic similarities. Trees are part of the natural landscape in most areas habitable by humans. While strict definitions of what a tree is are hard to come by both scientifically and culturally, generally speaking, the shape of the body of a tree is analogous to that of a human, its branches analogous to human arms, thus allowing for the possibility of associations between the two to occur across different, even independent cultures. Indeed, the common location of trees as singular figures in a landscape could also suggest that they serve as a vertical connection point across the horizon between earth and sky. Eliade's definitions included observations of this nature, but went far beyond them.

[256] Puett, "Social Order or Social Chaos," 128.

Noting these potential cross-cultural similarities need not be the end point of research. Often the differences between cultures are as important as similarities, especially as they tend to resist appeals to universalism. While the manner in while objects like trees are apprehended by humans may be in part determined by human perceptions, it is unlikely that this is to do with cultural archetypes of the type proposed by Eliade. Rather than relying on these necessarily vague and often vacillating archetypes, coming to terms with the full range of culturally specific meanings of phenomena like trees, cosmic or otherwise, should be the first step in a re-evaluation of strange trees in Early and Medieval China.

1.5.5. Mythology, folklore, and the strange

As an example of how to move beyond Eliadean archetypes without ignoring what is useful in his work and work inspired by it, this final section of the chapter will look at one particular anecdote about a strange tree. It appears in the *Shenyi jing* 神異經 (*Guideways to the Divine and the Strange*), a text of uncertain origins that is clearly modelled on the earlier and better known *Shanhai jing*.[257] Like the *Shanhai jing*, this text is made up of items arranged by region, with each item locating its subject in relation to the one before. The first item in the received text reads:

> 東方荒外有豫章焉，此樹主九州。其高千丈，圍百丈，本上三百丈，本如有條枝，敷張如帳，上有玄狐黑猿。枝主一州，南北并列，面向西南。有九力士操斧伐之，以占九州吉凶。斫復，其州有福；遲者州伯有病；積歲不復者，其州滅亡。[258]

[257] This text was traditionally attributed to Dongfang Shuo 東方朔 (ca. 160 – 90 BCE), although this is unlikely, see Li, *Tang qian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*, 151-152. For more background, see Campany, *Strange* Writing, 43-45, 280-282; Wang, *Shenyi jing yanjiu*; Chou, *Shenyi jing yanjiu*; Wang, *Wei Jin nanbeichao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu*, 307; Wang, *Liuchao zhiguai xiaoshuo kaolun*, 71-112.
[258] Wang, *Shenyijing yanjiu,* 49.

> Beyond the Eastern Wastes there is a camphor tree,[259] and this tree rules the Nine Regions.[260] Its height is a thousand *zhang*, its width one hundred *zhang*, and its roots ascend as high as three hundred *zhang*. Its roots are like branches, and spread out like a curtain. Upon the tree are dark foxes and black apes. Each branch rules one region, and they are arranged from north to south and face southwest. [When] nine strong men take up axes and chop at a branch, it is possible to determine whether the fate of the Nine Regions will be auspicious or inauspicious. If a branch is chopped and it grows back, then that region will have good fortune. If the branch grows back slowly, then the ruler of the region will become ill. If after many years it does not grow back, that region will perish.[261]

Here the monumental aspect of the tree would suggest "the World Tree" of comparative myth, especially the Norse tree Yggdrasil, which also is a large tree which presides over nine realms. If the description stopped there, then the similarities may seem striking. When the differences are emphasised however, another picture emerges. Unlike Yggdrasil, the tree in the *Shenyi jing* is not central, it is not an ash, it has nine roots instead of three, it is not covered in white mud, there is no corpse-eating serpent beneath it, there is no eagle on top of it with a hawk perched on its beak, there is no squirrel carrying insulting messages up it to the eagle from the serpent Níðhöggr, there is no god who hangs himself on its branches to gain knowledge, there is no human couple living within it, etc. When put plainly, what the two of them share is that they are both big divine trees – when the Eliadean labels are removed, the appearance of relation is diminished.

One striking aspect of the story is that this strange tree is that, apart from a visual description, it is described almost entirely in relation to its responsiveness to human behaviour, in particular human rulers. These two aspects of strange trees – their reaction to human behaviour and their connection to rulers – will be common themes in later chapters.

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[259] A large evergreen tree in the laurel family native to East Asia and found in the Jiangnan region in China. While it usually means camphor, some texts note that it may be a camphor tree or a *chenmu* 枕木, the differences between the two only being visible after the trees reach seven years of age (see above). The important qualities appear to be that the tree is evergreen and large, this latter quality being particularly associated with the character *zhang* 章, which in other contexts can mean large timber or, later, as a measure word for large trees. I note here that this tree is suited to a subtropical climate, which we would expect to find in the south, not the east.
[260] The concept of the Nine Regions is associated with Zou Yan and Yu the Great.
[261] Hargrave, "Pillars of the Nine Continents", 55-56.

Chapter 2: Intertwining Trees

2.1.1. Introduction

As part of an evaluation of the intellectual heritage of archetype theory, the previous section discussed some of the difficulties in identifying what the term *fusang* refers to in textual sources. This problem also occurs in attempts to identifying *fusang* trees in iconography, as the example of a large tree depicted in carvings from the Wu family shrines illustrates. These carvings also include other depictions of trees as signs, along with other signs from the natural world. By first looking at the *fusang* in texts and iconography, this section will examine how certain interpretations of strange trees can be overapplied, leading to certain aspects of their strangeness being overemphasised. It then will introduce another strange arboreal phenomenon depicted in the Wu family shrines and sometimes integrated into explanations of the *fusang* tree: that of the auspicious sign of intertwining branches.[262] This phenomenon will be explored through descriptions of it in official histories and anomaly collections, as well as other textual sources of the period.

2.1.2. The large tree in the Wu Liang shrine

Built during the Eastern Han dynasty in what is now Jiaxiang County, Shandong Province, the stones that made up this site contain various illustrations that depict culture heroes, scenes of life, cosmological scenes, historical figures, and auspicious signs. Usually referred to in English by the name of one of its occupants – the recluse Wu Liang 武梁 (78–151) – rubbings of the stones circulated from the Song dynasty, and for around a thousand years the remains have been studied, first by antiquarians and then later by modern archaeologists.[263]

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[262] This phenomenon is described in Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China*, 111-112.
[263] The classic study in English is Wu Hung's *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*. For discussions of the authenticity of the Wu Liang shrines, see Nylan in "Addicted to Antiquity (*nigu*): A Brief History of the Wu Family Shrines" and the responses from Bai, "The Intellectual Legacy of Huang Yi and His Friends: Reflections on Some Issues Raised by *Recarving China's Past*" and Kuroda, "Are the Wu Liang Shrine Pictorial Stones Forgeries? Examining the Han-Era Evidence".

The extensive pictorial wall carvings include depictions of Confucius meeting Laozi 老子, Jing Ke's 荊軻 (d. 227 BCE) attempted assassination of the future First Emperor, culture heroes like the Three August and Five Thearchs (*san Huang wu Di* 三皇五帝),[264] among other human figures (many of whom are notable for their filiality), as well as auspicious flora and fauna, and important items like a tripod and a jade tablet. Many, but not all, of these wall carvings include cartouches that identify their subjects, removing some potential ambiguity in their interpretation. One unlabelled image, on the left-hand side of what has been called the "central pavilion" scene, includes a depiction of a large tree with a horse and chariot tied to its trunk and archers shooting at birds in its branches.[265] The lack of a cartouche for this image has resulted in several different interpretations of the scene it depicts, especially regarding the identity of the tree.

Probably the most common interpretation of this tree identifies it with a tree called *fusang*, which as has been noted is itself is of somewhat uncertain identification.[266] The name *fusang* appears in texts from the Warring States onwards and is commonly identified as a mulberry tree that is associated with a legend that describes ten suns (sometimes taking the form of birds) that were shot down by Archer Yi.[267] The appearance of archers and birds in the scene seems to confirm this impression. Moreover, the poem *Lisao* 離騷 (usually translated as "Encountering Sorrow")[268] from the *Chuci* 楚辭 (*Elegies of Chu*) contains the lines:

> 飲余馬於咸池兮，總余轡乎扶桑。
>
> 折若木以拂日兮，聊逍遙以相羊。[269]
>
> I watered my dragon steeds at the Pool of Heaven

[264] Also translated as the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, e.g., in Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 87.
[265] Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 56-65, 145-148.
[266] I will leave the term *fusang* untranslated for the moment. Anne Birrell has translated *fusang* as "Leaning Mulberry" (*Chinese Mythology*, 234), but this literal interpretation reflects a tendency in Birrell's work to assume that the Chinese characters that make up names were always chosen for their semantic rather than phonetic aspects (on this point see Campany, review of Fracasso and Birrell, 179; for the phonetic aspects of *fusang* see Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*, 27). Strassberg also translates it as "the Supporting-Mulberry Tree", *A Chinese Bestiary*, 209.
[267] See Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*, 27-56.
[268] Nicholas Morrow Williams translates it as "Sublimating Sorrow", *Elegies of Chu*, 3.
[269] *Chuci buzhu*, 1.27-28.

And tied their reins up to the Fusang tree

I broke a sprig of the Ruo tree to strike the sun with

First I would roam a little for my enjoyment.[270]

The poem does not mention the ten suns being shot down by Archer Yi,[271] but the appearance of a horse tied to the tree does appear to support claims that the Wu Liang shrine tree is a *fusang*. A *fusang* is also mentioned in another poem in the *Chuci*, the "Eastern Lord" poem from the "Nine Songs" (*jiuge* 九歌):

曒將出兮東方，照吾檻兮扶桑。

撫余馬兮安驅，夜皎皎兮既明。[272]

With a faint flush I start to come out of the east,

Shining down on my threshold, Fusang.

As I urge my horses slowly forwards,

The night sky brightens, and day has come.[273]

In the *Lisao*, the appearance of another tree, a *ruomu* 若木, potentially connects it to a cluster of other stories, with Sarah Allan in particular hypothesising a connection between accounts of these trees and sun-related myths.[274]

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[270] I have here used the translation from Hawkes, *Songs of South*, 73. This is also discussed in Erickson 'Money Trees of the Eastern Han Dynasty', 11. Williams translates *fusang* as "Sunrise Mulberry" and the Ruo tree as "Dimming Wood" whose branch is used "to block the sun", *Elegies of Chu*, 9. See also Owen, "Reading the 'Li sao'", 288.
[271] Nevertheless, Yi does appear in the previous section as "a dissolute man who overindulged in hunting" who shot "the great boar", translation from Williams, *Elegies of Chu*, 7.
[272] *Chuci buzhu* 2.74.
[273] Translation from Hawkes, *Songs of South*, 113. See also Williams, *Elegies of Chu*, 31; Owen, "Reading 'Jiu ge'", 381-382.
[274] Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*, 27-56.

An early appearance of the term *fusang* is in the *Shanhai jing*, where it is described as being located in a place whose name means "boiling valley" (*tanggu* 湯谷) and is there place where the ten suns are "bathed" (*yu* 浴), making a strong connection between the name of this tree and the story of the suns.[275] In the *Shizhou ji*, however, the *fusang* is glossed as having "leaves like a mulberry tree" (*ye si sangshu* 葉似桑樹), which does suggest it is not precisely a mulberry, but merely resembles one.[276]

Another similar account appears in the "Celestial Patterns" (*Tianwen xun* 天文訓) section of the *Huainanzi*, which John Major et al. translate as:

> 日出於暘谷，浴於咸池，拂於扶桑，是謂晨明。[277]

> The sun rises up from the Bright Valley, bathes in the Pool of Xian, and rests in the Fusang Tree. This is called Dawn Light.[278]

There are some minor differences, such as the valley being designated with the phonetically and graphically similar "bright" *yang* 暘 instead of "boiling water",[279] but the passages are clearly related. In a commentary Gao You glosses *fumu* as *fusang*, connecting it to the Boiling Valley.[280] The *fumu* also appears in the *Shanhai jing*, where it is described as spreading out three hundred *li* and having leaves like those of a mustard plant (*jie* 芥).[281] In Wang Yi's commentary to the *Lisao*, he describes the *fusang* as "the tree where the sun shakes" (*ri suo fu mu ye* 日所拂木也). Here we see the use of the word *fu* 拂, which has been translated as "rests" by Major et al. As noted in the previous section, elsewhere in the *Huainanzi* a tree called *fumu* 扶木 is described being in the place where the sun shines (*ri zhi suo fei* 日之所曊). The graph that is used for "shines" is *fei* 曊,

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[275] *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 4.231; Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*, 28. See the previous section for background on this text.
[276] For a study of this text, see Smith, "Record of the Ten Continents".
[277] *Huainanzi jiaoshi*, 3.347.
[278] Translation from Major, Queen and Meyer, *The Huainanzi*, 130.
[279] It is probable that this is merely a graphical variation or scribal error, see *Huainanzi jiaoshi*, 3.362-663, n. 55.
[280] He also links the passages from the *Huainanzi* and the *Shanhai jing*, see Ho, "Gao You yin Shanhai jing kao", 29.
[281] *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 9.302.

which is visually similar to *fu* 拂, and so both graphs could be being used to write the same word with the meaning "shine," given the other textual similarities.

These associations between the *fusang* and *fumu* trees with suns and the east have been connected to claims that the graph *dong* 東 ("east") depicts the sun rising behind a tree.[282] While later forms of the graph may suggest this, analysis of oracle bone inscriptions does not support such an interpretation of the graph, with the most common explanation being that it depicted a bag tied at both ends and was used as a phonetic loan for the word for east.[283] Not having access to earlier forms of the writing system caused errors to be introduced even into the work of the most talented scholars, such as Xu Shen. The misunderstanding of the graph 東 was compounded by Xu Shen's inaccurate explanation for graph *sang* 桑 ("mulberry"), which he claimed was composed of *ruo* 叒 and *mu* 木, when it was in fact originally a picture of a tree and is unrelated to 叒.[284] Xu Shen further explained that 叒 was "the *fusang* where the sun ascended when it first goes east to the Boiling Valley" (*ri chu chu dongfang tanggu suo deng fusng* 日初出東方湯谷所登榑桑),[285] thus connecting mulberries with the sun, as well as to the story of the Boiling Valley specifically.[286] Unfortunately this also does not fit with the evidence, and as Chi Hsiu-Sheng 季旭昇 has pointed out, there is no textual evidence for this usage of *ruo* 叒.[287] By the Warring States, the graph 東 had already taken a form that could be confused with being a combination of those for sun and tree, so it is possible that this interpretation was available from then onwards.[288] Explanations of these graphs drew upon accounts of a tree called *fusang*, and then these explanations were themselves later used when describing the variations in accounts of the *fusang* tree, expanding their scope in the process.

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[282] See for instance Allan, *Shape of the Turtle*, 27-29, 47-50.
[283] See Chi, *Shuowen xinzheng*, vol. 1, 491-492. Jonathan Smith has suggested that the graph may have depicted a kind of gnomon, although this has not gained wide acceptance, see Smith, "Dōng 'East' and the Chinese Indian Circle".
[284] The graph 叒 is not seen in ancient texts, and probably came about as part of analysis of the graph *ruo* 若, see Chi, *Shuowen xinzheng*, vol. 1, 496. Allan provides a concise summary of these issues, but ultimately argues for Xu Shen's interpretation, *Shape of the Turtle*, 47-50.
[285] This graph *fu* 榑 is a phonetic variant.
[286] Hao Yixing 郝懿行 (1757-1825) for instance links the *fumu* mentioned in the *Shanhai jing* to Xu Shen's explanation of 叒, see *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 9.302.
[287] Chi, *Shuowen xinzheng*, vol. 1, 496.
[288] The graph 東 was usually associated with the phonetically similar *dong* 動 ("movement"), including by Xu Shen, see *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 240. For other examples see *Baihutong shuzheng*; *Hanshu* 21a.971. The weft text *Shangshu dazhuan* also makes this connection, see *Taiping yulan* 18.92.

To return to the large tree in the Wu Liang shrine, there are some issues with the connection made between it and the word *fusang*. As Kenneth Brashier has noted, there are elements in the image that do not fit with the story of Archer Yi shooting down nine of the ten suns (or birds), namely that there is more than one archer and the chariot and horse would appear superfluous to the story.[289] Secondly, much of the images on the Wu Liang shrines have cartouches that label the named individuals or things depicted, but while similar figures like Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa 女媧 are labelled, this supposed depiction of Archer Yi is not. It is difficult to identify unlabelled images of trees merely by looking at the form they take, as there is little evidence that images of plants were necessarily made based on careful observation of the natural world, and were rather more often simply idealised depictions not meant to closely correspond with botanical reality.[290]

Another interpretation of the scene is that its depiction of archery and a tied-up horse it meant to evoke leisure, a type of scene that is found in many Han tombs.[291] Scenes of archery in Han tombs have also been explained by Xin Yixiang 信立祥 as depicting the descendants of the occupants hunting animals to be given to the occupants in sacrifice at the tomb. Moreover, Xin regards the trees in images of this type not as representing divine trees (*shenmu* 神木), but ordinary trees planted at the tomb site.[292] The planting of trees on tombs will be examined in the next chapter.

It may be useful to compare this large tree next to the central pavilion scene with another depiction of a tree in the Wu Liang shrines. This image illustrates the story of the chaste wife of Qiu Hu of Lu 魯秋胡, who, immediately after getting married was sent away to serve as an official. Five years later he returned, and on his way back came across a woman picking mulberry leaves. He tries to seduce her, but the woman resists his advances. Qiu Hu goes home, only to

[289] Brashier, "Symbolic Discourse in Eastern Han Memorial Art," 281-283.
[290] Brashier, "Symbolic Discourse in Eastern Han Memorial Art," 292-293.
[291] Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寬 regards these scenes as relating to Xiwangmu, see Sofukawa, "Kandai seki niokeru nobori sen no keifu", although Xin Lixiong does not agree, Xin, *Handai huaxiangshi zonghe yanjiu*, 210-213. Similar scenes also contain monkeys, see Hsing, "Handai huaxiang zhong de shejue shehou tu". For an overview of debates on the interpretation of these scenes, see Jin, "Han huaxiang zhong shuxia sheniao tu kaobian".
[292] Xin, *Handai huaxiangshi zonghe yanjiu*, 93-102, 210-213.

discover that the woman is his wife.[293] The association of mulberry picking and sericulture with women goes back to at least the Shang dynasty and the more chaste the woman, so it was thought, the better quality the resulting silk would be.[294] Part of a section of the Wu Liang shrines devoted to eminent women depicts Qiu Hu on the left, a bindle on his back indicating that he is travelling, and his wife on the right picking the leaves of a plant. Both figures are clearly labelled.[295] While the plant itself is not labelled, due to the textual stories and cultural background of mulberry cultivation, it can only be a mulberry tree. It lacks the impressive, intertwined branches of the central pavilion tree, and is much smaller. There is also another tree with nine birds, archers, and a horse, but this one has two small figures at its base that resemble monkeys, and another bird standing on one leg beside the horse.[296] The presence of monkeys or ape-like figures in similar scenes have been interpreted as indicated leisure.

Brashier himself regards the central pavilion tree as depicting a *gantang* 甘棠, which is usually translated as sweet pear or birchleaf pear. He also cites a number of scholars who, by focusing on the pattern of its branches, interpret the tree as an illustrating the auspicious phenomenon of intertwining branches, commonly known as *mulianli* 木連理 in Chinese sources.[297]

As Brashier notes, there is another part of the Wu family shrines that depict a labelled *mulianli*, and it does not resemble the central pavilion tree designated *fusang*.[298] However, the term *lianli* likely does not refer to a specific tree or type of tree, but rather the intertwining behaviour itself. This section of the Wu Family shrines includes two ceiling slabs depicting numerous auspicious images, all of which have a brief cartouche that names what is being depicted, with some also including a slightly longer description. According to Wu Hung, only 24 can be reliably identified, which makes up probably less than half the original total. These signs include animals (including a dragon, a *qilin* 麒麟, birds, beasts, and fish), and objects (including a *gui* 圭 tablet, a headdress, a surging well, and a divine tripod). There are four plant omens: the calendrical plant called here

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[293] The main textual source for this story is Liu Xiang's 劉向 (77–6 BCE) *Biographies of Exemplary Women* (*Lienü zhuan* 列女傳) *Lienü zhuan buzhu* 5.207-210. For a translation see Kinney, *Exemplary Women of Early China*, 99-100.
[294] See Kuhn, *Spinning and Reeling*, 247-284.
[295] For a reconstruction of this scene, see Feng and Feng, *Shisuo* 3.48-49. See also Wu, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 254-256, 259.3
[296] See *Jinshisuo* 12.370b.
[297] Brashier, "Symbolic Discourse in Eastern Han Memorial Art," 284-285; Ruitenbeek, *Chinese Shadows*, 44; James, *A Guide to the Tomb and Shrine Art of the Han Dynasty*, 120.
[298] Brashier, "Symbolic Discourse in Eastern Han Memorial Art," 285, n. 6.

mingjia, a jade flower (*yuying* 玉英),[299] creeping grapevine (*juchang* 巨鬯),[300] and a pair of trees with intertwining branches.[301] Some of the texts on the cartouches of images of signs have been reconstructed by making reference to two later works: the history of the Liu-Song dynasty titled the *Songshu* 宋書 (*Book of Song*), completed by Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513),[302] and *Ruiying tuji* 瑞應圖記 (*Records and Charts of Auspicious Correspondences*) by Sun Rouzhi 孫柔之 (fl. ca. Western Jin).[303]

The cartouche on the image of the intertwining trees reads:

> 木連理，王者德純洽，八方為一家，則連理生。

> Trees Intertwining. Intertwining branches grow when a ruler's virtue is pure and harmonious, and when the eight directions are unified into a single family.[304]

This motif of intertwining trees can be seen on other wall carvings from the Han dynasty onwards, sometimes with cartouches that name them and sometimes without.[305]

As has been shown, identification of strange trees, and trees in general, can sometimes be difficult. This difficulty is not only present for modern academics. In pre-modern Chinese

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[299] See Wu, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 239.
[300] The image for this unfortunately does not survive. For the cartouche, see Wu, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 242. The *Songshu* calls it a grain (*he* 禾), *Songshu* 29.861.
[301] For an image of these slabs, which shows their damaged condition, see Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 75 (fig. 34). For close-up depictions, see pages 235-245. Wu has noted that while the first slab seems to only depict signs, some of the lower images on the second slab appear not the be auspicious signs.
[302] For more information on Shen Yue, see Mather, *The Poet Shen Yüeh (441-513): The Reticent Marquis* and *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature: A Reference Guide*, vol 2, 861-869. Dates are CE unless mentioned otherwise.
[303] This latter text has been lost, but fragments were compiled by Pi Xirui 皮錫瑞 (1850–1908) in the Qing dynasty. Sometimes titled simply *Ruiying tu* 瑞應圖 (*Charts of Auspicious Correspondences*), which is a title used by many texts. Most of the surviving text comes from quotations preserved in the *Taiping yulan*. See *Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu*, vol. 3, 376-377.
[304] Translation modified from Wu, *The Wu Liang Shrine*, 240. Note that Wu's transcription is missing the character 純.
[305] See Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 70, 99, 111-112; Wang and Peng, "Yousheng rusu: Handai lianlishu tuxiang yanjiu"; Yang and Yang, "Han huaxiangshi zhong shu tuxiang jiqi xiangzheng yiyi tanxi"; Yuan, "Huaxiangshi zhong de shu tuxiang yanjiu"; Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China*, 101-102, 125-127.

sources which record the strange behaviour of trees, explanations are sometimes given for what they mean. Interestingly, these explanations are not always consistent, suggesting that while there may have been a general view that bizarre natural phenomena were significant in some way, and thus worthy of being recorded in writing, what that significance was exactly remained to some degree up for discussion.

The next section will examine records of plant signs, many of which appear in the official histories. In particular, it will focus on one type of strange tree, or to put it another way, a particular type of strange arboreal behaviour: the motif of intertwining trees.

2.2.1. The Motif of Intertwined Trees

Trees growing together in some way, either their branches or their roots or their trunks, is usually interpreted as an auspicious sign in Chinese texts. A quotation from Jing Fang's 京房 (78–37 BCE)[306] *Yichuan* 易傳 (*Tradition of the Changes*)[307] preserved in the *Yiwen leiju* says,

> 木同本異枝，其君有慶，鄰邑來附者，則木生於君屋，上及朝廷。[308]

> [When] a tree has the same trunk and different branches, then the ruler will have favour from Heaven, and neighbouring districts will submit to him. When trees grow in the residence or courtyard of the ruler, that ruler is a sage.

A weft text on the *Liji* titled *Jimingwei* 稽命徵 *(Examination of [Heavenly] Commands and Signs*) likewise says,

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[306] Jing Fang's work was well-known for dealing with ideas associated with the five phases, see Nielsen, *A Companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology*, 129-32; Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin Periods (221 BC - AD 24)*, 199-200; Harper, "The Textual Form of Knowledge: Occult Miscellanies in Ancient and Medieval Chinese Manuscripts, 4th Century BCE to 10th Century CE", 317.
[307] Fragments from this text have been compared to unearthed manuscripts in Harper, "Occult Miscellanies in Ancient and Medieval Chinese Manuscripts", 316-318.
[308] *Yiwen leiju* 98.1699. Amended based on the version in the *Taiping yulan* 873.3874.

王者得禮之宜，則宗廟生祥木。[309]

[When] the ruler obtains the appropriateness of ritual, then auspicious trees will grow in the ancestral temple.

Images and descriptions of this phenomenon usually appear in the context of the interpretation of signs, where intertwined trees were merely one of the many unusual occurrences that were regarded as being a reaction to events in the human world and/or portents of future events. The phenomenon of auspicious signs can already be seen in oracle bone texts, and they continued to be recorded and interpreted in later texts, which greatly expanded from the Han dynasty onwards.[310] In the section on the Fengshan 封禪 sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, the *Baihutong* 白虎通 (*Discussions of the White Tiger Hall*)[311] makes this connection explicit when it says:

天下太平符瑞所以來至者，以為王者承統理，調和陰陽，陰陽和，萬物序，休氣充塞，故符瑞並臻，皆應德而至。[312]

The reason that auspicious omens appear when All Under Heaven is peaceful is because the ruler has control of governance. When yin and yang are in harmony the ten thousand

[309] Quoted in *Taiping yulan* 873.3874.
[310] There has been much research on signs or omens, especially during the Han dynasty. These include Bielenstein's "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Tsi'en-Han-shu" and "Han Portents and Prognostications"; Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation: The Case of the Han Wudi 漢武帝 Period (141-87 B.C.)"; Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 120-128; Eberhard, "Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers"; Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*; Yang, "Politics of Omenology in Chengdi's Reign"; Nylan, "On *Hanshu* 'Wuxing zhi' 五行志 and Ban Gu's Project"; Espesset, "Sketching out Portents Classification and Logics in the Monographs of Han Official Historiography".
[311] Attributed to Ban Gu. Traditionally, this text is regarded as a record of a meeting in the year 79 at the White Tiger Hall (*Baihu guan* 白虎觀) to discuss interpretations of the Five Classics. For background see Jian, "The Way to the White Tiger Hall Conference"; Loewe, "*Pai hu t'ung*," 347-356. Tjan Tjoe Som 曾珠森 (1903–1969), contra William Hung (Hong Ye 洪業, 1893–1980), regarded the transmitted text as deriving from the actual discussions, Tjan, *Po Hu T'un*, 63-66.
[312] *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.283.

> things will be in sequence, and felicitous *qi* will be pervasive. Therefore, when auspicious signs appear at once, they all arrive in response to virtue.[313]

This perspective is often referenced, albeit not always directly, when texts try to explain the connection between auspicious signs and the ruler. Indeed, very similar language to this section of the *Baihutong* can be seen in the cartouches of the Wu Liang shrines, lists of auspicious events in official histories, and in surviving quotations from weft texts.

Unusual events were probably recorded for several reasons. One of these was that certain unusual phenomena were understood to be signs – reactions in the natural world to human behaviour. If possible, these auspicious signs were taken to the court and presented to the emperor as proof of his proper rule. Records of such signs sometimes were included in the official histories, where they were arranged by type, noting where and when they occurred, and given a brief description. The motif of intertwining trees is only one such auspicious sign, and first appears in texts and iconography in the Han dynasty.

The occurrence of this motif and its interpretations can illustrate different perspectives in Early and Medieval China on the natural world and the relationship between it and human beings. Like many (but not all) natural signs or omens, this phenomenon can occur in nature. Known as inosculation or anastomosis or simply natural grafting, it occurs when over time the branches, roots, or trunks of two trees rub together until their vascular systems are joined.[314] It is plausible that the motif of intertwining trees found in iconography and texts was inspired by sightings of this natural phenomenon. Natural grafting is less common in branches than in roots, but the former would be more visible when it did occur, and indeed most descriptions of intertwining trees appear to refer to branches. It should be noted however that other natural signs cannot be rationalised in this way, and just as we must be careful not to impose onto our sources a separation between the natural world and the strange, so we must be careful not to separate phenomena we may regard as plausible (according to our modern understanding of biology) from those we may regard as implausible. Intertwined trees were discussed alongside dragons,

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[313] See also the translation in Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 241. "Virtue" here refers to the charismatic power of the ruler. For further discussions of *de* 德, see Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*; 216-225; Nivison, *The Ways of Confucianism*, 17-30; Wang, "A Genealogical Study of De".
[314] Mudge et al., "A History of Grafting," 439-441, 445-449.

miraculous writing, and all manner of unlikely things. The appearance of dragons themselves, for instance, was also based partly on observation of natural phenomena, as fierce storms and floods were understood to be caused by dragons, and so accounts of extreme weather were often accompanied by reported sightings of them.[315] We may see what is essentially the same world with the same human eyes, but we do not necessarily understand what we see on the same terms as people in the past.

As mentioned, descriptions of plant signs or omens can be found in the official histories, which appear to have been recorded in order to be presented to the court. Exactly what English term to use to refer to them – omens, signs, or some other word – deserves some attention. Michael Loewe has made a distinction between omens, divination, and oracles in pre-modern China, with divination involving the search for answers to questions, oracles the observation of natural phenomena that were regarded as felicitous auguries of the future, and omens the observation of natural phenomena that were regarded as infelicitous auguries of the future. Loewe gives the behaviour of wind and clouds as examples of oracles, and "the appearance and course of comets, earthquakes, the unexplained sound of voices, or the spontaneous uprooting of rocks and stones and trees" as examples of omens.[316] This distinction between oracles and omens is based on the fact that what Loewe calls oracles were regarded as indications that everything was happening as it should, and what he calls omens were precisely the opposite. While it is useful to bear this distinction in mind, I will simply refer to all natural phenomena that are interpreted as symptoms of something else as signs, as sometimes our sources suggest that the meaning of a sign is not clear and its implications a matter of debate.[317] While the word sign is more vague, it does not necessarily suggest a bad or good outcome as omen might, and so will be used more often in this study.

Signs regarding eclipses and other astronomical events have been the subject of some sinological discussion, with the accuracy of the available records receiving most of the attention. Wolfram Eberhard and Hans Bielenstein among others have argued that those records were manipulated

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315 For an examination of dragon sightings in a later period, see Brook, *The Troubled Empire*, 6-23.
316 Loewe, "China," 38-40.
317 Wang Chong makes interpretative inconsistencies a major part of his critique of omenology in the *Lunheng*., see Puett, "Listening to the Sages: Divination, Omens, and the Rhetoric of Antiquity in Wang Chong's Lunheng."

for political ends and that they are thus not always reliable.[318] These conclusions have been challenged in later studies by Martin Kern and David Pankenier.[319] False reports of signs, whether auspicious or inauspicious, could be punishable by death, and comparisons of estimates of solar events usually confirm the reliability of their records in Chinese sources.[320] Such a comparison is not possible with plant signs, but when they could be they were brought to the emperor, which would make their total fabrication less likely.[321] This does not mean, however, that descriptions of their behaviour should be taken as completely reliable, and in any case evaluating truth claims made by these sources regarding signs and unusual plant behaviour is not the focus of the present study. Moreover, regardless of their empirical status, they were recorded as part of larger historiographical projects that organised history around the court and focused on the activities of the elites in Chinese society, and these biases likely shaped descriptions of natural phenomena, especially when they behaved unusually.[322]

One text that was to exert a lasting influence on the interpretation of signs is Ban Gu's 'Treatise on the Five Phases' (*Wuxing zhi* 五行志), which is preserved in the *Hanshu*, instigating a form of treatise that would appear in many later histories.[323] This text describes the consequences of each of the Five Phases (or Agents)[324] losing their nature, and the shamefulness occurring in the Five Matters (or Duties) in different areas: demeanour, speech, sight, hearing, and thought (with another term augustness referring to shamefulness in them all).[325] The text describes each of these areas being disordered and the consequences of this. For the item on sight, the text reads,

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318 Eberhard, "The Political Function of Astronomy and Astrologers in Han China"; Bielenstein, "An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts'ien-Han-shu," 127-143.
319 Kern, "Religious Anxiety and Political Interest in Western Han Omen Interpretation"; Pankenier, "On the Reliability of Han Dynasty Solar Eclipse Records".
320 Pankenier, "On the Reliability of Han Dynasty Solar Eclipse Records", 201.
321 A later example of these types of signs being doubted appears in an anecdote from the *Chaoye qianzai* 朝野僉載 (*Court and Commons Equally Recorded*), compiled by Zhang Zhuo 張鷟 (660–732). In this anecdote, an unusual instance of cats being raised by dogs and dogs raised by cats was shown to be arranged by humans, and intertwining trees are included in a list of manmade auspicious signs, see *Taiping guangji* 238.1831.
322 See Lewis, *Writing and Authority*, 309-313.
323 For research on the *Wuxing zhi*, see Mansvelt-Belt, *Treatises of the Later Han, Chapter Six: The Five Phases*; Nylan, "On *Hanshu* 'Wuxing zhi' 五行志 and Ban Gu's Project"; Nylan, "The 'Treatise on the Wuxing' (*Wuxing zhi*)"; Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture*, 135-167; Espesset, "Sketching out Portents Classification and Logics in the Monographs of Han Official Historiography", 11-18.
For a translation see Eberhard, *Sternkunde und Weltbild im alten China.*
324 For this term, see Nylan, "*Yin-Yang*, Five Phases, and *Qi*".
325 This list is drawn from Espesset, "Sketching out Portents Classification and Logic in the Monographs of Han Official Historiography," 8. See also Mansvelt-Beck, *The Treatises of Later Han*, 131-141; Wang, *Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, 130-137.

> 《傳》曰：視之不明，是謂不悊，厥咎舒，厥罰恆奧，厥極疾。時則有草妖，時則有羸蟲之孽，時則有羊禍，時則有目疴，時則有赤眚赤祥。惟水沴火。[326]

> The *Tradition* says, "When sight is not clear, this is called not wise, its fault lies in laxity, its punishment is constant sweltering heat, its culmination is disease. Then at times there will be vegetable abnormalities, at times there will be plagues of wasps, at times there will be sheep calamities,[327] at times there will be eye convulsions, at times there will be red disasters and red auspicious omens. It is merely Water obstructing Fire.[328]

Previously, the treatise had explained vegetable abnormalities thusly: "In general, vegetative things and the like are called abnormalities. 'Abnormalities' are like 'new-born' and 'embryonic', in other words: still faint" (*fan caowu zhi lei wei zhi yao. Yao you aotai, yan shang wei* 凡草物之類謂之妖。妖猶夭胎，言尚微).[329] The rest of the abnormalities are then explained as being more and more developed. The treatise also connects unusual plant behaviour to incorrect human behaviour: "When punishments are not carried out then frost will not kill plants, just as [when] ministers give orders and deaths do not occur at their proper time, thus there will be vegetable abnormalities" (*zhu bu xing ze shuang bu sha cao, you chen xia ze sha bu yishi, gu you caoyao* 誅不行則霜不殺草，由臣下則殺不以時，故有草妖).[330]

While they continued to be collected and recorded, not all rulers thought that these signs should be taken seriously. Many years later, Emperor Taizong of Tang 唐太宗 (598–649) for instance ordered that only "great signs" (*darui* 大瑞), such as unicorns, phoenixes, tortoises, and dragons (*linfeng guilong* 麟鳳龜龍), should be reported to the throne, and then only their appearance and location – his reasoning being that dynasties succeed and fail due to the actions of humans, not

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326 *Hanshu* 27B2.1405.
327 Later explained in the treatise as referring to the theory that when sheep die in great numbers of disease during years of heats and droughts, they can become strange.
328 For another translation see Espesset, "Sketching out Portents Classification and Logic," 12-13.
329 As Espesset points out, the graph 夭 is being read as *ao* here rather than the more common *yao*, and appears due to it being a component of the graph *yao* 妖, Espesset, "Sketching out Portents Classification and Logic," 14.
330 *Hanshu* 27B2.1405.

due to Heaven and the portents it sends down.[331] Despite his scepticism – which includes cautions against the spreading of falsehoods – Taizong does not outright reject the practice of recording signs, something he shares with most sceptical evaluations of them.

As can be seen from Taizong's decree, there was a hierarchy of auspicious signs. In the treatise on officials (*baiguan zhi* 百官志) in the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 (*New Book of the Tang*), auspicious signs are listed by their importance:

> 凡景星、慶雲為大瑞，其名物六十四；白狼、赤兔為上瑞，其名物二十有八；蒼鳥、赤雁中瑞，其名物三十二；嘉禾、芝草、木連理為下瑞，其名物十四。[332]

> The spectacular star[333] and felicitous cloud are taken to be great signs, and there are 64 named ones; the white wolf and red rabbit are taken to be higher signs, and there are 28 named ones; the grey-green bird and the red goose are taken to be middle signs, and there are 32 named ones; the auspicious herb, the mushroom plant,[334] and intertwining trees are taken to be lesser signs, and there are 14 named ones.

Already we can see that the place of signs in the hierarchy could change according to different accounts. The *Tang liudian* 唐六典 (*Six Administrative Divisions of the Tang*),[335] a collection of administrative law, has a similar hierarchical list, but Li Linfu's 李林甫 (683–753) commentary

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331 *Tang huiyao* 28.619. See also Wechsler, "T'ai-tsung (reign 626-49) the Consolidator", 189. This is also the position advocated by Wang Chong (see below).
332 *Xin Tangshu* 46.1194.
333 Amended from "spectacular cloud" (*jingyun* 景雲), based on the commentary to the *Tang liudian* 4.114. In the *Songshu*, the spectacular star is described as being shaped like a half moon, *Songshu* 29.862. It also appears in the *Baihutong*, the *Huainanzi*, and the *Chunqiu fanlu* 春秋繁露 (*Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals*); *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.283; *Huainanzi jieshi* , 20.1373, 21.1453; *Chunqiu fanlu zhengyi* 4.101.
334 While I will use the term "mushroom" to translate *zhi* 芝, it should be noted that it actually covers a broader category of thing, and more correctly refers to abnormal secondary growths, thus it might be better translated as "excrescences". See Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 27.
335 This text is regarded as having a bias against Daoism and Buddhism in favour of Confucianism, see McMullin, "Confucianism: Tang (T'ang)", 144; Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History under the T'ang*, 101-103.

provides a more detailed enumeration of precisely what that list contains. While the present study is focusing specifically on plants, it is useful to see how they are arrayed with other signs:

> 大瑞謂景星、慶雲、黃星真人、河精、麟、鳳、鸞、比翼鳥、同心鳥、永樂鳥、富貴、吉利、神龜、龍、騶虞、白澤、神馬、龍馬、澤馬、白馬赤髦、白馬朱鬃之類，周匝、角瑞、獬豸、比肩獸、六足獸、茲白、騰黃、騊駼、白象、一角獸、天鹿、鱉封、酋耳、豹犬、露犬、玄珪、明珠、玉英、山稱萬歲、慶山、山車、象車、烏車、根車、金車、朱草、屈軼、蓂莢、平露、蓮甫、蒿柱、金牛、玉馬、玉猛獸、玉甕、神鼎、銀甕、丹甑、醴泉、浪井、河水清、江河水五色、海水不揚波之類，皆為大瑞。

> Great omens are: the spectacular star,[336] the felicitous cloud, the Perfected Person of the Yellow Star,[337] the River Essence,[338] the unicorn, the phoenix, the simurgh, paired-wing bird,[339] the same-heart bird, the eternal happiness bird,[340] the wealth and honour [bird],[341]

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336 In the *Engishiki* 延喜式 (Procedures of the Engi Era), produced in Japan during the Heian period 平安 (794–1185), this passage appears in fascicle 21, and the commentary glosses it as a "Virtue star, some are like a half moon, some are like a large star with a hole in the middle" (*Dexing ye, huo ru banyue, huo ru daxing er Zhong kong* 德星也，或如半月，或如大星而中空), *Engishiki* 21.1a. References to the *Engishiki* commentary note the fascicle, page, and sheet side. There is also a modern Japanese critical edition edited by Torao Toshiya 虎尾俊哉 (1925–2011), which also includes a Japanese translation, Torao, *Engishiki*, vol. 2, 644-655. Felicia Bock says the auspicious signs in this chapter of the *Engishiki* "are based on those listed in the ceremonial code of the T'ang", but the lists are essentially one and the same. See Bock, *Classical Learning and Taoist Practices in Early Japan*, 7.

337 This figure does not seem to appear elsewhere. The Yellow Star is a name sometimes used for the Northern Dipper (*beidou* 北斗). The *Engishiki* renders this name as "Yellow Perfected Person" (*Huang zhenren* 黃真人) and glosses it as "A golden person, also called a jade woman" (*jinren ye, you yue yunü ye* 金人也，又曰玉女也), *Engishiki* 21.1a. Torao regards it as referring to a figure (called a "Perfected Person" and a "golden person") from the time of the exalted rule of the Yellow Emperor who sailed in a royal pool, see Torao, *Engishiki*, vol. 2, 645; *Taiping yulan* 872.3868. For another instance of "golden person" see *Songshu* 29.853.

338 This is a fish-bodied deity of the Yellow River who in some accounts gave the river chart (*hetu* 河圖) to Yu the Great, the earliest appearance of this story is probably in the *Shizi* 尸子, *Shizi shuzheng*, 191; for a translation see Fischer, *Shizi: China's First Syncretist,* 130. In other accounts it is associated with the Warring States master musician Master Kuang 師曠, see for instance *Songshu* 29.866. Hejing has been identified as another name for the Count of the River (*hebo* 河伯), see Yuan, *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian*, 254 and Yoshikawa Tadao's entry on "Hebo" in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 277-278.

339 A bird of the south also called a *jianjian* 鶼鶼, it flies in pairs, each possessing one eye and one wing, *Erya zhushu* 7.217; *Engishiki* 1a-1b.

340 The *Engishiki* commentary glosses these two birds together as auguries of peace, *Engishiki* 21.1b.

341 This and the next bird are described by the *Engishiki* as having "the form of a bird with a beast's head" (*niao xing shou tou* 鳥形獸頭), *Engishiki* 21.644. Drawing on the Tang-era text *Treatise on the Auspicious Signs of Heaven and Earth* (*Tiandi ruixiang zhi* 天地瑞祥志), Torao further explains it as having feet like a *sushuang* 鷫鸘 bird – a creature similar to the phoenix – with a cow's head, *Engishiki*, 1271. For more information on this and the next bird, see Matsura, "Guanyu shoutou fenghuang 'jili, fugui': aoxiang yu luanshi de jiniao".

the auspicious and favourable [bird],[342] the divine tortoise, the dragon, the zouyu,[343] white marsh,[344] the divine steed, the dragon steed,[345] the marsh steed, the white horse with a long scarlet mane – of the white-horses-with-scarlet-manes type,[346] the encircling [beast],[347] the horn-shoot [beast],[348] the sagacious stag, the paired-shoulder beast,[349] the six-footed beast, the zibai [horse],[350] the galloping yellow [horse],[351] the tarpan [horse],[352] the white elephant,[353] the single-horned beast,[354] the heavenly deer,[355] the biefeng,[356] the

[342] Torao says this bird has the head of a *zhang* 獐, which is either a roe or river deer, and feet like the phoenix, *Engishiki*, 1271.
[343] The *Shuowen* describes this as a "white tiger with black stripes" (*baihu heiwen* 白虎黑文), *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 193. It also serves as a title of an official game warden, *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 2.118-120.
[344] For this creature, which was sometimes identified with the giant panda, see Harper, "A Chinese Demonography of the Third Century BC", 491 and Harper, "The Cultural History of the Giant Panda (Ailuropoda Melanoleuca) in Early China," 206.
[345] The *Engishiki* regards this and the next two items as glosses of the term "divine steed", and also lacks the phrase "of the white horses with scarlet manes type" (*baima zhuzong zhilei* 白馬朱鬃之類), *Engishiki* 21.1b.
[346] This line may be from a commentary that has found its way into the main text.
[347] The *Engishiki* renders this as 周币 and glosses it as a divine beast that understands the movements of the constellations, *Engishiki* 21.1b.
[348] A fabulous beast often described as being ox-like, see Yuan, *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian*, 202-203. Emending *duan* 端 for *rui* 瑞, which is supported by the *Engishiki*. For a description see *Songshu* 29.865.
[349] This creature is often described as being the product of a co-dependent relationship with two creatures called a *jue* 蟨 and a *qiongqiongjuxu* 蛩蛩駏驉, see Yuan, *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian*, 50, 373; *Erya zhushu* 7.217.
[350] A beast described as being like a white horse with saw-shaped teeth by the *Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書 (*Neglected Scriptures of Zhou*), or elsewhere in that text as a cow from Bactria 大夏, *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 7.846-847, 7.884-885. It appears to be related to the creature named *bo* 駮/駁 in *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 3.221-222; *Erya zhushu* 10.373.
[351] A divine horse (*shenma* 神馬), see *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 3.47. This item and the next do not appear in the list of the *Engishiki*.
[352] Kroll identifies this with the tarpan used by the nomads of Central Asia, and the "Northern Ocean" (*beihai* 北海) referred to as its location by the *Mountains and Seas* may refer to a number of northern bodies of water, including Lake Baikal, the Caspian Sea, or perhaps the Bohai Sea (*bohai* 渤海). It may be notable that the text describes this beast as being "like a horse in appearance" (*qi zhuang ru ma* 其狀如馬), rather than directly calling it a horse, see *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 3.221-222, *Erya zhushu* 10.373. It also appears in the *Yi Zhoushu*, where it is described as a tribute offered by the Yushi 禺氏, who may be the Yuezhi 月氏, *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 7.884.
[353] The *Engishiki* understands this as referring to the six-tusked white elephant that the Buddha's mother dreamed entered her womb, see Muller, "six tusked white elephant 六牙白象", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*; *Engishiki* 21.2a.
[354] The *Engishiki* describes this as having "the head of a unicorn and the body of a deer" (*lin shou lu xing* 麟首鹿形), *Engishiki* 21.2a. It also appears in the biography of Emperor Wu of Han in the *Shiji*. The emperor performs a suburban ceremony in Yong 雍, and obtained a single-horned beast which is described as resembling a roe deer (*pao* 麃), *Shiji* 12.457-458.
[355] For similar descriptions see *Songshu* 29.865, *Engishiki* 21.2a.
[356] Also written 鼜封. Described in the *Yi Zhoushu* as being like a swine (*zhi* 彘) with a head at its back and front, *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 7.855-857. Also appears as *bingfeng* 并封 and *pingpeng* 屏蓬 in the *Mountains and Seas*, which as Guo Pu notes are phonetically related, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 2.200-201, 11.343. According to Wen Yiduo 聞一多 (1899–1946), this name should be written *bingfeng* 并逢, as these characters have similar meanings (two people side by side and running into someone respectively), Wen, "Fuxi kao", 75-76.

qiu'er,[357] the leopard-dog,[358] the dew-dog,[359] the black jade tablet,[360] the bright pearl,[361] the flower of jade, the mountain declares: 'ten-thousand years',[362] the felicitous mountain, the mountain cart,[363] the simulacrum cart,[364] the crow cart, the root cart,[365] the metal cart,[366] the vermillion herb, the indicator plant, the calendar plant, peaceful dew,[367] the fan plant,[368] the wormwood pillar,[369] the metal ox,[370] the jade horse,[371] the jade wild beast,[372] the jade vat,[373] the divine tripod,[374] the silver vat, the cinnabar steamer,[375] the sweet liquor spring,[376] the coursing well,[377] the essence of the Yellow River, the Yangtze and Yellow rivers turning multi-coloured, the water of the oceans not swelling and the like, are all greater signs.

As the last line suggests, this long list only enumerates the highest level of signs. The list continues:

謂三角獸、白狼、赤羆、赤熊，赤狡、赤兔、九尾狐、白狐、玄狐、白鹿、白獐、白兕、玄鶴、赤烏，青烏、三足烏、赤鸑、赤雀、比目魚、甘露、廟生祥

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357 Also appears in the *Yi Zhoushu*, where it is described as having a body like a tiger or leopard, which it also eats, and it has a tail larger than its body, *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 7.847.
358 A *jiaoquan* 狡犬 ("crafty dog") is mentioned in the *Yi Zhoushu* and the *Shuowen*, where it is said to be an animal of the Xiongnu 匈奴, *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 7.888; *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng* 11.390.
359 See *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 1.851; *Bowu zhi jiaozheng* 3.36.
360 See note for "extending delight" below. Also appears in *Songshu* 29.851.
361 Mentioned in the *Baihutong*, see *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.285; Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 242.
362 A reference to an incident recorded in the *Hanshu* where Emperor Wu of Han ascended Mount Zhifu 之罘 and sailed the ocean, and then the mountain declares, "Ten-thousand years", see *Hanshu* 6.206-207.
363 According to a weft text on the *Liji* titled *Douweiyi* 斗威儀, it is a self-generating, self-propelling vehicle, *Yiwen leiju* 71.1235. See also *Songshu* 29.867.
364 Possibly the same as the mountain cart. Described as an essence of the mountain in *Songshu* 29.841.
365 The *Xiaojing yuanshenqi* says that this appears when virtue reaches the mountains, *Yiwen leiju* 71.1235. See also *Songshu* 29.848.
366 *Songshu* 29.841.
367 As noted previously, this is the name of a tree. Described as a plant that grows in courtyards and monitors the four directions, and if anywhere is heterodox, then it bends in that direction, see *Engishiki* 21.2a-2b.
368 Appears in the *Baihutong*, where it is written *shafu* 萐莆 (see previous section).
369 An auspicious plant associated with the Zhou dynasty, also called "artemisia palace" *haogong* 蒿宮, see *Da Dai liji jiegu* 8.152; *Songshu* 27.765.
370 Glossed as an auspicious vessel (or implement) (*qi* 器) in *Engishiki* 21.2b.
371 Another auspicious vessel, *Engishiki* 21.2b; *Songshu* 29.848.
372 An animal that eats *qi* and drinks dew, *Engishiki* 21.2b.
373 Like the next two vats, it is self-filling. *Songshu* 29.867.
374 *Songshu* 29.867.
375 *Songshu* 29.852
376 *Songshu* 29.866.
377 *Songshu* 29.863.

木、福草、禮草、萍實、大貝、白玉赤文、紫玉、玉羊、玉龜、玉牟、玉英、玉璜、黃銀、金籐、珊瑚鉤、駭雞犀、戴通璧、玉琉璃、雞趣璧之類，皆為上瑞。

Those called the three-horned beast, the white wolf,[378] the red bear,[379] the red puppy,[380] the red hare,[381] the nine-tailed fox,[382] the white fox,[383] the black fox, the white deer, the white river deer, the white rhinoceros, the black crane,[384] the red crow,[385] the blue-green crow, the three-footed crow,[386] the red swallow, the red sparrow,[387] the side-eyed fish,[388] sweet dew, the auspicious tree that grows in the courtyard,[389] the lucky herb,[390] the etiquette herb,[391] pond-lily fruit,[392] the large cowry,[393] white jade with red letters, purple jade, the jade sheep,[394] the jade tortoise, the jade pot,[395] jade inflorescence,[396] the jade pendant,[397] yellow silver,[398] the metal coffer,[399] the coral hook,[400] the "frightening

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[378] Mentioned as early as the *Guoyu*, and Wei Zhao's 韋昭 (204–273) commentary claims that it, along with the white dear, would be presented by the Quanrong 犬戎 people, *Guoyu jijie* 1.-10.
[379] This is depicted in the Wu Liang shrines, see Wu, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 239.
[380] The *Engishiki* commentary says that it has a horn like an ox and barks like a dog, *Engishiki* 21.2b-3a.
[381] Not to be confused with the name of Lü Bu's 呂布 (d. 198) horse.
[382] A similar beast is identified with this term by Guo Pu, see *Shanhai jingi jiaozhu* 1.5-6.
[383] Despite its name, this animal is described as being like a tiger or bear, and is elsewhere known as *pi* 貔 and *zhidi* 執夷, see *Erya zhushu* 10.363.
[384] Mentioned in a number of pre-Qin texts in an anecdote about the musician Master Kuang 師曠, see *Han Feizi jijie* 3.62-66.
[385] Associated with King Wu of Zhou, see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 13.682; *Shiji* 28.1366; *Lunheng jiaoshi* 3.124; *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 17.410.434.
[386] *Songshu* 29.841.
[387] Mentioned by Wang Chong as received by King Wen of Zhou, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 3.124.
[388] Probably a kind of flounder, see *Erya zhushu* 7.216-217; *Songshu* 29.860.
[389] Glossed as a red tree (*chimu* 赤木) in the *Engishiki* 21.648; see also *Taiping yulan*, 873.3874. This term appears in items preserved in *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 14.745-746; *Yiwen leiju* 82.1415, 88.1507; *Taiping yulan* 522.2374, 873.3874, 952.4226; *Taiping guangji* 406.3283, and is associated with correct ritual behaviours of the ruler.
[390] Also appears in the *Taiping yulan* (see previous section).
[391] Another name for the lucky herb.
[392] Mentioned in a story in the *Shuoyuan* – as one of a pair of omens explicated by Confucius – and described as being as large as a fist and as red as the sun. Translated by Henry as "duckweed bulb," which is unlikely as duckweeds are tiny free-floating plants that lack bulbs, see Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, 1087; *Shuoyuan xiaozheng* 18.465.
[393] See *Shangshu zhengyi* 18.278; *Erya zhushu* 9.334-335.
[394] *Songshu* 29.850.
[395] An item usually written *mou* 鍪.
[396] *Songshu* 29.851.
[397] Also mentioned in the *Shanhai jing* 2.192.
[398] Mentioned alongside "purple jade" *zise* 紫玉 in *Songshu* 29.864.
[399] Appears in the transmitted *Shangshu*, as well as in an unearthed text preserved in the Tsinghua University collection, see *Shangshu zhengyi* 13.185-189; Meyer, "Shu Traditions and Text Recomposition: A Reevaluation of Jinteng and Zhou Wu Wang you ji". See also *Songshu* 29.852.
[400] Appears in the weft text on the *Xiaojing* titled *Yuanshen qi* (see above). Also appears in *Songshu* 29.860.

chickens" rhinoceros [horn],[401] the daitong jade disc,[402] the jade liuli,[403] attracting-chickens jade disc and the like, are all higher signs.

謂白鳩、白烏、蒼烏、白澤、白雉、雉白首、翠鳥、黃鵠、小鳥生大鳥、朱雁、五色雁、白雀、赤狐、黃羆、青燕、玄貉、赤豹、白兔、九真奇獸、流黃出谷、澤谷生白玉、瑯玕景、碧石潤色、地出珠、陵出黑丹、威綏、延喜、福并、紫脫常生、賓連闊達、善茅、草木長生，如此之類，並為中瑞。

Those called the white dove,[404] the white crow,[405] the grey-green crow, the baize, the white pheasant, pheasants with white heads,[406] the kingfisher, the yellow swan, a small bird giving birth to a large bird, the vermillion goose, the multi-coloured goose, the white sparrow,[407] the yellow bear, the blue-green swallow, the black badger, the red leopard, the white rabbit, the strange beast of Jiuzhen,[408] sulphur appearing in a valley,[409] the marshes producing white jade, the light of gemstone jade, the gloss of cyan stone,[410] the ground producing pearls, mounds producing black cinnabar,[411] the awesome strap,[412] the extending delight [tablet],[413] the fortune side-by-side [herb],[414] the purple shedding

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401 A rhinoceros horn that emits light that frightens chickens. Appears in the *Chuci*, see *Chuci buzhu* 16.291. Williams simply translates it as "rhinoceros horn", *Elegies of Chu*. See also *Songshu* 29.867. Also called *tongtianxi* 通天犀, see *Baopuzi neipian jiaoyi* 17.312. The *Engishiki* regards this horn as of a piece with the next item, rendering it as *haijixi ji daitong* 駭雞犀及戴通, which Torao regards as sound, see *Engishiki* 21.3b; Torao, *Engishiki*, vol. 2, 1275-1276. The *Xiaojing yuanshenqi* also has *xijiao daitong* 犀角戴通, see *Kaiyuan zhan jing* 116.1101.

402 This follows the ordering of the *Tang liubian*.

403 According to the *Engishiki*, this should be *biliuli* 璧琉璃, *Engishiki* 21.3b.

404 According to Li Xian, this was an auspicious sign from the time of Cheng Tang, see *Wen Xuan*; see also *Songshu* 29.848.

405 Associated in the *Dongguan Hanji* with the appearance of sweet dew. Also appears in *Songshu* 29.841.

406 The *Xiaojing Yuanshen qi* says that when virtue reaches the birds and beasts, then pheasants heads are white, *Yiwen leiju* 917.4068. This appears to be a paraphrase from a longer passage in the *Baihutong*, see *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.284.

407 *Songshu* 29.843.

408 Jiuzhen is in modern-day Vietnam. This creature is mentioned in the *Hanshu*, where it is glossed by Jin Zhuo 晉灼 (fl. ca. 3rd century) as shaped like a colt, coloured like a unicorn, and the horn of an ox, *Hanshu* 8.259-260; *Engishiki* 21.1227.

409 Glossed as an essence of the earth in the *Engishiki* 21.3b.

410 Cyan stone is mentioned in the *Songshu* as something that appears when curious objects are cast aside, *Songshu* 29.867.

411 *Songshu* 29.867.

412 In the *Engishiki*, this item is preceded by the similar *weiwei* 威委 but with the latter glossed as a tree and the former as a herb along with the next item, *Engishiki* 21.4a. Either could potentially be a variant of the herb *weirui* 威蕤 ("sealwort"), which appears in *Songshu* 29.866.

413 Described as black jade tablet (*xuangui* 玄圭) associated with Yu the Great in a weft text on the *Shangshu* titled *Xuanjiling* 琁璣鈐, see *Yiwen leiju* 11.218; *Taiping yulan* 82.380.

414 *Engishiki* 21.4a.

[which] constantly grows,[415] the honoured intertwining and extensively sprouting [tree],[416] the excellent cogon grass, plants living long and the like, are all intermediate signs.

謂秬秠、嘉禾、芝草、華蘋、人參生、竹實滿、椒桂合生、木連理、嘉木，戴角麈鹿、駁鹿、神雀、冠雀、黑雉之類為下瑞。[417]

Those called the black broomcorn,[418] the auspicious grain, the mushroom plant,[419] flowering-peace,[420] ginseng growing,[421] bamboo fruiting fully, Sichuan pepper and cassia growing together, trees intertwining, the auspicious tree, the doe with horns, the dappled deer, the divine sparrow,[422] the stork,[423] the black pheasant and the like, are all lesser signs.

This list gives an idea of the range of auspicious phenomena, containing some that we have encountered already. The presence of objects that are usually considered manmade (jewellery, vessels, wells, and so on) illustrate that what counted as natural things, at least when it came to

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415 Elsewhere understood as the name of a flowering plant, see Xu "Apocrypha and Literary Rhetoric of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasty Periods", 152-153. However, based on a weft text titled *Lidou weiyi* 禮鬥威儀, it may refer to the rare phenomenon of purple bamboo, see *Yiwen* leilu . Another possibility is that it is related to the *zida* 紫達 mentioned in *Songshu* 29.866.

416 In the *Engishiki*, this appears as *binlianda* 賓連達, *Engishiki* 21.4a. On its own, *binlian* appears in the *Baihutong*, where it is described as a tree that appear indoors when royal succession is regular. It is described as having interconnecting branches, which mimic royal succession, *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.286; Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 242. See also note on the "purple sprout" in the previous section.

417 *Tang liudian* 4.114-115.

418 These graphs have been discussed in the previous section. For more details see Shirai, *Shokubutsu katanari kō*, 30-31; Hino, *Shokubutsu kaii densetsu shinkō*, 17-19.

419 As noted in the previous section, *zhi* is not quite the same as "mushroom". This is illustrated by the commentary in the *Engishiki*, which reads "It is shaped like coral, and its branches and leaves are intertwined. Some are vermillion and some are purple, some are black and some are gold coloured, and some change colour according to the four seasons. It is said that they flower thrice a year, and if eaten it extends life" (*xing si shanhu, zhiye lianjie, huo dan huo zi, huo hei huo jinse, huo sui sishi bianse, yiyue yi nian san hua, shi zhi ling meishou* 形似珊瑚，枝葉連結。或丹或紫，或黑或金色，或隨四時變色。一云一年三華，食之令眉壽). This description, while apparently based on observation, also uses plant terminology (branches, leaves, flowering) to describe something that is not a plant. This may explain why it is referred to as a "herb" in the main text.

420 As in the previous section, this term is written 華平 in *Engishiki* 21.4a. Described as flat or even in *Songshu* 29.861.

421 Another example of a plant known to botany that was nonetheless understood in ways at odds with modern science, such as being linked to a star in Ursa Major called *yaoguang* 搖光 or being described as crying like an infant, see *Taiping yulan* 991.4385.

422 Li Xian regards this as a phoenix.

423 Li Xian points out that this is another way to write *guanque* 鸛雀.

the rare and auspicious, does not necessarily conform to a modern conception of nature. The actual number of items does not quite fit the number given in the main text, with the number of higher signs being 32 instead of 28. 64, 32, and 28 are all auspicious numbers, with 64 being the number of hexagrams in the *Yijing* (*liushisi gua* 六十四卦), 32 being half of that, and 28 being the number of constellations (*ershiba xiu* 二十八宿), with 14 being half of that. Plant signs appear in each category, but make up over half of the lesser signs category, although that category does admittedly have the fewest items.

The main text of the *Tang liudian* says that great signs should be immediately reported to the emperor, and all civil and military officials are obliged to go to the palace to make their congratulations to him. At the end of the year, the rest of the signs will be presented together to the emperor by the Vice Director of the Bureau (*yuanwailang* 員外郎),[424] the relevant officials report to the ancestral temple, and all officials go to the palace to congratulate the emperor. If any bird and/or beast signs were captured alive, then they were to be released back into the wild. For signs that cannot be captured, such as intertwining trees and the like, after it had been verified that they were not false, a picture would be made of them. It is in this kind of context that the auspicious sign of intertwining trees usually appears in the official histories. The next section will examine this auspicious sign in more detail.

2.2.2. Trees Intertwining

When discussed in Chinese and Japanese scholarship, the term *mu lianli* is usually not glossed, but the structure of this phrase is worth addressing. Rather than being called *lianli mu*, "intertwining tree(s)", the most common form is *mu lianli*, "trees intertwining". While this may seem to be merely a small difference, it is semantically significant, as grammatically it is not the tree(s) that is being emphasized but the phenomenon of intertwining itself. Sometimes both the phenomenon of intertwining and the type of tree as given in a description, making this difference

[424] Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, 597.

explicit.[425] All of this illustrates that the phenomenon is not usually understood as referring to a specific type of plant (like say the calendar plant) but as a rare type of plant behaviour.[426]

As noted above, an illustration of the phenomenon of intertwining trees appears in the Wu Liang shrines. This motif also appears is other tomb iconography, albeit not always accompanied by a helpful cartouche confirming their identity.[427] Wang Yu 王煜 and Peng Hui 彭慧 have outlined general types of these images in tombs from the Eastern Han to the Wei-Jin period: those with labels and those without, and those that depict trunks that intertwine and those that depict branches that intertwine. As they point out, due to the weight given to written sources, scholars have tended to emphasise their role as auspicious signs and neglected their role as sites of transcendence from the mundane world.[428] As the present study is primarily based on written sources, an over-emphasis on auspicious signs may be difficult to avoid.

The phenomenon of intertwined trees is recorded in a number of official histories.[429] The term does not appear in the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Archivist*) or the *Hanshu*, but there are four *lianli* incidents recorded in the *Hou-Hanshu* 後漢書 (*The Book of the Later Han*),[430] and four in the *Jinshu* 晉書 (*The Book of Jin*).[431] The *Songshu* was the first official history to include a list of *lianli* incidents, which, like other records of anomalies, would usually consist merely of the year and location in which they occurred, but some also record the names of the people involved in a specific incident and/or the person who related the information about the anomaly.[432] The *Songshu* contains 112 of such incidents, collected in a treatise on auspicious signs (*furui* 符瑞), and

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425 See for instance *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng* 7.195.
426 This is not universally true however, as sometimes certain plants are described as growing like a *lianli*, for instance a prickly ash tree (*zhuyu shu* 茱萸樹) is so-described in *Jinshu* 28.909.
427 For a study of Han-era engravings of auspicious signs, including this one, see Tseng, *Picturing Heaven in Early China*, 89-149.
428 Wang and Peng, "Yousheng rusu: Handai lianlishu tuxiang yanjiu".
429 For a list of pre-Tang texts specifically dedicated to auspicious signs, see Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 87-88.
430 *Hou-Hanshu* 5.225; 5.239; 7.293; 60B.1980. There is also an incident recorded in the 17th year of the rule of Emperor Ming 明 of Han (28–75), where sweet dew descended and "tree branches turned towards the court [and] mushroom plants grow in front of the palace" (*shuzhi neifu, zhicao sheng dian qian* 樹枝內附，芝草生殿前), see *Hou-Hanshu* 2.121. This word *neifu* was later glossed by Li Xian as referring to *lianli*, see also *Taiping yulan* 873.3875.
431 *Jinshu* 28.859; 87.2264; 105.2747; 129.3194. The term is also mentioned incidentally in 6.147; 23.699; 28.909; 72.1901.
432 Tiziana Lippiello has studied the appearance of anomalous phenomena in the *Songshu* in the article "Why Was the Chinese Historian Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513) So Fond of Auspicious Signs and Prophecies?". See also Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 127-149.

then seven other incidents outside of the treatise.[433] The *Nan-Qishu* 南齊書 (*Book of the Southern Qi*) has 26,[434] and the *Weishu* 魏書 (*Book of the Wei*) has 91.[435] The *Liangshu* 梁書 (*The Book of the Liang*), the *Chenshu* 陳書 (*Book of the Chen*), the *Bei-Qishu* 北齊書 (*Book of the Northern Qi*), all lack a treatise section, and do not mention *lianli*. The *Sanguo zhi* 三國志 (*Records of the Three Kingdoms*), the *Zhoushu* 周書 (*Book of the [Northern] Zhou*), the *Nanshi* 南史 (*History of the Southern [Dynasties]*), and the *Beishi* 北史 (*History of the Northern [Dynasties]*) also lack a treatise section, but there is one mention of a *lianli* in the biography of Sun Quan 孫權 (182–252) in the *Sanguo zhi*,[436] one in the biography of Emperor Xiaomin 孝閔 (542–557) in the *Zhoushu*,[437] nine incidental mentions in the *Nanshi*,[438] and six in the *Beishi*.[439] The *Suishu* 隋書 (*Book of the Sui*), does contain a comprehensive section of treatises, but lacks a list of *lianli* incidents, although *lianli* are mentioned four times in the text.[440]

Of official histories outside the scope of the present study, the *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (*Old Book of the Tang*) only mentions the title of the poem *Mulianli song* 木連理頌 ('Ode to Trees Intertwining') in its bibliographic section,[441] as does the *Xin Tangshu*, along with three incidental mentions of *lianli*;[442] two incidental mentions in the *Jiu Wudaishi* 舊五代史 (*Old History of the Five Dynasties*),[443] one in the *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史 (*New History of the Five Dynasties*),[444] the *Songshi* 宋史 (*History of the Song*) has 46 mentions (not including titles of poems etc),[445] only one mention in the *Liaoshi* 遼史 (*History of the Liao*),[446] none in the *Jinshi* 金史 (*History of the Jin*), one in the *Yuanshi* 元史 (*History of the Yuan*),[447] and none in the *Mingshi* 明史 (*History of the Ming*)

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433 *Songshu* 16.439-440; 29.853-860; 32.939; 34.1007; 86.2191-2192.
434 *Nan-Qishu* 11.187; 18.359-360; 54.930; 54.940.
435 *Weishu* 4A.85; 4B.98; 112.2958-2963.
436 *Sanguo zhi* 47.1131.
437 *Zhoushu* 3.48.
438 *Nanshi* 2.60; 7.225; 25.686; 39.1001; 50.1244-1245; 74.1843; 75.1880; 76.1890.
439 *Beishi* 2.50; 2.57; 11.404; 86.2880; 100.3314-3315. There is also a mention of the title of Jia Yi's 賈誼 poem *Lianlishu fu* 連理樹賦 (Rhapsody on Intertwining Trees) in *Beishi* 26.962.
440 *Suishu* 1.13-14; 6.18; 73.1675. See also Nylan, "The 'Treatise on the Wuxing' (Wuxing zhi)".
441 *Jiu Tangshu* 47.2078.
442 *Xin Tangshu* 60.1619; 36.1194; 126.4424; 195.5590.
443 *Jiu Wudaishi* 31.431-432; 32.447-448.
444 *Xin Wudaishi* 63.788-789.
445 *Songshi* 14.268; 16.302; 63.1387-1396; 65.1416-1417; 128.1948; 138.3253; 138.3260; 142.3352; 146.3435-3436; 148. 3463-3464; 289.9695; 301.9993-9994; 456.13387; 456.13393; 456.13399. There are also mentions of flags with a *lianli* design in fascicle 147.
446 *Liaoshi* 13.144.
447 *Yuanshi* 194.4445.

This list is based on the use of a specific term (*lianli*), and so excludes descriptions of similar phenomena, such as when in one item recorded in the *Weishu* five branches are described as being interlinked (*wu zhi xianglian* 五枝相連).[448] That being said, from this list we can see that the *Songshu* and the *Weishu* have the most mentions of *lianli* incidents, and that there was a decline in records of these events from the histories of the Tang onwards. There are many possible reasons for this decline. One may simply be a change in attitudes towards recording strange incidents in general among compilers of state-sponsored histories. The Tang historian Liu Zhiji 劉知幾 (661–721) for instance was highly critical of treatises in the histories, especially those connected to "heavenly patterns" (*tianwen* 天文) and the "five phases" (*wuxing* 五行), which he regarded as extraneous and not useful – and he was especially critical of signs that either proved to be incorrect or had contradictory interpretations.[449]

As noted above, the first use of the term in an official history appear in the *Hou-Hanshu*. The chronologically first instance occurred during the reign of the Han Emperor An 安帝 (94–125). It is only a brief mention, and in its entirety reads,

> 東平陸上言木連理。[450]
>
> Dongpinglu[451] reported that trees intertwined.

[448] *Weishu* 112.2959.
[449] See Chaussende, "Treatises According to Tang Historian Liu Zhiji," 343-357. Chaussende also notes that the recording of omens in the histories declined after the *Songshi*. See also Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 126-127.
[450] *Hou-Hanshu* 5.225. The version of this item in the *Songshu* claims that it occurred in the first month of the third year of the Yuanchu 元初 reign of Emperor An (i.e. 116).
[451] Dongpinglu is in modern-day Pinglu county, in Yuncheng, Shanxi. In the *Songshu* record of this incident, Dongpinglu is rendered as Dongpingling 東平陵, *Songshu* 29.853.

Li Xian's comment on this item quotes from the mostly lost preface (*xuli* 序例) by the compiler of the *Hou-Hanshu* Fan Ye 范曄 (398–446),[452] which reads,

> 凡瑞應，自和帝以上，政事多美，近於有實，故書見於某處。自安帝以下，王道衰缺，容或虛飾，故書某處上言也。[453]

> As for auspicious responses,[454] up to Emperor He, government affairs were excellent and remained close to reality, and so [auspicious responses] were recorded as "manifesting in a certain place". After Emperor An, the kingly way was diminished, or perhaps even a sham, and so [auspicious responses] were recorded as "reports from a certain place".

In the *Hou-Hanshu*, auspicious phenomena like intertwined trees often appear in the context of "reports" (*shangyan* 上言) to the emperor. The above quotation shows that there was a connection, at least for Fan Ye, between governance and the location and manner of reporting of auspicious events. While Li Xian quotes him to give background on the term *shangyan*, Fan Ye's main point seems to be that when governance is good auspicious signs are close at hand, and when governance goes awry they appear away from the court.[455] Li Xian's comment notes that Dongpinglu is part of Dongpingguo 東平國, which was the Yanzhou 兗州 of Li's day, and is in modern-day Shandong.[456] The significance of these details appears to be that the intertwined trees did not appear at or near the court in Luoyang, but somewhere else.

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[452] See the special volume of *Monumenta Serica* 67.1 (2019) on Fan Ye and the *Hou-Hanshu*, especially the introduction by Béatrice L'Haridon and Hans Van Ess, "Fan Ye and the Hou Hanshu".
[453] Quoted in *Hou-Hanshu* 5.225 fn. 1.
[454] I render *ruiying* 瑞應 as "auspicious responses" because in a passage in the *Hou-Hanshu* discussing the duties of the Director of Archives (*Taishi ling* 太史令), Fan Ye contrasts "auspicious responses" with "disastrous anomalies" (*zaiyi* 災異), saying whenever they occur in the state (*guo* 國) they should be recorded (*Hou-Hanshu* 115.3572). For a discussion of the meaning of the title Director of Archives, as well as a review of alternative translations, see the introduction to the edited volume by Stephen Durant et al., *The Letter to Ren An and Sima Qian's Legacy*, 18-21. According to that introduction, "Director of Archives" is Michael Loewe's translation, but the editors do not provide a reference for this and I have not been able to find the term in his work. At least until 2006's *The Government of the Qin and Han Empires*, 24, Loewe was using "Director of Astronomy". In 2016's *Problems of Han Administration*, 113 – published the same year as the *Letter to Ren An* volume – Loewe does not translate the title, opting merely to transliterate it in *Hanyu pinyin*.
[455] For more background see Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 50-51.
[456] See also *Zhongguo lishi dacidian: lishi dili juan*, 208; *Hanshu* 28b.1637.

Emperor An nominally reigned from 106 to 125, but he became emperor as a child and Dowager Deng 鄧綏 (81–121), wife of the late Emperor He 和 (79–106), ruled in his stead until her death, even after he came of age in the year 109. She personally selected him to succeed Emperor He after the latter's son Liu Long 劉隆 (105–106) died in infancy. There are several reasons why Fan Ye may have regarded his rule as the beginning of the decline, one being that under his reign the Academy ceased to function and went into disrepair, although it was eventually restored under Emperor Shun. More importantly perhaps is that Dowager Deng held much of the real power behind the throne.[457] Indeed, there was also a presence behind the thrown of Emperor He, in this instance Dowager Dou 竇 (d. 97, personal name unknown), wife of Emperor He's father, Emperor Zhang 章 (56–88).[458] It is probably not a coincidence that the two Eastern Han emperors singled out by Fan Ye as marking the end of good governance and the beginning of the decline respectively were both seen as subordinate to powerful women.

Li Xian's citation of Fan Ye seems to be in part a rationalisation either of why intertwined trees could appear during the reign of Emperor An, or why the phenomenon should appear away from the court, or both. As noted above, this is the first, chronologically speaking, of the records of intertwining trees in the *Hou-Hanshu*, so it is clear that Fan Ye was not thinking of that specific phenomenon appearing during the reigns of previous emperors.

Auspicious signs in official histories appear to be usually located around the person of the emperor. This is not always the case, however. Both the *Shiji* and the *Hanshu* note that during the reign of Emperor Wen, a yellow dragon appeared in Chengji 成紀, in modern-day Gansu 甘肅.[459] Emperor Wen appears to take this as a sign that sacrifices to the suburbs should be attended to, as he calls upon his subordinates to deliberate on them as a result. There is more context to this event in the treatise on sacrifices to the suburbs (*jiaosi zhi* 郊祀志), which relates that Gongsun Chen 公孫臣 (fl. ca. 166 BCE) of Lu 魯 predicted that a yellow dragon would be seen based on his assertion that the virtue *de* 德 of the Han dynasty was Earth *tu* 土 in Five Phases cosmology. This put him at odds with Zhang Cang 張蒼 (d.152 BCE), who regarded the

[457] See *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 1, 304-305; Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 139.
[458] For an overview of these events, see de Crespigny, *Fire over Luoyang*, 114-122, 127-134, 170-177, 199-206.
[459] *Shiji* 10.430; *Hanshu* 5.127; *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 208; Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 40; Dubs, *The History of the Former Han Dynasty*, vol. 1, 258.

virtue of Han to be Water *shui* 水, but the appearance of the yellow dragon in Chengji seems to have shown that Gongsun Chen was correct, although his proposals were not followed.[460]

In his chapter on "Investigating Signs" (*yanfu* 驗符) in the *Lunheng* 論衡, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97) addresses this issue of the distance of signs. During the reign of Emperor Xuan 宣 (91–48 BCE), a phoenix (*fenghuang* 鳳皇)[461] came down to Pengcheng 彭城.[462] When this was reported to the emperor, he called upon his Palace Attendant (*shizhong* 侍中)[463] Song Wengyi 宋翁一, who said that as this phoenix did not appear in the capital and instead in distant Pengcheng, it cannot be accepted as an auspicious sign and is as if it never appeared in the first place. The emperor disagrees, noting that since all is united as one household under Heaven, Pengcheng and the capital are essentially the same.[464] Wang Chong then endorses this principle of distance being irrelevant when it comes to the domain of the emperor.[465] While there existed an assumption that auspicious signs should appear physically close to the ruler, the united territory of All Under Heaven could collapse binaries between near and far, and the appearance of auspicious signs are testament to that transcending power.

To return to intertwining trees, the 'Treatise on Auspicious Signs' (*furui zhi* 符瑞志) chapter of the *Songshu* is similar to the reconstructed cartouche of the Wu Liang shrine, although slightly different. It reads:

> 木連理，王者德澤純洽，八方合為一則生。[466]

[460] *Hanshu* 25a.1212-1213. Jia Yi made a similar suggestion in 180 BCE, but these ideas would only gain official approval in 104 BCE, see Loewe, "Water, Earth and Fire: The Symbols of the Han Dynasty," 64.
[461] This translation is made of convenience, and not to suggest that this bird is identical to the bird of Greek myth.
[462] Became a district *xian* 縣 in the Qin, located in modern-day Xuzhou, in Jiangsu Province, *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 883.
[463] Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, 423.
[464] For a translation see Forke, *Lun Heng*, vol. 2, 217.
[465] *Lunheng* 19.842. It is notable that Wang Chong does not dispute any of the omens discussed in this chapter, and in fact appears to tacitly endorse them.
[466] *Songshu* 29.853.

> Trees Intertwining. They grow when a ruler's abundant virtue is pure and harmonious, and when the eight directions are united as one.

A quote from He Fasheng's 何法盛 (fl. Liu-Song) *Jin zhong zhengxiang shuo* 晉中興徵祥說 (*Explanations of Auspicious Signs Flourishing During the Jin*)[467] preserved in the *Yiwen leiju* expands on this line, saying, "Trees that intertwine are a humane tree; sometimes different branches come round together, sometimes two trees grow together" (*lianli zhe, renmu ye, huo yizhi huanhe, huo liang shu gonghe* 連理者，仁木也，或異枝還合，或兩樹共合) and then goes onto to record some incidents.[468]

A cause-and-effect relationship between the behaviour of the ruler and the appearance of this and other signs is common. A surviving quote from a now lost Han-era weft text on the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (*Classic of Filial Piety*) called the *Yuanshen qi* 援神契 (*Contract for Spirit Assistance*) reads, "Once virtue extends to plants, then trees will intertwine" (*de zhiyu caomu ze mu lianli* 德至於草木，則木連理).[469] Again, the association is made between virtue and a physical change in the natural world, in this case intertwining trees. But intertwining trees are not unique in this regard, as the *Yuanshen qi* is also quoted as saying "Once virtue extends down to the earth, then auspicious grain will grow" (*de xia zhi di, ze jiahe sheng* 德下至地，則嘉禾生), "Once virtue extends to plants, then the mushroom plant will grow" (*de zhi caomu, ze zhicao sheng* 德至草木，則芝草生), and "Once the elderly are well taken care of, then the mushroom plant will flourish" (*shan yanglao ze zhicao mao* 善養老則芝草茂). Mushrooms and intertwining trees that grow in response to human goodness are paired in Zuo Si's 左思 (250-305) poem *Weidu fu* 魏都賦 (Rhapsody on the Wei Capital), which reads, "Virtuous, and trees intertwine / Humane, and

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467 Probably a section of *Jin zhong xing shu* 晉中興書. He Fasheng and this text are mentioned in Yan Zhitui's 顏之推 (531–591) *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 (*Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*), are mentioned incidentally in the *Songshu*, and listed in the bibliographic section of the *Suishu*, see *Yanshi jiaxun jijie* 6.473-474, 520; *Songshu* 100.2465; *Suishu* 33.955. See also Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 125.

468 *Yiwen leiju* 98.1699-1700.

469 This text was used by Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 37) to legitimise his rule when he declared himself emperor (See Bumbacher, *Empowered Writing*, 51). The title of this text has been translated as "*Qi*-Credentials of the Assisting Divinities" (Bumbacher, ibid), "Token for Rescuing the Spirit in the Classic of Filial Piety" by the editors of the *Dictionary of the Ben Cao Gang Mu*, Volume 3, 536, and Zhao translates it differently in the same work, first as "Covenant for Assistance from Spirits" then "Tally for Assistance from Spirits" (Zhao, *In Pursuit of the Great Peace*, 70; see also Espesset, "Authorial Strategies in Pursuit of the Great Book," 212).

mushroom plants shoot up" (*de lian muli, ren ting zhicao* 德連木理，仁挺芝草).[470] As these examples show, marvels appearing in the natural world – whether intertwining trees, auspicious grain, or a mushroom plant – were often regarded as responses to ideal human behaviour. While the reasons for their appearance are grounded in cosmological assumptions about the relationship between human beings and Heaven and Earth, they nevertheless grow in a naturalistic manner; just as ordinary plants grow in response to the right amount of water and sunlight, these special plants grow in response to worthy human behaviour.

The aforementioned mushroom plant[471] (*zhicao* 芝草) is usually understood to refer to the "sacred mushroom"[472] (*lingzhi* 靈芝). However, the Eastern Han writer Ying Shao's 應劭 commentary to the *Hanshu* glosses *zhi* as "A mushroom plant; its leaves are linked together" (*zhicao ye, qi ye xianglian* 芝草也，其葉相連). This is slightly puzzling, as we do not usually understand mushrooms to have leaves. The text being glossed in the *Hanshu* is from the biography of Emperor Wu, and reads,

> 六月，詔曰：「甘泉宮內中產芝，九莖連葉」。[473]
>
> In the sixth month, an imperial proclamation declaimed: "Within the Palace of Sweet Springwater grew a mushroom, it had nine stems and quickly grew leaves".

Regardless of exactly what type of plant it was, the important information appears to be that it grew within the palace, that it had nine stems (an auspicious number), and, according to Ying Shao at least, its "leaves" were intertwined. This apparent need to interpret suggests a lack of strict orthodoxy when it came to natural signs. Sometimes the meaning of the strange plant is presented as straightforward, such as when an appearance of intertwining trees during the later reign of Emperor Wu 武 (464–549) of Liang (502–557) was taken as a sign that his son the

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[470] *Wenxuan* 7.105.
[471] Of course, we now know that mushrooms are not plants, but the word *cao* (literally "grass") is likely being used here as a deliberately broad category of plant-like things.
[472] This is conventionally translated as "numinous mushroom".
[473] *Hanshu* 6.193.

Prince of Xiangdong 湘東王 – the later Emperor Yuan 元 (508–555) – would take the throne.[474] Other times observers did not always understand them, as can be seen in an item in the *Yiyuan* 異苑 (*A Garden of Marvels*), attributed to Liu Jingshu 劉敬叔 (fl. fifth century), which reads,

> 元嘉四年，東陽流[475]道先家中，筋竹林忽生連理，野人無知，謂之禍祟，欲斫殺之。[476]

> In the fourth year of the Yuanjia period,[477] in the household of Liu Daoxian of Dongyuan, within a forest of strong bamboo there suddenly grew intertwining [trees], but those uncultivated people in their ignorance called it a ghostly calamity and wanted to cut it down and kill it.

While these "uncultivated people" of Dongyang are clearly being scorned for their ignorance, this anecdote also suggests that to understand the meaning of strange phenomena in general and signs in particular required some specialist knowledge. Indeed, the existence of competing experts with different interpretations of signs is cited by Wang Chong in his criticism of omen interpretation.[478] Specifically, Wang Chong questions the idea that omens or signs are indicative of the conduct of the ruler being out of sync with Heaven. Nevertheless, Wang Chong characteristically does not regard omens as false in toto, rather that omens cannot be reliably interpreted the way others claim.[479] This being said, while Wang Chong is often a useful source of the intellectual positions of his day, his own positions are almost by definition the minority, so keen is he to pose views contrary to common assumptions. These assumptions deserve some attention.

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474 *Yiwen yulan* 196.946.
475 This graph is sometimes rendered as 劉, a more conventional surname.
476 *Yiyuan* 2.10-11.
477 I.e. the year 427. Yuanjia was a reign name of Emperor Wen 文 (407–453) of Liu-Song.
478 *Lunheng jiaoshi* 5.213-226.
479 See Puett, "Listening to the Sages: Divination, Omens, and the Rhetoric of Antiquity in Wang Chong's Lunheng", 274-275.

A major aspect of these assumptions is that humans are subordinate to Heaven while at the same time are unique in nature. Non-human beings can react to the underlying patterns of nature, whose ultimate source is Heaven, but only humans can truly grasp and make use of them.[480] While all things are interrelated, there were nevertheless distinctions between them. These distinctions moreover usually were regarded as being in a hierarchical relationship.

This challenges two modern assumptions often made about pre-modern China: that it lacked a concept of nature, and that the pre-modern Chinese worldview was non-anthropocentric. The issue of Chinese concepts of nature can be a complicated one, not least because discussions of the issue can often devolve into semantic debates about the meanings of the English word nature. I do not make the assumption that Chinese intellectual history will exactly conform to every permutation of the English word nature, but nor do I think that differences in specifics negates overall similarities. Broadly understood, some Chinese writers did indeed see a distinction between human beings and other animals, and between human beings and the world around them. They did not see an absolute separation between those realms, but it is doubtful that any society has ever seen such a strict separation, at least not large-scale agricultural ones. Those who claim that China lacked a concept of nature correctly point out that many Chinese descriptions of the world emphasised a shared pattern that underlies all things, and so saw everything as being inter-related. But being inter-related and being the same are quite different. Most Chinese writers on the contrary insisted on distinctions, and moreover assumed the existence of a natural hierarchy. That hierarchy fit perfectly with the idea of an underlying shared pattern. Just as there were hierarchies among humans which shared the same logic and were analogised to each other – most commonly the three "guiderope" (*sangang* 三綱) hierarchical relationships between ruler and minister, husband and wife, and father and son – so were there hierarchies among the myriad things. These non-human hierarchies were often cited as confirming the correctness of human hierarchies, and it is rare for Chinese writers, at least in this era, to seek out examples in human society that conform to the behaviour of flora and fauna, rather than the other way round, belying the idea of a non-anthropocentric worldview. This idea

[480] This view is not held by all scholars, with some even claiming categorically that there was no distinctions made between humans and other beings like animals, plants, and spirits, see for instance Nicolaisen, 'Rethinking Ontology with Equality of Life', 50. A less extreme position is taken by Sterckx, when he says that the "classic Chinese perception of the world did not insist on clear categorical or ontological boundaries", *Animal and the Daemon*, 5. This latter, qualified position is more reasonable, as it allows for what is a seemingly paradoxical worldview that sees humans as unique while also seeing them as just one part of an integrated whole.

is also complicated by the fact that it is almost exclusively human behaviour that is claimed causes signs to appear in the natural world.

To return to the official histories, some rulers only have one incident of intertwining trees occurring during their reign recorded and preserved in them, other rulers have many. The *Songshu* records only one incident in the reigns of Sun Quan and Cao Pi for instance, but records 29 incidents in the reign of the first emperor of Jin, Sima Yan 司馬炎 (236–290), more of any other Jin emperor. There were two recorded under Emperor Hui 惠 (259–307), seven under Emperor Min 愍 (300–318), two under Emperor Yuan 元 (276–323), three under Emperor Cheng 成 (322–342), one under Emperor Mu 穆 (343–361), five under Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (362–396), and one under Emperor An 安 (382–419).[481] None were recorded during the reigns of emperors Huai 懷 (284–313), Ming 明 (299–325), Kang 康 (322–344), Ai 哀 (341-365), Fei 廢 (346–386), or Jianwen 簡文 (320–372).

The most under any Liu-Song emperor is 28, which occurred under the reign of Emperor Wen 文 (407–453), although none were recorded under his predecessors, Wen's father the founding emperor Wu 武 (363–422), and his brother Emperor Shao 少 (406–424). There were 18 under Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (430–464), five under Emperor Ming 明 (439–472), and one under Emperor Shun 順 (469–479).[482] None were recorded under the other three emperors who did not receive era names, including Liu Shao 劉劭 (424–453) who killed his father Emperor Wen in 453. The *Nan-Qishu* has slightly different records for Emperor Shun of Liu-Song, with two occurring in his reign. Five incidents occurred during the reign of Emperor Gao 高 (427–482) of Southern Qi 南齊 (479–502) (although only one has a date) and 17 during the reign of his son Emperor Wu 武 (440–493).[483] It records no incidents for the remaining rulers of Southern Qi.

As noted, the other official history with a similarly long list of incidents is the *Weishu*, which records five incidents in the reign the first emperor of the Northern Wei 北魏 (386–535),

[481] *Songshu* 29.853-857.
[482] *Songshu* 29.857-860.
[483] *Nan-Qishu* 18.359-360.

Emperor Daowu 道武 (371–449), four in the reign of his son Emperor Mingyuan 明元 (392–423), five in the reign of Emperor Taiwu 太武 (408–452), seven in the reign of Emperor Xiaowen 孝文 (467–499), and 17 under Emperor Xiaoming 孝明 (510–528). By far the highest number during the Northern Wei occurred under the reign of Emperor Xuanwu 宣武 (483–515), with 34. Finally, it also lists 16 incidents under Emperor Xiaojing 孝靜 (524–552) of the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534–550).[484] None were recorded under the emperors Wencheng 文成 (440–465), Xianwen 獻文 (454–476), Xiaozhuang 孝莊 (507–531), or Xiaowu 孝武 (510–535), nor under the brief reigns of Tuoba Yu 拓拔余 (d.452), Yuan Ye 元曄 (509–532), or Yuan Lang 元朗 (513–532). Unlike the *Songshu* and *Nan-Qishu*, every item in this list includes the phrase *shangyan*, indicating who reported it. It also quotes without citation at the beginning of the section the phrase about the virtue of the ruler seen in the *Songshu* and the Wu Liang shrines, among other places.

In these records, sometimes the type of tree is mentioned (pine, oak, pear, etc) but more often just the phenomenon of intertwining itself is recorded. All of these incidents occur at different locations, rarely the capital (one incident during the reign of Emperor An of Han occurred in the office of the Guardian of the Left (*zuopingyi* 左馮翊), who was stationed in the capital, and one occurred in the reign of Emperor Wen of Liu-Song, another occurred in the Dai 代 commandery during the reign of Daowu, and so may have been in the capital), and many include the names of the official that vouched for them, thus lending credence to the account and no doubt prestige to the reporter. Unlike some earlier accounts of intertwining trees, they appear throughout the empire and yet are still regarded as being connected to the reign of the emperor.

In general then, while there were sometimes disagreements over interpretations, the phenomenon of intertwining trees as recorded in the official histories was usually understood as a positive sign connected to worthy human behaviour, commonly that of the ruler. While this section has mostly focused on the connection between intertwining trees and rulership, they were not exclusively connected. Over the years, the strange in general began to also appear outside of the realm of official accounts of the emperor, and more records appear of the strange

[484] *Weishu* 112B.2958-2963.

being encountered by relatively ordinary people (albeit still usually members of the elites of society). The phenomenon of intertwined trees is in this instance no exception.

While still collected in an official history, a biography of the Eastern Han official Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192), for instance describes the trees that he planted on his mother's tomb intertwining in response to his filial devotion as a son.[485] Later, the *Nanshi* records that when Xu Bozhen 徐伯珍 (414–497) retired to a mountain nine *li* south of his residence, trees grew up between the steps and windows of his residence and all grew intertwined, the catalpa tree in front of the gate grew to an arms-span, and a white sparrow perched above the doors and windows. These signs were regarded as being responses to Xu Bozhen's "reclusive virtue" (*yinde* 隱德).[486] Another example is in the *Suishu*, which says that because the rule of Laing Yanguang 梁彥光 (534–593), governor of Qizhou 岐州, was so benevolent, auspicious grain and intertwined trees grew at the provincial border.[487]

Not all instances share this connection between individual behaviour and the phenomenon, however. In a quotation preserved in the *Taiping yulan*, Liu Yiqing's *Youming lu* 幽明錄 (*Record of the Hidden and the Visible*)[488] records the following incident:

> 武宣程羈，偏生，未被舉。家常使種蔥，後連理樹生於園圃。[489]

[485] *Hou-Hanshu* 60B:1980. For an English-language biography of Cai Yong, see de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, 29-32. This connection between filial behaviour and strange trees will be explored in a later section.
[486] *Nanshi* 76.1889-1890. For more on reclusion in the mountains, see Berkowitz, *Patterns of Disengagement*; Wei, *Shanzhong de Liuchao shi*.
[487] *Suishu* 73.1675.
[488] Also known as 幽冥錄. The title is discussed in Zhang Zhenjun's study, *Buddhism and Tales of the Supernatural in Early Medieval China: A Study of Liu Yiqing's (403-444) Youming Lu*, 44-45. The edition used in this study is the one in Lu Xun's 魯迅 (1881–1936) *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 古小說鉤沉 (Deep Catch of Ancient Records of the Strange), for an evaluation of which see Zhang, *Buddhism and Tales of the Supernatural*, 54-57.
[489] *Guxiaoshuo gouchen* 403; *Taiping yulan* 824.3673.

> Cheng Ji of Wuxuan was born of a concubine and had not been selected for office. It was common in his residence to plant scallion, and later intertwined trees grew in the garden.

Unlike some of the accounts examined in the present study, Cheng Ji's personal details appear to be incidental to the intertwining trees growing in his garden.

Similarly, a quotation from *Jingzhou tuji* 荊州圖記 (*Records and Charts of Jingzhou*) records that in a village called Wubo 伍伯, south of Gucheng 故城, "there is a white elm intertwining tree, with separate roots joining together, and over four *zhang* tall, the local people attend upon it like an earth god altar" (*baiyu lianli shu, yigen hetiao, gao si zhang yu, tumin feng wei she* 白榆連理樹，異根合條，高四丈餘，土民奉為社).[490] Here the strange behaviour of the tree links it in the minds of local people to sacrifices to the earth god rather than to the figure of the emperor. In the later text on the exotic south, *Lingbiao luyi* 嶺表錄異 (*The Records of the Unusual from Lingnan*) by Liu Xun 劉恂 (fl. late 9th century) the banyan tree (*rongshu* 榕樹) is described as intertwining, something that southerners regard as normal and do not see it as an auspicious tree (*nanren yi wei chang, bu wei zhi ruimu* 南人以為常，不為之瑞木).[491]

2.3.1. Plant signs and rulership

As has already been noted, the phenomenon of intertwining trees was often regarded as an auspicious sign of proper rulership, but this connection was not limited to this strange phenomenon. Many unusual phenomena of the natural world, including phenomena we might now regard as supernatural,[492] were understood in these terms, and trees and plants in general are no exception.

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490 *Yiwen leiju* 39.708.
491 *Taiping yulan* 61.4262-4263. For studies of this text see Bocci and Ptak, "The Entries on Birds in Liu Xun's Lingbiao lu yi" and Feng, "Producing Knowledge of the Sea Coast: Marine Life and a Tang Geographical Miscellany of Lingnan".
492 This term is out of fashion in scholarship, but I use it in its conventional meaning, rather than anything with specific theological implications. Alternatives include supernormal and extranormal.

The importance of recording unusual signs can be seen in many texts. In particular, they are recorded in historical texts like annals and then later official histories.

It is not only in historical texts that this attitude towards signs can be observed. The late Warring States philosophical writer Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310–ca. 210 BCE)[493] notes that people should not be afraid of falling stars and groaning trees, but should merely marvel at them. For Xunzi, these and other unusual occurrences are merely part of the vicissitudes of Heaven and Earth and the transformations of *yin* and *yang*, and thus need not be feared. He then goes on to quote a "tradition" (*zhuan* 傳) that states "the strange among the myriad things should be recorded without discussion" (*wanwu zhi guai shu bu shuo* 萬物之怪書不說).[494] Xunzi was sceptical that signs were a manifestation of Heaven's will, but nevertheless, even when cautioning against investigating them, he still insisted on strange occurrences being preserved in writing.[495]

Some plants or plant behaviour appear to be regarded as inherently strange, and were usually taken as a positive or negative sign. One such plant is called *huaping* 華苹 (or 華平), which in an attempt to preserve the word order I will tentatively translate as "flower-peace". As with *mulianli*, the grammatical structure of this term suggests that it is describing the behaviour of the plant. Knechtges translates it as "flower of peace" when it appears in the poem "Rhapsody on the Eastern Capital" by Zhang Heng:

> 植華平於春圃，豐朱草於中唐。[496]

[493] Dates based on Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 1, 1-35. See also Hutton, *Xunzi*, xix.
[494] *Xunzi jijie* 11.313-314. See also translations in Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 2, 18; Hutton, *Xunzi*, 178-179. The trees in this passage have traditionally been connected to those planted on Earth God mounds, although this has been questioned by Ho Che Wah 何志華, see Ho "Xunzi Tianlun pian 'Xing zhui mu ming, guoren jie kong' jiegu" (trees on Earth God mounds will be discussed in the next section). See also the study of this chapter in Machle, *Nature and Heaven in the Xunzi: A Study of the Tian Lun*. Hutton regards the reference to *shu* 書 as referring to *The Documents*., but the Tang-era commentator Yang Jing 楊倞 regards it as referring more generally to the books of the "Six Classics" (*liushu* 六書), *Xunzi jijie* 11.316.
[495] For the former point see Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue: Ethics and the Body in Early China*, 166-167. Xunzi's position on signs is consistent with Confucius' demand to respect the spirits while keeping them at a distance (see *Analects* 6.22).
[496] *Wenxuan* 3.64.

He plants the flower of peace in the spring garden,
Proliferates the vermilion herb in the courtyard.[497]

When looking at the whole poem, it is clear that person who is doing the planting is the emperor, and the vermillion herb is another auspicious plant. Xue Zong 薛綜 (208–243) glosses this line thusly:

華平，瑞木也。天下平，其華則平；有不平處，其華則向其方傾。[498]

Flower-peace is an auspicious tree. When All Under Heaven is at peace, then its flowers are flat; when there is anywhere not at peace, then its flowers incline towards that direction.

Xue Zong appears to be making a connection between the different meanings of the graph *ping*, which include "peace" and "flat". In the *Songshu*, the flower-peace plant appears in the Treatise on Auspicious Omens, which reads:

華平，其枝正平，有德則生。德剛則仰，德弱則低。[499]

The flower-peace: its branches are completely flat – where there is virtue then it grows. When virtue is strong then [the branches] incline upwards, when virtue is weak then they incline downwards.

[497] Translation from Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 298-299.
[498] *Wenxuan* 3.64.
[499] *Songshu* 29.861.

Here it is the branches rather than the flowers that incline, but the connection between the behaviour of the plant and good rulership is explicit in both. The *Taiping yulan* quotes the weft text on the *Classic of Filial Piety*, the *Yuanshen qi*, saying:

> 王者德至於地，則華苹感。[500]
>
> Once the ruler's virtue extends to plants, then the flower-peace will respond.

This is a very similar quote to the one about intertwining trees from the same source mentioned above, but with "earth" instead of "plants" being to what the ruler's virtue extends. Indeed, this is something of a set phrase, with different auspicious phenomena appearing when the ruler is behaving in the proper way. So, according to the same source, when the ruler's virtue reaches plants, then the vermillion herb will grow,[501] the mushroom plant (*zhicao* 芝草)[502] will grow,[503] and auspicious grain will grow. When it reaches the Earth, the flower-peace will respond,[504] the calendar plant will grow,[505] auspicious grain will grow,[506] and creeping grapevine will grow.[507] When the ruler's virtue reaches the deep springs (*yuanquan* 淵泉), then the sweet liquor spring will issue,[508] and so on. According to the *Ruiying tu*, when it reaches Heaven, harmonious *qi* responds, and then sweet dew (*ganlu* 甘露) descends onto pines and cypresses (*songbai* 松柏).[509]

While also mentioning some of these specific signs, an explanation is given for the connection between the behaviour of the ruler and the appearance of auspicious signs in the *Baihutong*. In the

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[500] *Taiping yulan* 873.3871.
[501] *Taiping yulan* 873.3871. This is not the only situation that causes the vermillion herb to grow in weft texts.
[502] While funguses are not plants in a botanical sense, they are not so distinguished in pre-modern Chinese writings. As an auspicious or abnormally powerful plant, *zhicao* is usually understood as being another name for *lingzhi* 靈芝, which is conventionally translated as "numinous mushroom".
[503] *Taiping yulan* 873.3873.
[504] *Taiping yulan* 873.3871.
[505] *Taiping yulan* 873.3872.
[506] *Taiping yulan* 873.3872.
[507] *Taiping yulan* 873.3873.
[508] This echoes a line in the *Liji*, which says, "Heaven sends down sweet dew, Earth issues the sweet liquor spring" 天降甘露，地出醴泉 (*Liji*). For another translation see Harper, "The Sexual Arts of Ancient China", 557.
[509] *Taiping yulan* 12.62.

section on Fengshan 封禪 sacrifices,[510] which includes many similar formulations as those mentioned above, the text lays out the relationship between peaceful rule and the corresponding appearance of certain auspicious phenomena in the natural world:

> 天下太平符瑞所以來至者，以為王者承統理，調和陰陽，陰陽和，萬物序，休氣充塞，故符瑞並臻，皆應德而至。[511]

> The reason that auspicious omens appear when All Under Heaven is at peace is because the ruler, upon assuming control, harmonises yin and yang. When yin and the yang are in harmony the ten thousand things will have their sequence and be full of felicitous *qi*. Therefore, when auspicious omens appear at once, they do so in response to virtue.[512]

This passage makes the sequential aspect of auspicious omens clear: first the ruler accepts the reigns of governance from above, then yin and yang are harmonised, which in turn causes the conditions for auspicious omens to occur, that is, all things have their proper hierarchical order, and in consequence become full of the type of *qi* that gives rise to natural phenomena regarded as auspicious.[513]

One of the passages in the *Baihutong* that reflect this idea while using very similar language that we saw above reads:

> 德至天則斗極明，日月光，甘露降；德至地則嘉禾生，蓂莢起，秬鬯出，太平感；德至文表則景星見，五緯順軌；德至草木朱草生，木連理；德至鳥獸則鳳皇翔，鸞鳥舞，麒麟臻，白虎到，狐九尾，白雉降，白鹿見，白鳥下；德至山陵則景雲出，芝實茂，陵出黑丹，阜出蓮莆，山出器車，澤出神鼎；德至淵泉

[510] For background on these sacrifices, see Chen, "State Religious Ceremonies", 70; Puett, *To Become a God*, 287-315; Ess, "Der Sinn des Opfertraktates feng-shan shu des Ssu-ma Ch'ien".
[511] *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.283.
[512] My translations from this text have benefitted from Tjan's translation and commentary in *Po Hu T'ung*, 241-243.
[513] Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles*, 30-33.

則黃龍見，醴泉涌，河出龍圖，洛出龜書，江出大貝，海出明珠；德至八方，則祥風至，佳氣時喜，鐘律調，音度施，四夷化，越裳貢。[514]

When virtue extends to Heaven, then the Pole Star brightens, the sun and moon shine,[515] and the sweet dew descends; when virtue extends to Earth, then auspicious grain grows, the calendar plant emerges, the creeping grapevine appears, and the flower-peace reacts;[516] when virtue extends to the eight [geographical] limits,[517] then the Luminous Star becomes visible, and the Five Planets will follow their proper courses; when virtue extends to plants, then the vermillion herb will grow, and trees will intertwine; when virtue extends to birds and beasts, then the phoenix will sour, the simurgh will dance,[518] the unicorn will arrive,[519] the white tiger with come, foxes will have nine tails, the white peasant descends, the white deer will be seen, and the white bird will come down; when virtue extends to mountains, then the spectacular clouds will appear,[520] mushroom fruit will flourish, mounds will put out black cinnabar,[521] hills will put out the fan plant, mountains will put out the vessel chariot,[522] the marshes will put out the divine tripod;[523] when virtue extends to the deep springs, then the yellow dragon can be seen, the sweet liquor spring will bubble up,[524] the [Yellow] River will put out the dragon chart, and the Luo [River] will put out the turtle writing, the [Yangtze] River puts out the great cowry-

514 *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.283-285.
515 Possibly related to an item in the *Songshu* which connects the ruler to the sun, and so when the ruler does not depend upon the power of subordinates, then the sun and moon shine, *Songshu* 29.867.
516 The transmitted text has *taiping* 太平. Emendation based on Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 241 and 334 (note 328); *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.283-284.
517 Transmitted text has *wenbiao* 文表. Emendation based on Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 241 and 334 (note 329); *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.283-284. My translation of the term *babiao*, which could also be rendered as "eight borders", draws upon Tian Xiaofei's translation of it as the "eight limits of the earth", Tian, *Tao Yuanming and Manuscript Culture: The Record of a Dusty Table*, 135-136.
518 While neither "phoenix" nor "simurgh" are exactly equivalent, their similarity has made them common candidates for translation. See Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 116, 287-288
519 Kroll notes that the *qilin* has "few similar characteristics" with a unicorn, *Student's Dictionary*, 273.
520 According to Kroll, these clouds are usually multi-coloured, *Student's Dictionary*, 218.
521 Changing *hei* 黑 for *yi* 異, according to Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 241 and 336-337 (note 334); *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.284. Knechtges' gloss of Zhang Heng's "Rhapsody on the Eastern Capital" discusses black cinnabar, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 250, 252.
522 This is a very literal and not very satisfactory translation. This phrase appears in the "Evolution of Ritual" (*Liyun* 禮運) section of the *Liji*, and Legge translates it as "hill produced implements and chariots," reading *qiche* 器車 as two distinct entities. The modern punctuation for the 1995 Zhonghua edition of the *Liji* also reads it this way, separating the two graphs with an enumeration comma (*dunhao* 頓號), *Liji jixie* 22.622-623. Probably related to the mountain cart referenced above. For this reason, Tjan translates it as "the Natural Carriage", *Po Hu T'ung*, 242, 337 n. 336. See *Yiwen leiju* 71.1235.
523 This auspicious sign can be seen among those of the ceiling slabs of the Wu Liang shrines, see Wu, *Wu Liang Shrine*, 236. See also *Songshu* 29.867-874.
524 Replacing 涌 for 通, as per *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.285 and Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 337 (note 338).

> shell, the ocean puts out the bright pearl; when virtue extends to the eight directions, then the auspicious wind will arrive, the proper time for pleasing *qi* will be joyous, bells and their notes will be in harmony, tones and their measures will be applied, the four foreign [tribes] will be converted, and the Yuechang will offer tribute.[525]

Here the cause-and-effect relationship between virtuous rule and the appearance of unusual natural phenomena is made very clear. The phenomenon intertwining described in this quote is very similar to one from the *Yuanshen qi*, although here the vermillion herb is also mentioned. Again, grammatically the passage suggests that the auspicious phenomena is the interlocking itself, rather than a specific tree that is called *lianli*, as all these items in this list are nouns followed by verbs, and if we take *mulianli* as a noun, then it is unique in this list for lacking any description of its reactive behaviour. There are also instances of this word *lianli* being applied to stones.[526] Moreover, the scope of these phenomena is wider than what we might consider to be "natural phenomena", as it includes people (albeit people of the out-group).

These auspicious omens do not only appear in texts of this type. Wang Rong's preface to "Poem [Composed on] the Winding Stream on the Third Day of the Third Month" (*Sanyue sanri qushui shi* 三月三日曲水詩)[527] reads,

> 天瑞降，地符升，澤馬來，器車出；紫脫華，朱英秀；佞枝植，歷草孳。[528]

> Heavenly signs descend, terrestrial tokens ascend; the swamp steed arrives and [auspicious] vessels and [natural] carriages set forth. The purple shedding flowers, the vermillion blossom blooms; the indicator plant straightens and the calendar grass propogates.[529]

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[525] For another translation see Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung,* 241-242.
[526] See for instance *Jinlouzi jiaojian* 5.; *Taiping guangji* 135.964, 398.3186.
[527] The event referred to in this title is a feast hosted by Emperor Wu 武 of Southern Qi 南齊 (440–493). The poem is lost.
[528] *Wenxuan* 46.650.
[529] Translation amended from Scott Davis' translation of Xu "Apocrypha and Literary Rhetoric of the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasty Periods", 152153.

These ideas are seen in other weft texts, such as the weft text on the *Liji* titled *Hanwenjia* 含文嘉 (*In Praise of the Literary*).[530] Like many other weft texts, it only survives in quotations, but many of those quotations emphasise the correspondence between Heaven and Earth:

> 神農作田道，就耒耜，天應之以嘉禾，地應之以醴泉。[531]
>
> Shennong devised the way of farming and attended to ploughs and ploughshares, and Heaven responded with auspicious grain, and Earth responded with the sweet liquor spring.

Nor are they necessarily connected to plants, with many different phenomena resulting from the exemplary behaviour of rulers, as these two items illustrate:

> 伏羲德洽上下，天應之以鳥獸文章，地應之以龜書。[532]
>
> Fuxi's virtue harmonised above and below, and Heaven responded with birds-and-beast script, and Earth responded with turtle writing.[533]

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[530] This title is a reference to the *Changes*, see Wang, "Weishu shuming yi jie gao", 52.
[531] Quoted in *Wuxing dayi* 五行大義 by Xiao Ji 蕭吉 (d. 614), see *Weishu jicheng* 494. See also the variants in *Taiping yulan* 872.3870 and 872.3872. The *Wuxing dayi* has been translated into French in Kalinowski, *Cosmologie et divination dans la Chine ancienne*.
[532] Quoted in multiple sources, see *Weishu jicheng* 494.
[533] The origin of writing was often explained as coming from humans observing the patterns of animal, usually bird, tracks on the ground and/or the patterns on their fur and feathers. The underlying logic of these patterns ultimately derived from Heaven. "Turtle writing" is likely a reference to legends about the origins of the trigrams coming from Fuxi observing patterns he saw on the back of a turtle emerging from the river Luo 洛, see Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, 99-100. For *wenzhang* 文章 having the meaning of writing or script, see Cui Yuan's 崔瑗 (78–143) "Configuration of Cursive Script" (*Caoshu shi* 草書勢), which begins, "The flourishing of writing and inscription begins with Cang Jie; he wrote these bird tracks and fixed the written script" (*shuqi zhi xing, shi zi Jiahuang; xie bi niaoji, yi ding wenzhang* 書契之興，始自頡皇；寫彼鳥跡，以定文章) see also *Hanyu da cidian*, for Cui Yuan and writing see Leung, "Bad Writing: Cursive Calligraphy and the Ethics of Orthography in the Eastern Han Dynasty", 113-115.

黃帝修兵革以德行，則黃龍至，鳳凰來儀。[534]

When the Yellow Emperor reformed weapons and armour in order to act virtuously, then the Yellow Dragon arrived, and the phoenix came to pay homage.[535]

The kinds of phenomena that appear when the ruler is practicing good governance then are many and varied. The phenomenon of intertwined trees is one sign among many, although the motif of intertwining does appear to be one of the more common. It is not merely the phenomenon itself that is important, however. As has been noted, the location of these signs is also significant. Often, to connect them to the person of the ruler, they are recorded as occurring in the court of a ruler, and the next section will examine accounts of these trees appearing in courtyards.

2.3.2. Strange trees in courtyards

There are several anecdotes that feature strange trees growing in the courtyards of rulers, which are then interpreted as portents. An early example appears in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, in the "Governing Pleasure" (*zhile* 制樂)[536] section of the sixth fascicle. After observing that perfect music can only occur in a state of perfect governance, the text relates a story about King Tang of Shang (aka Cheng Tang):

成湯之時，有穀生於庭，昏而生，比旦而大拱，其吏請卜其故。湯退卜者曰：「吾聞祥者福之先者也，見祥而為不善則福不至；妖者禍之先者也，見妖而為善則禍不至。」於是早朝晏退，問疾弔喪，務鎮撫百姓，三日而穀亡。故禍兮福之所倚，福兮禍之所伏，聖人所獨見，眾人焉知其極。[537]

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[534] Quoted in *Wuxing dayi*, see *Weishu jicheng*, 494.
[535] These last four character are quoted in other texts as coming from the *Shangshu*, see *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 18.457; *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 6.311.
[536] For the reading of 樂 as "pleasure" *le* rather than "music" *yue*, see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 348 fn. 1.
[537] *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 6.347.

> In the time of Cheng Tang, a paper mulberry[538] grew in the courtyard at dusk and by dawn was as large as an arms-span.[539] [Cheng Tang's] officials[540] requested divination to determine the cause. Cheng Tang withdrew the diviners,[541] saying, "I have heard that auspicious signs precede good fortune, yet if on seeing an auspicious sign one does not behave well then good fortune will not come; the uncanny precedes disaster, yet if on seeing the uncanny one behaves well then disaster will not come." Thereupon [he went] early to court and retired late, visited the sick and mourned with the bereaved, applying himself to placating the Hundred Surnames, and in three days the paper mulberry was gone. Thus, "disaster is indeed that upon which good fortune depends, and good fortune is where disaster lays hidden"; that which the sage alone sees, how can the multitude understand to its end?[542]

In a different version retold in a number of texts, the Shang ruler in the story is Tai Wu 太戊 (trad. r. 1637–1563), aka Da Wu 大戊, who is advised by Yi Yin's son Yi Zhi 伊陟. An early example appears in the transmitted text of the *Shangshu*,[543] in the section titled either "Both possessed one virtue" (*xian you yi de* 咸有一德) or *Yingao* 尹誥 ("The Proclamation of Yin"):[544]

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538 Reading the graph *gu* 穀 for *gu* 穀 ("grains"), a common variation that differs by one stroke, which many commentators gloss as *zhu* 楮, see for instance *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 226. This graph is left untranslated in the English version by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 163.

539 The word *gong* 拱 here means the span enclosed by the arms, which is a common way to refer to the size of large trees. Knoblock and Riegel translate this as "clasped hands", which suggests something quite smaller, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 163.

540 Some versions of this text have *shi* 史 for *li* 吏, as *shi* were in charge of divination matters, see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 6.351 fn. 6; *Yiwen leiju* 12.221; *Taiping yulan* 83.390.

541 Knoblock and Riegel read this as "Tang withdrew and the diviner said, etc", an interpretation suggested by several commentators, with some such as the Qing commentator Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1730–1797) citing the *Han shi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 (*Unofficial Traditions of the Songs in the Han*), which describes the following speech as coming from Cheng Tang's able minister Yi Yin, see *Han shi waizhuan jishi* 3.81 and *Lüshi chunqiu jishi* vol. 1, 6.13. However, Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷 (1917–2006) points out that grammatically the subject of the phrase beginning "thereupon" *yushi* 於是 must still be Cheng Tang, *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 6.351-2 fn. 7. I am inclined to agree with this interpretation, but it must be pointed out that other versions of this story regard the quoted speech as coming from someone other than the ruler.

542 A quote and then paraphrase from *Laozi* 58 not included in other versions of this story. As Chen Qiyou notes, both Gao You's 高誘 (fl. 200 CE) commentary and the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 support the reading of *ji* 極 as "to its end", see *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 6.352 fn. 9.

543 Part of the corpus of materials allegedly discovered during the Western Han in the wall of Confucius' old residence in Qufu 曲阜.

544 Unearthed texts show discrepancies with the transmitted *Shangshu*, which confirm suspicions about the transmitted text that have existed since at least the Song dynasty, and this text is no exception, see Du, "Qinghuajian

伊陟相大戊。亳有祥桑穀共生于朝。[545]

Yi Zhi served as prime minister to [Tai] Wu. In Bo[546] there were portentous mulberry and paper mulberry [trees] that grew together in the court.

Unlike the *Lüshi chunqiu* version, the trees are described as growing together, a motif that will appear in most other versions. The commentary attributed to Kong Anguo 孔安國 (ca. 156 – ca. 74 BCE) glosses *xiang* 祥, a word that usually means "auspicious," as *yaoguai* 妖怪, a word which denotes strangeness – especially of the uncanny and monstrous variety. Kong Yingda claims that the court is not a place where trees grow, and so when they did it was taken as a sign of poor behaviour (*chao fei sheng mu zhi chu, shi wei bushan zhi zheng* 朝非生木之處，是爲不善之徵).[547] If only this version of the story survived, it would be difficult to see how the commentators concluded that *xiang* means something negative and that trees growing in courtyards must be a sign of something wrong. The other available versions however provide more information.

A longer example can be seen in the *Shiji*, where, as in the *Lüshi chunqiu*, an interpretation is given:

帝太戊立伊陟為相。亳有祥桑穀共生於朝，一暮大拱。帝太戊懼，問伊陟。伊陟曰：「臣聞妖不勝德，帝之政其有闕與？帝其修德。」太戊從之，而祥桑枯死而去。[548]

'Yingao' yu wanshu 'Xian you yi de' bianwei"; Liao, "Qinghuajian 'Yingao' yanjiu"; Liu, *Introduction to the Tsinghua Bamboo-Strip Manuscripts*, 111-113.

[545] *Shangshu zhengyi* 8.122.

[546] Bo was the capital of the Shang under Cheng Tang, see *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 776.

[547] *Shangshu zhengyi* 8.122.

[548] *Shiji* 3.100.

> King Tai Wu installed Yi Zhi as prime minister. In Bo there were portentous mulberry and paper mulberry [trees][549] that grew together in the court, and in one night they were as large as an arms-span. King Tai Wu was afraid, and asked Yi Zhi about it, who said, "Your humble servant has heard that the uncanny cannot defeat the virtuous, does the king's governance have deficiencies? [Then] the king must cultivate his virtue." Tai Wu followed his advice, and the portentous mulberry withered to death and disappeared.[550]

The text appears to take for granted that trees growing together in the court is something to be feared. Yi Zhi's interpretation that they are a sign that the king must remedy his behaviour appears to have been shown to be correct when the strange trees promptly wither away.

Other versions of this story appear in elsewhere, with minor differences.[551] Despite the difference in setting, the details and language make it clear that this story of a plant or plants growing in the courtyard of a Shang ruler are very closely related, and that commentators referred to these and/or other versions when evaluating them. For instance, Kong Anguo's commentary to the *Shangshu* echoes the *Shiji* version when it says, "[When] two trees grow together and in seven days [become] as large as an arms-span, this is punishment for disrespectfulness" (*er mu hesheng, qiri dagong, bugong zhi fa* 二木合生，七日大拱，不恭之罰).[552] The closeness of this textual connection is illustrated by the time given for how long the growth takes, with versions in the *Shiji*, the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 (*Garden of Eloquence*),[553] the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 (*Household Talk of Confucius*),[554] the *Lunheng*,[555] the *Hanshu*,[556] the *Qunshu zhiyao* 群書治要,[557] and the *Taiping yulan*[558]

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[549] Probably due to the use of the word "together" *gong* 共, most commentators regard these as two trees, despite only the *sang* 桑 being mentioned later in the text.
[550] For another translation see Nienhauser, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. 1, 46.
[551] The version that appears in the *Shuoyuan* is very similar to that of the *Lüshi chunqiu*, although the ruler is Tai Wu and the speaker is identified as an unnamed "diviner" (*buzhe* 卜者). Unlike the *Lüshi chunqiu* version, the plant is called *sanggu* 桑穀, but unlike other versions that use these two graphs, there is no description of them growing together. See *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 1.21. For a translation, see Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, 82.
[552] *Shangshu zhengyi* 8.122.
[553] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 1.21, 10.248.
[554] *Kongzi jiayu jiaozhu* 1.84. This version is much the same as the one in the *Shuoyuan* and the *Qunshu zhiyao* (see below). For a translation see Kramers, *The School Sayings of Confucius*, 228.
[555] *Lunheng jiaoshi* 5.213.
[556] *Hanshu* 25a.1192, 27c.1410.
[557] Compiled by Wei Zheng in 631. *Qunshu zhiyao* 10.243.
[558] *Taiping yulan* 83.390, 83.392.

all rendering the number as either one (*yi* 一) or seven (*qi* 七), which are graphically similar and easily confused.[559]

Alongside the version of this story in the *Shuoyuan* (both of which appear in the "The Way of the Ruler" (*jundao* 君道) section) there is a thematically similar story about a different Shang ruler. Versions of this story also appear in the *Shangshu dazhuan* 尚書大傳 (*Great Commentary on the Venerable Documents*) preserved in the *Taiping yulan*[560] and Wang Chong's *Lunheng*.[561] This story uses some of the same language but is different enough to be considered separate from those mentioned above. The version from the *Shuoyuan* reads:

> 高宗者，武丁也，高而宗之，故號高宗，成湯之後，先王道缺，刑法違犯，桑穀俱生乎朝，七日而大拱，武丁召其相而問焉，其相曰：「吾雖知之，吾弗得言也。」聞諸祖己[曰]：「桑穀者野草也，而生於朝，意者國亡乎？」武丁恐駭，飭身修行，思先王之政，興滅國，繼絕世，舉逸民，明養老。三年之後，蠻夷重譯而朝者七國，此之謂存亡繼絕之主，是以高而尊之也。[562]

> Gaozong is Wu Ding.[563] He was eminent and venerated; thus he is called Gaozong. After [the rule of] Cheng Tang, the way of the former kings declined, the laws of punishments were contravened, and a mulberry and a paper mulberry grew together in the courtyard, and in seven days they were as large as an arms-span. Wu Ding summoned his prime minister and asked him about it, and his minister said, "Although I understand it, I cannot put it into words." [Wu Ding] asked[564] Zu Ji,[565] [who said],[566] "Mulberry and paper

[559] Moreover, the majority of the aforementioned versions measure the time period in days (*ri* 日) or months (*yue* 月), which are also very similar graphically (the rest use "evening" *mu* 暮).
[560] *Taiping yulan* 83.392. The *Shangshu dazhuan* is a lost Han-era text that only survives in fragments, such as the one quoted in the *Taiping yulan*. It was reconstructed from these quotations in the Qing dynasty. For an overview see Vankeerberghen and Lin, "Shangshu dazhuan de chengshu, liuchuan ji qi shehuishi yiyi".
[561] *Lunheng jiaoshu* 5.213-215.
[562] *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 1.21-122.
[563] Wu Ding (r. c. 1225–1189), a Shang king. This, the following explanation of his name, and the last line of the item may be interpolated commentary.
[564] Reading 問 for 聞, which is how it appears in the *Lunheng*, see *Lunheng jiaoshu* 5.213.
[565] Eldest son of Wu Ding.
[566] Both the *Lunheng* and the version from the *Shangshu dazhuan* preserved in the *Taiping yulan* append words meaning "said" to Zu Ji's name.

> mulberry are wild plants;[567] when they grow in the courtyard, is the meaning that the state will fall?" Wu Ding, afraid and frightened, rectified himself and disciplined his behaviour, reflected on the rule of the ancient kings, revived destroyed states, reconnected severed linages, recommended unattached people,[568] and promoted care for the elderly. After three years, the Man and Yi repeatedly sent interpreters, and those who presented themselves at court were from the Seven States.[569] This is what is referred to as a ruler who can preserve what is in peril and reconnected the severed, this is why he is eminent and venerated.[570]

Again the ruler is depicted as being afraid of the strange trees, an explanation that their appearance is related to his behaviour is tentatively offered, and when he changes his behaviour for the better they disappear.

A version of this story is related by Wang Chong as part of his chapter on the falsity of anomalies (*yixu* 異虛), one chapter among many on various "falsehoods" (*xu* 虛).[571] Wang Chong claims that anomalies (*guai*) appear when one is about to die, so the tree anomaly in the story could only be true if the state really did collapse. Wang argues that by the time fatal auguries had appeared, it would already be too late, so Wu Ding's behaviour could not have influenced the future as the story relates.[572] This is part of Wang Chong's broader position on signs, which he regarded as external to human behaviour.

This story is interpreted by Confucius in another section of the *Shuoyuan* and in the *Kongzi jiayu*. In the *Kongzi jiayu* version, Confucius is asked about it by his frequent interlocutor Duke Ai of Lu. According to Confucius (or the Confucius in these texts at least), Heaven sends these strange

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567 Using the broader meaning of *cao*, rather than the more limited meaning of "herbaceous plants". As noted by Henry, Zheng Xuan appears to be confused by this usage, see Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, 82. The partially lost text *Qingshizi* 青史子 – listed in the treatise on literature in the *Hanshu* 30.1744 – uses the graph *cao* to refer to the parasol tree (*wu* 梧), willow tree (*liu* 柳), and *ji* jujube (*ji* 棘), and *zao* jujube (*zao* 棗), see Lu, *Gu xiaoshuo gouchen*, 123. The latter plant (referred to by two different words in Chinese) rarely grows higher than one meter in the wild, and thus straddles the modern definitional boundaries between a tree and a shrub, see Hu, *Food Plants of China*, 87.
568 I.e., selected recluses for office.
569 Other versions have different numbers of states.
570 For another translation, see Henry, *Garden of Eloquence*, 82.
571 For an English translation of the chapter, see Forke, *Lun Heng*, part 2, 161-170.
572 *Lunheng jiaoshi* 5.213-226.

signs as warnings to rulers, and if rulers heed these warnings and change their ways for the better, then they can avert disaster.[573] This goes against Wang Chong's position, but it appears that the interpretation attributed to Confucius in this story was the more commonly held view.

As Tao Jiang has written, there emerged in Early China two different interpretative strands on the relationship between humans and Heaven, one Jiang characterises as "caring/anthropocentric" and the other as "indifferent/naturalist".[574] As he sees the workings of Heaven as occurring independently of human intervention and unconcerned with human affairs, Wang Chong's position is the indifferent/naturalist one, which makes him part of what Jiang calls a "naturalist turn" that goes back to Laozi. These oppositions developed into positions subsumed under the headings *mingjiao* 名教 and *ziran* 自然, especially with the post-Han revival of interest in texts like the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, and served as part of the intellectual background of the production of anomaly accounts.[575] When discussing what should be done in the face of ominous signs, writers usually made use of either the anthropocentric or the naturalist position.

While these stories illustrate the practice of interpreting strange trees, they also illustrate the lack of a single, fixed system of interpretation. Unusual plant behaviour in these stories usually is marked by two motifs: growing in an unusual location (the royal court) and unusual growth (two trees growing together).

Not all trees that grow in palace courtyards are viewed as ill omens, however. The Emperor Yao is often associated with a plant that grew in the courtyard that I have translated above as the indicator plant. The *Bowu zhi* records:

> 堯時有屈佚草，生於庭，佞人入朝，則屈而指之。一名指佞草。[576]

[573] *Kongzi jiayu jiaozhu* 1.83-84; *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 1.21, 10.248.
[574] Jiang, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China: Contestation of Humaneness, Justice, and Personal Freedom*, 42-43, 184-231. See also *Philosophy East and West* 73.2 for a set of responses to Jiang's work.
[575] See Mather, "The Controversy over Conformity and Naturalness during the Six Dynasties"; Chan, "Neo-Daoism". Campany characterises these two positions as "locative and anti-locative views", *Strange Writing*, 278-279.
[576] *Bowu zhi jiaozheng* 3.39.

> In the time of Yao there was an indicator plant, it grew in the courtyard and when a sycophant enters the court, then it bends and points at him. It is called the indicator plant.

Here the plant, which is described as having naturalistic if unusual behaviour, is connected to the person of the ruler and assists him in discovering inferior advisors. Wang Chong also discusses this plant – although does not mention Yao – and asks how can it know who is a sycophant. Wang Chong doubts that this and other plants that he describes as appearing in times of peace like the *shafu* and the calendar plants exist, so while its behaviour may be naturalistic to some, it appears not to be for Wang Chong.

One example of competing interpretations, favourable and unfavourable, appears in the Eastern Han text *Yuejue shu* 越絕書 (*The Glory of Yue*),[577] which records a prophetic dream of the late Spring and Autumn era king Fuchai of Wu 夫差. While staying the night at Gusu 姑胥 Platform, King Wu has a frightening dream in which upon entering a palace called Zhangming 章明 he sees many strange things, including two bronze tripods on the fire yet not cooking, two black dogs barking in the north and the south, two ploughshares leaning against his palace hall, water pouring over the palace walls, and blacksmiths loudly hammering. Most importantly for the present study, he sees a *tong* tree suddenly grow in the front gardens (*jian qianyuan hengsuo sheng shu tong* 見前園橫索生樹桐).[578]

Fuchai does not know what these signs mean, and beseeches his chief minister Pi 太宰嚭 to explain them to him truthfully, whether they are good or ill. Pi tells him that the dream is favourable, and explains that the significance of the *tong* is that his musicians will play better. The king, still unnerved, asks Royal Grandson Luo 王孫駱 about the dream, who recommends a certain Gongsun Sheng 公孫聖, who knows that the king only listens to flattery and will execute

[577] This translation of the title comes from Olivia Milburn's translation of the text, *The Glory of Yue: An Annotated Translation of the* Yuejue Shu. There is also a partial translation in German by Axel Schuessler in his PhD dissertation "Das Yüe-chüe shu: Als hanzeitliche Quelle zur Geschichte der Chan-kuo-Zeit". See also Schuessler and Loewe, "Yüeh chüeh shu".

[578] The meaning of the graph *suo* 索 here is unclear to me.

him when he is told the truth. Despite the consequences, Gongsun Sheng's interpretation of the dream is not favourable, and he sees it as a sign of Wu's impending defeat to the forces of Yue. He regards the significance of the *tong* tree (or trees) to be that its wood is not used to make utensils, only to make tomb figurines which are buried with the dead (*tong bu wei qi yong, dan wei yong, dang yu ren ju zang* 桐不為器用，但為甬，當與人俱葬). The king indeed has him killed for his interpretation, and subsequently Wu are indeed defeated by Yue.[579]

This passage is an example of the possibilities available to experts while interpreting signs, an ambiguity which led many to distrust such interpretations. The differences are worth examining for what they say about the significance of certain trees. First a few words about the meaning of the phrase. Milburn translates Fuchai's recounting as "I saw a paulownia tree growing unpruned in the front garden" and in a footnote explains that while the "usual meaning of *hengsheng* 橫生 is 'unplanned' or 'accidental', it is hard to see how a tree can grow accidentally in this context, so I have interpreted this term as meaning something more like 'uncultivated.'"[580] However, as we have seen, it is not uncommon for strange trees to be depicted growing rapidly in courtyards. Moreover, this is a dream, and so we cannot assume the normal rules of tree growth will apply.

As noted, the meaning of the graph *suo* 索 in this context is not immediately apparent (Milburn does not mention it). The later derivative text *Wu Yue chunqiu* 吳越春秋 (*Spring and Autumn Annals of Wu and Yue*) renders the line as "suddenly grew *wutong*" (*hengsheng wutong* 橫生梧桐), dropping the *suo*, suggesting that it is an unnecessary edition to the original. More importantly, the texts refer to the tree(s) with two graphs instead of one. As we have seen, the graphs *wu* and *tong* are not systematically applied, and do not likely refer stably to a single species or even genus as the translation "paulownia" would suggest. I will return to this issue below.

The Tang-era text *Xiaoxiang lu* 瀟湘錄 (*The Records of Xiangjiang River*) records an anecdote about a strange tree that grew in the imperial park and presaged the founding of the dynasty:

[579] *Yuejue shu jiaoshi* 10.283-287. See the translation in Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, 260-268.
[580] Milburn, *The Glory of Yue*, 261.

長安城禁苑內一大樹，冬月雪中，忽花葉茂盛。及凋落結實，其子光明璨爛，如火之明焉。數日，皆化為紅蛺蝶飛去。至明年，唐高祖自唐國入長安。此必前兆也。[581]

In the imperial park of the city of Chang'an, there is a large tree. During the snows of the eleventh month, it's flowers and leaves suddenly came into full bloom. When they withered and bore fruit, the seeds shone bright and lustrous, like the light of fire. After several days, they all turned into red nymphalid butterflies and flew away. The next year, Tang Gaozu came from the state of Tang and entered Chang'an. This was certainly an omen.

Here a strange tree is a sign that things will change, but not necessarily a negative one, as a Tang writer would be unlikely to describe the fall of the previous dynasty and the founding of the current one as a disaster.

These strange trees then do not always mean the same thing, and their meaning is especially liable to vary according to their context, particularly their relationship to humans and what sort of human they are connected to. Another context which complicates their meaning is that of Buddhism.[582] While an in-depth study of the status of strange trees in Buddhism would be beyond the scope of the present study, it would be remiss to ignore Buddhism when making a study of this era. The remainder of this chapter will examine how intertwining trees are described when they appear in Buddhist contexts.

2.4.1. Strange trees in Buddhist temples

As has been shown, strange trees that exhibit intertwining branches may appear in the courtyards of rulers and other important people. They may also appear in other sites of authority, namely Buddhist temples. This section will examine descriptions of the auspicious sign of intertwining branches appearing in Buddhist temples. These descriptions most often appear in biographies of

[581] *Taiping guangji* 409.3292
[582] For a study of Buddhist conceptions of plants in medieval China, see Chen, *Animals and Plants*, 35-56.

monks, which are usually found in general encyclopaedic texts and in collections of biographies or miracle tales.

In biographies, monks are often described as being able to interpret signs of all kinds, this ability conferring authority onto them as well as onto Buddhist teachings more generally.[583] A biography of the monk Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–409)[584] preserved in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*)[585] and the *Taiping guangji* records him interpreting signs such as a sow giving birth to a three-headed piglet, a dragon appearing from a well in the court, and a black dragon descending upon the Jiugong gate (*jiugong men* 九宮門) during the reign of Lü Zuan 呂纂 (d. 401), son of the first ruler of the Later Liang 後涼 Lü Guang 呂光 (337–400). Kumārajīva regarded these as signs of a coming usurpation, but his words were not heeded. Later on, Lü Guang's nephew Lü Chao 呂超 (d. 416) killed Lü Zuan and placed his own brother Lü Long 呂隆 (d. 416) on the throne. The biography also contains an incident where trees intertwined in the garden of the imperial court and onions became fragrant herbs (probably angelica *zhi* 芷) during the reign of Yao Xing 姚興 (366–416) at the time when Kumārajīva was effectively a prisoner in Chang'an. This was taken by Yao Xing as a sign that a wise man was among them, that wise man being Kumārajīva.[586] Here the sign of intertwining trees is not directly connected to the ruler, but to the arrival of a revered monk. Moreover, the other sign in this anecdote of onions becoming angelica also illustrates the belief, described above, that in certain circumstances plants can transform from one type to another.

In Buddhist contexts, strange trees (including intertwining trees) are often interpreted using Buddhist terminology, especially names for trees derived from Sanskrit. The followed item does not mention intertwining trees but illustrates how strange trees can be described when they

583 Guggenmos, "Chinese Buddhism and Divination," 443-444.
584 For dates, see Lü, *Zhongguo fojiao renwu yu zhidu*, 97; Cheung, *An Anthology of Chinese Discourse on Translation: From Earliest Times to the Buddhist Project*, 93 n. 134.
585 Compiled by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554). For background see Wright, "Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's Lives of Eminent Monks"; Shinohara, "Biographies of Eminent Monks in a Comparative Perspective: The Function of the Holy in Medieval Chinese Buddhism"; and Lee, "The Invention of the 'Eminent Monk': Understanding the Biographical Craft of the *Gaoseng Zhuan* through the *Mingseng Zhuan*".
586 *Gaoseng zhuan* T.50.2059.0332a20-22; *Taiping guangji* 89.585-588. Guggenmos also cites this account, but only notes the version preserved in the later *Shenseng zhuan* 神僧傳 T no. 2064, which probably dates from the late Yuan to early Ming, Guggenmos, "Chinese Buddhism and Divination," 444. A translation appears in Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, vol. 2, 396.

appear in Buddhist temples. The item, quoted in the *Taiping guangji*, is recorded as coming from a text titled *Lizhou tongwangxian tujing* 黎州通望縣圖經 (*Displayed Guideways to Tongwang County, Li Prefecture*).[587] It reads:

> 黎州通望縣，有銷樟院，在縣西一百步。內有天王堂。前古柏樹。下有大池。池南有娑羅綿樹，三四人連手合抱方匝。先生花而後生葉。其花盛夏方開。謝時不背而墮，宛轉至地。其花蕊有綿，謂之娑羅棉。善政鬱茂，違時枯凋。古老相傳云：是肉齒和尚住持之靈跡也。縣界有和尚山和尚廟，皆肉齒也。[588]

> In Tongwang county, Li prefecture,[589] a hundred paces west of the border is Xiaozhang temple.[590] Inside is a Hall of the Heavenly King,[591] in front of which is an old cypress, and below that is a large pool. South of the pool is a śāla-floss tree, whose circumference would require three or four men to join hands around it. First it flowers, then later it produces leaves. The flowers only bloom at the height of summer. When they wither, they do not turn over before they fall, and meander down to the ground. Their stamen has floss, which is called śāla-floss. During times of good government, they flourish. In wayward times, they wither. An ancient legend has it: "these are the divine traces of when

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587 This text has been lost and its author unknown, and the graph *wang* 望 was originally written with the visually-similar *bi* 璧, see Lu, *Taiping guangji yinshu kao*, 274. According to Hua Linfu 華林甫, this extract appears to genuinely date from the Tang, see Hua, "Sui-Tang tujing jikao (xia)", 35. As Alexis Lycas has pointed out, the term *tujing* 圖經 may not mean "illustrated classic" (or similar translations). The use of *jing* instead is likely following in the tradition of texts like the *Shanhai jing* and the *Shuijing zhu*, an interpretation of *jing* which has already been addressed in a previous section. The graph *tu* also poses problems, as it likely does not refer to actual images, but as Wolfgang Behr has shown, is more related to "position", "orderedness", and "display". Lycas suggests "patterned guidelines" for *tujing*, as "a 'pattern' reflects the carefully ordered aspect of a *tujing*", but while I agree that *tujing* are not canonised and so should be called "classics", I will translate *tu* as "displayed" to avoid potential confusion caused by the term "patterned", and translate *jing* as "guideways", as "guidelines" gives the impression of a set of instructions. See Behr, "Placed Into the Right Position: Etymological Notes on Tu and Congeners"; Lycas, "The Patterned Guidelines of Shazhou (Shazhou Tujing) and Geographical Practices in Tang China", 482-483; Reiter, "Some Remarks on the Chinese Word t'u". At some point, *tujing* did indeed contain illustrations, see Sterckx, "The Limits of Illustration: Animalia and Pharmacopeia from Guo Pu to *Bencao Gangmu*".

588 *Taiping guangji* 46.3276.

589 According to *Le Grand Ricci*, Li prefecture was established in the Tang and was located in Sichuan.

590 While the graph *yuan* 院 can mean "courtyard", that is a named place that has a hall inside it suggests that it is being used as a term for a Buddhist temple or cloister, a usage that was common in the Tang. The later mention of a monk *heshang* 和尚 merely confirms this. See Muller, "hall 院", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*.

591 While this may be a generic name, the Four Heavenly Kings (*Sitianwang* 四天王) were said to have appeared to the monk Amoghavajra (*Bukongjin'gang* 不空金剛, 704/5-774) while at a temple in Xianfu, Sichuan, and so the latter established the worship of these guardian deities in China, whose images are to be found at the entrance of a temple, which is called their hall, Muller, "four heavenly kings 四天王", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*. This accords with the time and place of the extract from the *Lizhou tongwangxian tujing*, so it is plausible that the hall had this meaning.

the monk Rouchi served as abbot".[592] At the county border, there is a monastic mountain and temple, which are both Rouchi's.

Here the tree is referred to by a Sanskrit term rendered into Chinese: the śāla tree *suoluo* 娑羅, although curiously it is more specifically a "śāla-floss tree" (*suoluo mian shu* 娑羅綿樹), seemingly clarifying what type of śāla tree it is, which suggests śāla may be being used to refer to the specialness of the tree and cotton the type.[593]

Śāla (or sal) trees appear in many versions of stories of the life of the Buddha, often said to be the trees under which the Buddha was born and died. In iconography, trees are usually present in depictions of these two events, as well as of course in depictions of the Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi tree.[594] The name of the śāla tree has been rendered different ways in Chinese. In the translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sutra* titled *Bonihuan jing* 般泥洹經 (*Sutra of Complete Nirvana*),[595] for instance, the trees that the Buddha dies under are referred to as *sulian* 蘇連.[596] In another translation of a related sutra, the *Dabo niepan jing houfen* 大般涅槃經後分 (*The Latter Portion of the Mahāparinirvāṇa sutra*),[597] the Buddha is described being surrounded by śāla trees to his north, south, east, and west:

爾時，世尊娑羅林下寢臥寶牀，於其中夜入第四禪，寂然無聲。於是時頃，便般涅槃。大覺世尊入涅槃已，其娑羅林東西二雙合為一樹、南北二雙合為一

[592] I have not been able to identify this figure outside of this text.
[593] A mention of a cotton-like tree with this name appears in the Tang-era *Manshu*, see *Manshu jiaozhu* 7.183-184; Fujita, "Menka watanuno nikansuru shinajin no chishiki", 182-183.
[594] Bautze-Picron, "The Lady Under the Tree: A Visual Pattern from Māyā to the Tārā and Avalokiteśvara". For a study of how some of this iconography developed in China, see Wang, "Dōki Hokusei jidai no aiba betsurizō oyobi juka shīzō ni mirareru sōju nitsuite"; Celli, "The Birth of the Buddha and Related Episodes as Represented in Chinese Art".
[595] This is the chronologically second Chinese translation of this sutra, being produced some time during the Western Jin. The identity of the translator is unknown, although many scholars think that it was probably Zhi Qian 支謙 (222–252), see Nattier, *A Guide to the Earliest Chinese Buddhist Translations: Texts from the Eastern Han and Three Kingdoms Periods*, 126-128; Park, "A New Attribution of the Authorship of T5 and T6 Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra".
[596] T.1.6.184c19.
[597] Thought to have been produced during the Tang dynasty by Jñānabhadra 若那跋陀羅 and Huining 會寧 (fl. ca. 664–670).

樹，垂覆寶牀蓋於如來，其樹即時慘然變白，猶如白鶴，枝葉、花果、皮幹悉皆爆裂墮落，漸漸枯悴，摧折無餘。[598]

At that time, the World Honoured One rested on the precious dais beneath [the trees of] the śāla grove, and that night entered the fourth dhyāna, and was calm and silent. After some time, he then [entered] parinirvāṇa. Once the greatly enlightened World Honoured One entered nirvana, each side of the grove of śāla [trees] joined from east and west to become one, and each side of the grove of śāla [trees] joined from south and north to become one, hanging over the precious dais and covering the Tathāgata. The trees then as if saddened turned white, resembling white cranes, and the branches and leaves and flowers and fruits and bark and trunks all split open and fell, gradually withering away, breaking apart until there was nothing left.

This passage is then glossed in Guanding's 灌頂 (561–632) commentary to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sutra*,[599] where a detailed description of these trees is provided, which begins:

娑羅雙樹者，此翻堅固。一方二株，四方八株，悉高五丈，四枯四榮。下根相連上枝相合，相合似連理，榮枯似交讓。其葉豐蔚，華如車輪，果大如鉼，其甘如蜜，色香味具。[600]

Śāla twin trees: this is a translation of "sturdy". In each direction are two trees, in four directions eight, they are five *zhang* tall, four withered and four thrived.[601] The roots below are linked together, the branches above are joined together, joining together like intertwining [trees] (*lianli*), withering and thriving like taking-turns [trees] (*jiaorang*).[602]

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598 T.12.377.905a6-905a12.
599 *Daban niepan jing shu* 大般涅槃經疏.
600 T.38.1767.44b24-44b27.
601 A reference to what happened to the trees upon the death of the Buddha.
602 According to Li Shan, this is a double tree where one grows and the other withers, then vice versa every year, *Wenxuan* 4.77. Knechtges does not translate this term, perhaps because it does not confirm to modern botanical knowledge, Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 351.

> Their leaves are abundant, with flowers like chariot wheels, and fruit as large as bottles with sweetness like honey and full of colour, fragrance, and flavour.

In this Chinese gloss of a translation of a Buddhist sutra, the trees are compared to strange trees from China. Moreover, the paired or twinning aspect is clearly important. While some details like the rendering of the name of the trees varies, one aspect that is common to most sutras is that the trees are described as "paired trees" *shuangshu* 雙樹, or at the very least they are described as coming together in some way. This four character rendering (*suoluo shuangshu* 娑羅雙樹) appears in other translations of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sutra* attributed to Faxian 法顯 (337–422),[603] Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 (385–433),[604] and Huiyan 慧嚴 (363–443),[605] as well as in Chinese versions of numerous other sutras. A notable exception to this is Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) *Datang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (*The Great Tang Records of the Western Regions*), in which the trees of the śāla grove are described as being in the same category of "sweet-oak" (*hu* 槲), pale in colour, glossy of leaf, and the four trees around the place where Buddha achieved nirvana are described as being particularly tall.[606] Neither intertwining nor doubling is mentioned, although the number four could suggest the latter.

These trees do not only appear in stories of Gautama Buddha, but also of other Buddhas. In a list of the seven Buddhas of antiquity, the *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (*Longer Āgama-sūtra*)[607] records the trees under which each of them achieved enlightenment, and says that the third Buddha, Viśvabhū 毘舍婆佛, did so under śāla trees.[608] It does however also say that the

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603 First mention appears T.1.7.198c5. The attribution of this translation has been much discussed in scholarship, see Radich, "Was the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra T7 Translated by 'Faxian'?".
604 First mention appears T.12.374.365c5.
605 First mention appears T.12.375.605a5.
606 T.51.2087.903b16-903b17. This quote is also cited in both Xuanying's 玄應 (?–ca. 663) and Huilin's 慧琳 (736–820) *Yiqiejing yinyi* 一切經音義 (Sounds and Meanings of All the Scriptures), although the latter also notes that the name of the grove means "lofty" (*gaoyuan* 高遠), see *Huilin yinyi* 25.929 T.54.2128.463b23-463b24; *Xuanying yinyi* 2.35 C.56.1163.830b14-830b17. While these two texts have the same title, Huilin's builds and expands on Xuanying's. The titles have been amended in references to distinguish them. I am grateful to Ziwei Ye for these references.
607 Translated by Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍 (fl. early 5th century) and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 (fl. late 4th to early 5th century).
608 T.01.0001.2a29-2b1. The *Qifo fumu xingzi jing* 七佛父母姓字經 (*Sutra of the Names of the Parents of the Seven Buddhas*) also makes this association, but uses different names for Viśvabhū 隨葉佛 and śāla trees (*saluo shu* 薩羅樹), T.01.0004.159c21-159c22. This short text is thought to date to the Wei, but for problems in dating this and other sutras, see Radich, "Fei Changfang's Treatment of Sengyou's Anonymous Texts". For a discussion of the trees of these buddhas, see Shimizu, *Bodhi Tree Worship in Theravāda Buddhism*, 16-48.

Buddha obtained enlightenment under a tree called "paṭala" (*boduo shu* 鉢多樹),[609] and elsewhere the sutra claims that the Buddha obtained parinirvāṇa in a śāla garden (*suoluo yuan* 娑羅園) in the city of Kuśinagara 拘尸那揭羅,[610] an illustration of the instability of these names.

Trees then frequently appear in accounts of the lives of Buddhas, and the names of those trees continue to appear in later Buddhist stories. In the item from the *Lizhou tongwangxian tujing* quoted above, the śāla-floss tree is connected to governance and the source of its power is described as coming from the "traces" of a devoted monk, thus it is both associated with the secular world and the dharma. Other accounts of śāla trees in Buddhist contexts (outside of sutras) usually ignore the secular world and emphasise connections to the life of the Buddha. The next section will examine some examples that follow this pattern.

2.4.2. Strange trees, monks, and the Buddha

In a biography that can be found in the *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Mingxiang ji* 冥祥記 (*Signs from the Unseen Realm*),[611] the monk Sengyu 僧瑜 (412–455) at many points in his life vowed to self-immolate in order to avoid the three paths (*santu* 三途) of rebirth[612] through exhausting attachment and casting off physical form. On the day he was to burn, he held a banquet to bid farewell to his fellow monastics in Mount Lu 廬山, during which clouds gathered and rain fell. Sengyu then swore that if his goal can be seen to be true, then the skies will clear – but if there is no sympathetic response (*wugan* 無感), then it will continue to rain. The result, he said, will allow the four groups of Buddhist disciples (*sibei* 四輩) to understand the power of divine responses

609 T.01.0001.2b4. The name of this tree is also used as a transcription for pātra, or alms bowl.
610 T.01.0001.24b26-24b27.
611 This item is preserved in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (*Dharma Garden and Forest of Pearls*), *Fayuan zhulin jiaozhu* 63.1905-1906 (T.53.2122.0770a20-0770b8) and the *Fahua zhuanji* 法華傳記 (*Chronicle of the Dharma Blossom* [i.e., the *Lotus Sutra*]), T.51.2068.094b6-094b21. The translation of the title is from Campany's monograph, which includes a translation.
612 These paths led one either to be reborn in hell, as a domestic animal, or as a hungry ghost.

(s*henying* 神應).[613] As soon as he said these words, the clouds duly dispersed.[614] This not only illustrated the power of sympathetic responses, but also made the environmental conditions right for his immolation, again suggesting the correctness of his actions. At his burning, monks and laymen flocked to the mountain and prostrated themselves before him, all of them bearing witness to the purple vapour (*ziqi* 紫氣) that rose up into the air and dissipated.

The responses from the natural world continued after Sengyu's death:

> 其後旬有四日。瑜房中生雙梧桐。根枝豐茂。鉅細相如。貫壤直聳。遂成連樹。理識者以為娑羅寶樹克炳泥洹。瑜之庶幾故現斯證。因號為雙桐沙門。[615]

> Fourteen days later, in [Seng]yu's lodgings grew a pair of parasol trees – their roots and branches luxuriant, thick and thin alike, penetrating the earth and towering aloft – which then became intertwined trees.[616] Knowledgeable ones took them for precious śāla trees and as manifestations of [Sengyu entering] nirvana. Because [Seng]yu was worthy,[617] so there was this verification. Thereupon he was called the Śramaṇa of the Twin Parasol Trees.[618]

In this story, the strange behaviour of the trees is directly related to the worthy behaviour of a particular person, which echoes descriptions of trees planted on the tombs of filial people that will be examined in a later section, only here both the worthy behaviour and the trees themselves

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[613] The specific phrasing used is "the non-dimness of divine responses" (*shenying zhi wumei* 神應之無昧). Sengyu appears to be making a deliberate connection between the brightness of the weather and the metaphorical brightness of truth. For background on sympathetic resonances in Chinese Buddhism, see Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*, 77-136.

[614] T.50.2059.0405a8-0405a21. The *Gaoseng zhuan* version is discussed and partially translated by Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism*, 35-36, and is translated by Gernet, "Les suicides par le feu chez les bouddhistes chinois du v^{e} au x^{e} siècle", 175-176. Campany translates the *Mingxiang ji* version in *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 214-215, although makes amendments based on other versions.

[615] This quotation is from the version in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, T.50.2059.0405a21-0405a24.

[616] I have amended the punctuation based on the version in the *Fahua zhuanji*. This version also differs by describing the tree as becoming "marvellous" *qi* 奇 rather than intertwined, T.51.2068.094b20. The *Mingxiang ji* version has "then became a vast tree" (*sui cheng hong shu* 遂成鴻樹), Wang, *Mingxiang ji yanjiu*, 199; Liu, "Zhongsheng ru Foguo shenling jiang renjian: Mingxiang ji de kongjian yu yuwang quanshi", 27.

[617] This specific meaning of the word *shuji* 庶幾 comes from the "Appended Statements" *Xici* 繫辭 to the *Yijing*, see *Zhouyi jijie zuanshu* 9.651.

[618] This is, as Liu Yuan-ju points out, the only time in the *Mingxiang ji* where the word *niehuan* 泥洹 occurs, Liu, "Zhongsheng ru Foguo shenling jiang renjian", 27.

are unambiguously Buddhist. This story also makes explicit the importance of the strange, here described using the now familiar terminology of divine responses or resonances. More specifically, while in this story Sengyu makes explicit reference to the Medicine King chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* – a common citation for self-immolators[619] – Liu Yuan-ju 劉苑如 also sees the description of bejewelled trees as echoing the seven jewelled trees (*qibao zhushu* 七寶諸樹) in the *Aparimitāyu sutra* (*Wuliangshou jing* 無量壽經) as well as evoking the idea of a Pure Land.[620]

One discrepancy between the *Gaoseng zhuan* and *Mingxiang ji* versions of this story is that, while both refer to the trees as "paired" (*shuang* 雙), the former calls them *wutong* and the latter simply *tong*. According to Nicholas Menzies, *wutong* is *Firmiana simplex* (aka the Chinese parasol tree) and *tong* is paulownia.[621] Thus, James Benn's translation of the *Gaoseng zhuan* version renders it as firmiana, and Campany's translation of the *Mingxiang ji* version renders it as paulownia.[622] Before continuing, this discrepancy needs to be addressed in further detail.

Firmiana is a genus of deciduous trees and shrubs.[623] The genus name in Chinese is *wutong shu* 梧桐屬, and they were formerly classified in the *Sterculiaceae* family (in Chinese: *wutong ke* 梧桐科),[624] but are now thought to be within the *Malvaceae* family (*jinkui ke* 錦葵科).[625] *Paulownia* is a genus of deciduous hardwood trees that in the tropics are evergreen. The genus name is *paotong shu* 泡桐屬 in Chinese and they are classified within the *Scrophulariaceae* family (*xuanshen ke* 玄参科).[626] The specific species of paulownia indicated by *tong* is usually *Paulownia fortunei* (called *Baihuapaotong* 白花泡桐 in Chinese), which is named for the Scottish botanist and explorer Robert Fortune (1812–1880). In Chinese, the names for the modern botanical genera both

619 See Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, 3-6, 38-40; Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 215 n.760.
620 Liu, "Zhongsheng ru Foguo shenling jiang renjian", 28.
621 Daniels and Menzies, *Science and Civilisation in China* vol. 6.3, 593-597. This distinction is also made by Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 348-351, 119, 132. Kroll also suggests *Firmiana platanifolora* for *wutong*. See also Métailié, "Noms de plantes asiatiques dans les langues européennes".
622 Benn, *Burning for the Buddha*, 35-36, 46-47 and note 118; Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 214-215. Firmiana is the name of a genus, so to avoid the erroneous impression of botanical exactitude, I use the more colloquial term "parasol tree" to translate *wutong*.
623 *Flora of China*, vol. 12, 311.
624 For this family, see *Flora of China*, vol. 12, 301-330.
625 Upson and Cullen, "Firmiana simplex".
626 *Flora of China*, vol. 18, 9-11.

contain the graph *tong* (*wutong* and *paotong*), but this linguistic (if not botanical) continuity is not apparent in English.

Translating *wutong* and *tong* differently in different versions of the story of Sengyu thus poses a problem, as the versions are very close and are unlikely to be referring to different trees, especially as the two names are so similar and, as Menzies has pointed out, so often conflated. Both the graphs *wu* and *tong* can be found in early texts like the *Shijing*, appearing on their own, together, or with other graphs.[627] A *wutong* also appears in the *Zhuangzi*, where it is mentioned as the only place a southern bird called *yuanchu* 鵷鶵 would perch.[628]

Explanations, when provided, are usually lexicographic and tend to assume that digraph terms are subsidiary to single graphs. For instance, Lu Ji regards *tong* as being divided into four types: blue-black *tong* (*qingtong* 青桐),[629] red *tong* (*chitong* 赤桐), white *tong* (*baiting* 白桐), and *wutong* 梧桐, but despite this division he also notes that his contemporaries usually do not distinguish between types of *wutong*.[630] The *Erya* glosses *chen* 櫬 as *wu* and *rong* 榮 as *tong*, both of which Guo Pu says are words for the contemporary *wutong*, suggesting that he regards them as one.[631] Jia Sixie echoes this position, but differentiates them thusly: "[As for] the leaves of *tong*, those that flower but do not fruit are called white *tong*, those that fruit and have blue-black bark are called *wutong*" (*tongye hua er bu shi zhe yue baitong, shi er pi qing zhe yue wutong* 桐葉花而不實者曰白桐，實而皮青者曰

[627] For a convenient overview, see Chou, "Gudian shiwen de tongshu yixiang yu wenhua yihan", 37-40.
[628] Cheng Xuanying says that this bird is "in the group of simurghs and phoenixes, and some say it is the offspring of the phoenix" (*luanfeng zhishu, yi yan feng zi ye* 鸞鳳之屬，亦言鳳子也), *Zhuangzi jishi* 17.605-606. There is also another mention of the *tong* tree from a lost part the *Zhuangzi* which only survives partially in quotation. It reads, "An open gate invites the wind, the 'breasts' of a *tong* results in nests" (*kong men lai feng, tongru zhi chao* 空門來風，桐乳致巢). This reference to breasts is explained by Sima Biao thusly: "the seeds of the *tong* are like breasts, they produce leaves and grow, birds like to nest among them" (*tongzi si ru, zhuo ye er sheng, niao xi chao zhi* 桐子似乳, 着葉而生, 鳥喜巢之), *Wenxuan* 13.191. There is some variation in both these quotations, see *Yiwen leiju* 88.1527; *Taiping yulan* 956.4226.
[629] The colour term *qing* is often difficult to translate, and covers a wider spectrum than English terms like green or blue. Métailié translates it as "bluegreen", see "The *Bencao gangmu* of Li Shizhen: An Innovation in Natural History?", 244.
[630] *Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 1B.43.
[631] *Erya zhishu* 9.305-306; Chou, "Gudian shiwen de tongshu yixiang yu wenhua yihan", 37. The *Erya* also notes that the graph *chen* can refer to firewood.

梧桐).[632] Zheng Xuan, in his commentary to the *Shijing*, says that *tong* and *yi* 椅 are different names for the same type of thing (*tong lei er yi ming* 同類而異名).[633]

Although his list differs slightly to Lu Ji's, Tao Hongjing also says that there are four types of *tong* trees: blue-black *tong*, *wutong*, white *tong*, and hilly *tong* (*gangtong* 崗桐), and moreover notes that blue-black *tong* and hilly *tong* do not have seeds (*zi* 子) and the other two do.[634] In summarising some of this material, Li Shizhen notes that there are a number of contradictions, and disagrees both with Lu Ji that *yi* is *wutong* and with Guo Pu when he says that *rong* is *wutong*.[635] Overall, there seems to be a tendency to see *tong* and *wutong* as referring to the same thing before the Song dynasty, and a growing consensus that they are different thereafter.

While we can appreciate the grand systemising work of Li Shizhen, when it comes to examining a text, we cannot assume that there is necessarily a single stable botanical object behind a name of a tree (or any plant). This can make translation difficult generally, but there is an added complication with *wu* and *wutong*. Both firmiana and paulownia are names of genera, and both are named for Early Modern European aristocrats – Count Karl Joseph von Firmian (1716–1782) and Her Royal Highness Anna Pavlovna of Russia (1795–1865), respectively. Firmian was governor of Lombardy and patron of the Padua Botanic Garden, and Pavlovna, daughter of Czar Paul I and wife of King William II of the Netherlands, was patron of Franz von Siebold's botanical expedition to Japan.[636] While translation always involves a certain amount of decontextualization, the connotations of Early Modern European imperialism and emerging modern science may be too alien to the 5th century Chinese context of the story.

This issue persists in Campany's translation, where he says that the "*suoluobao* trees" (which he does not translate as śāla) "often designates teak trees, but that makes no sense in the context".[637] Campany does not elaborate why this does not make sense, but presumably he means simply

[632] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 5.254.
[633] *Mao Shi zhengyi* 10.351.
[634] *Bencao jing jizhu* 5.353.
[635] *Bencao gangmu* 35.1142. For a further discussion regarding Li Shizhen's explanations of *tong* and *wutong*, see Métailié, "The *Bencao gangmu* of Li Shizhen", 243-248.
[636] Sophus Reinert calls Firmian an "historiographically enigmatic Habsburg plenipotentiary", see Reinert, *The Academy of Fisticuffs*, 53-54. For Pavlovna see Nagata et al., "Paulownia tomentosa: A Chinese Plant in Japan".
[637] Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 215, note 763.

that a teak tree cannot be a paulownia. He does not however say that the purple vapour cannot be what the text describes it to be, even though purple vapour rising from a burning monk is as unlikely as a paulownia being a teak tree, or as unlikely as trees growing in 14 days, or indeed as unlikely as the weather changing due to a monk's commitment to self-immolation. This illustrates that even when in the proximity of seemingly impossible phenomena, there still seems to be an expectation on the part of scholars that plants will be described naturalistically. Rather than seeing these names of trees as referring to species, it makes more sense to see them as referring to looser categories of things, a looseness that reflects a pre-botanical understanding of the natural world. That being said, I do agree with Campany that when these texts say that trees they label as *wu* or *wutong* are *suoluo* trees, they likely do not mean what we would mean by different species or even genera.

In this item, then, the name of the śāla trees especially should be understood first and foremost as the name of an auspicious sign, and even the *tong*/*wutong* trees could be understood in a similar manner. The biological qualities of these plants are not the main focus; instead the focus is on their specific and unusual behaviour, in this instance their rapid and intertwined growth. Despite the discrepancy in the names of the trees, in both the *Gaoseng zhuan* and the *Mingxiang ji* versions Sengyu's epithet is the same: The Śramaṇa of the Twin Parasol Trees (*shuangtong shamen* 雙桐沙門). While there may be some subtextual implications in the use of the name of a tree sometimes associated with supernatural stories in literature, most likely the type or name of the tree is secondary to the behaviour of intertwining, hence the stability of the monk's epithet and the lack of consistency in the name of the trees. What appears to be important is that there were trees that intertwined, the name or type of those trees less so. This is also why the twin *tong*/*wutong* trees can be identified with another name.

By calling the intertwining trees śāla, the text makes a connection to some stories of the life of the Buddha, who is said in some sources to have been born and died under śāla trees. As noted, trees often feature in Buddhist iconography of events in the Buddha's life, even so-called aniconic depictions that do not depict the person of the Buddha directly. Moreover, as shown above, śāla trees are also depicted growing together in some of these accounts. That the connection is being made between the strange, intertwining behaviour of trees, the devotion of

the monk, and the life of the Buddha is significant, and it is not only in this story that such a connection appears.

These trees that loom large in the life of the Buddha are not always named śāla in Chinese (nor indeed in other languages). Sometimes they are named for the Buddha's enlightenment, and are called "bodhi trees" (*putishu* 菩提樹)[638] or sometimes "Way trees" (*daoshu* 道樹), both of which translate the Sanskrit terms bodhi-vṛkṣa or bodhi-druma.[639] Other names include "Buddha tree" (*foshu* 佛樹) and pippala tree (*biboluo* 畢缽羅, *beiboluo* 卑缽羅, *binboluo* 賓波羅, etc). Sometimes the tree under which Māyā gave birth to the Buddha is called other names like *ashujia* 阿輸迦 or *wuyou* 無憂, which is thought to be a transliteration and translation respectively of the term aśoka ("without sorrow"). This also names the famous king Ashoka (more usually King Ayu 阿育王 in Chinese), who himself is associated with caring for and restoring the tree that the Buddha meditated beneath (admittedly after nearly destroying it himself).[640]

These trees do not always conform to expectations of tree behaviour or appearance. An early Chinese translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra (*Dafangguangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經) by Buddhabhadra 佛馱跋陀羅 (359–429) begins with a description of the location where the Buddha obtained enlightenment. The surroundings are described in lavish terms; the ground is diamond and everything is decked in jewels and flowers. The bodhi tree is described as tall, with a trunk of clear beryl,[641] formed of branches, leaves, flowers all made of jewels, and having wish-fulfilling *mani* jewels as fruit.[642] In other contexts they are less fantastic, while apparently still

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638 See for instance *Datang xiyu ji* T.51.2087.0915b7-0915c25.

639 These terms also illustrate the different strategies of transliteration and translation available to translators, see Funayama, "Translation, Transcription, and What Else? Some Basic Characteristics of Chinese Buddhist Translation as a Cultural Contact between India and China, with Special Reference to Sanskrit ārya and Chinese sheng", 90.

640 See the quotation from the *Futu jing* 浮屠經 (*Buddha sutra*) made by Zhang Shoujie 張守節 (8th century) in his commentary to the *Shiji*. For Zhang and his text see Klein, *Reading Sima Qian from Han to Song*, 25, 359-360. For the *Futu jing*, see Gao, "Ye tan yixia futu jing". See also the entry in Muller, "Aśoka 阿輸迦", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, which cites the *Fan fanyu* 翻梵語 (*Translation of the Sanskrit Language*), a text dated to the early 6th century by Antonello Palumbo, see Palumbo, *An Early Chinese Commentary on the Ekottarika-āgama*, 129-130.

641 There has been some debate on what type of gem or precious stone the term *liuli* 瑠璃/琉璃 refers, with some regarding it as lapis lazuli or crystal or even glass, see Yu, "Liuli in Buddhist Rituals and Art in Medieval China", 236-239; Miyajima, "Kanyaku butsuten ni okeru honyaku go hari no seiritsu". I am grateful to Janine Nicol for her advice on this issue.

642 T.9.0278.0395a11-0395a15. See the translation of this passage in Teiser, "Ornamenting the Departed: Notes on the Language of Chinese Buddhist Ritual Texts," 219-220. See also the entry in Muller, "wish-granting jewel 如意摩尼", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism.*

special enough to be given as gifts. As Edward Schafer has noted, during the Tang *puti* trees were sent by Indic kings to the court, and by the mid-Tang the tree to which the term *puti shu* referred had transferred from a pippala (or peepul) to a linden tree.[643] The term śāla – or transliterations for it – appear in Chinese texts before the Tang,[644] and it will be on trees with that name that the rest of this section focuses.

An early reference appears in the *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (*Commentary to the Guideways to Rivers*) by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (d. 527),[645] which quotes the partially lost *Waiguo shi* 外國事 (*Affairs of Foreign Countries*) by the monk Zhi Sengzai 支僧載 (dates unknown).[646] In this quotation, Zhi Sengzai mentions the "paired trees" (*shuangshu*) and stupa installed by Aśoka at the place where the Buddha obtained nirvana, but notes that they no longer remain. He then glosses the paired trees thusly: "These trees are called śāla trees, their flowers are called śālakhā, [and] the colour of these flowers are white like frost and snow, and they are fragrant like no other" (*ci shu ming suoluoshu, qi shuhua ming suoluoqu ye, ci huase bai ru shuangxue, xiang wubi ye* 此樹名娑羅樹，其樹花名娑羅佉也，此花色白如霜雪，香無比也).[647]

A tree that is called a śāla tree makes an appearance in another anecdote recorded in the *Taiping yulan* as coming from the *Jingzhou ji* 荊州記 (*Record of Jingzhou*), attributed to Sheng Hongzhi 盛弘之 (fl. 432–439):

> 巴陵縣僧寺牀下忽生一木。不旬日，勢陵軒棟。道人移居避之，木即長遲，但極晚香。有西域僧見之，曰：「娑羅樹也，彼僧所憩之蔭。」常著花，至玄嘉十一年，忽生一花，狀如芙蓉。[648]

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643 Schafer, *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand*, 122-123.
644 Schafer also makes this point, see *Golden Peaches*, 124.
645 Hüsemann, "*Shuijing zhu*"; Hüsemann, *Das Altertum vergegenwärtigen: Eine Studie zum Shuijing zhu des Li Daoyuan*; Nylan, Wandering in the Ruins: The Shuijing zhu Reconsidered"; Lycas, "The Recollection of Place in Li Daoyuan's Shuijing zhu"; Tian, "Empire's Blue Highways"; Felt, *Structures of the Earth: Metageographies of Early Medieval China*, 165-210.
646 See Deeg, *The Places Where Siddhārtha Trod*; Hüsemann, "Located Imagination: India in the *Shuijing Zhu* of Li Daoyuan."
647 *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng* 1.5.
648 *Taiping yulan* 961.4267-4268.

> Below the beds of a Buddhist temple in Baling county[649] suddenly grew a tree, and shortly thereafter it had already climbed past the windows and ridgepole. The monks moved their lodgings to avoid it, and the tree then grew slower, only growing rapidly when evening incense was lit. A monk from the Western Regions who saw it said, "It is a śāla tree. Its shade is where monks can rest." It often flowered, and in the 11th year of the Xuanjia era,[650] it suddenly grew a flower in the shape of a lotus.

The strange rapid growth of the tree is connected to Buddhism through the location (monks lodgings in a temple), ritual practice (the lighting of evening incense), Sanskrit-derived terminology (śāla), interpretive authority (courtesy of the monk from the Western Regions), and flower symbolism (the lotus). A longer version of this story appears in the *Taiping guangji*, where the graphs for the tree are rendered as *poluo* 婆羅. There is a tree in Indra's garden called *kalpa-druma*, which can be written with the graphs *po* 婆 or *bo* 波 in Chinese,[651] but the similarity with the item above from the *Taiping yulan*, as well as the description of the plant, makes it more likely to be a graphical variant of *suoluo*. The item reads in part,

> 巴陵有寺，僧房牀下，忽生一木。隨伐隨長。外國僧見曰：「此婆羅也。」元嘉初，出一花如蓮。唐天寶初，安西進婆羅枝，狀言：「臣所管四鎮，有拔汗那，最為密近。木有婆羅樹，特為奇絕，不庇凡草，不止惡禽。聳榦無慚於松栝，成陰不媿於桃李。[652]

> In Baling there is a temple where below the beds of the monk's quarters a tree suddenly grew. Whenever it was cut it would grow back. On seeing it, a foreign monk said, "This is a śāla tree". In the early years of the Yuanjia reign, it produced a flower that resembled

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649 *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 168.
650 Probably referring to the Yuanjia era of Emperor Wen of the Liu-Song, which ran from 424 to 453, which would make this year 434 by modern Western reckoning.
651 Variants include *jiepoluo shu* 劫婆羅樹, *jiebo shu* 劫波樹, *jieshabo shu* 劫沙波娑, and *jieju* 劫具. See Muller, "kalpa-druma 劫婆羅樹", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*. Both Soothill and Hodous and the Foguang dictionary call it *kalpataru*, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 232-233; *Foguang dacidian*, 2815.
652 *Taiping guangji* 406.3278; *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.706.

> a lotus. In the early years of the Tianbao reign of the Tang,[653] Anxi presented a branch of the śāla tree, and reported, "Within the four strongholds managed by your humble servant is Ferghana 拔汗那, which is closest to your majesty. Of its trees, there is the śāla tree, which is especially marvellous. It does not [provide] shelter for vulgar herbs, nor rest for evil birds. It is lofty of trunk, in a manner not inferior to pines and juniper; it forms a leafy shade in a manner not inferior to peaches and plums.

It is worth noting here that the text describes a branch of the śāla being presented. This may be similar to how in the official histories auspicious signs are described as being presented to court,[654] or may be alluding to earlier Indic meanings of the term śāla which connected it to the motif of women pulling down a tree branch that was borrowed for the story of when Māyā birthed the Buddha.[655]

The fact that the tree grew suddenly in the temple itself has miraculous connotations. Schafer regards this story as evidence that the species *Shorea robusta* – with which the name śāla is identified in modern literature – was introduced to China before the Tang dynasty.[656] More likely is that the behaviour of the tree was regarded as strange and special, and so it was identified with a strange and special tree in the life of the Buddha. We should not assume that by naming a tree pre-modern authors are connecting the name and species, especially as the latter is a concept unavailable to them. As has been noted, there is not necessarily always botanical object to found behind the written word, and even if there was, it likely will remain inaccessible to those who only have textual evidence to go on.

From these examples it can be seen that trees of varied descriptions and behaviours are all being called śāla trees. Moreover, usually the person designating them such is a foreigner from the west, which is reasonable given that śāla is a foreign word from the west. The trees are thus

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653 That is, the years 742–756 of the Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (685–762).
654 For examples of plants being presented to the court in this way, see Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 117-132.
655 See the discussion in Roth, "Woman and Tree Motif Salabhanjika Dalamalika in Prakrit and Sanskrit Texts with Special Reference to Silpasastras Including Notes on Dohada and Related Jaina Texts".
656 Schafer, *Golden Peaches*, 123-124. Schafer cites the item as it appears in *Youyang zazu jiaojian* 18.1298.

being connected to knowledge of the western religion of Buddhism via authoritative figures, but also importantly through a name that is clearly non-Chinese in origin.

The official histories record the time and location of these appearances of strange trees, and connect them to the rule of the emperor. When appearing in a monastic context, strange trees are usually interpreted (often by foreigners) as trees with Indic names that are connected in some way to the story of the life of the Buddha. Both interpretive paradigms see strange trees as being connected to a higher authority, but even though both record phenomena that occur in China and both use Chinese to record those phenomena, only one connects them to a Chinese authority.[657]

Another difference between them is that auspicious signs in official histories are temporally directed to the present and the future: they suggest that things are currently going well or badly and will continue to do so unless something changes. Because they are interpreted as being Indic-named trees associated with the Buddha, strange trees in Chinese temples are temporally associated with the past. If the official histories understand strange trees as speaking to the here and now, then Buddhist anecdotal literature understands strange trees in temples as speaking to the there and then.

This reflects an underlying tension in Chinese Buddhism regarding its foreign origin and the status of China in Buddhist sacred geography. According to the traditional Indic view, China is a faraway place inhabited by *mlecchas*. This view was preserved in Buddhism and resulted in a concern among early Chinese Buddhists that they were living not just temporally but physically distant from the Buddha and the dharma.[658] This developed into what Antonio Forte has called a "borderland complex", whereby Chinese Buddhists were forced to admit that they lived in a soteriologically peripheral region, an idea that went against the traditional conception of China (and indeed the Emperor himself) as being the centre of the world.[659] Much effort was put into

[657] Jinhua Chen calls this mutual influence, of Chinese concepts being reinterpreted using Buddhist concepts and vice versa, "somewhat paradoxical", see Chen, "'Pañcavārṣika' Assemblies in Liang Wudi's Buddhist Palace Chapel", 88.
[658] Nicol, "Buddhist Sacred Geography of China", 59-61; 65-68.
[659] Forte, "Hui-chih (fl. 676-703 A.D.): A Brahmin Born in China". See also Deeg, "Chinese Buddhists in Search of Authenticity in the Dharma"; Barrett, "Exploratory Observations on Some Weeping Pilgrims". For a thorough study of this issue, see Nicol, "Buddhist Sacred Geography of China".

integrating China into the traditional Buddhist realm, whether by claiming that some of the stūpa of Aśoka were actually in China, or by associating Chinese mountains with Buddhist figures, such as Mount Wutai 五臺 with Mañjuśrī (*Wenshu* 文殊).[660]

When the auspicious sign of intertwining trees was linked to the Buddha, then, it was inevitably connected to the idea of China being far from the Buddhist sacred centre of the world, and to attempts to bring China closer to that centre. This is quite opposed to when intertwining trees were presented by governors of various regions located in the domain of the Chinese Emperor, as those presentations confirmed the proper and peaceful rule of the Son of Heaven, that is, the central figure of authority in the centre of the world. While the behaviour of these auspicious trees is much the same, the implications and interpretations of that behaviour can be quite different.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of intertwining trees was commonly regarded to be an auspicious sign. How exactly that sign was interpreted depended on who was doing the interpreting. Most commonly, it was understood as signifying the proper rule of the ruler, and records of this sign, like many others, would be collected either in textual form. Other forms of collection included physically moving the tree(s) or part of them, or sometimes if this was inconvenient or would be damaging to the tree(s), then an image would be made of them. In other contexts, the phenomenon was understood as strange, but an interpretation was not immediately available to those who witnessed it, leading to conflicting interpretations, with even some records showing that they would be destroyed by local people unaware of the tradition of viewing them as an auspicious sign. In Buddhist contexts, this phenomenon was also generally regarded as auspicious, but was also usually connected linguistically to Buddhist history, especially to stories of the life of the Buddha. In most contexts then, this phenomenon was regarded as an auspicious sign illuminating the good qualities of a ruler, either secular or spiritual. This phenomenon also illustrates the contested aspect of the strange, where the meaning of unusual phenomena is not immediately apparent, leading to attempts to provide a proper interpretation of it, usually in regard to political or religious leaders. That this phenomenon is a

[660] Deeg, "Mapping Common Territory–Mapping Other Territory", 153-158; Nicol, "Buddhist Sacred Geography of China", 260-270, 293-298; Robson, *Power of Place*, 53-54.

natural one (and can occur in nature) is also significant, as it illustrates how the natural world was understood to react to human activity, especially regarding the proper rule of important figures.

Chapter 3: Trees, Tombs, and the Strange

3.1.1. Introduction

In the previous section, the phenomenon of intertwining trees was examined. One aspect of these trees that did not receive full attention was the issue of filial piety.[661] This section will examine connections between filiality and strange trees, with a particular focus on the behaviour of trees planted on tombs.

3.2.1. Filiality

The *Classic of Filial Piety* is, as might be expected, very clear on the central importance of filiality. It at one point has Confucius saying,

> 天地之性，人為貴。人之行，莫大於孝，孝莫大於嚴父，嚴父莫大於配天。[662]

> Of all natures [bestowed by] Heaven and Earth, humans are the most noble. There is no greater form of human conduct than filial piety; there is no greater form of filial piety than being solemn with one's father; there is no greater form of being solemn with one's father than [sacrificing to] Heaven as a helpmate.[663]

This view of the high place of humans in a universal hierarchy, and the connection of that higher status to proper conduct, was not uncommon in pre-modern China. Proper conduct was also itself situated within a hierarchy, whereby behaving as one should to those above one in that

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[661] For histories of this concept, see Holzman, "The Place of Filial Piety in Ancient China"; Radice, "The Ways of Filial Piety in Early China"; Knapp, *Selfless Offspring: Filial Children and Social Order in Medieval China*; and the edited volume by Alan Kam-leung Chan and Sor-hoon Tan, *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*. For a slightly later period, see Zhang, *Performing Filial Piety in Northern Song China*.
[662] *Xiaojing zhushu* 5.43.
[663] Translation adapted from Goldin, "Filial Piety", 108-109. For issues relating to the translation of *xiao* 孝, see Knapp, "The Ru Reinterpretation of Xiao".

hierarchy was regarded as noble. In a section on sympathetic resonances (*ganying* 感應), the text also says,

> 孝悌之至，通於神明，光于四海，無所不通。[664]

> Filial piety and brotherly obedience at its zenith circulate to the spirits, shines throughout the four seas, and there is nowhere not penetrated [by them].[665]

As Mark Lewis has noted, this type of resonance was also understood to give rise to the appearance of auspicious signs in the natural world,[666] signs which included the phenomenon of intertwined trees, which were examined in the previous chapter.

The concept of filiality of course did not remain static. The introduction of Buddhism to China saw the concept used in polemics against the foreign religion, but also saw it change and be deployed in Buddhist contexts. Buddhism was attacked by some for encouraging sons and daughters to leave the family home, to fail in their duty of providing descendants, and inflict damage on the body which was a gift from their parents.[667] Buddhism could also be a site of filiality, with extraordinary stories of filial sons and daughters attempting to save their parents from suffering being staples of Buddhist miracle tales in China.[668] These changes also interacted with other traditions, conventionally labelled Confucianism and Daoism.[669]

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[664] *Xiaojing zhushu* 8.78.
[665] See the translation in Lewis, "Mothers and Sons in Early Imperial China", 254.
[666] Lewis, "Mothers and Sons", 254.
[667] Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest of China*, 281; Michihata, *Bukkyō to jukyō rinri*; Xing, "A Buddhist-Confucian Controversy on Filial Piety".
[668] See Ch'en, Kenneth K. S. "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism"; Teiser, *The Ghost Festival in Medieval China*; Hinsch, "Confucian Filial Piety and the Construction of the Ideal Buddhist Woman". Alan Cole has argued that Buddhists deliberately focused on the mother-son relationship in opposition to the traditional father-son emphasis in Confucianism, see Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism*. For a comparisons between Indic and Chinese Buddhist conceptions of filiality, see Strong, "Filial Piety and Buddhism: The Indian Antecedents to a 'Chinese Problem'"; Schopen, "Filial Piety and the Monk in the Practice of Indian Buddhism: A Question of 'Sinicization' Viewed from the Other Side"; Xing, "The Teaching and Practice of Filial Piety in Buddhism".
[669] For the latter see Bokenkamp, *Ancestors and Anxiety*; Mugitani, "Filial Piety and 'Authentic Parents' in Religious Daoism"; Kohn, "Immortal Parents and Universal Kin".

Descriptions of proper filial conduct feature in many texts, especially in biographies.[670] It is to descriptions of filial behaviour in biographies of notable figures that this study will now turn. The importance of filial piety was emphasized even in early texts, but by the Han dynasty, the concept of filiality had expanded from being focused only on parent-child relationships to included loyal behaviour towards rulers and general trustworthiness.[671] Biographical anecdotes of filial behaviour began to feature prominently in official histories from the *Hou-Hanshu* onwards, and included accounts of deceased parents being mourned by their filial sons.[672] According to Keith Knapp, the most common themes in filial tales were the reverent care (*gongyang* 供養) of parents (most commonly mothers) in need of it, and the proper care of parental graves.[673]

The proper rituals for mourning are described in a number of texts, and while there is some debate over exactly how long the mourning period lasted, the time most often proscribed was three years. Once the person had stopped breathing, the soul would be called back in a ritual called either *fu* 復 or *zhaohun* 招魂, and then, after a three day waiting period, the body would be placed in a coffin and the coffin placed in a tomb. From then the chief mourner, usually the son(s) of the deceased, would wear mourning garb and relinquish any office for a period of around three years.[674] This is of course an idealised picture of mourning, and in reality the period of time observed may have been much shorter.[675]

3.2.2. Filial biographies

As mentioned briefly in the previous section, a famous example of filial biography is that of the Eastern Han official Cai Yong, who was renowned as a young man for his devotion to his parents. When his mother suffered a long illness, Cai Yong was always by her side, and when she died, he was so attentive to her during the mourning period that rabbits around the dwelling were as if tamed, and the trees planted on the tomb grew intertwined (*mu sheng lianli* 木生連

[670] Holzman, "The Place of Filial Piety".
[671] Makeham, "Ming-chiao in the Eastern Han: Filial Piety, Reputation, and Office", 84-88.
[672] Holzman, "The Place of Filial Piety". For a list, see Eicher, "Early Representations of Filial Piety in Dynastic Historiography Textual History and Content of Hou Han Shu Chapter 39", 2 fn. 3.
[673] Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 9, 113-163.
[674] *Liji jijie* 54.1349-1354; Brown, *Politics of Mourning*, 11-15; Yü, "'O Soul, Come Back!'", 365-369.
[675] Brown, *Politics of Mourning*, 21-40. On prescriptive ritual texts, see Puett, "Combining the Ghosts and Spirits, Centering the Realm: Mortuary Ritual and Political Organization in the Ritual Compendia of Early China".

理).[676] As was elaborated in the previous section, particularly good moral human behaviour was often seen as resulting in corresponding unusual behaviour from things from the natural world, in this case rabbits and trees. The *Hou-Hanshu* notes that the unusualness of this entire situation – the filial devotion of Cai Yong and the subsequent strange behaviour of flora and fauna around the tomb – attracted attention far and wide, with many coming to the tomb to see it for themselves. It is important to note that this situation was special: sons were not normally so attentive, and flora and fauna were not expected to behave in this way. It is not that pre-modern Chinese writers saw the natural world as always full of magic and wonder, but rather that many of them assumed that there was, given exceptional circumstances, a potential for natural phenomena to behave in strange and unusual ways.

Filial piety was not merely an idealised form of moral behaviour to be praised and admired.[677] Not only was there social pressure to behave in this way, but one of the requirements (in principle at least) for certain official appointments was for men to be seen as properly filial.[678] Indeed, after relating his famous filiality, the *Hou-Hanshu* notes that Cai Yong studied under the patronage of the prominent official Hu Guang 胡廣 (91–172),[679] suggesting that Cai Yong rose to such prominence partly as a result of his filiality.[680] It is also notable that Cai Yong's loyalty to the Han royal house is emphasised in the *Hou-Hanshu*,[681] thus illustrating the interconnected loyalties of the three "guiderope" relationships.[682]

The presence of the strange served, often implicitly, as confirmation of something true about the world. This can be most clearly seen in the auspicious signs related to the emperor collected in

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[676] *Hou-Hanshu* 60B:1980. For another translation see Brown, *Politics of Mourning*, 80. Bokenkamp argues for 菟 (*tu*, dodder) to be read as 兔 (*tu*, rabbit) and identifies the tree as a *gantang* 甘棠, see *Ancestors and Anxiety*, 1-2.
[677] Jack Chen explores the performative aspect of filial mourning in "On Mourning and Sincerity in the Li ji and the Shishuo xinyu", 73-77.
[678] See Wu, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture*, 195-196; Powers, *Art and Political Expressions in Early China*, 42-3. Rafe de Crespigny points out that there was often a discrepancy between word and deed on this issue, see "The Recruitment System of the Imperial Bureaucracy of Later Han", 75-76.
[679] For a biography of Hu Guang, see de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, 326-327, which says that he "had the most distinguished career of any Later Han official".
[680] Cai Yong was also a noted author of funerary inscriptions that emphasised filiality, see Lewis, "Mothers and Sons in Early Imperial China", 249-551.
[681] *Hou-Hanshu* 60B:1979.
[682] As Knapp has noted, both types of loyalty are equally important, Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 117. In the case of Cai Yong however, it is the filial relationship between mother and son that is praised, not the usual father and son relationship of the three "guideropes". Knapp has suggested that medieval Chinese filial tales did not see filiality to either parent as paramount, and instead regarded filial devotion to either or both parents are equally admirable. See Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 114.

official histories (as related in the previous chapter), but they also appeared in accounts of the lives of other, less elevated figures, especially relating to their filial behaviour.[683] In these accounts, one site that the strange manifested itself in was in the behaviour of trees planted on tombs, which the next section will examine.

3.3.1. Trees on tombs

Given the length of time, it is not surprising to find that burial practices changed from Early to Medieval China, with the tendency to bury people amongst their clan without selecting a special site being complicated over the centuries by social upheaval and burial practices introduced via Buddhism.[684] Examples of the latter included the practicing of cremation and burial by exposure.[685] Moreover, the much-debated trend for lavish burials eventually reached a peak during the Eastern Han, with more modest tombs appearing in the Western Jin, although burial practices could vary significantly by time and region.[686] Proper burial was usually considered very important, not only as part of correct filial behaviour, but also to avoid spirits of the dead seeking revenge for their poor treatment, the latter being a feature of many records of the strange.[687]

The practice of planting trees on or around burial sites has been recorded in numerous textual sources.[688] According to Huan Kuan's 桓寬 (fl. 81–61 BCE) record of the 81 BCE court debate known as the *Yantie lun* 鹽鐵論 (*Discourses on Salt and Iron*),[689] the ancients did not make earth mounds nor plant trees (*bufeng bushu* 不封不樹) on tombs, and the practice among the wealthy in

683 Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China*.
684 Liu, *Chaoxiang shenghuo shijie de wenxue quanshi: Liuchao zongjiao xushu de shenti shijian yu kongjian shuxie*, 463-465.
685 Liu, "Linzang: Zhonggu fojiao lushi zang yanjiu zhi yi (1) (2) (3)"; Liu, "Death and the Degeneration of Life Exposure of the Corpse in Medieval Chinese Buddhism".
686 See Poo, "Ideas Concerning Death and Burial in Pre-Han and Han China"; Müller, "Northern Material Culture", 413-416; Kieser, "Southern Material Culture", 419-440.
687 Poo, "Images and Ritual Treatment of Dangerous Spirits", 1093. On the retribution of spirits, see Seidel, "Post-mortem Immortality—or the Taoist Resurrection of the Body" and "Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tomb". Guolong Lai has hypothesised that the transition in burial practices from the vertical pit tombs of the Shang to horizontal burial chambers during the Warring States to the Han is due to the belief in vengeful spirits, see Lai, *Excavating the Afterlife: The Archaeology of Early Chinese Religion*. See also the discussion in Clark and Winslett, *A Spiritual Geography of Early Chinese Thought*, 87-114.
688 For an overview that discusses graves, tumuli, and trees, see de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 2, 418-442.
689 For background on this event, see Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China*, 91-112.

Huan Kuan's time was to build mounds like mountains and plant trees like forests.[690] The *Zhouli* proscribes that the size of a tomb and the number of trees planted on it both must accord with the status of the occupant.[691] The "Qu li" 曲禮 section of the *Liji* demands that the gentleman must prioritise his sacrificial obligations over looking after himself, and says that he must not sell his sacrificial vessels even if he is poor, nor wear his sacrificial clothes even if he is cold. The third injunction is that he must not cut down grave trees to make dwellings (*wei gongshi, bu zhan yu qiumu* 為宮室，不斬於丘木).[692] Here it seems that grave trees are as important as sacrificial vessels and clothing, and the connection between the trees and the ancestors of the burial site is made explicit in a Song dynasty commentary by Lü Dalin 呂大臨 (1044–1091), which glosses this line as, "Grave trees protect the burial ground. To chop them down for the sake of making a dwelling is to neglect one's ancestors and instead benefit oneself" (*qiumu suo yi bi zhaizhao. wei gongshi er zhan zhi, shi man qi xian er ji wu si ye* 丘木所以庇宅兆。為宮室而斬之，是慢其先而濟吾私也).[693]

The practice of burial meant trespassing on the domain of the Earth God (*she* 社), and from the Eastern Han, contracts were drawn up to purchase the land from him.[694] Altars to the Earth God were similar to tumuli, and up to the Han dynasty at least were planted with trees.[695] *Lunyu* 3.21 records that different dynasties planted different trees: the Xia planted pines (*song* 松), the Shang cypress (*bo*/*bai* 柏), the Zhou chestnuts (*li* 栗).[696] The Han text *Baihutong* explains that the trees on these altars acted as a conduit of *qi*, as well as enabling the altar to be seen from far away.[697] Enemy forces could sever this conduit by covering the altar as punishment, thus cutting the land off from Heaven.[698]

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690 *Yantie lun jiaozhu* 6.393. The phrase *bufeng bushu* appears in several Han texts. This practice likely subsided after the Han.
691 "The size of tombs and the number of trees are according to the ranks of nobility" 以爵等為丘封之度與其樹數. *Zhouli zhengyi* 41.1697-1699.
692 *Liji jijie* 5.116-117; Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood*, 126. Both Sterckx and Wang Meng'ou (*Liji xuanzhu*, 28) understand this passage as referring to trees planted on grave mounds, but they could also plausibly have been planted around it. The word "grave trees" itself (*qiumu* 丘木) is uncommon.
693 Quoted in *Zhang hanlin zhengjiao Liji daquan.*
694 Kleeman, "Land Contracts and Related Documents"; Harper, "Contracts with the Spirit World in Han Common Religion"; Eschenbach, "Trees of Life and Trees of Death", 383-384.
695 Kominami, "Rituals for the Earth", 204-207.
696 *Lunyu jijie* 6.200.
697 *Baihutong shuzheng*, 3.89.
698 Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood*, 116-117.

In the imperial era, pines and cypresses (*songbo*/*bai* 松柏) early on became associated with tombs.[699] They had already long been associated with longevity for being evergreen, and so were common symbols of loyalty and steadfastness.[700] According to the *Fengsu tongyi*, demons called *wangliang* 魍魎, which ate the brains of the deceased, feared cypresses and tigers and so cypresses and stone tigers were placed before tombs.[701] When noting the sizes of tombs for different levels of society, the Han-era weft text *Hanwenjia* also records what kind of tree should be planted in each, giving pines for the Son of Heaven, cypresses for vassal lords (*zhuhou* 諸侯), goldenrain (*luan*) for grand masters (*dafu* 大夫),[702] pagoda trees (*huai*) for gentlemen (*shi* 士), and willows (*yangliu*) for the graves of the multitude, who do not have tombs.[703] Probably these precise instructions were never more than ideals, but both the practice of planting trees at burial sites and the high status of pines and cypresses appear to be common (at least among the societal elite), with cypresses apparently favoured above all.[704]

Trees then were seen as an important marker of burial grounds, and also served as connection points between the world of living humans and the world of dead ancestors. This connection, with trees as sites of correlative reaction, is clearly seen in accounts of filial sons planting of trees on tombs, especially by hand. The *Dongguan Hanji* 東觀漢記 (*Eastern Watchtower Records of the Han*)[705] relates that,

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[699] The graph 柏 can be read either *bo* or *bai* in modern Mandarin.
[700] See for instance *Lunyu* 9.28; *Mao Shi zhengyi* 9.331; *Liji jijie* 23.624. According to de Groot, they were also used because they were regarded as having the power to preserve the body of the dead, a power that de Groot connects to Five Phase theory, de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 2, 293-302, 462-473. Pines and cypresses were at least by some associated with ghosts and spirits, see for instance Dongfang Shuo's comments in *Hanshu* 65.2845-2846.
[701] See *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu*. 11.574; Jiang, *Chutu wenxian yu zaoqi daojiao*, 263, 267-268; Wang, *The Art of Terrestrial Diagrams in Early China*, 105.
[702] Hucker, *Official Titles*, 465.
[703] For the names of these trees, see chapter one. This quotation from the *Hanwenjia* is found in *Baihutong shuzheng* 11.559. In other variants, the trees on the tombs on all but the Son of Heaven and vassal lords are different, see Yang, *Zhongguo gudai lingqin zhidu shi*, 156. For a list of other similar hierarchical distinctions in Early China, see Yan, *Zhongguo gudai guanjie zhidu yinlun*, 198.
[704] Ding, "Lun Zhongguo gudai muzhi songbo xisu jiqi sangzang wenhua neihan", 40; Yang, *Zhongguo gudai lingqin zhidu shi*, 156. For more on tigers see Chen, *In the Land of Tigers and Snakes*.
[705] This text survives in fragments. For a history of this text, see Mansvelt-Beck, *Treatises of Later Han*, 19-25.

李恂遭父母喪六年，躬自負土樹柏，常在冢下。[706]

Li Xun[707] suffered the death of his parents for six years; he personally carried earth and planted cypresses, and was always at the foot of the tomb.

In relating the life of the official Shan Tao 山濤 (205–283), one of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (*zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢),[708] the *Jinshu* says,

濤年逾耳順，居喪過禮，負土成墳，手植松柏。[709]

[Shan] Tao had passed the age of 60, [yet] in mourning his parents he went beyond what was expected of him, he carried dirt and made a grave, and planted pine and cypress with his bare hands.

Another biographical story from the *Jinshu*, this time about Yu Gun 庾袞 (fl. late 3rd to early 4th centuries) – a fraternal uncle of Yu Wenjun 庾文君 (297–328), dowager empress Mingmu 明穆, wife of Emperor Ming – illustrates the important relationship between tomb trees and filiality. While Yu Gun was mourning the death of his mother,

或有斬其墓柏，莫知其誰，乃召隣人集於墓而自責焉，因叩頭泣涕，謝祖禰曰：德之不修，不能庇先人之樹，袞之罪也，父老咸亦為之垂泣，自後人莫之犯。[710]

[706] *Dongguan Hanji jiaozhu* 16.730.
[707] For another biography of Li Xun, see de Crespigny, *Biographical Dictionary*, 432-433 and *Hou-Hanshu* 51.1683-1684.
[708] See Lo, "The Seven Worthies of the Bamboo Grove".
[709] *Jinshu* 43.1223-1228.
[710] *Jinshu* 88.2281.

> Someone cut down the cypresses on [his mother's] tomb, but no-one knew who did it, so he called his neighbours to assemble at the tomb and he reproached himself, then kowtowed and wept, begging forgiveness from his ancestral spirit-tablets, saying, "Virtue has not been cultivated, and it was my fault that the trees of my ancestors was not protected." The elders all shed tears at this, and from then on there were none who committed this crime.

Yu Gun's extreme distress at the loss of the tomb trees should not be taken as commonplace, hence why it was so moving to those who witnessed it and recorded it for posterity, but it does show that tomb trees were regarded as belonging to its occupants and their protection an important part of filial duty. In an earlier biography in the *Hou-Hanshu*, the crime of cutting down tomb trees does not go unpunished. While Li Chong's 李充 (fl. ca. early 1st century) was in mourning for his mother someone stole the trees from her tomb, and so Li killed them with his own hands.[711] The importance of personally performing filial actions is emphasised in many accounts, and this tale is an extreme example of that.[712]

The behaviour of the trees themselves can sometimes indicate the filiality of the mourner.[713] The *Weishu* relates the life of the official Zhen Chen 甄琛 (452–524):

> 琛母服未闋，復喪父。琛於塋兆之內手種松柏，隆冬之月，負掘水土，鄉老哀之，咸助加力，十餘年中墳成木茂。[714]

> Chen's prescribed mourning period for his mother was not yet over when he lost his father, and Chen planted pines and cypresses by hand on his grave, and during a month in midwinter, he carried and dug up water and soil, and the village elders pitied him, and

711 *Hou-Hanshu* 81.2684. For an exploration of the connections between violence and ritual, see Cheng, "Filial Piety with a Vengeance".
712 Miranda Brown opens her study of mourning by describing Cai Yong lamenting being away from his mother when she died, and thus being unable to perform the proper rituals in person, Brown, *Politics of Mourning*, 1. Robbery of tomb trees was apparently enough of a problem for it to be punishable by foot amputation, see the quotation of the *Sanfu jiushi* 三輔舊事 (*Old Affairs of the Three Capital Districts*) preserved in *Yiwen leiju* 88; de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 2, 463-464.
713 Eschenbach, "Trees of Life and Trees of Death", 385-386.
714 *Weishu* 68.1513.

they all helped him in the effort. Within more than ten years, the tomb was completed and the trees were thriving.

In this example, the strange quality of the event is not pronounced, and the possibility of a causal relationship between the ideal behaviour of humans and flora is only suggested.

Confucius' own tomb was also said to be planted with notable trees. The early encyclopaedic compilation *Huanglan*[715] describes the trees planted on Confucius' tomb by his disciples:

孔子冢塋中樹數百，皆異種，魯人世世無能名者。人傳言：孔子弟子，異國人，持其國樹來種之。故有柞、枌、雒離、女貞、五味、毳檀之樹。[716]

Of the several hundred trees on Confucius' burial plot, all were rare kinds, and for generations the people of Lu could not name them. It is said that as Confucius' disciples were people of different regions,[717] they brought trees from their own regions to plant on his tomb, thus it has sawtooth oak trees,[718] elm trees,[719] *luoli* trees,[720] glossy privet trees,[721] five flavour trees,[722] and *chantan* trees.[723]

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715 Xiaofei Tian suggests that the apparent over-representation of tomb-related material in the reconstructed text of the *Huanglan* may be because this subject was underrepresented in other compilations. See Tian, "Literary Learning: Encyclopedias and Epitomes," 134.

716 Quoted in *Qimin yaoshu xiaoshi* 10.696.

717 In a variation of this quotation, found in Pei Yin's commentary on the *Shiji*, the word 方 is used in place of 國, thus I've used the word "region" here.

718 In other contexts, this character can also mean the evergreen shrubs brush-holly or logwood, but as this passage is discussing trees, sawtooth oak is more likely.

719 The Mao Commentary glosses this character as "white elm" *baiyu* 白榆, *Mao Shi zhengyi* 7.251.

720 Exactly what this term refers to is unclear, but *luo* 雒 is a common variant for *luo* 洛, thus this plant may come from the region around the Luo River. *Li* 離 is a highly polysemous character. Meanings related to plants include a certain type of rice (also written 秈, see *Huainan honglie jijie* 20.696-697) and lovage (also written 蘺 or *jiangli* 江蘺), but one possible tree candidate comes from a *fu* by Sima Xiangru, where (according to the commentary by Guo Pu) *li* is used as a homonym for "mountain pear" *shanli* 山梨. The Tang commentator on the *Shiji*, Sima Zhen 司馬貞 (fl. 713 – 742), glosses *luoli* as 落藜, and notes that *li* 藜 is the name of a herb (*Shiji jijie* 47.). Kroll gives the herbs "goosefoot" and "melde" for 藜, both of which are weeds.

721 The version in Pei Yin has 安貴 instead of 女貞, which appears to be a visual variant.

722 *Wuwei*, or *wuweizi*, is normally considered to be a vine whose berries are used in herbal medicine. Sima Zhen glosses *wuwei* as a "medicinal herb" (*yaocao* 藥草) (*Shiji jijie* 47.).

723 According to Sima Zhen, this is a "different type of *tan* tree" (毳檀, 檀樹之別種) (*Shiji jijie* 47.). Unfortunately, the character *tan* 檀 can refer to a number of different trees, including rosewoods, sandalwoods, sanderswood, and

The quotation in one version of the *Huanglan* ends there, but a version found in Pei Yin's 裴駰 (fl. 438) commentary on the *Shiji* continues, "Thorny brambles and weeds that prick people do not grow on Confucius' burial plot" (*Kongzi ying zhong bu sheng jingji ji ci ren cao* 孔子塋中不生荊棘及刺人草)[724] and according to the version preserved in the *Shuijing zhu*, "Now, not one branch of them remains" (*jin ze wufu yi tiao yi* 今則無復遺條矣).[725] While some versions preserve a hint of the strange (the *Shuijing zhu* uses the word *qimu* 奇木 "marvellous trees", for instance), overall the story is at the mundane end of the spectrum.[726] The core of the anecdote is that disciples of Confucius planted trees on his burial plot, and those trees were so unfamiliar to the people of Lu that they did not even know what they were called. This anecdote shows that act of planting trees at the burial site of a respected figure was not necessarily limited to the filial behaviour of children to their parents. The relationship between Confucius and his disciples was not strictly one of the "three guide-ropes" (*sangang* 三綱) – the three most important hierarchical relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife – but it was nevertheless a hierarchical relationship where those in the inferior position were expected to show appropriate levels of respect, including after the death of those in the superior position.[727] Planting trees on tombs, especially by hand, was a lasting visual demonstration of that respect. Moreover, the extra detail that none of the trees remain (as seen in the *Shuijing zhu* version) adds a sense of the loss of past greatness, a theme likely to resonate with those familiar with Confucius' own life story.

As noted, at first glance this story does not appear especially strange. The only really anomalous detail is the foreignness of the trees themselves, but they are otherwise not presented as

winged hackberry. According to the Ming scholar Fang Yizhi 方以智 (1611 – 1671), this particular tree is white sandalwood (*baitan* 白檀). The *Grand Ricci* glosses the variant *chan* 檛 (note the wood (*mu* 木) component) as "Tree that grew near the tomb of Confucius; possibly large-flowered magnolia or sandalwood".

[724] This version is also preserved in the collection *Wenjingtang congshu* 問經堂叢書, edited by Sun Fengyi 孫馮翼 (fl. 1801).

[725] *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng* 25.592.

[726] Two excerpts from the *Shuyi ji* 述異記 recorded in the *Taiping guangji* briefly describe the trees planted on Confucius' and his disciple Yan Hui's 顏回 (521–481 BCE) tombs in Qufu 曲阜. See *Taiping guangji* 46.3274.

[727] See *Mencius* 3A, where Mencius describes Confucius' disciples mourning for three years after his death, with Zigong mourning an additional three years by himself.

abnormal.[728] There is however one aspect that does at least suggest the strange in the stronger sense of being counter to the ordinary ways of the world: the fact that low-quality plants (thorny brambles and weeds that prick people) did not grow on Confucius' burial plot.[729] Just as the act of planting trees on tombs is a demonstration of filial respect, so the behaviour of plants on the tomb can be an indicator of the extra-ordinary qualities of the tomb occupant. Moreover, these qualities can be linked, something that is illustrated in the story of Xu Zi 許孜 (fl. 290 – 300), an official who despite being physically weak, went beyond the demands of traditional mourning rites. Xu Zi's master Kong Chong 孔冲 (dates unknown), a descendent of Confucius, passed away, and Xu went to Kong's hometown and performed mourning austerities for three years. His filial duties did not end there, however:

> 俄而二親沒，柴毀骨立，杖而能起，建墓於縣之東山，躬自負土，不受鄉人之助。或愍孜羸憊，苦求來助，孜晝則不逆，夜便除之。每一悲號，鳥獸翔集。孜以方營大功，乃棄其妻，鎮宿墓所，列植松柏亙五六里。時有鹿犯其松栽，孜悲歎曰：「鹿獨不念我乎！」明日，忽見鹿為猛獸所殺，置於所犯栽下。孜悵惋不已，乃為作塚，埋於隧側。猛獸即於孜前自撲而死，孜益歎息，又取埋之。自後樹木滋茂，而無犯者。[730]

> Soon after, Xu Zi's parents died. He was as thin as brushwood, his bones sticking out,[731] and he needed a staff to stand. He built a grave in the east mountains of the district, carrying the dirt himself, without the help of the people from his hometown. Some of them took pity on Xu Zi's emaciated and tired [appearance] and implored him to allow them to help him. During the day, Xu Zi did not defy them, but at night he got rid of all the work they did. Every time he cried out in grief, birds and beasts gathered [around him]. Because Xu Zi was undertaking his great meritorious deed [of mourning], he abandoned his wife, and resided by the grave and planted a series of pines and cypresses that stretched for five or six *li*. When a

[728] The mixed trees planted on Confucius' tomb are mentioned in an epitaph (*muzhiming* 墓誌銘) by Ren Fang 任昉 (460–508) without noting anything especially unusual, see the translation in Davis, *Entombed Epigraphy and Commemorative Culture in Early Medieval China*, 326.
[729] It is worth nothing that the possibility of another explanation – such as these trees were removed by unknown people – is, while unstated, left open.
[730] *Jinshu* 88.2279-2280.
[731] This phrase became used to describe someone who damages his health in excessive mourning.

> deer came and attacked the pine saplings, Xu Zi bewailed, "Only this deer does not pity me!" The next day, he suddenly caught sight of the deer being killed by a ferocious beast, who then placed the deer below the attacked saplings. Xu Zi, full of regret, made a burial mound, burying the deer at the side of the tomb passage. The ferocious beast then went before Xu Zi and threw itself to the floor and died. Xu Zi heaved a sigh of grief, then buried it too. From then on, the trees were luxuriant, and there were none who attacked them.

Here the connection between the growth of the plants on the grave and the strange is more explicit. It is implied that the ferocious beast kills the deer for desecrating the trees planted by Xu Zi, which are themselves a visual sign of his extreme filial devotion to his deceased parents. The strange quality of this story is also highlighted by the beast's subsequent behaviour, where it acts like a human being. The term *zipu* 自撲, is sometimes read as "beating oneself", similar to the practice first seen in Daoist texts where it is called *zibo* 自搏. The exact meaning of these phrases however have been a matter of some scholarly discussion, with Hu Shih 胡適 (1891–1962) for instance, in his comments on an article by Yang Lien-sheng 楊聯陞 (1914–1990), arguing that the term *zipu* in Buddhist texts usually means to throw oneself to the ground, reading *pu* 撲 as cognate with *pu* 仆 and *fu* 伏.[732] A notable example can be seen in the stories of the filial son and disciple of the Buddha Mulian 目連, who in a number of *bianwen* texts is described multiple times rising up and throwing himself to the ground (*jushen zipu* 舉身自撲),[733] something so dramatic as to be "like five Mount Tais collapsing" (*youru wu taishan beng* 猶如五太山崩). Mulian does this because the sight of his mother's plight as a hungry ghost in the underworld is unbearable to him, and the text uses these and other outward expressions of sorrow to highlight his filial devotion.[734] While Mulian could plausibly have raised himself up to beat himself, the description of this action as being "like five Mount Tais collapsing" makes it more likely that he

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[732] See Yang, "Daojiao zhi zibo yu fojiao zhi zipu bu lun", 275-289, which includes Yang's original article, Hu's comments on that article, and Yang's addendum in response to those comments. See also the entry for 自撲法 in *Foguang dacidian*, 2535.

[733] While *jushen* 舉身/擧身 in some Chinese translations of Buddhist texts is used to mean "the whole body", in those instances it is describing a bodily reaction ("[her] whole body suffered from pain" *jushen huantong* 擧身患痛, "[my] whole body was in pain" *jushen tengtong* 擧身疼痛, "the hairs on their entire body stood on end" *jushen maoshu* 擧身毛竪), not an action done to the whole body. See Muller, "whole body 擧身" *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*; T.22.1428.0868c20-0868c21; T.12.377.0904b07; T.01.0007.0204a25. These *bianwen* texts are probably of a later date than the biography of Xu Zi in the *Jinshu*.

[734] Crossland-Guo, "The Popularization of Buddhism as seen in the Mulian *Bianwen*", 300-1. The story of Mulian illustrates the integration of notions of filial piety into Chinese Buddhism. See Guo, *Ritual Opera and Mercantile Lineage*, 89-102.

is throwing himself to the ground. Not only does "collapsing" fit more with the idea of throwing oneself to the ground, but the number five likely is meant to refer to the body – that is, the four limbs plus the head.[735]

The use of the term *zipu* in the biography of Xu Zi likely does not indicate any specific Buddhist or Daoist practice, but to throw oneself onto the ground in this way is an act of repentance, and the suicide of the ferocious beast serves not only as an attempt to atone for the misconduct of the deer, but its human-like behaviour and sudden death also indicates to the reader that this is no ordinary wild animal, and the trees are no ordinary trees. The subsequent lush growth of the trees in itself could be regarded as a mere coincidence – an interpretation that also fits with expectations about the everyday, ordinary behaviour of plants – but taken in context their flourishing must have an extra significance.[736] It is in this ambiguous space between the ordinary and impossible that the strange occurs.

As Knapp has shown, the story of Xu Zi and others like it illustrate the importance for filial sons to engage in the physically demanding work of personally constructing their parents' tumulus by hand and without the help of servants, even though they may themselves be old or frail.[737] The planting of trees by hand and their subsequent strange behaviour is also an important element, but sometimes trees spontaneously grow on the burial plot themselves, as can be seen in the biography of Yu Shami 庾沙彌 (fl. 502) in the *Nanshi*. Yu was the son of a concubine, but treated his father's principle wife like his own mother.

> 嫡母劉氏寢疾，沙彌晨昏侍側，衣不解帶，或應針灸，輒以身先試之。及母亡，水漿不入口累日。初進大麥薄飲，經十旬方為薄粥。終喪不食鹽酢，冬日不衣綿纊，夏日不解衰絰。不出廬戶，晝夜號慟，鄰人不忍聞。所坐薦，淚沾為爛。墓在新林，忽生旅松百許株，枝葉鬱茂，有異常松。[738]

[735] Yang, "Daojiao zhi zibo yu fojiao zhi zipu bu lun", 276. Hu Shih gives examples from other *bianwen* texts that support this reading.
[736] See also the response ("by heaven, the cosmos, something or someone Out There") to behaviour through dreams in Campany, *The Chinese Dreamscape*, 37-40.
[737] Knapp, *Selfless Offspring*, 153-154.
[738] *Nanshi* 73.1829.

> His father's principal wife, née Liu, was confined to bed with illness, and Yu was beside her day and night, and did not remove his clothes [to sleep]. When she needed acupuncture and moxibustion, he would always test it on his own body first. Then when his father's principal wife died, for several days, liquids would not pass his mouth.[739] At first, he only drank some weak barley water. Only after a hundred days would he have weak gruel. Throughout the mourning period, he did not eat salt nor vinegar. During the winter he did not wear silk clothing, and in the summer he would not remove his mourning band. He would not come out of his mourning hut, and day and night he wailed in lamentation, and his neighbours could not bear to hear it. The mat that he sat on was so moistened with tears that it was rotting. The tomb was in Xinlin, and, unexpectedly, more than a hundred pines grew up one after the other, their branches and needles luxuriant, and were different to normal pines.

As in other accounts, at first glance the flourishing of trees on the burial plot may merely seem like a happy coincidence, but when read alongside other stories of tomb trees flourishing in response to the behaviour of filial sons, it is clear that the growth of the trees is to be taken as proof of that behaviour.[740] The strangeness of this is also explicitly noted by the text, which states that their lush growth was not like that of ordinary pines (*zhiye yumao, you yichang song* 枝葉鬱茂，有異常松). Moreover, while the version of this biography in the *Liangshu* lacks this last phrase, it nevertheless says that the trees grew up spontaneously by the side of the tomb (*zi sheng fen ce* 自生墳側),[741] again suggesting that the trees are responding to these circumstances in a manner different to what might usually be expected.

These references to tomb trees responding to the qualities or actions of the occupant or mourners are not only found in dynastic histories. An item from the *Shuyi ji* preserved in the *Taiping guangji* records an event that is said to have occurred during the Warring States, where a wife of a man from the state of Wei who had been sent to fight the Qin died, and when she was

[739] Another common term found in accounts of mourning.
[740] Eschenbach, "Trees of Life and Trees of Death", 385-386.
[741] *Liangshu* 47.655-656.

buried, the branches of the trees planted on her grave all grew bending towards the direction of her husband, and these trees were called "yearning trees" (*xiangsi mu* 相思木).[742]

Sometimes it is not the trees themselves that embody the strange, but instead serve as sites for unusual and auspicious animals. Another account of a filial son – variants of which in different sources are cited as appearing in either Xie Cheng's 謝承 (182–254) *Hou-Hanshu* or the *Chuxue ji* 初學記 (*Record for the Commencement of Study*),[743] an encyclopaedic text meant to be used as a handbook for princes – involves a certain Fang Chu 方儲 of Danyang, from the Eastern Han. One version reads:

> 方儲字聖明，遭母憂，負土成墳，松柏數十株，鸞烏棲其上，白兔遊其下。[744]

> Fang Chu, courtesy name Shengming: When his mother passed away, he carried earth to build a tomb, and planted several tens of pines and cypresses. *Luan* birds and crows perched upon them, and white rabbits roamed below.

Xiao Yi's 蕭繹 (508–554), aka Emperor Yuan 元 of Liang text *Jinlouzi* 金樓子 (*Master of the Golden Mansion*) contains this anecdote about Emperor Wu of Liang:

> 再拜山陵，杖而後起，涕淚所灑，松為變色。[745]

> He again paid his respects at the imperial tomb, and rose up with the assistance of a cane; the place on the pines where his tears fell changed colour.

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[742] *Taiping guangji* 389.3099-3100. For a translation see de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 4, 277.
[743] Compiled by Zhang Yue 張說 (667–731), Xu Jian 徐堅 (659–729), and others in 728.
[744] *Yiwen leiju* 88.1507; 88.1515, 90.1560, 95.1650; *Taiping yulan* 411.1895, 907.4021, 96.4059; the *Chuxue ji* version is quoted in the Qing encyclopaedia *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集.
[745] *Jinlouzi jiaojian* 1.208.

Another example of tomb trees responding to the qualities of the tomb occupant can be found in this anecdote about the Prince of Dongping, aka Liu Yu 劉宇 (d.20 BCE),[746] from the *Shengxian zhongmu ji* 聖賢冢墓記 (*Record of the Tombs of the Sages*):[747]

> 東平王歸國思京師，後薨，葬東平，其冢上松柏皆西靡。[748]

> The Prince of Dongping returned to his principality and yearned for the imperial capital. After he died, he was buried in Dongping, and the pines and cypresses upon his tomb had all been all blown back westwards.[749]

Again, these three anecdotes are low on the spectrum of the strange, but the implication that unusual behaviour in the natural world is a direct consequence of human filial behaviour is clear. This quality of merely suggesting the strange is common, and likely stems at least in part from criticisms of strange anecdotes as exaggerated. In this way, strange anecdotes resemble what Rebecca Suter has called, in a very different context, "fantastic hesitation", where a systematic explanation is suspended, leaving a space of ontological possibility in place of a concrete interpretation, which could have be open to criticism and ridicule.[750] The space for the significance of the strange comes from the very fact that, paradoxically, no fixed interpretation is settled-upon, which is why it is so rare for anecdotes of strange events to provide one.

In all the anecdotes examined above, while there are elements that regularly appear – trees being planted by hand, certain tree species being favoured, and strange responses from trees to the external stimulus of filiality – these elements are not codified and prescribed. This is especially the case for the strange behaviour of trees, which is merely suggestive rather than proof of any theory of nature. More important than the strange trees themselves is the exemplary human behaviour that appears to have been the cause of their strangeness, an attitude towards the

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[746] Fourth son of Emperor Xuan 宣 (91–48 BCE) and brother of Emperor Yuan 元 (73–35 BCE), see *Hanshu* 80.3320-3326; Loewe, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Qin, Former Han and Xin*, 401.
[747] Attributed to Li Tong 李彤 (dates unknown), see *Suishu* 33.983.
[748] See versions in *Jinlouzi jiaojian* 5.1186; *Yiwen leiju* 88.1512; *Taiping yulan* 952.4232. In his commentary to the *Hanshu*, Yan Shigu says this passage comes from the *Huanglan*, see *Hanshu* 80.3325-3326 n. 1.
[749] See also the translation in de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 2, 463.
[750] Suter, "The Spirit(s) of Modern Japanese Fiction".

natural world that can also be seen in texts that do not directly discuss the strange. Proof of filial behaviour is being observed in the strange manifested in trees, rather than the strange manifested in trees being proof of some quality of trees in general.

Chapter 4: The Physical Bodies of Strange Trees

4.1.1. Introduction

In a number of sources, what makes strange trees strange is that they take on human or animal qualities. Some sources describe trees as bleeding blood, or as being able to talk, or having human-like physical qualities like faces, or being places where animalistic demons live. Interestingly, strange trees with human-like qualities appear relatively late, with the few that appear before the Tang usually only having human-like external features, but lacking human-like mental interiority.[751] Moreover, unlike human and some animal spirits, spirits of trees are not usually depicted as taking the form of trees, and appear to be human-like forms separate to the bodies of the trees.[752] This section will examine the development of strange trees with human-like qualities in Early and Medieval China.

4.1.2. Trees and sentience

In his famous letter to Ren An 任安 (d. 91 BCE) (courtesy name Shaoqing 少卿), Sima Qian 司馬遷 (?145–86 BCE) bemoans his fate, describing his body as "not tree nor stone" (*shen fei mushi* 身非木石).[753] By this he means that one would have to have no feelings at all not to be saddened by his predicament: imprisoned for defending the disgraced general Li Ling 李陵 (d. 74 BCE) and suffering the humiliating punishment of castration. Sima Qian does not explain this phrase, rather, he allows the reader to make the obvious association between unfeelingness and stones and trees. The *Guliang zhuan* 穀梁傳 (*Guliang Tradition*), one of the commentarial traditions on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, incidentally mentions that stones are things that lack sentience (*wuzhi zhi wu* 無知之物) and *yi* birds (*yi* 鶃)[754] are things that have some sentience (*weiyou zhi wu*

[751] A distinction noted by J.J.M. de Groot is between trees that contain an animating force (identified by de Groot as *shen* 神) and trees that are possessed by spirits in human or animal form, see de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 5, 652. It is worth noting here that de Groot shares an evolutionary model of religion with comparativists like Frazer, which along with his at times unpleasant chauvinism will not be adopted in the present study.
[752] Something also noted by de Groot, who calls them "resident spirits", de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 4, 272-273.
[753] *Hanshu* 62.2730. See Durrant et al. *The Letter to Ren An & Sima Qian's Legacy*, 26.
[754] Written elsewhere as *yi* 鷁, and usually glossed as a kind of heron.

微有知之物).[755] While it does not mention trees, it reflects a common tendency to pair trees and stones together when talking about things that lack sentience. The 5th century poet Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414–466?) makes a similar use of this idea in a poem where he asks, rhetorically, "The heart is not tree nor stone, how can it be without feeling?" (*xin fei mushi qi wugan* 心非木石豈無感).[756] Another uses of this phrase appear in the biography of Wu Xi 吳喜 (427–471) in the *Songshu*.[757] It also appears in the biography of Li Xiong 李雄 (aka Li Zixiong 李子雄) of the Eastern Wei 東魏 (534–550) in the *Suishu*, where, after he is appointed to serve Prince Guang of Jin 晉王廣 (the future Emperor Yang of Sui 隋煬帝 (569–618)), Li self-effacingly replies,

> 臣雖愚固，心非木石，謹當竭誠效命，以答鴻恩。[758]
>
> Although your servant is stupid and set in his ways, his heart is not tree nor stone, I will certainly devote myself to the task wholeheartedly in order to repay this great kindness.

Taken together, these examples can be used to illustrate the existence of a common assumption that trees and stones were unfeeling. However, a counter to this could be that the sense of *mu* 木 in these examples is meant to refer to the material wood rather than the living plants called trees. Nevertheless, there are other examples of living trees represented as being without thought or feelings.

In an item from Huan Tan's 桓譚 (ca. 43 BCE–28) *Xinlun* 新論 (*New Disquisitions*),[759] preserved in the *Yiwen leiju* and the *Taiping yulan*, Huan Tan takes the insentience of trees as given:

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[755] *Chunqiu Guliang jingzhuan buzhu* 10.302. Many scholars regard this text to have been composed during the Han dynasty, see Zhao, *Chunqiuxue shi*, 169-170; Zhang, *Zhongguo zhexueshi shiliaoxue*, 97-98; Cai, *Witchcraft and the Rise of the First Confucian Empire*, 27.
[756] *Bao Zhao ji jiaozhu* 8.668. See the translation in *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, vol. 1, 534.
[757] *Songshu* 83.2119.
[758] *Suishu* 46.1261.
[759] For this text, see Pokora, "Hsin lun". His dates are uncertain, see Knechtges, *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, 90-96.

> 劉子駿信方士虛言，為神仙可學，余見其庭下有大榆樹，久老剝折。指謂曰：彼樹無情，然猶朽蠹，人雖欲愛養，何能使之不衰。[760]
>
> Liu Zijun believed the false words of the masters of methods who say that one may become a divine transcendent through study. I noticed a large elm tree in his courtyard that was very old, stripped, and broken. Pointing to it, I said, "That tree has no feelings, but, nevertheless, it will decay and become worm-eaten. While you may want to care for and nurture it, how can you possibly prevent its decline?"[761]

Huan Tan's intent here is to belittle attempts to prolong life beyond the usual allocation, and so he points out that humans cannot even prevent insentient life like trees from the inevitable process of decay, let alone themselves. In so doing he incidentally reveals an underlying assumption about plant insentience common to many texts.[762]

As in the examples from Buddhism discussed below, claims about the insentience of non-human entities like rocks and trees often appear as part of discussions on the nature of reality. During a famous and fractious 5th century debate on the nature of the spirit (*shen* 神),[763] multiple participants appealed to the insentience of plants as part of their polemics. For instance, in Zheng Xianzhi's 鄭鮮之 (364–427) dialogue *Shen bumie lun* 神不滅論 ("On the Non-Annihilation of the Spirit"), his interlocutor explains his position that form and spirit are inseparable by noting in passing that "plants do not have spirit or consciousness" (*caomu zhi*

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760 *Yiwen leiju* 88.1525; *Taiping yulan* 956.4243.
761 Modified from Pokora, *Hsin-Lun*, 156. Kohn also makes reference to this text in *Laughing at the Tao*, 112 n. 11.
762 In modern Chinese, this sentiment is often expressed as "Humans are not plants, how can they be without feeling? (*ren fei caomu, shu neng wuqing* 人非草木，孰能無情).
763 I have not used the word "soul" here to avoid appearing Christian-centric, although I note in passing that in Christian theology these terms are often interchangeable. Campany for instance uses "soul", see Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm*, 8-9. Much has been written on these debates, see Tang, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao fojiao shi*, 423-427; Liebenthal, "The Immortality of the Soul in China"; Chang, "Fan Chen and His 'Treatise on the Destruction of the Soul'"; Pachow, "The Controversy Over the Immortality of the Soul in Chinese Buddhism"; Lai, "Beyond the Debate on 'The Immortality of the Soul': Recovering an essay by Shen Yueh"; Lai, "Emperor Wu of Liang on the Immortal Soul, Shen Pu Mieh"; Liu, "Fan Chen's 'Treatise on the Destructibility of the Spirit' and Its Buddhist Critics"; Lee, "Liuchao shenmie bumie lun yu fojiao lunhui zhuti zhi yanjiu", 231-281; Tian, *Beacon Fire and Shooting Star*, 229-233; Radich, "A 'Prehistory' to Chinese Debates on the Survival of Death by the Spirit". For an examination of these issues in relation to the strange, see Lin, "Cong Wei-Jin Nanbeichao zhiguai xiaoshuo kan 'xingshen shengmie lihe' wenti".

wushen wushi 草木之無神無識).[764] The anti-Buddhist Fan Zhen 范縝 (450–510), another participant in this debate, in his dialogue *Shenmie lun* 神滅論 ("On the Annihilation of the Spirit") has both opposing sides of the dialogue insisting on the insentience of wood/trees (*mu* 木).[765] While these essays are ultimately opposed to each other of the persistence of the spirit beyond the body, they both appear to assume that plants do not share with humans something akin to sentience or feelings. This is not to say that any of these issues were completely settled – far from it – but suffice it to say that non-dualism and universal sentience were not necessarily assumed amongst elite writers of this period.[766]

While these are only a few examples, they all assume the insentience of trees to make some other point, as if plant insentience is self-evident. Insentience of plants then appears to be a common-sense position that does not usually require articulation, and so it follows that contrary claims would likely require some explanation. Interestingly, explicit discussions of the insentience of trees – and also stones – most often appear in a Buddhist context. This will be dealt with in a later section.

Despite the general assumption of a lack of plant sentience, some scholars insist that pre-modern China lacked a distinction between humans and non-humans.[767] Because many Chinese sources stress the underlying oneness of nature, so this interpretation goes, therefore they also saw humans and things in the natural world as equal and similar. Humans are indeed, like everything else in the world, a manifestation of interconnected underlying forces that have their ultimate root in Heaven, but there is also an insistence in those same sources on two other aspects: distinctions between things and the unique role of humans in the world. While there is of course a great deal of variation in discussions on the nature of the world, an assumption that humans are in some manner different is common.[768] Thus while the origin of writing was traced to the

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[764] Collected in the *Hongming ji* 弘明集 T.52.2102.27c28-29a16.
[765] *Hongming ji* T.52.2102.55a9-58a11. For an historical account, see *Nanshi* 57.1421-1422.
[766] An example of a complicating position appears in Huiyuan's 慧遠 (334–416) *Shamen bujing wangzhe lun* 沙門不敬王者論 ("On Why Buddhist Monks Do Not Bow Down Before Kings"), which uses the metaphor of fire coming from wood to explain the relationship between the spirit and the body, see *Hongming ji* T.52.2102.31b23-32a5.
[767] See Allan, *The Heir and the Sage*, 3; Nicolaisen, "Rethinking Ontology with Equality of Life", 45-50. De Groot claims that there was no "essential difference" between humans and animals, de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 4, 253.
[768] A full examination of this issue is beyond the scope of the present study, but in the *Mencius* for example, while noting that what differentiates humans and non-humans is slight, nevertheless only speaks of humans having the "four sprouts" (siduan 四端) of morals, just as they have four limbs, *Mencius* 2A6. Mencius' position on humans in

patterns of footprints left on the ground by birds, and therefore an instance of the inherent pattern underlying everything, it is a human being, Cangjie 倉頡, who is able to use these patterns to create writing. As Roel Sterckx has argued, animal patterns were "readable" to humans, especially sages, and provided an insight into the underlying logic of reality for those with the ability to see.[769]

4.2.1. Bodies of strange trees

When taking this intellectual background into consideration, we should expect Chinese sources in this era to assume insentience from plants. Interestingly, this insentience also appears in many accounts of strange trees that behave in otherwise unusual ways. According to Zhang Liming 張黎明, records of strange trees in anomaly accounts increased during the period after the collapse of the Han dynasty and tended to have animalistic as opposed to humanistic features before the Tang.[770] An example of a tree spirit in early sources who does not have the body of a tree is Goumang 句芒, who is described in the *Liji* as an official in charge of wood, and in the *Mozi* 墨子 and the *Shanhai jing* is described as having the body of a bird.[771] This change that began in the Tang suggests a development from an assumption of a lack to a presence of humanistic qualities in strange trees.

Some of the ambiguities that will be explored in this chapter are already present in an early and famous example of a strange tree that appears in the *Zhuangzi*. In this story, a carpenter named Shi 石 is travelling to the state of Qi 齊 and comes across a large tree in a place called Quyuan 曲轅. While the tree is admired by everyone there, Carpenter Shi regards it as poor quality, and anything made from its wood would be useless. Indeed, it is the large tree's very uselessness that has allowed it to survive so long. Later, Carpenter Shi is visited by the tree in a dream, and

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1A7 was later expanded to non-humans by the Cheng brothers, see *Chengshi yishu* 18.211; Huang, "Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi's Appropriations of the Mencius", 147-152. For more on human/non-human distinctions, see Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, particularly 88-91.

769 Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon*, 22, 96-101, 125.

770 Zhang, "Mujing wei qingniu kaoshi" and "Zhongguo wenhua zhong shumu jingguai shanbian yuanliu banxi". Zhang also accepts Frazer's model of animism, which will not be applied in the present study.

771 *Liji jijie* 15.403-404; *Mozi jiaozhu* 8.337-338; *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 9.235. This kind of half-human half-animal body is common to depictions of a number of culture heroes such as Fuxi and Nüwa, for more see Loewe, "Man and Beast". For more on Goumang, see Riegel, "Kou-Mang and Ju-Shou".

berates Shi for looking down on it, insisting that it has worked hard on being useless.[772] This passage has been oft-discussed in terms of the *Zhuangzi*'s counter-intuitive advocation of uselessness, but how the tree is described is more relevant to the present study.

When we first encounter the tree, it is called an "oak earth god tree" (*li sheshu* 櫟社樹). The *she* here could refer to the earth god, or could refer to the shrine of the same. When it appears in Carpenter Shi's dream, it is called "oak earth god" (*lishe* 櫟社). In most English translations, it is called a tree.[773] However, if its tree-ness was paramount, then it would likely be called an earth god oak (*sheli* 社櫟). Instead it appears to be an earth god associated with an oak, and so the word for "oak" is acting as a modifier. This reading is also supported by Cheng Xuanying's gloss, which reads "*li* is the name of a tree; *she* is the spirit of the earth" (*li, muming ye; she, tushen ye* 櫟，木名也；社，土神也). When the carpenter awakes, he interprets (*zhen* 診) his dream, and his disciples ask why does the tree choose uselessness if it wants serve as the earth god, whereupon the carpenter tells them to be quiet, and says that it was merely lodging in it (*bi yi zhi ji yan* 彼亦直寄焉). Guo Xiang's 郭象 (d.312) glosses this by saying, "It was that the earth god that came of its own accord to lodge in it, not that the tree sought to serve as the earth god" (*she zi lai ji er, fei ci mu qiu zhi wei she ye* 社自來寄耳，非此木求之為社也).[774] In this comment at least, the spirit of the earth god appears to be occupying the tree. This distinction is not strictly maintained throughout however, and while different interpretations are possible, it does appear that it is a spirit of the earth rather then a tree that is visiting Shi in his dream. This chapter will explore some of the issues in these distinctions between spirit and tree.

In this item from Gan Bao's 4th century *Soushen ji*, a tree bleeds when it is cut, but it is occupied by another being:

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772 *Zhuangzi jishi* 2B.170-175; Galvany, "Discussing Usefulness: Trees as Metaphor in the Zhuangzi", 86-92; Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi*, 40-41.

773 Legge, *The Writings of Kwang-dze*, 218; Giles, *Chuang Tzŭ*, 51; Wieger, Léon, *Nan-Hua-Ch'en-Ching*, 34; Feng, *Chuang Tzŭ*, 31; Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 30; Graham, *Chuang Tzu*, 73; Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, 37; Palmer, *Chuang Tzu*, 30; Höchsmann and Yang, *Zhuangzi*, 40; Galvany, "Discussing Usefulness", 86-87; Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi*, 40-41. An exception is Richard Lynn's translation based on Guo Xiang's commentary, which says "the great gnarled oak appeared to him in a dream as the shrine spirit", Lynn, *Zhuangzi*, 93.

774 *Nanhua zhenjing pingzhu* 2.37a. For Guo Xiang, see Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound*. See also the translation in Lynn, *Zhuangzi*, 94.

吳先主時，陸敬叔為建安太守，使人伐大樟樹，下數斧，忽有血出，樹斷，有物，人面，狗身，從樹中出。敬叔曰：「此名『彭侯』。」乃烹食之。其味如狗。白澤圖曰：「木之精名『彭侯』，狀如黑狗，無尾，可烹食之。」[775]

During the time of the first ruler of Wu, Lu Jingshu served as Governor of Jian'an Commandery, and he once dispatched people to cut down a large camphor tree. After several strokes of the axe, blood suddenly came out of the tree. When it split, a thing with a human face and the body of a dog came out of the tree. [Lu] Jingshu said, "This is called Penghou," and then he cooked and ate it. Its flavour was like dog. The *White Marsh Diagram*[776] says, "The essence of trees is called Penghou, it is shaped like a black dog without a tail, it can be cooked and eaten.[777]

Here the "essence" (*jing* 精) of a tree does not resemble a tree at all, but instead is a dog with a human face. According to certain accounts, things (*wu* 物) can become an "essence" when they get old, including trees. In separate item of the *Soushen ji*, an explanation of this tendency of things to become essences when old is explained by none other than Confucius. The story borrows as background a famous episode in Confucius' life when he was experiencing difficulties in Chen.[778] One night, while Confucius was playing his zither in an inn, a strange, giant man wearing black clothes and a tall hat entered. He made such a noise that he roused the occupants of the inn, and then accosted Confucius' disciples Zigong 子貢 and Zilu 子路 when they came

[775] *Soushen ji* 18.218.
[776] *Baize tu*, named for a fabulous creature mentioned in chapter one. This text survives in quotations and in some unearthed manuscripts, such as the Dunhuang texts P.2682 and S.6261, see Shi, "The Graph of the White Marsh and its Dunhuang 'Anomaly': The Multifunctionality of Dunhuang Manuscripts P.2682 and S.6261." Donald Harper has suggested that *Baizetu* may have been a generic title for "a type of medieval occult miscellany", see Harper, "The Textual Form of Knowledge: Occult Miscellanies in Ancient and Medieval Chinese Manuscripts, 4th Century BCE to 10th Century CE", 340. See also Harper, "'Hakutaku hi kai zu': White Marsh Diagram to Repel Ominous Prodigies"; Zhou, "Baize xinyang jiqi xingxiang zhuanbian zhi kaocha"; Sasaki, *Fukugen Hakutaku zu—kodai chūgoku no yōkai to hikisha bunka*; Okabe, "Higashiajia chīki niokeru ryū mi Hakutaku zuzō no denpa to juyō — Seian koken no Hakutaku zō o chūshin ni"; Kumazawa, "Kamijū 'Hakutaku' to bunka no denpa".
[777] For another translation, see DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 215-216. A longer version of this quotation from the *Baize tu* is preserved in the *Fayuan zhulin* and the *Taiping yulan* (see below).
[778] Versions of this story are retold in numerous sources. For an overview up to the end of the Han dynasty, see Hunter, *Confucius Beyond the Analects*, 63, 67-69, 77-83, 155, 276-286, and Makeham "Between Chen and Cai: *Zhuangzi* and the *Analects*".

to investigate the disturbance. Once Confucius noticed the man's strange armour, he advised his disciples to pull at it, and upon them so doing the man collapsed to the floor and was revealed to be a giant fish. Confucius then provided an explanation for this unusual occurrence:

> 此物也，何為來哉？吾聞：物老則群精依之。因衰而至此。其來也，豈以吾遇厄，絕糧，從者病乎！夫六畜之物，及龜蛇魚鱉草木之屬，久者神皆憑依，能為妖怪，故謂之五酉。五酉者，五行之方，皆有其物，酉者，老也，物老則為怪，殺之則已，夫何患焉。或者天之未喪斯文，以是繫予之命乎！不然，何為至於斯也。[779]
>
> Why did this thing come here? I have heard that when something becomes old, sundry essences (*jing*) attach themselves to it.[780] It is owing to [a thing's] decline that it becomes like this. Can the arrival of this thing be related to my present predicament and lack of provisions or because one of my disciples is ill? Once the six husbanded animals as well as tortoises, snakes, fish, turtles, and plants become old, spirits attach themselves to all of them, and they can become strange. For this reason, they are called the "Five *You*". The "Five *You*" are one aspect of the Five Agents, each of which have their own things. *You* means old;[781] once things get old, they become strange. Killing it puts an end to [the strangeness], and there is no need for regret. Perhaps Heaven has not yet abandoned this

[779] *Soushen ji* 19.234.
[780] For a similar idea see *Lunheng*, 22.934-935.
[781] Because *you* 酉 can mean "mature wine", it is associated with "old". See *Shiji* 25.1247; *Baihutong shu zhong*, 4.178, see also *Weishu jicheng*, 614.

culture[782] and is using this [incident] to bind me to my fate. If not, why send [this thing] here?"[783]

As Mark Csikszentmihalyi has noted (drawing upon the work of Anna Seidel), Han dynasty portrayals of Confucius can be divided between the motifs of "human sage" and "supernatural teacher".[784] In the latter, Confucius was described as having superhuman abilities, and even physically strange himself.[785] This mode of depiction can be seen in the above item of the *Soushen ji*, where Confucius is the source of strange knowledge, explaining that things become strange when they get old, and essences can attach (*yi* 依) themselves to them. Unlike the fish in this story, in the story of Lu Jingshu, the thing appears distinct from the tree, and it is not clear whether it grew from within it or merely occupied it somehow. Regardless, by "essence of a tree", the text appears to mean associated with trees, rather than an unusual type of tree. This is similar to descriptions of mountain spirits or essences, which are not mountains themselves but rather occupy mountains.

Another item in the *Souhen ji* reads:

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[782] "This culture" 斯文 is that associated by Confucius with figures of the ancient past like King Wen of Zhou. This line strongly echoes *Lunyu* 9.5, where Confucius is accosted in Kuang, and asks, "If Heaven intended this culture to perish, it would not have given it to those of us who live after King Wen's death. Since Heaven did not intend that this culture should perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" 天之將喪斯文也，後死者不得與於斯文也；天之未喪斯文也，匡人其如予何. Translation from Slingerland, *Analects*, 87.

[783] For another translation, see DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 234. DeWoskin and Crump read the list of "tortoises, snakes, fish, turtles, grasses, and trees" as being an enumeration of the term *liuchu*, which they read as meaning "six classes of things which nourish life". While *shu* 畜 ("livestock") can be read as *xu*, with the extended meaning of "to nourish", *liushu* as a fixed phrase referring to farmyard animals is seen in many other texts, and is unlikely to refer to plants. I read the list as enumerating five items, thus the text calls them "the Five Olds".

[784] Csikszentmihalyi, "Confucius and the Analects in the Han", 137.

[785] The *Shiji* (47:1909) for instance says that Confucius is described as being nine *chi* and six *cun* (approximately 7'3"), which people regarded as extraordinary (孔子長九尺有六寸，人皆謂之「長人」而異之). Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 178-9 discusses the association of unusual tallness with leadership.

秦時，武都故道，有怒特祠，祠上生梓樹，秦文公二十七年，使人伐之，輒有大風雨，樹創隨合，經日不斷。文公乃益發卒，持斧者至四十人，猶不斷。士疲，還息；其一人傷足，不能行，臥樹下，聞鬼語樹神曰：「勞乎攻戰？」其一人曰：「何足為勞。」又曰：「秦公將必不休，如之何？」答曰：「秦公其如予何。」又曰：「秦若使三百人，被髮，以朱絲繞樹，赭衣，灰垈伐汝，汝得不困耶？」神寂無言。明日，病人語所聞。公於是令人皆衣赭，隨斲創，垈以灰，樹斷。中有一青牛出，走入豐水中。其後，青牛出豐水中，使騎擊之，不勝；有騎墮地，復上，髻解，被髮，牛畏之，乃入水，不敢出。故秦自是置「旄頭騎」。[786]

During the Qin, in Gudao of Wudu Commandery there was a shrine to Nute, on top of which grew a large catalpa tree. In the 27th year of his reign, Duke Wen of Qin sent people to cut it down, and when they did great winds and rains came and the tree's wounds healed up, and at the end of the day it had still not been chopped down. Duke Wen then sent even more men, with 40 of them carrying axes, but still it could not be chopped down. Exhausted, the men retired, but one among them had injured his foot and was unable to walk, so he rested beneath the tree. He heard a demon speaking to the spirit of the tree, saying, "Are you tired of fighting?" and the man thought, "What has it got to be tired about?" The demon said, "The Duke of Qin will not give up, so what will you do?" The [spirit] replied, "What can the Duke of Qin do to me?" The demon said, "If Qin dispatches 300 men with dishevelled hair to tie up the tree with scarlet thread while wearing red convict clothes, powder you with ashes and chop at you, will you not be in trouble?" The spirit went quiet and did not speak. The next day, the injured man related what he had heard. The Duke then ordered men to wear red convict clothes and then chop at the tree and dust it wish ash. The tree was felled, and from within emerged a black ox that ran into the Feng River. Later, the black ox came out of the Feng River and riders were sent to attack it without success. One of the riders fell to the ground, and when he mounted his horse he loosed his bun and let his hair be dishevelled, and the ox

[786] *Soushen ji* 18.216.

feared him and retreated to the river without daring to come out. This is why the Qin instituted the Yak-head Riders.[787]

Even though the text describes the demon talking to "the spirit of the tree," that spirit is revealed to be a black ox. This motif of an animalistic creature occupying a tree appears in a number of texts.[788] Both the *Fayuan zhulin* and the *Taiping yulan* preserve a longer quotation from the aforementioned *Baize tu*, the first part of which is the same as the section about Penghou quoted in the *Soushen ji*. The next part reads,

千載木，其中有蟲，名曰賈誳，狀如豚，食之如狗肉味。[789]

The ten-thousand-year-old tree: inside it there is a bug whose name is Jia Chu, it is shaped like a boar; eat it and it has flavour like dog meat.

An item recorded in the late 5th century *Shuyi ji* 述異記 (*Records Relating the Strange*)[790] says,

梓樹之精化為青羊，生百年而紅，五百年而黃，又五百年而色蒼，又五百年而色白。[791]

The essence of a catalpa tree transforms into a black sheep, after it lives for a hundred years then it turns red, five hundred years and it turns yellow, and then five hundred

[787] See the translation in DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 213-214. "Yak-head Riders" is rather literal, and the term has been translated more broadly as "Standard Bearers", see Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times*, 25. De Crespigny translates it as "Ox-tail Banners", de Crespigny, *To Establish Peace*, 190.
[788] Zhang, "Zhongguo wenhua zhong shumu jingguai shanbian yuanliu banxi".
[789] *Fayuan zhulin jiaozhu* 45.1388 (T53 no. 2122 0633c13-0633c14); *Taiping yulan* 886.3937.
[790] There are two texts of this title, one attributed to Ren Fang 任昉 (460–508), the other to Zu Chongzhi 祖沖之 (429–500). For background, see Li, *Tanggian zhiguai xiaoshuo shi*, 390-405; Wang, *Wei Jin nanbeichao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu*, 313; Campany, *Strange Writing*, 83-85; Knechtges and Chang. *Ancient and Early Medieval Chinese Literature*, vol. 2, 955-957. For studies of Ren Fang's text, see Brightwell, "Discursive Flights: Structuring Stories in the Shuyi ji"; Liu
[791] *Gujin tushu jicheng* 240.

more years and its colour turns grey, and another five hundred years then its colour turns white.

Yet another item in *Soushen ji* that deals with strange trees does not depict the tree as having sentience:

> 廬江龍舒縣陸，亭流水邊有一大樹，高數十丈，常有黃鳥數千枚巢其上，時久旱，長老共相謂曰：「彼樹常有黃氣，或有神靈，可以祈雨。」因以酒脯往。亭中有寡婦李憲者，夜起，室中忽見一婦人，著繡衣，自稱曰：「我，樹神黃祖也。能興雲雨，以汝性潔，佐汝為生。朝來父老皆欲祈雨，吾已求之於帝，明日日中，大雨。」至期，果雨。遂為立祠。憲曰：「諸卿在此，吾居近水，當致少鯉魚。」言訖，有鯉魚數十頭，飛集堂下，坐者莫不驚悚。如此歲餘，神曰：「將有大兵，今辭汝去。」留一玉環曰：「持此可以避難。」後劉表、袁術相攻，龍舒之民皆徙去，唯憲里不被兵。[792]

> Beside a river in Luting, in Longshu district, Lujiang, there is a large tree that is several *zhang* in height, which usually had several thousand yellow birds[793] nesting on top of it. Once there was a lengthy drought, and the elders said, "This tree often has a yellow *qi* – supposing it has a spirit, then we can pray to it for rain." Thereupon they brought alcohol and salted meat there. In [Lu]ting there was a widow called Li Xian. She awoke that night and suddenly saw a woman in the room wearing embroidered clothes. The woman introduced herself by saying, "I am the tree spirit Huangzu, I can raise clouds and rain, and because your disposition is pure, I will help you to get by. In the morning the elders all wanted to pray for rain – I have already asked for it from the Thearch.[794] Tomorrow at noon a great rain will fall." When the time came, rain did indeed fall. Thereafter a shrine was set up, and [Li] Xian said, "You all assembled here,[795] I reside by the river, so carp ought to brought here". When she finished speaking, several tens of

[792] *Soushen ji* 18.217.
[793] DeWoskin and Crump translate this as "golden orioles", a reasonable inference based on other uses of *huangniao*, but as the important point is that they are yellow, I have translated the term plainly.
[794] I.e., the Lord of Heaven *tiandi* 天帝.
[795] Li Xian is addressing them directly. She also appears to be speaking as the tree spirit.

> carp leapt up and landed before the hall, and none who were there were not shocked. It went on like this for over a year, and the spirit said, "There is a great army on its way, I must leave you now". She left them a jade bracelet and said, "Whoever holds this can avoid misfortune". Later, Liu Biao and Yuan Shu did battle, and the people of Longshu had to flee, only [Li] Xian's village was spared attack.[796]

In this story, the tree spirit has no plant-like qualities. Other than calling herself a tree spirit, the only explicit connection made between spirit and tree is the colour yellow, as her name means Yellow Ancestor and the tree was regarded as having yellow *qi*. In this instance, "tree spirit" *shushen* 樹神 appears to mean a spirit associated with a tree, not a force that animates the tree itself. The presence of the tree spirit appears to endow the tree with yellow *qi*, which effects the colour of the birds that nest in it, but beyond that it behaves like any normal tree.

One item in the collection *Chuanqi* 傳奇 (*Transmission of the Strange*) by Pei Xing 裴鉶 (825–880),[797] and preserved in the *Taiping guangji*, illustrates both the fluidity of the terms used to refer to tree spirits, but also their consistent human-like qualities:

> 開成中，有江叟者多讀道書，廣尋方術，善吹笛，能作龍吟。往來多在永樂縣靈仙閣。時沈飲酒。適閿鄉，至盤豆館東官道大槐樹下醉寢。及夜艾，稍醒，聞一巨物行聲，舉步甚重。叟闇窺之，見一人崔嵬，高數丈，至槐側坐，而以毛手捫叟曰：「我意是樹畔鋤兒，乃瓮邊畢卓耳。」遂敲大樹數聲曰「可報荊山舘中二郎來省大兄。」大槐乃語云：「勞弟相訪。」便聞槐樹上有人下來與語。須臾，飲酌之聲交作。[798]

[796] See the translation in DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 214-215.
[797] For background on Pei Xing see Altenburger, *The Sword or the Needle*, 58; Wang, *Tangren xiaoshuo jiaoshi*, vol.1, 303-304; Xiao, *Zhongguo wenyan xiaoshuojia pingzhuan*, 210-215.
[798] Li, *Quan Tang Wudai xiaoshuo*, 1818; *Taiping guangji* 406.3389-3391.

During the Kaicheng era[799] there was an old man called Jiang[800] who often read books about the Way,[801] sought widely after cryptic arts, was good at playing the flute and could perform the dragon cry.[802] He often would come to Lingxian pavilion in Yongle[803] and frequently would get very drunk. He went to Wenxiang,[804] and drunkenly slept beneath a large pagoda tree on the road east of Pandou Inn.[805] He awoke in the middle of the night and heard the sound of a large thing moving, taking very heavy steps. Old man Jiang peered at it through the dark, and saw a man who towered at several *zhang* in height. This man came to sit by the pagoda tree, and with a hairy hand touched the old geezer and said, "I thought it was a hoe by the tree, but it's just a Bi Zhuo by his jug,"[806] and then he knocked on the great tree several times, saying, "It's Erlang of Jingshan Inn to see his brother".[807] The great pagoda tree then spoke, saying, "Thank you for troubling to visit, brother," then [the old man] heard someone come down from the tree to speak. Soon he heard the sound of drinks being toasted.

The text then refers to both the visitor and the host as pagoda trees, distinguishing the visitor by calling him the Jingshan pagoda tree. Their relationship is made clear by the visitor from Jingshan addressing the other by the respectful term older brother (*daxiong* 大兄):

荊山槐曰：「大兄何年拋卻兩京道上槐王耳。」大槐曰：「我三甲子，當棄此位。」荊山槐曰：「大兄不知老之將至，猶顧此位，直須至火入空心，膏流節斷，而方知退。大是無厭之士。何不如今因其震霆，自拔於道，必得為材用之木，搆大廈之梁棟，尚存得重重碎錦，片片真花。豈他日作朽蠹之薪。同入爨

[799] Reign name of Tang Wenzong, lasting from 836–841.
[800] The word *jiangsou* 江叟 can mean old fisherman, but there are a number of stories about old men (*sou*) known by their surname, such as Old Man Hei (*Heisou* 黑叟) and Old Man Yu (*Yusou* 俞叟), see Li, *Quan Tang Wudai xiaoshuo*, 1198, 1610.
[801] While this could refer to Buddhist or Daoist texts, in this instance it is probably the latter.
[802] This refers to the sound of the flute. This line is not in the *Taiping guangji* version, but appears in the Song-era *biji* titled *Category Discourses* (*leishuo* 類說), see Li, *Quan Tang Wudai xiaoshuo*, 1821, n. 1.
[803] In modern-day Hebei, *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 261.
[804] In modern-day Henan, *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 835.
[805] In modern-day Henan, *Zhongguo lishi dacidian*, 917. Also mentioned in the poem *Chuguan su pandou guan dui conglu yougan* 出關宿盤豆館對叢蘆有感 ("Moved While Facing Tufts of Reeds, Passing the Night at the Pandou Inn Out Beyond the [Tong] Pass") by Li Shangyin 李商隱 (813–858), see *Li Shangyin shige jijie*. 328.
[806] An allusion to a famous drunk of the Jin period, see *Jinshu* 49.1381.
[807] The graph *shan* 山 is also an emendation based on the *Leishuo*, Li, *Quan Tang Wudai xiaoshuo*, 1821, n. 3.

為煨燼耳。大槐曰：「雀鼠尚貪生，吾焉能辦此事邪。」槐曰：「老兄不足與語。」告別而去。

The Jingshan pagoda tree said, "Brother, what year will you stop being the Pagoda Tree King of the Two Capitals Road?" The great pagoda tree said, "In my third Jiazi year,[808] I will abandon this post". The Jingshan pagoda tree said, "Brother, you grow old without knowing the passing of the years,[809] why hold onto this position to the point where fire enters the hollows, the fat flows and joints break, and only then retiring? You truly would be a greedy man. Why not take advantage of a thunderstorm and uproot the tree onto the road, then it can be used for lumber and made into the beams of a great mansion, some of it still existing in tiny pieces and flower-fragments. What if someday it becomes rotten and worm-eaten firewood that gets burned up in the stove?" The great pagoda tree said, "[Even] sparrows and rats still cravenly cling to life, how could I do what you say?" The [Jingshan] pagoda tree said, "My brother, there is nothing more to say" and he bade the tree farewell and left.

Despite the text at one point describing a "person" (*ren* 人) coming down the tree to speak to the visitor and make alcoholic toasts (and presumably holding cups with their hands and drinking with their mouths), it is the body of the tree rather than of the person that is the focus of their conversation. The visitor discusses what will happen to the tree, making repeated references to its physical body. Here the question is whether the host is the tree – and so the visitor is warning him about harm coming to his own physical body – or occupies the tree – and so the visitor is warning him about harm coming to his home.[810] While there is some ambiguity in the text, the use of the term "position/post" (*wei* 位) does give the impression that the host is occupying the tree and could eventually leave it. This however also raises another issue: the possibility that the spirit and the tree are one, and the spirit is the animating force of the tree in a dualistic sense. That being said, it may also be the case that there was no singular and consistent rational logic

[808] I.e., when he is 180 years old.
[809] A reference to the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 7.19).
[810] See also the discussion of "human-formed enspirited nonhumans" in Campany, "Nonhuman Self-Cultivators in Early Medieval China", 37-40.

beneath these manifestations of the strange, reflecting the ultimately unknowable mysteries of the universe.[811]

The story continues with Old Man Jiang travelling to Jingshan, where the giant human-like "thing" (*wu* 物) that visited the pagoda tree is also referred to as a tree spirit:

> 及明，叟方起。數日，至閿鄉荊山館中，見庭槐森聳。枝榦扶疎。近欲十圍，疑附神物。遂伺其夜，以酒脯奠之云：「某昨夜聞槐神與盤豆官道大槐王論語云云。某臥其側，並歷歷記其說。今請樹神與我言語。」槐曰：「感子厚意，當有何求。殊不知爾夜爛醉於道，夫乃子邪。」叟曰：「某一生好道，但不逢其師。樹神有靈，乞為指教。使學道有處。當必奉酧。」槐神曰：「子但入荊山，尋鮑仙師。脫得見之，或水陸之間，必獲一處度世。蓋感子之請，慎勿洩吾言也。君不憶華表告老狐，禍及余矣。」叟感謝之。
>
> The old man finally awoke at dawn. After a few days, he arrived at Jingshan Inn[812] in Wenxiang, and saw a lofty pagoda tree in a courtyard. Its branches were spread out and it was nearly ten double-handspans wide, he suspected that a spirit was attached to it.[813] He waited until night and then offered wine and dried meat as an offering to it, and said, "A few nights ago I heard what you, pagoda tree spirit, were discussing with the great Pagoda Tree King of the Pandou road. I was laying by its side, and remember in detail what was said. Now I have come to request that you, tree spirit, talk with me." The pagoda tree said, "Your kind words are touching. What is it you seek? Who would have thought that the man drunk by the road that night was you!" The old man said, "All my life I have had a penchant for the Way, only I have not found a teacher. You, tree spirit, have great power, I beg you to teach me. If you can send me to a place to study the Way, I can certainly repay you." The pagoda tree spirit said, "You only need to enter Mount Jing and seek out Transcendent Master Bao. If you are able to find him, then whether on

[811] Brashier makes a similar point about the "clustering of ideas" on dualistic "souls" and similar phenomena in the Han dynasty, Brashier, "Han Thanatology and the Division of 'Souls'", 158.
[812] Adding *guan* 館 based on the *Leishuo*, Li, *Quan Tang Wudai xiaoshuo*, 1821, n. 5.
[813] Changing *ru* 如 for *huai* 疑 based on the *Leishuo*, Li, *Quan Tang Wudai xiaoshuo*, 1821, n. 6.

> rivers or on land, you certainly will find a niche to transcend the mundane world. I was moved by your request, but make sure you don't divulge what I have said! Don't forget what the tomb pillar said to the old fox – or misfortune will come to me." The old man was grateful and thanked him.

Old Man Jiang then seeks the transcendent Bao, and he is not able to keep the tree spirit's secret from Bao, who, despite Jiang begging for forgiveness, vows to punish the tree spirit. Bao calls it a "little demon" (*xiaogui* 小鬼), and says he will send a flying talisman (*feifu* 飛符) to injure one of its branches. The story then moves away from the tree spirits to relate how Bao taught Jiang how to use his flute playing ability to obtain a river elixir (*shuidan* 水丹) from a dragon.

The reference made by the pagoda tree spirit to a story about Zhang Hua, a tomb pillar, and an old fox appears in the *Soushen ji*. In the story, an old fox who lived in front of the tomb of the Warring States ruler King Zhao of Yan 燕昭王 (d. 279 BCE), had, through living long, developed the ability to transform itself. The fox wanted to talk to the famous Zhang Hua, and so took on the appearance of a young scholar and asked the tomb pillar (*huabiao* 華表) if it thought he was worthy. The tomb pillar praises the fox's abilities, but warns it that Zhang Hua is extremely intelligent and will see through any ploys, and when he does it won't only be the fox who gets in trouble, but the tomb pillar as well. The fox does not heed this advice and goes to see Zhang Hua, who realises that it is not human, but the only way to prove it is to use the light of the flames from burning wood that is over a thousand years old. Discussing the issue with Lei Huan 雷煥 (265–334), the latter suggests that Zhang Hua set hounds on him to force the fox to reveal himself, but to no avail. Zhang Hua claims that while ordinary demons (he uses the term *chimei* 魑魅)[814] that are several hundred years old fear dogs, those that are a thousand years old can only be distinguished by shining the light burning from thousand year old wood. Zhang then sent men to cut down the old post at King Zhao's tomb, and when they get there a black-clad child appears and asks them what they are doing. Upon hearing their plan, says "The old fox didn't understand and did not heed my words, now this misfortune has befallen me, and I cannot escape it" (*laohu bu zhi, bu ting wo yan, jinri huo yi ji wo, qi ke tao hu* 老狐不智，不聽我言，

[814] For more on the concept of *mei* 魅, see Lin, "Shi mei" and Yang, *Zhongguo mei wenhua*.

今日禍已及我，其可逃乎). Thereupon the child weeps and leaves, and the men cut down the pillar, which bleeds.[815]

This story has the same separation between tree/wood and spirit, but in this case the dependence between them is clear. While the spirit of the pillar can manifest externally to it in the form of a human child, it cannot live without the body of the pillar. Indeed, when cut, the pillar bleeds like a human. Thus while tree spirits are often human-like or animalistic, they are not completely distinct from trees, as in many explanations of the strange, unusual phenomena are taken to be emanations from the natural world. As Michael Puett has pointed out, aspects of the landscape were regarding as putting out dangerous forces that could manifest as the strange if not properly dealt with through sacrifice.[816] This complicates any attempt to make definitive statements about non-dualism and anthropocentricism.

While a tension sometimes exists between dualistic body of the tree and the presence of the spirit, several texts do describe ghosts or spirits residing in trees. In the *Hanshu* biography of Dongfang Shuo, he at one point says "cypresses are the court of the ghost" (*bai zhe, gui zhi ting ye* 柏者，鬼之廷也), which Yan Shigu glosses thusly: "It is said that ghosts and spirits value darkness, thus they take pines and cypress trees as their base" (*yan guishen shang youan, gu yi songbai zhi shu wei tingfu* 言鬼神尚幽闇，故以松柏之樹為廷府).[817] As in the examples above, Dongfang Shuo's comment is made incidentally as part of a wider debate not specifically about ghosts or trees, and he appears to be saying something that he regards as common knowledge.

An anecdote in the *Youming lu* also suggests that trees were the abode of spirits:

> 京兆董奇，庭前有大樹，陰映甚佳。後霖雨，奇獨在家鄉，有小吏言云：「承雲府君來。」乃見承雲，著通天冠，長八尺，自稱為方伯，「某第三子有雋才，方

[815] *Soushen ji* 18.219-220. See the translation in DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 216-218.
[816] Puett, "The Offering of Food and the Creation of Order: The Practice of Sacrifice in Early China", 76-83.
[817] *Hanshu* 65.2845-2846; Wu, *The Art of the Yellow Springs: Understanding Chinese Tombs*, 124. As noted previously with *wutong* trees, here is an example of one tree in a digraph pair standing in for the other in a way that makes species identification difficult – if not irrelevant.

當與君周旋。」明日，覺樹下有異，每晡後無人，輒有一少年，就奇語戲，或命取飲食。如是半年，奇氣強壯，一門無疾。奇後適下墅，其僕客三人送護，言：「樹材可用，欲貨之，郎常不聽，今試共斬斫之。」奇遂許之。神亦自爾絕矣。[818]

Dong Qi of Jingzhao: in the front of his courtyard was a large tree which gave excellent shade. One day the rain was heavy and continuous, and [Dong] Qi was alone in the household when a petty official told him, "The Lord of Chengyun is here".[819] When he saw Chengyun, he was wearing the Permeating Heaven cap,[820] was eight *chi* tall, and called himself Regional Inspector,[821] [he said], "My third son is exceptionally talented, soon you will have dealings with him". From the next day, [Dong Qi] discovered that there was something strange under the tree: every late afternoon, even though no-one was there, suddenly a youth would appear and approach [Dong] Qi and chat and make merry with him, sometimes ordering [Dong] Qi to bring food and drink. It went on like this for half a year, [Dong] Qi had become strong and healthy, and none in his household got ill. Later, [Dong] Qi went to Xiashu accompanied by three servants, who said to him, "The wood of this tree could be very useful, we'd like to sell it, but Master has always refused to – perhaps today we could fell it?" [Dong] Qi assented to this, and from then on, the spirit was also cut off.

In this anecdote, the tree is the place under which the youth suddenly appears, and when the tree is cut down, the youth never returns. The text suggests that the tree is the abode of the humanistic spirit(s), but it is never stated explicitly.

The tension between expected tree behaviour and the strange sometimes are part of anomaly accounts. One item found in both the *Fengsu tongyi* and the *Soushen ji* reads:

[818] *Guxiaoshuo gouchen* 418-419; *Taiping guangji* 415.3380-3381.
[819] While the title *fujun* 府君 is normally another name for *taishou* 太守 ("governor"), as Chengyun is not the name of a commandery, it seems clear that this is not an earthly title.
[820] Worn by the emperor.
[821] See Hucker, *Official Titles*, 209.

魏，桂陽太守江夏張遼，字叔高，去鄢陵，家居，買田，田中有大樹，十餘圍，枝葉扶疏，蓋地數畝，不生穀。遣客伐之。斧數下，有赤汁六七斗出，客驚怖，歸白叔高。叔高大怒曰：「樹老汁赤，如何得怪？」因自嚴行復斲之。血大流灑。叔高使先斲其枝，上有一空處，見白頭公，可長四五尺，突出，往赴叔高。高以刀逆格之，如此，凡殺四五頭，並死。左右皆驚怖伏地。叔高神慮怡然如舊。徐熟視，非人，非獸。遂伐其木。此所謂木石之怪夔魍魎者乎？是歲應司空辟侍御史兗州刺史。以二千石之尊，過鄉里，薦祝祖考，白日繡衣榮羨，竟無他怪。[822]

During the Wei, Zhang Liao of Jiangxia, courtesy name Shugao, the Grand Protector of Guiyang, went to Yanling to make his home. He purchased fields, and in the middle of one was a large tree several tens of double-handspans wide, its branches and leaves luxuriant, covering the ground for several *mu* so that no grains could grow.[823] He dispatched retainers to cut it down, and after several blows of the axe, six or seven *dou* of red sap came out. The retainers were afraid and returned to tell [Zhang] Shugao. Shugao was very angry, and said, "When a tree is old its sap is red, what's strange about that?" And thereupon went quickly over there and began chopping it himself. The blood poured out, so Shugao ordered that the branches be cut first. Above there was an opening, in which white haired old men could be seen, they were around four or five *chi* tall. They suddenly came out and went for Shugao, who faced them off with his sword, and assailed four or five, killing all of them. His subordinates were all prostrate on the ground in terror, but Shugao's disposition was as agreeable as ever. Calmly looking them over, he saw that they were not human nor beast. Then they cut down the tree. Was this what have been called the spirits of wood and stone: the *kui* and *wangliang*? In that year, Zhang Liao accepted an offer from the Minister of Works to serve as Attendant Censor and then Regional Inspector for Yanzhou. As an official deserving of 2,000 bushels of grain, he visited his hometown to worship his ancestors, and was honoured to wear

[822] This is the version from *Soushen ji* 18.217-218, see also *Fengsu tongyi jiaozhu* 9.434.
[823] DeWoskin and Crump translate this as the tree "bore no edible seeds", which does not seem plausible, DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 215.

colourful embroidered clothes in broad daylight. In the end, no other abnormalities appeared.[824]

As seen in other accounts discussed above, a connection is made between age and the strange, and trees are described bleeding in a manner that could resemble both tree-like sap and human-like blood. In this account, Zhang Liao first is scornful of his subordinates' fear of the tree, an instance of a common element in anomaly literature where doubts about the strange are included into the narrative, usually to be proven wrong by subsequent events.

Trees grow old and they can bleed sap that resembles blood, but in the texts examined so far, they usually serve as hosts for spirits or strange beings. In other accounts, trees can take on the physical forms of humans, but interestingly when they do they do not take on human-like thoughts or speech. The next section will look at some of these trees with human forms.

4.2.2. Trees in the shape of humans

While many of the words for the strange are used as synonyms, in some texts a difference in some of these terms is implied. For instance, in his *Baopuzi*, in the section on climbing mountains, Ge Hong is elaborating on what advanced practitioners (*shangshi* 上士) must arm themselves with texts and the names of spirits, and then "abnormalities of wood and stone and essences of mountains and rivers will not dare molest them" (*mushi zhi guai, shanchuan zhi jing, bugan lai shi ren* 木石之怪，山川之精，不敢來試人).[825] The distinction between "abnormalities" (*guai* 怪) and "essences" (*jing* 精) here appears to be that the former have the physical aspects of wood and stone, and the latter reside there. This terminological distinction is not always insisted on, however, and the more generic "thing" (*wu* 物) was often used as a one-size-fits-all term to describe all manner of unusual beings.

[824] See also the translations in DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 215 and de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, vol. 4, 273-274. The version in *Fengsu tongyi* is regarded by de Groot as the oldest story which describes plant spirits as having human or animal-like form.
[825] *Baopuzi neipian* 17.300. For another translation see Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine, and Religion in the China of A.D. 320*, 282. See also Jiang, *Chutu wenxian yu zaoqi daojiao*, 154-171.

While Ge Hong did not discuss them in detail, there are examples of abnormalities that take the form of wood or trees in other texts. For instance, in the *Jinshu* biography of Liu Yao 劉曜 (d. 329), the last emperor of the Han-Zhao 漢趙 dynasty (304–329),

> 西明門內大樹風吹折，經一宿，樹撥變為人形，髮長一尺，鬚眉長三寸，皆黃白色，有斂手之狀，亦有兩腳著裙之形，惟無目鼻，每夜有聲，十日而生柯條，遂成大樹，枝葉甚茂。[826]

> Within the Ximing Gate[827] a large tree was snapped by the wind. A night passed, and the tree had bent into the shape of a human, with hair one *chi* in length, its beard and eyebrows three *cun* in length, all sallow-coloured, and it also formed hands making a respectful gesture, and the shape of two legs wearing a robe.[828] It only lacked eyes and a nose and every night it would make noise. In ten days it had grown small twigs, and it later became a large tree of luxuriant branches and leaves.

Apart from the somewhat ambiguous "noise" (*sheng* 聲) made at night, there does not seem to be anything human about the tree beyond its striking appearance. Two similar incidents are recorded as occurring in the Han dynasty:

> 哀帝建平三年十月，汝南西平遂陽鄉柱仆地，生支如人形，身青黃色，面白，頭有务髮，稍長大，凡長六寸一分。[829]

> During the tenth month of the third year of the Jianping era of Emperor Ai, a pillar in Suiyang village, in Xiping in Runan, fell to the ground and grew branches that resembled

[826] *Jinshu* 103.2686; see also *Taiping yulan* 117.577.
[827] In Luoyang. The version in the *Taiping yulan* give the date as the fifth month of the third year of the reign of Liu Yao, which would be 320.
[828] The *Taiping yulan* has the legs wearing shoes (*zhuolü* 著履).
[829] *Hanshu* 27.1413; Gan Bao's version is shorter, *Soushen ji* 6.79.

the shape of a human, its body greenish yellow, its face white, its head had hair which grew somewhat longer, all of which were six *cun* and a tenth.[830]

靈帝熹平三年，右校別作中有兩槀樹，皆高四尺所，其一株宿夕暴長，長丈餘，大一圍，作胡人狀，頭目鬢鬚髮備具。[831]

In the third year of the Xiping era of Emperor Ling, in the Office of the Construction Foreman of the Right[832] grew two ailanthus trees that were both four *chi* in height, and one of them overnight suddenly grew to a height of over one *zhang* and one double-handspan wide. It took the appearance of a foreigner, including head, eyes, sidelocks, beard, and hair.[833]

Emperor Ai was the last emperor of the Western Han before the Wang family took over the court, and Emperor Ling was the last of the Eastern Han before Dong Zhuo 董卓 (c. 140s – 192) became the power behind the throne. Liu Zhao's 劉昭 (fl. 502–519) commentary to the *Hou-Hanshu* also links the foreign appearance of the tree during the reign of Emperor Ling to the large numbers of foreign soldiers during the chaos at the end of the Han dynasty, as well as the violence of the Xianbei 鮮卑.[834] These three incidents all occurred during the rule of the last emperor of a dynasty, and so were likely to have been seen as inauspicious signs. As described in a previous section, these signs do not usually come with interpretations, it is clear that these incidents were recorded due to an assumption that these kind of anomalies were connected someway to governance, hence why they are often collected as part of the biographies of rulers, or the specific reign of a ruler in which they occurred is recorded.

[830] See the translation in DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 74-75.
[831] *Hou-Hanshu* 3299; *Soushen ji* 6.86.
[832] See Hucker, *Official Titles*, 234; DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 81.
[833] For another translation see DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 81. They regard this item as being about "a piece of lumbar" rather than a pillar.
[834] *Hou-Hanshu* 3299.

Despite this, there are some texts that provide us with snapshots of explanatory material alongside records of anomalies. In *Soushen ji*, the item above about the strange wooden post during the reign Emperor Ai is collected with a similar item:

> 成帝永始元年二月，河南街郵樗樹生枝如人頭，眉目鬚皆具，亡頭髮耳。[835]

> During the second month of the Yongshi reign of Emperor Cheng, at the highway relay-station[836] in Henan an ailanthus tree grew branches shaped like a human head, eyebrows, eyes, beard and all, it only lacked hair.

Like Emperor Ai, Emperor Cheng has not been judged favourably by history, with many historians seeing his reign as marking the beginning of the end for the Western Han.

While the order of these texts may have been arranged much later, possibly even as late as the Ming dynasty, these items are clearly linked in the *Soushen ji* by the term *zhi* 至 before the incident during Emperor Ai's reign, and they are also paired together in the transmitted text of the *Hanshu*. In both the *Hanshu* and *Soushen ji*, these two items have the following quote appended:

> 京房易傳曰：「王德衰，下人將起，則有木生為人狀」。[837]

> Jing Fang's *Tradition of the Changes* says, "When a ruler's virtue diminishes and lower people rise up, trees will grow in human shapes."

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[835] *Hanshu* 27.1413; *Soushen ji* 6.79.

[836] This station is also mentioned in Pan Yue's "Rhapsody on a Westward Journey" (*xizheng fu* 西征賦), which Knetches translates as "Highway Station", *Wen xuan*, vol. 2, 187.

[837] *Hanshu* 27.1413. *Hou-Hanshu* quotes this after the incident that occurred during the reign of Emperor Ling, *Hou-Hanshu* 3299.

This formulation is similar to those from weft texts explaining the appearance of auspicious signs quoted in the previous chapter on intertwined trees. In the *Soushen ji*, Gan Bao notes that "afterwards Wang Mang's usurpation occurred" (*qi hou you Wang Mang zhi cuan* 其後有王莽之簒).[838] Gan Bao then, via the authority of Jing Fang and the *Hanshu*, regards the phenomenon of trees taking human form as being connected to the decline of kingly virtue and the rise of subordinates, and directly connects the quoted incidents with the Wang Mang interregnum. That being said, the incident during the reign of Emperor Cheng occurred in 16 BCE, who continued to reign until 7 BCE, so these incidents were probably only symptoms of a long decline, rather than signs of immediate danger.

Distinctions between strange human-like trees and actual humans is sometimes insisted upon. As part of his enumeration of strange mountain phenomena in the *Baopuzi* cited above, Ge Hong explicitly says that mountain trees that appear to be able to speak are not actually the tree itself speaking: "In the mountains there are large trees, of those that can talk, it is not the tree that can talk" (*shan zhong you dashu, you neng yu zhe, fei shu neng yu ye* 山中有大樹，有能語者，非樹能語也). He then goes on to say that the essence within the tree is named Yunyang 雲陽, and calling its name brings good fortune.[839] Clearly this is not an attempt by Ge Hong to deny the existence of the strange, but instead reflects an assumption that plants, even strange plants, lack certain qualities that humans have such as speech.

Another example of trees taking human form is the "sweet-gum man" (*fengren* 楓人), which are old sweet-gum trees that form nodules resembling human faces. Like the phenomenon of intertwined trees, in descriptions of *fengren* the line between observation of nature and the strange is blurred. An account from the *Lingbiao luyi* preserved in encyclopaedic texts illustrates this tension:

[838] See also the translation in DeWoskin and Crump, *In Search of the Supernatural*, 74-75.
[839] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 17.304.

楓人嶺，多楓樹，樹老則有瘤癭。忽一夜遇暴雷驟雨，其樹贅則暗長三數尺。南中謂之楓人。越巫云：「取之雕刻神鬼，易致靈驗。」[840]

In Fengren Ridge there are many sweet-gum trees. When the trees get old they grow nodules. One night there suddenly came violent thunder and torrential rain, and the nodules on the trees covertly grew several *chi*. In the south they call these trees sweet-gum men. The spirit-mediums of Yue say, "use this wood to carve spirits and demons and they will become spiritually potent."

While trees can grow nodules and they may resemble human faces, this description could be called naturalistic. However, they are unlikely to grow so quickly overnight, which makes them strange. They do not however, in this text at least, speak like humans or have any other human-like characteristics.

In all these incidents, human-like forms appearing on non-human things appear to be understood as signs of something going wrong in the world. This physical hybridity illustrates a strong motif of the strange, namely that of the crossing of boundaries (human/nonhuman in this instance).[841] Also, despite taking human-like forms, many of these trees do not appear to have corresponding human-like interiority. This is not to say that all trees or wood anomalies lack the ability to think or speak. It is less common, but does occasionally occur, even as early as in *Soushen ji*, where one entry reads,

宋元嘉初，富陽人姓王，於窮瀆中作蟹斷。旦往觀之，見一材，長二尺許，在斷中。而斷裂開，蟹出都盡。乃修治斷，出材岸上。明往視之，材復在斷中，斷敗如前。王又治斷出材。明晨視，所見如初。王疑此材妖異，乃取內蟹籠中，攣頭擔歸，云：「至家，當斧砍燃之。」未至家二三里，聞籠中倅倅動。轉頭顧視，見向材頭變成一物，人面猴身，一手一足，語王曰：「我性嗜蟹，比日

[840] *Taiping yulan* 957.4250; *Taiping guangji* 407.3289. Another version appears in the *Nanfang caomu zhuang*. For a comparison of these texts, see Hu, "Zhiwu yu diguo: Nanfang caomu zhuang yu Wei-Jin shiqi de Lingnan jiyi".
[841] The consequences of the crossing of categories is discussed in Mary Douglas' highly influential *Purity and Danger*.

實入水破君蟹斷，入斷食蟹。相負已爾，望君見恕，開籠出我。我是山神，當相佑助，並令斷得大蟹。」王曰：「汝犯暴人，前後非一，罪自應死。」此物懇告，苦請乞放。王回顧不應。物曰：「君何姓名，我欲知之。」頻問不已，王遂不答。去家轉近，物曰：「既不放我，又不告我姓名，當復何計，但應就死耳。」王至家，熾火焚之。後寂然無復聲。土俗謂之山獠，云知人姓名，則能中傷人。所以勤勤問王，欲害人自免。[842]

In the first year of the Yuanjia era of the Liu-Song,[843] a person surnamed Wang from Fuyang had placed a crab trap in an exhausted canal. At dawn he went to look at it and saw a piece of timber that was around two *chi* in length inside the trap. The crab trap broke open, and all the crabs escaped. He then fixed the trap and put the timber on the shore. The next day he went to look at it, and the piece of timber was again inside the trap, which was broken as before. Wang again fixed the trap and removed the timber. In the morning he looked at it again, and saw it was again broken. Wang suspected that the timber might be an abnormality, and took it and put it in his basket, which he attached to his head and carried it back, saying, "When I get home, I should chop this up and burn it". When he had not yet got two or three *li* from his home, he heard the sound of movement coming from the basket. He looked around at it, and saw that the piece of timber had turned into a thing (*wu* 物) with the face of a human and the body of an ape, it had one arm and one leg, and said to Wang, "I have a liking for crabs, and over the past few days I have indeed been going into the water to break your crab trap to get in and eat them. It's a small betrayal, I hope you can forgive me and open up this basket and let me out. I am a mountain spirit, so I certainly can be of assistance to you, and I can make it so your trap catches huge crabs". Wang replied, "You have committed a crime, and done so more than once, the punishment must be death." The thing begged him, imploring bitterly to be released, but Wang turned his head and didn't respond. The thing said, "What is your name? I wish to know." It kept asking over and over, but Wang did not answer. When Wang was close to home, the thing said, "Since you won't let me free and you won't tell me your name, then I don't know what to do, I can only die." Wang got to his house, lit a fire, and burned it. Afterwards all was still and nothing made

[842] *Soushen hou ji* 7.89-90. This item is also quoted in the *Taiping guangji* as coming from the *Shuyi ji*, see *Taiping guangji* 323.2560.

[843] An era name of Emperor Wen 文 (424–453).

> a sound. The local people call the thing "Mountain Xiao" (*shanxiao* 山獟),[844] and say that when it knows a person's name, then it can injure them, thus it repeatedly asked Wang for his name, as he desired to harm Wang to save itself.[845]

This item illustrates the importance of names when dealing with anomalous phenomena – which as we have seen Ge Hong emphasised was necessary for those wanting to venture into the mountains – but in this case the thing wants to know Wang's name in order to harm him. More importantly for the purposes of the present study, this item depicts what originally appears to be a piece of wood that does indeed behave, speak, and apparently think like a human, but is only depicted behaving in that way once it changes into a "thing" with human and animal-like physical attributes. Moreover, when it starts talking to the crab fisherman Wang, it claims to be a mountain spirit (*shanshen* 山神),[846] another illustration that a spirit of something like a mountain or a tree need not take its form. For the thing itself, taking the form of a piece of timber appears to simply be a disguise to avoid being caught stealing crabs.

While there is no unified way that strange trees are depicted across all texts, there is a tendency in many of them to assume that trees are not alive in quite the same way that humans and even animals are. When they do possess human-like interiority or agency, it is because they are possessed by an animalistic entity, or because they are merely assuming plant physicality as a disguise. When plants go against their nature and take on human form, it is either because they are actually a spirit-like "thing" or because events in the human world of politics have caused them to take on forms contrary to their nature, but these forms do not usually give them a corresponding human-like interiority. Preliminarily, this suggests that Chinese texts of this era did indeed make ontological distinctions between humans and plants, and they did not regard plants as being alive in quite the same way that humans are.

Humans might be often analogised to animals in Early and Medieval China, but plants less so. In many Early Chinese texts there was a "moral consonance", to use Roel Sterckx's phrase, between

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[844] The version from the *Shuyi ji* renders this graph as *xiao* 魈, *Taiping guangji* 323.2560.
[845] See also the translation in Campany, *Garden of Marvels*, 39-40.
[846] Interestingly, this spirit has one leg like the *kui* mentioned in the *Guoyu* and referenced in the story of Zhang Ling above.

human and animal behaviour.[847] Like humans, animals were made of "blood and *qi*" (*xieqi* 血氣), and thus a physical commonality that resulted in similar behaviour and temperament.[848] Animals were for instance considered to be the ultimate source of music, but could nevertheless not comprehend the higher aspects of music.[849] According to a line attributed to Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期 about how emotions were put into music, wood and stone (that is, the materials of musical instruments) responded to the emotions of the human musician:

> 悲在心也，非在手也，非木非石也，悲於心而木石應之，以至誠故也。[850]

> Sadness is in the heart, not in the hand, not in wood, not in stone. Sadness is in the heart; wood and stone respond to it, through utmost sincerity.[851]

Non-sentient non-humans may respond to human beings, but human interiority does not seem to reside within them. Music may pervade the world, and exist due to underlying patterns shared by everything, but humans alone are properly positioned to appreciate and produce it.

The relationship between humans and animals is a complex one, but humans were despite being part of the natural world still nevertheless marked out as special within it. As Sterckx points out, Wang Chong rationalised the apparently strange and difficult to believe fact that animals were susceptible to the transformational qualities of music by noting that animal ears are similar to human ears. Wang Chong accepted that animals could be transformed by music, but for him it was the physical similarities between humans and animals that allowed for the possibility of mental similarities.[852] Such similarities are lacking between humans and plants, so we should

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[847] Sterckx, *Animal and Daemon*, 123.
[848] Sterckx argues that this should be understood as a compound term, see *Animal and Daemon*, 73-78. This term is also used in medical texts, see Unschuld, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen*, 413-418; Raphals, "Body, Mind, and Spirit in Early Chinese Medicine", 536-537, 546.
[849] Sterckx, *Animal and Daemon*, 129-130.
[850] This line is found in the *Lüshi chunqiu* and *Xinxu*. The former with slightly different vocabulary to the version quoted above, *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 9.508, *Xinxu jiaoshi* 4.613-614.
[851] For another translation see Knoblock and Riegel, *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, 220.
[852] Sterckx, *Animal and Daemon*, 129-137, 73-78.

therefore expect to see fewer attempts to project human-like intelligence or interiority onto plants.

An example of how ideas on these issues changed over time can be seen in a dialogue by the Song dynasty philosopher Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), which includes mention of the sweet-gum trees that take the form of human faces mentioned above. In this dialogue, Cheng's interlocutor asks him about a text called *Huashu* 化書 (*Book of Transformations*) attributed to the Southern Tang 南唐 (937–976) figure Song Qiqiu 宋齊丘 (887–959).[853] In that text, Song says,

> 有無情而化為有情者，有有情而化為無情者。無情而化為有情者，若楓樹化為老人是也。有情而化為無情者，如望夫化為石是也。[854]

> There are those without sentience that then transform to have sentience, and there are those with sentience that then transform to be without sentience. Those without sentience that then transform to have sentience are like sweet-gum trees that transform into old men. Those with sentience that then transform to be without sentience are like the [wife] looking for her husband who transformed into stone.

This quotation makes reference to the sweet-gum trees with nodules like human faces, as well as a story about a wife who waited for her husband so long that she turned to stone.[855] Here however the claim is that the trees become old men, rather than just resemble them. The other example give is to a story about a wife on a mountain looking out for her husband to return from war, and after a while turned to stone.[856] In the dialogue, the interlocutor asks about this statement, and Cheng Yi rejects it, noting that while cicadas can become flowers and earthworms can become lilies, they are only like stone crabs, swallows, or people, i.e., they are still bugs and

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[853] It may have actually been written by Tan Qiao 譚峭 (880–950). For these issues and background on the text, see Didier, "Messrs. T'an, Chancellor Sung, and the Book of Transformation (Hua shu)"; Ding, "Tan Qiao Huashu de shehua zhengzhi sixiang he zhexue sixiang".
[854] *Chengshi yishu* 18.199. The quote above differs from the version in *Huashu* 1.2-3.
[855] Different versions of this story are preserved in *Taiping yulan* 46.221, 48.232, 52.255, 440.2025, 888.3945.
[856] This story appears in the *Youming lu* (*Gu xiaoshuo gouchen* 355); *Chuxue ji* 5.108; *Yiwen leiju* 46.221, 48.232. A translation of the former appears in Zhang, *Buddhism and Tales of the Supernatural*, 12 n. 37.

still stone.[857] While the Cheng brothers were part of a philosophical movement that expanded moral sentiments described in the *Mencius* to non-humans,[858] they still insisted on this essential difference. Crucially, they and other figures of the time were in part responding to Buddhist ideas about sentience. This can be seen in the terminology used in the quotation from the *Huashu*, which both uses the terms *youqing* and *wuqing*, which were regularly deployed in Buddhist debates over sentience and buddha-nature, as well as the fact that the examples given are plants (the sweet-gum trees) and stones (the husband-watching stone).[859]

This distinction can also be seen in the 6th century polemical text *Xiaodao lun* 笑道論 (*Laughing at the Dao*), by Zhen Luan 甄鸞 (535–566), which quotes a Daoist text titled *Laozi baibashi jie zhonglü* 老子百八十戒重律 ("Laozi's 180 Precepts and Revered Rules")[860] saying:

> 吾戒大重。向樹說之則枯。向畜說之則死。[861]

> My precepts are very powerful. [If you] pronounce them before trees, they will wither. [If you] pronounce them before livestock, they will die.[862]

Zhen Luan's response to this quotes a text that describes innumerable people obtaining the way after hearing the ten precepts, and a precept that orders not to harbour an evil heart, as one has committed a crime (*zui* 罪) if one slanders others after hearing the precepts. From this doctrinal foundation, Zhen then attacks the idea of trees withering before the sound of the precepts:

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857 *Chengshi yishu* 18.199.
858 Huang, "Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi's Appropriations of the Mencius", 140-142; Xu, "Tang-Song jian de Mengzi shengge yundong". Cheng Hao once claimed that humans have the same minds (*xin* 心) of plants, birds and beasts, see *Chengshi yishu* 1.4.
859 More could be said about the Cheng brothers and other Song dynasty philosophers, but this would go beyond the scope of the present study.
860 For this text see, Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao*, 201.
861 In *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Expanded Collection on the Propagation and Clarification [of Buddhism]), T.52.2103.0149b16-0149b17.
862 Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao*, 111.

今樹木無情。不慮獲罪起謗。何須戒之令枯。若必枯死。此則有知。若有知者。聞法應悟。然無此理。何用斯言。[863]

Now, trees do not have feelings. They could not possibly commit a sin or give rise to slander. Why, then, should the pronouncement of the precepts make them wither? If the trees really wither and die, they must have understanding. If they have understanding, they can also hear the teaching and attain enlightenment. But because this is not the case, what use is it to pronounce precepts over trees?[864]

Of course, this is a piece of polemic written by a Buddhist with the express purpose to mock Daoism, so we cannot assume that it quotes or understands the Daoist text reliably. Nonetheless, its mockery would be more powerful if it rang true with its audience, so the contents of the quoted Daoist text probably resembled at least stereotyped views of Daoism in Zhen's milieu.[865] While a text with a similar title does exist, it does not contain the passage quoted by Zhen Luan.[866] One of the earliest surviving texts providing moral precepts to practitioners in the Celestial Masters (*tianshi* 天師) tradition, one section of the extant text does mention decaying trees:

老君曰：人生雖有壽萬年者，若不持戒律，與老樹朽石何異？寧一日持戒為道德之人而死補天官，屍解升仙。世人死有重罪，無益魂神，魂神受罪耳。祭酒明奉行之。[867]

Lord Lao said, "Even if a human life lasts 10,000 years, if the precepts are not upheld, what is the difference between him and old trees and withered stones? It is better to hold to the precepts for a single day as a virtuous man, and then die, filling their position as a

[863] T.52.2103.0149b25- 0149b28.
[864] Kohn, *Laughing at the Tao*, 112-113.
[865] The imagery of rotting trees does appear in *Laozi* 76.
[866] *Laojun shuo yibabashi jie* 老君說一百八十戒 (*DZ* 786). For its textual history, see Hendrischke and Penny, "The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao", 17-20; Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 1, 131-132.
[867] *DZ* 786.

> heavenly official, being liberated from the corpse and becoming transcendent."[868] Then he said, "Worldly people die with serious crimes, this cannot benefit their souls, as it is souls that bear the responsibility for the offense. Libationers clearly are responsible for putting [the precepts] into practice."[869]

Lord Lao (aka Laozi) goes on to repeat this point, only this time making a distinction between human beings and "tiles and rocks" (*washi* 瓦石), which are also commonly used rhetorically to indicate insentient things. These excerpts appear to be making an assumption similar to the one made by Sima Qian and Huan Tan about the lesser status of trees in comparison to human existence, seeing them as equivalent to inanimate objects. That this text appeared at a time when ideas about plants having Buddha-nature were in circulation illustrates that they were not universally accepted in China.

It is to the intersection of strange trees with Buddhist ideas of non-animal sentience, especially regarding the expanding definition of Buddha-nature that began in China around the 4th century, that this study will now turn.

4.3.1. Trees, Buddha-nature, and the strange

Perhaps the most immediate connection between the teachings of Buddhism and the physical bodies of trees is the role they play – or the space beneath them at least – as sites of meditation and enlightenment for buddhas, not least Sakyamuni himself.[870] For this reason, trees feature heavily in Buddhist iconography, motifs that found easy counterparts in China, where figures from Confucius to the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove have been depicted beneath trees in writing and in art. The motif of intertwined trees, discussed in a previous chapter, often appears in depictions of the Buddha, indicating the miraculousness of the scenes depicted. As He Liqun 何利群 and Wang Shu 王姝 have pointed out, the presence of the motif of paired trees were prominent in iconographic depictions of the Buddha contemplating under trees and separating

[868] See also the quote from Tao Hongjing's *Zhengao* 真誥 ("Declarations of the Perfected") in *Taiping yulan* 664.3093.
[869] For another translation, see Hendrischke and Penny, "The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao", 21.
[870] For an overview that focuses on Theravāda, see Shimizu, *Bodhi Tree Worship in Theravāda Buddhism*.

from his beloved horse that flourishing during the Eastern Wei and Northern Qi periods.[871] As discussed in a previous section, this imagery was also important in written sources, both in translations of sutras and biographies of monks and other figures.

More pertinent to the argument in this section is the question of plant sentience and the related issue of whether plant spirits are plants themselves or merely occupy them. The relationship between Buddhism and plants is a long and complex one, and an in-depth evaluation is beyond the scope of the present study, so the following can only be a brief summary.

Lambert Schmithausen has helpfully provided a detailed overview of early Buddhist perspectives on plants. He notes the existence of some vinaya texts that instruct monks to treat plants well, but also points out that this is directed towards the proper behaviour of monks and their position in society rather than being about protecting nature for its own sake.[872] From early on, plants, along with other insentient things like stones, were categorised outside of the four types of beings that are reborn along six paths (*liudao sisheng* 六道四生) and were referred to as being without feelings (usually rendered as *wuqing* 無情 in Chinese). Moreover, many early Buddhist writers explicitly denied the sentience of plants, including those in the Mahāyāna tradition like Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–667) and Dharmottara (ca. 750–810).[873] While he focuses on Japanese Buddhism in particular, Fabio Rambelli has also examined these issues and his conclusions can be applied to East Asian Buddhisms more generally, in particular about debates regarding the pervasiveness of Buddha-nature (*foxing* 佛性).[874] These would lead to some writers claiming that plants not only technically had Buddha-nature without being able to do what was required to become a buddha, they in fact could become buddhas.[875]

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[871] He, "Bei Qi longshu bei kun shi zaoxiang de jishu chuancheng he goutu tezheng"; Wang, "Dōki Hokusei jidai no aiba betsurizō oyobi juka shīzō ni mirareru sōju nitsuite", 511-514. See also Yen, "The Double Tree Motif in Chinese Buddhist Iconography".

[872] Schmithausen, *The Problem of the Sentience of Plants in Earliest Buddhism*, 5. Schmithausen speculates that this may have been in recognition of a belief in trees being inhabited by spirits, thus monks should avoid angering those who hold this view by attacking an abode of spirits.

[873] Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 13; Schmithausen, *The Problem of the Sentience of Plants in Earliest Buddhism*, 83-96 and 102-103.

[874] Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas*, 1-3; *Buddhist Materiality*, 11.

[875] Rambelli, *Vegetal Buddhas*, 7-40.

The view that plants were insentient was also present among Buddhists in China, with the monk Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414) for instance claiming, "What the world designates as 'insentient' refers to such like rocks and trees that are empty and without feelings" (*shi cheng wuzhi zhe, wei deng mushi taixu wuqing zhiliu* 世稱無知者，謂等木石太虛無情之流).[876] This statement is part of a broader discussion by Sengzhao on the ultimate emptiness of everything, but most important to the present discussion is that he is making a statement about what he regards to be a common belief about rocks and trees, namely that they lack feelings (*qing* 情). Nevertheless it was in China that a significant development on this issue would begin, or at least develop to maturity and spread to the rest of East Asia.

The monk Daosheng 道生 (355–434) took what Rambelli calls a "radically innovative position" where all sentient beings had Buddha-nature and thus could become buddhas.[877] The term "plants becoming Buddhas" (*caomu chengfo* 草木成佛) can be traced back to the monk Jizang 吉藏 (549–623),[878] in his *Dasheng xuanlun* 大乘玄論 (*On the Mysteries of the Great Vehicle*): "If plants have Buddha-nature, [then] a plant can become a Buddha" (*ruo caomu you foxing, caomu nai chengfo* 若草木有佛性。草木乃成佛).[879] The monk Fazang 法藏 (643–712) also echoed and helped spread this sentiment,[880] and it became much debated between different Buddhist schools.[881]

Rambelli notes that the more common formulation of this idea in Chinese is "Non-sentients becoming Buddhas" *wuqing chengfo* 無情成佛 (also written *feiqing chengfo* 非情成佛),[882] which again reflects the vocabulary used to refer to the insentience of rocks and trees. Some scholars have regarded these ideas as demonstrating an ecological mindset, or even what some have called an "ecocentric" worldview (as opposed to a homocentric or egocentric worldview).[883] However, the insistence that even rocks and trees has Buddha-nature were part of broader debates in

[876] *Zhaolun* 肇論 (Treatises of [Seng]zhao), T.45.1858.0156b18-0156b19.
[877] Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 14.
[878] Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 14.
[879] T.45.1853.0040b23.
[880] Akao, "Hōzō ni mieru sōmoku jōbutsu ni tsuite".
[881] For a helpful overview of this debate in English, see Pan, *Painting Faith*, 84-86.
[882] Rambelli, *Buddhist Materiality*, 14-15.
[883] Shaner and Duval, "Conservation Ethics and the Japanese Intellectual Tradition".

Buddhism and were not necessarily focused on plants for their own sake, but rather on the doctrinal consequences of the extent of fundamental Buddhist concepts.

Despite all this, and despite there being a dedicated literature to Buddhist records of the strange,[884] there are to my knowledge no stories from this period where a tree takes on human-like behaviours such as speaking to illustrate its possession of Buddha-nature. It is important to note that while these ideas became a commonplace of East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism, they were very controversial at the time, and stimulated much debate between different factions. Whatever the reasons are for this apparently lack of human-like sentience in strange trees even during the spread of ideas of plants becoming buddhas, it seems that the more powerful assumption remained that trees did not think or speak like humans, even when they were at their strangest, and even when they were endowed with the ability to become buddhas.

[884] For an overview, see Xue, *Liuchao fojiao zhiguai xiaoshuo yanjiu*.

Conclusion

When examining natural phenomena as recorded in textual sources, one is confronted with varied forms of knowledge, both from the past and the present. This thesis has attempted to use accounts of what I call strange trees to examine how humans interact with and understand the natural world, and how those interactions and understandings are so often anthropocentric.

The study began with an examination of several interlinked methodological and theoretical issues that revolve around botanical classification, the concept of the strange, and mythological theories of sacred trees. Defining what trees are is not easy, even in science, let alone when they are strange. The problem of identifying species based solely on historical descriptions is fraught with problems, a situation further complicated by the absence of the modern biological concept of species prior to the 19th century. When combined with other forms of knowledge, described by terms like religious or mythological, these issues become even more fraught.

Throughout Chinese history, anomalous phenomena have been recorded, often using what Robert Campany has called the "descriptive mode", meaning that their attributes and qualities were plainly recorded, even those attributes and qualities that may seem impossible to modern reader.[885] They were collected into special collections, included in official histories, or were compiled into encyclopaedic texts. While their social and historical contexts are often diverse, these records serve as a crucial resource for strange trees, not least because no single text is devoted to such a concept.

A specific focus was placed in this study on the motif of intertwining trees, which appears in tomb iconography and in various textual sources over hundreds of years. This phenomenon was often understood as an auspicious signs of proper rulership, indicating that such trees were perceived as responding to ideal (human) governance. In Buddhist texts, similar motifs are associated with the authority of the dharma and the Buddha, employing Sanskrit-derived terminology and referencing significant events in the Buddha's life were strongly associated with trees, that themselves became strange in response to him.

The relationship between filial piety and strange trees is another important aspect, which can be particularly seen in the behaviour of trees at tomb sites, which were predominantly pines and cypresses. These trees, sometimes planted by hand by filial sons, often exhibited unusual behaviour in response to acts of filial piety or to the virtuous qualities of the deceased. This

[885] Campany, *Strange Writing*, 213-222.

underscores the notion that the strangeness of these trees is a manifestation of their response to exemplary human conduct.

Finally, this study has examined the physical characteristics of strange trees, questioning whether tree spirits inhabit the trees with which they are associated or are inherently part of them. Descriptions of strange trees with human-like features provide a deeper understanding of pre-modern Chinese conceptions of nature and the evolving perceptions of the distinctions between humans and plants. Despite Chinese Buddhism evolving a more pervasive conception of Buddha-nature that insisted on the ability of plants to become buddhas, it does not seem that this view encouraged records of trees as having human sentience or similar attributes. These insights can provide historical context for contemporary discussions on environmentalism, as they highlight how historical attitudes towards nature do not necessarily fit our understanding of pre-industrial societies.

Humans think. When we look at non-human things, we sometimes think that they might think too. This thought is not necessarily wrong. But this tendency does not also necessarily imply the creation of a view of the non-human as being the same as humans. Projecting human-like qualities onto the non-human appears to be common, but it also appears to be more difficult to do so onto things which do not resemble humans. Plants are quite different to us, and maybe in the end that is what is most strange about them.

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Appendix 1: Lists of trees in encyclopaedic texts

1A: *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記

"Herbs and trees" (*caomu* 草木) section:

"Trees" *mu* 木 (37 items), "trees with writing-patterns" *wenli mu* 文理木 (nine items),[886] "strange trees" *yi mu* 異木 (40 items), "herbs" *cao* 草 (47 items), "herbaceous flowers" *caohua* 草花 (eight items), "tree flowers" *muhua* 木花 (49 items), "fruits" *guo* 果 (55 items), "vegetables" *cai* 菜 (11 items), "bamboo" *zhu* 竹 (15 items), "the five grains" *wugu* 五穀 (15 items), "tea and tea-leaves" *chachuan* 茶荈 (four items), "mushrooms" *zhi* 芝 (21 items),[887] "mosses" *tai* 苔 (seven items), "aromatics and herbs" *xiangyao* 香藥 (19 items), "consumable remedies" *fu'er* 服餌 (16 items), "wood anomalies" *muguai* 木怪 (18 items), "flower anomalies" *huahuiguai* 花卉怪 (12 items), "herbal anomalies" *yaoguai* 藥怪 (three items), and "fungal anomalies" *jun'guai* 菌怪 (three items).[888]

1B: *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚

"Trees" *mu* (75 items), "pine" *song* 松 (60 items),[889] "cypress" 栢 *bai* or *bo* (41 items),[890] "saphora" or "pagoda tree" *huai* 槐 (31 items),[891] "mulberry" *sang* 桑 (66 items), "elm" *yu* 榆 (31 items),[892] "paulownia" *tong* 桐 (49 items),[893] "willow" *yangliu* 楊柳 (72 items),[894] "Sichuan pepper" *jiao* 椒

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[886] While this phrase could in other contexts simply mean trees with patterns on them, the contents of these items make it clear that the patterns take the form of writing.

[887] Just as the word "bug" does not cover quite the same range of creatures as the word *chong* 蟲, so the English word "mushroom" is not precisely equivalent to the Chinese *zhi*. It can refer to plants, fungi, or even minerals (note again the lack of exclusivity in nature categories), and they may be mundane or supernatural, and in the latter case the word is a synonym with *lingzhi* 靈芝, which is conventionally translated in sinology as "numinous mushroom". Following Needham, some use "magic mushroom" for *lingzhi*, but this seems ripe for misinterpretation (see Needham and Lu, *Magisteries of Gold and Immortality*, 121; see also Zornica Kirkova, *Roaming into the Beyond: Representations of Xian Immortality in Early Medieval Chinese Verse*, 12). Williams opts for "mystic mushroom", *Elegies of Chu*, 253. Other translations for *zhi* include "excrescences", meant to suggest abnormal growth. An early discussion of *zhi* appears in Ge Hong's *Baopuzi*, who notes many different varieties, see *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 11.196-202. For a brief overview of *zhi*, see Fabrizio Pregadio's entry in *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 1270-1274. Inexact as it may be, as with "bug", I will use "mushroom" to stand in for the semantic range suggested by *zhi*.

[888] Note that *jun* 菌 can also be translated as "mushroom" – the *Erya* for instance glosses the possibly related graph *xiu* or *qiu* 茵 as *zhi* 芝, *Erya zhushu* 8.262-263.

[889] For this tree, see Daniels and Menzies, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 6.3, *Agro-Industries: Sugarcane Technology, Agro-Industries, and Forestry*, 567-571.

[890] This character can also be written 柏, which likely reflects the variants in pronunciation. Daniels and Menzies, *Agro-industries and Forestry*, 571-574; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 336-337.

[891] Bretschneider points out that this graph can refer to different plants, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 379. See also *Erya zhushu* 9.306-307.

[892] Daniels and Menzies, *Agro-industries and Forestry*, 583-588.

[893] Daniels and Menzies, *Agro-industries and Forestry*, 593-597; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 348-350; Métailié, "Noms de plantes asiatiques dans les langues européennes".

[894] Daniels and Menzies, *Agro-industries and Forestry*, 588-593.

(23 items),[895] "catalpa" *zi* 梓 (ten items),[896] "cassia" *gui* 桂 (53 items),[897] "rose-mallow" *mujin* 木槿 (20 items),[898] "thorny tree" *jing* 荊 (21 items),[899] "jujube" *ji* 棘 (17 items),[900] and bamboo *zhu* (53 items). While fruits and herbs are separated from the tree section, bamboo, "palm" *binglü* 并閭 (six items),[901] and some shrubs like "rose-mallow" and "gardenia" *zhizi* 梔子 (nine items)[902] are also included.

For the *Yiwen leiju*, 15 subsections have more than ten items. They are "tree" *mu* (71 items), "willow" *yangliu* (71 items), "mulberry" *sang* (62 items), "pine" *song* (59 items), "bamboo" *zhu* (53 items), "cassia" *gui* (51 items), "paulownia" *tong* (46 items), "cypress" *bai* or *bo* (40 items), "saphora" or "pagoda tree" *huai* (31 items), "elm" *yu* (31 items), "fagara" aka "Sichuan pepper" *jiao* (23 items), "thorny tree" *jing* (21 items), "rose-mallow" *mujin* (20 items), "jujube" *ji* (17 items), and "catalpa" *zi* (ten items). The only subsections that have significantly more items than the *Taiping yulan* are "willow" (71 compared to 51) and "cassia" (51 compared to 30).

1C: *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽

"tree" *mu* 木 (90 items), "pine" *song* (68 items), "cypress" *bai*/*bo* (60 items), "saphora/pagoda tree" *huai* (32 items), "mulberry" *sang* (81 items), "elm" *yu* (35 items), "paulownia" *tong* (45

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[895] *Erya zhushu* 9.302-303. Haw argues against "fagara" contra Austin and Felgar, see Haw, "Cinnamon, Cassia, and Ancient Trade", 9; Austin and Felger, "Sichuan Peppers and the Etymology of Fagara (Rutaceae)". See also Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 322-324; Lander, *The King's Harvest*, 214, note 36.
[896] Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 339-343.
[897] Another common word for this in English is cinnamon, which is how it is often translated. According to Chennault, this character can either indicate cinnamon or osmanthus and when it is red, it is the latter, Chennault, "The Reclusive *Gui*—Cinnamon or Osmanthus?", 153. An issue with translation is that it is not clear what plant is referred to in languages west of China in early times. Haw suggests that the terms cinnamon and cassia probably referred to the African *Cassia abbreviate*, thus making it different to what is sometimes called Chinese cassia, a plant in the genus *Cinnamomum*, see Haw, "Cinnamon, Cassia, and Ancient Trade", 11-12. My choice of cassia over cinnamon is also to avoid confusion with *Cinnamomum zeylanicum*, aka Ceylon cinnamon, see Achini and Esham, "Ceylon Cinnamon Production and Markets", 66-67.
[898] Bretschneider identifies this as *Hibiscus syriacus*, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 376, see also *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine*, 327. Sometimes identified as althea.
[899] This word is somewhat ambiguous. It can refer in general to thorns, or thorny bushes or trees, and sometimes specifically the needle-bush (*Acacia farnesiana*) aka *jinggiuhua* 荊球花. According to Kroll, it can also refer to "various species of the orchid-tree (*Bauhinia*) or chaste-tree (*Vitex*) or redbud (*Cercis*)". I have rendered it as 'thorny tree' to reflect this ambiguity. However, the character for jujube *ji* 棘 has a similar ambiguity, in that it can also mean both specific thorny plants and thorns/thorniness in general, see Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 308; Métailié, "Noms de plantes asiatiques dans les langues européennes
[900] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 185.
[901] Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 387.
[902] *Le Grand Ricci*.; *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine*, 578.

items),[903] "willow" *yangliu* (55 items), "cassia" *gui* (30 items), "China fir" *shan* 杉 (six items),[904] "sweet-gum" or "maple" *feng* 楓 (11 items),[905] "camphor tree" *yuzhang* 豫章 (13 items),[906] "nanmu" *nan* 楠 (one item),[907] "Chinese juniper" *gui* or *kuai* 檜 (three items),[908] "sawtooth oak" *zuo* 柞 (eight items),[909] "rosewood" *tan* 檀 (three items),[910] "silkworm-thorn" *zhe* 柘 (nine items),[911] "purple willow" *qi* 杞 (five items),[912] "catalpa" *zi* (16 items), "catalpa" *qiu* 楸 (three items),[913] "momi-fir" *cong* 樅 (two items),[914] "Sichuan pepper" *jiao* (20 items), "laurel magnolia" *mulan* 木蘭 (seven items),[915] "silk tree" *yehe* 夜合 (one item),[916] "sweet pear" *gantang* 甘棠 (two

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[903] Issues with translating this name will be discussed in a later section.

[904] Xing Bing's sub-commentary on the *Erya* notes that *shan* is the colloquial term for the graphs *bi* 柀 and *shan* 釤. Guo Pu notes that it resembles the pine, *Erya zhushu* 9.298. Bretschneider claims that for "ancient Chinese authors" it is *Cunninghamia lanceolata*, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 106-107. Kroll follows Bretschneider, calling it "the great evergreen conifer" but still glosses the variants *bi* and *shan* as "China fir", *Student's Dictionary*, 399. See also Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 98-99.

[905] "Sweet-gum" and "maple" are quite different plants. The former is a fragrant tree found in the south, the latter a non-fragrant tree found in the north. They both have leaves that turn red in the autumn. Kroll regards the meaning of "maple" to be less common in poetry, *Student's Dictionary*, 114. *Erya zhushu* 9.303. Sweet-gum is sometimes called *fengxiang* 楓香, see Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 77-79.

[906] This has sometimes been understood as referring to two trees. In their commentaries on the section on the Sima Xiangru 司馬相如 (d. 117 BCE) chapter of the *Shiji*, Guo Pu says *yuzhang* can only be distinguished once they reach seven years old, and Wen Huoren 溫活人 (dates unknown) glosses *yu* 豫 as *chenmu* 枕木 (for this pronunciation, see *Hanyu da cidian*) and *zhang* 章 as *zhang* 樟 (*Shiji* 117.3008). Yan Shigu notes that, in *Mingyi bielu* 名醫別錄 (*Additional Records of Famous Physicians*, attributed to Tao Hongjing), the *yu* tree is called "spicebush" or "spicewood" *diaozhang* 釣樟 ("spicebush" and "camphor" is the translation used by Knechtges in his translation of Zuo Si's 左思 (250–305) *Wudu fu* 吳都賦 (Rhapsody on the Wu Capital), *Wen Xuan*, or *Selections of Refined Literature*, vol. 1, 386-387). *Le Grand Ricci* also suggests Japanese bay tree (*Machilus thunbergia*) for *diaozhang*, and this plant tends to be much larger than those covered by the term "spicebush" or "spicewood". As the context in the *Shiji* is a list of plants preceded by the line "to its north there is a shady forest of enormous trees" (*qi bei you yinlin jushu* 其北有陰林巨樹), then the larger plant seems more likely. In his commentary to the *Hou-Hanshu*, Li Xian 李賢 (654–684), he glosses *yuzhang* as *zhangmu* (*yuzhang ji zhangmu ye* 豫章即樟木也), *Hou-Hanshu* 49.1637.

[907] Large evergreen tree from the southwest, later extensively used in the construction of imperial palaces, Campbell, *What the Emperor Built*, 53-54. This graph has a broader meaning in earlier texts, see Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 345-346.

[908] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 148; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 337-339; *Erya zhushu* 9.311.

[909] As Bretschneider points out, this is one of the many Chinese terms for oak, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 368-372. Kroll also notes that it can refer to a shrub known as brush-holly or logwood (*Xylosma japonicum*), *Student's Dictionary*, 636.

[910] Kroll gives many different plants that this can refer to, *Student's Dictionary*, 442. See also Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 375-376; Schafer, "Rosewood, Dragon's Blood, and Lac".

[911] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 597.

[912] When not indicating a tree, this is the shrub wolfberry, Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 356.

[913] Kroll says this is a different species to *zi* catalpa, *Student's Dictionary*, 373.

[914] As noted above, this identification is uncertain.

[915] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 252; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 383, 29-30. *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine* regards it as a synonym for "lily magnolia" (*ziyulan* 紫玉蘭), 327, 596.

[916] See *Le Grand Ricci. Zhiwu gu Hanming tukao* identifies it as Chinese knotweed (*heshouwu* 何首烏), 205.

items),[917] "prickly ash" *dang* 欓 (one item),[918] "sawtooth oak" *li* 櫟 (five items),[919] "sawtooth oak" *xiang* 橡 (seven items),[920] "thorn tree" *hu* 楛 (four items),[921] "divine longevity" *lingshou* 靈壽 (two items),[922] "ailanthus" *chu* 樗 (six items),[923] "thorny tree" *jing* (20 items), "jujube" *ji* (26 items), "gentleman tree" *junzi* 君子 (two items),[924] "longevity tree" *changsheng* 長生 (two items), *wannian* 萬年 (two items),[925] "cork tree" *huangbo* 黃蘗 (four items), "gardenia" *zhizi* 支子 (seven items),[926]

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[917] Lu Ji gives a number of synonyms, *Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 1B.62; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 444; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 111; *Erya zhushu* 9.302. As Williams notes, it is technically a birchleaf pear, but "sweet" reflects its name in Chinese, *Elegies of Chu*, 256.

[918] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 77.

[919] As noted, there are many words for oak in Chinese, especially sawtooth oak. Lu Ji says that people of Qin call *zuo* 柞 *li* and people who live north of the Yellow River use the term *muliao* 木蓼 to refer to *li*, and regard them as being akin to *jiaosha* 椒榝, which appears to be a dogwood-like shrub, *Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 1B.57-58. The *Erya* says, "*li*, its fruit is *qiu*" (*li, qi shi qiu* 櫟，其實梂), to which Guo Pu adds "[it] has *qiu* which come together and wrap themselves up" (*you qiu hui zi guo* 有梂彙自裹). Bretschneider claims to not understand this line, but then goes on to accurately rephrase it as "the sublate scales of the cupule of the acorn", Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 368, 116; *Erya zhushu* 9.304. Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 263.

[920] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 499.

[921] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 166.

[922] Often glossed as *ju* 椐 and described as similar to bamboo, such as in Guo Pu's commentary to the *Shanhai jing*. In his commentary on the *Erya*, Guo Pu says that *ju* (also called *kui* 櫆) is used to make walking sticks, and Hao Yixing 郝懿行 (1757–1825) says that *lingshou*, *ju*, and *kui* are all different words for the same thing. Kroll tentatively identifies *ju* with "zelkova", but notes that this does not fit the descriptions of a bamboo-like plant, *Student's Dictionary*, 223. Wu Chengzhi's 吳承志 (1844–1917) commentary on the *Shanhai jing* cites the mention in the *Lüshi chunqiu* of a "longevity tree" (*shoumu* 壽木), which Gao You 高誘 (ca. 160–220) says grows on Mount Kunlun, and if one eats it, one will not die. Yuan Ke endorses this reading for the *Shanhai jing*, as it reflects the "mythological" (神話 *shenhua*) aspect, which does at least conform with the name of this plant. *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 13.374-375; *Erya zhushu* 9.301. *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine* has weedy plant called *lingshouci* 靈壽茨, which is possibly related, 279.

[923] The mountain variant *shancha* 山樝 is described as being similar to *kao* 栲 by Guo Yu in the *Erya*, which is normally understood as referring to euscaphis, which are large shrubs, but probably in this instance refers to ailanthus, *Erya zhushu* 9.297; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 104; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 56; *Zhiwu gu Hanming tukao*, 260-261. Also known in European languages as "tree of heaven", from an Amboyna word, which Georg Eberhard Rumphius (1627–1702) regarded as referring to its great height. First named ailanthus by the French botanist René Louiche Desfontaines (1750–1833), its modern Chinese name is "stinking cedrela" (*qiuchun* 臭椿), which reflects its unpleasant odour. Swingle, "The Early European History and the Botanical Name of the Tree of Heaven, Ailanthus altissima," 495-496; Hu, Shiu-ying. "Ailanthus," 33-35.

[924] The *Taiping yulan* quotes the *Guangzhi*, which reads "The gentleman tree is like tamarisk and pine, Cao Shuang planted it in his courtyard" (*Junzishu, si chengsong, Cao Shuang zhu zhi yu ting* 君子樹，似檉松，曹爽樹之於庭). This gloss poses its own problems, as it *chengsong* is either two trees, which makes it unclear how the gentleman tree resembles them both, or, perhaps more likely, it is one tree, a type of pine modified by the graph *cheng* 檉. This is how the *Hanyu da cidian* understands it, although the editors do not explain *cheng*. Confusingly, the word *chengliu* 檉柳 also means tamarisk, as does "river willow" *heliu* 河柳, rather than a kind of willow. *Erya zhushu* 9.301; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 364-365. For Cao Shuang 曹爽 (d. 249), see *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 2*, 46-49.
檉柳 does not refer to a type of willow, but a tamarisk. *Cheng* and *song* do appear together in Zhang Heng's 張衡 (78–139) *Nandu fu* 南都賦 (Rhapsody on the Southern Capital), but they appear to be two trees (this is how Knechtges translates them, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 315).

[925] Appears in He Yan's 何晏 (196–249) *Jingfu dian fu* 景福殿賦 (Rhapsody on the Hall of Great Blessings). Knechtges translates this as "thousand year trees", *Wen Xuan*, vol. 2, 287.

[926] Alternative form of *zhizi* 梔子.

"without misfortune tree" *wuhuan* 無患 (three items),[927] "palm" *binglü* 栟櫚 (ten items).[928] "Chinese honey locust" *zaojia* 皂莢 (13 items),[929] "magnolia" *xinyi* 辛夷 (three items),[930] "prickly ash" *zhuyu* 茱萸 (seven items),[931] "paper mulberry" *gu* 穀 (eight items),[932] "parasitic mistletoe" *niao* 蔦 (two items),[933] "silk tree" *hehuan* 合歡 (six items),[934] "white silver tree" *baiyin* 白銀 (two items),[935] "you tree" *you* 枏 (three items),[936] "sugar-palm" *guanglang* 桄榔 (eight items),[937] "sago palm" *xiang* 橐 (two items,[938] "sago palm" *suomu* 莎木 (three items),[939] "cotton tree" *mumian* 木綿 (four items),[940] "yuan tree" *yuan* 杬 (three items),[941] "white soul [tree]" *po* 魄(two items),[942] "sweet oak" *supu* 樕樸 (one item),[943] "Chinese elm" *huotuo* 榼椸 (one item),[944] "goldenrain" *luan* 欒 (one item),[945] "ebony" *wenmu* 文木 (three items),[946] "rambutan" *shao* 韶 (one item),[947] "ginkgo" *pingzhong* 平仲 (one item),[948] "date plum" *junqian* 君遷 (two items),[949] "fig" *gudu* 古度 (three

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[927] Another name of the smokewood tree *lumu* 櫨木, the name "without misfortune" derives from a belief that it could be used to ward off ghosts, see Yuan, *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian*, 57-58.
[928] Note the slight difference in orthography from the previous mention of this word. These variations, especially the presence or absence of the "wood" *mu* 木 or "grass" *cao* 艸 components, are common in plant-related graphs.
[929] According to Tao Hongjing, *Bencao jing jizhu* 5.349.
[930] *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine* gives three options, all in the magnolia family, 513.
[931] This word appears in *Shudu fu* 蜀都賦 (Rhapsody on the Shu Capital) by Zuo Si, and is translated by Knechtges as "Sichuan hot pepper", *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 354.
[932] The *Shuowen jiezi* glosses this as *chu* 楮, which is another name for paper mulberry, *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 226.
[933] This is another word for the plant Bretschneider translates as "dwelling on trees" (*yumu* 寓木), which as its name suggests lives parasitically on trees, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 116. The *Erya* gives *wantong* 宛童 as a synonym of *yumu*, and Guo Pu gives *niao* as another name for it, *Erya zhushu* 9.303. I follow Kroll's translation.
[934] Another name for *yehe* (see above). According to the *Gujin zhu* 古今注 (*Notes on Things Ancient and Modern*) (attributed to Cui Bao 崔豹, fl. 290–306), it is similar to the parasol tree (*wutong* 梧桐).
[935] It is not clear what kind of tree this is, but it is also mentioned in the *Taiping guangji* 406.3274.
[936] This tree is sometimes referred to as *zhangyou* 章枏, and is in one item described as being red in colour (*chi* 赤).
[937] Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 90-92; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 145.
[938] See Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 387-388; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 497.
[939] See *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.703-704; *Zhiwu gu Hanming tukao*, 268.
[940] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.702; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 63.
[941] The *Erya* identifies this as "fish poison" *yudu* 魚毒 (*Erya zhusu* 9.302), but Knechtges argues against this for this graph in the "Rhapsody on the Wu Capital," because "fish poison" appears to be the same as the shrub "Chinese daphne" (*yuanhua* 芫花), but the *Wenxuan* commentary describes *yuan* as a large tree, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 387-388; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 287-288; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 33.
[942] Another uncertain tree. The *Erya* groups it with *xixi* 榽檕, whose meaning is also unclear. Guo Pu says it is large tree with thin leaves, and resembles rosewood *tan* 檀, *Erya zhushu* 9.301.
[943] *Erya zhushu* 9.309.
[944] Lu Ji glosses it as "Chinese elm" (*langyu* 榔榆), which he regards at the contemporary term. A number of sources say it is tree whose wood is used to make the vessel known as *beiquan* 杯棬, *Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 1B.53; *Erya zhushu* 9.299.
[945] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 287.
[946] Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*.
[947] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.719; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 403; Miao and Qiu identify this as *Nephelium chryseum*, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 152-153.
[948] The more common name is *yinxing* 銀杏, Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 386-387. The next two items are mentioned in the same poem, and are both identified by Knechtges.
[949] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.720.

items),[950] "wing nut" *ju* 櫸 (one item),[951] "pattra" *beiduo* 貝多 (five items),[952] "blackberry lily" *shegan* 射干 (two items),[953] "pleasure-of-the-times" *shihao* 時好 (one item), "mochu [tree]" *mochu* 摩廚 (one item),[954] "Chinese banyan" *rong* 榕 (three items), *fulou* 夫漏 (one item),[955] *doutong* 都桶 (two items),[956] "thousand years" *qiansui* 千歲 (one item),[957] "stonecrop" *shenhuo* 慎火 (one item),[958] "surpassing-fire" *shenghuo* 勝火 (two items),[959] "shaking serviceberry" *boyi* 播栘 (one items), "taking turns tree" *jiaorang* 交讓 (2 items),[960] "*jian* tree" 建木 (two items), "*ruo* tree" 若木 (two items), "guyou [tree]" *guyou* 姑繇 (one item),[961] "cinnabar tree" *danmu* 丹木 (two items),[962] *mingling* 蓂靈 (one item),[963] "fragrant cedar" *chun* 椿 (three items),[964] "lost mulberry" *migu* 迷穀 (one item),[965] "lord's rest" *dixiu* 帝休 (one item),[966] "luochang [tree]" *luochang* 雒常 (one item),[967] "returning soul" *fanhun* 返魂 (one item),[968] "how about" *ruhe* 如何 (two items),[969] "transcendent tree" *xianshu* 仙樹 (one item), "lun camphor" *lun* 棆 (one item),[970] *ji* 机 (one item),[971] "wood deer

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[950] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.721.
[951] Also written 柜, synonym of *qiliu* 杞柳 or *fengyang* 楓楊. See *Mengzi zhushu* 11.346; *Erya zhushu* 9.299-300; *Le Grand Ricci*.
[952] A loan from Sanskrit, see Muller, "pattra 貝多", *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*.
[953] For this translation see Williams, *Elegies of Chu*.
[954] An unidentified plant mentioned in the *Yiwu zhi*. Found in a place called Sidiao (*sidiaoguo* 斯調國), which may be in Sri Lanka or perhaps Java, see Unschuld, *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, vol. 6, 817; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 12.
[955] Mentioned in the (lost) *Nanfang ji* 南方記 (*Record of the Southern Regions*).
[956] Another southern plant of uncertain identification. May be related to the *dujiao* 都桷 mentioned in the *Nanfang caomu* zhuang, see *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.723; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 79-80.
[957] A strange evergreen tree which no-one has ever observed withering.
[958] Another name for *jingtian* 景天. See Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 140-141.
[959] *Shuijing zhu jiaozheng* 26.631.
[960] For an explanation, see Chapter Two.
[961] A large tree that appears in the *Mutianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳 (*Biography of Mu, Son of Heaven*), which according to Guo Pu's commentary is a large tree that appears in the *Shanhai jing*, see *Mutianzi zhuan huijiao jishi* 6.298. Sometimes glossed as *you* 櫾, which is itself related to *you* 柚, pomelo, but that plant is not particularly large.
[962] Described as having extranormal powers in *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 2.37, 2.58.
[963] This and the next tree are mentioned in the *Zhuangzi* but not included in this section of the *Taiping yulan*. They appear in the section on the sequence of the seasons (*shixu* 時序), see *Taiping yulan* 19.115; *Zhuangzi jishi* 1.11. Ziporyn does not translate *mingling*, *Complete Writings*, 4. Watson appear to think it is a caterpillar, and translates *chun* as "rose of Sharon", *Complete Works*, 2.
[964] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 62.
[965] *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 1.1.
[966] Said to resemble a poplar, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 5.135.
[967] Also written *xiongchang* 雄常, see *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 7.205.
[968] Described in the *Shizhou ji* 十洲記 (*Record of the Ten Regions*) as a tree similar to the sweet-gum or maple (*feng*) whose fragrance can cause the dead to awaken, see *Zhongguo shenhua chuanshuo cidian*, 83.
[969] Appears in the *Shenyi jing*, see Wang, *Shenyi jing yanjiu*, 69.
[970] According to Guo Pu this is a southern tree that resembles a camphor, *Erya zhushu* 9.301.
[971] Sometimes glossed as *qimu* 榿木, which is an alder.

[tree]" *mulu* 木鹿 (one item), "*duan*-pomelo" *duan* (one item),[972] "largeleaf dogwood" *liang* 椋 (one item), "rosewood" *tan* 檀 (one item),[973] "ximi [tree]" *ximi* 系彌 (two items),[974] "chen-beam" *chenliang* 枕梁 (one item),[975] "yi tree" *yimu* 乙木 (one item),[976] "Qiannuowei [tree]" *qiunuowei* 求那衛 (one item),[977] "male blue-green" *nanqing* 男青 (one item),[978] "searching tree" *xunmu* 尋木 (one item),[979] "jade tree" *yushu* 玉樹 (five items),[980] *shuma* 疏麻 (one item),[981] "Chinese elm" *man* 槾 (one item), "gemstone-jade tree" *lang'gan* 榔玕 (one item),[982] "skull-head" *lutou* 盧頭 (one item),[983] "black pagoda" *huai* 櫰 (one item),[984] "red pear" *shatang* 杪棠 (one item),[985] "ring-cupped oak" *zhu* 櫧 (one item),[986] *diwu* 帝屋 (one item),[987] "six-dapple" *liubo* 六駁 (two items),[988] "lacquer tree" *qi* 漆 (two items), "sweet oak" *hu* 槲 (four items), "white birch" *hua* 樺 (two items), "nanmu" *nan* 柟 (two items), "stone-south" *shinan* 石南 (two items),[989] "jackfruit" *ponasuo* 婆那

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[972] This is another difficult plant to identify, as this graph, along with the related *fei* 櫠, appears in different contexts and in a number of compounds. The *Taiping yulan* quotes Guo Pu, who regards this as a kind of pomelo (*you*), see also *Erya zhusu* 9.298. Bretschneider notes that the graph *duan* is often confounded with the visually-similar *jia* 椵, "Botanicon Sinicum" part 2, 104-105. Elsewhere in the *Erya*, a variant is glossed as being similar to a *li*-plum, *Erya zhushu* 8.257. Also appears in the *Taiping yulan* (see below).

[973] Glossed as *lin* 橉, Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 274. Also described as similar to *su* 蘇, which Kroll explains is perilla (a plant in the mint family), *Student's Dictionary*, 432.

[974] A plant similar to sandalwood.

[975] Miao and Qiu suggest this may be *chenmu*, another name for a camphor tree, and the graph *liang* is being used for the wood's suitability to be used as beams, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 61.

[976] Miao and Qiu are unable to identify this tree, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 91.

[977] The similar term *juuowei* 俱那衛 appears in the "Collected Sequels" (*xuji* 續集) of the *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 (*Miscellaneous Morsels of Youyang*), see *Youyang zazu jiaojian* 29.2076.

[978] A vine. For issues with translating the term *qing* 青, see Boodberg, *Selected Works*, 178-179.

[979] *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 8.217.

[980] *Huainanzi jiaoshi* 4.450; *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 6.262.

[981] This term appears in the *Chuci* 楚辭, where Williams translates it as "soma", *Elegies of Chu*. For more on this connection, see Williams, "Shamans, Souls, and Soma: Comparative Religion and Early China"; Zhang, "Is Shuma the Chinese Analog of Soma/Haoma? A Study of Early Contacts between Indo-Iranians and Chinese".
Miao and Qiu are not able to identify this plant, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 139.

[982] See discussion of this word below.

[983] An unidentified plant, see Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 13-14. The translation is tentative.

[984] Identification based on *Erya zhushu* 9.306.

[985] A variant of *shatang* 沙棠 (see above).

[986] In the received *Shanhai jing*, this graph is rendered *zhu* 櫧, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 5.154.

[987] Like many things that appear in the *Shanhai jing*, this appears to be a phonetic rendering of a local name, *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 5.137.

[988] The related *boma* 駁馬 is glossed by Lu Ji as *xiyu* 梓榆, the name comes from its mottling resembling that of a horse, *Mao Shi caomu niaoshou chongyu shu* 1B.48. Unschuld understands *xiyu* as "catalpa ovata", *Ben Cao Gang Mu,* vol. 7, 329. In his *Mengxi bitan* 夢溪筆談 (*Brush Talks from Dream Brook*), Shen Kuo 沈括 (1031–1095) says that in the south *xiyu* is known as *pu* 樸 (which is either Chinese hackberry or sweet oak), *Mengxi bitan* 27.235. For background on this text see Fu, "When Shen Gua Encountered the 'Natural World'".

[989] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.727; Miao and Qiu regard this tree as in the genus *Photinia*, in the rose family, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 92-93.

娑 (one item),[990] "silkworm-oak" *bao* 枹 (one item), "cotton tree" *shoupoluo* 牧婆羅 (one item),[991] "blue-green field" *qingtian* 青田 (one item),[992] "mangosteen" *dunian* 都念 (two items),[993] "śāla tree" *suoluo* 娑羅 (two items),[994] "child tree" *ershu* 兒樹 (one item),[995] "alcohol tree" *jiushu* 酒樹 (one item),[996] "sago palm" *dugou* 都勾 (two items),[997] "black pattern tree" *wuwen* 烏文 (one item),[998] "palm" *bilü* 比閭 (one item), *zhimu* 制木 (one item).[999] Some names that elude identification have not been translated.

good omens (*xiuzheng bu* 休徵部):

"fan plant" *shafu* 萐莆 (three items),[1000] "flowering-peace" *huaping* 華苹 (three items),[1001] "vermillion herb" *zhucao* 朱草 (19 items),[1002] "calendar plant" *mingjia* 蓂莢 (11 items),[1003]

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990 From the Sanskrit panasa.

991 This is one of many words in Chinese that ultimately derive from the Sanskrit term śālmali, referring to the cotton tree, see Liu, *Mian ma fangzhi shihua*, 58-59.

992 An unidentified fruit from the Central Asian kingdom of Wusun 烏孫.

993 Also written *daonianzi* 倒捻子, Unschuld, *Ben Cao Gang Mu*, vol. 6, 815-816.

994 Liu Kexiang also regards this term as coming from śālmali, Liu, *Mian ma fangzhi shihua*, 59.

995 A strange tree that took the form of a child.

996 Probably a kind of palm whose fruit was used to make alcohol, see Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 111-112.

997 Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 128.

998 Probably ebony from Persia.

999 Another Persian tree. Of unclear identification.

1000 A fan-shaped plant that, according to legend, grew in the kitchen of Yao, see *Songshu* 29.862. It appears in the *Baihutong*, but Tjan does not translate it, *Po Hu T'ung*, 242. Also called "inclining fan" (*yishan* 倚扇). It is associated with filial piety and grows in the kitchen, see *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.285. The *Songshu* and *Engishiki* describe it as being like *peng* 蓬 ("fleabane"), and the former also says it appeared during the reign of Yao, *Songshu* 29.862; *Engishiki* 21.2b. See also *Taiping yulan* 873.3871. Also mentioned in the *Lunheng*, and Forke translates it as "meat fan", *Lun Heng, part 2*, 315; *Lunheng jiaoshi* 17.752.

1001 Appears in *Dongjing fu* 東京賦 ("Rhapsody on the Eastern Capital") by Zhang Heng, where it is planted by the emperor. Knechtges translates it as "flower of peace", *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 298-299. Based on other sources, the graph *ping* 苹 or 平 in other contexts has been understood to refer to parts of the plant being "even" as opposed to inclined to one direction, probably as a correspondence between the meanings "even" and "peace". As it is sometimes described as a tree, I will not directly call it a flower. This plant is discussed further in a later section.

1002 Also called "vermillion blossom" *zhuying* 朱英.

1003 Lit. "*ming* pod", also called *licao* 历草 (variant *licao* 歷草) or *liying* 歷莢 or 歷荚. Richard von Glahn has translated it as "the menstrual plant", which is lexicographically plausible, but highly misleading, von Glahn, "Re-examining the Authenticity of Song Paper Money Specimens", 84. This plant is sometimes said to have grown in the palace of Yao 堯, see for instance *Songshu* 29.862; *Taiping yulan* 83.3872. The *Baihutong* explains it as, "When the calendar has been properly delineated, then the calendar plant will grow in the stairway. "Calendar plant" is the name of a tree, from the first day of the month it will produce a pod, and will stop on the fifteenth day; from the sixteenth day it loses a pod, and so the pods at the stairway are produced like the days and months" (*rili de qi fendu, ze mingjia shengyu jie jian. Mingjia shuming ye, yue yiri sheng yi jia, shiwuri bi, zhi shiliuri qu jia, gu jia jie sheng si riyue ye* 日曆得其分度，則蓂莢生於階間。蓂莢樹名也，月一日生一莢，十五日畢，至十六日去莢，故莢階生似日月也), *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.286. It also appears as *jieming* 階蓂 in the poem *Sanri dai Huaguang dian qushui yan: dairen yingzhao* 三日侍華光殿曲水宴：代人應詔 ("On the Third Day in Attendance at a Banquet by the Winding Streams of the Huaguang Hall: Written in Place of Another by Imperial Decree") by Xie Tiao 謝朓 (464–499), which Richard Mather translates as the "stepside mystic legume", Mather, *The Age of Eternal Brilliance*, vol. 2, 178.

"auspicious grain" *jiagu* 嘉穀 (27 items),[1004] "creeping grapevine" *juchang* 秬鬯 (four items),[1005] "blessed herb" *fucao* 福草 (two items),[1006] "the fortune side-by-side [herb]" *fubing* 福并 (one item), "sealwort" *weirui* 威蕤 (two items),[1007] "indicator plant" *quyi* 屈軼 (one item),[1008]

[1004] Usually written *jiahe* 嘉禾. The graph *jia* 嘉 could also be rendered "fine" or "excellent". See Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 243, 341-342 (note 360).

[1005] Normally, this word refers to a type of sacrificial millet wine, a detailed history of which can be found in Ling, "Zhongguo jiu zhi qiyuan", 896-905. The *Shuowen* gloss for *chang* 鬯 says that *ju* 秬 is used with a fragrant herb called *yu* 鬱 to ferment it. The graph *ju* is usually regarded as referring to some kind of black millet (*heishu* 黑黍), see for instance *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 22.882; Bretschneider, "Botanicum Sinicum" part two, 147-148. The *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (*Commentary on the Classic of Rivers*) glosses *yu* as fragrant herbaceous plant, and says that the flowers of herbaceous plants are boiled and fermented with black millet to draw down the spirits, *Shuijing zhu* 36.831. It also gives an alternative gloss, identifying *yu* with the contemporary name *yujinxiang* 鬱金香, which is usually regarded as a kind of tulip, probably *Tulipa gesneriana*, see *Le Grand Ricci* (for further discussion of this graph, which can refer to many things, see below). Although it does not mention *juchang*, the description in the *Shuijing zhu* shares many similarities with the gloss in the *Shuowen*. Ji Xunsheng 季旭昇 points out that the oracle bone forms of the graph *chang* depicted a vessel with dots indicating (contra Xu Shen) fragrant alcohol, which again points to this word referring to a vessel, *Shuowen xinzheng*, vol. 1, 430. The word *juchang* also appears in the *Poetry* and the *Venerable Documents*, in both instances with the measure *you* 卣, meaning a sacrificial wine vessel (*Shangshu zhengyi* 15.230; *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 23.984), which suggests that *juchang* is the drink not the vessel. A line in the *Changes* says "do not lose the ladle and *chang*", which Sun Xingyan 孫星衍 (1753–1818) glosses as "utensils used by the ancients in sacrifices at the royal ancestral temple" (*gudai jisi zongmiao yongwu* 古代祭祀宗庙用物, 5.114), so while *chang* is often understood in dictionaries to be the alcohol itself, in some contexts it appears to refer to the vessel that holds it. It also appears with similar meanings in the *Lüshi chunqiu* and the *Liji*. The excerpts collected in this section of the *Taiping yulan* however all describe it as "growing" (*sheng* 生) in response to kingly behaviour. An early instance of *chang* as a plant appears in Wang Chong's *Lunheng*, in the line "During the Zhou, All Under Heaven was at peace, Yuechang presented white pheasant, and the Dwarf People offered up *chang* herb" (*Zhou shi Tianxia taiping, Yuechang xian baizhi, Woren gong changcao* 周時天下太平，越裳獻白雉，倭人貢鬯草). Yuechang is a southern region, and the Dwarf People are usually identified as being from Japan. Wang Chong goes on to note that eating white pheasant and taking *chang* herb cannot dispel disasters (*shi baizhi, fu changcao, buneng chuxiong* 食白雉，服鬯草，不能除兇), *Lunheng jiaoshi* 8.375. "Taking" *fu* 服 is somewhat vague, but does not usually suggest the consumption of alcohol; it could also mean to wear like a pendant. This *changcao* appears to be cognate with *changcao* 暢草, which Wang Chong uses earlier in a very similar item in his chapter on "Fictious Prodigies" (*yixu* 異虛), to use Forke's translation, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 5.222. This specifically herbaceous meaning can also be seen in later dictionaries (or glossaries) like the 6th century *Yupian* 玉篇 (*Jade Chapters*), first compiled by Gu Yewang 顧野王 (519–581), which glosses the graph *chang* as a "fragrant herb" (*chang, xiangcao ye* 鬯，香艸也), a definition echoed in the Song-era *Guangyun* 廣韻 (*Expanded Rimes*), which *Le Grand Ricci* regards as a synonym for *gelei* 葛藟, identified as *Vitis flexuosa*, a creeping vine in the grape family, see *Dictionnaire Ricci des Plantes de Chine*, 247. In the *Songshu*, it appears three times in the section on auspicious omens, and each time it goes by a different name: *juchang* 巨鬯, *chang*, and *jupi* 秬秠. The first is described as being "a grain with three pairs, with two grains per chaff; when the ruler's ancestral temple is in order then it appears" (*san ou zhi he, yi fu yi mi; wangzhe zongmiao xiu ze chu* 三禺之禾，一稃二米；王者宗廟修則出), *Songshu* 29.861. In a discussion of alcohol, the *Baihutong* quotes the lost *Records of the Monarch's Measurements* (*Wangdu ji* 王度記), listing plants by social category: "The Son of Heaven: *chang*, the vassal lords: *xun*, high ranking officials, low-ranking nobles: *jian*, commoners: *ai* (*Tianzi chang, zhuhou xun, dafu qi lan, shuren ai* 天子鬯、諸侯薰、大夫芑蘭、士蒹、庶人艾), *Baihutong shuzheng* 7.309-310. Tjan does not translate these terms, but regards them as "odoriferous plants, belonging to the *Artemisia* family", *Po Hu T'ung*, 508. While this may be too specific for some of these terms, at the very least it does appear in context that they are all plants.

[1006] According to Song Jun 宋均, it is a synonym for the vermillion herb. For Song Jun, see Nielson, "Hexagrams and Prognostication in the Weishu Literature", 58-59.

[1007] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 392.

[1008] In some accounts, this plant appeared in the courtyard of Yao, where it would point to the glib or sycophantic. See *Bowu zhi jiaozheng* 3.39. Also called *zhiningcao* 指佞草 or *ningzhi* 佞枝. The latter term appears in "Sanyue sanri qu" and is glossed by 呂延濟 as "The Yellow Emperor had an indicator plant that appeared on the steps, and if a sycophant entered the court, then it would bend and point to him, thus it is called the sycophant branch" (*Huangdi*

"extending favour" *yanjia* 延嘉 (two items), "purple sprout" *zida* 紫達 (two items),[1009] "mushrooms" *zhi* (26 items), "thoroughwort" *lan* 蘭 (one item),[1010] "cogon grass" *mao* 茅 (four items), and "wormwood" *hao* 蒿 (one item). The next section on trees has 16 items under *mu*, then two items under "the honoured intertwining and extensively sprouting [tree]" *binlian kuoda* 賓連闊達,[1011] and three under "peaceful dew" *pinglu* 平露.[1012]

you quyicao, chuyu jie, ruo ningren ruchao, ze qu er zhi zhi, gu yue ningzhi 黃帝有屈軼草，出於階，若佞人入朝，則屈而指之，故曰佞枝). It appears in the *Bowu zhi*, but Greatrex merely transliterates the name, Greatrex, *Bowu Zhi*, 102. This plant is also mentioned by Wang Chong in the *Lunheng*, and Wang has a characteristically unique perspective on it, *Lunheng jiaoshi* 17.758. Alfred Forke translates it as "indicator", and offers a rationalisation of this story by suggesting that this plant may be one whose leaves move quickly in response to external stimulus, such as *Mimosa pudica*, Forke, *Lun Heng, Part 2*, 119-121. Mather, when translating Xie Tiao's poem "On the Third Day in Attendance at a Banquet by the Winding Streams of the Huaguang Hall", renders it as "bending herb". It appears alongside the aforementioned calendar plant. Mather, *The Age of Eternal Brilliance*, vol. 2, 178.

[1009] The Ming dynasty *Ya of Couplets* (*Pianya* 駢雅) by Zhu Mouhan (fl. 16th century) says that *zida*, along with the terms *zida* 紫達, *zituo* 紫脫, and *kuoda* 闊達, are all *lianda* 連達. Of those terms, *zituo* appears in Wang Rong's 王融 (467–493) poem, and is explained by Li Shan as coming "from the north and pointing upwards to the Purple Palace" (*beifang zhi wu, shangzhi zigong* 北方之物，上值紫宮). The Purple Palace is the constellation *ziweiyuan* 紫微垣, Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 47. Both *da* 達 and *tuo* 脫 can have meanings relating to "coming out", with one meaning of *da* specifically referring to "a plant's sprouting, breaking through the surface of the ground," Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 72-73. Gabrielle Tola translates *Pianya* as "The rhythmical guide", Tola, *John Fryer and The Translator's Vade-mecum*, 176. See also Zhu, "Language and Linguistics in Pre-Modern China and East Asia". For the significance of the colour purple, see Porkert, "Untersuchungen Einiger Philosophisch-Wissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe Und Beziehungen Im Chinesischen", 439-441.

[1010] Kroll notes that this doesn't mean "orchid" before the Song, Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 252.

[1011] This appears to be related to the purple sprout and its synonyms. Tjan does not translate it, *Po Hu T'ung*, 242. See the next section for more details.

[1012] Name of a plant that indicates peace. Appears in the *Baihutong*, where it is rendered *pinglu* 平路, *Baihutong shuzheng* 6.286; Tjan, *Po Hu T'ung*, 242. Also appears in *Songshu* 29.862.

Appendix 2: Lists of fruits in encyclopaedic texts

2A: *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚

The *Yiwen leiju* divides the fruits into the subsections "plum" (*Prunus salicina*) *li* 李 (31 items),[1013] "peach" *tao* 桃 (52 items), "plum" (*Prunus mume*) *mei* 梅 (23 items),[1014] "pear" *li* 梨 (26 items),[1015] "sweetpeel tangerine" *gan* 甘 (19 items),[1016] "sourpeel tangerine" *ju* 橘 (31 items),[1017] "sour cherry" *yingtao* 櫻桃 (12 items),[1018] "pomegranate" *shiliu* 石榴 (15 items),[1019] "persimmon" *shi* 柿 (6 items), "Japanese quince" *zha* 楂 (seven items),[1020] "crabapple" *nai* 柰 (15 items), "jujube" *zao* 棗 (28 items),[1021] "apricot" *xing* 杏 (26 items), "chestnut" *li* 栗 (28 items), "walnut" *hutao* 胡桃 (8 items), "red apple" *linqin* 林檎 (4 items),[1022] "yam" *ganshu* 甘藷 (one item),[1023] "red pear" *shatang* 沙棠 (two items),[1024] "coconut" *ye* 椰 (four items), "loquat" *pipa* 枇杷 (seven items), "Yan

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[1013] Possibly in early sources referred to the fruit rather than the tree, see Chi, *Shuowen xinzheng* vol. 2, 297-298; *Shuowen jiezi kaozheng*, 221.

[1014] In this instance, these different plants have the same names in English, and so a scientific binomial is useful to distinguish them. Kroll notes that *Prunus salicina* has a "thin, hard, crisp pulp" and *Prunus mume* has a "thick, soft pulp", *Student's Dictionary*, 298. To distinguish between the *li*-plum and the *mei*-plum, Kroll suggests translating the latter as "prunus". The *mei*-plum is sometimes translated as "Chinese plum" or "Japanese apricot" (as it is more closely related to the apricot than the plum). See also Simoons, *Food in China*, 221-222.

[1015] This graph is sometimes written 棃. Kroll notes that *li* usually indicates *Pyruspyrifolia*, and "white pear" *baili* 白棃 indicates the related but distinct species *Pyrus bretschneideri*, *Student's Dictionary*, 239.

[1016] This graph is also written 柑, and Kroll identifies it as *Citrus nobilis*, *Student's Dictionary*, 127.

[1017] Kroll notes that this graph, the aforementioned *gan*, and "sweet orange" (*Citrus sinensis*) *cheng* 橙 are closely related but distinct, *Student's Dictionary*, 225.

[1018] Commonly found north of the Yangtze, this is different to the sweet cheery (*Prunus aviam*) found in western and central Europe, although *yingtao* is now popularly used to refer to the fruit of that plant. Simoons, *Food in China*, 222.

[1019] Long associated with Persia, it is thought to have arrived in Cambodia at the beginning of the 6th century. Linguistic evidence suggests that the name entered Chinese from Persian-speakers. See Simoons, *Food in China*, 246; Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, 280, 282-286.

[1020] Four of these are only titles.

[1021] This is a different graph to the above-mentioned graph for "jujube". Bretschneider calls it "the classical and common name for the Chinese jujube, *Zizyphus vulgaris*", "Botanicon Sinicum", part 2, 305-306; 118.

[1022] Bretschneider claims that *qin* 檎 is a wild *Pyrus malus*, or red apple, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 126-127. Other sources, like the *Hanyu da cidian*, glosses *linqin* as the Chinese pear-leafed crabapple (*huahong* 花紅 or *shaguo* 沙果).

[1023] This entry notes that it "is like taro" (*si yu* 似竽, reading 芋 for 竽), *Yiwen leiju* 87.1490. I follow Li's use of "yam" rather than "sweet potato", see Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 41-43.

[1024] Kroll notes that this fruit has yellow flowers, red fruit, and tastes like a *li*-plum, *Student's Dictionary*, 444. The *Shanhai jing* claims that it can be found on Mount Kunlun, but the *Yiwen leiju* does not quote this source. It does appear in the *Taiping yulan*, however. See *Taiping yulan* 92.4310; *Shanhai jing jiaozhu* 2.42-43. Miao and Qiu note that this is distinct from *shatangzi* 沙棠子, which is in the genus *Celtis*, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 134.

cherry" *yanyu* 燕薁 (two items),[1025] "wild pear" *sui* 棳 (two items),[1026] "betel pepper" *juzi* 蒟子 (two items),[1027] "honey-tree" *zhiju* 枳椇 (three items),[1028] "pomelo" *you* 柚 (eight items),[1029] "Chinese quince" *mugua* 木瓜 (five items),[1030] "birchleaf pear" *duli* 杜梨 (five items),[1031] "taro" *yu* 芋 (seven items),[1032] "bayberry" *yangmei* 楊梅 (seven items),[1033] "grape" *putao* 蒲萄 (18 items), "betel" *binlang* or *binglang* 檳榔 (13 items),[1034] "lychee" *lizhi* 荔支 (12 items),[1035] "sharp-leaf galangal" *yizhi* 益智 (seven items),[1036] "mulberry fruit" *shen* 椹 (eight items),[1037] "Japanese banana" *bajiao* 芭蕉 (12 items),[1038] "sugarcane" *ganzhe* 甘蔗 (11 items), and "melon" *gua* 瓜 (48 items).[1039]

2B: *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽

the *Taiping yulan* divides its material into "fruits" *guo* (27 items), "chestnut" *li* (42 items), "jujube" *zao* (76 items), "sweetpeel tangerine" *gan* (29 items), "sourpeel tangerine" *ju* (58 items), "peach" *tao* (83 items), "apricot" *xing* (33 items), "plum" *li* (60 items), "pear" *li* (51 items), "Japanese

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[1025] *Le Grand Ricci* notes that this is a synonym for *Vitis adstricta* (*yingyu* 蘡薁). It is actualy in the grape family, but much of the commentary tradition associates it with cherries, see *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 13.519-520.

[1026] In his sub-commentary to the Mao *Poetry*, Lu Ji says that the contemporary word for this graph is *yangsui* 楊棳, and its fruit is like a pear, only smaller (*shi ru li, dan xiao er* 實如梨，但小耳) and offers many other names for it. The *Erya* glosses this as *luo* 蘿, a graph that can be used for many different plants, and Guo Pu's commentary echoes Lu Ji's, *Erya zhushu* 9.304. See also Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 117.

[1027] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.619. Genus *Piper*, unrelated to betel palm *binglang* 檳榔 (see below). For a discussion of black pepper in China, see Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 46-53.

[1028] Also known as the Japanese raisin tree or the oriental raisin tree, and identified as *Hovenia dulcis*. Simoons points out that, as this tree comes from China, it should be called the Chinese raisin tree, but to avoid this problem I will use "honey tree", as suggested by Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 607. See Simoons, *Food in China*, 230.

[1029] Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 311.

[1030] Literally "tree-melon". The *Erya* glosses *mao* 楙 as *mugua*, whose fruit Guo Pu says is like a small melon (*xiaogua* 小瓜) and is vinegary (*cu* 酢), *Erya zhusu* 9.298. Legge's translation of it as "papaya" in *The Classic of Poetry* is rejected by Bretschneider, as *Carica papaya* is native to North America, "Botanicon Sinicum", 300. The English name comes from its aroma resembling that of the European quince, Simoons, *Food in China*, 226-7.

[1031] Kroll also gives "dancer flowering pear" (both *Pyrus betulifolia*), *Student's Dictionary*, 94. Bretschneider quotes Guo Pu saying that *duli* is the contemporary word for *du* 杜, but the editors of the *Erya* have corrected the character 梨 to 堂, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 303-304, 111; *Erya zhushu* 9.300.

[1032] *Nanfang caomu zhuang* says that some regard "yam" *ganshu* as similar to this plant. Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 41

[1033] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 532; Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 117-118; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*.

[1034] Also known as the areca plant. The Chinese word *binlang* and the English word betel both likely originate from the Malay *pinang*, Zumbroich, "The Origin and Diffusion of Betel Chewing", ; Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 111-113.

[1035] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.610-611.

[1036] *Le Grand Ricci* says this is *Alpinia oxyphylla*, citing Friedrich Anton Wilhelm Miquel (1811–1871). The *Hanyu da cidian* also notes that *yizhi* is another name for "dragon's eye" (*longyan* 龍眼). See also *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.612; Bretschneider, Botanicon Sinicum" part three, 429; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 88.

[1037] Also written *shen* 葚, *Erya zhushu* 9.308.

[1038] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.620-621.

[1039] *Yiwen leiju* 86.1465-87.1505.

quince" *zha* 楂 (nine items),[1040] "sour cherry" *yingtao* (22 items), "plum" *mei* (40 items), "pomegranate" *shiliu* (31 items), "crabapple" *nai* (23 items), "persimmon" *shi* (eight items), "sweet orange" *cheng* 橙 (11 items), "red apple" *linqin* (six items), "Dahurian buckthorn" *bei* 椑 (11 items),[1041] "loquat" *pipa* (14 items), "betel" *binlang* (26 items), "ginger" *doukou* 豆寇 (six items),[1042] "walnut" *hutao* (11 items), "lychee" *lizhi* (15 items), "grape" *putao* (29 items), "canarium" *ganlan* 橄欖 (eight items),[1043] "coconut" *ye* (14 items), "bayberry" *yangmei* (8 items), "red pear" *shatang* (four items), "bitter citron" *gouyuan* 枸櫞 (four items),[1044] "sharp-leaf galangal" *yizhi* (seven items), *tongzi* or *juezi* 桶子 or 桷子 (four items),[1045] "wild pear" *sui* (five items), "dragon's eye" *longyan* 龍眼 (nine items),[1046] "Chinese quince" *mingzha* 榠楂 (two items),[1047] "emblic" *yugan* 餘甘 (six items),[1048] "betel pepper" *juzi* (three items), "quince" *mugua* (11 items),

[1040] This graph is a variant of 樝.

[1041] Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 340; *Le Grand Ricci.*

[1042] Probably in genus *Alpinia*. The term *doukou* was later used to refer to nutmeg around the early 13th century,and even then did not always have this meaning, see Haw, "Nutmeg and the Identity of Chinese Rou doukou", 378-389. In his translation of Zuo Si's "Rhapsody on the Wu Capital", David Knechtges – drawing upon Smith and Stuart's *Chinese Materia Medica*, 36 and Li's translation of *Nanfang caomu zhuang*, 38-39 – translates *doukou* (here written 豆蔻) as "cardamon", and provides the binomial *Amomum cardamomum* (Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 384-385). The entry in Smith and Stuart is actually for *baidoukou* 白豆蔻, which shows how the citation of binomials can become unmoored from their botanical context when used to translate literature. See also Tao Hongjing's commentary on *Shennong's Compendium of Materia Medica*, *Bencao jing jizhu* 459; *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.616-617.

[1043] Also known as "Chinese olive", although it is not related to the Western olive. The first mention of this word appears to be in Xi Han's *Poetry* subcommentary, see Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 120-122. See also Simoons, *Food in China*, 225-226; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 127.

[1044] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.609.

[1045] This fruit has alluded identification. The *Taiping yulan* quotes the Jin dynasty text *Guangzhi* 廣志 (*Treatise on the Guang [Region]*), attributed to Guo Yigong 郭義恭 (dates unknown), which glosses this word as "like a Chinese quince tree" (*si mugua shumu* 似木瓜樹木), *Taiping yulan* 972.4311. The graph *jue* appears in the *Yijing*. Kong Yingda's 孔穎達 (574–648) sub-commentary glosses *jue* as *cui* 椳, which is a word for rafter, Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 69. The character *jue* appears in the *Shijing*, in a line that again connects it to rafters. The *Nanfang caomu zhuang* says that it is "as large as a chicken egg" (*da ru jiluan* 大如雞卵) and comes from Jiaozhi 交趾 (modern-day northern Vietnam). Miao and Qiu suggest that it may be a paper mulberry or a tulip mangrove tree, see Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 79. See also *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.615.

[1046] Related to the lychee, this fruit is also known as longan in English, which derives from its Cantonese pronunciation (*lung ngaan*). Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 122-123; *Le Grand Ricci* lists numerous synonyms.

[1047] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.618.

[1048] Also known as *yuganzi* 餘甘子. Schafer notes that these grew in Annam and south-eastern China, see *Golden Peaches*, 146; *The Vermilion Bird*, 191. See also *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.618; Simoons, *Food in China*, 237-238; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 30.

"camellia" *liu* 劉 (four items),[1049] "Japanese bush cherry" *yu* 郁/鬱 (10 items),[1050] "pomelo" *you* (25 items), "*duan*-pomelo" *duan* 椴 (one item), "mulberry fruit" *shen* (19 items), "honey-tree" *zhiju* (five items), "frost-resistant pear" *chan* 棎 (two items),[1051] "pinang" *na* 蒳 (three items),[1052] "black olive" *muqi* 木威 (two items),[1053] *yuanmu* 榬木 (one item),[1054] "hawthorn" *qiu* 朹 (one item),[1055] *yan* 棪 (three items),[1056] "starfruit" *yangtao* 楊桃 (three items),[1057] *yangyao* 楊榣 (one item),[1058] "winter

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[1049] This graph was originally used to write a word for a battle-axe, see Chi, *Shuowen xinzheng* vol. 2, 247; Wang, *Wang Li gu Hanyu zidian*, 76-77. In the section on trees, the *Erya* simply glosses *liu* as *liuyi* 劉杙, and in Guo Pu's commentary, he says that the *liu* or *liuyi* grows in the mountains, has fruit like a pear (*li* 梨), is sour-sweet with a hard stone, and comes from Jiaozhi (*Erya zhushu* 9.306). See also *Qimin yaoshu jinshi*, 745. It can also be written *liu* 榴, which Kroll notes in pre-Tang works usually means camellia, and afterwards means pomegranate. The *Taiping yulan* quotes from a *Nanfang caomu zhuang*, although this item does not appear in the transmitted version attributed to Xi Han. *Le Grand Ricci* says that it is a fruit tree that comes from North Vietnam which resembles a pear tree and has been incorrectly identified with a pomegranate tree.

[1050] There is some confusion between these two graphs. The *Taiping yulan* quotes the Mao Commentary of the line "In the sixth month, [we] eat *yu* and cherry" (*liuyue shi yu ji you* 六月食鬱及薁) in the poem "The Seventh Month" (*Qiyue* 七月) from the "Airs of Bin" (*Binfeng* 豳風). The Mao Commentary glosses *yu* 鬱 as *di* 棣, which, according to Kroll is "variously identified as species of cherry, plum, pear, or quince", *Student's Dictionary*, 84. Legge translates it as "sparrow-plums" (see below) and Waley as "wild plums", Legge, *The She King*; Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 166. Kong Yingda's sub-commentary says it is "in the same category of *tangdi*" 唐棣 (*tangdi zhi leishu ye* 唐棣之類屬也), which does not get us very far (on *tangdi*, Bretschneider notes that "[v]ery different views are held by the Chinese commentators," "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 297-298), but Kong also quotes Liu Zhen's 劉稹 (d. 217) lost *Meanings and Queries on the Mao Poetry* (*Mao Shi yiwen* 毛詩義問), which says it is a tree from five to six *chi* high, with bright red and sweet fruit the size of a *li*-plum. Kong, apparently drawing on Lu Ji, further quotes a *bencao* text (probably Shennong's) that gives three other names for *yu*: "sparrow-plum" *queli* 雀李, "plum-beneath-the-chariot" *chexiali* 車下李 and the aforementioned *di* 棣, as well as noting that it fruits in the fifth month. Kong regards *yu* 鬱 as related to *di* 棣 as well as *yu* 薁, albeit with slight differences, thus Kong understands them all as some kind of cherry, *Shi sanjia yi jishu* 13.519-520, see also Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part 2, 296. Also quoted in the *Taiping yulan* is a line from Pan Yue's 潘岳 (247–300) poem *Xianju fu* 閑居賦 (Rhapsody on Living in Idleness), where the graph is *yu* 郁. The line reads *mei xing yu di zhi shu* 梅杏郁棣之屬, which Knechtges translates as "Black plum, apricot, dwarf cherry", *Wen Xuan* vol. 3, 145-157. Knechtges does not provide annotations for this line (nor any for lines 76-95), but he appears to be reading *yu di* 郁棣 as one word. In his commentary to the *Wenxuan*, Li Shan 李善 (d. 689) glosses *yu* as *yuli* 郁李, saying that the latter is the contemporary term. It is also clear that he regards *yu* and *di* as distinct, as he glosses them separately, *Wenxuan* 16.227. *Le Grand Ricci* glosses *yu* 郁 as *yu* 薁 – which brings us back to the quote from the *Classic of Poetry* – and identifies it as *Prunus japonica*, or Japanese bush cherry.

[1051] This translation comes from Knechtges, who draws upon a description of this fruit in the *Record of Strange Things* (*Yiwu zhi* 異物志) for his translation of Zuo Si's "Rhapsody on the Wu Capital", *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 390-391. This quotation also appears in the *Taiping yulan*. The *Guangyun* glosses this graph as "the name of a fruit that resembles a crabapple and is sour" (*guo ming sin ai er suan* 果名似柰而酸).

[1052] A type of palm. Another plant that appears in "Rhapsody on the Wu Capital", translation from Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 384-385, see also *Qimin yaoshu jinshi*, 767-68.

[1053] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.718.

[1054] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.719. Described as having fruit like the banana (*ganjiao* 甘蕉).

[1055] "Hawthorn" can apply to a wide variety of plants, a situation reflected in the explanations of this graph in Chinese literature. Guo Pu for one says it resembles the *mei*-plum. *Erya zhushu* 9.301; *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.715; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 111.

[1056] Bretschneider confessed that he "cannot say what the *yen* tree was", "Botanicon Sinicum" part two, 120-121. This tree appears in the *Shanhai jing*, but Strassberg also does not translate it, *A Chinese Bestiary*, 85. Guo Pu says the fruit is like a crabapple (*nai*), red, and edible, *Erya zhushu* 9.306.

[1057] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.570; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 24-25.

[1058] *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.570. It is unknown what plant this word refers to, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 25.

cherry" *dongshu* 冬熟 (one item),[1059] "houta grass" *houta* 猴闥 (one item),[1060] "guan peach" *guantao* 關桃 (one item),[1061] "earth codger" *tuweng* 土翁 (one item),[1062] "dog stall" *goucao* 狗槽 (one item),[1063] "chicken tangerine" *jiju* 雞橘 (one item),[1064] "monkey knot" *houzong* 猴惣 (one item),[1065] "more south" *duonan* 多南 (one item),[1066] "wampee" *wangtan* 王壇 (three items),[1067] "three-corner" *sanlian* 三廉 (two items),[1068] "demon eyes" *guimu* 鬼目 (six items),[1069] "sugarcane" *ganzhe* (33 items), "yam" *ganshu* (two items), "Yan cherry" *yanyu* (eight items), "galangal" *lianjiang* 廉薑 (four items),[1070] "banana" *ganjiao* 甘蕉 (nine items),[1071] "betel vine" *fuliu* 扶留 (six items),[1072] "taro" *yu* (17 items), "water chestnut" *ling* 菱 (21 items)[1073] "prickly waterlily" *qian* 芡 (nine items),[1074] "lotus" *lian* 蓮 (14 items),[1075] and "lotus rhizome" *ou* 藕 (seven items).[1076]

[1059] Commentaries on the *Erya* understand this and other terms as words for cherries, saying "peaches that ripen in the winter are called *mao*" (*taozi dong shu zhe ming mao* 桃子冬熟者名旄). The graph *mao* is also written 牦, see *Yupian*. The confusion between peaches and cherries comes from the name for cherries including the graph for peach. *Erya zhushu* 9.304. Bretschneider translates it as "winter peach", "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 117. Miao and Qiu note that in the modern era this term is associated with wolfberry, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 26.

[1060] These following items from the *Linhai yiwu zhi* all appear to be local names and are difficult to translate. Some may be attempts to render phonetic information. Miao and Qiu's *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi* offers tentative identifications of many of them.

[1061] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Sour-flavoured, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 26.

[1062] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Similar to a Chinese lacquer tree, see Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 26-27.

[1063] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. A scarlet, sweet fruit, see Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 27.

[1064] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Possibly referring to a fruit tree in the genus *Fortunella* sometimes called a Hongkong kumquat, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 27.

[1065] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Similar to a persimmon, but unlikely to refer to a single plant, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 27-28.

[1066] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Possibly a mangosteen, Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 28.

[1067] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 28-29. Literally "king's mound", which sometimes features in explanations, but probably a phonetic loan.

[1068] *Linhai yiwu zhi*. Star fruit, aka five-corner (*wulianzi* 五斂子). *Le Grand Ricci* regards it as a synonym for forsythia (*liaoqiao* 連翹). However, the graph *lian* 廉 here is being used for its early meaning of "side-portions of a hall or large room" or "corner" (Kroll). Some weapons and other implements have been described in this way, and *jiao* 角 ("horn", "corner") is used in the names of some plants, which also occurs in descriptions of implements. See Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 45.

[1069] The *Erya* says this is another term for "climbing nightshade" *fu* 苻, *Erya zhushu* 8.269; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 55-56, 352. In his *Bencao tujing* 本草圖經, Su Song 蘇頌 (1020–1101) says that another name among the people of the Lower Yangtze region for ailanthus (*chu* 樗) is *guimu* (*Jiangdongren huwei guimu* 江東人呼為鬼目). See also *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.605.

[1070] In the ginger family. *Le Grand Ricci* glosses this as *Alpinia chinensis*.

[1071] Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 32-35.

[1072] Li, *Nan-fang Ts'ao-mu Chuang*, 111-113; *Qimin yaoshu jiaoshi* 10.622-623; Knechtges, *Wen Xuan*, vol. 1, 385-386; Miao and Qiu, *Han-Wei liuchao lingnan zhiwu zhilu jishi*, 65.

[1073] Also known as "caltrop". Also written *ling* 蔆. Guo Pu glosses it as *ji* 芰, a synonym for water chestnut/caltrop, *Erya zhushu* 8.279. See also Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 74, 219-220.

[1074] Popularly known as "cock's head" (*jitou* 雞頭). Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 218; Kroll, *Student's Dictionary*, 361.

[1075] *Erya zhushu* 8.279; Bretschneider, "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 73-74.

[1076] *Erya zhushu* 8.274-275; "Botanicon Sinicum", part two, 65. *Taiping yulan* 964.4277-975.4323. For the items without Chinese characters, see the list from the *Yiwen leiju* above.