

*The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, edited by Sarah A. Queen and Michael Puett. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xviii, 396 pp. US\$180.00 (cloth).

## General Evaluation

Sarah Queen and Michael Puett's edited volume on the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and its textual production is the first collection of essays on Liu An's 劉安 (ca. 179–122 BCE) text published in English. It is a direct outcome of a workshop titled "Liu An's Vision of Empire: New Perspectives," which the editors convened at Harvard University in May 2008 as a spin-off of the text's first English translation by John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth.<sup>1</sup> In order to benefit further from the concentrated, communal, and laborious effort put into the translation of Liu An's majestic work, the editors organized the workshop and produced this volume of scholarly articles. It promises the birth of "a new and exciting field of study" by offering "diverse and novel approaches to the text" that express "ideas on future directions for the field" (3).

The *Huainanzi* is a text that Liu An, the king of Huainan, presumably presented in 139 BCE to Emperor Wu's 漢武帝 (156–87 BCE) court during his inaugural visit. According to Liu An's biography in the *History of the Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), the king of Huainan gathered together erudites from around the empire at his court in Shouchun 壽春 in order to produce this extensive text. In that sense, he apparently designed the *Huainanzi* as a collaborative effort by the entire empire to be submitted to the newly inaugurated emperor. Due to its comprehensive concerns—crystallized in the titles of its twenty-one chapters, for example "Originating the Way" (*Yuandao* 原道), "Heavenly Patterns" (*Tianwen* 天文), "Quintessential Spirit" (*Jingshen* 精神), "The Arts of Rulership" (*Zhushu* 主術), and "An Overview of the Military" (*Binglüe* 兵略)—the text as a whole provides, in comparison to the majority of early

<sup>1</sup> John S. Major, Sarah A. Queen, Andrew Seth Meyer, and Harold D. Roth, trans. and eds., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

Chinese writings, atypically elaborate visions of cosmology, self-cultivation, politics, and pre-imperial Chinese “history.” Consequently, the *Huainanzi* offers a fascinating and unique opportunity to engage in the thought and practices that might have been prevalent during the early Western Han 西漢 dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE).

However, despite an increased interest in parts of Liu An’s text since the 1980s, the *Huainanzi* has still occupied a rather marginal position in the study of early China. One reason for its general disregard in the academic community has been due to its previous categorization as miscellaneous (*za* 雜) or syncretic by Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE), the compiler of the *Hanshu* and its important “Record of the Literature [of Artistic Writings]” (*Yiwenzhi* 藝文志). Modern scholars such as Fung Yu-lan and Angus C. Graham interpreted *za* as a catch-all category “that includes only works such as the *Lü Spring and Autumn* and *Huai-nan-tzu* which he [i.e., Ban Gu] cannot fit elsewhere into his scheme.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, they denounced the *Huainanzi* as a piecemeal text that lacks coherence. As a consequence, it has long been rejected as a hodgepodge encyclopedia that does not develop a cohesive intellectual program.

Many of the articles in the edited volume, which are organized around the three themes of “Authorship and Textual Formation,” “Knowledge and Rhetoric,” and “Audience and Reception,” oppose this position by emphasizing the *Huainanzi*’s highly constructed style and overarching organization. As I will explain in the summaries of the individual contributions below, they clearly show the text’s incredible value for our understanding of the intellectual and religio-political environment during the early Western Han dynasty. By presenting this collection of articles on a much-neglected text, Sarah Queen and Michael Puett surely bring attention to Liu An’s magnificent work, whose cultural significance has not been satisfactorily reflected in modern scholarship on early China.

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<sup>2</sup> Angus C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989), 381.

## Summary of Individual Chapters

### Part 1: Authorship and Textual Formation

Andrew Meyer sets out in chapter 1, “Root-Branches Structuralism in the *Huainanzi*,” to illuminate the subtle framework that lends unity and coherence to the conceptual and stylistic diversity of Liu An’s text. He argues against its evaluation as an “eclectic” work by illustrating how the normative metaphors of roots and branches (*benmo* 本末) serve as conceptual templates that organize the text’s doctrines and composition. He illustrates how the principle of a unitary and potent root developing into a variety of segregated branches is echoed in the *Huainanzi*’s depictions of the cosmos, body, consciousness, social structures, political institutions, and history. This principle, which is based on the famous cosmogony in *Laozi* 老子 42 situating the creation of the entire phenomenal world in the Dao (*Dao sheng yi, yi sheng er, er sheng san, san sheng wanwu* 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物 The Way gave birth to One; One gave birth to Two; Two gave birth to Three; Three gave birth to the Myriad Things), also shapes the text’s organization. The *Huainanzi* “moves from the single and universal root, the Way (chapter 1, ‘Originating the Way’ 原道) through the successively posterior and contingent realms: Potency 德 (chapter 2, ‘Activating the Genuine’ 俶真), Heaven 天 (chapter 3, ‘Heavenly Patterns’ 天文), Earth 地 (chapter 4, ‘Terrestrial Forms’ 墜形), and so on, leading ultimately to the present-day terrain of the Han-Empire (chapter 20, ‘The Exalted Lineage’ 泰族)” (34). Consequently, Meyer claims that the cosmogonic scheme of roots and branches takes over such an all-pervasive role within the text that it may serve as a key to uncover the cohesiveness behind the *Huainanzi*’s conceptual diversity and textual production.

In chapter 2, “Daoist Inner Cultivation Thought and the Textual Structure of the *Huainanzi*,” Harold D. Roth argues that Liu An’s text belongs to an “inner cultivation” tradition whose intellectual remnants he believes are found in the *Laozi*, in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, in the “Techniques of the Mind” (*Xinshu* 心術) chapters within the *Guanzi* 管子, in parts of *Master Lü’s Spring and Autumn* (*Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋), and in some recently

excavated texts such as the “Silk Manuscripts of Huang-Lao” (*Huang-Lao boshu* 黃老帛書). He argues that these inner cultivation texts focus mainly on cosmology, self-cultivation, and political thought. They may be distinguished from other writings by their shared philosophical vocabulary and concepts: their ideas “begin and end with a common understanding of the Way (*dao* 道) as the ultimate source of the cosmos, Potency (*de* 德) as its manifestation in terms of concrete phenomena and experience, Nonaction (*wuwei* 無為) as its definitive movement, and Formlessness (*wuxing* 無形) as its characteristic mode” (43). According to his analysis, the root section of the *Huainanzi* text (chapters 1–8), the root chapters of that root section (chapters 1–2), and the root passages at the beginning of each chapter are all filled with references to these inner cultivation techniques, concepts, and vocabulary. Thus, Roth suggests their employment in these foundational parts of the *Huainanzi*’s overall textual structure indicates that Liu An’s text belongs *de facto* to what he calls an “inner cultivation” tradition in early China.

Sarah A. Queen sketches in chapter 3, “Representations of Confucius in the *Huainanzi*,” a first reconstruction of the various images of Kongzi 孔子 in Liu An’s text. She ventures to assemble a topologically organized collection of several passages that contain textual, anecdotal, or conceptual traces of Kongzi. In so doing, Queen discovers that the Confucian tradition receives different evaluations in Liu An’s text depending on the chapters in which these references occur. While the first eight root chapters either do not contain images of Kongzi or display his teachings and disciples in a negative way, the *Ru*-ist tradition (*rujia* 儒家) appears in a rather positive light in the latter thirteen branch chapters. Queen attempts to reconcile this seeming incoherence in the *Huainanzi* in two ways. On the one hand, she suggests that the master may fulfill a pedagogical role in the text. Apparently, the image of Kongzi alters according to “the broader pedagogical aims of the text to demonstrate how a present-day emperor might successfully incorporate the best of the various wisdom traditions that he has inherited as the ruler of the contemporary Han world” (122–123). Thus, she argues that Kongzi takes on a variety of forms as needed

for the specific goals of the chapters. On the other hand, Queen also suspects that the reason behind his wide employment in the *Huainanzi* might simply lie in his prominence during the Western Han dynasty. She argues that “he had become the common intellectual property of all who hoped to influence the course of Han history. Yet the diverse contributors to the *Huainanzi* sought to shape and control Confucius’ authority and prestige in ways commensurate with their respective agendas: thus the different portrayals in different parts of the text” (123).

In chapter 4, “Creating a Book and Performing It: The ‘Yao lüe’ Chapter of the *Huainanzi* as a Western Han *Fu*,” Martin Kern rightfully complains that Liu An’s text has primarily been read through the lens of intellectual history, which has downplayed its style and language. Thus, he analyzes the stylistic properties of the *Huainanzi*’s last chapter, “An Overview of the Essentials” (*Yao lüe* 要略). Kern reveals that it contains a dense rhyming pattern, metric versatility, syntactic complexity, and a large number of initial and concluding particles that are typical in Western Han rhapsodies (*fu* 賦). Furthermore, he claims that the orderly sequence of the rhymed chapter list included in the *Yao lüe* “encompasses the complete *Huainanzi* in a nutshell, defining the text as an indivisible whole. . . . It determines the specific order of the chapters; the coherence of rhyme determines and secures the distinct places of the individual chapters within the overall sequence” (138–139). In other words, the “Overview” lends coherence to the *Huainanzi* and, at the same time, presents this organization to the audience. Based on these two observations, Kern makes the fascinating proposition that the last chapter is *de facto* a text that was meant to be recited (*song* 誦) at the imperial court as part of the ceremonial presentation (*zou* 奏) of the *Huainanzi* to the young emperor Wu. Consequently, he suggests that Liu An’s text proper consists of only twenty chapters, while the “Yao lüe” had only afterward been included either by the authors or later editors.

## Part 2: Knowledge and Rhetoric

John S. Major follows a similar direction as Sarah Queen in his chapter 5, “Tool Metaphors in the *Huainanzi* and Other Early

Texts.” He argues that tools played a significant role in explaining and describing major themes of Liu An’s text: cosmic order and processes, the sage and his relationship to officials, laws and standards, and the general enhancement of the lifeworld. He claims that the text’s primary employment of tools used to design and measure objects, such as the compass (*gui* 規), square (*ju* 矩), marking cord (*sheng* 繩), balance beam (*heng* 衡), weight (*quan* 權), level (*zhun* 準), angle (*gou* 鉤), gnomon (*biao* 表), and sighting tube (*guan* 管), clearly reflects a focus on taxonomy and the organization of the cosmos and society in the *Huainanzi*. Beyond a topological assemblage of passages, he uses statistical analysis to show that one may reconstruct textual relationships and a text’s date of production based on the occurrences of tool terminologies in early Chinese texts.

In chapter 6, “The *Huainanzi*’s ‘Heavenly Patterns’ and the *Shiji*’s ‘Treatise on the Celestial Offices’: What’s the Difference?,” David W. Pankenier presents a rift between these two almost contemporaneous treatises on astrological phenomena. He claims that the scientific and rational treatise from the *Grand Scribe’s Records* (*Shiji* 史記), which founds its practices on astral prognostications and what is observable, clearly contrasts with the cosmological and correlative tract from the *Huainanzi*, which relies on hemerological predictions based on schemes, calendars, and numerology. He argues that the different motives behind the production of the two texts accounts for this contrast. According to Pankenier’s reading, Liu An commissioned the *Huainanzi* in order to convince his kinsmen and the emperor of a decentralized vision of governance. In his opinion, such a rhetorical context of the *Huainanzi* and Liu An’s interest in reaching out to the non-specialist audience among his kinsmen explain in part why the “Heavenly Patterns” chapter resorts to an archaic yet widely known conception of the sky that solely focuses on the Middle Kingdom as the center of the universe. In contrast, the slightly later treatise from Sima Qian’s 司馬遷 (ca. 145–86 BCE) *Shiji* represents a new and more complex “imperial macroastrology,” which had probably been written solely for the professional astrologers (*shi* 史) at the imperial court. No longer did the sky represent only the

Chinese vision of the world as reflected in previous models such as the one employed in the *Huainanzi*. Instead, the *Shiji*'s "Treatise" also included the non-Chinese tribes in its vision of the sky. On the one hand, it attributed to the non-Chinese tribes the northern and western quadrants of heaven, which the text associates with Yin 陰 aspects of the sky. On the other hand, the "Treatise" assigned to the Chinese world the southern and eastern quadrants that relate to Heaven's Yang 陽 qualities. Therefore, Pankenier concludes that the *Shiji*'s new vision of the sky reflects the imperial need to include foreign kingdoms in their prognostications due to intensified conflicts between the Chinese and frontier people during the Han dynasty, elements that apparently played no role for the *Huainanzi*'s idealized vision of heaven and the cosmos.

Michael Nylan discusses in chapter 7, "A Note on Logical Connectives in the *Huainanzi*," an important stylistic aspect of Liu An's text: the conscious use and omission of particles. She argues that the *Huainanzi*'s chapter "Quintessential Spirit" (*Jingshen* 精神) displays distinctive patterns based on the use of particles, vocabulary, and grammatical formations. She claims that these patterns allow one to subdivide the entire chapter into seven semantic units. As part of this analysis, she comes to the conclusion that the text's organization, structure, and usage of particles seem to reflect rhetorical practices rather than logical deductions. For example, she suggests that the term *shigu* 是故, commonly translated as "therefore," generally does not establish a logical conclusion but rather introduces "a rhetorically impressive passage about to be enunciated" (255). Nylan uses her meticulous textual analysis to call for sensitivity toward the performative context of patron-client exchanges at the courts of rulers. She asserts that texts like the *Huainanzi* were produced in order to orally persuade the ruler of a change of conduct. Only if we accept rather than dismiss these classical notions of textual compilation, which favor rhetorical devices beyond the scope of mere logics, she claims, will we be able to recognize and appreciate the deep structures that lie within early Chinese texts.

### Part 3: Reception and Audience

Michael Puett provides in chapter 8, “Sages, Creation, and the End of History in the *Huainanzi*,” a crucial contribution to the field. He claims that Liu An’s text constructs a historical narrative that divides the universe into a primordial cosmic unity and a continuously degenerative age in which sages had effected increasing disunion between the myriad things due to their technological inventions. He shows that the *Huainanzi* perceives itself as the very object that ends this degenerative history. It purports to be a sagely scripture that is capable of re-creating the primordial cosmic unity while at the same time retaining the technologies that previously led to this process of alienation. Puett proposes that Liu An’s text was apparently written to serve primarily as an efficacious embodiment of the Great One (*taiyi* 太一), the supreme stellar deity that governs Heaven and unites all celestial bodies. According to his analysis, the *Huainanzi*’s “unifying all previous knowledge into a single harmonious whole . . . serves as a final sage. Even if later rulers are not sages, they will be able, by following this text, to perfectly harmonize the world” (287). Puett’s reading of the *Huainanzi* as a sagely scripture offers a radically new avenue in the study of early Chinese texts prior to the rise of Daoism in the second century CE. It raises an important question that hopefully will trigger several publications in the future: what if not only human beings but also texts themselves could be divinized?

In chapter 9, “The Liu Clan’s ‘Flesh and Bone’: The Foundation of Liu An’s Vision of Empire,” Judson B. Murray focuses on the role that corporeal images of kinship play in the *Huainanzi*. He argues that Liu An’s text repeatedly refers to flesh and bone (*gurou* 骨肉) in order to promote the importance of family ties and kinship relations for ordering and stabilizing the Han Empire. Murray contextualizes the *Huainanzi*’s vision of proper rulership within the greater discourse of strategic disposition (*shi* 勢) and enfeoffment as represented in earlier and roughly contemporaneous Chinese texts such as the *Guanzi*, *Lüshi chunqiu*, and the *Shiji*. He thereby shows that Liu An was very critical toward any models of rulership that the Han had inherited from the Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206

BCE), whose rule lasted less than two decades. The king of Huainan, apparently, opposed the commandery system and political centralization that the Han Empire increasingly established during the second century BCE. Consequently, Murray argues that the *Huainanzi* offered an alternative vision of rulership from the Qin system. The text employed the image of “flesh and bone” as a means to reinforce a version of an earlier Western Zhou 周 (ca. 1046–771 BCE) model of enfeoffment wherein the family plays a significant role in maintaining the emperor’s position of power.

In chapter 10, “The Discourse about Lords (*Zhuhou*) in the *Huainanzi*,” Griet Vankeerberghen discusses Liu An’s take on the role of the lord-kings (*zhuhouwang* 諸侯王). She tries to understand it through the lens of the political situation in the early Western Han, which was marred by remembrance of the ruthless fighting during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) and the rebellion of the seven kings in 154 BCE. She claims that the *Huainanzi* constructs an image of sagely rulership that necessitates submission of the lord-kings to the emperor. The lord-kings were “men enfeoffed by the Han emperors as kings over often-large territories as a reward for extraordinary military achievements or as an acknowledgment of close kinship ties with the reigning emperor” (326). She asserts that Liu An did not create a vision of empire that demanded further decentralization and autonomy for fiefdoms, as secondary literature often suggests. On the contrary, the *Huainanzi* indicates that Liu An was willing to submit himself and the kingdom he ruled to the Son of Heaven in order to avoid further stirring up of any conflict between the imperial center and its familial ties at the fringes of the realm.

Anne Behnke Kinney traces the various narratives that wound around the Commoner Woman (*shunü* 庶女) of Qi 齊 in the last chapter, “Breaking through Heaven’s Glass Ceiling: The Significance of the Commoner Woman of Qi in the ‘Lan Ming’ Chapter of the *Huainanzi*.” She shows how Liu An’s text appropriates earlier narratives about the Commoner Woman to reinforce its position “that not just a sage-king but any person, no matter how lowly, is capable of activating [a] mysterious resonance” with the Dao so that “the ruler with no knowledge of it can fall victim to even an

ordinary woman” (367). Kinney argues that the *Huainanzi*’s use of female characters reflects two important developments. First, the heightened role of the Commoner Woman in the *Huainanzi* does not reflect an empowerment of women per se. However, Kinney is convinced that it is nonetheless a textual manifestation of a trend from the late Warring States that the ruling elite could no longer ignore the female population of the society. Second, the Commoner Woman’s increased importance reflects the *Huainanzi*’s cosmological vision that an imbalance of Yin and Yang could lead to cosmic and social disorder.

### Summary

Generally speaking, the articles in the edited volume are examples of excellently executed traditional Sinology. The majority of contributions deal with the *Huainanzi*’s textual history and its philosophical concepts, and their methods remain within the disciplinary boundaries of philology and philosophy, two staples of the study of early China. Together, the contributions create a concerted argument for a conceptual and textual coherence behind Liu An’s work that will, along with the full translation of the text in 2010, surely invigorate interest in this complex and fascinating textual artifact from the Western Han dynasty.

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