

The art of knowing others: The *Remmu zhi* and its cultural background*

Licia Di Giacinto (Bochum)

The birth of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–265 AD) along the reaches of the Yellow river saw the fight among different ways to interpret imperial institutions and the society as a whole. Torn between the dream to revive the splendour of the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) and the necessity to look for new paths, Cao Pi's 曹丕 (187–226) court swarmed with scholars and intellectuals who competed for visibility. Many of them comprehended the necessity to have a confrontation with the recent historical cataclysm: in front of the arduous task to explain the reasons which had led to the definitive downfall of the Han dynasty, the Wei scholars were unable to find a unanimous diagnosis. Several intellectuals highlighted the problem of recruitment of capable and honest officials. On the other side, there were those who explained the historical debacle of the second and third century AD through the Han cosmic paradigm and, in particular, with the theory of heaven's mandate (*tianming* 天命). The *Remmu zhi* 人物志, written by Liu Shao 劉劭 (ca. 186–245) at the beginning of the third century AD, has to be understood in this context.¹

The medieval text very early attracted the attention of the sinological world. As early as 1937, when several basic texts of Chinese tradition were still awaiting for reflection and consideration, Shryock “discovered” and translated the text integrally. His useful introductory notes present the *Remmu zhi* as a psychological treatise on typology of human characters. This sudden concern for a work, which, in spite of the recent translation by Lara,² has never gained again a wide resonance, can only be understood within the intellectual context of the thirties, when America faced the interrelated intellectual action of behaviourism and neopositivism. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in fact, American psychology began to experience a traumatic evolution. The strong call for transforming psychology in a strict empirical science led scholars to shift the focus on those phenomena that could be objectively analysed and measured. The new exigencies caused, in turn, the gradual fading in importance of traditional concepts as “consciousness”, “mind”, and “feeling”. From a methodological perspective, thus, the psychologists substituted the analysis of the mind with the observation of human behaviour. On a more theoretical level, a new target was set, namely the

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1 According to his biography in the *Sanguo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), Liu Shao began his official career at the Han court of emperor Ling 靈 (r. 168–189). Apparently, his life continued quietly during the traumatic decades of the third century AD. Under the Wei, he was appointed twice for important mansions. During the reign of Mingdi 明帝 (r. 227–240), he became member of a commission for the revision and the correction of the imperial legal code; later, around the middle of the third century AD, he was commanded to draw regulations for the examination of officials. In this regard, see: *Sanguo zhi* 21:617-622. For further details on Liu Shao's life, see: Shryock, John K., *The Study of Human Abilities. The Jen wu chih of Liu Shao*. New York: Kraus, 1966 (reprint-First Edition: New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1937), pp. 20-26.

2 See: Lara, Anne-Marie, *Traité des Caractères*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997. Unlike Shryock's work, Lara limits her introductory notes to a general comparative presentation of the medieval text. However, her translation is worth of note, mainly in virtue of the exhaustive footnotes.

drawing of an array of principles, which could enable the researchers to predict and to control behaviour.³

The impressive growth of importance of behaviourism in its several tendencies and theories, together with the neopositivistic wind coming from Europe, moulded intellectually the America of the mid-1930ies: it was under these intellectual circumstances that Shryock published his pioneer-translation of the *Remwu zhi*. The American sinologist, in fact, did not miss to notice the similarities between the Chinese text and the new intellectual tendencies and, as a consequence, his translation specifically highlights Liu Shao's focus on manner and behaviour. It is undoubtedly true, for instance, that the medieval thinker attaches a great importance to objectivity and observation: as Shryock says: "He never gives a non-scientific answer to a scientific question".⁴ In this way, the *Remwu zhi* came to be considered primarily in terms of an enlightening description of talents and features of men. Thus, in Shryock's opinion, Liu Shao's work should be regarded as a remarkable treatise of applied psychology, whose scientific analysis of human characters well deserved the praise of the whole scholarly community.⁵

In order to demonstrate the cultural value of the *Remwu zhi*, the American sinologist preferred to defend its intellectual and scientific validity by opting for a comparative approach. Despite its success in providing the readers with an exhaustive analysis of the text, this framework is not adequate enough to explain, on one hand, how Liu Shao remoulded his cultural background and, on the other hand, for which reasons he regarded as necessary to write extensively on ways of behaving. From this point of view, it is worthwhile to dwell on the intellectual profile Shryock sketches of the author of the *Remwu zhi*. First, the medieval philosopher is described as a conservative thinker, whose respect for Confucianism, and above all for the Confucius of the *Lunyu* 論語, brings him into conflict with the cultural landscape of his age.⁶ Moreover, in the attempt to respect the tradi-

3 As John Watson (1878–1958) put it in the famous lecture delivered in 1913 at the Columbia University, psychology has to be regarded as a "purely objective experimental branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behaviour. Introspection forms no essential part of its methods, nor is the scientific value of its data dependent upon the readiness with which they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of consciousness". See: Watson, John B., "Psychology as the behaviorist views it", in: *Psychological Review*, 20 (1913), page 158. Watson's lecture has been usually regarded as the very starting point of behaviourism. Recently, however, this point of view has been challenged in view of a more organic vision of the psychological theories prior to 1913. Wozniak, for instance, emphasizes the studies on human and animal behaviour carried on in the decades before Watson delivered his famous speech. In this regard, see: Wozniak, Robert H. (Ed.), *Theoretical Roots of Early Behaviourism: Functionalism, the Critique of Introspection, and the Nature and Evolution of Consciousness*. London: Routledge/Thoemmes, 1993. For the reception of Watson's theories, see: Samelson, Franz, "Struggle for scientific authority: the Reception of Watson's Behaviourism, 1913–1920", in: *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 17 (1985), pp. 399–425.

4 Shryock (see footnote 1), page 38.

5 As far as the consideration of the *Remwu zhi* within the western sinological community is concerned, Shryock's work should be regarded as a turning point of basic importance. In this regard, we may compare the position of two famous sinologists. A few years before the publication of Shryock's translation, Alfred Forke defined the text as the first attempt to delineate a *Charakterologie*, whose main features were to be reckoned in the centrality of physiognomy and in the lack in scientific method. See: Forke, Alfred, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen chinesischen Philosophie*. Hamburg: Friederichsen, De Gruyter & Co. M. B. H., 1934, p. 197. During the fifties, Needham, strong of the new integral translation, described Liu Shao's work as the most important book on psychology of characters in old Chinese literature. Moreover, he added: "It is significant to find that the *Jen Wu Chih* (Study of human abilities) [...] has nothing whatever to say about physiognomy. It is based entirely on a rationalistic observation of psychological traits and their effects in human affairs". See: Needham, Joseph and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilisation in China*. Vol. 2. *History of Scientific Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1962, page 386.

6 Shryock recalls the medieval reaction against Confucianism, understood as the state ideology, which rose to a dominant position during the Han dynasty. See: Shryock, *op. cit.*, page 40. For a reflection on Han theories, see: Cheng,

tional classification of the text, the American sinologist speaks of him as “the Confucian wing of the logicians”, with additional tendencies towards Daoism and Legism. Shryock gives a perhaps less generic evaluation when he highlights that the materialistic thought outlined in the medieval essay has to be regarded as a mark of pessimism in a world, which had just witnessed the institutional collapse of Han China.⁷

The vagueness of these short remarks on Liu Shao’s cultural background clearly shows how the American sinologist preferred to avoid a careful consideration of the intellectual contiguities between the contents of *Remmu zhi* and earlier Chinese works, by opting, instead, for a comparative approach. There are several factors, which can help to clear up Shryock’s choices. The surrounding cultural climate of the thirties must have undoubtedly played a decisive role.⁸ A further factor of some importance is represented by the ambiguities of the historiographic judgement on this medieval work. In several bibliographic catalogues compiled from the Sui 隋 dynasty (589–618) onwards, for instance, the *Remmu zhi* is classified under the School of Names (*mingjia* 名家).⁹ Then, at the end of the eighteenth century, the scholars working at the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 accepted, on one hand, the traditional cataloguing and, on the other hand, emphasized its contiguity to Confucian texts.¹⁰ Finally, the scarce interest shown by Shryock for an analysis of the relationship between the *Remmu zhi* and its cultural past is more comprehensible in view of the novelty of the theme. After all, the classification of human talents – surely the feature that had mostly attracted Shryock’s attention – constitutes a new field within the Chinese tradition.

At this point, it is reasonable to ask whether the typology of human characters has to be necessarily regarded as the only nerve centre of Liu Shao’s work. An analysis that aims to explain the intellectual relationship between the medieval thinker and his cultural forefathers should, rather, consider this argument as arrival point of a long theoretical path, which may be summed up in the expression “know others” (*zhi ren* 知人). As a matter of fact, if the classification of human talents may be regarded as a permutation of scholarly interests, the knowledge of men is a recurring *topos* in Chinese culture: from the *Shujing* 書經 up to the later decades of the Han dynasty, the importance of this topic had always been a matter of debate. Confucius himself, for instance, once identified wisdom (*zhi* 知) with the knowledge of other human beings.¹¹ Consequently, this paper will not address the analysis of human characteristics: it will rather show up the theoretical assumptions as well as methodological considerations Liu Shao took as starting point for his analysis of human talents. Thus, the *Remmu zhi* will be considered as a reflection on the ways a man formulates his judgement on other human beings. Actually, such a reading of the text finds its justification in the overture of this short medieval essay, where the medieval thinker tries to wipe out any possible misunderstanding:

Anne, *Étude sur le Confucianisme Han: L'Élaboration d'une Tradition Exégétique sur les Classiques*. Paris: Institut des Hautes études Chinoises, 1985. See: Shryock (footnote 1).

7 See: Shryock, *op. cit.*, page 40. Apart from these scattered notes on Liu Shao’s cultural background, Shryock also devotes a short section of his work to discuss the position of the *Remmu zhi* within the whole Chinese tradition. See: Shryock, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-48.

8 In this regard, see the chapters on science and psychology in the *Remmu zhi*. See: Shryock, *op.cit.*, pp. 37-43.

9 For the traditional cataloguing, see: *Suishi* 34:1004 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979); *Jiu Tangshu* 47:2031 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1975); *Xin Tangshu* 59:1532 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975); *Songshi* 205:5203 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977).

10 See: *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao puzheng* 35:921-922. (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1964); Shryock, *op.cit.*, pp. 27-30.

11 *Lunyu* 12.22:33 (*Lunyu zhubi suoyin*). The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1995).

Among the enchanting sides of the sages and of the worthies, nothing is more fascinating than intelligence. Among the treasures of intelligence, nothing is more valuable than to know other human beings.¹²

夫聖賢之所美，莫美乎聰明；聰明之所貴莫貴乎知人。

The analysis of mutual knowledge among men, as it was understood and explained at the eve of the third century AD, will gain in clarity if paired with an enquiry of the intellectual frameworks, which constituted Liu Shao's cultural background. This basic instrument of scrutiny shall work as a litmus test for novelty and originality of the text, both from an intellectual and historical perspective.

In order to portray Liu Shao's argumentation on the art of knowing others, it is convenient to proceed gradually and dissect the topic "know others" (*zhi ren*) in different spheres of analysis. First of all, it is necessary to define the object of knowledge, meaning that the significance of *ren* 人 within the *Renwu zhi* should be adequately explained and investigated. The crucial importance of this point is mainly related to its being the theoretical pillar of the issue under examination. As it will be shown below, discrepant interpretations of the meaning of *ren* led to the formulation of different strategies for knowing men.

It is well known that the definition of "human being" within the intellectual communities of both pre-imperial and imperial China passed also through the analysis of meaning of human nature (*xing* 性): the attempt to give an ethical judgement of it had found its climax in the famous controversy between Xunzi 荀子 (313–230 BC) and Mengzi 孟子 (372–281 BC). Furthermore, the success of human emotions (*qing* 情) as important part of the debate had to further complicate the main coordinates of the topic. With the foundation of the centralized empire the dispute on moral qualities of human nature not only went on fascinating scholars and intellectuals but it even radicalised into a sharp classification of *xing* as source of goodness in a man, and of emotions as spring of human degenerations. The success of this theory and its consequent promotion to imperial dogma did not impede, however, the arousal of competing ideas:¹³ only fifty years before the drafting of the *Renwu zhi*, for instance, Xun Yue 荀悅 (ca.148–209) devoted a small section of his work *Shenjian* 申鑒 to the summary of several scholarly opinions on the features of *xing* and its emotional component.¹⁴ If we look at the question from this point of view, it would be easy to expect a similar approach when we come up to Liu Shao's time. Astonishingly, the medieval philosopher shuns to be trapped in the classical diatribe as the perspective he proposes completely avoids the discussion on the inborn moral qualities in a man. The target he set himself was, rather, a definition of *ren* in structural terms. Therefore, it is not by chance that the discussion is opened with a statement on the subtlety and mysteriousness of

12 *Renwu zhi quanyi* 卷. 21 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1998).

13 *Baibutong* 30:55 (*Baibutong zhubi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1995) defends the goodness of basic nature by identifying it in the five primary virtues: benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), etiquette (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and trustiness (*xin* 信). This statement should be regarded as a summary of the intellectual positions developed during the Former Han. According to Wang Chong, for instance, Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BC) had been the first important defender of this theory. See: *Lunheng* 13:38 (*Lunheng zhubi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1996.) In *Chunqiu fanlu* 10.1:45 (*Chunqiu fanlu zhubi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1994) there are some clear hints in this direction. Sarah Queen, however, prefers to read in the *Chunqiu fanlu* a dual theory, meaning that both human nature and human feelings should have *yang* as well as *yin* components. For further details, see: Queen, Sarah A., *From Chronicle to Canon: the Hermeneutics of the Spring and Autumn Annals, According to Tung Chung-shu*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996; page 52.

14 Xun Yue as well as Wang Chong testify that the opinions of Han scholars on this delicate topic were far from being unanimous. See: *Shenjian* 5:22-23 (*Congshu jicheng* ed. Vol. 533); *Lunheng* 13:36-39. On Xun Yue's summary, see also: Santangelo, Paolo, *Il Peccato in Cina*. Bari: Laterza, 1991, page 53.

the primordial endowment of men: Liu Shao was evidently drawing on Confucius' refusal to speak about matters concerning human nature.¹⁵

The human being who materializes from the first chapter of the *Renwu zhi* is a multi-levelled fabric based on mixture of cosmic mass. The more obscure part, namely basic nature, is fruit of the concoction of the *yin* 陰 and of the *yang* 陽. The deposit of original *qi* 氣 in the body then constitutes what Liu Shao calls (material) essence (*zhi* 質), whereas the concomitant action of the five agents (*wu xing* 五行) will manifest itself in the form (*xing* 形). The second and the third elements of this composite structure are the pivot on which Liu Shao orchestrates his two-fold argument. First, the material essence is comparable to a melting pot where the several characteristics of human temperaments are blended. In particular, it encompasses virtues as well as inborn talents (*cai* 材). The features of the cosmic material within a human body will, in fact, determine the ethical potentialities of each individual: it is thus up to the quantity and the quality of the endowed substance if a man will be more intelligent or simply more talented. Second, each of these peculiarities and inborn talents will reflect in the form, which works essentially as a mirror. In this way, the features of the material substance are deducible through an analysis of the external signs: tones of voice, facial expressions, physical constitution, ways of behaving are all weapons available to those wishing to decipher the inner structure of a man.

In order to illustrate the meaning of such arguments, we may dwell on the explanations Liu Shao gives in regard to the features and development of virtues. The schema below should work as a diagrammatic presentation:¹⁶

Inner structure = The actuality of five agents (<i>wu wu zhi shi</i> 五物之實)		Reflects in	Outer structure = The manifestation of five agents (<i>wu wu zhi xiang</i> 五物之象)	
Agent	Virtue		Agent	Part of the human body
Wood (<i>mu</i> 木)	Benevolence (<i>ren</i> 仁)	↔	Wood	Bones (<i>gu</i> 骨)
Metal (<i>jin</i> 金)	Righteousness (<i>yi</i> 義)		Metal	Muscles (<i>jin</i> 筋)
Fire (<i>huo</i> 火)	Etiquette (<i>li</i> 禮)		Fire	Breath (<i>qi</i> 氣)
Earth (<i>tu</i> 土)	Wisdom (<i>zhi</i> 智)		Earth	Flesh (<i>ji</i> 肌)
Water (<i>shui</i> 水)	Trustiness (<i>xin</i> 信)		Water	Blood (<i>xue</i> 血)

The table above represents Liu Shao's view of the double structure of men and, in particular, his opinion regarding the body as reflection of human innerness: as the author says, the inner system reveals itself in the form (*xingrong* 形容), appears in voice and looks (*shengse* 聲色) and emerges from feelings. Each of the inner features, concludes Liu Shao, is exactly as its exterior manifestation (*ge ru qi xiang* 各如其象).¹⁷

The table above not only works as an attempt to present visually Liu Shao's argument on human structure, but also illustrates a section of Han cosmic paradigm. In fact, the advent of a state ideology under the first successful dynasty of China set the basis for a substantial interpretation of the original endowments of men. In trying to summarize the whole cosmos in a set of models, the Han scholars treated the themes "human nature" and "human feelings" in terms of *yin/yang* categories. The five

15 *Lanyu* 5.13:10.

16 The table has been drawn according to *Renwu zhi* 1:5-6. See also: Shryock (footnote 1), pp. 98-99.

17 *Renwu zhi* 1:8; Shryock (footnote 1), page 98.

agents, in turn, were seen as correspondent to the five virtues.¹⁸ Even the apparent confusion in Liu Shao's association of earth/water – wisdom/trustiness reproduces loyally an intellectual problem of the Han, which, as late as the third century AD, had not yet been solved.¹⁹

The crucial question that arouses from Liu Shao's arguments is whether the cosmic material hidden in the human body at the moment of birth is the same for everybody. Liu Shao clearly rejects this possibility by presenting the three classes of people, which, in his opinion, establish a virtual pyramid of human potential. The so-called men of all-encompassing virtues (*jiande* 兼德), who occupy the position at the top, distinguish themselves for the exceptionality of their inner substance. In particular, the perfect balance (*zhonghe* 中和) and the refinement of their *yin/yang* components predestine these individuals to become heroes and sages. At the other end of this imaginary pyramid are those who are called “men with one-sided talents” (*biancai* 偏材), or, in other words, individuals whose inner substance is highly deficient. The multi-talented people (*jiancai* 兼材) represent the nexus between these borderline-cases. Liu Shao is very strict in defending, on one hand, the substantial difference among these kinds of people and, on the other hand, the discrepancy among their talents.²⁰

This categorical point of view opens the way to the discussion of a further hot theme: the issue of human improvement. In other words, is it possible for a man whose inborn substance is highly deficient to correct an unlucky coincidence of nature and to improve his character? Liu Shao's opinion emerges very clearly from the following passage:

Then, the study is the means to perfect the talents [...]. The basic nature of a man of one-sided talents cannot be totally changed. Even if we educate him and the talents flourish, at the end, he will lose [what he got].²¹

夫學所以成材也。[...] 偏材之性不可移轉矣。雖教之以學材成而隨之以失。

Liu Shao's attitude towards human being and role of education clashes with some basic thought of Chinese ethical tradition. The paradigm of pre-medieval China was generically based on that famous *Lunyu* statement, where Confucius maintained that, as far as human nature is concerned, the human beings are close to each other: it is only due to experience that they will finally drift apart.²² Actually, Confucius took into account some exceptional cases as well. In particular, the Master of Lu 魯 is remarkably explicit in stating that the best among men are those born with an innate knowledge.

18 In *Baibutong* 30:55 it is stated: “What do we call emotions and basic nature? Basic nature is what *yang* has arranged [in our body] and feelings are what *yin* has altered. The human being is endowed with the *qi* of the *yin* and the *qi* of the *yang* and then he is born. Therefore, he cherishes inside [himself] the five [components of] human nature and the six emotions.” On the *Baibutong*, see: Tjan, Tjoe Som, *Po hu t'ing: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall. A Contribution to the History of Classical Studies in the Han Period*. Leiden: Brill, 1949, 1952.

19 According to Ban Gu, for instance, water had to be related to trustiness, whereas wisdom was the counterpart of earth. However, a different interpretation must have played a role as well. As some of the weft-texts (*weishu* 緯書) witness, a few Han scholars preferred to identify trustiness in the agent earth and wisdom in water. This point of view was later accepted by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200). For the different opinions on this topic see: *Wuxing dayi* 14:78 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001). On the *Wuxing Dayi*, see: Kalinowski, Marc, *Cosmologie et Divination dans la Chine Ancienne: Le Compendium des cinq Agents*. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1991.

20 *Renmu zhi* 1:15; Shryock, *op.cit.*, pp. 100-101.

21 *Renmu zhi* 2:32; Shryock (footnote 1), page 105.

22 *Lunyu* 17.2:47; see: Roetz, Heiner, *Die chinesische Ethik der Achsenzeit. Eine Rekonstruktion des Durchbruchs zu postkonventionellem Denken*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1992, pp. 205, 317; Roetz, Heiner: *Konfuzius*. München: C.H.Beck, 1995, pp. 13-14.

The people who need to study to reach this level build the next step, whereas those whose inborn faculties are limited and do not even study are to be regarded as the lowest level.²³

Even if the Master had conceived the possibility that men were different in some way, his followers generally preferred to highlight their similarity and, above all, to stress the possibility each individual has to grow ethically. During the Han, for instance, several scholars defended this assumption, by simply ignoring the problems deriving from a cosmic interpretation of human structure. In this way, many of them chose to explain “human nature” in terms of the life (*sheng* 生) each human being is provided with.²⁴ This axiom was still valid as late as the second half of the second century AD, when Wang Fu 王符 (ca. 90–165) wrote:

Basic natures and emotional spheres of human beings cannot be distinguished in hundred sorts and yet clarity and wisdom of the men differ for thousand kinds. These, however, are not talents, which are inborn in their real nature.²⁵
 人之情性，未能相百，而其明智有相萬也。此非其真性之材也。

The clash between the ideas presented in *Renwu zhi* and the axioms of pre-medieval China stands particularly out if we recall Liu Shao’s definition of study as a method that does not penetrate the Way (*bu ru dao* 不入道). On the other side, the just mentioned Wang Fu preferred to insist that the *dao* flourishes in the study and hides itself in the books.²⁶

If Wang Fu’s words portray the official point of view under the Han, a stronger materialistic interpretation of human nature must have played a significant role as well. This is easily provable through the reading of some sections of the *Lunheng* 論衡. Here, in speculating as to why some succeed in raising their ethical stature, while others remain slaves of their desires and ambitions all their lives, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97 AD) states that, when a man is born, he receives a certain quantity of *qi*, which encompasses the *qi* of the Five Phases. Since the quantity of this vital fluid varies from person to person, it is appropriate to distinguish among three classes of people: the first is represented by the masses with an average quantity of *qi*; then, there are those endowed with less *qi*, who will be inclined to follow their bad instincts, whereas those lucky people with a superior quantity of the heavenly breath will excel over others, both ethically and politically.

As we see, Wang Chong’s opinion seems to reflect quite well the arguments of the *Renwu zhi*. Yet, the Later Han thinker, probably afraid of the logical consequences of his theoretical assumptions, preferred to avoid a sharp distinction between bad and good human natures. In his opinion, the basic endowment of the gentlemen and of the common people is similar to the five cereals: each of them has its own function in spite of their identical substance. This makes the human beings members of the same category (*lei* 類): consequently, their results and accomplishments will stand out only through the process of maturity and education.²⁷

23 See: *Lunyu* 16.9:46. We can also consider *Lunyu* 17.3:47, where the master concedes that the best and the worse among the men do not have any possibility to change. This topic was proposed again several centuries later in *Shenjian* 5:523. On the deterministic implications of Liu Shao’s argument, see: <http://www.lancashire45.freemove.co.uk/LiuShao.pdf>. I would like to thank Dr. Wolfgang Behr for having drawn my attention to this study.

24 See, for instance: *Chunqiu fanlu* 10.1:45, where the original and therefore normative meaning of *xing* is identified in *sheng*.

25 *Qianfu lun* 1:2 (*Qianfu lun zhuzi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1994).

26 *Qianfu lun* 1:1; *Renwu zhi* 2:32; Shryock, *op.cit.*, page 105.

27 *Lunheng* 8:21. Wang Chong’s determinism appears to be much stronger in the chapter on destiny where he presents the life of men almost completely dominated by the obscure forces of fate. In this regard, see: *Lunheng* 3:6-9; Forke, Alfred, *Lun-hêng*. Vol. I. *Philosophical Essays of Wang Ch’ung*. New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962, page 144.

The theoretical definition of men as an unchangeable structure worked as *conditio sine qua non* for the elaboration of a theory of knowledge.

Since [a human being] is provided with a form and a substance, it is possible to delimitate his [features] and to look for them.²⁸
苟有形質，猶可即而求之。

The significant excerpt above seals the passage from the first sphere of analysis to the successive phase: after having clarified his understanding of human being, Liu Shao now turns towards the difficulties of the process of knowledge. Actually, the arduousness of knowing others had been accepted in China at least from the drafting of the *Shujing* onwards. Moreover, as in the case of the medieval thinker, the earlier intellectuals saw in the theoretical definition of *ren* a springboard for the development of a theory, which could illustrate and explain the complex mechanisms triggered off by people who try to comprehend each other.²⁹ The strategy, which found a wide assent among the scholars, was undoubtedly the definition of knowledge as a process in which the knower approaches and understands the man in front of him by means of analogy with himself. In this regard, the *Lǐshǐ Chūnqiū* 呂氏春秋 offers a very clear account:

The ancient rulers took the human being as starting point for the formulation of the law. Yet, they were men as well! Therefore, the analysis of the self will conduct to know others and the analysis of the present will lead to understand the antiquity. At the end, past and present form a unity and the others are the same than I am.³⁰

先王之所以為法者，人也。而已亦人也。故察已則可以知人，察今則可以知古。古今一也人與我同耳。

The confidence in the possibility of extending the knowledge of one's self up to embrace all mankind was a direct consequence of the hypothesized similarity among human beings. This point was even strengthened under the Han, both by the sustainers of the cosmic paradigm and by more sceptical intellects. The scholars who worked at the drafting of the *Huainanzǐ* 淮南子, for instance, strongly defended the analogical character of knowledge, called in the text "know the differences from the affinities" (*you jin zhi yuan* 由近知遠).³¹ More than a century later, Wang Chong reinforced the ancient theory by stating explicitly that knowledge may be obtained exclusively among members of the same species.

Human beings share basic nature and kind. Beasts and human beings are provided with a different basic nature. How would it be possible to know them? Men cannot know beasts and beasts cannot know men as well. These two species cannot obtain a mutual knowledge.³²
人性類[...]鳥獸與人異性，何能知之？人不能知鳥獸亦不能知人，兩不能相知。

28 *Remu zhi* 1:2; Shryock (footnote 1), page 96.

29 On the difficulty of knowing men, see: also *Da Dai liji* 6.2:37 (*Da Dai liji zhuzi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1996).

30 *Lǐshǐ chūnqiū* 15.8:88 (*Lǐshǐ chūnqiū zhuzi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1992).

31 *Huainanzǐ* 8:62 (*Huainanzǐ zhuzi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1992). On the analogical character of knowledge in the *Xunzi*, see: Roetz, Heiner, "Chinas Tradition der Traditionskritik", in: *Tradition und Moderne. Religion, Philosophie und Literatur in China*. C. Hammer, B. Führer (Ed.), Bochum: Edition Cathay, 1997, page 22.

32 *Lǔmbēng* 51:229. Wang Chong also maintains that it is possible to understand the past by analogy with the present. In this regard, see: *Lǔmbēng* 56:248-251.

If we try to judge the classic theory from Liu Shao's perspective, we may first emphasize its theoretical inadequacy, as it evidently does not fit the assumptions of the *Renwu zhi*: if Wang Chong reputed necessary to exclude the possibility of mutual knowledge among members of different classes, the medieval thinker simply recalls that differences in category do indeed exist among human beings as well. A second problematic issue involves a methodological perspective.

Liu Shao's strategy for an effective knowledge of human beings was conceived as an analytical process marked by a strong empirical approach. Essentially, it is possible to distinguish two main phases. First, Liu Shao highlights the importance of observation (*guan* 觀), through which the subject of knowledge approaches its object. This first stage is then followed by a reflective moment, as the results of the observational phase need to be elaborated and systematised. Liu Shao indicates this second phase by using the key word *ming* 名. As Shryock has argued, *ming* plays a basic role in the intellectual structure of the medieval text and should be understood in its meaning of "classify". During this classificatory moment, thus, the knower expresses his judgement about the man in front of him. In this context, however, the word "judgement" does not exclusively involve a generic opinion since it mainly regards evaluation and estimation of the inner structure of an individual.³³

For the purposes of this paper, We shall narrow the discussion on Liu Shao's strategy by focusing the attention on the treatment of the observational moment. In discussing the role of observation, Liu Shao does not miss to emphasize the importance of the standpoint from which the observer approaches his target. From this perspective, it is useful to dwell on Liu Shao's methodological manifesto.

The eight fields of observation: the first is to observe what a man grasps and what he leaves in order to clear up (his inner) mixture. The second is to observe a man under emotional reactions in order to analyse his firm points. The third is to observe his intentions in order to know how he (should) be classified. The fourth is to observe his starting point in order to distinguish to what he could be similar. The fifth is to observe what a man loves and respects in order to know what he can overcome and from what he can be stopped; the sixth is to observe the nucleus of his feelings in order to distinguish his devotion and his doubts; the seventh is to observe what he lacks of in order to grasp his gifts. The eighth is to observe his wisdom in order to know what he can reach.³⁴

八觀者，一曰：觀其奪救，以明間雜。二曰：觀其感變，以審常度。三曰：觀其志質，以知其名。四曰：觀其所由，以辨依似。五曰：觀其愛敬，以知通塞。六曰：觀其情機，以辨疑惑。七曰：觀其所短，以知其長。八曰：觀其聰明，以知所達。

What Liu Shao is trying to illustrate here is the necessity to carry on an analysis based on the observation of the whole life of an individual: the examination of what a man undertakes and what a man does constitute the first step for grasping the most evident features of human characters. Yet, the scrutiny of action cannot be regarded as sufficient for the formulation of a comprehensive judgement as emotional impulses and dialectical exchange are basic factors as well. In this way, a man who wishes to understand others is very attentive in analysing their emotional reactions. These, in turn, should be carefully checked through the examination of discussion. In particular, there is a point where Liu Shao emphasizes the importance of speaking with the man whom we are trying to know.

Then, the examination of words means to distinguish between the beauty and ugliness of sounds. The analysis of replies is tantamount to look for capabilities and inabilities of the wisdom. There-

33 For an analysis of the classificatory moment, see: Shryock (footnote 1), page 34.

34 *Renwu zhi* 9:112-113; Shryock (footnote 1), pp. 130-131.

fore, the examination of words and the analysis of replies are enough to allow (men) to know each other.³⁵

夫觀其辭旨，猶聽音之善丑；察其應贊，猶視智之能否也。故觀辭察應，足以互相別識。

The importance of discussion is repeatedly stressed in the pages of the *Remmu zhi*. Liu Shao, in fact, nurtured the conviction that dialectic exchange may reveal a large part of human characteristics: an ideal sovereign, for instance, would be able to decipher the features of a man after three days of discussion.³⁶

As for the feelings, they constitute an extremely effective weapon, in so far the knower uses them to comprehend the man in front of him. On the other side, they may represent an insurmountable obstacle if the observer let them get the upper hand during the operation of judgement. This point, in turn, introduces a further important issue since, by now, it still remains to clear up which factors are to be regarded as potentially misleading for a full comprehension of human beings. First, if it is carried on in a discretionary way, the observational phase risks to seriously compromise the process of knowing. In particular, the analysis of single fields as well as an examination lacking in well-established criteria are dangers that should be absolutely avoided. The partiality of collected data, in fact, could lead the observer to ignore or to put aside elements, which are of fundamental importance for his analysis. Hence, it is necessary to establish criteria (*du* 度) whose validity should be atemporal and objective. From this standpoint, the analogical model of knowledge reveals its methodological incongruities:

Now, at the beginning, human beings are extremely difficult to know [...]. Each man reposes himself able to know others: in the analysis of others, one takes himself as criterion and believes that thereby the men are knowable. If we observe someone absorbed in the analysis of other men, (we see that) he does not reach the acquaintance. [...] One may be able to discern the positive sides of the same kind but sometimes he will miss the (natural) gifts of different sort.³⁷

夫人初甚難知，[...]皆自以為知人，故以己觀人則以為可知也。觀人之察人則以為不識也。[...]能識同體之善，而或失異量之美。

Thus, in Liu Shao's opinion, the analogical understanding of knowledge completely lacks objectivity. To take oneself as first criterion of judgement means to renounce to commonly shared principles. As a result, the knower will constantly misunderstand qualities and features of the man in front of him.³⁸

Yet, there is a point where the analytical strategy and the analogical model seem to meet. Liu Shao's emphasis on direct experience has to be regarded as a direct inheritance of the past. In fact, the condemnation of data gathered through secondary sources echoes what Wang Chong called "the supremacy of seeing over hearing (*wen buru jian* 聞不如見)"³⁹:

35 *Remmu zhi* 9:117; Shryock, *op. cit.*, page 132. Liu Shao even lists the most important features of a discussion in order to interpret them as revealing signs of human temperaments. Shryock has arranged these characteristics in tabular form. See: Shryock, *op. cit.*, page 83.

36 *Remmu zhi* 7:99; Shryock, *op. cit.*, page 126.

37 *Remmu zhi* 7:95; Shryock (footnote 1), page 124.

38 In this regard, Liu Shao offers several examples to elucidate his point of view. We can consider, for instance, the case of a man with a broad talent for the formulation of laws (*fuzhi zhi ren* 法制之人): he will take his own gift for differentiation and analysis (*fen shu* 分術) as a main criterion of observation. Consequently, he will reckon all the people with an unambiguous personality, by missing, at the same time, the changes, which take place in the surrounding world. See: *Remmu zhi* 7:95; Shryock, *op. cit.*, page 125.

39 *Lunheng* 83:359. In regard to the discussion of this topic in pre-imperial China, see: Roetz (footnote 30), pp. 21-23.

Therefore those able to know men use what they see in order to correct what they have heard.
And those unable to know others let their ears win over their eyes.⁴⁰
是故知人者，以目正耳，不知人者，以耳敗目。

The discussion of theoretical assumptions and methodology has shown two important factors. First, in proposing a monograph on the art of knowing others, Liu Shao was surely unearthing a theme, which had formerly been treated in several occasions. Nevertheless, the philosopher has exhibited a remarkable intellectual independence from the dogmas of Chinese tradition. Thus, the second aspect emerging from the analysis above deals exactly with the originality of the text, both from a theoretical and methodological perspective. At this point it is legitimate to wonder about the reasons which led Liu Shao first to propose a renewed concept of human being and then to sketch a methodology whose different phases had been defined and justified. In formulating an answer to this question, it is possible to suppose that Liu Shao was simply systematising the inheritance of the past. This hypothesis, in turn, would lead to consider the *Renwu zhi* as an original elaboration of a theme that, as late as the third century AD, was still waiting for an organic treatment. In this perspective, it seems appropriate to speak about an intellectual need of Chinese cultural world at the eve of the third century AD. This argument, however, is not strong enough to explain the hidden reasons that pushed Liu Shao to investigate the process of knowing among human beings and to deviate from the clear indications he had found in earlier sources.

Liu Shao's desire to clear up how men approach and know each other reflects a precise historical perspective. In order to elucidate what is meant by historical perspective, it is necessary to turn the attention at the question of functionality. This new sphere of analysis, both on its individual and social level, is well testified in Chinese sources from the very beginning onwards. In the *Shujing*, for instance, the knowledge of human beings was taken as pointer of wisdom and, at the same time, as main feature of the government of emperor Yao 堯. In this way, a man able to know others was called sage, whereas the figure of an ideal ruler was characterized through his ability to reckon and to engage the worthies in the government.⁴¹ Apart from these few general hints, however, the classic is quite sparing with details on the relationship between the private and public sphere. The task to enlighten the several facets of this complex problem was carried on in the following centuries when the knowledge of human beings came to be explicitly conceived as one of the traits, which characterized the ethical growth of an individual. Confucius, for instance, encouraged his disciples to shelve being ignored by others and to worry, rather, about the personal incapability to know men.⁴² Moreover, in pairing the comprehension of others with the understanding of the self, as to form two sides of a coin, the Confucian scholars of pre-imperial China also managed to bind the individual level of human mutual knowledge to its function within the social community. In this way, the concentration on the inner realm was to be regarded as a basic step for ethical growth: self-knowledge, self-respect, and self-love were all distinctive traits of a *jūnzǐ* 君子. The importance of the individual level did not necessarily involve a sharp separation from the outside: Confucius, in fact, dispelled the temptation to withdraw from the community in the famous passage on the surmounting of the self and the return to the world (*kejǐ fùlǐ* 克己復禮).⁴³

The reverting to society marks the passage from the private sphere of human knowledge to its social dimension. If we look at the question from this perspective, it is necessary to recall that a

40 *Renwu zhi* 10:144; Shryock, *op.cit.*, page 141.

41 See: Legge, James, *The Chinese Classics*. Vol. III: *The Shoo King*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960, page 71.

42 *Lunyu* 1.16:2.

43 *Lunyu* 12.1.30. In regard to this passage, see: Roetz (footnote 22), page 258.

Confucian ruler was supposed to be able to mould his community in an ethical way, mainly in virtue of the successful cultivation of his inner realm. At this point, his capacity to know others may be fruitfully applied within the political sphere. When Xunzi was called to define the traits of an ideal sovereign, he highlighted that the *dao* 道 of a ruler is identifiable with the knowledge of others (*zhu dao zhi ren* 主道知人). It is exactly this particular ability that enables a sovereign to reckon worthies and sages and to appoint them as ministers in his government: these, in turn, will be in charge of practical political affairs (*chen dao zhi shi* 臣道知事).⁴⁴

The advent of Han cosmic paradigm shifted the emphasis on the importance of knowing natural processes. Even if knowledge of others remained one of the features of an ideal ruler, the comprehension of *tian* 天 came to be the precondition for an effective perception of human qualities and characteristics. Therefore, Han scholars emphasized the importance of a multi-layered knowledge, which is based on the need to know natural processes as well as on the necessity to comprehend the importance of human action. The *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳, for example, states:

Above, he knows heaven, for being able to take advantage from its rhythm; below, he knows earth, for gaining profit from its resources; in the middle, he knows men, for managing to pacify them: this man is surely a wise.⁴⁵

上知天，能用其時；下知地，能用其財；中知人，能安樂之，是聖人者也。

This point was strengthened several times. In particular, the complementarity of knowledge of heaven and man was clearly expounded in the *Huainanzǐ*:

To know heaven without understanding men makes it impossible to get in touch with the world. To understand men without knowing heaven makes it impossible to travel along the Way.⁴⁶

知天而不知人，則無以與俗交；知人而不知天，則無以與道遊。

In a more political perspective, the ideological paradigm demanded from Han scholars to go beyond the ethical viewpoint. In this regard, the ruler became a *trait d'union*, which could unify the whole cosmos, both in its temporal and spatial dimensions. As proof of the new understanding of the sovereign, it is interesting to dwell on the ways Ban Gu 班固 (32–92) explained the reasons, which had led to the success of the Liu 劉 clan at the end of the third century BC. First, the Han historian hinted at the historical necessity: the Han were in fact regarded as the legitimate heirs of the great emperor Yao. Then, as proof of Liu Bang's 劉邦 unicity, Ban Gu evokes the singularity of his exterior aspect and the fact that heaven had conceded its mandate through numerous proofs. Finally, he recalled the intellectual and moral virtues of the emperor and his capacities to reckon and appoint worthies.⁴⁷

Before directing the attention to how Liu Shao solved the problem of functionality, there is a further issue that needs some remarks. It is, in fact, interesting to wonder whether the scholars of pre-medieval China did specify the characteristics of those in charge of governmental matters. In other words, what did Xunzi understand under the word “minister”? In order to attempt an answer

44 *Xunzi* 29:143 (*Xunzi zhuzi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1996). On the self, see: Roetz, *op.cit.*, page 258-265.

45 *Hanshi waizhuan* 1.25:5 (*Hanshi waizhuan zhuzi suoyin*. The ICS Ancient Chinese Texts Concordances Series. Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1992)

46 *Huainanzǐ* 18:199. In *Chunqiu fanlu* 17.3:82 it is also said that an ideal ruler has no other possibility than knowing heaven. The emphasis put on the knowledge of *tian* was later violently attacked in the pages of the *Lunheng*, where Wang Chong accused his contemporaries to try to understand heaven simply by means of analogy with human beings (*tui ren yi zhi tian* 推人以知天). In this regard, see: *Lunheng* 23:88.

47 *Hanshu* 100A:4211 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972).

to this delicate question, it may be helpful to investigate the image Liu Shao's intellectual forefathers had of bureaucracy. In an ideal Confucian community, ministers were undoubtedly *junzhi* or, in other words, men of remarkable ethical stature. Thus, they fitted the ideal of great ministers (*dachen* 大臣) and served the prince by following the Way and by withdrawing when the ruler betrayed their ethical values. In conclusion, they were not comparable to instruments (*junzhi bu qi* 君子不器).⁴⁸ At this point, it is reasonable to ask whether Confucius and his followers conceived the existence of an alternative sort of ministers. Once, asked whether Zilu 子路 and Ranyou 冉有 could be regarded as true ministers, Confucius resolutely denied and called them *juchen* 具臣: unlike the officials who deserved to be called *dachen*, they would have withdrawn from the court only in circumstances of extreme gravity, as, for instance, patricide.⁴⁹ What does *juchen* mean? Kong Anguo 孔安國 explained the term by hinting at the practical methods of ministers (*chen shu* 臣數).⁵⁰ The definition of *juchen* may also involve the positive form of *Lunyu* 2.12: Zilu and Ranyou were instruments (*qi*), apt to perform specific tasks but unfit for being great ministers. A confirmation of this hypothesis is traceable in the *Xunzi*, where it is said that there are people versed in the Way and there are those versed in specific fields (*wu* 物).⁵¹ A few centuries later, even Wang Chong regarded as necessary to highlight this aspect. In the first chapter of his work, the later Han thinker maintained that the appointment of great ministers is feasible only under a ruler of remarkable ethical stature. On the other side, mediocre rulers will employ technicians (*juchen*) and will exchange them for true ministers (*dachen*): under such sovereigns sages and worthies are rejected simply because the ideals they represent are by far out of reach.⁵²

The difference between great ministers and common officials may help the reader to understand why Liu Shao put a great emphasis on the art of knowing others. First of all, it is appropriate to highlight Liu Shao's ambiguity in accepting the knowledge of men as occasion for an individual growth. In this regard, it is advantageous to recall that Liu Shao conceived the human being primarily in structural terms, with the consequence that virtues came to be regarded as phases in the development of a precise structural element. In this way, for instance, it will be up to the agent wood deposited within his body if a man will develop the virtue of humaneness.⁵³

The materialistic interpretation of ethics had had a two-fold argumentative advantage. First, it surely enabled Liu Shao to defend the feasibility of grasping human temperaments and, secondly, it allowed the use of this postulated achievability as a springboard to approach the social function of this kind of knowledge. Finally, the comprehension of human structure authorized the knower to classify classes and kinds of people. Consequently, Liu Shao devoted entire chapters to the punctual analysis of human features and, still more important, of their possible utiliza-

48 *Lunyu* 11.24:28; *Lunyu* 2.12:3. Perhaps, the aptest examples of such kind of ministers were the officials of king Zhou 紂, the last ruler of the Shang 商. As recalled in the *Lunyu*, the viscount of Wei 微 withdrew from the court; the viscount of Qi 箕 became a slave; Bigan 比干 remonstrated with the sovereign and died. See: *Lunyu* 18.1:51.

49 *Lunyu* 11.24:28.

50 *Shiji* 67:2193 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972).

51 *Xunzi* 21:105.

52 *Lunheng* 1:1; Forke, Alfred: *Lun-hêng*, Vol. II. *Miscellaneous Essays of Wang Ch'ung*. New York: Paragon Book Gallery, 1962, page 31. See also: *Lunyu* 11.3:26, where Confucius listed those who distinguished themselves for moral conduct, for rhetoric capabilities or for literary talent.

53 *Renwu zhi* 1:5-7. Even if the figure of the sage with his superior ethical stature is a recurring *topos* in the medieval text, yet the discussion on moral virtues appears to be characterized by a certain mannerism. Therefore, it seems appropriate to accept Shryock's point of view and to define the text as "a highly moral book, though in no sense a book on morals". See: Shryock (footnote 1), pp. 97-98.

tion within the governmental apparatus. In particular, there is a point where the medieval philosopher seems to reproduce Xunzi's argument:

In general, the twelve categories of abilities correspond to the bureaucratic posts. The virtue of an ideal sovereign is not counted among them: it is luminous, well balanced and it summarizes all possible talents. Yet (this ruler) will not take the care of political affairs upon himself. Therefore, when the Way of an ideal sovereign is set up, each of the twelve talents will get its (appropriate) post.⁵⁴

凡此十二材，皆人臣之任也，主德不預焉。主德者，聰明平淡，總達眾材，而不以事自任者也。是故主道立，則十二材各得其任也。

The line of reasoning expressed above coincides perfectly with Xunzi's argument on the incompatibility between sovereign and practical affairs as well as on the need to concentrate the management of the state into the hands of a bureaucratic stratum. At this point, the question, which needs to be faced, is what Liu Shao understood under "bureaucratic stratum". Are we in front of great ministers or are we in front of Wang Chong's technicians? The excerpt above may help to formulate a first hypothesis. The hint at twelve classes of human talents and the short remark on the need to assign an official post to a *specific* person with a *specific* talent echoes those disciples whom Confucius once defined as *juchen*. The following two passages shall work as definitive proofs.

1. Then, the capabilities emerge from the talents and talents do not weigh the same. Therefore, if talents and capabilities diverge from the beginning, appointments and policies (should be) dissimilar as well.⁵⁵

夫能出于材，才不同量。材能既殊，任政亦異。

2. Generally, men of one-sided talents (express) the beauty of a taste. Therefore, they are suitable for holding a position but inadequate for (governing) the whole country. As for the reasons (behind this fact), a man who holds a (specific) position will assist the five tastes with his own taste, whereas a man in charge of a whole country will harmonize the five tastes with his being tasteless.⁵⁶

凡備材之人，皆一味之美，故長於為一官，而短於為一國。何者，夫一官之任，以一味協五味；一國之政，以無味和五味。

Both excerpts above suggest that Liu Shao shared Xunzi's opinion on the existence of men versed in the *dao* in contraposition to those individuals versed in particular fields. However, the medieval thinker regarded the ethical perspective of his intellectual forefathers, and in particular the emphasis on true ministers, as inadequate for solving the problem. The individuation and the appointment of men whose main feature was their outstanding ethical stature was, in Liu Shao's opinion, a misdirected answer to the complexities of imperial apparatus. First, human talents should fit the dimensions of the region under control: a state needs a man with superior abilities, whereas a less capable man is sufficient to administrate a territory of hundred *li* 里.⁵⁷ Moreover, the allocation of single governmental responsibilities was to be carried out on the basis of a clear distinction of human talents: a man whose most evident gift is a certain predisposition to rhetoric should be employed in the diplomatic field, whereas the one who embodies the capacity to set up laws and institutions should hold the post at the department of justice.⁵⁸

54 *Remmu zhi* 3:43; Shryock, *op.cit.*, page 110.

55 *Remmu zhi* 5:78; Shryock (footnote 1), page 118.

56 *Remmu zhi* 5:80-81; Shryock, *op.cit.*, page 121.

57 *Remmu zhi* 5:75; Shryock, *op.cit.*, page 119.

58 The correspondences between human talents and official posts are expounded in *Remmu zhi* 5:78-80. See: Shryock, *op.cit.*, pp. 120-121.

At this point, it could be inferred that Liu Shao's argumentation was an attempt to solve a political problem: if this is the case, his short treatise should be regarded as an answer to a precise historical need. A glance back in time shall corroborate this hypothesis. In fact, the complexity of finding an adequate definition of bureaucratic stratum had been stressed several times in the past.⁵⁹ The consciousness that imperial institutions were by far more complex than in the antiquity pushed the Han scholars to reflect on characteristics and potentialities of the bureaucratic stratum. In this way, for instance, they accepted Shen Buhai's 申不害 (d. 337 BC) assumption that a complex state can work only with a capable and powerful bureaucracy. During the Later Han, the importance of this issue remarkably grew. In the second century AD, the famous astronomer Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) addressed a memorial to the throne where he maintained that:

Zengzi excelled in filial piety [...]. With regard to culture, he did not reach the level of (Zi)you or of (Zi)xia and, as for governmental affairs, he could not stand the comparison with Ran(you) or with Ji(lu). Today, we aim to appoint a man who gathers (all capabilities). These (capabilities) may appear outside but they must be incomplete inside.⁶⁰
 曾子長於[...]孝文學不若游、夏，政事不若冉、季。今欲使一人兼之，苟外可觀，內必有闕。

Zhang Heng's reference to Ranyou shows how the man whom Confucius once called *jurem* was taken, six centuries later, as symbol of political talent. Yet, this is not the only interesting topic discussed above. In fact, the attempt to abandon the utopia of ministers "factotum" constitutes a good starting point to grasp the reasons lying behind the drafting of the *Remmu zhi*. When the Han central power began to lose the control over numerous areas of the empire, in fact, this issue became essential.⁶¹ The downfall of the Han dynasty as well as the difficulties experienced by Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220) and Cao Pi in imposing their government was then regarded as a proof for the need of a further political analysis. In this perspective, the conjecture that Liu Shao was simply answering to a precise historical need gains in consistency.

The validity of this hypothesis is to be proved in the light of the cultural climate at the court of the Wei dynasty. If we take into account the challenge the new ruling family was in front of, that is the possibility to become the only legitimate heir of the Han ruling clan, we should also consider that such a task also needed an intellectual explanation of the recent political earthquake. By searching for elements and factors able to explain the failure of the Han and the success of Cao Cao, part of the court, for instance, preferred to look back into time: in particular, they turned towards Wang Mang's 王莽 (45 BC – 23 AD) period and the cruel civil war, which had marked the passage from the Western to the Eastern Han dynasty. In this way, the heavenly investiture through omens and *regalia* became once again the most important feature of the sovereign.⁶² Nevertheless, the Wei dynasty lived in

59 As early as the first century BC, for instance, He Wu 何武, an official who served at the court of emperor 成 (r. 32–6 BC), hinted at the necessity to review the whole administrative apparatus by suggesting that a servile imitation of the antiquity was not enough to solve the complex problems of the contemporary age. In this regard, see: *Hanshu* 83:3404. He Wu's position has been discussed in: van Ess, Hans: *Politik und Gelehrsamkeit in der Zeit der Han – Die Alttext/ Neutext-Kontroverse*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1993, page 248.

60 *Hou Hanji* 18.513 (*Hou Hanji jiaozhu*. Tianjin: Guji chubanshe, 1987). For Zhang Heng's memorial and for the discussion on bureaucracy during the Later Han dynasty, see: van Ess, *op. cit.*, pp. 95–101.

61 For an overview of the reasons which led to the downfall of the Later Han dynasty, see: Twitchett, Denis and Loewe, Michael (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 1, The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 BC-AD 220*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986, pp. 317–376.

62 The dynastic histories let assume that the ideological strategies pursued from the end of the Later Han dynasty onwards reproduced quite loyally the climate of the civil war of two centuries earlier. Among the contenders who aspired to the Chinese throne in the third century AD, Cao Cao and his entourage constitutes undoubtedly the circle where

period that, both from a historical and intellectual perspective, was remarkably different from the decades straddled between the first century BC and the first century AD. Liu Shao's behaviour at the court may serve as an example: questioned on the proper ritual conduct in case of an eclipse of the sun, the scholar preferred to hint at the necessities to carry on the ceremonies without much regard to the meaning of this calamitous sign.⁶³ The memorial can be taken as indicative example to show Liu Shao's unwillingness to side with the (re-) proponents of the Han cosmic paradigm. In any case, the medieval thinker was allowed to freely express his opinion: this fact should highlight the substantial differences between the Wei court and the circles which organized Wang Mang's propaganda machine.⁶⁴ In this way the author of the *Renmu zhi* should be taken as symbol of an intellectual community, which tried to consider the historical tumults by adopting a pure political approach. His professional experiences at the Wei court may provide the reader with an additional proof. Around the middle of the third century AD, in fact, he was commanded to draw regulations for the examination of officials: with all probabilities, this involvement played a very significant role for the drafting of the *Renmu zhi*.

Liu Shao was evidently picking up the inheritance of the Han, when the recruitment of capable officials became a basic question. In this way, through the emphasis on the social function of knowledge among men, the *Renmu zhi* comes to be a reflection on human characters, where the ethical and naturalistic perspectives gave way to the strong call for specialisation of politics and for the development of administrative science: as Liu Shao once said, the discussion on human talents cannot be carried on exclusively in the light of their being great or small since the analysis must necessarily involve their proper dislocation within the bureaucratic apparatus.⁶⁵

the use of such methods was at its peak. Amid the most active officials in this sense, Li Fu 李伏 and Xu Zhi 許芝 are well worthy of mentioning. As a matter of facts both engaged to persuade Cao Pi that the span of time allotted to the Han dynasty was at the end. In this way, they regarded it as opportune and necessary to declare the beginning of a new phase of the Chinese history with the definitive fading of the Han power and the rising of a new dynasty protected by the force of the earth. See: *Sanguo zhi* 2:62-63.

63 *Sanguo zhi* 21:617; Shryock (footnote 1), page 21.

64 Wang's ability in preparing his accession to the throne in 9 AD is renewed. Methods and strategies in the ideological justification of the grounding of a new dynasty are well described in *Hanshu* 99 and can be summarised in the following main points: theoretically, he claimed to rule by the force of the earth-yellow, which had inherited the power over China from the fire-red of the Han. His argument was provided also with a genealogy which saw him as direct descendant of Huangdi 黃帝. Factually, Wang Mang studied his path to the Chinese throne with fictitious omens and regalia, all presented as definitive proofs of the heavenly favour. For his carefully prepared advent to the throne, see: Twitchett and Loewe (footnote 61), pp. 223-240; see also: Loewe, Michael, "Water, Earth and Fire – the Symbols of the Han Dynasty", in *Nachrichten der Gesellschaft für Natur und Völkerkunde Ostasiens* 125 (1979). In regard to the development of ideological strategies under the Former Han, see: Loewe, Michael, *Divination, Mythology, and Monarchy in Han China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

65 *Renmu zhi* 5:76; Shryock, *op.cit.*, page 119.