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## The Place of Shen-nong in the System of Legendary History of the Apocryphal Text *Chunqiu Minglixu*

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*Abstract:* Shen-nong (Divine Farmer) is one of the sovereigns who was believed to rule All-Under-Heaven in ancient times. Although from the 1st c. BC onwards his place in the legendary history of China was generally defined, some conflicting accounts still remained. One of these contained in now lost apocryphal text *Chunqiu Minglixu*, notable for its unique system of ancient history. Although Shen-nong is only twice mentioned in the surviving quotations from this apocrypha, fragments of other lost texts that were influenced by *Minglixu* testify its special treatment of Shen-nong. They allow to conclude that in this apocrypha's system of ancient history there were two Shen-nongs: the first one, the August Shen-nong, ruled at the dawn of history and was endowed with cosmogonic activities, while the second one, also called Yan-di from the Da-ting clan, reigned much later and was perceived as a founder of his own dynasty.

*Key words:* China's legendary history, Shen-nong, Yan-di, *Chunqiu Minglixu*, Chinese apocrypha

### I. Shen-nong and Yan-di

In traditional China the ideas of the legendary history were always far from being unified. The different views on this subject flourished during the Warring States (453–221 BC) period, resulting in a number of conflicting accounts. The composition, identity and sequence of legendary monarchs were prone to debate. Although during the Han (206 BC — 220 AD) these views underwent some degree of unification, it was far from being definitive. While some monarchs, such as Huang-di 黃帝 (Yellow Thearch), have firmly taken their place in the system of ancient history, the situation of others was not so unambiguous. One of such sovereigns was Shen-nong 神農 (Divine Farmer), the legendary inventor of agriculture and patron of pharmaceuticals.

In the pre-Han sources Shen-nong is mentioned quite rarely. A.C. Graham dates his appearance in extant texts to the late 4th and 3rd cc. BC.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> GRAHAM 1990: 70.

earliest references to him are in *Mengzi* 孟子, where certain Xu Xing 許行 is said to “implement the words of Shen-nong” (*wei Shen-nong zhi yan* 為神農之言),<sup>2</sup> and in “Xici zhuan” 繫辭傳 (“Commentary of Appended Judgments”) chapter of *Zhouyi* 周易 (*Changes of The Zhou*), where Shen-nong turns out to be a sovereign who ruled after Fu-xi 伏羲<sup>3</sup> and before Huang-di, as well as the inventor of the ploughshare, plow and markets.<sup>4</sup>

Some pre-Han sources imply that Shen-nong was perceived as the founder of his own dynasty or as the name of the ruling clan. In one of the chapters of *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (*Master Lü's Springs and Autumns*) it is said that “Shen-nong owned All-Under-Heaven for seventeen generations”.<sup>5</sup> A phrase similar but different in one important respect is contained in a fragment of the now lost treatise *Shizi* 尸子 by Shi Jiao (390–330 BC), preserved in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽 (*Imperial Reader of the Taiping Era*): “The Shen-nong clan owned All-Under-Heaven for seventy generations”.<sup>6</sup> The difference in the number of generations given in the two texts is the result of a reversal of the characters *shi* 十 (“ten”) and *qi* 七 (“seven”). It is obvious that one of the versions is the result of an error, but it is impossible to say unequivocally which one; however, it can be assumed that the *Shizi* version is more authentic, since the number seventy in Early China was an analogue of the number seventy-two, which played an extremely important role in Chinese culture,<sup>7</sup> while the number seventeen, as far as I know, was devoid of any numerological background.

At some point Shen-nong has been merged with another legendary ruler — Yan-di 炎帝 (Flaming Emperor). References to Yan-di in ancient sources are even less numerous. His name appears in *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (*Zuo Tradition*) and *Guoyu* 國語 (*Discourses of The States*), where he figures as a sovereign who ruled after Tai-hao 大皞 and Gong-gong 共工 and before Huang-di,<sup>8</sup> as well as Huang-di's brother born from the marriage of Shao-dian 少典 with a girl from the You-jiao clan 有嬌.<sup>9</sup> In addition, in *Liji* 禮記 (*Records on Rituals*) chapter “Yueling” 月令 (“Monthly regulations”), Yan-

<sup>2</sup> *Mengzi zhengyi*: juan 11 [3A]: 365. A.C. Graham specifies that Xu Xing came to the state of Teng 滕, where he met Mengzi, about 315 BC. See GRAHAM 1990: 67.

<sup>3</sup> In “Xici zhuan” he is called Bao-xi 包犧.

<sup>4</sup> *Zhouyi zhengyi*: juan 8: 351–352.

<sup>5</sup> *Lüshi chunqiu jishi*: juan 17, ch. 6: 461.

<sup>6</sup> *Taiping yulan*: juan 78: 365.

<sup>7</sup> WEN 2006.

<sup>8</sup> *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: juan 48 [Zhao 17]: 1567.

<sup>9</sup> *Guoyu*: juan 10 [Jin yu 4]: 356.

di is associated with summer<sup>10</sup> and, as a result, with the south and the Power of Fire.

The identification of Shen-nong with Yan-di occurred most likely as a result of attempts to combine two systems of ancient rulers: the chronological one, in which Shen-nong was perceived as a monarch who ruled before Huang-di, and the correlative one, in which Yan-di acted as one of the sovereigns associated with various cardinal points, seasons and Powers.<sup>11</sup> The earliest known attempt to combine these two images was made by Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145/135–86? BC). In the beginning of the first chapter of his *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*) it is implied that Yan-di was the last sovereign of the Shen-nong dynasty: “During the time of Xuan-yuan 軒轅 (i.e. Huang-di — *A.T.*), the Shen-nong clan had been declining for generations... Yan-di had a desire to oppress the feudal lords, and the feudal lords all turned to Xuan-yuan. Xuan-yuan then... fought... against Yan-di in the wilds of Banquan... The feudal lords all honored Xuan-yuan as the Son of Heaven. He replaced the Shen-nong clan. This was The Huang-di”.<sup>12</sup>

The identity of Shen-nong and Yan-di was finally established by the end of the 1st c. BC. In its finished form, it was reflected in the text *Shijing* 世經 (*Canon of Generations*), compiled by the famous scholar Liu Xin 劉歆 (50? BC — 23 AD), which reports the following: “[As for] Yan-di, *Changes* say: ‘Pao-xi (i.e. Fu-xi — *A.T.*) clan disappeared, and Shen-nong clan was established’...<sup>13</sup> With the help of the [Power] of Fire, he succeeded the [Power] of Wood, so he became Yan-di. He taught the people to plow and farm, so [the people] of All-Under-Heaven gave [him] the title ‘[ruler] from the Shen-nong clan’”.<sup>14</sup> Since then, the identification of Shen-nong with Yan-di has become generally accepted.

Most of the sources agree that Shen-nong was the name of the dynasty, and Yan-di, one of its rulers. For example, the commentary to the *Zuozhuan*

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<sup>10</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: juan 15: 574, juan 16: 582, 594.

<sup>11</sup> KARLGREN 1946: 221–224. One of the possible reasons for this merger may be the fact that they almost never appear together in ancient sources. The only exception seems to be *Guanzi* 管子 chapter “Feng Shan” 封禪 (“*Feng* and *Shan* Sacrifices”) where Shen-nong and Yan-di are listed side-by-side as the third and fourth among ancient rulers that performed Feng and Shan sacrifices (*Guanzi jiaozhu*: juan 16, ch. 50: 953; cf. *Shiji*: juan 28: 1361). For other reasons of their identification, see HENRICKS 1998.

<sup>12</sup> *Shiji*: juan 1: 3; tr. adopted from *The Grand Scribe’s Records* 1994: 2–3, slightly modified.

<sup>13</sup> See *Zhouyi zhengyi*: juan 8: 351.

<sup>14</sup> *Hanshu*: juan 21b: 1012.

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says that “[the authors] of *Succession of Emperors* (*Dixi* 帝系)<sup>15</sup> and *The Roots of Generations* (*Shiben* 世本)<sup>16</sup> all believed that Yan-di was the [ruler] from the Shen-nong clan; Yan-di was [his] personal title (*shenhao* 身號), and Shen-nong was a dynastic title (*daihao* 代號).<sup>17</sup> A similar statement can be found in a Later Han text *Qianfulun* 潛夫論 (*Comments of a Recluse*) by Wang Fu 王符 (78/85–163) where it is said that this ruler’s “personal title (*shenhao*) was Yan-di, and hereditary title (*shihao* 世號) was Shen-nong.”<sup>18</sup>

## II. *Minglixu* and *Lushi*

Some interesting developments of Shen-nong’s image can be found in *Chunqiu Minglixu* 春秋命歷序 (*Spring and Autumn: The Sequence of The Periods [of Rule Established by Heaven’s] Mandate*, hereafter *Minglixu*), one of the texts from the corpus of so-called apocrypha (*chenwei* 讖緯), religiopolitical miscellanea that were created during the first centuries AD to legitimize the rule of the Later Han (25–220) dynasty. As most of the apocryphal texts, *Minglixu* was lost and now exists only in fragments, quoted in medieval encyclopedias and commentaries to the classical, literary and historical works. What makes it unique is its subject matter, that is, the legendary history of China. Of course, other apocryphal texts also included some historical content, but it is *Minglixu* that focuses primarily on this topic. In this work the system of ancient Chinese history underwent a significant revision: while in earlier tradition history was believed to span several thousand years and include several reigns of pre-dynastic rulers, here it turned into the one few million years long. It was divided into ten eras (*shiji* 十紀), Cyclopean periods represented by many dozens of ruling clans.

<sup>15</sup> It is not clear which text is meant by *Dixi* in this case. In the *Da Dai liji* 大戴禮記 (*Elder Dai’s Records on Rituals*) chapter of the same name neither Shen-nong nor Yan-di is mentioned.

<sup>16</sup> *Shiben* is a now lost text of late Warring States origin. In all probability the identification of Yan-di and Shen-nong mentioned here was not implied by the original text, but introduced by Song Zhong’s 宋忠/衷 (Song Zhongzi 宋仲子, d. 219) commentary (WANG Mo 1957: 3).

<sup>17</sup> *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: juan 48 [Zhao 17]: 1567.

<sup>18</sup> *Qianfulun jiaozheng*: juan 8, ch. 34: 386.

Although among the *Minglixu* fragments we find no indication of the number of the monarchs ruling during these periods, it can be hinted by some later texts, which most probably were influenced by that apocrypha. For example, the now lost work *Liuyilun* 六藝論 (*Discussion on the Six Arts*) by the famous Later Han scholar Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200 AD) said that six eras included 91 dynasties (*dai* 代). A commentary by certain Fang Shuji 方叔機 specifies that Zheng Xuan referred to the first six eras and indicates the number of dynasties that ruled during each of them: one during the first one (Jiu-tou 九頭), five during the second (Wu-long 五龍), seventy-two during the third (She-ti 攝提), three during the fourth (He-luo 合雒), six during the fifth (Lian-tong 連通) and four during the sixth era (Xu-ming 叙命).<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, no list of the rulers of these eras has survived. Nevertheless, we have such a list of sovereigns for the eighth (Yin-ti 因提) and ninth (Shan-tong 禪通) eras. It was preserved in a quotation from the now lost medieval source of unknown origin called *Danhushu* 丹壺書 (*Book of The Cinnabar Kettle*), cited in the most complete treatise on legendary history — *Lushi* 路史 (*Grandiose History*) by the Southern Song (1127–1279) intellectual Luo Mi 羅泌 (1131–1189/1203).<sup>20</sup> This list names 13 clans which ruled for 68 generations during the eighth era and 16 clans which ruled for 88 generations during the ninth. Moreover, Luo Mi himself compiled the list of 22 ruling families of the seventh era (Xun-fei 循蜚), which reigned for “more than sixty generations”.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the tenth era (Shu-yi 疏仡) was believed to begin with Huang-di,<sup>22</sup> and thus roughly corresponded to the version of ancient history presented in *Shiji*. Although we can’t be certain that these lists (especially, Luo Mi’s one) accurately reflect the content of *Minglixu*, they help us to imagine the scope of this new version of the legendary history.

Nevertheless, in the surviving fragments of *Minglixu* itself we only find mentions of three eras (the first two and the fourth one) and 16 sovereigns (some of which were perceived to be the founders of their own dynasties). Some of them, such as Huang-shen 黃神, Ju-shen 狙神 (Wei-shen 為神), Chen-fang 辰放 or Li-guang 離光, do not appear in earlier texts, while others, such as Huang-di, Shao-hao 少昊, Zhuan-xu 顓頊 and Di-ku 帝嚳, are well known from previous tradition.

<sup>19</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: juan 1: 2.

<sup>20</sup> See *Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 3: 20.

<sup>21</sup> See *Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 3: 19–37.

<sup>22</sup> *Bu Shiji*: 966.

Shen-nong is mentioned in one of the surviving fragments of *Minglixu*, quoted in Song encyclopedia *Taiping yulan*: “There was a divine person called Shi-er 石耳. [He had] a green face, large eyebrows, and a jade pattern on his head.<sup>23</sup> [He] drove [a chariot harnessed] by six dragons, came from Difu 地輔 and bore the title of the August Shen-nong (Huang Shen-nong 皇神農). [He] first established the forms of the earth and accurately measured [the space between] the four seas, [ascertaining that it stretches for] 900.000 *li* from east to west, and for 810.000 *li* from south to north<sup>24</sup>.”<sup>25</sup> This passage contains much information unknown from earlier sources, such as Shen-nong’s personal name, description of his appearance, mode of travel, place of origin, and activities that can be considered cosmogonic. However, from this fragment it is not clear which period of history Shen-nong’s reign belongs to.

<sup>23</sup> *Taiping yulan* cites an original commentary that says: “The sun and the moon were pure and clear and complied with the order and sequence [of their appearance in the sky], therefore the Divine [farmer], having responded to the [influence] of harmonious vapors, was born. ‘Jade pattern’ (*yuli* 玉理) is the same as ‘jade flower’ (*yuying* 玉莢) or ‘jade hairpin’ (*yusheng* 玉勝)” (*Taiping yulan*: juan 78: 365).

<sup>24</sup> *Taiping yulan* cites an original commentary that says: “That what he has done was like this, his instructions were like those of the divinity; [he] farmed plants and planted trees, ordered the people to eat cereals, therefore [the people] of All-Under-Heaven [gave him] the title of August Shen-nong. [He] accurately recorded [information about] the distance and proximity of the forms of the earth and [about] where mountains, streams, forests and lakes extend” (*Taiping yulan*: juan 78: 365).

<sup>25</sup> *Taiping yulan*: juan 78: 365. Parts of this fragment are cited in a number of other texts from the 7th c. onwards. The earliest of these is the Tang encyclopedia *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (*Classified Collection Based on the Classics and Other Literature*), completed by 624 AD. It contains the first half of the *Taiping yulan* quotation with an accompanying commentary and explanation that the “divine person” in question is Shen-nong, though his name is written as Shi-nian 石年 (*Yiwen leiju*: juan 11: 209). Another relatively early version of this citation is given in Li Shan’s 李善 (630–689) commentary to the literary anthology *Wenxuan* 文選 (*Selections of Refined Literature*) (*Xin jiaoding liujia zhu Wenxuan*: juan 19: 1169). Moreover, the second half of the *Taiping yulan* quotation is contained in Northern Song (960–1127) encyclopedia *Shiwu jiyuan* 事物紀原 (Beginnings and Origins of Phenomena and Things) (*Shiwu jiyuan*: juan 7: 361). Besides, brief pieces of this fragment are cited in *Chuxueji* 初學記 (*Records for The Beginning of Learning*) and *Kaiyuan zhanjing* 開元占經 (*Classic of Divination of The Kai-yuan Era*) (*Chuxueji*: juan 9: 202; *Kaiyuan zhanjing*: juan 4: 199). In the collections of apocryphal texts a word-for-word matching fragment is attributed to another work — *Shang shu Xuan ji qian* 尚書璿璣鈴 (*Venerated Scriptures: Seal of The Xuanji [Star]*) (*Liang Han chenwei wenxian*: 18973); however, its source — the so-called *Qinghe jun ben* 清河郡本 (*Tome from Qinghe County*) — is not trustworthy (see, for example, YU 2013; LUO 2017).

In this situation, it seems logical to turn to *Lushi*. In this text, Shen-nong is presented as the founder of the Yan-di clan, the last dynasty of the ninth of ten eras, which was succeeded by Huang-di, the first monarch of the last era. Luo Mi devotes a whole chapter to Shen-nong (*Houji*, *juan* 3), in which a number of quotations from *Minglixu* are given. Yet, all of them are parts of the fragment and its commentary cited in *Taiping yulan*.<sup>26</sup> Thus, it could be assumed that in *Minglixu* Shen-nong was also seen as a founder of his own dynasty which ruled at the end of the ninth era.

### III. The Da-ting clan

At the first glance this is consistent with another surviving fragment of *Minglixu* that says that “Yan-di bore the title ‘[ruler] from the Da-ting 大庭 clan’, [power in his family] was transmitted [over] eight generations [that ruled] for a total of 520 years”.<sup>27</sup> The fragment continues with the enumeration of the dynasties of Huang-di (10 generations, 1520 years), Shao-hao (8 generations, 500 years), Zhuan-xu (20 generations, 350 years) and Di-ku (10 generations, 400 years).<sup>28</sup>

The identification of Yan-di with the “ruler from the Da-ting clan” is also far from being unproblematic. The name Da-ting *shi* 氏 appears in ancient sources quite rarely. It is first mentioned in *Zuozhuan* as a name of storehouse (*ku* 庫) in Lu 魯;<sup>29</sup> later it also appears in a list of twelve ancient rulers in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 chapter “Cutting open Satchels” (“Quqie” 祛箠) along with Shen-nong, as second and last sovereigns, respectively. Ruler from Da-ting clan figures in *Hanshu* 漢書 (*Book of Han*) chapter “The Table of Ancient and Modern Men” (“Gujin renbiao” 古今人表) as the fourth of eighteen “middle upper: humane persons” (*shangzhong renren* 上中仁人) who is placed after “Thearch Tai-hao from the Fu-xi clan” (Tai-hao di Fu-xi

<sup>26</sup> The only difference is Shen-nong’s personal name which is written (probably via *Yiwen leiju*) as Shi-nian 石年; *Taiping yulan*’s version “Shi-er” is explicitly discarded as an erroneous one (*Lushi jianzhu*: *Houji*, *juan* 3: 153, 157, n. 4).

<sup>27</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: *juan* 46: 1508.

<sup>28</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: *juan* 46: 1508–1509. Similar passage, but without the number of generations can be found in another apocryphal text, *Yiwei Jilantu* 易緯稽覽圖 (*The Apocrypha of Changes: Chart of Critical Examination*) (*Liang Han chenwei wenxian*: 18851–18852).

<sup>29</sup> *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: *juan* 48 [Zhao 18]: 1581. Du Yu 杜預 (223–285) in a commentary specifies that “Da-ting shi” is “the name of ancient polity within the walls of Lu” (*Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: *juan* 48 [Zhao 18]: 1581).

shi 太昊帝宓羲氏) and before “Yan-di from the Shen-nong clan” (Yan-di Shen-nong shi 炎帝神農氏).<sup>30</sup> The idea that the sovereign from the Da-ting clan ruled between these two monarchs was followed by the authors of such texts as *Diwang shiji* 帝王世紀 (*Genealogical Annals of The Emperors And Kings*) and *Dunjia kaishantu* 遁甲開山圖 (*Dunjia Chart for Opening Mountains*), who mentioned Da-ting as a monarch who ruled right after Nü-wa 女媧 (an immediate successor to Fu-xi) and a number of generations before Shen-nong.<sup>31</sup>

In *Lushi* Da-ting is also represented as a separate sovereign, the fourth monarch of the ninth era who “ruled for 90 years, reigned under the auspices of Fire and bore the title Yan-di”.<sup>32</sup> The commentary accompanying this passage states that “due to the fact that he [reigned under the auspices of] the Power of Fire, subsequent generations believed that he was Shen-nong... [but this is] nonsense”; it also mentions that Liu Shu 劉恕 (1032–1078), the author of *Zizhi tongjian waiji* 資治通鑑外紀 (*The Annals Outside of “Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance”*), “believed that Shen-nong was [called] Da-ting, arguing [that he] was different from [the sovereign] from the Da-ting clan which was after Bao-xi (i.e. Fu-xi. — *A.T.*), and [thereby] created two Da-tings. [This] is even more misleading”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Luo Mi acknowledged that Da-ting bore the title Yan-di, yet distinguished him from Shen-nong the founder of the Yan-di dynasty.

Yet, it seems that at least in the Later Han there was a separate tradition that followed *Minglixu*’s identification of Yan-di and Da-ting. It was shared in particular by Zheng Xuan, who in his commentary to *Liji* stated that “Yan-di was [the ruler] from the Da-ting clan”.<sup>34</sup> The fact that this tradition goes back to *Minglixu* is hinted by the phrase following the above-quoted citation containing the enumeration of ancient ruler’s dynasties beginning with Yan-di as a ruler from the Da-ting clan: “This is what Zheng [Xuan] based [his ideas] on”.<sup>35</sup>

All of these names — Yan-di, Shen-nong and Da-ting — come together in “*Chunqiu* interpretation” (*Chunqiu shuo* 春秋說) quoted by He Yin 何胤

<sup>30</sup> *Hanshu*: juan 20: 863–866.

<sup>31</sup> *Diwang shiji jicun*: juan 1: 2, 9; *Taiping yulan*: juan 78: 365.

<sup>32</sup> *Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 6: 75. Elsewhere it is mentioned with reference to the lost text *Danhushu* that monarchs from the Da-ting clan ruled for five generations (*Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 3: 20).

<sup>33</sup> *Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 6: 76, n. 3; cf. *Zizhi tongjian waiji*: juan 1a: 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: juan 15: 574.

<sup>35</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: juan 46: 1509.



(446–531), which is most likely one of the apocryphal texts associated with the *Chunqiu* classic: “Yan-di bore the title ‘[ruler] from the Da-ting clan’. Below [he] was the August One of Earth (*dihuang* 地皇). [He] created plough and ploughshare, sowed hundred cereals and was called Shen-nong”.<sup>36</sup> Considering the fact that Da-ting clan is mentioned only twice in surviving fragments of apocryphal corpus, and that the first part of this quotation matches the *Minglixu* fragment cited above, it can be surmised that the “*Chunqiu* interpretation” in question is *Minglixu*. Thus, it seems that the above assumption that Shen-nong’s place in *Minglixu* is consistent with that in *Lushi* (disregarding the issue of Da-ting clan) seems to be correct.

#### IV. *Jindai qianshu*

Nevertheless, it is refuted by a quotation from another lost text — Meng Shen’s 孟誥 (621–713) *Jindai qianshu* 錦帶前書 (*Former Book of the Brocade Belt*), also known as *Jindaishu* 錦帶書 (*Book of the Brocade Belt*).<sup>37</sup> Almost no information about this book has been preserved; however, a number of its fragments were cited in later writings, primarily in the Northern Song encyclopedia *Shiwu jiyuan* by Gao Cheng 高承 (11th c.). In particular, it says: “In Meng Shen’s *Former Book of Brocade Belt*, [in the subsection] ‘Kuo-ti Era’ (‘Kuo-ti ji’ 括提紀)<sup>38</sup> [of the section] ‘Initial eras’ (‘Zaoji’ 早紀) it is said: ‘There was [a ruler] from the Shen-nong clan; [he] established the forms of the earth<sup>39</sup> and created the four seas. This was the former Shen-nong’ (*ci qian Shen-nong ye* 此前神農也)”.<sup>40</sup> It is easy

<sup>36</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: juan 15: 574.

<sup>37</sup> Apparently, the character *qian* 前 (“former”) was added to the title of this book to distinguish it from the treatise of the same name, which was traditionally attributed to Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501–531), but in reality was probably compiled at the beginning of the Song (960–1279) period (LUO & GUO 2019).

<sup>38</sup> Kuo-ti is an alternative name for the She-ti era, the third of the ten. The fact that it was called Kuo-ti in *Jindai qianshu* is reported in the commentary to *Lushi* (*Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 2: 14, n. 1).

<sup>39</sup> In the modern version of the text, there is a character *she* 蛇 (“snake”), which does not make sense in this context. It is an obvious mistake for *di* 地 (“earth”), outwardly similar to one of the allographs of character “snake” (*she* 虵). This assumption is confirmed, in particular, by a parallel quotation from *Minglixu*, also given in *Shiwu jiyuan*, which have the character *di* in the same position (*Shiwu jiyuan*: juan 7: 361).

<sup>40</sup> *Shiwu jiyuan*, juan 1: 6. It is not clear if this last phrase is a part of the quotation from *Jindai qianshu* or Gao Chen’s own explanation; however, the first option is more likely.

to notice that the second and third parts of the quotation from *Jindai qianshu* correspond verbatim to the surviving fragment of *Minglixu* quoted above. This textual match, as well as the mention of one of the ten eras, suggests that Meng Shen was familiar with *Minglixu* and its system of ancient history.

Based on this quotation, two important conclusions can be drawn about the content of *Jindai qianshu*. First, it turns out that this book consisted of several sections, at least two of which dealt with the ten eras: the presence of an “Early Eras” section implies that there must have been either “Later Eras” section (“Wanji” 晚紀?), possibly preceded by a section on the “Middle Eras” (“Zhong ji” 中紀?), or, more likely, special sections on each of the “later” eras, about which, in contrast to the “early” ones, more could be said. Taking into account the fact that in the standard version the She-ti (Kuo-ti) era is the third of the ten eras, it can be argued that the “early” eras in *Jindai qianshu* (provided that the order of the eras in this work was not different from the traditional one) included at least the first three eras. Provided that there were no “middle eras” in Meng Shen’s system, it can be assumed that the next three eras whose lists of rulers are not found in the texts that have come down to us, He-luo, Lian-tong and Xu-ming, and possibly the seventh era, Xun-fei, whose list of sovereigns is given in *Lushi*, but is not in the above-mentioned quote from *Danhushu*, also belonged to the “early” ones. In addition, it is clear that at least the “Early Eras” section was divided into subsections dedicated to individual eras.

Second, the fact that the reign of Shen-nong in *Jindai qianshu* is placed in the She-ti era makes this book the only known work to mention by name at least one sovereign of this era; as a consequence, it can be assumed that other monarchs of this period were also mentioned in *Jindai qianshu*, but since the fragments in which they were mentioned have not survived, this hypothesis can’t be either proved or disproved. In addition, this fact gives meaning to the phrase about the “former Shen-nong” that closes the above quotation. In the context of traditional version of the ancient history, the word “former” (*qian* 前) used here is meaningless. If we assume that in this case Shen-nong figures as the first ruler of his own dynasty, then the choice of the word *qian* to denote this fact seems unobvious to say the least and has no analogues in other texts. If we assume that part of this phrase was simply lost (in this case, the existing characters could be translated as “Before this, Shen-nong...”), then it is difficult to explain why the surviving fragment ends with the final particle *ye* 也. Nevertheless, if we take into account that the

reign of Shen-nong usually dated to a much later time it can be assumed that in Meng Shen's system there were several rulers of this name. One of them, Shen-nong known to us from other sources, ruled in one of the "late" eras, while the other — "early Shen-nong", or the "August Shen-nong" as he is called in the fuller version of *Minglixu*'s fragment — during the She-ti era.

Although the coincidence of the names of different characters is not uncommon in the ancient Chinese tradition,<sup>41</sup> the "two Shen-nongs" are not, as far as I know, reported in any surviving text, and thus may be a feature of *Minglixu* inherited by *Jindai qianshu*.

## V. *Gushikao*

This argument is corroborated by another lost text — Qiao Zhou's 譙周 (199–270) *Gushikao* 古史考 (*Investigations of Ancient History*). Although there are no verbatim matches between *Gushikao* and *Minglixu*, their systems of ancient history show certain similarities. Besides, Qiao Zhou was a representative of a scholarly tradition that went back to Yang Hou 楊厚 (or Yang Xu 楊序, 72–153),<sup>42</sup> a specialist in apocryphal texts with particular connection to *Minglixu*,<sup>43</sup> so it is highly probable that Qiao Zhou saw this text and could include some of its propositions into his own work.

Several of *Gushikao*'s surviving fragments and expositions of its contents touch upon the relationship between Shen-nong and Yan-di. For example, in the commentary to *Zuozhuan* it is said that "Qiao Zhou,

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<sup>41</sup> In the lists of monarchs of the Ten Eras that have come down to us, there is at least one such case: there is a sovereign called Da-chao 大巢 in the list of the rulers of the eight era, and You-chao 有巢 in the list of the rulers of the ninth (*Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 3: 20); in *Lushi* both of them are called You-chao (*Lushi jianzhu*: Qianji, juan 5: 55; juan 9: 107). In addition, *Lushi* contains an essay specifically dedicated to this problem: "Distinguishing [people] with the same personal and family names" ("Tong mingshi bian" 同名氏辨) (*Lushi jianzhu*: Fahui, juan 1: 905–906). Moreover, a number of similar examples is given in "Shiben jilan tonglun" 世本集覽通論 ("The Penetrative Discourses on the Collection [Fragments] of the Roots of Generations") by Wang Zicai 王梓材 (1792–1851), included in his reconstruction of *Shiben* (WANG Zicai 1957: 61–66).

<sup>42</sup> FARMER 2007: 17–21.

<sup>43</sup> A prophecy contained in *Minglixu* is cited in *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*Book of Later Han*) in connection with Yang Hou's memorial to the throne, thus implying that he either quoted or based his argument on it (*Hou Hanshu*: juan 30a: 1048–1049).

investigating the ancient history, believed that Yan-di and Shen-nong each was a single person”.<sup>44</sup> Similar statement is found in the commentary to *Liji*: “Qiao Zhou believed that Shen-nong and Yan-di were different people, and also believed that Shen-nong [ruled with] the Power of Wood”.<sup>45</sup> Provided that the idea of Wood (which was associated with color green) as Shen-nong’s patronizing Power goes back to *Minglixu*, it can explain August Shen-nong’s “green face” (*cangse* 蒼色) in the fragment of this apocrypha quoted above.

As for Yan-di, Qiao Zhou regarded him as the founder of his own dynasty, which ruled before Huang-di: “According to the [books] of many sages and *Investigations of Ancient History*, there were eight generations of Yan-di’s descendants altogether, [which ruled] for more than 500 years, and the [sovereign] from the Xuan-yuan clan replaced them”.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Qiao Zhou shares *Minglixu*’s idea of Yan-di as the sovereign from the Da-ting clan: “Qiao Zhou’s *Investigations of Ancient History* says: ‘[Sovereign] from the Da-ting clan was surnamed Jiang 姜, ruled under the auspices of the Power of Fire, and therefore bore the title Yan-di’ ”.<sup>47</sup> The name of the clan (Da-ting), the number of generations (eight) and the duration of the reign (520 years/500-odd years) coincide with those indicated in the *Minglixu* fragment.

Although in the surviving fragments of the *Investigations of Ancient History* there is no mention of the ten eras, we are told that “Qiao Zhou believed that... [from] Shen-nong to Yan-di [there was] 133 families”.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: juan 48 [Zhao 17]: 1567.

<sup>45</sup> *Liji zhengyi*: juan 1: 21.

<sup>46</sup> *Bu Shiji*: 965.

<sup>47</sup> *Chuxueji*: juan 9: 202. It could be argued that this Da-ting was not the Yan-di mentioned in the previous quote, but the one mentioned in *Lushi*, who also bore the title Yan-di, but Jiang as a surname of Yan-di the dynastic founder is attested in a number of earlier sources (*Guoyu*: juan 10 [Jin yu 4]: 356; *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhengyi*: juan 58 [Ai 9]: 1901).

<sup>48</sup> *Liji Zhengyi*: juan 1: 21. The number 133 here is problematic. It seems that in ordering early sovereigns Qiao Zhou adhered to the Five Powers (*wuxing* 五行) theory in its mutual generation (*xiangsheng* 相生) sequence: Wood → Fire → Soil → Metal → Water. In the fragment just quoted it is also said that according to *Gushikao* the period between Fu-xi (traditionally associated with the Power of Wood) and Nü-wa (explicitly connected with the Power of Water) there were 3 families (i.e. Fire, Soil and Metal), and between Nü-wa and Shen-nong (who was said to rule under the auspices of Wood), 50 families (i.e. ten times the full rotation of Five Powers). Thus, the number of families between Shen-nong (Wood) and Yan-di (Fire) should also be a multiple of 5 — that is, 130 or 135. Therefore, the number 133 might be a mistake of either of these numbers.

If we confront this information with the ten eras system, this period might be seen as an interval between the third and the ninth eras.

Thus, although Qiao Zhou apparently didn't call Yan-di Shen-nong, it seems likely that his discrimination of Shen-nong and Yan-di is rooted in the "two Shen-nongs" concept of *Minglixu*.

## VI. Conclusions

As a result, it can be concluded that in *Minglixu* there were two monarchs with the name Shen-nong: the first one, the August Shen-nong, ruled at the dawn of history, in the third of the ten eras, while the second one, also known as Yan-di from the Da-ting clan, was the founder of his own dynasty, in much later times.

This view distinguishes the ideas about the legendary history of China reflected in this text both from earlier ones, according to which the Shen-nong clan ruled for seventy (or seventeen) generations, from the ideas popular at the time of the creation of this text, according to which Shen-nong was the name of the dynasty, the most famous representative of which was Yan-di, and from a much later version of *Lushi*, according to which Shen-nong was the first ruler of the Yan-di dynasty. This circumstance testifies to the significant originality of the ideas about the legendary history of China reflected in *Minglixu*.

*Minglixu's* view of Shen-nong and Yan-di influenced some later works, such as *Gushikao* and *Jindai qianshu*. However, by the time of Luo Mi these ideas were lost, as well as *Minglixu* itself, as otherwise he would have mentioned the inconsistency between the content of this text and his own views on the succession of ancient rulers, as he often did in similar cases.

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