CHAPTER SIX

THE CHAPTERS OF THE CHUNQIU FANLU AND THEIR CONTENTS

Diversity of subject matter

The great variety in the subject matter and content of the Chunqiu fanlu does not always receive the attention that is its due. The chapters range over (a) explanations of the wording to be seen in the Chunqiu with its implications and lessons (e.g., pian nos. 11–17); (b) a thesis on historical processes as seen in the turn and turn about of the seat of rulership (e.g., pian no. 23); (c) a detailed account of rituals enacted to produce results that are beneficial to mankind (e.g., pian nos. 72, 74, 75); and (d) a review of the forces and rhythms whereby the universe maintains its eternal operation (e.g., pian nos. 58–64). There is no rigid adherence throughout the book to the precepts of a named school of philosophers nor is there a concentration on illustrating a particular theme, as may be seen in works such as the Zhuangzi, or the Xin yu of Lu Jia. A number of pian or chapters would seem to include two or more discrete sections that are not necessarily connected together closely (e.g., nos. 6, 8, 13).

Hsū Fu-kuan 徐復觀 sees the Chunqiu fanlu as concerning three types of subject: expatiations or interpretations of the Chunqiu according to the Gongyang tradition; Dong Zhongshu’s concepts of heaven; and respect and services to heaven and sacrificial rituals in general. More recently Joachim Gentz has distinguished between different ways in which the Gongyang tradition is seen in the first sixteen pian of the book. Professor Queen, while not disagreeing with Hsū Fu-kuan,

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1 Four scholars have made conspicuous contributions to the textual study of the Chunqiu fanlu and its interpretation, i.e., Lu Wenchao (1785) and Ling Shu (1815) for whom see Chapter Five pp. 218–9 above; Su Yu, whose Chunqiu fanlu yizheng (1914; facsimile reprint 1973; punctuated edition 1992) takes account of the two predecessors; and Liu Shipei, ‘Chunqiu fanlu jiaobu’ (1912).

2 Liang Han sixiang shi (1976), pp. 309–11.

3 For the Gongyang tradition, see Chapter Eight below, p. 307. See Gentz, as cited in note 6 below.
identifies five ‘units’ of the text, which include exegetical chapters; Huang-Lao chapters; Yin-yang chapters; Five-phase chapters; and Ritual chapters.4

While no certain or comprehensive answer can be made to the fundamental question of what parts of the Chunqiu fanlu and which of its ideas can be authentically traced to Dong Zhongshu, it is possible to identify certain pian which can probably or perhaps certainly be ascribed to different sources of various types. These include:

a. Pian which draw directly on the explanations of the Gongyang zhuan. In his study of the Gongyang zhuan, Joachim Gentz traces the development of certain concepts, such as correlative thought, or types of exegesis of the Chunqiu, as seen in the Gongyang zhuan, Chunqiu fanlu and some of the apocryphal texts.5 He sets out three different approaches towards the Gongyang tradition as seen in Chunqiu fanlu (pian nos. 1 to 17) as being those parts of that work that are most likely to be the authentic work, or represent the authentic views, of Dong Zhongshu.6 He distinguishes three stages of types of explanation of passages in the Chunqiu that may be seen in these chapters. (i) pian nos. 1 to 9, which seek to solve contradictions in the Gongyang tradition and introduce certain new concepts such as those of zhi 質 and wen 文, and those of Tian; (ii) pian nos. 10 to 12 which define the principles of the Chunqiu, taking account of metaphysical concepts and omenology; (iii) pian nos. 13–16 which are of a mixed type and include reference to the Wu xing in one pian (no. 14). No. 17 is a postface.

b. Pian which concern the Wu xing. The extent of the attention paid to the Wu xing in the book is remarkable, amounting to nine pian that set out theory and one that describes its application to a matter of

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4 Queen, From Chronicle to Canon (1996), pp. 76–112.
5 For the wei texts, see Tjan Tjoe Som, Po Hu T’ung The comprehensive discussions in the White Tiger Hall vol. 1 (1949), pp. 100–20; Anne Cheng, Étude sur le Confucianisme Han l’élaboration d’une tradition exégétique sur les classiques (1985), p. 87; and Chapter Eight below, p. 310.