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TEN THOUSAND NAMES: RANK AND LINEAGE AFFILIATION IN THE WENXIAN COVENANT TEXTS

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*Abstract*¹

The following paper looks at evidence of rank distinction and lineage affiliation among participants in a covenant recorded on tablets excavated at Wenxian 濫縣, Henan province, and dated to the fifth century BC. The covenant is in the form of a loyalty oath to a leader, taken to be the head of the Han 韓 lineage, one of the ministerial families of Jin 晉. The text of the covenant is written in ink on stone tablets, each individualized with the name of a covenantor. Tablets with this particular covenant text were found in five separate pits. The number of tablets in each pit ranged from several dozen to more than 5000. The stone-type and shape of the tablets varied within and among pits. I argue that these variations are evidence of distinctions in rank among the covenantors. I discuss a set of four related names from the tablets that appear to support this conjecture. I then look at names, of both covenantors and enemies, in which a lineage name is found. I argue that these names show that it was loyalty to the Han leader, not shared lineage affiliation, which was the main requirement for participation in the covenanting group. I conclude with a brief discussion on

- 1 I have been working with the excavators of the Wenxian covenants, Hao Benxing 郝本性 and Zhao Shigang 趙世綱, on the processing and preparation for publication of these texts, and would like to acknowledge my gratitude to them for their support in the use of these materials in my research, and permission to use the images included in this paper. I would like to thank Susan Roosevelt Weld who invited me to join the project that she initiated with the excavators to photograph and digitalize the Wenxian texts (see: WELD, 2004). All the images used herein were photographed during the period 1999 to 2000 as part of that project. I would like to thank Sarah Allan and Keith McMahon for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of the article. I also thank those participants of the European Association for the Study of Chinese Manuscripts 2008 workshop (University of Zurich, 27–29 June, 2008) who commented on my talk on this topic. I am particularly grateful to Adam Smith for a set of detailed and insightful comments on an earlier version of the article, and also to an anonymous reviewer who provided many valuable suggestions. Research for this work was aided by: a Fellowship for East Asian Archaeology and Early History from the American Council of Learned Societies, with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation; a Franklin Research Grant from the American Philosophical Society; and a University of Kansas New Faculty General Research Fund. The University of Kansas generously provided supplemental salary funding during the period of the fellowship.

the size of the covenanting group, lineages within political groups, and the wider significance of these materials.

1. Introduction

The Houma and Wenxian Covenant Texts (*Houma mengshu* 侯馬盟書 and *Wenxian mengshu* 溫縣盟書) are tied in content and function to the place of their discovery, the historical Jin 晉 state of the fifth century BC.² They are witnesses to this unsettled period in Jin's history and, I believe, played a direct role in the consolidation of groups centred on the Han 韓 and Zhao 趙 lineages. It was Han and Zhao, along with Wei 魏, that eventually divided Jin into three independent states in the second half of the fifth century.

The Houma Covenant Texts were produced by the Zhao lineage, recorded in transmitted texts as one of the ministerial families of Jin; the Wenxian Covenant Texts were produced by the Han lineage, another Jin ministerial family.³ Each set of covenants was written on stone tablets that were buried in pits dug into an earthen terrace adjacent to a city site. The terraces were used over extended periods for ritual activity and contained large numbers of sacrificial pits in addition to the covenant pits. The city site at Houma is identified as Xintian 新田, the Jin capital from the sixth to fourth centuries, and the Wenxian city site is identified as Zhou 州, which historical texts link to the Han lineage. Both sets of texts are dated to the fifth century and include a number of different covenants.⁴ These covenants appear to have been produced in reaction to conflict

2 This and all further dates are BC. For introductions to the history of Jin and its three successor states, see the relevant sections of: HSU, 1999; LEWIS, 1999.

3 According to the transmitted histories, high ranking Jin officials were drawn from six lineages, the "ministerial families" of Han 韓, Zhao 趙, Wei 魏, Zhonghang 中行, Fan 范, and Zhi 智. The linking of these excavated covenants to the Han 韓 and Zhao 趙 lineages is based on tablets in which the name of the covenant lord is given as Zhao 趙, in the case of the Houma texts, and Han 韓, for the Wenxian texts. See: SHANXI SHENG WENWU GONGZUO WEIYUANHUI, 2006 (1976):63–66; ZHAO/ZHAO, 2004:199–201.

4 For the dating of the texts see: SHANXI SHENG WENWU GONGZUO WEIYUANHUI, 2006 (1976):73–76; HENAN SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1983:82 and *passim*; LI, 1998; WILLIAMS, 2005a:55–60. One of the previously unpublished covenant types from Wenxian calls on the covenantors to take a certain Qizhang 啓章 as their leader. Hao Benxing has noted that this is the name given in historical sources for the Han leader Han Wuzi 韓武子, who reigned from around 425 (the exact date is disputed) to 408 (Hao Benxing, personal communication, September 2008). The Wenxian Type 1 covenant has been dated to 497, based on a date

both among and within the ministerial families and their allies. More than fifteen different covenant types have been identified.⁵ They generally take the form of a loyalty oath to the lineage leader made by groups of subordinates. They call on a spirit to sanction stipulations demanding loyalty to the lineage leader, along with more specific requirements or prohibitions, the majority aimed at the consolidation of the group centred on the lineage and the identification and rejection of both named and unnamed enemies. An individualized tablet was prepared for each covenantor, giving the covenantor's name and the text of the particular covenant type. The number of covenantors participating in each covenant ranged from dozens to thousands. I conjecture that these covenants played a role in the process by which the Zhao and Han lineages became fully independent from Jin and took on statehood. The following article presents part of my preliminary research on this topic, focusing on a covenant from Wenxian in which thousands of individuals participated.

This paper aims to complement a number of studies that have made use of excavated materials to examine the nature of lineage in Zhou China.⁶ In *Chinese Society in the Age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): the Archaeological Evidence*, von Falkenhausen analyzes bronze-vessel sets and lineage cemeteries in order to examine lineages as social phenomena.⁷ He concludes that, probably right up until the end of the Zhou period, lineages were the basic building blocks of the social order. Shaughnessy, in two articles on inscriptions and naming practices in the Zhouyuan 周原 bronze hoards, and David Sena, in his Ph.D. dissertation, both demonstrate the highly political nature of elite lineages, members of which held high office in the Western Zhou government.⁸

given in examples from tomb WT1K1. If this is correct, and if the name Qizhang does refer to Han Wuzi, then this is evidence that the site was used for covenant burials for a period of over seventy years.

5 For the Houma Covenant Texts, see: SHANXI SHENG WENWU GONGZUO WEIYUANHUI, 2006 (1976):31–49; WELD, 1997; WELD, 1990:324–420. For the Wenxian Covenant Texts, see: HENAN SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1983; ZHAO/LUO, 1996; ZHAO, 2003; HAO, 2004; WILLIAMS, 2004; WILLIAMS, 2005; HAO/WEI (WILLIAMS), 2006.

6 Studies such as these, which make little direct use of transmitted texts, are essential in order to determine what the archaeological evidence can tell us independently of the received tradition. This then allows a further stage of research in which these findings may be compared with the relevant evidence from transmitted texts. For a comprehensive and detailed analysis of lineage that primarily makes use of evidence from the transmitted texts, see GASSMANN, 2006.

7 FALKENHAUSEN, 2006.

8 SHAUGHNESSY, 2003; SHAUGHNESSY, 2004; SENA, 2005.

Von Falkenhausen examines hierarchies within lineages on the basis of gradations evident from ritual bronze-vessel assemblages, tombs and tomb contents. He shows that, in the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States periods to which the covenants are dated, the hierarchy within lineages had become polarized. A small subgroup of the ranked elite displayed its great wealth, power and privilege with particular assemblages of fine bronzes and richly furnished graves, while the smaller and simpler tombs of the lower-ranking elites reveal their much lower status. The previously smooth gradation of rank between the highest and lowest levels had disappeared by this period.

Shaughnessy calculates that the Zhouyuan bronze hoards reveal the presence of at least eighteen lineages from six different clans at this site. The bronze inscriptions name many members of these different lineages as high ranking officials in the Zhou court. For Sena, this and the fact that in the Western Zhou lineages were created only through the political act of bestowal of land and people, are evidence that lineages were political by their very nature. He further shows that, as a lineage expanded, it could spread to have separate subgroups resident in different locations, and these might be distinguished by the adoption of a variation of the lineage name (for example by the addition of a qualifier). However, these geographically disparate groups were, he argues, still politically and religiously unified.

It is the nature of bronze ritual sets and lineage cemeteries that they present lineages as cohesive groups extending over many generations through male descent lines. The covenants provide evidence for a quite different aspect of lineage activity. A single covenant type represents a group of living individuals at a particular point in time. The aim of the majority of covenants from Houma and Wenxian is the consolidation of the covenanting group as loyal followers, clearly demarcated from enemy groups. While they are centred on a lineage, the key criterion for membership of the group is *not* lineage affiliation, but loyalty. They are a tool for political organization and control and, though lineage centred, participation is not restricted to members of a single lineage.

The Houma and Wenxian covenants provide primary materials to investigate the nature of such lineage-centred but loyalty-based groups. In the current article I focus on the Wenxian covenant that is most directly relevant to this question. I look at certain characteristics of the very large group of people brought together by the Han lineage leader with this covenant. I demonstrate, firstly, how the non-textual archaeological evidence, considered in conjunction with the textual evidence, shows that the covenanting group was divided by rank, suggesting that it was an organizationally and politically significant body.

Secondly, on the basis of the excavated textual evidence, specifically the names of individual covenantors and enemies, I show that the group participating in this covenant was made up of members of different lineages, not just the Han lineage. And, conversely, that membership of the Han lineage did not automatically confer membership of this covenanting group – certain members of the Han lineage were, in fact, specifically excluded from the group. I conclude that this covenant was creating, or at least consolidating, a political grouping with internal rank distinctions. While the group was centred on the Han lineage, the covenanting group was not created on the basis of blood ties, but on the basis of loyalty to the Han leader. It seems clear that, in the context of political organization in this region at this time, membership of this group was of more immediate significance to the covenantors than their lineage affiliation. As I have said, I believe this covenant was a significant step on the way to independence for the Han lineage and its allies. The Houma covenants played a similar role for the Zhao lineage.

2. The Houma and Wenxian Covenant Texts

The Houma Covenant Texts were excavated in 1965 at the modern city of Houma, in southern Shanxi 山西 province. They are written on stone tablets, the majority of which are narrow in shape with a pointed top, angled shoulders and a square base, that is to say, the shape commonly associated with the ritual object *gui* 圭. Those texts still legible were written in red ink with a brush. A very small number were written in black ink. The total number of excavated tablets and fragments was over 5000, of which 656 were published in 1976.⁹ The texts were categorized into six main types based on their content. The tablets were found in 43 of 326 pits that had been dug into an earthen terrace measuring 70 by 55 metres, located in the eastern section of a large complex of archaeological sites. The ancient city on which this complex is centred is identified as Xintian, the Jin state capital from 585 to 369. Most pits were aligned on a north-south axis. The majority of pits, including those with covenant tablets, contained the remains of a sacrificial animal and/or a jade object. Remains of building foundations discovered about 1000 metres north of the terrace may be those of a temple, leading scholars to suggest that this part of the Xintian site was dedi-

9 SHANXI SHENG WENWU GONGZUO WEIYUANHUI, 2006 (1976).

cated to Jin-state ritual activity.¹⁰ Transmitted texts and archaeological finds place the main area of Zhao political power in northern Jin.¹¹ However, the Houma covenants provide clear evidence of Zhao ritual activity in the Jin capital during the fifth century. As a Jin ministerial family, Zhao must have had a presence in the capital. Scholars have suggested that the several walled areas that form the city-site of Xintian may have been for the use of the ministerial families.¹² That Zhao made use of the Jin capital's ritual area for its covenants, rather than a centre of Zhao power such as Jinyang 晉陽, accords with the view given by the covenant texts themselves, that Zhao, at least nominally, still considered itself subordinate to the Jin royal house.¹³ On the other hand, that Zhao could make use of what must have been an important Jin ritual area, suggests the great influence of the family in Jin politics.

The Wenxian covenants were excavated from 1980 to 1981 in Wenxian (Wen 溫 county) in northern Henan province, about 150 km south-east of the Houma site.¹⁴ Their burial context was similar to that of the Houma tablets: they were found in pits dug into an earthen terrace, the pits roughly aligned on a north-south axis. The terrace was situated outside the eastern wall of an ancient-city site. The terrace had originally been over two metres high but had been gradually levelled as earth was removed for various uses, including, in the 1950s, the building of the Qin 沁 river dyke, situated about 200 metres north of the site. The eastern part of the terrace had been completely removed. On the basis of cores taken from the remaining area, the original perimeter size was approximately 135 metres north to south and 50 metres east to west. A total of 124 pits were excavated, located in the north-west part of the terrace, and, as at Houma, the majority contained evidence of a sacrifice or offering. Covenant tablets were found in sixteen of these pits. The total number of excavated tablets, including complete and damaged examples, was over 12,000. The ink, where

10 SHANXI SHENG KAOGU YANJIUSUO HOUMA GONGZUOZHAN, 1987; EMURA, 1996.

11 For example, Jinyang 晉陽 is recorded as being the Zhao lineage's main base in the fifth century. A site near modern Taiyuan is identified as Jinyang and archaeological finds here include the very rich tomb M251 discovered in 1987 and thought to be that of Zhao Yang 趙鞅 or Zhao Wuxu 趙無恤. The histories also record a branch-lineage centre at Handan 邯鄲, the city which became the Zhao capital in the Warring States period. Excavations in this area have unearthed a Warring States city site, cemeteries and large tombs. See, for example: LI, 1991a:57–60; WELD, 1990:287–304; LIU, 2007:59–71.

12 WELD, 1990:161–174.

13 The Houma “Pledge Texts”, for example, prohibit covenantors from returning enemies to the “Jin state” (*Jin bang zhi zhong* 晉邦之中), not “Zhao territory”.

14 HENAN SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1983.

still visible, is black, not red as at Houma. The full excavation report for the site is now being prepared for publication and will contain images of the great majority of those several thousand tablets and fragments on which characters are still visible. I have identified seven categories of covenants amongst the Wenxian tablets for which there are examples of a complete text or for which a complete text can be reconstructed. There are several other categories, not more than ten, with just a very few examples containing incomplete texts that have not yet been thoroughly analysed. The stipulations of the texts, as at Houma, are mainly concerned with demands of loyalty, in this case to the Han lineage leader, and rejection of enemies.

The city site adjacent to the covenant site has not been excavated. Based on the *Shuijingzhu* 水經注 and *Kuodizhi* 括地志, the excavators of the covenants believe this site is the historical city of Zhou.¹⁵ Unlike the Houma site, identified as a state capital in the possession of a single ruling house for over two centuries, the historical lineage affiliation of Zhou is not straightforward. The city is recorded as having passed through the hands of several different lineages during the Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods. The *Zuozhuan* 左傳 records that Han successfully schemed to take control of Zhou in the second half of the sixth century but then exchanged it with Song 宋 for another fief.¹⁶ Whether or not the city site adjacent to the Wenxian covenant site is Zhou, the covenants provide strong evidence that this was a very important centre of Han-lineage activity over the fifth-century period during which the covenants were produced.

3. The Wenxian Type 1 Covenant

The Wenxian covenant I discuss here is an oath of loyalty to the Han covenant lord, whom we may assume was the leader of the main branch of the Han lineage (see discussion below). Below is an example of this covenant. The transcription is interpretative with added punctuation and is laid out following the four-

15 HENAN SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1983:89.

16 For an introduction to the archaeological and historical background to the Wenxian site, see: WELD, 1990:304–323.

clause structure of name clause, stipulations, submission and imprecation, as described by Weld.¹⁷

Text of Wenxian covenant tablet WT1K1–3802¹⁸

- I. 十五年十二月乙未朔辛酉。自今以往，喬
 II.A. 敢不□¹⁹焉中心事其主
 II.B. 而敢與賊為徒者，
 III. 丕顯岳公大冢，
 IV. 諦極視汝，靡夷彼氏。
- I. Fifteenth year, twelfth month, *yiwei* was the first day of the month, [today is] *xinyou* [the 27th day of the month]. From this day onward, [if] Qiao
 II.A. dares not ___ly [?]²⁰ and loyally serve his ruler,
 II.B. and dares to join with the enemy as a follower,
 III. resplendent Lord Yue, Great Mountain,²¹ attentively and tirelessly²² watching you [i.e. Qiao]
 IV. [will] wipe out that [i.e. Qiao's] *shi* 氏.

The first clause gives the name of the individual covenantor (Qiao, in this case) for whom the tablet was prepared. Thus each tablet represents a single covenantor. In this example the period of effectiveness for the covenant is also given in this clause.²³ The second clause gives the specific stipulations demanded of

17 WELD, 1990:353–354. An “interpretative transcription” gives the standard characters for the words identified as being denoted by the graphs used in the excavated text. For this and other palaeographic terminology used here, see: WILLIAMS, 2005a.

18 HENAN SHENG WENWU YANJIUSUO, 1983:85 and plate 7. Each individual tablet from Wenxian is identified by its test-square number (prefixed by the letters “WT”), its pit number (prefixed by the letter “K”), and its individual number. In some of the tables below this is shortened by omitting the “WT” and “K” and using short dashes between the numbers, thus WT1K1–1 becomes 1-1-1.

19 The symbol “□” indicates an unidentified graph.

20 A question mark in square brackets indicates that the interpretation of the previous word or phrase is tentative. In this case, I conjecture that the unidentified graph is adverbial, hence the “-ly”.

21 Based on new materials from the Wenxian covenants, I argue that the spirit invoked here is a mountain spirit called Lord Yue. See: WILLIAMS, (forthcoming).

22 I adopt an identification of the word here as *ji* 極 that was suggested by Chen Jian 陳劍: Personal communication, February 22, 2009.

23 The reign year in the date is most probably that of the Jin lord. Phrases such as the “From this day onward” here, marking the period at which the content of the pronouncement

the covenantor. The first stipulation in this covenant is a pledge of loyalty to the covenant lord. Several of the other covenant types use a personal name to refer to the covenant lord, and one (from pit WT4K5) adds the lineage name Han before that personal name. As mentioned above (footnote 4), Hao Benxing 郝本性 has recently identified the name of another covenant lord, from a different covenant type, as that of the Han leader Han Wuzi. Thus we can be confident that for all the Wenxian covenants, the covenant lord was the Han-lineage leader at the time the texts were produced. Within the ruling hierarchy of the Jin state, he was head of the Han ministerial family. The second stipulation is a pledge not to join with the enemy as a *tu* 徒, which I translate here as “follower”. The “enemy” I take to be one or more groups in conflict with the Han lineage and its allies. Transmitted histories contain records of such conflicts both among and within lineages in fifth-century Jin. The term *tu* may have had a more specific meaning than the “followers” I use here: received texts suggest that *tu* generally referred to “able-bodied men [...] capable of doing various services” but who were “used primarily for armed or military actions.”²⁴ The third and fourth clauses are formulaic and call on a spirit to oversee the covenant and punish the covenantor if the oath is violated. I understand the *shi* 氏 targeted by the imprecation to refer to the covenantor and his direct male descendants.²⁵ These covenant tablets were buried in order to bring their content to the attention of this spirit and it is, thus, to the spirit that they are ultimately addressed.²⁶

becomes effective, are common in decrees, oaths, covenants and prayers in excavated and received texts. See: WILLIAMS, 2005a:221–228.

24 The quotes here are taken from written comments provided by an anonymous reviewer. GASSMANN, 2006:416–431, has a detailed discussion of the *tu*. This point is very significant when we consider the nature and purpose of the group being formed by the covenant. This issue is taken up again in the concluding section of the paper.

25 WILLIAMS, 2009.

26 This issue of to whom the covenant is addressed is somewhat confusing given that, as in this example, the covenantor is sometimes referred to as *ru* 汝 “you”, suggesting the covenantor was the intended recipient of the text. However, note that, as in this example, a single text can mix the pronouns that refer to the covenantor: in this case *qi* 其 “his” is used as well as the *ru* 汝 “you”. Such arbitrary use of singular personal pronouns by the scribes who prepared the tablets may reflect an oral dimension to the ceremony in which the tablets were used. It suggests different parts of the covenant were spoken by different people, or sections read by an official to be repeated by the covenantor and the pronoun adjusted accordingly. The covenantor might, then, have been addressed at certain points in the ceremony. However, the intended recipient of the text was the spirit called on to sanction the covenantor’s oath.

Tablets with this covenant text, which I will call Type 1, were found in five of the sixteen covenant pits excavated at Wenxian. The great majority of tablets from these five pits share the same covenant text, although those from pit WT1K1 have a date while, with one exception in pit WT4K9, the others do not.²⁷ This raises the question as to whether the tablets in all five pits should be associated with this date and considered to be products of a single covenanting event. For a particular covenant carried out at a particular time, each covenantor would have been named on one tablet, and, it is logical to assume, not more than one tablet. Thus, if the five pits are indeed the products of a single event, then each and every tablet from these pits represents a different individual. If, on the other hand, the five pits reflect several different covenanting events held at different times, but using the same covenant text, then it is possible that the covenant texts in one or more pits are reaffirmations of a previous covenant (the *xun meng* 尋盟 of transmitted texts), in which case a single individual could be represented in two or more pits. Since this issue is as yet unresolved, these two possibilities should be borne in mind when making inferences about the data presented here.

The number of tablets in each of these five pits varies, as does the stone-type and the shape of the tablets. Each tablet bore the name of a covenantor, and the name is still legible on many tablets. As suggested by the title of this paper, based on the number of tablets and fragments excavated, there originally must have been at least ten-thousand names recorded in these materials. At this stage approximately 1775 names have been noted among the total set of photographed tablets. I have found about 180 which use two or more characters in the name and, of these, around 80 appear to include a lineage name. Below I examine a number of tablets with lineage names from the five Type 1 pits, and demonstrate, firstly, that there were distinct ranks within the group covenanting and, secondly, that non-Han lineages participated in the event.

The approximate number of tablets excavated from each pit is given in Table 1. The first line of figures shows the total number of pieces (including complete tablets and larger fragments) first recorded by the excavators. Some fragments were later united as single tablets, so the actual number of tablets represented is less than this total. The size of the pit and the extent to which the

27 The tablet in question from WT4K9 has the same date as tablets from WT1K1. Pit WT1K1 had been disturbed by digging before the scientific excavation took place so we cannot rule out the possibility that this tablet from WT4K9 was, in fact, originally from WT1K1 but became displaced and mistakenly taken to be from this other pit.

pit had been disturbed prior to formal excavation is indicated. This latter information is significant when trying to determine the original number of tablets in each pit. The number of tablets photographed during the 1999 to 2000 period is also given along with, where recorded, the number of these which, after digitalization and enhancement, had legible text. Finally, the number of these legible examples which can be confirmed to be Type 1 covenants is given.²⁸

Pit name	WT1K1	WT1K14	WT4K9	WT4K10	WT5K21
Size of pit mouth (m) ²⁹	1.3/0.5	1.5/0.7	1.25/0.5	1.1/0.5	1.1/0.5
Pit disturbance at level of tablets	Top layers disturbed	Largely undisturbed	Disturbed	Undisturbed	Largely undisturbed
Approximate number of excavated tablets and larger fragments	4590	6235	711	45	146
Number of photographed tablets and larger fragments	1928	1444	170	26	66
Number of photographed tablets with legible text	Not recorded	Not recorded	136	23	47
Number of confirmed Type 1 covenants	No non-Type 1 covenants noted	No non-Type 1 covenants noted	118	14	46

Table 1: The distribution among pits of the Wenxian Type 1 covenant.

At the time of their excavation, a large number of the tablets were found to be blank, but I will assume, as the excavators do, that all tablets originally had text.

- 28 Legible tablets not confirmed as Type 1 fall into three categories: 1. Those in need of further enhancement as some characters are unclear; 2. Those that are probably Type 1, but have minor variations in wording and thus require further examination; 3. Those with a non-Type 1 covenant.
- 29 The depth measurement for the pit is not given here. Due to previous disturbance of the terrace the original depth of each pit was difficult to determine. Length and width figures are those for the widest and longest sections in cases where these were not uniform for the whole pit.

The extent of fading of the text can differ over a single tablet, showing that conditions within the pit caused varying degrees of legibility. It is thus not surprising that many tablets appear to be without text. I also see no obvious function for blank tablets in the pits.³⁰

The great majority of the Type 1 tablets were found in two of the five pits: WT1K1 and WT1K14, and I will at times refer to these as the “large” pits. These two pits were less than a metre apart, WT1K1 to the north and slightly east of WT1K14. Pit WT1K1 had been badly disturbed at the upper levels, so determining the original number of tablets is not possible. Hao Benxing estimates an original total of at least 5000 tablets in this pit. That is to say, over 5000 people are represented in this pit alone. WT1K14 had not been disturbed. Due to the great number of tablets it contained, this pit was dug out, crated and transported as a block back to the provincial archaeology institute in Zhengzhou where the individual tablets could be carefully removed. This pit contained over 6000 tablets and larger fragments. Hao estimates the original number of complete tablets would have been between 5000 and 6000. Thus between 5000 and 6000 people are represented in this pit.

Three other pits containing the same covenant were excavated, but with significantly fewer examples. Pit WT5K21 was situated about 4.75 metres north and slightly west of pit WT1K1. Pits WT4K9 and WT4K10 were adjacent to each other, about half-a-metre apart, situated 12 metres north-east of pit WT5K21. Of these three pits, the greatest number of tablets was excavated from pit WT4K9. However, determining even an approximate total number of tablets for this pit is impossible since it had been cut into by a later tomb, leaving less than half the pit intact. The total of 711 tablets given for this pit includes those from the remaining part of the pit as well as those with text that were found in the tomb’s backfill.

Pit WT5K21 had been cut into by a later pit but the overlap is very small and it seems that the pit was largely undisturbed at the level of the tablets. Pit WT5K21 yielded 146 covenant tablet fragments. The total number of complete tablets has not been estimated for this pit, so we can only say that the total number of covenantors would have been less than 146. In pit WT4K10 the level at which the tablets were discovered seems to have been undisturbed and a total

30 The covenants were placed in the pits in order to transmit their stipulations along with the names of the participating individuals to the sanctioning spirit, who was to watch over these named covenantors, punishing any that violated the oath. Thus, a tablet without a covenantor’s name and oath would have had no function in the pit.

of 45 tablets and large fragments were removed, along with some small fragments. The total number of covenantors is estimated by Zhao Shigang 趙世綱 to have been 40. I will refer to pits WT5K21 and WT4K10 as the “small” pits, reflecting the relatively small number of tablets they contained.

3.1 Evidence for ranking differences among the Wenxian Type 1 covenantors

I believe that the use of several pits for the Type 1 covenant and the different numbers of covenant tablets in these pits reflect different ranks among the participants, with the small pits being used by higher-ranking members of the covenanting group. This conjecture is supported by differences in the shape and material of the tablets found in these pits.

Three stone types were identified for the purposes of categorizing the tablets during processing. The most common stone is slate. Much less common is sandstone. Also uncommon are examples of a much finer, lighter-coloured stone, which was identified as carbonatite, although there seem to be certain other stone-types used of a similar quality.³¹ The following five categories were used during processing to record the shape of the tablets: straight-edged *gui*; curved-edged *gui*; isosceles *gui*; slip (*jian* 簡); *zhang* 璋. The names were used for identification and categorization purposes only and there is no intention to imply that those who produced the tablets would have named them in this way.³²

What we find is that, of the photographed tablets and large fragments from the two large pits, almost all are made of slate and use one of the three *gui* shapes. In contrast, all the tablets and large fragments from the two small pits, including those not photographed, are made of the carbonatite material (or other finer stone) and generally use the slip or *zhang* shape. Table 2 shows the number of photographed tablets and large fragments of each different stone type in these five pits:³³

31 WILLIAMS, 2005a:49. I will use the term “carbonatite” to refer collectively to all the finer stone types.

32 Since there are examples in each category self-named as *gui*, it appears that those organizing these covenants felt that the tablets used, with these various different shapes, could all be referred to with this term. See: WILLIAMS, 2005a:166.

33 The figures for the total number of tablets in pits WT1K1, WT1K14 and WT4K9 are slightly lower here than in Table 1. This is due to various inconsistencies in the database, such as the stone-type category not being filled in for some tablets. However, none of these omissions include examples which would invalidate the conclusions drawn from the figures.

	WT1K1	WT1K14	WT4K9	WT4K10	WT5K21	Totals
Slate	1799	1392	105			3296
Sandstone	40	11	63			114
Carbonatite	44			26	66	136
Totals	1883	1403	168	26	66	3716

Table 2: Stone types by pit for Wenxian Covenant Type 1 (photographed tablets only).

In WT1K1 and WT1K14 the great majority of tablets are slate and use the *gui* shapes. Other stone types and shapes are much less common, or not found at all in these pits. In the small pits, WT4K10 and WT5K21, in contrast, we find only the finer stone, the carbonatite, made, almost without exception, into a slip or *zhang* form.³⁴ I suggest that the use of these finer quality tablets was restricted to higher ranks and that this is evidence that the two small pits were used by the elite among those covenanting.

We should note, however, that while none of the higher quality tablets were found in pit WT1K14, about fifty slip- or *zhang*-shaped carbonatite tablets were excavated from the other large pit, WT1K1. Hao Benxing observes that these higher quality tablets were found at the bottom of this pit. He suggests that these were the tablets of higher ranking covenantors, whose tablets were placed first in the pit, after which the tablets of lower ranking covenantors were interred.³⁵ Thus there seems to be a ranking of covenantors within pit WT1K1. This is in contrast to the two small pits which, I suggest, were used only by higher ranking covenantors, and also contrasts with pit WT1K14, which contained only the lower quality tablets and which was perhaps used solely by lower ranking covenantors.³⁶

34 There are a small number of examples that have different shapes. WT4K10, for example, includes two rectangular tablets.

35 HAO, 2004:78.

36 The distinction between the carbonatite slip- or *zhang*-shaped tablets and the other tablets is the most obvious, particularly given the exclusive use of carbonatite tablets in two of the pits. However, one might further consider whether the use of sandstone for tablets and also the different *gui* shapes were also related to rank. It is interesting, for example, to observe that among the slate tablets from pit WT1K1, a total of 1033 are recorded as being “straight-edged *gui*” and 472 as “curved-edged *gui*”. In contrast, in pit WT1K14 the equivalent figures are 315 and 1090 – the frequency of usage is more or less reversed. We might, then, conjecture that these two different *gui* shapes did signify a difference in rank. If so, this would add a further gradation in rank for our consideration.

I have also found one piece of circumstantial evidence among the names of the covenantors which may reflect a link between the covenantors in two different pits as well as differences in rank. In the small pit WT5K21, on tablet WT5K21–12, the covenantor’s name is made up of the following two graphs:



Table 3: The covenantor’s name on tablet WT5K21–12.

A formal transcription would give: 郎職.³⁷ The lineage-name is 郎.³⁸ The second character, *zhi* 職, is a personal name.³⁹ WT5K21 is a small pit and thus, I suggest, this covenantor was a member of the elite among the covenanting group. In the large pit WT1K1, we find three tablets made in slate using the straight-edged *gui* form. The style of character composition and calligraphy suggest they were written by a single scribe. The numbers assigned to these tablets when excavated suggest they were originally buried close to each other

- 37 The second graph is made up of the components *yin* 音, *ge* 戈, *er* 耳, and *ren* 刃. We can take the *ren* 刃 as an additional component, paired with the *ge* 戈: the two components are similar in meaning (*ren* ‘blade’ and *ge* ‘ge-halberd’) and the same variation is common in examples of the graph *zei* 賊 in the Wenxian texts. The *ren* 刃 with the *ge* 戈 can, then, be considered equivalent to the single component *ge* 戈, giving the attested character *zhi* 職.
- 38 The character 郎 is not attested in lexicons, but the character 長 is common as a lineage name in Warring States bronze weapons from Zhao, Han and Wei (WU, 2006:178–179). We might conjecture that the 長 is a variant of 郎 and that the characters were used for the same lineage at different periods. Zhao Shigang suggests the lineage name 長 is equivalent to the Chang 萇 found in received texts: a Chang Hong 萇弘 is recorded as a Zhou minister who played a role in the inter-lineage struggles in Jin in the early fifth century (ZHAO, 2001).
- 39 Or it could be a *zi* 字 (‘style name’). However, according to Li Xueqin 李學勤, in oracle bones and bronze inscriptions, the name, rather than *zi*, is used when addressing spirits, ancestors or the king (LI, 1991b:106–107). In the case of the covenant tablets, the sanctioning spirit is invoked. On the question of the evidence for the use of both names and *zi* in bronze inscriptions, see: SENA, 2005:118–120.

(WT1K1–2643, WT1K1–2647 and WT1K1–2658).⁴⁰ The names of the covenantors on these tablets are as follows:

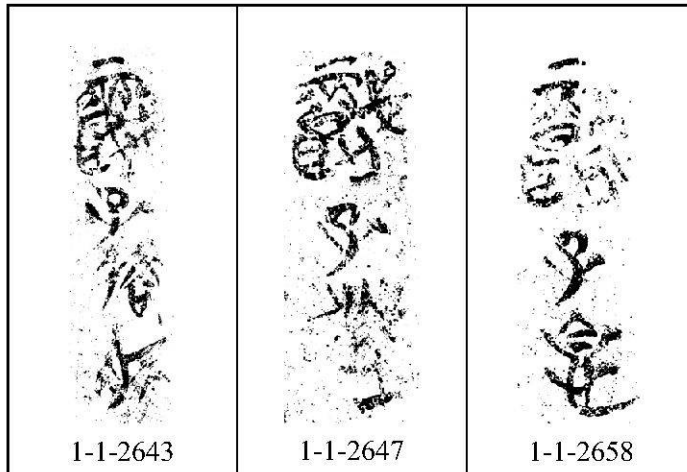


Table 4: Covenantor names on tablets WT1K1–2643/2647/2658.

The first character in each case matches that of the name of the elite covenantor in tablet WT5K21–12, i.e., Zhi 職. The second character in all three examples is *zi* 子 ‘son’. Thus each name begins with the phrase “Zhi’s son”. This is followed by the actual name of the son. Thus, the name of the covenantor in tablet WT1K1–2643 is “Zhi’s son Quji 去疾”, and in WT1K1–2658 the name is “Zhi’s son Xi 息”. I conjecture that these three covenantors were the sons of 長職 of tablet WT5K21–12. If correct, then we have a father who is a member of the group of higher-ranking covenantors, using finer tablets buried in a small pit, and he had three sons who were of a lower rank and who covenanted with the larger group using the more common tablet type. That a father would be of higher rank than his sons accords with the system of hereditary rank.⁴¹ We may infer, then, that the covenantors in pit WT1K1 and WT5K21 were members of a single large group but that, within that group, there was a clearly marked distinction in rank. We might also conjecture that pit WT5K21 dates to a time close to that of

40 Each tablet was assigned a number as it was removed from the pit and numbering was consecutive. Frequently, then, closely numbered tablets were originally physically close in the pit. This is not a completely reliable criterion, but, in the absence of a diagram for WT1K1 giving the original location of each tablet, it can be helpful.

41 A man’s rank was generally passed down to his eldest son, leaving any other sons holding a lower rank, or no rank at all. See, for example: HSU, 1965:6–7.

WT1K1, perhaps even the same day, but the evidence does not require that this was the case.

Thus, based on the varying numbers of tablets in the pits, the distribution of different quality tablets among the pits, and the names just discussed, I suggest that the Type 1 covenant at Wenxian brought together a very large group of people, in which internal ranks were recognized, and these people were all pledging their loyalty to the leader of the Han lineage. The evidence presented demonstrates that there was at minimum a two-way distinction in rank. This would correspond to von Falkenhausen's findings, mentioned earlier, that at this period lineage hierarchies had become polarized. Further study of the distribution of the different stone types and tablet shapes may suggest further rank distinctions. However, the limited number of stone types and shapes suggests at most just a few ranks rather than a complex hierarchy.

3.2 *Evidence for the participation of individuals from non-Han lineages in the Type 1 covenant*

I now turn to my second point, which is that this large group of covenantors was not solely composed of people sharing the Han lineage-name, but included individuals and groups from other lineages. This is clear from the occurrence of non-Han lineage names among the covenantors and supported by the large size of the covenanting group. Names of enemies given in the covenants show that lineages were split into factions, supporting the view that loyalty, not lineage-affiliation was the key criterion for participation in this covenant.

Determining the lineage affiliation of the individual covenantors is only a possibility in a small number of cases, due to the fact that the great majority of names on the tablets include only a personal name and no lineage name. In the case of the Houma texts, the authors of the *Houma mengshu* argued that individuals referred to with only a personal name were all members of the Zhao lineage.⁴² Zhu Fenghan 朱鳳瀚 believes this cannot be assumed, noting that there are examples in bronze inscriptions in which personal names alone are used for people not sharing the lineage name of any of the main characters featured in the text. Zhu argues that the reason lineage names are often not used in the Houma texts is not because the covenantors shared the same lineage name as the covenant lord, but because the texts are oaths, in which a spirit is invoked, and in such cases it was customary to use only the personal name.⁴³ One might suggest

42 SHANXI SHENG WENWU GONGZUO WEIYUANHUI, 2006 (1976):68.

43 ZHU, 2004:507.

that this use of personal names for covenantors was in fact done out of deference to the covenant lord. However, there are Wenxian covenants in which the covenant lord himself is referred to with only a personal name, supporting Zhu's argument that it was the invocation of the spirit that was the reason for this practice. Another suggestion that would explain the absence of lineage names for at least some of the covenantors is that at this period some people did not have a lineage name at all, only a personal name.⁴⁴ Gassmann, however, argues that, since even commoners were ultimately descended from lineages, all people did, in fact, have a lineage name.⁴⁵ The apparent father and son group looked at in the previous section is relevant to this discussion. No lineage name is given on the tablets in WT1K1 prepared for the three brothers but, if they are indeed sons of 郎職, then their lineage name is 長郎, not Han. This would demonstrate that we cannot assume covenantors recorded using only a personal name were members of the lineage organizing the covenant. This then allows the conjecture that the thousands of covenantors taking part in the Type 1 covenant at Wenxian may have belonged to many different lineages.

While the majority of covenant texts give only a personal name for each covenantor, there are examples in which a lineage name is found. In many cases, this lineage name is one other than "Han". We must bear in mind, however, that branch lineages, as noted earlier, sometimes adopted a name different to that of the trunk lineage. That is to say, a lineage name other than Han could be that of a Han branch lineage. Determining whether this is the case, however, is difficult because we often do not know the origin of less common lineage names and so cannot link them with a known trunk lineage. Thus, for a covenantor with a lineage name other than Han, while we can be confident that this person was not a member of the Han trunk lineage, we cannot always be certain that he or she was not a member of a Han sub-branch, and therefore still genealogically related to the Han. Nevertheless, there are exceptions which do allow us to be confident that the Type 1 covenant did include participants with no lineage-affiliation to Han. These include two tablets, for example, in which the lineage name of the covenantors is Zhao 趙.⁴⁶ Zhao and Han were certainly not sub-branches of a single lineage, not even sharing the same clan name (Zhao had the clan name Ying 嬴, Han's clan name was Ji 姬). This is clear evidence that participation in the Type 1 covenant was not restricted to members of the Han trunk or branch

44 See, for example: CHEN, 2007:348–353.

45 GASSMANN, 2006:193.

46 Tablets WT1K1–1133 and WT1K1–3606.

lineages. That Zhao lineage members had chosen to ally themselves to the Han lineage leader indicates the breakdown of traditional lineage ties and the willingness of individuals to swear loyalty to an individual leader, regardless of his lineage affiliation.

Let us now look at two less well-known lineage names that occur in the Type 1 covenants from pit WT1K1. In both cases, we can identify a group of covenantors who share the same lineage name. The names are *pan* 鄱 and *lei* 雷, with thirteen individuals with the lineage name Pan and twelve with the name Lei (Tables 5 and 6).

1-1-1967 	1-1-1976 	1-1-1979 	1-1-1984 	1-1-2011 	1-1-2016 	1-1-2182 
1-1-2249 	1-1-2275 	1-1-2277 	1-1-2291 	1-1-2998 	1-1-3039 	

Table 5: The names of covenantors with the lineage name Pan 鄱 (Wenxian Covenant Type 1).













1-1-3674 	1-1-3675 	1-1-3676 	1-1-3677 	1-1-3686 	1-1-3695 
1-1-3696 	1-1-3697 	1-1-3702 	1-1-3703 	1-1-3705 	1-1-3977 

Table 6: The names of covenantors with the lineage name Lei 雷 (Wenxian Covenant Type 1).

The numbers that were assigned to these tablets during their excavation suggest that each set was originally grouped together in a bundle in the pit. For example, the Lei-lineage tablets include the sequences: 3674–3677, 3695–3697, 3702–3703 and 3705. It also appears to be the case that, for each of these two sets, one scribe was responsible for writing most, perhaps all, the texts – a thorough analysis would be needed to confirm this, but the similarity in composition and calligraphic style of the repeated lineage name in each set is apparent. It is likely, then, that for the purposes of the covenant, these two groups were treated as units. This may also suggest that the covenantors named in each set of tablets formed a subgroup within their own lineage.⁴⁷ The origin of the Pan and Lei lineages is not known so we cannot rule out the possibility that they were sub-

47 I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

branches of the Han lineage.⁴⁸ Thus, this is, at minimum, evidence for the participation of members of Han sub-branch lineages in the covenant, but may, in fact, be further evidence that lineages unrelated to the Han were taking part.

We discussed the non-Han lineage name 長郎 in the previous section, arguing that the individual 長郎職 was a member of the elite rank of the covenanting group. This, then, is another case of someone from outside the Han trunk lineage taking part in the covenant. But, what it also demonstrates is that such individuals were to be found in the ruling elite of the covenanting group. Thus, as well as finding non-Han individuals among the lower ranking covenantors, we also see them in the higher-ranking group: one did not have to be called “Han” to be a member of that privileged set.

The great number of people represented by the Type 1 covenant is further evidence that the event was not restricted to a single lineage. Determining the total number of people represented by the Type 1 covenant at Wenxian is a problem for several reasons. We are not yet clear about the relationship between the large pits WT1K1 and WT1K14, and it may be that one is a reaffirmation of the other, with many of the same people taking part. We also do not know whether each covenantor represented just a single person or a household. It is also not clear at this stage whether or not women took part as covenantors. Nevertheless, the minimum number of people represented by the Type 1 covenant must be 5000 to 6000 people, that being the number of tablets in pit WT1K14. If the two large pits are not the same set of people and were conducted as part of the same event at a similar time, then that number rises to around 10,000. If the Type 1 covenants from the remaining three pits are also included, the number rises to close to 11,000. However, for each of these estimates, the actual number of people represented by the covenants is almost certainly significantly larger. It seems unlikely, for example, that children were included. It may also be that only males above a certain age took part. If the term *tu* “followers” refers only to “able-bodied men”, a possibility discussed above, this would further narrow the number of individuals who were eligible to participate. To consider a high estimate, we can conjecture that only family heads covenanted. In this case, assuming an average family-size of five, the numbers

48 The lineage name Lei 雷 is not seen in bronze inscriptions and is only recorded in transmitted texts from the Han period on. There is a lineage name from the Chu 楚 region, found in bronzes, that uses the character 潘 or 番, but this is presumably unrelated to the Jin-region lineage mentioned here in the covenants. There is also a Warring States place name, Panwu 鄆吾, said to be in the Zhao area, and perhaps this is related to the lineage name found here in the covenants. For these names in bronze inscriptions, see: WU, 2006.

represented by the covenants rise to 25,000 people for just the single pit WT1K14, and 55,000 people for all the Type 1 covenants, and this does not include non-family household members, such as servants.⁴⁹ Whether the actual number of people represented by the Type 1 covenant is closer to the lowest estimate of 5000 to 6000 people, or to the higher estimate of over 50,000, these are substantially more people than we would expect to find in a single trunk or branch lineage.⁵⁰ This further supports the argument that the Wenxian Type 1 covenant was bringing together members of different lineages.

The argument that shared lineage affiliation was not the main criterion for participation in the covenanting group is corroborated by names in enemy lists found in the Wenxian texts. In the covenant from pit WT4K6, in a list of eight named enemies, four have the lineage name Han. That is to say, these individuals were members of the lineage on which the covenants are centred, but they were specifically being targeted as enemies of the covenanting group. In a similar example, in tablets from pit WT4K5 covenantors are prohibited from having any dealings with two individuals whose names are written with the graphs: 郎戍 and 郎癸. The 郎 is the lineage name of the high-ranking covenantor discussed

49 Mark Lewis argues that the core family unit in the Zhou period was the nuclear family of “two parents and their children” (LEWIS, 2006:79). Lewis states that “Evidence from the late Warring States through the early Han indicates that the average size of the household was five or six people” (LEWIS, 2006:89). Before the late Warring States period there is little evidence to judge average family size and one must take into account the distinction between the extended households of nobles, with their numerous retainers, and the basic nuclear families of peasants. Nevertheless, based on transmitted texts, Lewis feels that “the typical family imagined by Warring States scholars was a nuclear family”, i.e. of parents and unmarried children (LEWIS, 2006:85). He points out that families could, at certain stages of their development, be larger “stem families” in which the elderly parents would be living with one married son and, possibly, also his unmarried siblings (LEWIS, 2006:85). This gives a household of between six and about nine people (a family of five plus the married son’s wife and up to three of his children). These points allow us to consider possible total numbers of people represented by the covenant tablets if we conjecture that all males above a certain age took part. Thus, within a “stem family” there could be two (father and married son) or perhaps even four (father, son and two of his unmarried but adult brothers) such covenantors – in which case the ratio of covenantors to the total number of family members would be either 2:9 or 4:9. In a five-member nuclear family, there could be one covenantor – just the father – or perhaps up to four, in the unlikely case that there were three unmarried adult sons living with their parents.

50 Based on KOSSE, 1990, von Falkenhausen suggests a figure of 2000 to 3000 people for the maximum size of a lineage, after which it would have split. See: FALKENHAUSEN, 2006:69, n. 65.

in the previous section. That individual was swearing his loyalty to the Han leader and promising not to join with the enemy, while, in this separate covenant, two of his relatives are named as members of the enemy camp. Clearly, members of both this lineage and the Han lineage itself were divided on the basis of loyalty to different leaders.

This section has shown that, on the basis of lineage names of the covenantors and enemies named in the texts, we can be confident that the covenanting group was made up of individuals from different lineage groups, not only the Han trunk lineage. There were rifts within lineages, with different factions allied to different leaders, not necessarily sharing the same lineage name. The Wenxian Type 1 covenant was forming a group based on loyalty to the Han leader, not simply shared ancestry with the Han lineage.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the materials and analysis presented above suggest that the Wenxian Type 1 covenant, in which loyalty was sworn to the Han lineage leader, was participated in by a very large group of people within which different ranks were recognized. Among both the lower and upper ranks there were individuals and groups who were not members of the Han lineage, and certain members of the Han lineage are specifically named in other covenants as being outside the group. I conclude that the covenant formed, or consolidated, an internally ranked body centred around a single lineage, but including groups from other lineages. Since the covenant demands loyalty to the Han leader and prohibits covenantors from joining with the enemy, I further conclude that the motivation for the formation of the group was political and military.

The situation with the Houma texts is similar. In his *Shang Zhou jiazhu xingtai yanjiu* 商周家族形態研究, Zhu Fenghan discusses the names on the Houma Covenant Texts and notes that several non-Zhao lineage names are found among the covenantors, for example: Ren 仁, Shi 史, Shi 石 and Hou 侯, as well as a member of the 長 郎 lineage that we discussed above. Among the enemies listed in the Houma texts, we find that, as at Wenxian, several are members of the lineage on which the covenant is centred. This includes the individual targeted as the leader of the enemy group in the Houma texts. His name is written Zhao Hu 趙弧 and he shares the lineage name of the covenant

lord at Houma, i.e., the leader of the covenanting group and the group's main enemy were both members of the Zhao lineage.⁵¹

In conclusion, I would make the following three observations. Firstly, based on Kosse's work on group size and societal complexity, the number of covenantors that took part in the Type 1 covenant from Wenxian suggests a high degree of political organization, with an aristocratic elite at the top of a tiered hierarchy.⁵² Higher estimates for the total number of individuals represented by these tablets imply a gathering of regional groups. In the previous section, we saw that the total number of people represented by the Type 1 covenant is at minimum 5000 to 6000, but most probably several tens of thousands. We can compare these figures to the estimated maximum size of the population of the Jin capital during the Western Zhou period. On the basis of the Shangma 上馬 and Tianma-Qucun 天馬曲村 cemeteries, von Falkenhausen gives a rough estimate of a maximum size of 7000 people at any one time for this population.⁵³ The numbers of covenants at Wenxian suggest, then, at minimum a major settlement with an aristocratic elite, and possibly a larger gathering of several big regional groups from a wide area. As discussed above, the numbers are much higher than those we would expect for a single trunk or branch lineage – it is likely that several branches of the Han lineage were involved, along with non-Han groups.

Sena, as mentioned in the introduction, observes that during the Western Zhou a lineage could have regionally based subgroups that might eventually become separate branch lineages. The evidence in the Wenxian covenants of enmity between individuals sharing the Han lineage name suggests that, by this time in its development, there were subgroups of the Han lineage in different locations, and that, unlike those discussed by Sena, these groups were not unified. The covenant was perhaps in part a great calling in of dispersed sections of the Han lineage, the head of the main trunk demanding that they provide clear evidence of where their loyalties lay. Weld, in her study of the Houma and Wenxian covenants, observes that: "fiefs held by one family could be separated by hundreds of kilometres and interdigitated with those of rival lineages. This frag-

51 Evidence for different ranks among the covenantors at Houma is not as apparent as at Wenxian. Several of the Houma covenant types are widely spread among many pits, unlike the Wenxian site where only a small number of pits share the same covenant. The Houma situation may reflect different sub-groups among the covenantors but there does not appear to be clear evidence to suggest different ranks, as we find at Wenxian.

52 KOSSE, 1990. This study is cited in: FALKENHAUSEN, 2006:69, n. 65.

53 FALKENHAUSEN, 2006:132–133 and 133, n. 10.

mentation of landholding posed a formidable obstacle to unification and consolidation by a centralizing state government.”⁵⁴ Weld further conjectures that the covenantors at Houma and Wenxian may have included members of local Jin elites “invisible in the historical sources” but “whose support the major lineages had to win to consolidate power and establish unified areas of suzerainty”.⁵⁵

Given the higher estimates for the size of the group participating in the Wenxian Type 1 covenant, it may not only have been elites who were involved. Scholars argue that, during the fifth and fourth centuries, rulers wishing to defend and expand their territories were looking beyond the lineage-based aristocracy to the lower strata of society to provide the armies and resources necessary for war.⁵⁶ Rulers instituted reforms that aimed to mobilize and control the lower strata in order to increase agricultural production and tax revenue, and provide conscripts for military service.⁵⁷ We may conjecture that covenant in the form of a loyalty oath was identified by the Han lineage leaders as a useful tool to be employed in such efforts. The covenant provided a ritual with which to bind groups from the lower strata to the Han ruling elite.

My second point concerns lineages as centres of political groups and lineage subgroups as units within such groups. Shaughnessy and Sena’s work demonstrates that different lineages from different clans held high office in the Western Zhou government. I have shown, based on the evidence of a non-Han lineage member covenanting with the elite group, that a similar situation was probably true for the ruling elite centred on the Han lineage. Furthermore, the covenants demonstrate that shared lineage affiliation did not ensure loyalty, as is evident from the naming of enemies with the same lineage name as the covenant lord. Thus it appears that, at this time, for the purpose of political organization, lineage affiliation was not a requirement for membership of a particular ruling elite. For the leader of such an elite, covenant was a mechanism with which to obtain a clear statement of loyalty, instil a sense of solidarity, and consolidate this group. This was quite probably the aim of the Type 1 covenants from the

54 WELD, 1990:433.

55 WELD, 1990:432.

56 See, for example: HUI, 2005; SHELAGH/PINES, 2006; MCNEAL, 2000. An anonymous reviewer points out that examples of this phenomenon are also seen earlier, during the Spring and Autumn period.

57 If the term *tu* in the Type 1 covenant does, as discussed earlier, refer to able-bodied men primarily used for military purposes, it would support the view that a key motivation of this covenant was to discourage the covenantors from fighting for rival forces, and secure them for use in Han-led military action.

two small pits, those I believe were used for the higher ranking covenants. As for the lower ranking covenants, we have shown that this group also comprised people from different lineages. Thus, for both the elite and lower ranks, shared lineage affiliation with the Han lineage was not a requirement for participation in the covenanting group. This accords, we may observe, with the role of covenant recorded by transmitted texts and their commentaries: to bind groups together when ties of ancestry were no longer effective.⁵⁸

The view that ties of ancestry had become weaker is supported by the evidence presented here, showing that lineages were divided and individuals could swear allegiance to a leader who did not share the same lineage name. However, this is not to suggest that lineage was no longer significant. Lineage affiliation was still a basic organizing principle. This is clear from the Houma and Wenxian Covenant Texts, which are centred on single lineages, the Zhao and the Han.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the two groups of covenants discussed above, with the names Pan and Lei, are examples of lineage subgroups acting as units for the purpose of covenanting. Thus the excavated covenants demonstrate that, on one hand, lineage affiliation was a basis for organization, but, on the other

58 See, for example: LEWIS, 1990:43–50 and *passim*. Lewis makes use of traditional sources and the Houma covenants, arguing that: “the sacrifices of covenants gradually replaced those of the ancestral cult as the primary mode of constituting a political order, and this order thus began to detach itself from kin structures” (LEWIS, 1990:44). One might wonder at the apparent faith among rulers in covenant as an effective tool for encouraging loyalty, given the numerous examples in transmitted texts of covenants being broken with impunity. On the other hand, the belief that such ceremony is indeed of use in instilling a sense of loyalty and group identity, delineating a group from enemies or potential enemies, and uniting otherwise disparate groups has remained throughout history and is still held by many in authority today. The oath that is required when a foreigner adopts citizenship of the United States, for example, exhibits several of the same basic concerns as the Wenxian oath: allegiance, rejection of any previous ties of loyalty, and rejection of enemies, with a supernatural power called on to sanction the oath: “I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; [...] so help me God.” (From the website of the “U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services”: <<http://www.uscis.gov>>, accessed on January 5th, 2009. That allegiance is sworn to the “Constitution and laws” of the country, rather than a leader or group of leaders, is, of course, a very significant difference.)

59 These lineages themselves were divided, as we have seen, but the Houma and Wenxian covenant lords were the leaders of the main factions.

hand, a lineage was not a monolithic body. Lineages could, and did, split into factions, and small groups could break off and act independently. Such a unit could ally with a larger group centred on a different lineage. The motivation behind the formation of such groups was political and military. The result was very large hierarchical organizations, much greater in size than a single lineage, and potentially much more powerful.

Finally, I would make the point that this is a preliminary study of these materials, and there is much potential for further research. I have demonstrated that the Type 1 covenant from Wenxian brought together a large group of people on the basis of shared loyalty to the head of the Han lineage, rather than lineage affiliation, and that there was a distinction in rank among the covenantors. I conjecture that a covenant of this size must have played some role in the process that led to Han's secession from Jin. In examining this question we have the opportunity to integrate evidence from these excavated texts with other archaeological materials, and with the received histories.⁶⁰ The excavated covenants from Wenxian and Houma provide primary evidence for the study of how two ruling elites attempted to define and control subordinate groups during a period of state formation. They are of great significance for our understanding of this pivotal period in Chinese history, and, more broadly, for the study of how human relationships and allegiances change as societies become more complex.

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60 For an example of such an approach, looking at state formation in Qin, see: SHELACH/PINES, 2006.

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