


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Leaking Rulers and Confidential Officials: Secrecy and Status in Early Chinese Political Culture

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Abstract

This article traces the spread of a norm of confidentiality within elite political culture during the Warring States, Qin, and Western Han periods. Instead of an emphasis on secrecy within military and administrative contexts, it explores discussions of “leaking” (*xie* 泄/洩 or *lou* 漏) and characterizations of “confidentiality” (*zhou* 周 and *mi* 密) in idealized representations of political action. While Warring States texts drew upon a medical language of *qi* circulation to fashion a model of a perfectly leakproof ruler, by Western Han attention had shifted from rulers to officials. This valorization of official confidentiality was connected to institutional developments, especially proscriptions against leaking from privileged spaces at the imperial court, visible in sources from the late Western Han. In this final period there arose a celebrated norm of circumspection, shared by rulers and officials alike, that in theory would allow all parties to evade disaster.

Keywords: secrecy; Warring States; Qin Dynasty; Han Dynasty; political culture; rulership; bureaucracy

We see all governments as obscure and invisible.
Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning* (1605)

Few early Chinese sources matched Francis Bacon’s extremism in advocating for a ruler’s absolute right to secrecy in deliberations and decisions,¹ but most recognized some level of secrecy as essential for governing.² The concern is broadly evident in discussions

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¹Todd Butler, *Literature and Political Intellection in Early Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 96–107, explored Bacon’s advocacy of secrecy for the sovereign during a dispute between James I and one of his jurists.

²Early China (and Stuart England) were of course not outliers, since historical and anthropological evidence shows that secrecy and taboos (from the Tongan *tabu* “not to be touched”), which separate out rulers from everybody else, are near universal constants in the creation of political power. See David Graeber,

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of government and rulership, whether to ensure effective operations or create a sense of majestic authority.³ Scholars have not ignored this fact, offering studies of a) the importance of secrecy in military strategy and intelligence gathering;⁴ b) bureaucratic procedures from pre-imperial and early imperial times, particularly those designed to ensure documents remained confidential;⁵ and, especially, c) an ideal model of rulership in which the sovereign remained obscured, outside the system of laws and regulations that he directed.⁶ Beyond the question of criminal sanctions backed by a supposed obsession with state secrecy and surveillance,⁷ however, students of early China have

“Notes on the Politics of Divine Kingship, or, Elements for an Archaeology of Sovereignty,” in *On Kings*, edited by David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins (Chicago: Hau Books, 2017), 377–464. This article thus does not attempt to trace an imagined “origins” of secrecy in early Chinese government.

³No consensus understanding on questions of secrecy and visibility exists in early sources. Some argued “authority” (wei 威) could only be achieved when rooted in obscurity, while others emphasized the importance of awesome visual display. The former perspective is evident in the “Lun wei” 論威 chapter of the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (comp. 239 BCE). See *Lüshi chunqiu zhuzi suoyin* 呂氏春秋逐字索引 (Taipei: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1996), 39, lines 1–4; *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, translated by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 194. For the latter, see the famous account of Xiao He 蕭何 (d. 193 BCE) upbraiding Liu Bang 劉邦 (r. 202–195 BCE), founding Western Han emperor, for balking at the construction of palaces. Xiao argued that if the Son of Heaven “was not grand and gorgeous, he will have no way to augment his authority” (非壯麗無以重威). See *Shiji* 史記, comp. Sima Qian (ca. 145–86 BCE) (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1997), *juan* 8, p. 386. Generally speaking, from the Warring States period, if not earlier, sources recognized that different contexts called for varied levels of obscurity or display. See Michael Nylan, “Beliefs About Social Seeing: Hiddenness (wei 微) and Visibility in Classical-Era China,” in *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, edited by Paula Varsano (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 53–78; Christopher C. Rand, *Military Thought in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 36–44. See also Trenton Wilson, “Empire of Luck: Trust and Suspicion in Early China” (PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2021), which argues that questions about visibility and hiddenness (e.g., To what extent should the ruler be visible? Should there be limits to what superiors can know about inferiors?) were at the heart of debates about the nature of imperial government.

⁴Ralph Sawyer, *Tao of Spycraft: Intelligence Theory and Practice in Traditional China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2004); Rand, *Military Thought in Early China*, 78–95. As Rand emphasizes, intelligence-gathering in pre-Qin and early imperial China included mantic techniques that offered strategic information about enemies. The “Yin fu” 陰符 (Secret tallies) chapter of *Liu tao* 六韜 (Six Quivers) prescribes execution for leaking strategic information on tallies. See *Liu tao zhuzi suoyin Yu zi zhuzi suoyin* 六韜逐字索引·鬻子逐字索引 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1997), 23, lines 24–25.

⁵The legal statutes excavated from tomb 247 at Zhangjiashan 張家山 (sealed 186 BCE), include descriptions of punishments for breaking clay seals on documents. See “Ze lu” 賊律 (strip #16) and “Xing shu lu” 行書律 (#274-5), in Anthony J. Barbieri-Low and Robin D. S. Yates, *Law, State, and Society in Early Imperial China: A Study with Critical Edition and Translation of the Legal Texts from Zhangjiashan Tomb no. 247* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2:395 and 741–42. Manuscripts from the arid northwest confirm that postal stations noted whether documents in transit were sealed. For a discussion of the system, see Y. Edmund Lien, “Reconstructing the Postal Relay System of the Han Period,” in *A History of Chinese Letters and Epistolary Culture*, edited by Antje Richter (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 18–52.

⁶The most famous articulation of this idea, which has received substantial attention in the secondary literature, is in the *Han Feizi* 韓非子. For a discussion, see Albert Galvany, “Beyond the Rule of Rules: The Foundation of Sovereign Power in the *Han Feizi*,” in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, edited by Paul Goldin (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 87–106. See also Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire: Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2009), 102–6.

⁷For an extreme version of the view that early Chinese government was singularly focused on secrecy, including a suggestion that the Qin created a “spy state” (166), see Robert Boesche, “Han Feizi’s Legalism versus Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*,” *Asian Philosophy* 15.2 (2005), 157–72.

mostly ignored the problem of breakdowns in confidentiality. How were failures in maintaining secrecy framed and discussed?

This article answers this question by exploring the use in early sources of several terms, including *xie* 泄 (or 洩) and *lou* 漏 (both meaning “to leak”), as well as *zhou* 周 and *mi* 密 (“confidential,” among other meanings). The leaking metaphor in particular passes with surprising smoothness into contemporary English and our endless debates about information leaks.⁸ We are accustomed to understanding the leak, almost an inevitable by-product of confidential military and central government activities, as a transgression between secret and open spheres performed for a variety of reasons.⁹ Such concerns are by no means absent from Chinese discussions of the leak: for instance, as this article will show, early sources reflect an expanding scope of secret information at the imperial court as well as critiques of that expansion. The terms given above, however, referred as much to states of perfect behavior and physical cultivation as they did to the status of different kinds of information. In this vein, note the following passage from the “Xici zhuan” 繫辭傳 (Commentary on the appended sayings) chapter of the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of changes), which as discussed in greater detail below was cited with some regularity in the final decades of Western Han (202 BCE–9 CE):

君不密則失臣，臣不密則失身，幾事不密則害成。是以君子慎密而不出也。

If the ruler is not discreet then he will lose his minister. If the minister is not discreet then he will lose his life. If pivotal matters are not kept discreet then disasters will occur. This is why the ruler is careful about discretion and is not forthcoming.¹⁰

The passage offers two interlinked claims. First, rulers, officials, and secret matters alike all had to remain discreet, and second, the ruler should therefore be “not forthcoming” (*bu chu* 不出), a proscription against noticeable actions that could include the ruler’s physical location, expressions, or verbal statements. Rather than drawing a line between “secret” and “open” matters, then, the passage emphasizes a comprehensive mode of circumspect behavior. The world it evokes is one in which inadvertent leaks, from mistaken movements to slips of the tongue, are just as important and receive as much critical attention as those that are purposeful.

One of the anchoring observations of this article, however, is that the earliest extant citations of this passage, made by court officials in the final decades of the Western Han, completely omitted the final statement about the ruler. Instead of a meditation on how to maintain the ruler’s power or the power of his government, then, by late

⁸According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, this sense of “to leak” in English is relatively recent, first surfacing in the mid-nineteenth century. As late as the 1970s, *The Times* still put the word in quotation marks when used in this way.

⁹For an overview, aging remarkably well, that reflects these primary concerns in modern discussions of the leak, see Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 171–229.

¹⁰*Zhouyi zhuzi suoyin* 周易逐字索引 (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1995), 65/79/3–4, which notes that the text excavated from the tomb at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (sealed 168 BCE) uses the character *bi* 閉 (shut away, hidden) instead of *mi*. The translation departs slightly from *The Classic of Changes: A New Translation of the I Ching, as Interpreted by Wang Bi*, trans. Richard John Lynn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 59. It follows, however, Lynn’s rendering of *bu chu* 不出 as “not forthcoming,” an appropriately capacious translation that encompasses all manner of actions.

Western Han the passage was understood to articulate a shared, idealized state of circumspect behavior that allowed all parties to evade disaster.¹¹ How did such a vision emerge? This article attempts to answer this question by tracing, in three sections, debates and representations of leaking. The first section starts with a detailed discussion of the terms given above (*xie*, *lou*, *zhou*, and *mi*), which in early texts sometimes evoke secret information but just as frequently refer to idealized states of physical cultivation. Relevant chapters from the *Guanzi* 管子 are enlightening in this regard, for they draw upon medical theories of *qi* 氣 circulation to construct a vision of rulership in which vital essences and information are not leaked from the sovereign's body. This model, also evident in other texts, was rejected in the *Xunzi* 荀子, which advocated an open and highly visible sovereign whose power comes from visibility, not secrecy. The second section starts by noting that the question of the ruler's visibility is central to stories from the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Senior Archivist*, comp. ca. 86 BCE) about the First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuang di 秦始皇帝; r. 221–210 BCE). The First Emperor, of course, is famous for his obsession with secrecy, but less recognized is that the *Shiji* suggests this obsession created institutional and spatial divisions within the capital designed to prevent the spread of confidential information. In this sense, the *Shiji* story reflects anecdotes from the *Han Feizi* 韓非子 that explore the spaces and audiences at court for leaked information, and the constraining power they exerted over rulers and officials alike.

The third and final section delves into further institutional changes during Western Han that formalized such constraints, allowing officials to celebrate adherence to the highest codes of professional responsibility, highlight their membership in the most elite circles, and remind everybody (including the emperor) of conventions that required circumspection of all parties at court. The case of leaking thus provides an enlightening way to write a cultural history of officialdom, during a period when many of the formal regulations and informal norms that governed the behavior of officials were still being worked out. If the earliest discussions of leaking, discussed in the first section, were informed by medical theories applied primarily to the perfected body of an idealized sage ruler, the late-Western Han proscriptions against leaking discussed in the final section are far from a reflection of the ruler's power. The desire to properly manage the ruler's body, both internally and externally, as well as the information that supported his authority, led to regulations that officials and others at court used in extra-legal ways, expressing their status and advancing a vision of elite political action bound by shared norms.

Leaking Bodies, Obscured (and Visible) Rulers

Starting from around the fourth century BCE, as Romain Graziani has noted, a burgeoning interest in a “holistic discourse grounded in *qi*” prompted a variety of investigations that created a “continuum between medicine and philosophy.”¹² Discussions of

¹¹This article thus finds inspiration in other recent studies that urge us to resist understandings of early Chinese political concepts that assume the perspective of the ruler and privilege centralized state power. See, e.g., Erica Brindley, “The Polarization of the Concepts ‘Si’ (Private Interest) and ‘Gong’ (Public Interest) in Early Chinese Thought,” *Asia Major (Third Series)* 26.2 (2013), 1–31; and Michael Nylan and Trenton Wilson, “Circle of Fear in Early China,” *Religions* 12.1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010026>.

¹²Graziani, “The Subject and the Sovereign: Exploring the Self in Early Chinese Self-Cultivation,” in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang Through Han (1250 BC–220 AD)*, vol. 1, edited by John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 473.

leaking rested on this same continuum, for medical texts, on the one hand, and discussions of rulership that drew upon ideas of self-cultivation or “nurturing life” (*yang sheng* 養生), on the other, all equally evinced concern about *qi* circulation and the possibility of vital essences oozing out of the body. As we will see via close readings of essays contained in the *Guanzi*, however, the further texts on this continuum moved away from discussions of medical concepts and toward questions of rulership and governance, the more emphasis was placed on the dangers of leaking and the importance of maintaining a perfectly cultivated and hardened body that expelled (and revealed) nothing. The *Xunzi* will help us clarify this model, for it rejected its assumptions, dismissing concerns about leaking and emphasizing instead a highly open and visible form of rulership.

Detailed study of the medical side of the continuum, entailing as it would complicated technical questions in the history of early Chinese medicine, must remain outside the bounds of this article.¹³ The important point for our purposes is that medical practitioners were highly concerned with movement of *qi* and other essences across boundaries. Whether to retain or expel depended on the substance, as Nathan Sivin has noted:

To sustain life, the body can be neither completely open nor completely closed. Food and *qi* must enter without admitting agents of disease; wastes must be excreted without allowing the body's vitalities to leak out.¹⁴

In early medical texts *xie* and *lou*, “leaks” into and out of the body and within the body, could be good or bad. Thus the text **Shi wen* 十問 (Ten questions) from Mawangdui 馬王堆 tomb 247 (sealed in 168 BCE) articulates problems caused by “Yin essence leaking out” (陰精漏泄),¹⁵ while the “*Si qi tiao shen da lun*” 四氣調神大論 (Comprehensive discourse on regulating the spirit via the four seasonal *qi*) chapter of *Huangdi nei jing su wen* 黃帝內經素問 (Inner classic of the Yellow Emperor—basic questions) mentions the salutary importance of “allowing *qi* to leak away” (使氣得泄) during the summer.¹⁶ Notwithstanding Sivin’s use of the verb “leak” as a deleterious action, usage in early medical texts suggests *xie* and *lou* were neutral actions: whether or not such flows were harmful or helpful depended on the type of substance, amount, and timing, among other factors.

Texts that articulated cultivation practices and “nurturing life” (*yang sheng* 養生) ideas for the development of ideal bodies, especially the ideal bodies of sagely beings and rulers, drew upon a similar language of inner and outer, “bad” and “good” leaking.

¹³Vivienne Lo, “Crossing the *Neiguan* 內關 ‘Inner Pass’: A *Nei/wai* 內外 ‘Inner/Outer’ Distinction in Early Chinese Medicine,” in *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* 17 (2000), 15–65, noted that medical texts recovered from Mawangdui did not posit a single, fixed line dividing the body’s interior from the exterior. Medical practitioners rather identified several boundaries within the body, with the relevance of any given line depending on the treatment.

¹⁴Sivin, “State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 55.1 (1995), 15.

¹⁵For the original text with Japanese translation, see Ōgata Tōru 大形徹, *Taisansho, Zakkinhō, Tenka shidōdan, Gōin’yōhō, Jūmon* 胎產書・雜禁方・天下至道談・合陰陽方・十問 (Tōkyō: Tōhō shoten, 2015), 311.

¹⁶*Huangdi nei jing su wen, jiao zhu yu yi* 黃帝內經素問校注語譯, edited by Guo Aichun 郭霽春 (Tianjin: Tianjin kexue jishu chubanshe, 1999), 8. See also Paul Unschuld and Hermann Tessenow, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen: An Annotated Translation of Huang Di’s Inner Classic—Basic Questions*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 47.

Both are evident in “Nei ye” 內業 (Inner Training), one of the most famous chapters from the *Guanzi* and an important early source for practices of physical self-cultivation.¹⁷ The problem of “bad” leaking is evident in the text’s opening discussion of “essence” (*jing* 精) and a following treatment of the Dao 道. The two key concepts mostly receive similar treatment,¹⁸ but when it comes to descriptions of their movement, contrasting language forms a model of the body that implies the dangers of leaking. According to “Nei ye,” essence “flows” (*liu* 流) and can be “stored within the chest” (*cang yu xiong zhong* 藏於胸中),¹⁹ forming a “wellspring” (*quan yuan* 泉原) and “pool of qi” (*qi yuan* 氣淵). If this wellspring does not “dry out” (*he* 涸), then the “nine apertures” (*jiu qiao* 九竅) become “penetrating” (*tong* 通) and “reach to the ends of Heaven and Earth” (窮天地).²⁰ In contrast, the Dao does not “flow” but “goes” (*wang* 往) or “comes” (*lai* 來) and “fills the form” (*chong xing* 充形).²¹ Since, as the chapter states, “in all cases, the Dao is certain to be bounded (*zhou*) and close (*mi*), broad and expansive, hard and secure” (凡道必周必密, 必寬必舒, 必堅必固),²² presumably Dao-filled bodily forms (*xing*) would attain the same properties. How a body could simultaneously be both “bounded and close” and “broad and expansive” is not entirely clear.²³ Nonetheless, the language of “Nei ye” suggests a contrast between the behavior of “essence” (*jing*) and the Dao, outlining a cultivated body animated by internal flows and stores of essence, contained within a compacted, strengthened form that protects the “pool of qi” inside.

¹⁷For an introduction and full translation of “Nei ye,” see W. Allyn Rickett, ed. and trans., *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays From Early China*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 15–55. I have consulted Rickett’s volume, but all translations from the *Guanzi* are my own unless specified. For the “Nei ye” text, see *Xin bian zhuzi jicheng: Guanzi jiao zhu* 新編諸子集成：管子校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2004) (hereafter, GZJZ), 2:931–51.

¹⁸For example, while essence “cannot be stopped by force” (不可止以力) (GZJZ 2:931), “people cannot [forcibly] secure” (人不能固) the Dao (GZJZ 2:932); both the essence and the Dao tend to be repelled by “sounds” (*sheng* 聲) and “tones” (*yin* 音) (GZJZ 2:932, 2:935); and people can “lose” (*shi* 失) either one if they fail to maintain a perfectly stilled heart-mind (GZJZ 2:931, 2:935).

¹⁹GZJZ 2:931.

²⁰GZJZ 2:938–9.

²¹GZJZ 2:932.

²²GZJZ 2:942. My translation follows Rickett, *Guanzi*, 2:49, with the exception of *zhou*, which Rickett renders “dense.” As Rickett noted, Ma Feibai 馬非百, an important modern scholar of the *Guanzi*, glossed *zhou* here as *pubian* 普遍 (pervasive) and *quanmian* 全面 (comprehensive). See Ma Feibai, “*Guanzi* ‘Nei ye’ pian ji zhu, xu yi” 管子內業篇集注續一, *Guanzi xue kan*, no. 2 (1990), 19. While other usages of *zhou* examined below are best rendered as “comprehensive” or “all-encompassing,” I agree with Rickett that *zhou* and *mi* here should be interpreted as synonyms, consistent with the subsequent two pairs in the phrase. My rendering of “bounded” is not unrelated to Rickett’s “dense,” since an item bounded or wrapped up will almost necessarily be denser than something unwrapped. Axel Schuessler has noted that the etymology of *zhou* is uncertain, but provided three different possibilities, all of them referring to twisting, bending, or encircling things (e.g. hair, rattan, bamboo, cloth). “Bounded” here thus evokes this act of encircling or wrapping, and is related to other usages, explored in more detail below, that more clearly emphasize closing something off or keeping things hidden from view. See Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2009), 623.

²³In his commentarial notes, Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578–648) hinted at his own confusion on this point: “Being bounded and close, care is taken to not leak” (周密則慎不泄), “Being broad and expansive, it is extensive but close” (寬舒則博而密), “Being hard and secure, the essence is not released” (堅固則精不解). While the first and third comments make clearer claims that the Dao does not leak or release, the second clause is more vague and just restates the same language from the passage itself. See GZJZ 2:942.

At the same time, even while the “Nei ye” thus emphasizes the dangers of leaks from this pool, the statement that the bodily apertures become “penetrating” (*tong*) hints at passages allowing interchange between interior and exterior. Moreover, at the very end we find mention of “leaking” (*xie*) in a positive context:

得道之人，理丞而屯泄，匈中無敗。節欲之道，萬物不害。

For the person who has attained the Dao, lines in the skin excrete and hair follicles leak (*xie*), while within the chest nothing is corrupt. With this Way (*dao*) of moderating desires, the myriad things cause no harm.²⁴

Commentators have struggled over the phrase “lines in the skin excrete and hair follicles leak,”²⁵ but typically cite a parallel passage in the “Tai zu” 泰族 chapter of *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (comp. 139 BCE) to strengthen the interpretation reflected in this translation.²⁶ Both texts thus evoke the medical understanding of the body described by Sivin, “neither completely closed nor completely open,” but applied to self-cultivation practice: the refined essence remains stored within the chest, while regular and modulated leaks (*xie*) out of the protective skin create a perfectly regulated, sagely body. The “Nei ye” thus explicitly recognizes the sage’s homeostatic stability, of leaks outward that accompany the preservation of essence inward, even if the opening passages focus primarily on hardening the body’s exterior and preventing leaks.²⁷

When we move to other *Guanzi* chapters and further down the continuum, away from purely medical understandings and toward expressly political formulations of ideal rulership, we see familiar terminology, but even the limited recognition of positive leaking seen in “Nei ye” is absent. The “Shu yan” 樞言 (Pivotal sayings) chapter, for instance, uses language reminiscent of “Nei ye,” in particular the word *zhou*, in order to argue that the ruler’s body should reveal nothing:

周者，不出于口，不見于色，一龍一蛇，一日五化之謂周。故先王不以一過二，先王不獨舉，不擅功。

²⁴GZJZ 2:950.

²⁵For a summary and relevant quotes, see Ma Feibai 馬非百, “*Guanzi* ‘Nei ye’ pian ji zhu, xu er” 管子內業篇集注續二, *Guanzi xue kan*, no. 3 (1990), 20–21. Most commentators agree that *tun* 屯 should read *mao* 毛 (hair), with “Nei ye” not the only source confusing the two characters. For examples, see Guo Moruo 郭沫若, *Guanzi ji jiao* 管子集校, in *Guo Moruo quan ji* 郭沫若全集, vol. 7 (Beijing: Renmin, 1984), 141–42.

²⁶The *Huainanzi* reads: “Hair follicles excrete and lines in the skin leak” (*mao zheng li xie* 毛蒸理泄), *Xin bian zhu zi ji cheng: Huainanzi ji shi* 新編諸子集成：淮南子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1998), 3:1382. Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 (1895–1941) argued that *mao* should be read as *biao* 表 (“exterior”) and *li* as *li* 裡 (“interior”), while Yang Shuda 楊樹達 (1885–1956) argued that *li* specifically referred to skin. The details differ, but both assume a separation between the body’s interior and exterior, with fluids passing between. Sarah A. Queen and John S. Major, sidestepping these debates, rendered the line: “their hairs’ vapor vents away in an orderly fashion.” See Major, et al., *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 801.

²⁷Elisabeth Hsu, *Pulse Diagnosis in Early Chinese Medicine: The Telling Touch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 30, stated only that “Nei ye” reflected an emphasis on “firm, solid, and hard” bodies that she argues was characteristic of texts on nurturing life (*yang sheng*). The discussion here partially confirms Hsu’s characterization, but since “Nei ye” also described regular and regulated leaks from apertures and patterned fissures in the body, we can more clearly recognize it as a text that straddled medical and political understandings of the body.

“Bounded off” (*zhou*) refers to nothing emerging from the mouth or appearing in the expression, even while now a dragon, now a serpent, five transformations occur in one day.²⁸ Prior kings thus did not go from the [unified] one to the [divided] two. They did not act on their own or arrogate achievements [for themselves].²⁹

While some details are elusive, the passage’s overall picture is clear: the “bounded off” (*zhou*) body of an ideal ruler becomes clothed in a kind of exterior armor,³⁰ never emitting speech or revealing facial expressions in irregular or uncontrolled fashion. Indeed, such irregularities are impossible, since the physical person of the ruler is entirely unified and free of internal divisions.³¹ Readers familiar with Warring States philosophical texts will no doubt recognize this sort of imagery from several chapters of the *Laozi* 老子, which describe the ideal sage ruler as entirely “still” (*jing* 靜) and “not engaging in purposeful action” (*wu wei* 無為), while his subjects “transform themselves” (*zi hua* 自化) and “bring themselves into alignment” (*zi zheng* 自正).³² The *Han Feizi*, of course, famously developed such ideas even further, with the “Zhu dao” 主道 (Way of the ruler) chapter describing a perfectly still, even “invisible” ruler who does not reveal his intentions or plans until the moment of action.³³

Through its reference to a perfectly unitary and still body, the “Shu yan” chapter bridges the gap between discussions of self-cultivation and calls for secrecy in rule. Other *Guanzi* chapters, however, much more explicitly call for discretion, using the same words *zhou* and also *mi*, in the sense of “secret” or “confidential.” For instance, the “Fa fa” 法法 (Model laws) chapter warns that, “when secret plans are not kept discreet (*mi*) it is dangerous” (幾而不密殆). It then goes on to argue that the ruler who is not *zhoumi*, here best translated as “confidential,” will be unable to attract truthful and righteous advisors to his court. As a result, factions and cliques will form and eventually cause the ruler’s downfall.³⁴ The *Han Feizi* contains an almost identical passage, as well as appeals for the ruler to remain “confidential.”³⁵ The *Guanzi* chapters thus allow us to

²⁸Cf. *Zhuangzi*, “Shan mu” 山木 chapter: “It would be very different, though, if you were to climb upon the Dao and its Power and go drifting and wandering, neither praised nor damned, now a dragon, now a snake, completely transforming with the times, never willing to hold to one course only” (若夫乘道德而浮遊則不然。無譽無訾，一龍一蛇，與時俱化，而無肯專為)。See *Xin bian zhuzi jicheng: Zhuangzi ji shi* 新編諸子集成：莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961 [2014]), 2:666. Translation partially follows *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, translated by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 156.

²⁹*Guanzi*, “Shu yan” 4.12; GZJZ, 1:245.

³⁰Cf. Chapter 28 of the *Guanzi*, “Can huan” 參患, which reads: “When armor is not hard [*jian*] and closely fit together [*mi*], then it has the same effect as thin mail” 甲不堅密，與儻者同實 (GZJZ 2:537). Recall that, in the phrase already translated (see n.22 above), “Nei ye” similarly describes the Dao as both “close” (*mi*) and “hard” (*jian*).

³¹Note that compared to the “Shan mu” chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (see n.28 above), in which the change from dragon to snake illustrates shifting with the times, the *Guanzi* contrasts an entirely calm and placid physical exterior with the image of (internalized?) dragon-snake transformations.

³²See esp. Chapter 54 of the *Laozi*. For a summary, see Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 36–38.

³³See n.6 above.

³⁴*Guanzi*, “Fa fa” 6.16; GZJZ, 1:293; Rickett, *Guanzi*, 1:251. The phrase “When secret plans are not kept discreet [*mi*] it is dangerous” recalls the passage from the “Xici zhuan” chapter discussed in the introduction and in further detail below. The “Fa fa” chapter, however, makes no mention of officials remaining discreet, emphasizing rather the importance of the ruler’s discretion.

³⁵See *Han Feizi*, “Wang Zheng” 亡徵 chapter, which characterizes leaking and an inability to be “discreet” (*zhou mi*) as a sign of disaster for the ruler. See *Han Feizi ji jie* 韓非子集解 (hereafter *HFZJJ*), annot. by Wang Xianshen 王先慎 (1859–1922) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1998 [2011]), 110.

move from a medically informed image in “Nei ye” of a body “bounded and close” (*zhou mi*), capable of storing vital essences (though not impermeable), to a ruler “bounded off” from his advisors and revealing no intentions. In terms of *qi* and leaking, then, movement along the continuum from medicine to philosophical models of ideal rulership entailed a closing off, with the homeostatic stability of a regulated physical body transforming into a bounded, obscured, and confidential political body.

The *Xunzi*, however, took the circularity implied by the word *zhou* and developed it in a different direction, using it to mean “all-encompassing” or “comprehensive.” This sense of the word occurs frequently in the text and helps clarify the issues at stake, for it emphasizes the importance of being “all-encompassing and close” (*zhou mi*) when it comes to cultivating the best kind of knowledge, which the text emphasizes is much more important than cultivating a perfect physical body. A long passage in the “Ru xiao” 儒效 (Achievements of the classicists) chapter, for instance, describes a hierarchy of self-cultivation practices that ends with the highest program possible: that of the sage (*sheng ren* 聖人). Sagely practices, we read, cannot be compared to mere physical cultivation, since “to take nurturing life as one’s own supreme Dao is the virtue of a commoner” (以養生為己至道，是民德也). The passage, however, retains *zhou mi* as characteristic of the sage’s “deliberations” (*zhi lü* 知慮).³⁶ In other words, the ruler’s knowledge must be complete in a way that cannot be achieved by mere physical cultivation. The *Xunzi* thus borrowed language associated with “nurturing life” practices (e.g. those in the “Nei ye” chapter of the *Guanzi*), but recast *zhou* as a description of the sage ruler’s all-encompassing, comprehensive knowledge, doing so in a way that downplayed the connection drawn in the *Guanzi* between physical self-cultivation and the Dao.³⁷

Indeed, the *Xunzi* explicitly condemns the connotation of *zhou* as closed off or “bounded.” The “Zheng lun” 正論 (Aligned judgments) chapter, for example, opens by noting that “vulgar purveyors of doctrine” (世俗之為說者) claim, “the way of the ruler benefits from being closed off” (主道利周). The *Xunzi* immediately disputes the statement, arguing that when “standards are hidden then subordinates will not move” (儀隱則下無動也).³⁸ At the very end of the “Jie bi” 解蔽 (Undoing fixations) chapter, meanwhile, we read that, “achieving success by being bound off and failing due to leaking (*xie*)—this the enlightened lord will not have” (周而成，泄而敗，明君無之有也).³⁹ Somewhat astonishingly, then, the *Xunzi* refutes the idea that the ruler should close himself off, be secretive, and prevent leaking. Indeed, advocating a model of shining openness, the text implies that leaking simply cannot happen, because nothing is hidden. With the ruler emerging as a standard for all to follow, even his deliberations must be based on comprehensive, all-encompassing knowledge.⁴⁰ The *Xunzi* thus helps us clarify the issues at stake, for, as we saw above, many other texts

³⁶*Xunzi jishi* (hereafter XZJS), 87. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, translated by Eric Hutton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 59, translated *zhoumi* as “all-encompassing and totally thorough.”

³⁷My observation here thus echoes Ori Tavor, “Xunzi’s Theory of Ritual Revisited: Reading Ritual as Corporal Technology,” *Dao: A Journal of Contemporary Philosophy* 12.3 (2013), 313–30, which argued that the *Xunzi* formulated its theory of ritual partially to reject ideas found in “nurturing life” texts.

³⁸XZJS, 233, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, 183.

³⁹XZJS, 207; *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, 235 (with *zhou* translated as “secretive”).

⁴⁰As Eric Hutton put it, the *Xunzi* advanced “criticism of views that advocate secrecy for rulers” (*Xunzi: The Complete Text*, 235n29). For a deeper discussion, see Lisa Raphals, “Sunzi versus Xunzi: Two Views of Deception and Indirection,” *Early China* 39 (2016), 185–229. Of course, these statements do not mean that the compilers of the *Xunzi* categorically opposed all confidentiality measures.

made the opposing claim that the ruler's secrecy and guardedness were central to effective rule. Whether or not such debates about sagely cultivation, the ruler's body, secrecy, and leaking influenced legal regulations during the Warring States period cannot be fully answered, due to limitations in pre-Qin sources.⁴¹ The salient issue for our purposes is that such regulations do not receive particular emphasis in our extant sources. As we will see in the next section, the picture does begin to shift in Qin and early Western Han, though only in an oblique way: stories were circulating that linked the ruler's demands for secrecy not so much to explicit legal regulation, but rather to spatial and institutional divisions at court, creating a plethora of considerations that constrained both rulers and officials.

Secret Spaces and Leaking Officials

The texts analyzed above, while focused almost entirely on the ruler, still evince some recognition that he was surrounded by officials. Note, for instance, the reference in the "Fa fa" chapter of the *Guanzi* that only if the ruler is circumspect will he be able to prevent the formation of factions and cliques at court. Such references, however, primarily depicted officials as an undifferentiated audience, reacting to the ruler in a generic space. Strikingly, then, stories in the *Shiji* about the First Emperor of Qin foreground questions of space and audience, explicitly claiming that the ruler's need for secrecy—rooted in his desire not just for safety but also to commune with the gods—resulted in spatial and institutional divisions at the capital. Anecdotes in the *Han Feizi*, meanwhile, extended this discussion of space and the circulation of privileged information from rulers to officials.

The First Emperor of Qin was famously obsessed with secrecy, demonstrated most spectacularly by his decision to build covered walkways to hide his location. Surely security considerations were one factor driving this decision, as some scholars have claimed.⁴² However, a closer look at the narrative in the "Basic Annals of the First Emperor of Qin" of the *Shiji*, still our most important source for the First Emperor's life and activities in the Qin capital of Xianyang 咸陽, shows that motivations less strategic and more divine were at play: specifically, concerns about secrecy and leaking were driven by the First Emperor's obsession with meeting the gods. According to the narrative in the "Basic Annals," toward the end of his life the emperor became increasingly obsessed with immortal deities on elusive ocean islands and mysterious, life-prolonging drugs. One of the men advising him on such matters, Lu Sheng 盧生, eventually persuaded the First Emperor to hide himself in his palaces, even from his own advisors, since "if vassal ministers know where the ruler is residing, this will cause disfavor with the gods" (人主所居而人臣知之，則害於神).⁴³ Lu concluded by advising the

⁴¹Such regulations, of course, most certainly did exist. See n.4 and n.5 above.

⁴²Tang Xiaofeng explained the First Emperor's retreat into hiding as a security measure to avoid "would-be assassins." See Tang, "The Evolution of Urban Form in Western Han Chang'an," in *Chang'an 26 BCE: An Augustan Age in China*, edited by Michael Nylan and Griet Vankeerberghen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 57. For a similar claim, see Charles Sanft, *Imperial Communication and Cooperation in Early Imperial China: Publicizing the Qin Dynasty* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), 102. Security must have been a concern, but I am less willing than Tang and Sanft to dismiss the narrative in the *Shiji*, since it both connects and contrasts with Warring States discussions of the ruler's language and body as sacred or quasi-sacred phenomena that had to remain confidential.

⁴³*Shiji* 6.257. The goal was for the First Emperor to avoid malicious ghosts so that the "perfected man" (*zhen ren* 真人), perhaps a kind of immortal, would appear.

emperor that drugs of immortality could “probably be obtained” (殆可得也) if he made his place of residence secret. The emperor agreed and immediately ordered all walkways between his palaces covered up and forbade anybody, on pain of death, from revealing his location. Later, however, the emperor was angered to see that his Chancellor had nonetheless followed him on a journey to Mt. Liang. When he noticed that the Chancellor immediately pulled back and reduced his entourage, he furiously exclaimed: “This means that a person in my palace has leaked my words” (此中人泄吾語).⁴⁴ When no one admitted to divulging his supposedly secret location, the emperor executed all in attendance. Subsequently, we read, nobody knew the emperor’s location, while “all audiences and the conferral of decisions to ministers took place in the palace at Xianyang [the capital]” (聽事，群臣受決事，悉於咸陽宮).

As we saw in the previous section’s discussion of essays in the *Guanzi* and *Xunzi*, pre-imperial texts had already addressed the ruler’s closing off of body, facial expression, and words. The story of the First Emperor cloistering himself away shows a demand for confidentiality about both what the emperor said (“my words,” *wu yu* 吾語) and his physical person, with both related to specific places. Concerns about location and space surely existed prior to the First Emperor, but while the *Guanzi* and other texts emphasized the idea that the patterns of the Dao allowed the ruler to maintain a “bounded and close” body, the *Shiji* narrative of the First Emperor highlights the importance of space as a confidential location in which the ruler communed with spirits. Moreover, while the First Emperor’s obsession with secrecy supposedly sprang from his search for the spirits of immortality, the “Basic Annals” suggests that his demand for confidentiality led to a spatial division of administrative work. The palace at Xianyang theoretically became the sole location for making official decisions, and officials would organize their work accordingly.⁴⁵ Such normative claims, of course, did not reflect actual practice. After all, when the First Emperor died while traveling in his “covered chariot” (*wen liang* 輜輦), a small group of advisors concealed the emperor’s body (and its stench) while continuing to issue decisions from the chariot in his name, secretly destroying sealed letters, and forging new documents that established a different heir to the throne.⁴⁶ *Shiji* stories of the First Emperor’s seclusion and death, then, evince a sensitive understanding of attempts by both rulers and officials to establish and navigate boundaries, boundaries that isolated different audiences and activities as well as conferred authority upon central government directives.

Such concerns find direct reflection in stories and anecdotes found in the *Han Feizi*, most of the chapters of which can be associated with the man Han Fei—who actually served at the court of the future First Emperor of Qin—and would have been known and in circulation at the Western Han court. While parts of the *Han Feizi* famously assert the ruler’s dominance over ministers who appear as inherently suspect figures, liable to commit acts of betrayal,⁴⁷ other parts of the text examine political dynamics from the perspective of officials. Importantly, they also explore the different spaces and audiences through which leaks travelled, in a manner reminiscent of the *Shiji*

⁴⁴*Shiji* 6.257.

⁴⁵The passage does not identify specific palaces, but probably the “Basic Annals” referred to the palaces located north of the Wei River, which Tang, “The Evolution of Urban Form in Western Han Chang’an,” emphasized were always higher in status and the “true seat of ... administration” (58).

⁴⁶See *Shiji* 6.264. The scene, and the quandary it caused for Chancellor Li Si 李斯, is described in greater detail in the account of Li Si’s life (*Shiji* 87.2548–51).

⁴⁷For a discussion, see Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, 174–77.

stories about the First Emperor. In a story from one of the “Chu shuo” 儲說 (Stockpiled persuasions) chapters, for instance, one Tangxi Gong 堂谿公 describes to Lord Zhao 昭侯 two different chalices: an expensive but bottomless jade chalice, and a humble ceramic one that “did not leak” (*bu lou*). Even though the jade chalice was “supremely valuable” (*zhi gui* 至貴), it could not hold any water, so “who indeed would pour liquid into it?” (人孰注漿哉). Tangxi Gong goes on to equate the jade chalice with the ruler who leaks information to his ministers: “Even if he has sagely intelligence, because of his leaks he does not fully exhaust his techniques [of rule]” (雖有聖智，莫盡其術，為其漏也). The story concludes with a disturbed Lord Zhao, who goes so far as to change his sleeping patterns in order to prevent inadvertent disclosures of information:

昭侯聞堂谿公之言，自此之後，欲發天下之大事，未嘗不獨寢，恐夢言而使人知其謀也。

Lord Zhao heard Tangxi Gong’s statements, and from then on, whenever he wanted to engage in a major effort in All Under Heaven, he never failed to sleep by himself, since he feared that while dreaming he would talk and thus allow others to know his plan.⁴⁸

An alternate version of this story immediately follows, as is common in the “Chu shuo” chapters. It concludes by identifying more explicitly these “others”: the ruler’s wife and consorts (*qi qie* 妻妾).⁴⁹ While the story emphasizes the importance of the ruler remaining discreet, recalling the essays analyzed in the previous section, it does not call attention to the ruler’s perfect cultivation; indeed, the bottomless jade chalice hints that the ruler’s magnificent appearance did not guarantee discretion, while the final passage about sleeping separately suggests Lord Zhao did not trust that his own body would maintain the required level of confidentiality. As we saw above, the First Emperor of Qin similarly cloistered himself away to ensure secrecy.

The *Han Feizi* makes clear, however, that such concern about spaces and audience were not only the province of the ruler. In another anecdote from the “Chu shuo” chapter, we read first that the ruler is like a chariot hub who collectively transports all archers (cf. *Laozi*, chapter 11), before going on to note that that this hub-like function of the ruler can only be accomplished if he hides his desires from view. Similarly, “if statements and words circulate then the vassal will find it difficult to speak, while the ruler will not be divine” (辭言通則臣難言，而主不神).⁵⁰ The chapter cites stories about leaking, including one Gongsun Yan 公孫衍, also called Xi Shou 犀首 (“Rhinoceros Head?”), to illustrate the point:

甘茂相秦惠王，惠王愛公孫衍，與之間有所言，曰：「寡人將相子。」甘茂之吏道穴聞之，以告甘茂。

甘茂入見王，曰：「王得賢相，臣敢再拜賀。」

王曰：「寡人託國於子，安更得賢相？」

對曰：「將相犀首。」

王曰：「子安聞之？」

⁴⁸“Wai chu shuo you shang,” 外出說右上 HFZJJ, 321.

⁴⁹“Wai chu shuo you shang,” HFZJJ, 321.

⁵⁰“Wai chu shuo you shang,” HFZJJ, 310.

對曰：「犀首告臣。」
王怒犀首之泄，乃逐之。

Gan Mao served as minister to King Hui of Qin. King Hui favored Gongsun Yan, and secretly had a word with him, saying: “I plan to make you minister.” One of Gan Mao’s subordinate officials heard what he said through a carved hole and then reported it back.

Gan Mao then went in for an audience with the king, saying: “My king has obtained a worthy minister, and your servant dares to repeatedly bow in congratulations.”

King Hui said: “I have entrusted the realm to you, so why would I then seek a worthy minister?”

Gan Mao responded: “You plan to appoint Xi Shou [Gongsun Yan] minister.”

King Hui said: “Where did you hear this?”

Gan Mao responded: “Xi Shou told me, your servant.”

The King was furious about Xi Shou’s leaking, and had him exiled.⁵¹

Though King Kang took Xi Shou to a separate room in order to speak with him privately, one of Gan Mao’s underlings was able to listen to the conversation through a hole in the wall. That Gan Mao had spies at his disposal is hardly surprising, and in this version of the story Xi Shou is a rather hapless figure, easily framed and dispatched by Gan Mao’s strategic disclosure of information to the king.

The variant version of the story that immediately follows describes Gongsun Yan as a famous general from Liang who flees to Qin after being convicted of a crime. The King of Qin favored him, much to the worry of the Qin general Chu Liji 樗里疾 who, fearful of being replaced, carved a hole in the “place where the king often spoke in secret” (王之所常隱語者). During one of these confidential conversations, Gongsun Yan gave advice on a military campaign, and in response the king said he would appoint him prime minister. Having overheard the exchange, General Chu quickly related the details to the “gentlemen of the palace” (*lang zhong* 郎中). By the end of the day, all of them knew about the plans for the attack and Gongsun Yan’s appointment; by month’s end, “within the borders of the realm everybody knew about it” (境內盡知之). General Chu accused Gongsun Yan of divulging the plans, but the nervous king expressed confusion, stating falsely (perhaps to protect himself) that he had never spoken with Gongsun. In response, General Chu characterized his rival as an itinerant guest, one whose loyalty was suspect since he had fled Liang. As General Chu put it, “in his heart he is alone, so he made these statements to wed himself to the populace” (其心孤，是言自嫁於眾).⁵² The first version of the story is a relatively simple tale of an official spying on a king’s conversation and using it to dispatch a potential rival. The more complicated second version, however, shows the king and his officials deceiving each other and jockeying for political gain via different spaces and audiences, from the court and its courtiers to the entire realm and its inhabitants.⁵³

⁵¹“Wai chu shuo you shang,” *HFZJJ*, 319–20.

⁵²“Wai chu shuo you shang,” *HFZJJ*, 320.

⁵³It is significant that Chu Liji uses the verb *jia* 嫁 (“wed”) to describe Gongsun Yan’s attempts to curry favor with the “the many” (*zhong* 眾) of the realm. This feminization of Gongsun perhaps underscores Chu Liji’s accusation that the upstart general had attempted to circumvent the established power structure. The

Such concerns are the central topic of “Shuo nan” 說難 (Difficulties of persuasion), an essay by Han Fei that attained great fame during Western Han for its eloquent articulation of the predicaments faced by officials trying to convince rulers of a course of action.⁵⁴ The dangers of leaking were one of these predicaments, and the chapter exhorts would-be persuaders that, “affairs are successful because of discretion, while words fail because of leaking” (事以密成, 語以泄敗). The line evinces a broad understanding of “leaking” that extends beyond a premeditated and direct disclosure of privileged information.⁵⁵ For instance, if a persuader, “when speaking happens upon a matter that has been concealed” (語及所匿之事), he will be in danger, presumably because the ruler will assume the speaker obtained the information through secret channels, whether or not the persuader understands the matter to be confidential.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the persuader must also fear his rivals at court, for even if he managed to convince the ruler of a given course of action, “intelligent people might surmise the plan from the outside and obtain it, so that it is leaked to the outer world” (知者揣之外而得之, 事泄於外). In such cases, the ruler will “necessarily assume that you [the speaker] leaked it, putting you in danger” (必以為己也, 如此者身危).⁵⁷ Officials must beware not only of how their statements will be perceived by the ruler, but also by others at court, in the “outer world.”

The *Han Feizi* and stories from the “Basic Annals of the First Emperor” thus show an overriding concern with audiences for confidential information (whether or not everybody understands it to be secret) within confidential space. That space was conceived as simultaneously housing and protecting the ruler’s sacred body, demarcating areas for administrative work, and serving as an arena in which officials jockeyed for political advantage. This third and final concern, as we shall see in the next section, received the bulk of attention starting in the last century of Western Han, when institutional patterns and regulations emerged that both attempted to control leaking and allowed officials to assert authority and status.

Leaking in the Late Western Han: Institutions, Laws, and Status

The division of administrative space that the *Shiji* claims emerged after the First Emperor concealed his location, even if it was at best honored in the breach, remained an ongoing pattern and problem into the Western Han. The sources examined in greater detail below suggest that such concerns only grew in intensity, with late Western Han providing evidence for regulations that proscribed leaking privileged information from specified spaces. Such proscriptions emerged alongside a recognition of confidentiality as a shared norm that bound all at court and, especially, served as a characteristic of exemplary officials.

story raises the question of whether whispers and leaks were understood in feminine terms, though I have not consistently detected such a pattern.

⁵⁴For the prominence of “Shuo nan” during Western Han, see Michael Hunter, “The Difficulty with ‘The Difficulties of Persuasion,’” in *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei*, edited by Paul Goldin (New York: Springer, 2013), 169–95.

⁵⁵“Shuo nan,” *HFZJJ*, 86. Some versions of the *Han Feizi* as well as quotations of this line substitute *er* 而 for the character *yu* 語 (“speak”), in which case the phrase would read: “plans are successful because of discretion, but fail because of leaking.” Note the similar wording of this statement and one from the *Xunzi* discussed above (see n.39), though the difference is obvious: while the latter focused on the ruler, the former here discusses leaking as a danger for officials.

⁵⁶“Shuo nan,” *HFZJJ*, 86.

⁵⁷“Shuo nan,” *HFZJJ*, 86.

A full history of the spatial and institutional growth of the Western Han capital and its palaces, as well as the rules and regulations governing them, cannot be attempted here. It is sufficient for our purposes to note that the palaces of Chang'an 長安 came to be tightly secured by three different guard corps, each under the direction of separate government ministries, which patrolled nested areas of the imperial palaces.⁵⁸ Access to these different palace spaces was controlled by a registry, which guards would check before allowing entry into a given space. The most closely monitored spaces were the so-called “inspection zones” (*xing zhong* 省中), sometimes called the “forbidden zones” (*jin zhong* 禁中). These areas were the emperor’s most private chambers, only accessible with special permission or by possession of a supernumerary title (e.g. *ji shi zhong* 給事中) that allowed free entry. We do not know much about the zones, which were not necessarily fixed in one location (or even limited to one palace).

The same could be said about the location of secret archives and document repositories, which were sprinkled through different palaces in Chang’an. The number and scope of such archives likely increased, especially after the reign of Wudi 武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) and up to the reign of Chengdi 成帝 (r. 33–7 BCE), when that emperor famously launched an effort to collect and collate manuscripts from around the empire.⁵⁹ Even if the details remain unclear, the growth of imperial archives must have entailed a concomitant expansion in security regulations designed to restrict access to the archives and the activities that took place therein. Parallel to these developments was the creation and rise in stature of the Imperial Secretariat (*Shangshu* 尚書), the director of which was in charge of receiving and forwarding official documents and imperial edicts (see the poem by Yang Xiong discussed below). By the end of the Western Han, the Secretariat had become a larger and more organized office,⁶⁰ and the director of the office was one of the most important officials in the empire, with several incumbents going on to serve as Chancellor.⁶¹ Though admittedly sketchy, our overall picture is one of rising influence as well as increasing institutional growth and differentiation.⁶²

⁵⁸For a detailed study, see Liu Pak-yuen 廖伯源. *Lishi yu zhidu—Han dai zhengzhi zhidu shishi* 歷史與制度—漢代政治制度試釋 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1998).

⁵⁹See Michael Nylan, *Yang Xiong and the Pleasures of Reading and Classical Learning in China* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 2011), 40–47.

⁶⁰According to commentarial remarks by Yan Shigu 顏師古 (581–645 CE), in 29 BCE Chengdi appointed five sets of personnel, organized into “bureaus” (*cao* 曹), to oversee the Secretariat. See *Hanshu* 10.308.

⁶¹The two seminal modern essays focusing on the Secretariat are Lao Gan 勞幹, “Lun Han dai de nei-chao yu waichao” 論漢代的內朝與外朝. *Lishi yuyan yanjiu suo ji kan* 13 (1948), 227–67, and Kamada Shigeo 鎌田重雄, “Kan dai no shōsho kan: Ryō shōsho ji to roku shōsho ji to wo chūshin to shite” 漢代の尚書官：領尚書事と録尚書事を中心として, *Tōyō shi kenkyū* 26.4 (1968), 113–37. Both posited a set division between inner and outer court, with the former being used by the emperor in order to centralize and concentrate his power. Hans Bielenstein rejected this inner/outer court rubric, noting that emperors never fully controlled the Secretariat. See Bielenstein, *The Bureaucracy of Han Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 154–55. Tomita Kenshi 富田健之 offered further revisionist accounts, emphasizing that the development of the Secretariat was part of a larger trend of institutionalization across imperial offices. See, e.g., “Kan jidai ni okeru shōsho taisei no keisei to so no yigi” 漢時代における尚書体制の形成とその意義, *Tōyō shi kenkyū* 45.2 (1986), 212–40.

⁶²The Secretariat receives clearer treatment in late Eastern Han commentaries and texts, especially the *Duduan* 獨斷 by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192). See Enno Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong’s “Duduan”* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006).

As a result, even if we accept the *Shiji* account that the First Emperor established spatial divisions and institutional patterns in order to ensure his secrecy, by the end of the Western Han our sources suggest that the object of secrecy measures and regulations was no longer so focused on the ruler. Incidents and stories dating to the last century of Western Han demonstrate that while legal regulation and punishment of leaking were ultimately connected to the emperor, the action had shifted to officials accusing others and being accused themselves of different leaking crimes. Almost all of these accusations come relatively late, after the reign of Wudi. Several of them receive mention in the “Table of the Many Offices and Ministerial Posts” (*Bai guan gong qing biao* 百官公卿表) included in the *Hanshu* 漢書 (*History of the Han*, comp. ca. 100 CE). The earliest such accusation in the “Table,” in an entry dating to 77 BCE, reads as follows:

蒲侯蘇昌為太常，十一年坐籍霍山書泄秘書免。

Su Chang, the noble of Pu, was appointed Superintendent of Ceremonial. Eleven years later (66 BCE), he was charged with passing documents to Huo Shan and dismissed for leaking secret palace writings.⁶³

This incident was part of a larger purge that eliminated the Huo 霍 family from the imperial court at the start of Xuandi’s reign.⁶⁴ The salient point for our discussion is that “leaking” involved not the spoken disclosure of information, which was so central to the *Han Feizi* stories as well as the paranoia of the First Emperor in the *Shiji*, but rather the unauthorized release of what amounted to classified documents (if of an unspecified nature).⁶⁵ The story bolsters the narrative of institutional growth and regulation of imperial archives detailed above: while details remain unclear, the growth of imperial archives would have entailed a concomitant expansion in security regulations designed to restrict access to the archives and the activities taking place therein.

Concern about oral leaks of information, however, hardly went away, and the connection between the regulation of space and the regulation of information was not limited to imperial archives and confidential documents.⁶⁶ After the reign of Wudi, we

⁶³*Hanshu* 19b.796. My translation here follows Yan Shigu’s commentary to this line, which states that Su Chang “took secret writings and gave them to Huo Shan” (以秘書借霍山).

⁶⁴The *Hanshu* elsewhere states that Huo Shan “copied secret records” (*xie mi shu* 寫秘書) (*Hanshu* 68.2956). On the downfall of the Huo, see Michael Loewe, *Crisis and Conflict in Han China: 104 BC to AD 9* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 133–53.

⁶⁵The precise meaning of *mi shu* 秘書 (“secret writing” or “palace writing”) during the Han period is a complicated problem. The term seems to indicate any number of writings, housed in archives and government ministries within the capital, that could only be released with special permission. For a detailed discussion, see Xu Xingwu 徐興無, “Han dai de ‘mi shu’” 漢代的「秘書」, *Wen shi* 106.1 (2014): 209–24. Xu argues that *mi shu* referred to rare or magical texts, on the one hand, or documents that were so sensitive as to be classified (see esp. 214–15). The division is somewhat arbitrary, since there was undoubtedly significant overlap between the two. A perhaps more important point, also recognized by Xu, is that the emperor ultimately had broad power to give out restricted texts or provide access to them. For the famous story of Chengdi refusing to bestow copies of the *Shiji* 史記 (at the time called *Taishi gong shu* 太史公書) to a visiting king, see *Hanshu* 80.3324–25 and 100.4203. Note that Liu Xiang 劉向 (79/78–8 BCE), appointed by Chengdi to direct the imperial library project, was described as being in charge of the “secret palace texts” (*mi shu*).

⁶⁶Nor, it should be said, was concern about leaking limited to the capital and imperial palaces. Bamboo strips from the mid-Western Han Yinqueshan corpus refer to “leaking” (*lou* 漏) from mountain passes,

begin to see regular charges of “leaking words from the inspection zone” (泄省中語).⁶⁷ Most of the accusations mentioned in the *Hanshu* came from Shi Xian 石顯, the powerful court insider during the reign of Yuandi 元帝 (48–33 BCE), who included “leaking words from the inspection zone” among charges lodged against several officials he believed threatened his position.⁶⁸ We need not conclude that all such accusations were trumped up pretexts to be used in politically based attacks.⁶⁹ At the same time, accusations of leaking necessarily invoked court regulations even while they simultaneously indicated social status, access to privileged spaces, and proper comportment as a good official.⁷⁰ This latter point receives confirmation in a story about Kong Guang 孔光 (d. 5 CE), the director of the Secretariat, who was famous for being so circumspect that he refused to mention even the type of trees growing within the inspection zone.⁷¹

It is not necessarily the case, however, that *not* leaking indicated fidelity to the law and the good of the empire. Depending on the context, circumspection could actually subvert imperial institutions. The *Hanshu* records a scene, for instance, in which Zhu Bo 朱博, while serving in 15 BCE as Metropolitan Superintendent of the Left (Zuo Pingyi 左馮翊), recruited a man from his district to be a personal client and spy. After discovering the man had paid bribes to avoid a mutilating punishment, Zhu dismissed all attendants, called in the man for a personal meeting, and gained his confession. Rather than penalizing him, however, Zhu offered total amnesty in exchange for becoming an ally. Naturally, the man agreed to serve his new patron to the death. With a warning to “not leak my words” (毋得洩語), Zhu asked the man to put down in writing anything he heard that might be to Zhu’s advantage. The story concludes by stating that the man subsequently became Zhu’s intimate confidant, his “eyes and ears” (耳目).⁷² Such recruitment and employment of spies by officials was no doubt common,⁷³ but the

though the nature of the leaked object (whether documents, people, material goods, or all of the above) is left unstated. To what extent the physical territory of the empire was imagined as an entity that could “leak” (akin to the ruler?) is a significant question that requires separate study. See *Yinqueshan Han mu zhu jian* 銀雀山漢墓竹簡, ed. Yinqueshan Han mu zhu jian zhengli xiaozu 銀雀山漢墓竹簡整理小組, vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), strip no. 1310 (transcription, 171; photography, 43) and strip no. 1496 (transcription, 185; photograph, 60).

⁶⁷The phrase is absent from the *Shiji*, but appears six times in the *Hanshu*, all in relation to incidents that occurred under post-Wudi rulers.

⁶⁸See, e.g., *Hanshu* 64b.2837; 66.2900. For the politics of Yuandi’s reign, see Michael Loewe, “Han Yuandi, Reigned 48 to 33 B.C.E., and His Advisors,” *Early China* 35–36 (2012–13), 361–93.

⁶⁹According to the “Table of the Many Offices and Ministerial Posts,” in 27 BCE one Song Deng 宋登 was demoted from his position as Governor of the Capital. Before he could be sent off to his new provincial post, however, Song was imprisoned on accusations of “leaking words from the inspection zone” and then committed suicide (*Hanshu* 19b.827). We know little about Song Deng, but a description elsewhere in the *Hanshu* of governors during the early 20s BCE, presumably including Song Deng, says that they “did not conform to the duties of their office” (不稱職) (*Hanshu* 76.3238). The circumstances behind the accusation of leaking against Song Deng very well could have been political in nature, but it is also possible that he revealed information in a way that failed to maintain the confidentiality expected of high ministers. It can thus be difficult to distinguish between slanderous political accusations and “actual” violations of regulations.

⁷⁰For further details, see Habberstad, *Forming the Early Chinese Court: Rituals, Spaces, Roles* (University of Washington Press, 2017), 108–12.

⁷¹*Hanshu* 81.3354.

⁷²*Hanshu* 83.3402.

⁷³Cf. *Wei li zhi dao* 為吏之道 (How to act as a good official), a text recovered from the Qin-era Shuihudi 睡虎地 tomb, which includes the following line: “Examine ears, eyes, and mouth; ten ears equal one pair of eyes” 審耳目口，十耳當一目。See *Qin jian du he ji* 秦簡牘合集, ed. Chen Wei 陳偉 (Wuhan: Wuhan

specific reference to leaking vividly shows the bond Zhu forged with his new underling. In the context of the *Hanshu* narrative, the warning against leaking immediately underscored the privileged nature of their relationship, one that existed outside of the bureaucratic structure. Circumspection and “leaking,” then, were contingent behaviors whose moral value (not to mention legality) depended on the person or institution receiving the protection of confidentiality. Who or what deserved circumspection and why? The correct answers to such questions were not necessarily obvious, but the fact that by the late Western Han such dilemmas were being framed separately from the ruler himself (e.g. leaks were from the “inspection zone,” not the ruler) shows how far the problem had evolved from Warring States times.

Everybody at court, then, including the emperor, faced pressure from norms and regulations that proscribed certain kinds of leaking. It was in this context that the “Xici zhuan” passage translated earlier in this article, though only the first portion predicting disaster if rulers, officials, or secret affairs are indiscreet (*bu mi* 不密), emerged as a commonplace quoted in statements from late Western Han officials. Explicitly characterizing it as a line from the *Changes* (*Yi* 易), Liu Xiang 劉向 (79/78–8 BCE), cited the phrase toward the end of a memorial that decried the influence of the imperial distaff (*waiqi* 外戚) Wang 王 family and urged Chengdi to distance himself from its powerful members.⁷⁴ For Liu, then, the holistic, tripartite understanding of circumspection articulated in the line supported his case that the Wang family rightly remained outside the regular order of the imperial court. It is somewhat ironic, then, that when he ascended the throne of his newly established Xin 新 dynasty in 9 CE, Wang Mang 王莽, scion of the Wang family, also cited the phrase, though only its third and final clause—“when pivotal matters are not kept discreet then disasters will occur” (機事不密則害成)—to explain the danger of leaking from the inspection zones and the Secretariat.⁷⁵

Meanwhile, just a few years earlier, during the reign of Aidi 哀帝 (r. 7–1 BCE), the high official Shi Dan 師丹 (d. 3 CE) was accused of letting memorials leak (*lou xie*) so that others “transmitted copies and spread hearsay throughout the empire” (傳寫流聞四方). Arguing for an investigation, the accusers invoked the second clause of the “Xici” statement, that “officials who are not discreet will lose their life” (臣不密則失身). Though Shi Dan was accused of leaking written memorials, in a careful statement after the investigation Aidi equated his high officials as “Our vital organs” (朕之腹心) and criticized Shi for a more general lack of circumspection, mentioning his “deliberations that were not discreet” (*lü bu zhoumi* 慮不周密).⁷⁶ This final move by Aidi, from a specific act of leaking to an assessment of Shi Dan’s overall behavior

daxue, 2014), vol. 1.1, 322. Instead of hearsay, the line seems to encourage officials or would-be officials to privilege what they have seen with their own eyes. At the same time, the line does not preclude the possibility that multiple secondhand accounts (from allies or spies?) could provide usable information. Note that by the Tang 唐 (618–907), the term “Eyes and Ears Official” (*Ermu guan* 耳目官) became an informal title used to refer to imperial censors (*yu shi* 御史). See *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, 112.4166.

⁷⁴*Hanshu* 70.1962.

⁷⁵*Hanshu* 99b.4116. The explanation comes in a larger statement Wang Mang made upon his accession in which, among other things, he gave his ally Chen Chong 陳崇 the title *Wuwei siming* 五威司命. Wang offered “six articles” (*liu tiao* 六條), one of them describing the danger of leaks, that collectively comprised the “leading and guiding lines of the empire” (國之綱紀) which Chen would oversee.

⁷⁶*Hanshu* 86.3507. Aidi’s statement recalls praise in the *Xunzi* for the “all-encompassing and close” (*zhoumi*) nature of the sage’s “deliberations” (*zhi lü*), though Aidi understood *zhoumi* to mean “discreet.”

and character, shows that the emergence of regulatory proscriptions against leaking oral and written statements from secure palace zones did not replace a holistic understanding of circumspection as the mark of a perfectly refined person. Indeed, the truly cultivated official would ideally embody regulatory norms in such a way that the laws themselves would be unnecessary.

In his “Shangshu zhen” 尚書箴 (Admonition on the Secretariat), the late Western Han exegete Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE-18 CE) advanced precisely such a vision of exemplary service, in the process suggesting that the best kind of official followed the same norms as the ruler and could in fact more capably accord with them. Writing in the voice of an idealized incumbent, Yang Xiong described the behavior of a director of the Secretariat perfectly fulfilling the duties of the office. Yang celebrated the Secretariat as the one “Issuing and reporting on the royal commands / As the throat and tongue of the king” (出入王命 / 王之喉舌).⁷⁷ He then celebrates the perfect cultivation of the ideal Secretariat:

我視云明	Our sight sharpens,
我聽云聰	Our hearing becomes clear.
載夙載夜	Dawn after dawn and night after night,
惟允惟恭	Always proper, always attentive. ⁷⁸

Midway through, however, the poem turns toward rulers, writing “The *Annals* criticizes leaked words / The *Changes* says that without confidentiality ministers are lost” (春秋譏漏言 / 易稱不密則失臣).⁷⁹ Yang thus paired our now-familiar *Changes* statement about rulers with a reference to a passage from the *Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), which states that the pre-imperial state of Jin 晉 put to death a high official, after which another man fled to a different realm. According to the *Gongyang* 公羊 and *Guliang* 穀梁 commentaries to the *Annals*, the passage refers to an incident in which an official successfully convinced the king of Jin not to send a particular general on a military expedition. The king then demoted the general, explaining to him the advice he had received from the official. In retaliation, the demoted general killed the official and fled. Both commentaries blame the ruler for this turn of events, condemning him for “leaking” to the general.⁸⁰ By applying stories about leaking rulers to illustrate the ideal behavior of a model Secretariat, the admonition both confirms a shared norm of confidentiality that applied equally to all figures at court and suggests that a Secretariat director who conformed to the duties of confidentiality relevant to his office had the potential to act in a more responsible and upright manner than an actual ruler.

⁷⁷ *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, vol. 1, juan 54.4 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1961). The couplet quotes nearly verbatim from the *Odes* (*Shijing* 詩經), #260 “Zheng min 蒸民” (The People of Our Race), stanza 3.

⁷⁸ *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, vol. 1, juan 54.4.

⁷⁹ *Quan Shanggu Sandai Qin Han Sanguo Liuchao wen*, vol. 1, juan 54.4.

⁸⁰ See *Shisan jing zhushu* (*biao dian ben*) 十三經注疏 (標點本), no. 8, *Chunqiu Gongyang zhuan zhu shu* 春秋公羊傳注疏, 286; and no. 9, *Chunqiu Guliang zhuan zhu shu* 春秋穀梁傳注疏, 165. The high official in question, one Yang Chufu 陽處父, continued to serve as a cautionary example to rulers in the post-Han period. See, e.g., *San guo zhi* 三國志, 23.657.

Coda: Leaking and Laws, Politics and Position

Histories of spy-craft tell us that ancient and modern states alike have developed sophisticated measures for gathering and deploying intelligence for strategic purposes in war or political struggle. States, concerned as they inevitably must be with governing populations, enacting policies, and ensuring security, are necessarily interested in managing and controlling information. Such a concern seems characteristic of almost all states, whether or not they seek monopoly control over the accumulation and dissemination of this information. While more detailed study of laws, regulations, and practices related to secrecy and leaking in early China might yield helpful information about innovative solutions, it would not upend our understanding of the underlying problem that confronted the contending realms of the Warring States period and the Qin and Han empires that succeeded them. The evidence assembled in this essay thus suggests that the significance of regulating confidentiality and leaking can and should be understood in terms broader than the strategic requirements of states or the legal and bureaucratic procedures designed to ensure confidentiality. Rather, secrecy and the fear of leaking helps illustrate the convergence of laws, institutions, political considerations, and status, all of which informed rhetorical representations of court actors. The subject allows us to trace a different kind of legal and administrative history through an investigation of sources that can by no means be understood strictly as “legal” or even “administrative.”

Indeed, this article explored a history of leaking that traces back not to the strategic demands of states and militaries, but to visions of sagely rulership that drew upon medical concepts, particularly *qi* circulation, and self-cultivation practices. Without repeating all of the interpretations advanced above, we might note that across the medical-philosophy continuum, from a medical body that leaked essences to achieve homeostatic balance to the political body of a ruler that was “bound off” (*zhou*) and confidential, the boundaries that separated inner from outer were an unchanging but implicit concern. Such concerns were made entirely explicit in the *Shiji* stories of the First Emperor, tracing as they did the emergence of spatial and institutional boundaries at court to the emperor’s concerns about maintaining secrecy and preventing leaks that denied him access to the spirits. A prominent story during Western Han, then, was that the divine status of the ruler’s person, not just security or strategic concerns, drove secrecy regulations at the imperial court. The anecdotes in the *Han Feizi* explored the implications of such a spatially and institutionally segmented court, bound by confidentiality, that both rulers *and* officials were forced to navigate.

By the late Western Han, this trend toward shared norms and confidentiality regulations had accelerated, along with a growth in secret spaces and institutions bound by quasi-legal proscriptions (e.g. to not leak secret documents or conversations from the “inspection zone”) that seem to have almost taken on a momentum and logic of their own, or at least a logic removed from the direct concerns and actions of the ruler. Leaking or not leaking thus presented ethical problems, since circumspection could solidify extra-official factions as much as the stability of the entire court itself. Nonetheless, the popularity of the “Xici zhuan” line and Yang Xiong’s poem on the Secretariat shows that court officials did not hesitate to elevate regulatory demands for secrecy to an almost sanctified norm equally expected of rulers and officials. Concerns about leaking, as expressed through regulations and ethical standards, rooted in practices of self-cultivation and idealized patterns of behavior, provided a language for officials to partake of a divine power that had settled across the entire court, including the ruler but by no means limited to him.

Even if writers in the Eastern Han and post-Han period continued to elaborate on the problem and dynamics of leaking in new ways,⁸¹ such a reflexive understanding of this status of the court, and its implications for leaking secret information, endured. An illustrative example, which relates to the changed understanding of leaking charted in this article, can be seen in commentary by Du Yu 杜預 (222–284 CE) to a passage in the *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (comp. ca. late fourth century BCE?). For such a massive text, full of stories about political conflict, anecdotes about leaking are surprisingly few. One, however, describes King Kang 康王 (d. 545 BCE) of Chu 楚 issuing an order to execute his chief minister. Before actually carrying out the execution, the king met three times with the minister's son, who happened to serve in the king's royal guard. After eventually mustering the courage to tell him that his father was going to die, King Kang asked the son and guard if he would remain in royal service. He responded by noting that the king would undoubtedly be unable to keep him in the guard post after his father was executed. At the same time, he stated, "leaking your order (*ming*) will result in a heavy punishment, so I also will not do that" (洩命重刑, 臣亦不為).⁸²

The story, then, associates leaking a ruler's "command" (*ming* 命) with punishment, but interpretive difficulties make it impossible to clarify the precise connection between the two: we can, after all, understand the punishment not as a specific reaction to leaking a command, but rather a potential result of a series of events that would be set in motion by the leak. In King Kang's plan to execute the prime minister, the prime minister's son might have feared that if he betrayed the king's plans, his father would launch a pre-emptive rebellion that would lead to his own execution.⁸³ Taken on its own terms, then, the *Zuozhuan* anecdote highlights the risks of elite politics, but does not go much further. Du Yu did go further, however, papering over ambiguities within the story and arguing that the actor simply wished to avoid punishment, since "leaking a ruler's command explains the heaviness of the crime" (漏泄君命, 罪之重).⁸⁴ Du Yu, writing decades after the collapse of Eastern Han, thus cast leaking a ruler's command as a formally proscribed act that merited punishment, suggesting a legalistic, cause-and-effect relationship between infraction and response so reflexive as to be mechanistic. Based on the evidence assembled in this article, however, we should not solely cast Du Yu's

⁸¹For instance, in his *Lunheng* 論衡, Wang Chong 王充 (27–97? CE) wrote that a "major sycophant" (*da ning* 大佞) was so rhetorically skilled that he could avoid political attacks, but a "minor sycophant" (*xiao ning* 小佞) was not, and so "in responding to others makes mistakes and leaks (*lou*)" (對鄉失漏) that reveal his motivations. And so, the "major is difficult [to identify] and the minor easy" (大難小易也), just like "leaks from the top of a house" (屋漏在上): "when such a leak is large, from below one sees it clearly; when the leak is minor, from below one sees it only faintly" (漏大, 下見之著, 漏小, 下見之微). With the leaky roof image, Wang Chong thus played with an inverse relationship between the size of a leak and the abilities of a sycophant: a "minor" in the latter category is akin to a "major" case in the former, since in both evidence of the leak is so obvious. And, perhaps more importantly, the roof leak metaphor allows Wang Chong to hint that the major sycophant is more dangerous, just like a minor roof leak whose invisibility causes more damage over time. See *Lunheng zhuzi suoyin* 論衡逐字索引, edited by D. C. Lau (Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1996), vol. 2, 165.15–17.

⁸²*Zuozhuan*, Xiang gong (22.6); *Chunqiu zuo zhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, annot. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981 [2014]), vol. 3, 1069; *Zuo Tradition / Zuozhuan / 左傳*, translated by Stephen Durrant, Wai-ye Li, and David Schaberg (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), vol. 2, 1099.

⁸³Yang Bojun offered this interpretation. See *Chunqiu zuo zhuan zhu*, vol. 3, 1069.

⁸⁴*Shisan jing zhushu (biao dian ben)*, no. 7, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, vol. 2, 982. Du Yu offered a similarly legalistic interpretation of the only other *Zuozhuan* story about leaking the command of a ruler, in this case Lord Zhao 昭公 of Lu 魯. See *Ibid.*, vol. 3, 1459.

interpretation as the product of an ever-more elaborate legal code designed to privilege the ruler's power. It can also be understood as a coda to the story told above, an accretive process by which different understandings about leaking and secrecy at the imperial court layered on top of each other. Writing in this context, Du Yu transformed a story of back-stabbing political intrigue by assuming a conventionalized understanding of rules and norms that constrained the statements and speech of court actors, including rulers and officials alike.