Echoes of Orthodoxy: An Analysis of the Relationship between Music and Politics in the Han Dynasty

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Citation

Palmucci, L. (2023). *Echoes of Orthodoxy: An Analysis of the Relationship between Music and Politics in the Han Dynasty*.

Version:	Not Applicable (or Unknown)
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Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3633316

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Echoes of Orthodoxy

An Analysis of the Relationship between Music and Politics in the Han Dynasty

Master Thesis

Submitted in accordance with the requirements of the Master in Chinese Studies

At Leiden University

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S3230112

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Submitted on: 01/07/2023

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Introduction

夫樂者、樂也，人情之所必不免也.

"Music is joy, an unavoidable human disposition".

(*Xunzi*, translated by Hutton, 218)

Music's captivating power still stands today as one of the simplest and yet most complex cultural manifestation of the humankind. Music is primeval, yet simultaneously reveals the intricacies of cultural and political power. It is with such conviction that I have approached this research about the revelatory power of music in disclosing the logical and practical fallacies in believing that the early Western dynasty (approximately from the 2nd to the 1st century BCE), emblematically represented by emperors Han Gaozu (漢高祖 256 – 195 BCE) and Han Wudi (漢武帝 156 – 87 BCE), was culturally defined as a guardian of a Confucian orthodoxy.

Confucianism to its core, leaving aside all the later ramifications, is a system of thought founded on the idea of social harmony to be found in a highly hierarchized reality, therefore it is an ideal candidate to gain state sponsorship. Such harmony is then maintained by being moral and always virtuous to one's superior. The idea of morality has subsequently expanded to poetry and music,[1] where the latter became a "barometer" of the political well-being of a state.[2] Chinese classical musical terminology

[1] The relation existing between poetry and music is a very old one, as highlighted in book about the oral formulaic features of the poems of the *Shijing* ("Classic of Odes" 詩經) allowing to be more culturally effecting and lasting. See, Yang, *The bell and the drum: shih ching as formulaic poetry in an oral tradition*.

[2] DeWoskin, 29

is complex as it features three terms to refer to music: *sheng* 聲 *yin* 音, *yue* 樂. The first one referring to a generic aural sound, the second one referring to a patterns of sounds, and the third one referring to music in a larger sense, including both the singing and dancing act accompanied by a sense of morality.[3] It is usually the third term, *yue*, that is employed to describe a noble sound that Confucian orthodoxy would call *yayue* ("Elegant Music"雅樂), whereas it is never used to describe tunes considered pernicious, like those of the state of Zheng and Wei.[4] *Yayue* stands at the pinnacle of the musical composition and of Chinese civilization as they were ascribed to the Central Plains and to the former kings (*xianwang* 先王) of the Zhou dynasty (1046 – 256 BCE). In opposition to the morally edifying *yayue*, Confucian juxtaposed the idea of a popular, unrefined kind of music, *suyue* ("Popular Music" 俗樂), that was considered but a lowly form on entertainment, sometimes even dangerous as it may lead listener into perdition, definitely lacking any social or moral values. Although the orthodoxy by definition should not change, musicscape did mutate, especially after the contamination with Central Asian tunes and instruments since the final part of the Zhou dynasty.[5] Furthermore, from the 3rd century BCE onwards, music undergoes another transformation as it shift from a passive reflection of political (in)stability and (a)morality into an active agent of the cosmos itself.[6] This is germane in the musicological discussions on the famous Qin era (221-206 BCE) compendium *Lüshi Chunqiu* ("The Annals of Mr. Lü" 呂氏春秋) or in the Han era *Huainanzi* (淮南子). Music then, especially during the early West Han dynasty, became an incredibly efficacious trope to convey harmony, morality and legitimate rulership. The two emperors this essay will investigate were, in fact, interested in political legitimation and were ready to resort to the power of music. However, both realized the possibilities, but also the limitedness, of an orthodox Confucian approach and so they went on to adopt it rhetorically while simultaneously injecting music with new coeval preoccupations and personalistic ideas. Music remained a tool of antiquity, but was now full of modern prerogatives,

[3] Cook, 48-55.

[4] They are normally described as "sounds of Zheng and Wei" (鄭衛之聲). Zheng and Wei were two states during the Spring and Autumns period (722-481 BCE) that become a notorious trope for corrupted tunes and countries in ruins.

[5] Kaufmann, 74.

[6] It took an active role in defining and interacting with reality as will be explained in chap 2.1.

becoming the visible and audible sound of an extemporaneous, yet long-lasting 'orthodoxy of now'. The two emperors were chosen because of their lasting political and cultural impact on imperial China. Han Gaozu, in fact, was the founder of the dynasty, the one who paved the way for it to prosper, but still needed a legitimizing force that would distinguish the Han from the previous Qin dynasty, one that could be found by linking the Han to Zhou; Han Wudi instead reigned during the apex of the Western Han dynasty, therefore what he needed was to centralize his court's power by asserting his personalistic form of rulership to eternity. The question underlying this entire research and connecting these two reigning periods is whether they approached Confucian orthodoxy *vis-à-vis* their necessities. Confucian orthodoxy was already a very volatile concept by their time, and it was blurred ever more to accommodate a multitude of interpretations to justify different forms of political authority, this is particularly true in music. In their reign one can therefore observe a distortion of the concept of traditional music in both promoting unorthodox tunes, like those of Chu or other forms of *suyue*, and in their institutionalization in official hymns or the "Music Bureau" (*Yuefu* 樂府).

Given the complexity of the two periods under scrutiny and the limitedness of space, I have adopted a comprehensive methodology centered around the meticulous analysis of secondary sources and some occasional use of primary ones (like the *Hanshu* or the *Shiji*). Among many, I feel myself mostly indebted to the work of the great sinologists Kern, Nylan and Loewe for their studies about the early Han dynasty that gave me the tools to dig deeper into the disruption of the concept of Confucian orthodoxy; also, I cannot not mention DeWoskin's, Rom's and Brindley's seminal works about musical studies in ancient China that provided me with constant inspiration; finally, more general account in Chinese like those of Cai, and Yang and Geng gave me a great overlook on the major trends of musical evolution in China. This researches therefore places itself in a field with substantial scholarly body, however, grounded in the idea of music as revelatory of the larger political tendencies (even the non-manifested ones), it tries to derive a novel perspective on the volatility of Confucian orthodoxy in a specific timeframe, when the contingent needs for political legitimization required

some major adapting of the Confucian principles, switching from an ontological orthodoxy echoing the past to one which encapsulate the greatness of the present.

Chapter 1 starts off with an introduction of the socio-cultural context in which Han Gaozu operated his newly founded empire (1.1), then moves on to provide the ideas of the two main thinkers at the emperor court, Lu Jia and Shusun Tong as they lay the foundation for breaching Confucian orthodoxy, while operating inside of it (1.2), finally the last part will offer a more concrete example of how music absorbs and presents the political changes in which it is embedded though the analysis of one song and an official set of hymns. Similarly, chapter 2 opens with a description of the socio-cultural context of Wudi's time, then moves on to depict the contention between central and the several smaller courts by the analyzing the *Huainanzi* and its unorthodox musical proprieties that rendered this untraditional text one of paramount importance for Wudi's cosmic claim of rulership (2.1). Afterwards, the focus shifts back to the central court and its personalistic sanctioning of a certain kind of music (*suyue*) as seen through the lenses of Sima Xiangru's eclectic *shanglin fu* (2.3). Finally, the chapter will come to an end by describing another set of political hymns and the *Yuefu* as the institutionalizations of Han Wudi's political needs and musical preferences engraved in cultural history henceforth (2.3), therefore confuting the traditional idea that sees this time as a rampart of Confucian orthodox, by, on the contrary officializing unorthodox approaches to cater to different present necessities.

Chapter 1

The Dice is Cast; the Empire is Formed

This chapter will focus on the former, Liu Bang, also known as emperor Han Gaozu 漢高, in his quest to form the Han empire. What I mean by 'empire' is not just the military and bureaucratic apparatus, but it is also – and foremost – an empire in the cultural sense, whereby a close net of shared value and ideas in the context of the secular and the sacred are enmeshed in society. Western Han 'cultural

empire' will be investigated in its early stage under the rule of emperor Gaozu as it tries to define itself in opposition to the Qin empire, by trying to resort to a so called Confucian orthodoxy (*zhengtong* 正統),[7] and the role music played in delimiting such a definition. Contrary to its meaning of strict adherence to faith or creed, orthodoxy is an incredibly volatile concept, rarely applicable. By first introducing the political context of Liu Bang rise to power (1.1), then the attempts to set a cultural agenda through three main intellectuals of the time (1.2), and finally a double analysis of two pieces – supposedly orthodox – of music preserved in the *Hanshu* unveiling the fallacies of orthodoxy and the strength of an historical Han propaganda (1.3), this chapter will analyze how, unlike historiography and some scholars might have maintained, the early Western Han dynasty (202 BCE-9 CE) rests fact in being unorthodox in their approach, exactly as Nylan has pointed out: the success of the Confucian élites was their "impulse toward diversity".[8] The definition of orthodoxy is therefore ever-evolving and it can never reproduce the past entirely, it can just point at it for contemporary necessities and thus presents many contradiction, as the early Han empire did. Orthodoxy is particularistic and fails on its own broader premises when observed in retrospect, in such a sense that we may refer to it as the 'orthodoxy of the present'. Nevertheless, the canonization *a posteriori* ensured a persuasive and misleading rhetoric perceiving Han Gaozu as the first emperor reestablishing a new orthodox canon in all its (apparently) pristine purity.

1.1 *Liu Bang's accession to the Empire*

Emperor Gaozu (256 – 1 June 195 BCE), or rather Liu Bang (劉邦), was born commoner outside royal lineage, managed to take avail of the grave tensions that were tearing apart the Qin empire at the death of Qin Shi Huangdi (210 BCE) to obtain the title of emperor by founding the Han dynasty in 202 BCE. The *Shiji* describes Liu Bang as a practical man, generous and charismatic, though

[7] Interestingly the literal translation of *zhengtong*, as introduced by Ban Gu, is that of a 'correct rule'.
[8] Nylan, 32.

uninterested in either education or work,[9] originally from Chu, a depiction portraying more of a warrior than a bureaucrat.

Although Liu Bang managed to found the Han dynasty in 202 BCE, he was a *primus inter pares,*[10] as many kingdoms of the empire were independent.[11] Therefore, in order not to let the newly born Han empire end up in shambles like its predecessor, Liu Bang, under the guidance of intellectuals at his court, realized that an empire is not just a political project, but also a cultural enterprise. In that regard, early Han empire felt the need to re-organize under the banner of orthodoxy, that is, by extension, tradition. The past tradition the early thinkers refer to is that of the Zhou, the golden age of Confucianism, so the empire and the emperor had to present themselves as protector and enactor of values and culture originated from that time, this meant tracing a direct line from the Zhou dynasty to them. By depicting the Qin as uncivilized and making up propagandistic stories about their intolerance towards the Confucians and culture in general (e.g., the Burning of books and Burying of the Scholar),[12] Liu Bang and his successors would present themselves to history as saviors of China by pacifying the country and, not less importantly, by upholding the correct principle of Confucian orthodoxy.[13]

The story of Confucianism acquiring more and more prestige at court is a common act of propaganda by the Han, as it would seem to culturally connect the Han directly to the Zhou dynasty, but in reality, the apparent purity of the Confucianism was long lost (if ever existed). Already since the Warring States the intellectual borderlines between the various school of thought was quite porous.[14] Laying

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[9] *Shiji*, 435.

[10] The territory at the time was supervised by a series of regional lord, through a system named *junxian* 郡縣, where Liu Bang's closest brothers in arms were initially appointed. Later Liu Bang will have them killed and appoint his relatives as regional kings.

[11] The feudalistic system implied a series of smaller kingdoms swearing loyalty to the first Han emperors who, unlike Han Wudi after them, were not capable to exert total control from the center. *Cfr.* Sabbatini and Santangelo.122-132.

[12] The historicity of these event is quite dubious. Although some books were burned, and some scholars executed (though the definition of 'Confucian' was pretty vague at the time) it was not on the scale that the historical tradition led by Sima Qian' *Shiji* make it to be. See, Goldin, "The rise and fall of the Qin empire". Moreover, the intellectual debate still seems to too vigorous to suggest a total intellectual suppression. See, Ge p.213.

[13] Kern, *The Stele Inscriptions of Ch'in Shih-Huang*, 156.

[14] Ge,12. It was indeed convenient to see the Hundred Schools of Thought *baijia* 百家 being so rigidly separated, sometimes almost in open opposition to one another, this is also due to the account Sima Tan (Sima Qian's father) makes

out a Confucian worldview, with its focus on the hierarchy and institutionalism, though seemed exactly how the dynasty wanted to be portrayed. Renewing its focus on the study of Classics (*jing* 經)[15] and the virtue they profess, reestablishing the ritualistic and musicals system accordingly sounded very appealing, and in turn it would make Gaozu himself appear to be a virtuous ruler, worthy of being emulated. However, such orthodoxy, with its continuous echoes to the past could in fact but remain in the past: according to Kern, the remembrances to the golden past are but useful tool for political legitimation "where a sanctified system of order is transferred with ideological gestures to the here and now".[16] Orthodoxy is therefore emptied of its original meaning, it is variable and particularistic and very embedded in the contemporaneity; it becomes another way glorify the 'now' more than that of the 'past'. Bending orthodoxy confers it the changeability over time and makes it much adaptable to hint at the past while ennobling the present, especially through music and rites.[17] Because of the ability of early Western Han to mythicize a purported sense of tradition, Han Gaozu and his court managed to sew a thread connecting his newly formed empire to the Zhou dynasty through the defense and enactment of the ritual and music, in the name of a so-called orthodoxy. Orthodoxy not in the sense of prescribing to the norm of the past, but rather use them as a particularistic platform to incense and legitimize the current rulership, indeed an 'orthodoxy of the present'.

1.2 *New Fervor at Gaozu's Court*

Naturally when I refer to 'Liu Bang's time', this is to be intended holistically, that is his reign achieving a totality larger than the sum of its components. It is therefore important to observe how

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of them by simplistically leashing ideologies within the intellectual borders of a school. See: *Shiji*, *Taishigong Zixu* (太史公自序). 3989-4034.

[15] Once again Nylan warns us about the idea of literal, reverent acceptance of a canon of book. The fact that a myriad of commentaries were still circulating until late in the dynasty, and that many of the classics we have now were probably edited or written during Han, and that the classics themselves would deal with the most desparate topic should make us weary about the validity of literary tradition accepted as it was presented. Nylan, 25.

[16] Kern, *In Praise of Political Legitimacy*. 49-50

[17] Kern, 2000, 170-1; On another occasion Kern explains that "the idea of 'timeliness' or 'changing with the times' connected Western Han political and administrative needs to contemporaneous cosmology" Kern, *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, 108.

the two major thinker at Gaozu's court molded a new paradigm of the world based on a new concept of orthodoxy on a large scale which wanted to be presented as a rupture with the past, but it rather reinforces the prospect of a convergence and reinterpretation of ideas.[18]

Lu Jia 陸家 (died ca. 170 BCE) and Shusun Tong 叔孫通 (died ca.188 BCE) will in fact set out to explore how two major figures of Han Gaozu's reign set the empire – the cultural one – in motion ideologically. Two figures both hailing from Chu 楚, Liu Bang's homeland, and both served under the Qin, to smoothly transit into being erudite for the Han court later.[19] It is already self-evident how contradictory their vision of an empire in direct connection with the Zhou's golden era was. How was it possible to detach themselves from the Qin administration they worked under, especially Shusun Tong, for many years? The rationale of Confucian 'orthodoxy' and its traditionally moral principles distinguishing the Zhou era (thus, implicitly the Han era) from the brutalities perpetuated under the Qin remained the same, however, at a closer look, we can see how the principles and ideas as well as the ritual these two intellectuals propended for were substantially unorthodox, and very much disclosing how variegated the early Han court was, ensuing from the old dichotomy of what was written about in later times *vis-à-vis* the actual complexity of the situation.

Lu Jia 陸賈 is one of the architect behind the cultural imperialism of the Han, thus setting China's cultural trajectory for almost two millennia by tiding the legitimation of power to orthodox Confucianism in its apparently most classical form.[20] As such he is one of the most important intellectual of the early Han era, though he is often understudied as a political thinker.[21] Lu Jia, along with the emperor and Shunsun Tong, was originally from the state of Chu, and albeit this may sound irrelevant, it is instead crucial in identifying their views that ensue from it. The state of Chu (*Chuguo* 楚國) was one of the most powerful during the Western Zhou and due to his geographical distance

[18] Ge, p.212.
[19] For Lu Jia, *Shiji*, 3261-3278. Although it is not specified it worked under Qin, it is very likely he was already an administrator for the previous Qin government, which would explain his fame already at the beginning of the Han. For Shusun Tong, *Shiji*, 3289-3304.
[20] Goldin and Sabattini, 8.
[21] He became more famous for his rhapsodies *fu* 賦 than his political writings.

from the Central Plains always boasted a peculiarly independent cultural and musical scene.[22] Therefore, it is already evident how such three powerful figures might have, intentionally or not, brought their own taste and perspective at court and disguised them in the face of history under the veil of an 'orthodoxy'.

One particular passage from the *Shiji* involving Lu Jia 陸賈 reprimanding Han Gaozu is exemplary in showing how the former would envision the dynasty and present it to the latter.[23] Indeed, when Liu Jia was chided by the emperor complaining that he had conquered the empire "from the back of a horse" and that what use could he "ever make of the *Odes* and the *Documents"*,[24] to which the scholar replied by asking sagaciously whether was it possible to rule over such an empire from the back of an horse.[25] Lu Jia realized that the Han empire would have never come into being were it not for its military conquests, nevertheless, in order to truly prosper, it needed also a culture supporting such project ideologically.[26] In his *magnus opus*, the "New Discourses" *xinyu* 新語, composed for Han Gaozu's court lays out his vision promoting a continuity between the Han and the Zhou dynasties.[27] To achieve that, he would need to make the Qin dynasty come across as a degeneration of the values transmitted by the Zhou. Tearing apart that 'umbilical cord' with the Qin dynasty was something attainable, for Lu Jia, by (re)establishing the proper transmission of knowledge, the morality, rituality and musicality of the classical Zhou era, according to proper standards; an objective also shared by his intellectual peer Shusun Tong. Nonetheless, the 'cord' might be difficult to sever, in fact, the early Han dynasty while publicly rejected the Qin institutions, it continued to adopt them.[28] Politically, this divergence between the ideological orthodoxy and the reality of things is also rather glaring: Lu Jia in fact hoped for a governance based upon a true sense of Confucian morality (*de* 德), and yet he

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[22] Tian, p 25-6.
[23] Lu Jia is also said to be man of great rhetorical skill, able to have various reign submit to the Han empire without shedding blood. He was therefore very esteemed both by emperor Gaozu and Wen. Goldin and Sabattini , p. 4.
[24] Within the Chinese canon those also represent the Confucian orthodoxy *par excellence*.
[25] *Shiji*, 3266.
[26] 文武並用 "The civil and martial aspects are both to be employed". *Idem*.
[27] Kern, Cambridge, p. 107
[28] Barbieri-Low and Yates, 219–242.

expressed the ideal sovereign as *not-acting* (*wuwei* 無為), a staple Daoist conception.[29] The idea of adapt creatively to new circumstances as they arise seems to collide with his attempts to depict his connection to the past.[30] Abiding by principles of humanity (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義) as the inalterable paradigms might seem tempting but what it does is implementing a vision of the world tailor-suited for his time. Once again it does not adhere to the past, it rather takes avail of it to legitimize the new empire and its existence.

In his approach to music, Lu Jia largely maintains a typical Confucian stand, believing Music 樂, in concomitancy with Rituals, to be the pillar of the good governing.[31] However, this conception again intertwines with the Daoist idea of the *wuwei*, where by controlling Rite and Music (*zhi liyue* 制禮樂) the ruler could not act for everything was already set in motion[32] and "Heaven and people joined in harmony (天人合策)", revolutionizing the tradition Confucian appeal for action by inserting a somewhat cosmological hint to the claim of Han rulership.[33]

If Lu Jia molded the theoretical field on the 'orthodoxy of now', Shusun Tong is then the practical enactor of such principle. He is the person credited to having re-organized all the ritual system for the new court, apparently modeled on the past.[34] His attempts of controlling Rituals and Music 制禮樂 was well received by the emperor and extended to all the imperial administration.[35] The value of this enterprise was twofold: connecting the new empire to a tradition that saw in Rituals and Music the most effective way to exercise political control,[36] while at the same time practicing new forms of entertainment. The offices in the early Han dynasty in charge with managing and arranging music *yayue* 雅樂 was the "Great Music" (*Taiyue* 太樂)[37]. The office had a similar endeavor to Shusun's project of trying to make the dynasty soundscape echoing back to the splendors of the Zhou dynasty,

[29] Goldin and Sabbattini,7; Cai, 256
[30] *Idem*
[31] Cai, 256.
[32] *Idem*
[33] Goldin and Sabbatini, 27.
[34] *Hanshu*, 83.
[35] Tsai, p.104
[36] *Xunzi*'s *Treatise on Music* is emblematic in this sense. See Hutton's translation, 218-223.
[37] Yang and Geng, p.17. There are some evidence that the *Yuefu* already existed by this time, but it certainly did not enjoy the same influence as under Han Wudi. *Yuefu* will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.3.

by cultivating the correct (orthodox) tunes. Shusun Tong has been therefore regarded as the founder of the Han rituality and musicality — while not a falsity, it though rests on the assumption that his enterprise was a re-enactment of the Zhou's *liyue* (禮樂) system.[38] However, this should be considered as Han propagandistic move from the system itself but also from the men, such as Shusun Tong, that benefited from it.[39] Indeed, Shusun Tong was very capable at adapting to the times changing as he had been a high stature figure from the Qin to the Han dynasty.[40] He managed to coalesce different claims of rulership, by leveraging on coeval necessities and tastes, while proclaiming the severance of their respective cultural and social context in the face of the reestablishment of orthodox ritualistic system. In short, Shusun Tong made Confucianism more orthodox on paper while, in actuality, he rendered it closer to forms of pragmatism and openness that will be able to make his way centuries later to the official doctrine of the state.[41]

After having examined how Lu Jia and Shusun Tong lay down the ideological and institutional framework for research of an apparent orthodoxy pivoting around the idea of a cultural continuity with the Zhou, the final segment of this chapter will explore more in detail two instances of music and the illogicities generated by the pursue of a purported orthodox past transformed into the sanctification of the present.

1.3 *Music of (Un)orthodoxy*

Constantly entrenched in the debate about the superiority of *yayue* over *suyue*, the early Han is 'watershed' period for Chinese musical theory.[42] The very proclaimed commitment to orthodoxy is

[38] His systematization of rituals and music proved immensely influential to the theories of legitimation thereafter. See, Guo, 30. Moreover, Guo offers a view on the major ritualistic changes in act and how they further stretch apart from the original Confucian doctrine, in a process of 'constant alteration'.

[39] As Yang points out, it is very likely that already by the time of the Qin unification many of the original sounds of the Zhou court were lost. Yang, 6.

[40] Kern, 2000, 157.

[41] Ge, 214; Nylan, 32.

[42] DeWoskin, 31.

challenged by the intrinsic vulnerability to outward influences and extemporaneousness of music as an art form, compared to, say, a written text with its physical as well cultural materiality.

The Han musical era is characterized by a purported adherence to the tradition, but as many archeological findings have shown, the influx of well-established independent musical tradition (like that of Chu and its instruments)[43] or proper foreign musical influence (mainly from Central Asia tuning system and instrumentations),[44] have led scholars to believe that *suyue*, in the sense of anything not ascribing under the classical musical definition of *yayue*, was getting increasingly more popular to the point that it slowly underwent a process of slow canonization.[45] *Yayue* is *de facto* permeated by different elements of *suyue*,[46] hence neglecting the pattern of purity that the traditional historiography has attributed to the Confucian revival in the early Han dynasty. Two early cases musical composition, will be analyzed in this chapter, namely the "Great Wind Ode" (*dafeng ge* 大風歌) and the "Chamber songs to pacify the era" (*anshi fangzhong ge* 安世房中歌) to show, through the medium of music, the impediments to talk about orthodoxy in its traditional acceptation. The first one shows the unconcealable traits of oral, popular songs; the second, more interestingly, is the musical arrangement for a corpus of official hymns, therefore should stick to the most traditional norms, however depictions in traditional histographies themselves seem to contradict this idea.

Owing to such nature and the problem with music notation,[47] the written texts are one of the main sources of understanding in how the musical soundscape might have been like at Liu Bang's court. Although one should always realize the historical accuracy and the intentionality of spreading a certain agenda in a given text, it is relevant to see how music is discusses and what are the implications of transcribing a certain song over many others. In the context of music criticism, Ban Gu was not exactly neutral in his *a posteriori* judgment, unlike Sima Qian who instead wanted to transmit

[43] Furniss, 2019, 55.
[44] Kaufmann, 74 and Furniss, 2009, 37.
[45] Furniss, 2009, 35.
[46] 以俗入雅. See, Xiu, p.56.
[47] According to Yang and Geng, there is a possibility that some of the texts contained musical notation, but it does not investigate further, as it is probably unreadable to a modern audience, if true. See Yang and Geng, pp. 69-70.

knowledge from the past and was embedded in his time (ca. Han Wudi's reign).[48] Yet, according to both the *Shiji* and *Hanshu*, while stopping in Pei for a banquet, Liu Bai, inebriated by alcohol, composed the "Great Wind Ode"; the fact that it was so moved to burst into tears stands as a testament to how such kinds of songs resonated with the emperor.[49] The lyrics of the "Great Wind Ode" are collected *in toto* in both the two historiographies, therefore one might assume the popularity it had enjoyed centuries later after Liu Bang's passing.[50] Naturally, we do know not how exactly the song might have sounded like, but at first glimpse, the lyrics suggest a strong connection with Chu. This is mostly noticeable in the use of the participle *xi* 兮, which remind the reader/listener to the sounds of Chu, in particular the *Chuqi* 楚辭.[51] The fact that this song is mentioned in both the historiographies is not unusual — if anything, it contributes to a more colorful description of Liu Bang, nonetheless the fact that both historians bothered to write down the entire lyrics is a relevant fact. A song glaringly unorthodox being officially transcribed means that it had already become musical heritage of the dynasty and, through the close association with Han Gaozu and the official patronage in the *Hanshu* and *Shiji*, the "Great Wind Ode" assumes a special status. This defies the canonicity as privileged tutelage of an idyllic past musicality, rather in this song it is evident how much the paradigm for orthodoxy is indeed flexible and able to englobe different tunes.

In the political liturgy of the rituals, among the new sets established by Shusun Tong, one fundamental component were the so-called state hymns, which, other than pivotal task of providing wording to the performance, they synchronically create the intended meaning and 'other-reality', or ideal worldview beyond ritual act itself.[52] The ritual – in its wholeness, similarly to the Classics (經) – becomes indispensable for the court to legitimize its power, regulate the course of history and exerts one's own authority under the guise of return to the pomps of a semi-mythical past.[53] The semiotics of the hymn language is highly representative of how the dynasty sees itself and wants to be presented in the face

[48] Zheng, 153
[49] *Hanshu*, 94; *Shiji*, 489.
[50] The lyrics are preserved in *Idem*.
[51] For an introduction and translation of the *Chuci*, see Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*.
[52] Kern, 1996, p.32.
[53] Tsai, 105; Ge, 237.

of history. One of the most significant collections of state hymns dating back to the Han Gaozu's era is the *Anshi Fangzhong Ge* 安世房中歌 (hereafter *ANFZG*).[54] Despite they might appear bed-chamber music (房中), the topics covered, e.g. the expression of ethical-political norms, the autoreferential presentation of the ritual performance, and the euphemistic praise of military actions,[55] point to a more official role as hymns.[56] The macro-topics of these hymns present a discrepancy between the supposedly eternal values of the past and the exhaltation of the present, namely Gaozu's military achievements.[57] The one element that seem to be hinting of a more 'orthodox' approach to their composition is the archaic language. *ASFZG* exhibits an abundance of archaisms both in language and notion linking the texts to the political language of the *Classic of Odes* and the *Documents* (*shangshu* 尚書), the bronze epigraphs of Zhou times and later texts of the orthodox tradition and a basic monotony created by an extremely rarefied vocabulary, granting the text a high degree of interchangeability and classical flavor.[58] The unorthodox element is found in its (probable) musicality. Kern points out how in the *Hanshu* the *ASFZG* is said to possess "sounds of Chu" (*chusheng* 楚聲). Although Kern dismisses the "Sound of Chu" as literally embedded in the text, while acknowledging a potential connection in the musical performance of the hymns according to the region standards of state of Chu.[59], he is quick at stating that "the explicit references to the dignified music of the Zhou, regarded as the ultimate expression of culture and politics, may be basically ideological rather than factual."[60] As we have demonstrated so far, it would plausible for Han musician to take inspiration from Chu, for two main reasons: first, the musical style at Liu Bang's era was rather freewheeling which one must assume there were no precise standards in defying what the music of the Zhou kings might have sounded like; second, it would almost seem like Shusun Tong

[54] Not mentioned in the *Shiji*, but presented in the *Treatise of Ritual and Music* 禮樂志 of the *Hanshu*.
[55] Kern, 1996, p.37.
[56] Kern, 2000, p178.
[57] A partial translation of the hymns is offered in Kern, 2000, 41-3.
[58] *Ibidem,* 44.
[59] *Ibidem*, 37. Furniss, (2019, p.36) tells us about the preservation of some of Chu's musical instruments like a special kind of drum, or the special lacquering process (p. 51) makes it even likelier. Tian (p.26) also elaborate on how Chu musicality had manyfold penetrated the very essence of the early Han musical scene.
[60] Kern, *ibidem,* 41.

in 're-enacting' the entire ritual and musical system from the previous dynasty emulating the Zhou *liyue* system,[61] he could have molded his tunes upon the musicality of Chu, to appeal to his own and emperor's personal propensions, for they were men of Chu.[62]

Although we do not have incontrovertible evidence of Chu being the foundation of the Han musicality, nevertheless, many studies in the literary, musicological, and archeological fields, have demonstrated how at least partially Chu's culture have shaped the tastes – and therefore the opinion – of the Han court. Given the fact that the tuning of *yayue* by the Han dynasty was probably a long-forgotten memory, their attempt to re-create them might have been influenced by the "Sounds of Chu" given the geographical biases and inclination for Chu's musicality of the three leading people of the time, Han Gaozu, Lu Jia and Shusun Tong. This was in fact the case for the "Great Wind Ode" and probably for the *ASFZG*.

In synthesis, through the analysis of these two musical works in their materiality as literary pieces, I have attempted to demonstrate how the rhetoric according to which Han have managed to re-create and rekindle the ritual and musical system of the Zhou, therefore claiming Confucian orthodoxy as a powerful ideological foundation for political legitimation, was but unsubstantiated rhetoric. This is not to say that the Han did not uphold an 'orthodoxy', they did, but not in the traditional sense of the word as observer of the sacred value transmitted from the past. The analysis of the "Great Wind Ode" and of *ASFZG* have shown how musically the two pieces – certainly the former and probably the second – present connections to the Chu musicscape, which in turns implies a vast acceptance of these tunes, even in the case of official hymns. This is in line with what many scholars believing that the folk music *suyue* enters ever more deeply into *yayue* confines, making them ever more penetrable.[63] In assuming that these tunes could link them the newborn dynasty to a glorious semi-mythical past, the Han implemented an 'orthodoxy of now', whereby the actual glorification is but in a suspended present.

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[61] Kern, *Ibidem*, 37

[62] Kern, 2000, 179.

[63] According to Yang and Geng, some *yayue* songs were performed during dinners as form of entertainment, therefore the boundaries between *yayue* and *suyue* were becoming ever more porous. Yang and Geng, 28.

Chapter 2

Han Wudi's Limitless Empire

Arguably the most influential and powerful emperor of the Western Han (222 BCE – 9 CE), Han Wudi (漢武帝 156-87 BCE) stands as a paradigm-shifting figure able to link past and future in the inexorable necessities of present. Emperor Wu succeeded his father Jingdi (景皇 188 – 141 BCE) and went on to rule the already thriving Han dynasty for 54 years (141-87 BCE) ushering it into its most prosperous era. Gifted with a visionary leadership and seemingly 'cosmic' ambitions, he expanded the empire's boundaries, strengthened central governance, and implemented policies that laid the foundation unified China. His reign not only left a mark in the political landscape of the Chinese empires, but also modeled culture on an unprecedented scale. Many modern and traditional historiographies would see Han Wudi's reign as high point in establishing Confucianism as the sole ideology of the state, therefore imposing this philosophy's orthodox teachings as the main paradigm for political and cultural appraisal. However, this seem to be a rather preliminary and superficial account of the cultural atmosphere at the Han court. If anything, Han Wudi, while courting Confucian orthodoxy,[64] was in fact deconstructing it in order to make space for his personalistic takes on many topics. His eclecticism made him open-minded about a series of contradictory cults and approaches, also to music,[65] which emperor would wield as a cultural power to enforce his own orthodoxy.

Han Wudi is considered by the historian Loewe as the high point of the government approach he calls "modernist",[66] favoring government monopolies and allowing for a larger budget to be devolved to new cultural enterprises apt to propagate Emperor Wu's personalistic views and transmute them into political orthodoxy of the 'now'. This would not surely the first case in which an emperor tries

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[64] Certainly, under his rule the Confucian boosted their prestige through the formation of teaching posts dedicated to the study and interpretation of Classics. However, the idea of a strict orthodoxy was impossible due to the different interpretations of the Classics and the political unwillingness to enforce one. See, Nylan, 20-2.

[65] Birrell, 1993, 3.

[66] Loewe, 1974, 11.

to impose his own worldview onto the dynasty, but Han Wudi's attempt strikes for the potency with which it rewrote and re-molded cultural orthodoxy by amalgamating multiple perspective on a new cosmic framework that ultimately referenced to the empire and the man at its center.

This chapter would attempt to show how a cultural manifestation like music go along political changes. An attentive reader might notice the absence of Dong Zhongshu (董仲舒), deemed to be one of the most significant thinkers of the Western Han, from this chapter. I purposefully avoided his musicological propositions because they are contained in a work to him attributed, the "Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals" (*Chunqiu Fanlu* 春秋繁露), and I find myself to agree with Loewe about them being a later addition, thus unreliable for this research's purposes.[67] I have instead decided to start with an analysis of *Huainanzi* offering a glimpse into the cosmological speculations about music and rulership from a de-centralized perspective, that is from Liu An's kingdom, and how this syncretically unorthodox approach was later absorbed by the central court rhetoric to legitimate Wudi's rule within his contentions with the smaller semi-independent states inside the empire. The second part of the chapter will then move on to show how the centralized power was then able to project a certain cultural defiance towards what were believed to orthodox principles regarding music. The images of the boastful Han court and its musical scenes through the lenses of a Sima Xiangru's rhapsody picture a musical environment that could certainly not be contained by any such definition, let alone the dogmas of any previous musical tradition. Finally, through the creation of the hymnic "Songs for the Sacrifices at the Suburban Altars" and the "Music Bureau" we witness the institutionalization of the emperor's personalistic views on rituality and music being completed and able to resist a certain opposition after Wudi's dead, thanks to the reconceptualization of old paradigms of orthodoxy into more discernably modern forms.

[67] Loewe convincingly argues that Dong Zhongshu was by Wudi's time critic of some of his policies, therefore he did not enjoy the great Confucian *literatus* status he is often attributed to. At the time, he was somewhat known as a scholar of the Gongyang school of interpretation for the "Annals" (*Chunqiu* 春秋). *Cfr.* Loewe, *Dong Zhongshu, a 'Confucian' Heritage and the Chunqiu fanlu*.

2.1 Huainanzi: A Myriad of Universes

Not just one of the most relevant philosophical text of the early Han, the *Huainanzi* ("Masters of Huainan" 淮南子) is also of critical importance for the entire Chinese philosophical speculation, whose significance, one might well argue, has been cosmic.[68] The *textus receptus* comprises of 21 chapter dealing with the most disparate topics, from cosmology to rulership, from aesthetics to mythology. The text is thus better described as a compendium, a *summa* even, of sagely advise for a young and ambition new emperor at the time, Han Wudi (漢武帝).[69] In a poignant essay Murray highlights how the *Huainanzi* fundamentally concerns a family and its internal relations, one's 'flesh and blood' (*gurou* 骨肉);[70] while this is undoubtedly the underlying principle of the book, the entire gamut of topics covered within the *Huainanzi* are embedded in a thick fabric of correlative speculations which define our very own reality, or as Leblanc would have it, our ontologies.[71] Therefore, what was passed down as a support to Han Wudi rulership's claims, in reality, conceals contested visions about the world and the state, with Liu An's *Huainanzi* still not willing to relinquish the old enfeoffment as the ideal system of government.[72] Contextually, though, the world was changing: as Wudi was assembling more and more power and was centralizing state control, allowing for the court to exert a significantly more cultural influence and the emperor very personalistic 'orthodox' agenda. The *Huainanzi* therefore puts forward solutions to anachronistic questions.[73]

This chapter is therefore the analysis of such times-changing ontological clash between a minor kingdom, that of the kingdom of Huainan ruled by Liu An, and the increasingly more centralizing tendencies of Han Wudi's court. Furthermore, after introducing the political and intellectual context in which the *Huainanzi* was composed, the role of music in pushing forward Liu An's worldview will be observed, and how such a-historical (i.e. untraditional) conceptions would ultimately be seized by

[68] Major, 51.
[69] Kern, *Creating a Book and Performing It*, 150.
[70] Murray, *The Liu Clan's 'Flesh and Bone'*, 291.
[71] Leblanc, 74
[72] Ge, 235. Murray traced all the major critiques raised in the *Huainanzi* against the central court's excess of power trampling over the smaller kingdoms like Huainan. See Murray, *passim*, 306-24.
[73] Rom, *Echoes of Rulership*, 51.

the central court itself, strengthening Wudi's rulership while simultaneously confuting traditional orthodoxies.

2.1.1 *The Text and Its Author(s)*

The *Huainanzi* (淮南子) takes its name from the small kingdom where it was composed. Huainan was located in the modern-day Anhui province and, similarly to a western fief it enjoyed a *modicum* of independence, although nominally was under the control of the central court in Chang'an. At the time of the composition of the text Liu An (劉安 179-122 BCE) was the prince ruling over Huainan, whose court had become famous for attracting talents from all over the empire. This fervent intellectual context is reflected in the *Huainanzi*: although Liu An is often quoted as the writer, he probably acted as a supervisor, given the considerable amount of wide-ranging subjects and philosophical expertise, in particular of the *Huang-Lao* (黃老),[74] that were poured into the compendium by many scholars.

Liu An was also directly part of the Liu royal lineage as Han Gaozu's nephew and Han Wudi's great-uncle, to whom it acted as personal advisor.[75] The Huainan prince was born in an era where the only conceivable mode of governing was through feudalism in the style of the East Zhou era. He would envision the Zhou king as more naturally fit to rule than Han emperors. That was the idea of many minor ruler until Wudi's central bureaucratism would bring about the end of feudalism as formerly conceived.[76] The contention will be such that, after having been accused of plotting against Wudi, Liu An would kill himself, therefore dying as a traitor. Notwithstanding this, the *Huainanzi* was still preserved as an odd piece within the orthodox tradition and Liu An considered a patron of arts,[77] all thanks to Han Wudi's personal sanction of the text. As a matter of fact, the first 'big book' of Han times and its overall composition could have been seen as a forceful intervention into the politics and

[74] A syncretic school of thought heavily from Daoism and local folk religion. See, Goldin, 161-3.
[75] Kern, 150
[76] Major, 51.
[77] *Idem*, 52

culture at the time of the more experienced Jingdi (Wudi's father). However, the efficacious performance given to elucidate its content for a young and suggestible Wudi, as well as the text ability to synthetize all the previous knowledge in a single, mathematically discernable *unicum* provided claims to rulership for the emperor that went beyond echoing past glories, claims pivoting around the idea of a cosmic legitimation of the present. All of this prevented the *Huainanzi* from falling into the oblivion of history,[78] once again proving how the definition of orthodoxy was incredibly malleable, especially at Wudi's boastful court. We now turn on to see how music helped preserving the text, in its cosmic assertion and its performative potency.

2.1.2 *The Totality of Music*

Since at least the Warring States, Chinese philosophical ideas were much more amalgamated than later historians, starting from Ban Biao, made them seem to be. Early Han dynasty might as well be defined as the culmination of such phenomenon, converging ideas from both the Zhou and the Qin era into a grand system of what has been called "correlative cosmologies". Following the stabilization of a united empire, this one needed to make sense of the complexities of the world in a way that was modifiable by the sages/rulers, but intelligible to most people. The necessity to logicize the world in the totality of its manifest and not has brought about the creation of system Brindley refers to as "spiritual naturalism".[79] This term includes both the religious aspect and the proto-scientific approach through which nature and cosmos are explored. The *Huainanzi* is perhaps the spiritual-naturalist text *par excellence*, a text where various intellectuals, skilled in different fields of learning, came together to realize an *oeuvre* trying to expound upon all the human knowledge. The text combines the cosmic space and time, Heaven and Earth, life and death, according to a system of reference, which was mathematically[80] and logically integrated into an intellectual framework that came to define the early

[78] Kern, *Idem*, 150.
[79] Brindley, 4
[80] The *Huainanzi* in fact contains many ingenious mathematical models to calculate a myriad of things such as planetary movements or even pitches. See, Kaufmann, 139-49; Rom, 134.

Western Han.[81] Realities or cosmologies, according to the *Huainanzi*, relate and interconnect through a system of resonance (*ganying* 感應), ultimately to bring the True Man, the one who understand the silent potency of the *Dao* (The Way) and enters into a communion with it, to the fullest self-realization.[82]

Although there is not a chapter entirely dedicated to it like in the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, music is still embedded in the argumentative structure of the *Huainanzi* through allusions or references.[83] With prevalence of acoustic over moral music theories (the latter becoming a corollary of the former), music offers tangible examples of resonances between the worldly phenomena.[84]

Music in the *Huainanzi* is more of a tool than an ideal in at least two ways: literal and sonic. The musicological discussion in the *Huainanzi* is an interesting example of syncretism, between Daoism immaterialism and Confucian pragmatism. Reversing the traditional Confucian perspective on music, the *Huainan* maintains that the greatest aural product manifestation is the *absence* of sound.[85] In a in a zhuangzian logic,[86] the absence of sound is the potential container of *all* sounds, actual music is therefore but a subclass (or a "branch" *mo* 末) of silence. Nonetheless, this is but an ideal remark, music is often present in its sonic form, in its alterable and material form, therefore it needs 'to be controlled and not let one be controlled by it'.[87] Once the ruler has exhausted his inherent knowledge in the Way, the control exerted on music and rites serve to harmonize the "human affairs" 事 by striking balance, almost in physiological sense.[88] It is thus no coincidence that music becomes a rhetorical tool as a demonstration of ideal rulership, a Confucian 'orthodox' method applied in unorthodox text.

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[81] Ge, 232.

[82] Leblanc, 64.

[83] They both discuss amply pitch-standards *lü*, however the *Huainanzi* not only does it discusses them in relation to the cosmos, but also to the ethical and aesthetical sentiment. Rom, 127.

[84] DeWoskin, 30. The Chinese pentatonic scale *wuyin* 五音 also started to acquire a cosmogonic significance when, along with the "5 tastes" (*wuyin* 五音), went on to be associated with the "Five Agents" (*wuxing* 五行), i.e., Major, 29

[85] *The Great Ancestor of all music is the non-music* (無音者，聲之大宗). Rom, 142.

[86] Liu An is also said to be one of the final compilers of the *Zhuangzi*. Wong, 519.

[87] The *Huainanzi* divide reality in the unalterable "Way" (*dao* 道) and the "human affairs" (*shi* 事), changeable by the intervention of the ruler. Rom, 147.

[88] Interestingly, the Chinese term for "governing" *zhi* 治 pertains to the medical sphere, also meaning "curing".

Other interesting musical aspects of the *Huainanzi* are not in its content but rather its form. As observed by Wong, *Huainanzi*'s capacity to penetrate into the mind of literati of the Han court and consequent decision to transmit it to the posteriority also stems from the text's ability to permit a somatic process of aural reading and philosophical praxis to occur simultaneously.[89] The rhyme-patterned passages are, in fact, not just a mere embellishing figures of speech, but rather they facilitate the memorization through an act of repeatable, musical vocalization,[90] which, in turn, render the internalization of philosophical concepts more intuitive and easily appreciated.[91]

Here, we have explored how the Huainanzi poses itself to be one of the most important, paradigm-shifting text to be produced in the Han dynasty, perhaps in the entire imperial era. In the first part it was observed how this text, apart from its every cosmological speculation, is a text of 'flesh and blood', where the ideological contention between the old feudalism and bureaucratic centralism was materializing in the text and in the figures of Liu An and his nephew, the emperor Han Wudi and how the latter's court was able to englobe the former's work into his personalistic concept of orthodoxy. Subsequently, we have explored how was music useful in making claims of rulership more appealable to the court. The *Huainanzi* takes avail of the multitude of ways, both literal and sonic, in which music is able to convey and even magnify the cosmological messages within the intelligible framework of "cosmic resonance " 感應, in so doing, this text was – through Wudi's sanction – indirectly canonized in a tradition which purportedly respected the Confucian orthodoxy, but in reality seemed to be more and the more personalistic and based on contingent necessities of rulership.

2.2 *The Vainglorious Court*

Han Wudi and its massive ambitions, both military and cultural, left an indelible mark upon the identity of Chinese culture. Indeed, after concentrating increasingly more power in the central court's

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[89] Wong, 516.
[90] Something similar has been demonstrated by Yang in his analysis of *Shijing* as formulaic, ritualistic, pro-musical, para dancing oral poetry. Yang, 97.
[91] *Idem*

hands by limiting those of the minor courts like Liu An's Huainan Kingdom, Wudi was in a privileged position to play a decisive role regarding the establishment of state cultural orthodoxy.[92] However, this chapter wants to join a series of modern scholars[93] in confuting the idea depicting Han Wudi as the staunch defender of Confucian orthodoxy in his promotion of classical texts and their study. Rather, it wants to picture Wudi's boastful reign as a cultural powerhouse, – extremely personalistic and emperor-based – capable of forging its own cultural (and therefore ontological) orthodoxy and, through efficacious means of state-sanctioning, to engrave it into the very cultural fabric of Chinese history. Indeed, Wudi's cultural sphere would occasionally resort to the past mostly in his attempts to reinforce the emperor's ancestry and bless his legacy. However, in comparatively stable empire and ruling family, the claim to rulership became more unorthodox, echoing system of correlative cosmologies to legitimize the emperor. As with Han Gaozu before, the establishment of a system of rituals and music would prove crucial in leaving a lasting cultural print. Therefore, this chapter will probe into Han Wudi's extravagant court, and in its choices regarding music and rituals, to see how what has been a passed down as the moment where Confucian orthodoxy becomes state doctrine is actually misleading insofar Wudi's court did impose an orthodoxy, but not necessarily a Confucian one, rather his own personalistic version of it, adhering more to the necessities of 'now' than the 'values' of the past.

2.2.1 *Wudi's Court and Reign*

After a series of successful military campaigns against the tribal confederation of the *Xiongnu* that expanded the Han-controlled territories while also securing the borders, as well as the reduction of small kingdoms states autonomy, Han Wudi's focus concentrated on how to project his authority *culturally*. Wudi's court was set out to fulfil this task and soon transformed into the reflection of his

[92] Dull, 10.
[93] Among which I cannot not mention Nylan, Loewe and Kern.

very personalistic rule. The emperor, himself a poet and a musician,[94] had a natural propension for music and poetry, and was frenetic to sponsor whoever he saw as a talented person. His imaginative curiosity made the court the epicenter of cultural output revolving around his persona.[95] Han Wudi's reign emanated an extreme sense of self-confidence and was enriched by floods of goods and people coming from all over the empire and beyond; the court then was really embodying its times: it was opulent, and it was boastful. It was therefore absolutely against the principle of thriftiness that characterize the ideal image of the Confucian sage-ruler and yet it is considered the pinnacle of the Confucian orthodoxy. Why is that so? Because Han Wudi and his court were controlling the cultural narrative. The emperor was the ultimate sponsor and receiver of all literary and artistic works; therefore, he was the ultimate pivot of the cultural world, at least of the one preserved to posteriority. Han rhetoric was as persuasively grand and often grounded in (semi) historical precedents, cosmological speculations (like the ones covered in the chapter before) or ritual practices,[96] which in the end were all politically motived by a desire to re-affirm the rightfulness of the Han court.[97] But it was easier to try to make sense of the Classics as there was no set of Confucian orthodoxy already established at his time.[98]All the different strains of interpretations for one single classic made it impossible to find a unitary vision,[99] but once again, with no ideological threat to a nominally "Confucian" empire until very late in Eastern Han, the Han throne had no good reason to enforce a strict orthodoxy—and every reason not to.[100] On the contrary, the versality provided an ampler and more effective way to spread ideas in support of the court and its tastes.

Musically – and ritually by extension – Wudi's choices were also very personally or contextually motivated, in some sense he unshackled Chinese musicscape more than ever before. By elevating in front of the posterity genre like the *fu* ("rhapsody" 賦) and *suyue*, while simultaneously continuing to

[94] Zhou, 1.
[95] Knechtges, 1994, 53-4.
[96] Kern, 2010, 480.
[97] *Chin Chuan*, 102.
[98] Dull, 10.
[99] Nylan, 20
[100] *Ibidem*, 21-2

avail of traditional rituals in his own terms, Wudi shows the logic fragilities in perceiving his reign as dominated by Confucian orthodoxy.

The *fu* (usually anglicized as “rhapsody” or “rhyme-prose”)[101] was somewhat of a newcomer into the Chinese literary world. Albeit having its roots in a pre-Han context (potentially Chu), it was not until the dynasty was established that it finally obtained literary acknowledgement. One can easily see why: *fu*, especially the original strain of it classified as *gufu* (古賦) were in fact long, difficult poems characterized by an ornate and hyperbolic style and language, a mixture of rhymed and unrhymed passages, repetition of synonyms, difficult language, a tendency toward a complete portrayal of a subject, and often a moral conclusion.[102] The *fu* and its recitation became an actual entertainment form at court, [103] therefore it was to the court (thus the emperor) that these compositions ultimately addressed and try to cater to. It is then no surprise that some of most important *fu* composer lived and thrived in Han Wudi’s time and court, among whom, Sima Xiangru (司馬相如) certainly stands out. This is significant as *fu*’s semi-poetic form diametrically diverges from the standard of classic poetry *shi* 詩, and yet it has reached a quite unique status of canonicity within Chinese literary history.[104] This further come to show how alterable the concept of orthodoxy may be, especially in regard to the cultural sphere. Other than sharing a possible musical link connected to its performative aspect, the *fu* is also an interesting– though exaggerated – repertory of Han court’s life, particularly in Sima Xiangru (179-117 BCE)’s work. His most famous piece, the “*fu* on the imperial park” (*shanglin fu* 上林賦) was composed under the patronage of Han Wudi at his court, and can be seen at its core as an ornated panegyric for the emperor. The *fu* presents three men discussing about their respective countries’ royal palaces, and the last one of the three provides an imaginative description of a palace, indirectly referring to glories of Han Wudi’s court. What is interesting for this research are the verses 374-404,[105] where a feast is organized to celebrate the emperor’s return from his glorious hunt, and

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[101] Knechtges 2008, 59.
[102] *Idem*
[103] Given its performative language, it is possible that *fu* were accompanied by music during the recitation.
[104] *Fu* was evidently accepted as a full-fledged genre; many later writers would use its forms to different ends. A famous one is Lu Ji’s “*fu* on literature” (文賦).
[105] A full English translation of the *fu* by Knechtges can be found in Knechtges, 2008, 61-73.

in describing the semi-fictious context, Sima Xiangru provides an interesting overview on the musical situation at Han Wudi's palace. First of all, as Knechtges mentions, the exaggerated descriptions demonstrate that the park is a symbol for the empire at large where the Han emperor occupies the center of the cosmos, from which he radiates his imperial power.[106] What we may conclude then is that, while overly exaggerated, the visions laid down in the *fu* are state-sanctioned, thus the flamboyant description of "thousand voices sing the lead …[and] the harmony" or the grandiose "Bells and drums alternately sound[ing]" are tunes of universal significance, which the court has control over and as such are encouraged. Moreover, the music performance depicted in the Xiangru's *shanglin fu* offers the attentive reader a glimpse on the more practical musical tendencies of that time: what we notice is a massive number of tunes being played and dances being performed. While the amount itself is already jaw-droppingly confusing for a Confucian proper ritual-musical performance that favors simpler harmonies and instrumentations, what it the more striking though is the inclusion, hence the implicit state patronage, of the "airs of Zheng and Wei" 鄭衛之聲, traditionally considered the corrupting antithesis to the edifying *yayue*. Again, in the musicological discourse, one can find germane ways to deconstruct the false myth of early Han dynasty as defender of the Confucian orthodoxy. What an orthodox Confucian would scorn at, *suyue*, or "popular music" was in Han Wudi's time in fact becoming incredibly popular, inasmuch to take over the court, and indeed another element solidifying the thesis that the emperor Wu's approach to tradition is not that of sternly conforming orthodoxy, but rather a dynamic amalgamation of ideas based on personalistic tastes, rulership concerns or when possible, both.

With the Han empire's capital Chang'an (長安) transforming into a cosmopolitan center, foreigners started to pour into the city and the empire,[107] this resulted in a challenge to Confucian paradigms which saw the Central Plains as the center of culture with a cultural (and moral) decline proportional

[106] *Ibidem*, 78.

[107] Furniss reconstructs the presence of many foreign musicians at court(s) through archeological findings, though she also acknowledges that they were not very well-represented on statue, details of their foreign origin are hard to spot, unlike in the Tang-era finds. See Furniss, *Unearthing Chinese Musicians*.

to the distance from them.[108] The influx of new people from outside the empire borders revitalized and pluralized the musical scene in Chang'an,[109] to a degree where it easily surpassed the *yayue* in importance or even started to change the musical tastes at large by infiltrating its tunes into the older musical forms. The *shanglin fu* is not the only text that describes the rise of foreign tunes at Han Wudi's court, for instance Ban Gu also describes the emperor's court as being corrupted by the tunes of Zheng and Wei.[110] When this comes from a moralizing historiography like the *Hanshu* is even more significant as it indirectly acknowledges that the *suyue* became a distinctive trait of Han Wudi's court soundscape. This should not be surprising, for *yayue* was notoriously more tedious to listen to, whereas *suyue* proved to be more dynamic, more harmonically complex, indeed more enjoyable to hear; this was a fact known from ancient time.[111] However it is when a person like emperor Wu who concentrates so much power, most importantly cultural, in the hands of the few élites that the latter are able to impose one's personal taste as a new orthodoxy in the face of history, by enlarging and sanctioning the production of new genre of the discovery of different local forms.[112]

To conclude, Han Wudi's influence over musical evolution in China is then immense and 'orthodoxy-bending', while simultaneously capable to impose new cultural and musical models that, albeit received criticism after his death, were extended temporally and geographically.[113] Han Wudi's image as a liberator of music is surely a tempting one, but, as I argue in next chapter, his success in imposing his personalistic orthodoxy was not just the result of his strong personality or love for the arts, but it also depended upon to the institutionalization of the emperor's tastes in the form of official hymns and the "Music Bureau".

[108] Kaufmann, 74.
[109] Yang and Geng, 45.
[110] Zheng, 153.
[111] A passage in the Mencius (*Mengzi* 孟子) where the King of Qi admits to Mencius his incapacity to enjoy the proper *yayue* music of the Former Kingd, while taking much more pleasure in listening to the popular music *suyue*. *Mencius*, 60–61; Kaufmann, 73.
[112] A record of the major *suyue* musical forms in the Han Dynasty is offered in Yang and Geng, 45-62.
[113] Marsili argues how Emperor Wu was the first sovereign who seemed capable of extending the authority of the court to the periphery. Marsili 61.

2.3 *Institution and Music: Official Hymns and Yuefu*

In chapter 1.3 we have observed the important role that Shusun Tong played in 're-enforcing' or rather re-creating *ad hoc* a series of rituals and tunes that had the declared purpose to connect the newborn Han dynasty to the virtuous times of the Zhou dynasty, while it has actually been revealed how the attempts to do so were themselves acts of rather unorthodox cultural creation based on the contingent necessities. Similarly, Han Wudi's court would depart from the tradition interpretation (if there was ever one) of music and ritual and would superimpose his personalistic prerogatives, and somewhat officially (in the sense of being state-backed) and successfully liberated music from many of its constraints.[114] However, compared to Han Gaozu, Wudi did not need to confront himself *vis-à-vis* with a previous dynasty's earlier hegemony — by Wudi's time western Han dynasty was stably well-established —, but in order to justify and elevate his ritual and musical changes to the contemporaneity, let alone to the posterity, what needed to be done was their *institutionalization*. This is most evident in the crafting of the classical-echoing "Songs for the Sacrifices at the Suburban altars" (*jiaosi ge* 郊祀歌) and the massive autonomy conferred to the "Music Bureau" (*Yuefu*, 樂府) in shaping new tunes that will be here discussed.

Although *suyue* was for most of the time preferred over the (imitation) of 'classical' *yayue* sounds, references to a purportedly orthodox music were still a powerful tool to evoke the sense of rulership of the past as a mean of comparison to the present. As we noticed before, Han Wudi reign is characterized by an unprecedented sense of self-confidence and rulership boasting cosmic ambitions, therefore hymns like the Gaozu's era *ASFZG* no longer seem to fulfill those prerogatives. As a matter of fact, a new set of hymns was prepared, its name was "Songs for the Sacrifices at the Suburban Altars" (hereafter *SSSA*). The suburban ceremonies were solemnly carried out once a year by the emperor to thank Heaven (*tianshen taiyi* 天神泰一) and Earth (*diti houtu* 地祇后土) for their benevolence and protection. As the name suggests, these rituals were performed at the suburbs, in the

[114] Citing Dieny from Kern, 2000, 65.

north and in the south, almost in attempt to enclose everything under the 'spell' of expanding Han rulership. These hymns presented the most typical array of classical features: tetrasyllable form (*wuyan* 五言), independence from single historical events, and their cosmological the model based on the correlative "five agents" mirroring the phases of cosmic order.[115] In Wudi's case everything was done on a grander, unorthodox, scale: dynastic legitimation is provided by a cosmic rule and natural omens, the references to past are no longer to Zhou Kings, but the legendary "five emperors" (*wudi* 五帝),[116] in particular to Yellow Emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) as a model of government that suggests political will going beyond individual inclinations.[117] Sacrifices modeled upon regional specificities helped to social cohesion for they showed the authority of the emperor extended from the court to the periphery;[118] in a twist of logic, it is in fact the emperor that goes outside the central court. It is then evident how, apart from the semi-classical language employed, these sacrificial hymns were operating within a personalistic framework that projected homogenization and unity within what Marsili refers to as 'religion for the emperor'.[119] By now it should not come as surprise, but *SSSA* also possessed an unconventional music: Yang and Geng highlight how the *Shij*, in recording the hymns' earlier form,[120] presented a version of the texts heavily influenced by the "sounds of Chu" (楚聲) which abounded in typical Chu's style features, like the aforementioned use of the particle *xi* 兮.[121] Even though the hymns set was said to be revised by Sima Xiangru to render it more classical-sounding (*guya* 古雅),[122] the results were quite mixed, as some later historiographies like the *Hanshu* and the *Jinshu* ("Book of Jin", 晉書) would still point out the Chu influence on the collection.[123] The short analysis of the *SSSA* demonstrates how, even under the most potentially orthodox context of the

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[115] Kern, Hymns, 53.
[116] While the "five emperors" belong to the shared mythological Chinese world, when discussing about political legitimation, usually the one being invoked are the "former kings" 先王.
[117] *Ibidem*, 60-1.
[118] Marsili, 61-2
[119] *Ibidem*, 83.
[120] This is because Sima Qian was a contemporary to Han Wudi, whereas Ban Gu lived centuries later during the western, therefore, different historical time and closeness-distance relation to the events sometimes led up to different recordings.
[121] Yang and Geng, 31.
[122] If true, it would seem ironic to have somebody that thrived on composing an unorthodox genre like the *fu* as the revisor of the hymns.
[123] *Ibidem*, 32.

sacrificial hymns, orthodoxy is bent in order to serve different purposes, and for music, even the what was considered the most classical of *yayue* or *zhengya* ("elegant and correct" 正雅) were not usually adopted, nor did they receive the liking of the court; what was considered "elegant music", and actually performed at court, was in all likelihood 'contaminated' by "popular music".[124]

It is, in fact, *suyue* that under Wudi's reign received an unparalleled success, not only among private patrons,[125] but also thanks to its institutionalization (and therefore indirect imprinting into the cultural and social fabric of Chinese empires there onwards) in the "Music Bureau" (*Yuefu* 樂府). According to the traditional attribution, the *Yuefu* was established by Han Wudi,[126] its stated purposes were to collect poetry (in its primitive state are like songs) from all over the empire through a series of messengers in order to gauge into the country political satisfaction.[127] Although what it was collecting was mostly "popular poetry/music",[128] theoretically, it was based on an orthodox premise by echoing a traditional office dating back to Zhou era which was tasked with similar duties (*caoshi zhi guan* 採詩之官).[129] The *Yuefu* possibilities to adhere to the Confucian traditional system, though, end here. First of all, its very foundation is a matter of scholarly debate: while there is no doubt that the bureau raised to prominence over the course of Wudi's reign, it is very likely he did not establish it, but rather it was reinstated from another prior office.[130] Through the patronage of emperor Wudi, the *Yuefu* became a reflection of the musical tastes of his and his court. This is evident not only in the musical choices that were made, preferring *suyue*, but also on the people that were chosen to head it. Its first known Chief Command of Harmony was in fact a man named Li Yannian (李延年 d. 90 BCE),[131]

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[124] *Idem* and Loewe, 1974, 206. There were some attempts to recreate *yayue* music, most notably by king Xian of Hejian (*hejian xianwang* 河間獻王), but they were hardly performed. See *Idem* and Knechtges, 1994, 63.

[125] Affluent families had their own private orchestra. Furniss, 2009, 27-8.

[126] Ban Gu says that the office was 'established' (*li* 立).See, *Hanshu*, 1755-6.

[127] Kern, 2010, 96; Bielenstein, 52.

[128] The office spurred an entire eponymous genre, *yuefu*, claiming to originate from the songs collected by the *Yuefu*, it was probably just inspired by the supposedly lyrical content of the songs. To check his characteristics, *cfr*. Birrell, 1993 XXXII.

[129] Kern, 2010, 486.

[130] According to Birrell there are serious temporal incongruences in the founding dates as provided by the *Hanshu*, in particular those referring to Sima Xiangru that was a member of the office but was already dead by that time. While Birrell believes Li Yannian was made Master of Music before the *Yuefu* took up its name in 120 BCE, Loewe dates the Bureau's reenactment at 114 BCE. It may be safe to assume that the office was revolutionized. See, Birrell,1989, 224-226; Loewe, 1974, 193; Birrell, 1993,XX.

[131] Knechtges, 1994, 62.

which is significant for two reasons: firstly, Li Yannian shared a personal relationship with the emperor, as he was his brother-in-law, hence it is another evidence of Wudi's highly personalistic form of leadership; secondly, Yannian was a musician expert on foreign music,[132] by promoting such a man the emperor was also publicly supporting the rise of "popular music" and its official permeation into the court, and into the realm of *yayue*;[133] the emperor was therefore more defiantly institutionalizing his preferences *vis-à-vis* the Confucian tradition.

Yuefu is a crucial institution to understand Wudi's bending of the concept of orthodoxy not just in the *suyue* (or *suyue*-infused) music sanctioned and played in entertainment or official contexts, but also in the important regulatory task it had. It has already been discussed before how Wudi's political discourse stretches from particularistic preferences to cosmic reverberations, and, in this sense, this not different with the *Yuefu* which would seem to synthesize his style of rulership. As a matter of fact, the *Yuefu*, among other musical composition and performance duties, was also tasked with controlling the pitch-standards (*lü* 律), in particular to always re-harmonize the supreme pitch, the "Yellow Bell" (*huangzhong* 黃鐘).[134] Trying to grasp reality and its functioning according to the mathematically intelligible model of "correlative thoughts", music in its barest and absolute form of the pentatonic scale was easily associated to the "five agents",[135] therefore to the cosmic and epochal changes that these ensue.[136] Seizing the soundscape, therefore, implied not just a cultural domination, but an effective control over the very operations of the cosmos, power at its pinnacle. Naturally, controlling music had become a matter of political interest and the pitch-standards (律),[137] through which one

[132] By that foreign music also started to called *xinyue* ("New Music" 新樂) which had a less pejorative connotation Birrell, 1993, 2.
[133] Xiu, 56. Yang and Geng provide an overlook of the *yayue* and *suyue* condition at court. See Yang and Geng, 26-33; 45-64.
[134] DeWoskin, *Early Chinese Music and the Origin of Aesthetic Terminology,* 151.
[135] More commonly known as "five elements", I prefer to refer to them as "agents" because of their nature. These five entities, namely Fire (*huo* 火), Water (*shui* 水), Wood (*mu* 木), Metal (*jin* 金), and Earth (*tu* 土), were in fact in continuous relation of mutual generation and destruction, in this sense they are "agents" of the cosmical phases. Their cycle also came to potently symbolize the dynastic passage, with each dynasty being associated with one particular element, in a logic of continuous mutation, portended by omens in the form of natural phenomena (like a flood or an earthquake).
[136] The five basic note (*wuyin* 五音) of the Chinese anhemitonic pentatonic scale are discussed in Kaufmann, 113; Cook, 55. The association between the *wuyin* and the "five agents" are mentioned in DeWoskin,45; Major, 29.
[137] There were twelve of them, six *ya*ng and six *yin*.

can set the tuning, transcended the confines of musical theory to assume a central role in the emperor's quest for cosmic domination. Given the fact that the "five notes" of the pentatonic scale were very variable, they needed the invariable pitch-standards to provide a specific chromatic gamut.[138] The *Yuefu* was therefore a proper 'office' insofar as it was dedicated to the 'bureaucratization' of something – music and pitches in this case – to render it more comprehensible and therefore assert control over it by the central government, i.e., Han Wudi's court. The *Yuefu* is then a 'institutionalized' extension of Han Wudi's personal claims regarding, of course, musical choices and political (un)orthodoxy.

The tale of Han Wudi is one of many radical institutional and cultural changes and contradictions, his reign saw the emperor most defiantly imposing his own political and personal paradigms steering even further away from a traditional Confucian orthodoxy than Han Gaozu did, while at the same time, through the creation of specific posts for experts (*boshi* 博士) for the study of the Classics and declaring Confucianism the state ideology, reinforced his image as a legitimate Confucian ruler.

Han Wudi's choices were not shared by all the scholars or politicians and sparked heated debate in whether to follow Wudi's "modernist" approach or switch to a "reformist" approach.[139] In the end, event though, the reformist lead by Kuang Heng (匡衡) took ahold of power and managed to convince emperor Cheng (51-7 BCE) to undo some Wudi's reforms by moving the suburban altar sacrifices back to the outskirt Chang'an,[140] ultimately Wudi's practices were reprised and merged within the vortex of 'Confucian orthodoxy'.[141] A similar fate fell on the *Yuefu* that after Wudi's death lacked imperial patronage and was increasingly reduced in scope and functions until (27-1 BCE) emperor Ai abolished it in 7 BCE.[142] Though, what could no longer be abolished after many years of

[138] DeWoskin, 45-6.

[139] The written record of the debate is called "Discourses on Salt and Iron" (*yantielun* 鹽鐵論). For an overview of its content and the position of the "reformist", favorable to less spending, more privatization and return to the values of the past, and the "modernist", favorable to lavish spending, more economic state-control, *cfr.* Loewe, 91-112.

[140] Kuang Heng petitioned to change the ritual structure deemed too outlandishly ornated, Kern, 2010, 481-2.

[141] Marsili, 203.

[142] The *Yuefu* was abolished through an imperial act citing the spreading of "pernicious music" (*xieyin* 邪音). See Loewe, 206 and Bielenstein, 52. Similar offices will later be opened by the Sui and Tang dynasty.

institutional and official court sanctioning was the taste developed for *suyue* that, under the guise of "New Music" (*xinyue* 新樂), was able to influence the very course of Chinese musical trajectory.[143] In short, the pervasiveness of Han Wudi's musical and ritual practices was so engraved in the institutions, and then in the cultural and social fabric, in a way that was impossible to discard completely, and stands therefore as a testament to the ability of an emperor with an unprecedented power to distort the concept of Confucian orthodoxy for his own version of it, one that was concerned with the idea of lavish 'now' than that of an ideal past.

Conclusion

Music echoes and reverberates in our ears as much as it does in cultural *strata*. Rooted in the idea that cultural orthodoxy is a continuous process of reinterpretation, this work has, as a matter of fact, employed music as the cultural manifestation of orthodoxy succumbing to its own premises, while being remodeled according to a new set of contemporary prerogatives. The one orthodoxy covered in this article is of course that of the Confucians within the context of the two reigns of arguably the most important Western Han emperors, Han Gaozu and Han Wudi.

Chapter 1 provides an initial overview of Liu Bang's ambitions as he becomes the first emperor of the Han dynasty, which can be summarized in the need of not only political and military power, but also of a cultural base legitimizing his yet unstable claims of rulership (1.1). Such claims seem to be addressed by the thinkers Lu Jia and Shusun Tong, both emphasizing the need to look back and re-establish a connection with the golden age of the Zhou dynasty while distancing from the Qin. With the former providing the theoretical framework of Liu Bang's rulership, while the latter providing the practical ritual and music arrangements (1.2). Even though they seem to operate within the scope of Confucian tradition, it is already evident how this was not the case in the analysis of the "Great Wind Ode" and the *Anshi Fanzhong ge* which demonstrate how the tonalities of Chu, the favorite of the

[143] *Suyue* forms will be preserved into the later Eastern dynasty (25 -220 CE), to thrive once again during the Six Dynasties (220-589 CE) until the culmination under the Tang (618 - 907 CE).

emperor, had by then already permeated the official hymns or the description in official historiographies (1.3), *de fact* had bent orthodoxy to his needs. Chapter 2 lays out Wudi's socio-cultural context, then goes on to depict the power struggle between central and peripheral courts, as symbolized by Wudi and Liu An. The analysis of text attributed to Liu An, *Huainanzi* and its unorthodox musical proprieties which rendered this untraditional text one of paramount importance for Wudi's cosmic claim of rulership, therefore one to preserved within his new and personalistic canon (2.1). Afterwards, it ensues a depiction of Wudi's the central court and its personalistic sanctioning of a certain kind of music (*suyue*) shown through the lenses of Sima Xiangru's eclectic *shanglin fu* (2.2). The description of "hymns for the ritual on the suburban altars" and the *Yuefu* serve to frame the institutionalizations of Han Wudi's political needs and musical preferences as engraved in Chinese culture henceforth (2.3), showing how Han Wudi and the Han Gaozu before him, though under different political circumstances, legitimized (to the point of officializing in Wudi's case) unorthodox approaches to cater to present necessities.

While not a trailblazer in his field, this thesis still conserves the hope of, through a different approach, opening up another small road to join many other scholars in criticizing the misconception of early Han Dynasty being a bastion of Confucian orthodoxy. Inevitably, this research suffers some limitations, firstly, due to the nature of 'immediateness' music possess, it does not make possible to hear and grasp the differences in musical timbres and tuning, thus renders the differences between what was listened as *yayue* or *suyue* harder to pinpoint; secondly one might be disappointed by the lesser use I have made of primary sources. Notwithstanding this, I am hopeful that this work's shortcomings could fuel a future and more detailed research about music in ancient China.

To conclude, as I have tried to address the question on if and how did Han Gaozu and Wudi adhere to any form Confucian orthodoxy with a special attention to music, it would be more correct to consider how did they bend the old orthodox principles without never completely breaking them, and how ultimately the necessities for a semi-mythical, idealized version past are but tropes that underlines new unorthodox perspectives focused on more immediate political justifications. This is

to say that, under the patronage and sponsorship of the powerful emperors, such new visions would later be engraved in the cultural fabric of the empire so deeply that they original unorthodoxy is then transformed in another prospect on the definition of orthodoxy.

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Final Word Count: 147