CHAPTER NINE

CHEN CHENG HENG

Introduction

The “Chen Cheng Heng” chapter of the Yuejue shu is an important and highly influential example of a tradition associating the figure of Confucius with the history of the ancient south, which is very closely related to the chapter on the disciples of Confucius found in the Shiji. Although the title, “Chen Cheng Heng,” is the name of one of the most senior ministers in the state of Qi during the life of Confucius, he is not the focus of the text. Instead the aim of this text is to demonstrate the crucial involvement of one of Confucius’ most important disciples, Zigong, in the great political events of the day, in particular the conquest of Wu by Yue. Zigong was the style-name of Duanmu Ci (variously given as 端木赐 or 端沐赐), a disciple of Confucius some thirty years his junior, who originated from the state of Wei. Zigong is described in conversation with Confucius in many key early Confucian texts, such as the Lunyu, but they provide little detail about his contemporary importance. The story given in this chapter of the Yuejue shu, and subsequently repeated in the Shiji and Kongzi jiayu, would make him a crucial player in key events at the end of the Spring and Autumn period. It was said to be Zigong alone whose diplomacy caused the usurpation of the marquisate of Qi by the Tian family, the collapse of the kingdom of Wu, the triumph of Yue, and the dominance of Jin of the affairs of the Central States following the covenant at Huangchi.

The diplomatic triumph achieved by Zigong is described in detail in this chapter. According to this tale, he seems to have been able to sow discord wherever he went for the sake of his ultimate aim: preserving the state of Lu from attack. Small wonder then that this chapter is described in such glowing terms in the “Narratives of Virtue.”

By reading “Chen Heng”
You can understand skills as useful now as in antiquity.1

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1 Yuejue shu, 103 (“Dexu”).
This chapter is also mentioned in the “Concluding Remarks” chapter of the Yuejue shu. Here it is described as a text from a decadent and immoral historical period, when social and family order had become totally perverted:

When sons plot against their fathers, when subjects kill their rulers, this is something that Heaven and Earth will not bear. Evil is then indeed deep-dyed, and therefore [the book] finishes with the “Chen Huan” chapter.²

子謀父, 臣殺主, 天地所不容載。惡之甚深, 故終於陳恒也.

The “Chen Cheng Heng,” one of the core texts of the Yuejue shu, seems to be the product of just one hand. This chapter is also one of the oldest in the Yuejue shu, almost certainly dating to the Qin dynasty. The “Chen Cheng Heng” chapter is extremely closely related to the biography of Zigong found in the Shiji, and the Kongzi jiayu account of the same events. Given the close relationship between this chapter and the “Zhongni dizi liezhuan 仲尼弟子列傳” (Biography of the Disciples of Confucius) in the Shiji, it is likely that either this was one of Sima Qian’s source texts when he was compiling his great history, or that this is so closely related as to be virtually identical to the source text. Sima Qian does not explicitly name any of the texts that he used for writing the sections concerned with Wu and Yue in the Shiji, therefore it is not clear if what Sima Qian saw was an independent text, or perhaps even part of the proto-Yuejue shu which had apparently already been formed in the early Western Han dynasty.

The early date posited for this chapter can be borne out by study of the characters used. The personal name of the founder of the Han dynasty is not tabooed in this text. This is in contrast to the comparable sections in the Shiji, where the phrases such as fumu zhi bang 父母之邦 (the state in which my parents lived) and nanfa zhi bang 難伐之邦 (a state that is difficult to attack) found in the “Chen Cheng Heng” have been changed to fumu zhiguo 父母之國 and nanfa zhi guo 難伐之國.³ It is most unlikely that this text could have been forged during the Han dynasty by excerpting the story of Zigong’s travels from the Shiji and re-instituting

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² Yuejue shu, 106 [“Pianxu”].
³ See Yuejue shu, 51 [“Chen Cheng Heng”]; see also Shiji, 67:2197.