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Sketching out Portents Classification and Logic in the Monographs of Han Official Historiography

Grégoire Espeset

In ancient China, portentology was a “science” in its own right, a specialised field of knowledge developed by rational individuals who endeavoured to fathom the concealed mechanisms at work beneath the spectacles of history and the world at large. This paper focuses on the nomenclature of portents (observed phenomena interpreted as auspicious or inauspicious signs) displayed in the chapters of the Han era official historiography known as the “monographs” – or “treatises” – on celestial phenomena and the Five Agents, examining the pre- and early imperial sources of this typology and its underlying classificatory principles, and assessing how these matters have been dealt with by modern scholarship.

In China as elsewhere in the ancient world, the lore of portents or prodigies – prognostication based on unusual phenomena interpreted as auspicious or, more often, inauspicious signs – has played an important role from the earliest times, mediated by a wide array of techniques, specialists, traditions and representations.¹ This paper endeavours to shed some light on the Chinese official typology and nomenclature of portents during the Han 漢 era (206 BCE – 220 CE) of the First Empire.² Elaborating upon, and nuancing, previous work by B. J. Mansvelt Beck (*The Treatises of Later Han*, 1990), Aihe Wang (*Cosmology and Political Culture in Early China*, 2000) and David Pankenier (*Astrology and Cosmology in Early China*, 2013), it does not claim to change radically our general knowledge of the relevant primary sources. Its focus is on the portents classification displayed in the official historiography of the period under consideration and the underlying logic, if any, that informs this classification.

The source corpus

One of the best ways to approach the official view of portents in Han China is to investigate the corpus of monographs, in Chinese *shu* 書 (documents) or *chih* 志 (memoirs), included in the three historiographical sources of the era: (a) the *Records*

¹ Kalinowski (2003: 7–33, “Introduction générale”) offers an adequately recent state of the field and further bibliographical references. For the period under consideration here, see Bielenstein (1950, 1984), Eberhard (1957), Lippiello (2001), Kalinowski (2010).

² The designation “First Empire” refers to the era spanning the time from the late third century BCE to the early third century CE and encompassing the Ch’in 秦 (221–207 BCE) and Han Dynasties; on this historical era, see Lewis (2007). The Han controlled a variable ensemble of territories corresponding to today’s Central China and adjoining parts of North, East and South China, parts of the Korean peninsula and of today’s Vietnam coast, and a north-western corridor extending towards the Tarim basin.

of the *Historiographer* (*Shih chi* 史記), undertaken by Ssü-ma T'an 司馬談 (ca. 180–110 BCE) and completed by his son Ssü-ma Ch'ien 司馬遷 (145–87 BCE) before 90 BCE; (b) the *Book of the Han* (*Han shu* 漢書), mainly by Pan Ku 班固 (32–92); and (c) the *Book of the Later Han* (*Hou Han shu* 後漢書), mainly by Fan Yeh 范曄 (398–445). Mansvelt Beck has defined the monographs, sometimes called “treatises” in Western publications, as “dealing with more impermanent, impersonal features of the dynasty” when compared to the other main components of Chinese official historiography, which are the imperial annals (*chi* 紀) and the biographies (*chuan* 傳) of important clan members and noteworthy individuals (Mansvelt Beck 1990: 1f.). Of special relevance in this corpus are those monographs dedicated to the celestial phenomena and, in the latter two sources, to the Five Agents (*wu-hsing* 五行).³ Mansvelt Beck has called both monographs together “the Portent Treatises” and devoted a supplementary chapter of his book to their joint analysis.⁴ The next two sections sketch the main differences between these two monographs in the three sources under consideration.

(1) Celestial phenomena

(1.1) The prototype of all dynastic histories, *Records of the Historiographer*, comprises eight monographs (called *shu*, “documents”). The fifth one bears the title “Documents on the Celestial Offices” (*T'ien-kuan shu* 天官書) and reviews descriptive astronomy – the five sectorial Palaces (*kung* 宮), the Five Planets (*wu-hsing* 五星) and planetary theory; political astrology, including the correspondence system paralleling areas of the nightly sky and human geography known as the “allocated fields” (*fên-yeh* 分野) system; solar (*jih* 日) and lunar (*yüeh* 月) phenomena, including eclipses (*shih* 食); meteorological phenomena; and a practice called “watching for the harvest” (*hou sui* 候歲).⁵ The second part of the monograph unfolds a chronology of the observation and interpretation of celestial phenomena up to the first century BCE.⁶

(1.2) The *Book of the Han* was incomplete at the time of Pan Ku's death in 92, particularly with regard to some of the monographs (called *chih*, “memoirs”). Sixth in a series of ten monographs, the “Memoirs on the Celestial Signs” (*T'ien-wên chih* 天文志) were completed in 111 by Ma Hsü 馬續 (before 79 – after 141) and other scholars under the directorship of Pan Ku's sister, Pan Chao 班昭 (49–116)

³ For a summing-up of received knowledge on the appearance, developments and applications of theories involving the Five Agents, see Loewe (2004: 457–521). Nylan (2010) champions a more critical approach.

⁴ See Mansvelt Beck (1990: 111–130, “Chapter Six: The Heavens”; 131–155, “Chapter Seven: The Five Phases”; and 156–174, “Chapter Eight: The Portent Treatises”).

⁵ For the “allocated fields” theory, see Pankenier (2005).

⁶ See Pankenier (2013: 444–511) for a study and full translation of this monograph.

(Hulsewé 1961: 39). Ma Hsü's monograph appears to be an elaboration and re-organisation of the "Documents on the Celestial Offices" from the *Records of the Historiographer*, concluded by a chronology of recorded celestial observations from the Spring and Autumn (Ch'un-ch'iu 春秋) period (771–481/453 BCE) up to 2 or 1 BCE.⁷

(1.3) The eight monographs (also called *chih*) in the *Book of the Later Han* were compiled by Ssü-ma Piao 司馬彪 (ca. 240 – ca. 306), who used the works of predecessors as source materials.⁸ Fourth in the series, the "Memoirs on the Celestial Signs" (also titled *T'ien-wên chih*) are easily distinguished from both earlier analogous monographs. A concise introduction leads to a chronology of recorded observations extending from 22 CE – near the end of Wang Mang's 王莽 (45 BCE – 23 CE) Hsin 新 Dynasty (9–23) – to 218 (shortly before the formal end of the Han Dynasty). This chronology includes comets ("shooting stars", *pei hsing* 孛星) – while in the *Book of the Han*, comets appeared in the "Five Agents" monograph (see below) – and a short appended list of meteorites ("precipitating stones", *yün shih* 隕石) whose awkward location might betray the intervention of a later hand.⁹

The appended Table 1 outlines the similarities and discrepancies observable between the structures of all three monographs. This table confirms that the *Records of the Historiographer* and the *Book of the Han* by and large follow the same model, to which the latter adds an introduction and a chronology. In both sources the star catalogue describes the Central Palace (*chung-kung* 中宮) and the palaces of the four quadrants, ending with the Northern Palace (*pei-kung* 北宮). Both sources then review the Five Planets, Jupiter ("Year Star", *sui-hsing* 歲星), Mars ("Dazzling Delusion", *ying-huo* 熒惑), Saturn ("Quelling Star", *chên-hsing* 填[or 鎮]星), Venus ("Great White", *t'ai-pai* 太白) and Mercury ("Indicator Star", *ch'ên-hsing* 辰星), albeit not in the same order, as we shall see. In detail, data pertaining to the sun, the moon and auspicious or inauspicious stars are organised differently in each source. Finally, the *Book of the Later Han* monograph eschews theoretical disquisition and directly resumes the chronology, starting from the end of Wang Mang's reign.

⁷ Contrary to Mansvelt Beck's statement (1990: 111f.), the *Han shu* mentions solar eclipses (26.1291, 26.1296f.) and lists "allocated fields" correspondences (26.1288).

⁸ On Ssü-ma Piao, see Mansvelt Beck (1990: 5–35), Knechtges/Chang (2014: 958f.). Ssü-ma Piao wrote a *Supplement to the Book of the Han* (*Hsü Han shu* 續漢書). Today lost, this text was one of the sources used by Fan Yeh to compile the received *Book of the Later Han*, completed in 445. Ssü-ma Piao based his two portent monographs on materials ascribed to Ts'ai Yung 蔡邕 (132–192), Ying Shao 應劭 (d. ca. 200), Tung Pa 董巴 (d. after 220) and Ch'iao Chou 譙周 (199–270). See de Crespigny (2007: 29–32, 148, 704, 987); Huang (2011). Liu Chao 劉昭 (fl. 502–520) commented on Ssü-ma Piao's monographs and appended them to Fan Yeh's work.

⁹ As suggested by Mansvelt Beck (1990: 114f.).

(2) Five Agents phenomena

(2.1) The *Records of the Historiographer* have no monograph devoted to the Five Agents. The invention of Five Agents monographs as a genre is credited to the main author of the *Book of the Han*, Pan Ku.

(2.2) The “Memoirs on the Five Agents” (*Wu-hsing chih* 五行志), seventh monograph in the *Book of the Han*, are the first such monograph in China’s official historiography. Data therein are organised according to eleven classes. The first five classes cover the effects of each Agent “losing its nature” (*shih ch’i hsing* 失其性), as follows: (1) Wood (*mu* 木), (2) Fire (*huo* 火), (3) Soil (*t’u* 土), (4) Metal (*chin* 金) and (5) Water (*shui* 水). The next five classes do the same for “shamefulness” (*hsiu* 羞) related to Five Matters (*wu-shih* 五事, also translated “five duties”), in the following order: (6) Demeanour (*mao* 貌), (7) Speech (*yen* 言), (8) Sight (*shih* 視), (9) Hearing (*t’ing* 聽) and (10) Thought (*ssü* 思). The last class, (11) Augustness (*huang* 皇) covers the dysfunction of all Five Matters.¹⁰ Each of these eleven classes opens with a short discussion, then unfolds historical records of portents more or less arranged following a varying number of groupings that I call “sub-classes” in this paper (though they are untitled as such in Pan Ku’s text). The penultimate subclass includes solar eclipses, which the Ssü-mas had dealt with in their “Documents on the Celestial Offices”.

(2.3) Ssü-ma Piao’s “Memoirs on the Five Agents” in the *Book of the Later Han* open as a chronological continuation of their namesake in the *Book of the Han*. As Mansvelt Beck has shown, the basic structure of this monograph is a simplified rendition of Pan Ku’s monograph and comprises only six classes. The first five classes bring together Pan Ku’s two five-fold series of denatured Five Agents and “shameful” Five Matters, as follows: (1) Wood/Demeanour, (2) Metal/Speech, (3) Fire/Sight, (4) Water/Hearing and (5) Soil/Thought. As in Pan Ku’s work, a sixth and last class, (6) Augustness, tops the nomenclature. Unlike the four monographs mentioned above, however, each of the corresponding chapters of Ssü-ma Piao’s “Memoirs” has a subheading listing the subclasses covers therein.¹¹ Whether these subheadings originated in early editions of the monograph or result from a later editorial intervention is unclear.

The appended Table 2 shows the frequent overlapping of subclasses from this second monograph in our latter two sources. Compared with Pan Ku’s monograph, Ssü-ma Piao’s most conspicuous interventions are (a) the location of rainbows (*hung* 虹 and *ni* 蜺) and of some solar and lunar phenomena in this monograph rather than in the preceding one; (b) the renaming of most of Pan Ku’s portent subclasses, as we shall see in some detail further on; and (c) the coining of a few subclasses,

¹⁰ See Mansvelt Beck (1990: 131–141), Wang (2000: 130–137).

¹¹ See Mansvelt Beck (1990: 141f.). Three subclasses, mentioned in the text but blank for lack of recorded data, are omitted in these subheadings; my appended Table 2 includes them in square brackets. On Ssü-ma Piao’s reworking, see also Huang (2011).

for example “water changing colour” (*shui pien sê* 水變色), “mountain emitting sound” (*shan ming* 山鳴) and “epidemic” (*i* 疫).

The “determinative” of phenomenal observation

In this paper I call “determinative” the rationale justifying that a given observed phenomenon should be considered a portent and interpreted as such while other phenomena are not taken into consideration. To the modern mind, it appears that the determinative at work in our corpus is mostly what may be summed up in the term “irregularity”, however banal it will seem to readers familiar with today’s prevalent explanation of sign interpretation in the ancient world.¹² In catalogue form: the apparent unusual location, supernumerary instance, unpredictable motion or alteration of celestial objects; unseasonable or excessive weather conditions; various “natural catastrophes” (conflagration, flood, seismic activity, epidemic, vermin); altered or abnormal human or animal corporeal features; odd human or animal behaviour; spontaneous motion or alteration of inanimate objects; and unexplained sensory perceptions such as sounds and lights.

Let us now approach the determinative at work from the Han perspective of our primary sources. As far as stellar observation is concerned, both “Memoirs on the Five Agents” in the *Book of the Han* and the *Book of the Later Han* – remarkably not their “Memoirs on Celestial Signs”, however – offer the same formula: “Solar and lunar disorderly motion, astral wayward motion” (*jih yüeh luan hsing, hsing-chên ni hsing* 日月亂行, 星辰逆行).¹³ Both strongly loaded terms, *luan* 亂 and *ni* 逆 convey the idea of disruption in the regular or “natural” order of things, including the sphere of human activities.¹⁴

Concerning the monographs on the “Five Agents”, one notes that the typology of subclasses resorts to a lexicon dominated by the excessive magnitude (*ta* 大) or duration (*hêng* 恆, *ch’ang* 常) of weather conditions; various sorts of “deviance” (*yao* 妖), “anomaly” (*nieh* 孽) and “disaster” (*huo* 禍); human “malady” (*k’o* 痼) (which, remarkably, includes mutinous violence), “transformation” (*hua* 化) and “resurrection” (*fu-shêng* 復生); heterogeneous subclasses of colour-based signs following the expected quinary chromatic correspondences (Wood/green, Fire/red,

¹² The French historian Raymond Bloch (1914–1997) defined “prodigy” in Greco-Roman times as “a truly exceptional phenomenon that disrupts the normal course of things,” adding that only “importance and gravity” distinguish “prodigies” from “portent”: In his view, both equally denote “signs that, if understood or interpreted correctly, can reveal personal destinies and the will of the gods” (2005 [1987]: 7337). For more recent approaches and further references, see the papers collected in Annus (2010).

¹³ *Han shu*, 27CA.1458f.; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 17.3341.

¹⁴ *Luan* 亂 is commonly used for civil and military troubles; *ni* 逆, for disobedience or failure to conform to the “natural” propensity of things. Schuessler (2007) gives “to rebel” and “disorder” for *luan* (369); for *ni*, “go against” and “rebellious”, among other meanings (399).

Soil/yellow and so forth), called “ill omens” (*shêng* 眚) and “lucky omens” (*hsiang* 祥), although the corresponding lists of records seem to include only the former; and, finally, the Five Agents “obstructing” (*li* 沴) each other in alternation. Consequently, the sources themselves seem to confirm that “irregularity” was the main determinative at work in Han minds. But was there any further logic beneath this Five Agents lexicon?

The sources of Han Dynasty “Five Agents” monographs

It is well known that Pan Ku’s typology in his “Memoirs on the Five Agents” is not his invention but supposedly derived from earlier material. However, Pan Ku seems somewhat reluctant to name all his sources explicitly, and he may have edited them to fit the needs of his systematic construction. The introductory sections opening the monograph quote from the *Changes* (*I* 易) – more specifically from the “Attached Statements” (*Hsi-tz’ü* 繫辭) commentary thereon –, then from an untitled authoritative work or “Classic” (*ching* 經) that turns out to be the celebrated “Vast Plan” (*Hung-fan* 洪範) chapter from the *Revered Documents* (*Shang-shu* 尚書).¹⁵ Next, from (1) Wood to (5) Water, each Agent class is introduced by two consecutive quotations from untitled sources, first an exegetical tradition (*chuan* 傳) and then an “explanation” (*shuo* 說). (6) Demeanour, the first of the last six classes, is introduced by a sequence of three quotations – from the “Classic” (the “Vast Plan” again), the unspecified exegetical tradition, and its “explanation” again. Each of the last five classes, from (7) Speech to (11) Augustness, is introduced only by a quotation from the unspecified exegetical tradition.¹⁶ In his reworked version of Pan Ku’s introductory sections, Ssü-ma Piao names the exegetical tradition a “Five Agents Exegesis” (*Wu-hsing chuan* 五行傳).¹⁷

Traditionally, both Pan Ku’s unspecified exegetical tradition and Ssü-ma Piao’s “Five Agents Exegesis” have been assumed to refer to the “Five Agents Exegesis of the Vast Plan” (*Hung-fan wu-hsing chuan* 洪範五行傳). This commentary is today part of the *Major Exegesis of the Revered Documents* (*Shang-shu ta chuan*

¹⁵ One of the “Ten Wings” (*Shih-i* 十翼) appended to the *Changes*, the received “Attached Statements” may date to the mid-third or early second century BCE at the earliest; see the discussion in Peterson (1982: 75–77). The “Vast Plan” dates perhaps to the fourth century BCE; see Nylan (2001: 139–142) for this date and a paraphrase of the text.

¹⁶ See *Han shu*, 27A.1318f. (Wood, quoting “Classic”, “Exegesis” and “explanation”); 1320 (Fire: “Exegesis” and “explanation”); 1338 (Soil: “Exegesis” and “explanation”); 1339f. (Metal: “Exegesis” and “explanation”); 1342 (Water: “Exegesis” and “explanation”); 27BA.1351–1353 (Demeanour: “Classic”, “Exegesis” and “explanation”); 1376f. (Speech: “explanation”); 27BB.1405 (Sight: “explanation”); 1421 (Hearing: “explanation”); 27CA.1441 (Thought: “explanation”); 1458 (Augustness: “explanation”).

¹⁷ See *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 13.3265 (Wood/Demeanour); 3275f. (Metal/Speech); 14.3291 (Fire/Sight); 15.3305 (Water/Hearing); 16.3327 (Soil/Thought); 17.3341 (Augustness).

尚書大傳), itself originally compiled towards the mid-second century BCE, but whose extant versions are all later reconstitutions based on collected fragments.¹⁸ This influential commentary on the *Revered Documents* has long been ascribed to a certain Fu Shêng 伏生 (perhaps “Scholar Fu”) or 勝 (mid-3rd c. – after 180 BCE), from Chi-nan 濟南 in modern Shan-tung 山東 province, a Ch’in Dynasty Academician (*po-shih* 博士) who had reached the age of ninety at the beginning of Emperor Wên’s (文帝) reign (180–157 BCE), or to a group of Fu’s anonymous students. A *Five Agents Exegesis of the Vast Plan*, said to have been conferred by the same Fu to a Chang Shêng 張生 (perhaps “Scholar Chang”), also from Chi-nan, was later transmitted by Hsia-hou Shih-ch’ang 夏侯始昌 (fl. 104 BCE) to his nephew Hsia-hou Shêng 夏侯勝 (fl. 74–before 37 BCE), two scholars versed in the Five Classics (*wu-ching* 五經), Yin/Yang 陰陽 and the Five Agents, whom Pan Ku mentions.¹⁹ Indeed, Pan Ku’s “chuan” quotation and a shorter quotation from a *Five Agents Exegesis of the Vast Plan* ascribed to Hsia-hou Shêng show matching, though not strictly identical, contents, suggesting at least a common source.²⁰

In addition to this source, Pan Ku credits other theories to a number of scholars, including Tung Chung-shu 董仲舒 (198/179–118/104 BCE), Ching Fang 景房 (77–37 BCE), Yang Hsiung 楊雄 (53 BCE – 18 CE), Liu Hsiang 劉向 (79–8 BCE) and his youngest son Liu Hsin 劉歆 (46 BCE – 23 CE).²¹ Pan Ku’s “explanation” passages, however, do not refer to a particular scholar or source. All these distinct and often conflicting voices reflect the political debates that took place during the Former Han (Ch’ien Han 前漢) Dynasty (206 BCE – 8 CE) (Wang 2000: 134f.).

Pan Ku’s “Five Agents” typology and its classificatory logic

Beginning with his first five classes – the Five Agents – Pan Ku explains how each Agent “loses its nature” (*shih ch’i hsing*) due to human ill conduct. “Wood not being crooked [or] straight” (*mu pu ch’ü chih* 木不曲直) causes “continuous rain” (*ch’ang yü* 常雨); “Fire not blazing up” (*huo pu yen shang* 火不炎上) causes “conflagration” (*tsai* 災) and iron objects to fly spontaneously (*t’ieh fei* 鐵飛);

¹⁸ Shaughnessy (1993: 385f.). According to Yang Chieh (2014), the work’s earliest title was simply *Exegesis of the Revered Documents* (*Shang-shu chuan* 尚書傳).

¹⁹ Biographies in *Han shu*, 75.3154f. See Loewe (2000: 595f.).

²⁰ Cf. *Han shu*, 27CA.1458 (Pan Ku’s quotation: 傳曰：皇之不極……厥罰恆陰……時則有下人伐上之病); 27CA.1459 (Hsia-hou Shêng’s quotation: 洪範五行傳曰：皇之不極，厥罰常陰，時則有下人伐上); and 75.3155 (variant of Hsia-hou Shêng’s quotation: 洪範傳曰：皇之不極，厥罰常陰，時則下人有伐上者). See below for a full translation of the corresponding passage.

²¹ On these figures, see Queen (1996), Loewe (2000: 107, 372–375, 383–386, 637–639), Nielsen (2003: 129–132), Loewe (2011), Huang (2011), Hsü (2014). Liu Hsiang was the author of a *Discourse on the Five Agents Exegesis of the Vast Plan* (*Hung-fan wu-hsing chuan lun* 洪範五行傳論), today lost, which belonged to a separate exegetical tradition.

when Soil “loses its nature”, “sowing and reaping are not accomplished” (*chia sé pu ch'êng* 稼穡不成), causing “waterlessness” (*wang shui* 亡水); “Metal not following modification” (*chin pu ts'ung ko* 金不從革) causes “stone emitting sound” (*shih ming* 石鳴); and “Water not soaking down” (*shui pu jun hsia* 水不潤下) causes “flooding” (*ta shui* 大水).²² Pan Ku’s first six subclasses are inferred from this passage (see the appended Table 2).

Pan Ku’s sixth to eleventh classes – the Five Matters and Augustness – receive more attention and provide a greater number of subclasses. In fact, six syntactically parallel quotations from the untitled exegetical tradition serve together to define most of Pan Ku’s “Five Agents” subclasses. A first quotation introduces the sixth class of the monograph, (6) Demeanour, and the relevant subclasses:

傳曰：貌之不恭，是謂不肅；厥咎狂；厥罰恆雨；厥極惡。時則有服妖；時則有龜孽；時則有雞禍；時則有下體生上之痾；時則有青眚青祥。唯金沴木。

“The *Exegesis* says: ‘Demeanour not being respectful, this is called irreverence; its liability is derangement; its punishment is persistent rain; its ultimate is evil. Therefore, at times, there are clothing deviances; therefore, at times, there are testudinate anomalies; therefore, at times, there are gallinaceous disasters; therefore, at times, there are maladies of lower body [parts] growing on the upper [part of the body]; therefore, at times, there are green ill omens and green lucky omens. It is only Metal obstructing Wood’” (*Han shu*, 27B.1352).²³

The second quotation, concerning class (7) Speech, runs as follows:

傳曰：言之不從，是謂不艾；厥咎僭；厥罰恆陽；厥極憂。時則有詩妖；時則有介蟲之孽；時則有犬禍；時則有口舌之痾；時則有白眚白祥。唯木沴金。

“The *Exegesis* says: ‘Speech not being consequent, this is called inelegance; its liability is overstepping; its punishment is persistent sunshine; its ultimate is anxiety. Therefore, at times, there are poetic deviances; therefore, at times, there are anomalies of legged animals with carapace; therefore, at times, there are canine disasters; therefore, at times, there are maladies of the mouth and tongue; therefore, at times, there are white ill omens and white lucky omens. It is only Wood obstructing Metal’” (*Han shu*, 27BA.1376).

The third quotation concerns class (8) Sight:

傳曰：視之不明，是謂不愆；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；時則有目痾；時則有赤眚赤祥。唯水沴火。

“The *Exegesis* says: ‘Sight not being clear, this is called not discerning; its liability is slackness; its punishment is persistent warmth; its ultimate is rashness. Therefore, at times, there are vegetable deviances; therefore, at times, there are anomalies

²² See Mansvelt Beck (1990: 131–136).

²³ See Mansvelt Beck (1990: 137), Wang (2000: 162).

of bare legged animals;²⁴ therefore, at times, there are ovine disasters; therefore, at times, there are maladies of the eye; therefore, at times, there are red ill omens and red lucky omens. It is only Water obstructing Fire” (*Han shu*, 27BB.1405).

The fourth quotation deals with class (9) Hearing:

傳曰：聽之不聰，是謂不謀；厥咎急；厥罰恆寒；厥極貧。時則有鼓妖；時則有魚孽；時則有豕禍；時則有耳癰；時則有黑眚黑祥。唯火沴水。

“The *Exegesis* says: ‘Hearing not being perceptive, this is called heedlessness; its liability is impulsiveness; its punishment is persistent cold; its ultimate is privation. Therefore, at times, there are percussive deviances; therefore, at times, there are piscine anomalies; therefore, at times, there are porcine disasters; therefore, at times, there are maladies of the ear; therefore, at times, there are black ill omens and black lucky omens. It is only Fire obstructing Water” (*Han shu*, 27BB.1421).

The penultimate fifth quotation is about class (10) Thought:

傳曰：思心之不睿，是謂不聖；厥咎霧；厥罰恆風；厥極凶短折。時則有脂夜之妖；時則有華孽；時則有牛禍；時則有心腹之癰；時則有黃眚黃祥。時則有金木水火沴土。

“The *Exegesis* says: ‘Thinking not being astute, this is called injudiciousness; its liability is haziness; its punishment is persistent wind; its ultimate is inauspicious early death. Therefore, at times, there are sebaceous [and?] nocturnal deviances; therefore, at times, there are efflorescence anomalies; therefore, at times, there are bovine disasters; therefore, at times, there are maladies of the heart and abdomen; therefore, at times, there are yellow ill omens and yellow lucky omens. Therefore, at times, there are Metal, Wood, Water and Fire obstructing Soil” (*Han shu*, 27CA.1441).²⁵

Finally, from the last quotation can be inferred the portent subclasses coming under the last class, (11) Augustness:

傳曰：皇之不極，是謂不建；厥咎眊；厥罰恆陰；厥極弱。時則有射妖；時則有龍蛇之孽；時則有馬禍；時則有下人伐上之癰；時則有日月亂行，星辰逆行。

“The *Exegesis* says: ‘Augustness not being the ultimate, this is called not being founded; its liability is muddleheadedness; its punishment is persistent overcast; its ultimate is feebleness. Therefore, at times, there are emissive deviances; therefore, at times, there are draconic and ophidian anomalies; therefore, at times, there are equine

²⁴ As Yen Shih-ku 顏師古 (581–645) comments, *lo* 羸 means “without scales, shell, pelage or feathers” (無鱗甲毛羽; *Han shu*, 27BA.1405, n. 3). Pan Ku uses the alternative spelling 裸.

²⁵ As Pan Ku notes (*Han shu*, 27CA.1442), the quotation’s final sentence (“therefore, at times, there are Metal, Wood, Water and Fire obstructing Soil”) clarifies the meaning of *wei* 唯 in the preceding four passages (“it is ‘only’ such-and-such an Agent obstructing another Agent”). For the interpretation problem of *chih-yeh chih yao* 脂夜之妖, see text and n. 37 below.

disasters; therefore, at times, there are maladies of inferior people attacking superior; therefore, at times, there are solar and lunar disorderly motion, astral wayward motion” (*Han shu*, 27CA.1458).

His eleven classes and most of his subclasses being thus introduced, Pan Ku is ready to unfold lists of historical portent records in each subclass, in chronological order. But is there any logic underlying this Five Matters typology? Immediately following the first of the six *Exegesis* quotations translated above – class (6) De-meanour – Pan Ku comments on this picturesque lexicon by referring to the unspecified “explanation” again:

說曰：凡，草物之類謂之妖；妖猶天胎，言尚微。蟲豸之類謂之孽；孽則牙孽矣。及六畜謂之禍，言其著也。及人謂之痾；痾，病貌，言浸深也。甚則異物生，謂之眚；自外來謂之祥；祥猶禎也。氣相傷謂之沴；沴猶臨莅，不和意也。每一事云時則以絕之，言非必俱至；或有，或亡；或在前，或在後也。

“Explanation: ‘In general, one speaks of “deviance” for the category of plants; deviance is like being just born or unborn,²⁶ it means still imperceptible. One speaks of “anomaly” for the category of legged and legless [wild] animals;²⁷ anomaly, hence incipient. Coming to the six domestic animals, one speaks of “disaster”, which means its manifestation. Coming to humans, one speaks of “malady”; malady, a sick countenance, means worsening. Intensifying, hence the birth of abnormal things, which are called “ill omens” [or, for those] of external origin, “lucky omens”; a lucky omen is like fortune.²⁸ One speaks of “obstructing” when the pneumata [of the Five Agents] injure each other; obstructing is like being fully effective,²⁹ it has disharmonious implications. For each single matter, saying “therefore, at times” serves to qualify it; it means that [signs] do not necessarily all befall; some occur, some do

²⁶ *Yao* 妖 and 夭 (here pronounced *ao* and used for very young animals or plants) are brought together due to the graphic component they share, a pun in line with the graphic and semantic analysis that prevailed when Hsü Shên 許慎 (1 c. CE – after 120) authored his *Explanation of Graphs and Analysis of Characters* (*Shuo-wên chieh-tzŭ* 說文解字), ca. 100 CE (see Bottéro 2002). Hsü Shên’s own definition of *nieh* (written 孽) was visibly influenced by the same material as that used by Pan Ku, if not directly by Pan Ku’s monograph itself: “One speaks of ‘deviance’ for strangeness in garments, in songs and rhyme, and in plants; of ‘anomaly’ for strangeness in wild beasts and legged animals [such as] locust” (衣服歌謠艸木之怪謂之妖；禽獸蟲蝗之怪謂之孽; *Shuo-wên chieh-tzŭ*, 283a). *Ch’in-shou* 禽獸 includes all non-domestic birds and quadrupeds, hence my “wild beasts”. Dictionaries usually consider Hsü Shên’s spelling (禎 and 孽) and Pan Ku’s (妖 and 孽) to be equivalent.

²⁷ *Ch’ung chih* 蟲豸. For the definition given for *ch’ung* 蟲 in the *Shuo-wên chieh-tzŭ*, see Fèvre (1993: 61).

²⁸ *Shêng* 生 (birth) and *shêng* 眚 (ill omen) form another pun, graphic and phonetic, as both probably belonged to the same rhyme group *kêng* 耕 in Han times (Lo/Chou 1958: 191).

²⁹ *Lin-li* 臨莅 is an allusion to a newly enthroned sovereign’s accession to power.

not; some take place before [the event they announce], some after [it]” (*Han shu*, 27BA.1353).³⁰

This quotation proves important in many respects. First, it sheds some light on diachronic causality in the semiotics of Han portents. Though we would logically expect signs to necessarily precede what they announce, we are told explicitly that, in some cases, portents will be observed after the events they heralded. Indeed, Wolfram Eberhard, who analysed the “time relation between portents and events” in Han historiography, noted that some phenomena interpreted as portents manifested themselves up to twenty years *after* the events they announced actually occurred (Eberhard 1957: 53f.). Second, this quotation shows that the peculiar lexicon of irregularity noted above reflects a fixed typology, at least in theory (see below): the plant kingdom is covered by “deviance” (*yao*) and – in a single case – by “anomaly” (*nieh*);³¹ “anomaly” (*nieh*) and “disaster” (*huo*) together concern the animal kingdom; “malady” (*k’o*), the human realm; “abnormal things” (*i-wu* 異物) otherwise unclassifiable because not appearing under any other rubric are entered as “ill omens” (*shêng*) or “lucky omens” (*hsiang*); and “obstruction” (*li*) is reserved for the metaphysical and ontological realm of the “pneumata” (*ch’i* 氣) of the Five Agents.³² And third, this quotation shows not only that this lexicon of signs expresses a difference in kind, but also a difference in degree – in other words, a gradation of portent severity.³³ This portent typology and its severity scale may be sketched as follows:

³⁰ Cf. Wang (2000: 165), where the last 43 words out of 108 (40% of the passage) are omitted.

³¹ On the subclass “efflorescence anomaly” (*hua nieh* 華孽), supposed to cover the flowering of large plants (*mu* 木) in autumn and winter, see *Han shu*, 27CA.1441f.

³² Commonly used to denote visible “vapour” in the context of uranic observation, *ch’i* 氣 in cosmology designates the subtle constituent of all things, whose agency and transformations inform life activity. For a discussion of how difficult it is to find an adequate English rendering for the term, see Libbrecht (1990).

³³ Rather than “a measure of degrees of the emperor’s transgression and punishment”, as Wang (2000: 165) over-interprets the passage. First, the lexicon of severity – from “imperceptible” to “fully effective” – clearly applies to the manifestations or signs and, beyond, to the catastrophes they presage; second, the historical records listed in the monograph shows that, if the trespasser is often the ruler, he/she may also be a member of the upper politico-social sphere in the widest sense: the imperial or any powerful clan, courtiers, favourites, high dignitaries of the regime, civil and military officers, and like authority holders or power contestants.

Degree	Portent type	Portent severity	Sphere of manifestation
1st	Deviance (<i>yao</i> 妖)	Imperceptible (<i>wei</i> 微)	Plants (<i>ts'ao-wu</i> 草物)
2nd	Anomaly (<i>nieh</i> 孽)	Incipient (<i>ya-nieh</i> 牙孽)	Legged and legless [wild] animals (<i>ch'ung-chih</i> 蟲豸)
3rd	Disaster (<i>huo</i> 禍)	Manifest (<i>chu</i> 著)	Six domestic animals (<i>liu-ch'u</i> 六畜)
4th	Malady (<i>k'o</i> 痼)	Worsening (<i>chin-shên</i> 浸深)	Humans (<i>jên</i> 人)
5th	Ill omen (<i>shêng</i> 眚) and lucky omen (<i>hsiang</i> 祥)	Intensifying (<i>shên</i> 甚)	Abnormal things (<i>i-wu</i> 異物)
6th	Obstruction (<i>li</i> 沴)	Fully effective (<i>lin-li</i> 臨莅)	Pneumata (<i>ch'i</i> 氣) [of the Five Agents]

Actually, upon closer scrutiny, Pan Ku's subclasses appear to conform only loosely to this typology, and not only because he deliberately took some liberty with his prestigious sources. For one thing, the "explanation" passage opens with *fan* 凡, a clear indication that what follows is to be taken as a general rule. As the cluster of passages translated above show, Pan Ku's source also lists "clothing", "poetic", "percussive" and "emissive" types of "deviance" (1st degree), all related to human activity or material culture and not the plant kingdom. But Pan Ku is fully aware of this discrepancy. As he explains, the presence of plants amongst the "deviance" type should be seen as the result of a logical, necessary adjustment:

凡妖，貌則以服；言則以詩；聽則以聲；視則以色者，五色物之大分也，在於眚祥，故聖人以爲草妖，失秉之明者也。

"In general, 'deviance' in demeanour [is made apparent] by clothing; in speech, by poetry; and in hearing, by sound. In sight, [it is made apparent] by colour, but since things divided [according to] the five colours come under 'ill and lucky omens', the Sage used 'vegetable deviance' for the loss of clarity in authority" (*Han shu*, 27BC.1405f.).

In lieu of "efflorescence anomaly" (2nd degree), Pan Ku prefers to follow Liu Hsin and uses the subclass "anomaly of bare legged animal" (*lo-ch'ung chih nieh* 裸蟲之孽), in line with the dominant animal typology of *nieh*.³⁴ That subclass, however, originally belonged to class (8) Sight, where, in its place, Pan Ku uses "anomaly of feathered legged animal" (*yü-ch'ung chih nieh* 羽蟲之孽), yet another subclass borrowed from Liu Hsin.³⁵ In class (9) Hearing, immediately after the

³⁴ *Han shu*, 27CA.1445–1447. For this and the following examples, see Huang (2013: 166).

³⁵ *Han shu*, 27BB.1414–1419. The subclass mainly deals with cases involving birds.

subclass “piscine anomaly” (*yü nieh* 魚孽), he adds “anomaly of legged animal with carapace” (*chieh-ch’ung chih nieh* 介蟲之孽), arguing – again following Liu Hsin – that both types should be treated together while acknowledging that the latter subclass comes under class (7) Speech, according to Liu Hsiang.³⁶

Of the six types of human “malady” (4th degree), Pan Ku in fact uses only those of “the heart and abdomen” in class (10) Thought and of “inferior people attacking superior” in the last class, (11) Augustness.

As regards the data entered by Pan Ku into each subclass, their relationship to what the said subclass is about, if not to the overall organisation of the system, is at times unclear, in particular the colour-based, catch-all “ill and lucky omens” subclasses, as Mansvelt Beck noted. Even the meaning of some types remains uncertain, such as *chih-yeh chih yao* 脂夜之妖, possible interpretations being “sebaceous and nocturnal deviance” or “deviance of sebaceous night”.³⁷

Interestingly, some terms from this portent typology are also used in another work whose compilation has been ascribed traditionally to no other than Pan Ku, the *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger [Pavilion]* (*Pai-hu t’ung-i* 白虎通義 or simply *Pai-hu t’ung*), derived from a gathering of scholars in 79 CE.³⁸ In the *Comprehensive Discussions*, the disquisition on portents contains the following two items, strongly reminiscent of Pan Ku’s “Memoirs on the Five Agents” in the *Book of the Han*:

妖者，何謂也？衣服乍大乍小，言語非常。……孽者，何謂也？曰：介蟲生爲非常。

“‘What does “deviance” mean?’ ‘Garments now large now small, extraordinary utterances.’ [...] ‘What does “anomaly” mean?’ Answer: ‘The proliferation of legged animals with carapace.’”³⁹

Both items are followed by truncated citations from Fu’s *Major Exegesis of the Revered Documents*, which match Pan Ku’s *Exegesis* quotations in his monograph on the “Five Agents”; but, except for the three portents mentioned here – garment

³⁶ *Han shu*, 27BB.1431. This is consistent with the second *Exegesis* quotation translated above.

³⁷ *Han shu*, 27CA.1441. See Mansvelt Beck (1990: 143f., n. 7) for a summing-up of some of the explanations proposed by commentators. In addition to adipose secretion of human or animal origin, *chih* 脂 may refer to various types of ointment or, as a simpler variant of *yen-chih* 胭脂 (cochineal), to facial cosmetics (rouge).

³⁸ The received *Pai-hu t’ung*, however, has been dated to the first half of the third century at the earliest (see Loewe 1993).

³⁹ See *Textual Criticism of the Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Pavilion* (*Pai-hu t’ung shu-chêng* 白虎通疏證), 6.270, compiled by Ch’ên Li 陳立 (1809–1869). Cf. Tjan (1952: 490): “What does *yao* ‘magic’ mean? [We speak of magic] when clothes become now too large, now too small, and when unusual adages appear in speech.” “What does *yeh* ‘freak’ mean? It means that small insects grow up to unusual size.” No other portent also appearing in the *Book of the Han* is similarly examined in the *Comprehensive Discussions*.

(class Demeanour) and utterance (class Speech) “deviances”, “anomaly” of legged animals with carapace (class Hearing) – all other subclasses are ignored. Unless this omission reflects a deliberate choice, which one cannot prove, this suggests that Pan Ku may have become aware of the existence of this portent typology while, as a compiler, he was handling the proceedings of the White Tiger Pavilion convention and becoming familiar with the classical sources that the participants discussed. It is possible that, at this point, he still had not grasped the severity scale implied in that typology. Actually, we can only hypothesise that he ever grasped it, even as he compiled his “Five Agents” monograph, but in my view, the very fact that he quoted the revealing “explanation” passage suggests he did.

Ssŭ-ma Piao’s revision of Pan Ku’s “Five Agents” classification

Since both quinary series – the Agents and Matters – are basically rooted in Five Agents theories, Pan Ku’s first ten classes displayed redundant subclasses, in particular two types of irregular precipitation called “continuous rain” (*ch’ang yŭ*) in class (1) Wood and “persistent rain” (*hêng yŭ* 恆雨) in class (6) Demeanour. Pan Ku even listed a case of “downpour” (*ta yŭ* 大雨) in class (5) Water, among ten cases of “flooding” (*ta shui* 大水, which I use as a de facto name for the subclass in my Table 2).⁴⁰ This redundancy may have been among the reasons that prompted Ssŭ-ma Piao to simplify Pan Ku’s complex architecture into a six-fold typology. In doing so, however, he came to disregard the “explanation” quotation that holds the key to the whole nomenclature – the implied severity scale: of the 106 words of the quotation in Pan Ku’s monograph, Ssŭ-ma Piao only transcribed the definition of *li* 沴 (“The mutual injuring of pneumata is called ‘obstruction’”, *ch’i chih hsiang-shang wei chih li* 氣之相傷謂之沴; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 13.3265). Consequently, he produced a simpler yet one-dimensional inventory, in part denatured, which hardly makes sense if one has not beforehand fully grasped the classification and its underlying logic in Pan Ku’s monograph.⁴¹ The cluster of examples below will demonstrate how Ssŭ-ma Piao’s reworking of Pan Ku’s subclasses chiefly consisted in narrowing them down to what was, at least in the historical records at his disposal, their unique or majority component, and renaming them accordingly.⁴²

- Class (6) Demeanour = Ssŭ-ma Piao’s (1) Wood/Demeanour:
 - Pan Ku’s “Metal obstructing Wood” (*chin li mu* 金沴木) had four occurrences of constructions “deteriorating spontaneously” (*tzŭ-huai* 自壞) or collapsing without apparent cause. The same held true for Ssŭ-ma Piao’s data, hence his

⁴⁰ For the isolated case of “downpour” in the “flooding” subclass, see *Han shu*, 27A.1346.

⁴¹ “Sima Biao assumes that we know Ban Gu’s system by heart” (Mansvelt Beck 1990: 142).

⁴² Cf. Mansvelt Beck’s overview of both monographs (1990: 137–139; 142–144).

naming of the subclass “building deteriorating spontaneously” (*wu tzŭ-huai* 屋自壞), thereby dismissing Pan Ku’s “obstruction” (*li*) type.⁴³

• Class (7) Speech = Ssŭ-ma Piao’s (2) Metal/Speech:

- Pan Ku’s “persistent sunshine” (*hêng yang* 恆陽) contained fifteen cases of “drought” (*han* 旱), eight of “sacrifice for rain” (*yü* 雩) and four of “not raining” (*pu yü* 不雨). Ssŭ-ma Piao, who had nineteen records of drought, named the entire subclass “drought” (*han*), leaving out the irregularity tag “persistence” (*hêng* 恆).⁴⁴
- Pan Ku’s “poetic deviance” (*shih yao* 詩妖) had five cases of “children’s rhyme” (*t’ung yao* 童謠) and one of “ballad” (*ko-yao* 謳謠). Ssŭ-ma Piao’s records had eleven cases of “children’s rhyme” and one case of “song” (*ko* 歌), therefore he subsumed the whole subclass into “rhyme” (*yao* 謠) and discarded the “deviance” (*yao*) type from Pan Ku’s source.⁴⁵
- Pan Ku’s “canine disaster” (*ch’üan huo* 犬禍) listed five cases involving “dogs” (*kou* 狗). Since Ssŭ-ma Piao’s records concerned only two cases of wolves attacking humans, he named his own subclass “wolf devouring people” (*lang shih jên* 狼食人) and discarded the “disaster” (*huo*) type from Pan Ku’s source.⁴⁶

• Class (9) Hearing = Ssŭ-ma Piao’s (4) Water/Hearing:

- Pan Ku’s “percussive deviance” (*ku yao* 鼓妖) consisted in two cases of unexplained sounds (*shêng* 聲) and one case of “thunder with cloudless sky” (*t’ien wu yün êrh lei* 天無雲而雷). Ssŭ-ma Piao’s records, alongside four cases involving “thunder” (*lei* 雷) and two cases of “thunder without cloud” (*wu yün êrh lei* 無雲而雷), reported eleven cases of “hibernal thunder” (*tung lei* 冬雷). He thus named his subclass “hibernal thunder”, again discarding the “deviance” type.⁴⁷
- Pan Ku’s type “anomaly of legged animal with carapace” (*chieh-ch’ung chih nieh* 介蟲之孽) listed ten cases of “grasshoppers” (*chung* 螽), seven of “locusts” (*huang* 蝗), and isolated occurrences of *fei* 蜚 (perhaps a kind of “stink bug”) and “larvae” (*yüan* 蜎). Regardless of the “anomaly” (*nieh*) type, Ssŭ-

⁴³ *Han shu*, 27BA.1375f.; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 13.3265 (subheading); 3274f.

⁴⁴ *Han shu*, 27BA.1385–1393; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 13.3265 (subheading); 3277–3280.

⁴⁵ *Han shu*, 27BA.1393–1396; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 13.3265 (subheading); 3280–3285.

⁴⁶ *Han shu*, 27BA.1397–1399; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 13.3265 (subheading); 3285f.

⁴⁷ *Han shu*, 27BB.1428–1430; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 15.3305 (subheading); 3315–3317.

ma Piao simply named his subclass “locusts” (*huang*) and included only cases of locusts in it.⁴⁸

• Class (10) Thought = Ssŭ-ma Piao’s (5) Soil/Thought:

- Pan Ku’s “persistent wind” (*hêng fêng* 恆風) mainly concerned cases of “gale” (*ta fêng* 大風), while Ssŭ-ma Piao’s records specified “gale uprooting tree” (*ta fêng pa shu* 大風拔樹). Therefore, he named his subclass “gale uprooting tree”, again abandoning the irregularity tag “persistence”.⁴⁹
- Pan Ku’s “anomaly of bare legged animal” (*lo-ch’ung chih nieh* 裸蟲之孽) listed “caterpillars” (*ming* 螟) only. Ssŭ-ma Piao compiled an analogous list and, again abandoning the “anomaly” type, simply named his subclass “caterpillars”.⁵⁰
- Pan Ku’s “bovine disaster” (*niu huo* 牛禍) reported three abnormality cases among cattle. Ssŭ-ma Piao had in his own records two cases of “bovine epidemic” (*niu i* 牛疫) only, hence his naming of the subclass and, again, his discarding of the “disaster” type.⁵¹
- Pan Ku’s “Metal, Wood, Water and Fire obstructing Soil” (*chin mu shui huo li t’u* 金木水火沴土) combined a dozen cases of “earthquake” (*ti-chên* 地震) with five cases of “mountain collapsing” (*shan pêng* 山崩). For once Ssŭ-ma Piao acknowledged the versatility of Pan Ku’s typology. He devised two subclasses and created a third one to accommodate ten further cases:

[1] “Earthquake” (*ti-chên*), over fifty cases.

[2] “Mountain collapsing” (*shan pêng*), a dozen cases.

[3] “Landslide” (*ti-hsien* 地陷), in fact comprising eight cases of “earth faulting” (*ti lieh* 地裂) and two of “earth fissuring” (*ti ch’ê* 地坼).⁵²

• Class (11) Augustness = Ssŭ-ma Piao’s (6) Augustness:

- One of the most variegated of Pan Ku’s lists, “malady of inferior people attacking superior” (*hsia-jên fa shang chih k’o* 下人伐上之癘) includes two cases of human oversize, two cases of gender change (one each way), two cases of death followed by resurrection, a case of abnormal birth (conjoined twins), a case of human deformity (an old person growing a horn), and three cases of odd human behaviour (two cases of persons entering the Palace and a

⁴⁸ *Han shu*, 27BB.1431–1436; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 15.3305 (subheading); 3317–3320.

⁴⁹ *Han shu*, 27CA.1442–1444; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 16.3327 (subheading); 3335f.

⁵⁰ *Han shu*, 27CA.1445–1447; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 16.3327 (subheading); 3336.

⁵¹ *Han shu*, 27CA.1447f.; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 16.3327 (subheading); 3336f.

⁵² *Han shu*, 27CA.1451–1458; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 16.3327–3334.

well-known case of a popular collective religious craze provoked by the expected advent of the Queen Mother of the West, Hsi-wang-mu 西王母).⁵³ Ssü-ma Piao faced a comparable heterogeneity in his recorded data and accordingly designed three subclasses:

- [1] “Human malady” (*jên k’o* 人癘) for a case of collective panic, two cases of anthropophagus, a bizarre sighting of a person in a wall, three cases of people entering the Palace and three abnormal births.
- [2] “Human transformation” (*jên hua* 人化) for a woman changing into an animal and a man turning into a woman.
- [3] “Death and resurrection” (*ssü fu-shêng* 死復生) for two cases of dead people found to be still alive.

As a result, the “malady” (*k’o*) type from Pan Ku’s source appeared only in the name of Ssü-ma Piao’s first subclass.⁵⁴

- Pan Ku’s “solar and lunar disorderly motion” (*jih yüeh luan hsing*) listed ninety-three reports of “sun being eclipsed” (*jih yu shih chih* 日有食之), followed by a discussion of “paired moons appearing superimposed” (*liang yüeh chung hsien* 兩月重見) – perhaps a rare phenomenon known as paraselene, “mock moon” or “moondog” today – and two cases of “abnormal sun” (*i-jih* 異日), or abnormal alteration of the solar photosphere. Here again, Ssü-ma Piao resorted to a more detailed typology, in part reflecting the evolution of stellar observation since the early imperial times. The corresponding chapter in his monograph lists no less than seven subclass headings:

- [1] “Solar eclipse” (*jih shih* 日蝕), seventy-two cases.
- [2] “Solar embrace” (*jih pao* 日抱, partial lateral arc of 22 ° solar halo), one case.
- [3] “Sun red and lightless” (*jih ch’ih wu kuang* 日赤無光), one case.
- [4] “Solar yellow earring” (*jih huang êrh* 日黃珥, partial lateral arc of 46 ° solar halo), one case.
- [5] “Blackness in centre of sun” (*jih chung hei* 日中黑, sunspot), two cases.
- [6] “Rainbow traversing sun” (*hung kuan jih* 虹貫日), two cases.
- [7] “Lunar eclipse during wrong lunation” (*yüeh shih fei ch’i yüeh* 月蝕非其月), two cases.⁵⁵

- Pan Ku’s next and penultimate list, “astral wayward motion” (*hsing-chên ni hsing*), reported two cases of meteoric shower (“stars precipitating like rain”,

⁵³ The latter case is dated 3 BCE; see Cahill (1993: 21–23).

⁵⁴ *Han shu*, 27CA.1471–1477; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 17.3341 (headings); 3345–3350.

⁵⁵ *Han shu*, 27CB.1479–1508; *Hou Han shu*, “Chih”, 18.3357–3374. My proposed astronomical identifications follow Needham/Wang (1959: 473–477), Ho/Needham (1959) and Schöve/Ho (1967).

hsing yün ju yü 星隕如雨) and about a dozen cases of comets (“shooting stars”, *hsing pei* 星孛).⁵⁶ Ssü-ma Piao, who had dealt with these phenomena in his “Memoirs on the Celestial Signs” already, as we have seen, had no equivalent subclass here.

Han cosmology and the primary cause of portents

The earliest two monographs on celestial phenomena begin as descriptive and explanatory inventories of celestial bodies and phenomena, starting from the centre of the sky (just as reviewing human hierarchy would begin with the Emperor), and then unfold lists of observational records chronologically arranged, while the third monograph consists in a chronology of observations. In this context, “celestial phenomena” are to be understood as combining astronomy, meteorology and astrology – quite a disturbing mixture to our modern rationality. This was not discomforting for the Han mind, however, because, simply put, any phenomenon observed in the sky manifested the activity of cosmic instances, chief among them being pneuma (*ch’i*), essence (*ching* 精), Yin and Yang and the Five Agents – but there existed different definitions of these agencies and competing theories, as well as other numerological series, and no synthetic explanatory system seems to have evolved before the middle of the Han era. In all three monographs on celestial matters, stellar nomenclature shows the starry sky and the human world to be conceived of as mirroring each other, the earthly regions that correspond to certain areas of the sky being indicated by the “allocated fields” system mentioned above (variants of which also existed). As the monograph on “the Celestial Offices” composed by the Ssü-mas suggests right from its title, both planes shared a bureaucratic organisation, centred around a pivotal figure – the heavenly monarch in the centre of the starry vault (an asterism that, as observed from earth, seemed to be the axis of the celestial nightly rotation, and whose identification varied over time due to the astronomical phenomena of precession and stellar motion) and the emperor in his palace, symbolical centre of the realm “under heaven” (*t’ien-hsia* 天下).⁵⁷ Any erratic management of human affairs would have almost mechanical repercussions upon universal harmony. Solar, lunar and meteorological phenomena were pneumatic (*ch’i*) manifestations of this tight interlocking of the two planes. The Five Planets would also react to human excesses: Jupiter (Wood), Mars (Fire), Venus (Metal) and Mercury (Water) would send punishment (*fa* 罰) in case of human

⁵⁶ *Han shu*, 27CB.1508–1518.

⁵⁷ I can only offer a simplistic survey of a complex topic abundantly studied by Sinologists; see Sun/Kistemaker (1997: 95–112), Lloyd/Sivin (2002: 214–226) and Nylan (2010). For expressions of the parallelism between heaven and earth in cosmography, see Henderson (1994). For variants of the “allocated fields” system, see Mansvelt Beck (1990: 121–126) and Pankenier (2013: 446–456). For temporal changes in the identification of the polar star, see Ōzaki (1987: 210–218), among others. For various visual representations of the Han sky, see Tseng (2011).

inadequacy in righteousness (*i* 義), propriety (*li* 禮), killing (*sha* 殺) and penalties (*hsing* 刑) respectively; and Saturn (Soil) would twinkle (*tung-yao* 動搖) when propriety, virtue (*tê* 德), righteousness, killing and penalties were all inadequate. Another well-known passage from *Records of the Historiographer* likens the Five Planets in the sky to the Five Agents, just as the moon and the sun correspond to Yin and Yang, and the constellations to terrestrial regions (*chou-yü* 州域) in the “allocated fields” system. The text adds that stellar bodies are Yin and Yang essences (*ching*), thereby confirming that all these agencies at least partake in the same ontological whole.⁵⁸

This may well have been one of the reasons why the Ssü-mas did not feel the need to compile a “Five Agents” monograph in addition to their “Documents on the Celestial Offices”, but the situation was notably different when the monographs in the received *Book of the Han* were put together two centuries later. Pan Chao, Ma Hsü and their collaborators, in their “Memoirs on Celestial Signs”, did not challenge the Ssü-mas’ order of things radically. And yet, in their short introduction explaining that all stellar and at least some meteorological phenomena – they mention irregularities in clouds, vapours (*ch’i*), wind and thunder – are earthly Yin and Yang essences sent up to heaven where they undergo transformation in response to faulty governance here below, they left out the Five Agents.⁵⁹ The most evident reason for doing so – namely, that Pan Ku had, two decades earlier, completed a new type of monograph especially devoted to quinary agency – leaves certain questions unanswered.⁶⁰ Some of the reasons why Pan Ku decided to compile a “Five Agents” monograph are easier to hypothesise. Around the turn of the millennium and in particular during Wang Mang’s rule, Five Agents theories seem to have gained in influence, due in part to their official recognition and use in political propaganda.⁶¹ It is more difficult to figure out how differently both monographs deem signs to be irregular. The targeted phenomena themselves provide no satisfying answer inasmuch as, as we have seen, some stellar and meteorological phenomena are dealt with in both monographs; for the same reason, it is difficult to accept that the monograph on “Celestial Signs” concerns only celestial portents, while the one on “Five Agents” deals only with earthly portents, as some have proposed.⁶² Could there be a difference in agency, perhaps verticality (Yin and Yang pneumata circulating between heaven and earth in “Celestial Signs”) versus

⁵⁸ *Shih chi*, 27.1312, 1317, 1320, 1327, 1342, 1351. Passages translated in Pankenier (2013: 473, 477, 479, 481f., 486, 503, 510).

⁵⁹ *Han shu*, 26.1273. Translation in Lippiello (2001: 28).

⁶⁰ Mansvelt Beck (1990: 112): “One may doubt whether Ban Gu ever planned a Treatise on the Heavens, or, if he did, whether it would have taken the form of Ma Xu’s Treatise.”

⁶¹ See Loewe (2011: 30–32).

⁶² For instance Lippiello (2001: 21, 28). Such may have become the case in later times, however, as each of the two monographs became increasingly specific in purpose and scope.

horizontality (the Agents cycling through the four quadrants and the centre in “Five Agents”)? But heaven and earth, Yin/Yang and the Five Agents appear in both monographs. Just as in the Ssū-mas’ “Documents on the Celestial Offices”, the ideological basis of Pan Ku’s “Memoirs on the Five Agents” is the dualism of the celestial and human realms, that “Way of Heaven and Man” (*t’ien-jên chih tao* 天人之道) brilliantly manifested by the “Vast Plan”, the hexagrams of the *Changes*, the *Spring and Autumn* (*Ch’un-ch’iu*) and its Confucian exegesis, the *River Chart* (*Ho t’u* 河圖) and the *Writing of the Lo* (*Lo shu* 洛書), all of which brought to humans knowledge primarily of heavenly nature.⁶³ To sum up, not only did both types of monograph complement each other in Han times, they also overlapped, and their specificity seemed to lie mostly in a difference of vantage points.

Aihe Wang has inventively proposed that the ideology at work behind Pan Ku’s eleven-fold classification is the triadic scheme Heaven/Earth/Man (*t’ien ti jên* 天地人), abundantly documented elsewhere.⁶⁴ That Pan Ku was aware of the triadic logic and familiar with its rhetoric tools is unquestionable, as testified by the passage below from the *Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Pavilion*, where he noted down the justification of human hierarchy (without at this point citing any source explicitly):

天道莫不成於三。天有三光：日、月、星；地有三形：高、下、平；人有三等：君、父、師。故一公，三卿佐之；一卿，三大夫佐之；一大夫，三元士佐之。天有三光，然後能遍照，各自有三法。

“Nothing in the Way of Heaven is not accomplished in three. Heaven has the Three Luminaries: the sun, moon and stars; Earth has three configurations: elevated, low and level; Man has three classes: lord, father and teacher. Thus one duke is assisted by three ministers; one minister is assisted by three grand masters; one grand master is assisted by three senior servicemen. [Just as] Heaven can spread light everywhere since it has the Three Luminaries, each [rank] has its own triple model.”⁶⁵

⁶³ *Han shu*, 27A.1316. Paraphrase in Mansvelt Beck (1990: 132).

⁶⁴ Particularly in the *Great Peace Scripture* (*T’ai-p’ing ching* 太平經); see Espeset (2004).

⁶⁵ *Pai-hu t’ung shu-chêng*, 4.131. My translations of official titles rely on Hucker (1985: 173, no. 1255; 290, no. 3388; 465, no. 5939; 596, no. 8237). For “three classes” (*san têng* 三等), some editions read “three worthies” (*san tsun* 三尊). Cf. Tjan (1952: 410f.): “The Way of Heaven everywhere perfects itself in [the number of] three; Heaven has the Three Luminary Bodies: the sun, the moon, and the stars; Earth has the Three Configurations: high, low, and level; man has the Three Elevated Positions: Lord, father, and teacher. Therefore one Ducal Minister has three Ministers to assist him; one Minister has three great officers to assist him; one great officer has three common officers to assist him. [In the same way as] Heaven only with the help of the Three Luminary Bodies can everywhere shed its illumination, [so] the model of three applies to each [of them].”

But such seems hardly to be the case with Pan Ku's "Five Agents" monograph.⁶⁶ The typology of portent derived by Pan Ku from the "Vast Plan" does not support the hypothesis of any clear, coherent, permeable threefold classification. It may be tempting to see the Heaven/Earth/Man scheme in the six degrees of the portent gravity scale itself, the first two degrees (involving plants and wild animals but also human material culture) representing Earth; the next two degrees (involving the six domestic animals and humans), Man; and the last two degrees (involving colour-based "abnormal things" and the pneumata of the Agents), Heaven. But this again is nowhere made obvious in the source. On the contrary, after a refutation of Liu Hsin's proposed interpretation for the "anomaly" (*nieh*), "disaster" (*huo*) and "malady" (*k'o*) portents falling under class (6) Countenance, Pan Ku concludes:

禍與妖疴祥省同類，不得獨異。

Disaster (3rd degree) is of the same category as deviance (1st degree), malady (4th degree), lucky omen and ill omen (5th degree), it cannot be [dealt with] separately (*Han shu*, 27BA.1354).

While it is not entirely clear to me why Pan Ku omitted "anomaly" (2nd degree) and "obstruction" (*li*) (6th degree) in this statement, it seems very unlikely that he understood the six portent types as obeying any ternary arrangement. In the whole passage as elsewhere in his "Five Agents" monograph, he justifies the semiotics of portents by reference to authoritative sources (in the present case, the *Changes* and its eight-fold spatial arrangement of trigrams), Agents-based quinary correlations, loss (*shih* 失) in governance and social conduct ultimately triggered by the ruler (*jên-chün* 人君) and, for continuous (*ch'ang* 常) weather conditions, the seasonal and pneumatic interplay of Yin and Yang. Some of these correlations occasionally tally with various "early patterns of correspondence" assumed to date back to the First Empire, but, as one may expect in view of the number of variant systems that seem to have coexisted and perhaps competed in the course of half a millennium, matching items are in most instances isolated cases, at best incomplete series.⁶⁷

Should a numerological model be singled out as the prevailing one in our source monographs, it would be a quinary rather than a ternary model: the Palaces of the centre and the four quadrants, the Five Planets and, of course, the Five Agents and

⁶⁶ Wang contends that "The Realm of Earth" corresponds to Pan Ku's classes 1–5 (Five Agents), "The Realm of Man" to classes 6–10 (Five Matters) and "The Realm of Heaven" to class 11 (Augustness) (2000: 157–167). As an example of fallacy in this hypothesis, Wang claims that "the realms of Earth, Man, and Heaven are each introduced by a quotation from 'Hongfan,' followed by an interpretation of the quotation from the *Commentary* on *Wuxing* by Fu Sheng" (156), but concedes only a few pages farther that, contrary to this claim, "the part of 'Wuxing zhi' devoted to Heaven does not open with a quotation from 'Hongfan'; instead, it goes directly to Fu Sheng's *Commentary*" (165).

⁶⁷ I quote "early patterns of correspondence" from Unschuld (2003: 106–112; see his Tables 1–7). See also, among other chartings, Wang (2000: Table 3.4).

the Five Matters. But to claim that this model was uniformly and consistently applied would be to misrepresent the sources, considering that they display no less than four different sequences obeying different logics:

- (1) Both the *Records of the Historiographer* and the *Book of the Han* review the five celestial palaces starting from the Centre, then moving through the East, South and West to terminate in the North. This is the only sequence in our monographs to begin from the Centre (all other sequences unfold from the East) but not the only one to end in the North (so does the next model; the last two models terminate in the Centre). This peculiar cosmographic order seems to have been characteristic of the “Han” worldview, insofar as all known later star catalogues follow a reverse sequence inspired by the apparent motion of stellar bodies when reviewing the four outer palaces (East, North, West, South), before concluding in the Centre.⁶⁸
- (2) Next, the *Records of the Historiographer* review the Five Planets in an order reminiscent of the “production” cycle (*hsiang-shêng* 相生) of the Five Agents, a theory that has been ascribed to Liu Hsiang and Liu Hsin: Jupiter/East, Mars/South, Saturn/Centre, Venus/West, Mercury/North.⁶⁹ In the *Book of the Han*, Pan Ku’s “Memoirs on the Five Agents” follow the same well-known sequence for the Five Agents proper (classes 1–5): Wood, Fire, Soil, Metal, Water.
- (3) In their “Celestial Signs” monograph in the *Book of the Han*, Ma Hsü and his collaborators basically took up the Ssü-mas’ material but moved Saturn/Centre to the last, fifth position, perhaps in order to expound general planetary theory once all Five Planets had been dealt with.⁷⁰ This variant cosmographic order – unique in our source monographs – happens to coincide with a sequence appearing once in the *Tso Exegesis* (*Tso chuan* 左傳) to the *Spring and Autumn*, perhaps one of the earliest known occurrences of the “space-oriented generation cycle”.⁷¹
- (4) And finally, in the *Book of the Han*, after the Five Agents, Pan Ku proceeds to review the Five Matters (classes 6–10) according to the so-called “overcoming” (*hsiang-k’o* 相剋) or “defeating” (*hsiang-shêng* 相勝) order (Wood,

⁶⁸ See Ōzaki (1987: 205–201) and Sun/Kistemaker (1997: 143–145).

⁶⁹ This model is called the “Mutual Production Order” by Needham (Needham/Wang 1956: 255) and “Generation cycle 1” by Aihe Wang (2000: Tables 3.1–3.2).

⁷⁰ The fact that, in both sources, general planetary theory comes after Saturn is perhaps due to Saturn’s association with the Centre. If such is the case, then the location of planetary theory “in the middle of the discussion of the individual planets” in *Records of the Historiographer* is not “curious”, as Pankenier thought it to be (2013: 479, n. 190). At any rate, in the same note the statement that planetary theory “appears after the discussion of the fifth planet, Mercury” in the *Book of the Han* is mistaken.

⁷¹ Quoting Wang (2000: 98), who calls this model “Generation cycle 2” (Tables 3.1–3.2).

Metal, Fire, Water, Soil), a model conventionally ascribed to Tsou Yen 鄒 (or 駟) 衍 (ca. 305–240 BCE) and believed to have preceded the Lius' "production" cycle.⁷² In the *Book of the Later Han*, Ssü-ma Piao's "Five Agents" monograph follows the same "overcoming"/"defeating" model as Pan Ku.

Strikingly, although the "Vast Plan" explicitly serves as theoretical groundwork for both Pan Ku's and Ssü-ma Piao's "Five Agents" monographs, neither of them used its exact sequence, which starts from the North (unlike all the sequences encountered here): North, South, East, West, Centre.⁷³

The introduction to the "Memoirs on the Celestial Signs" in the *Book of the Later Han* keeps to this Han parallelism between heaven and earth, for instance when equating the celestial "images" (*hsiang* 象) – the sun, moon and stars – with the earthly "models" (*fa* 法) – "waterways, the soil and terrestrial divisions" (*shui t'u chou-fên* 水土州分) – or when likening human hierarchical order with stellar organisation (*Hou Han shu*, "Chih", 10.3213), in the same way as the *Comprehensive Discussions* quotation above. The "Memoirs on the Five Agents" in the *Book of the Later Han* even bypass any theoretical introduction, only briefly acknowledging the efforts of the various authors involved in its compiling before moving on to reiterate the same source quotations used by Pan Ku in his monograph.

Epilogue

Insofar as I could ascertain, early medical texts do not shed light on the typology of "malady" (*k'o*) derived from the "Vast Plan", but specialists in the field might think differently or come up with sources I may have neglected. Another approach I cannot take up for lack of expertise is the possibility that there exists some connexion between the six degrees of portent severity from the "Vast Plan" and the six lines composing hexagrams in the *Changes* (despite the most evident fact that the portent severity scale does not operate as a cycle of parallel increase and decrease).⁷⁴ At any rate, our source monographs evidence that, rather than being the product of irrational minds or of ecstatic states of consciousness as the word "mantic" still might imply, early Chinese portentology was a "science" in its own right, a quite "rational" body of knowledge built by the presumably sane intellects of people who, to put it in a simplistic way, endeavoured to fathom the concealed

⁷² Called "Mutual Conquest Order" by Needham (see Needham/Wang 1956: 256), this model corresponds to Aihe Wang's "Reversed conquest" (2000: Table 3.1), though Wang describes the cycle as beginning, rather than ending, with Earth. For the role of the Lius in the transition from the "overcoming"/"defeating" cycle to the "production" cycle, see Wang (2000: 137–155) and Loewe (2004: 477–482).

⁷³ This last model has been styled the "Cosmogonic Order" by Needham (see Needham/Wang 1956: 254f.) and "Magic square order" by Wang (2000: Table 3.1).

⁷⁴ Both suggestions were made by an anonymous reader whom I hereby thank.

mechanisms at work beneath the spectacles of history and the world at large.⁷⁵ It cannot be mere chance that we owe the ancient Chinese, among many other observations, the earliest known complex technical records of astronomical phenomena such as solar haloes and parhelia, which, by the seventh century of our era, already formed “a body of knowledge unapproached until the Renaissance in the West a thousand years later”; nor that, recently, the remarkable accuracy of the 127 solar eclipse records for the entire Han era has been scientifically confirmed.⁷⁶ Clearly, ancient bodies of knowledge are in many respects incompatible with our modern definition of “science”, but this should by no means prevent us from studying them as epistemological objects unbridled by such reductive and biased labels as “superstition” and “belief”. And, as we proceed, we should avoid value judgements and the temptation of anachronistic comparison that hamper, if not preclude, heuristic advances.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The English word “mantic” derives from the Greek μάντις (seer, prophet), itself perhaps derived from μαίνομαι (to rage, be furious), used in reference to “persons who uttered oracles in a state of divine frenzy”; quoting Liddell/Scott (1883: 914; 920f.). For the limits of these definitions, which hark back to Plato’s “descriptive and proscriptive” agenda of “limiting the validity of divination to the small group of female prophets who underwent mediumistic/spirit possession [in order to undermine] the self-representation and claim to authority of those seers who did not enter into ecstatic states of altered consciousness”, see Flower (2008: 84–91). As regards “rationality”, modern historians have warned us that it lies in the eye of the beholder, inasmuch as any observer imposes his or her own rationality upon what he or she observes; see, for instance, Grosser (1972: 30–32).

⁷⁶ For these two examples, see Ho/Needham (1959: 133) and Pankenier (2012).

⁷⁷ For an example of ancient knowledge unfairly submitted to anachronistic comparison in a recent European publication, see Espeset (2014).

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Appendix

In both tables below, elements in square brackets are my addition. Cells left blank reflect the absence of corresponding items (classes and/or subclasses) in the source, in some cases due to a difference in contents sequence. Identical Chinese text (same transliteration, same characters) is not repeated.

Table 1. Compared structures of the monograph on the celestial phenomena in *Records of the Historiographer*, *Book of the Han* and the “Chih” section of *Book of the Later Han*

<i>Shih-chi</i>	<i>Han shu</i>	<i>Hou Han shu</i>
Chapter 27	Chapter 26	Chapter 10
	[Introduction]	[Introduction]
[1] [The Offices]	[1] [The Offices]	
Central Palace (<i>chung-kung</i> 中宮)	Central Palace	
Eastern Palace (<i>tung-kung</i> 東宮)	Eastern Palace	
Southern Palace (<i>nan-kung</i> 南宮)	Southern Palace	
Western Palace (<i>hsi-kung</i> 西宮)	Western Palace	
Northern Palace (<i>pei-kung</i> 北宮)	Northern Palace	
[2] [The Five Planets]	[2] [The Five Planets]	
Jupiter (<i>sui-hsing</i> 歲星)	Jupiter	
Mars (<i>ying-huo</i> 熒惑)	Mars	
Saturn (<i>chên-hsing</i> 填星)	Venus	
[General planetary theory]	Mercury	
Venus (<i>t'ai-pai</i> 太白)	Saturn	
Mercury (<i>ch'ên-hsing</i> 辰星)	[General planetary theory]	
[3] [Allocated fields]	[3] [Allocated fields]	
[4] [Solar phenomena and] eclipses (<i>shih</i> 食)	[4] [Solar/lunar eclipses]	
[5] [Lunar motion]	[5] [Auspicious/inauspicious stars]	
[6] [Lunar/solar eclipses]	[6] [Solar/lunar motion]	
[7] [Auspicious/inauspicious stars]	[7] [Solar phenomena and eclipses]	

[8] Clouds and vapour (<i>yün ch'i</i> 雲氣)	[8] Clouds and vapour	
[9] Watching for the harvest (<i>hou sui</i> 候歲)	[9] Watching for the harvest	
[10] [Astrological history]	[10] [Chronology]	[Chronology]
		Chapters 11–12
		[Chronology, continued]

Table 2. Compared structures of the “Memoirs on the Five Agents” in *Book of the Han* and the “Chih” section of *Book of the Later Han*

<i>Han shu</i>	<i>Hou Han shu</i>
Chapter 27A	
Introduction	
[1] Wood losing its nature (<i>mu shih ch'i hsing</i> 木失其性)	
Continuous rain (<i>ch'ang yü</i> 常雨)	
[2] Fire losing its nature (<i>huo shih ch'i hsing</i> 火失其性)	
Conflagration (<i>tsai</i> 災)	
Iron [objects] flying (<i>t'ieh fei</i> 鐵飛)	
[3] Soil losing its nature (<i>t'u shih ch'i hsing</i> 土失其性)	
Waterlessness (<i>wang shui</i> 亡水)	
[4] Metal losing its nature (<i>chin shih ch'i hsing</i> 金失其性)	
Stone emitting sound (<i>shih ming</i> 石鳴)	
[5] Water losing its nature (<i>shui shih ch'i hsing</i> 水失其性)	
Flooding (<i>ta shui</i> 大水)	

Chapter 27BA	Chapter 13
	[Introduction]
[6] Demeanour not being respectful (<i>mao pu kung</i> 貌不恭)	[1] [Wood/Demeanour]
	Demeanour being disrespectful
Persistent rain (<i>hêng yü</i> 恆雨)	Excessive rain (<i>yin yü</i> 淫雨)
Clothing deviance (<i>fu yao</i> 服妖)	Clothing deviance
Gallinaceous disaster (<i>chi huo</i> 雞禍)	Gallinaceous disaster
Ill and lucky omens of green (<i>ch'ing shêng ch'ing hsiang</i> 青眚青祥)	Omens of green (<i>ch'ing shêng</i> 青眚)
Metal obstructing Wood (<i>chin li mu</i> 金沴木)	Building deteriorating spontaneously (<i>wu tzü-huai</i> 屋自壞)
[7] Speech not being consequent (<i>yen pu ts'ung</i> 言不從)	[2] [Metal/Speech]
	Rumour (<i>o-yen</i> 訛言)
Persistent sunshine (<i>hêng yang</i> 恆陽)	Drought (<i>han</i> 旱)
Poetic deviance (<i>shih yao</i> 詩妖)	Rhyme (<i>yao</i> 謠)
Anomaly of legged animal with pelage (<i>mao-ch'ung chih nieh</i> 毛蟲之孽)	
Canine disaster (<i>ch'üan huo</i> 犬禍)	Wolf devouring people (<i>lang shih jên</i> 狼食人)
Ill and lucky omens of white (<i>pai shêng pai hsiang</i> 白眚白祥)	
Wood obstructing Metal (<i>mu li chin</i> 木沴金)	

Chapter 27BB	Chapter 14
[8] Sight not being clear (<i>shih pu ming</i> 視不明)	[3] [Fire/Sight]
Persistent warmth (<i>hêng yü</i> 恆燠)	
	Conflagration and arson (<i>tsai huo</i> 災火)
	[Persistent warmth (<i>hêng yü</i> 恆燠)]
Vegetable deviance (<i>ts'ao yao</i> 草妖)	Vegetable deviance

Anomaly of feathered legged animal (<i>yü-ch'ung chih nieh</i> 羽蟲之孽)	Feathered legged animal anomaly (<i>yü-ch'ung nieh</i> 羽蟲孽)
Ovine disaster (<i>yang huo</i> 羊禍)	Ovine disaster
Ill and lucky omens of red (<i>ch'ih shêng ch'ih hsiang</i> 赤眚赤祥)	

Chapter 27BB, continued	Chapter 15
[9] Hearing not being perceptive (<i>t'ing pu ts'ung</i> 聽不聰)	[4] [Water/Hearing]
	Flooding
	Water changing colour (<i>shui pien sé</i> 水變色)
Persistent cold (<i>hêng han</i> 恆寒)	Great cold (<i>ta han</i> 大寒)
Frost precipitation (<i>yün shuang</i> 隕霜)	
Hail (<i>pao</i> 雹)	Hail
Percussive deviance (<i>ku yao</i> 鼓妖)	
Thunder with cloudless sky (<i>t'ien wu yün êrh lei</i> 天無雲而雷)	Hibernal thunder (<i>tung lei</i> 冬雷)
	Mountain emitting sound (<i>shan ming</i> 山鳴)
Piscine anomaly (<i>yü nieh</i> 魚孽)	Piscine anomaly
Anomaly of legged animal with carapace (<i>chieh-ch'ung chih nieh</i> 介蟲之孽)	Locusts (<i>huang</i> 蝗)
Porcine disaster (<i>shih huo</i> 豕禍)	
Fire obstructing Water (<i>huo li shui</i> 火沴水)	

Chapter 27CA	Chapter 16
[10] Thought not being astute (<i>ssũ pu jui</i> 思不睿)	[5] [Soil/Thought]
	Earthquake (<i>ti-chên</i> 地震)
	Mountain collapsing (<i>shan pêng</i> 山崩)
	Landslide (<i>ti-hsien</i> 地陷)

Persistent wind (<i>hêng fêng</i> 恆風)	Gale uprooting tree (<i>ta fêng pa shu</i> 大風拔樹)
Sebaceous and nocturnal deviance (<i>chih-yeh chih yao</i> 脂夜之妖)	[Sebaceous and nocturnal deviance]
Anomaly of bare legged animal (<i>lo-ch'ung chih nieh</i> 裸蟲之孽)	Caterpillars (<i>ming</i> 螟)
Bovine disaster (<i>niu huo</i> 牛禍)	Bovine epidemic (<i>niu i</i> 牛疫)
Malady of the heart and abdomen (<i>hsin-fu chih k'o</i> 心腹之痼)	
Ill and lucky omens of yellow (<i>huang shêng huang hsiang</i> 黃眚黃祥)	
Metal, Wood, Water and Fire obstructing Soil (<i>chin mu shui huo li t'u</i> 金木水火沴土)	

Chapter 27CA, continued	Chapter 17
[11] Augustness not being the ultimate (<i>huang pu chi</i> 皇不極)	[6] [Augustness]
Persistent overcast (<i>hêng yin</i> 恆陰)	[Persistent overcast]
Emissive deviance (<i>shê yao</i> 射妖)	Emissive deviance
Draconic and ophidian anomaly (<i>lung-shê nieh</i> 龍蛇孽)	Draconic and ophidian anomaly
Equine disaster (<i>ma huo</i> 馬禍)	Equine disaster
Malady of inferior people attacking superior (<i>hsia-jên fa shang chih k'o</i> 下人伐上之痼)	Human malady (<i>jên k'o</i> 人痼)
	Human transformation (<i>jên hua</i> 人化)
	Death and resurrection (<i>ssũ fu-shêng</i> 死復生)
	Epidemic (<i>i</i> 疫)
	Cast female rainbow (<i>t'ou ni</i> 投蜺)

Chapter 27CB	Chapter 18
Solar and lunar disorderly motion (<i>jih yüeh luan hsing</i> 日月亂行)	Solar eclipse (<i>jih shih</i> 日蝕)
	Solar embrace (<i>jih pao</i> 日抱)
	Sun red and lightless (<i>jih ch'ih wu kuang</i> 日赤無光)
	Solar yellow earring (<i>jih huang êrh</i> 日黃珥)
	Blackness in centre of sun (<i>jih chung hei</i> 日中黑)
	Rainbow traversing sun (<i>hung kuan jih</i> 虹貫日)
	Lunar eclipse during wrong lunation (<i>yüeh shih fei ch'i yüeh</i> 月蝕非其月)
Astral wayward motion (<i>hsing-chên ni hsing</i> 星辰逆行)	
Precipitating stone (<i>yün shih</i> 隕石)	