Several fragmentary printed almanacs dating from the ninth century were among the documents discovered in 1900 in Cave 17 at the ‘Thousand Buddha’ cave temple site near Dunhuang, north-west China. One fragment, now in the British Library, bears an inscription stating that it was printed in the East Market of the then Chinese capital (see fig. 1). Yet an official decree of 835 had stipulated that the private printing and possession of almanacs was forbidden by law.\(^1\)

By itself, the decree, almost certainly the oldest publication ordinance in the world, suggests that almanacs were subject to strict censorship. But the discovery of the Dunhuang almanacs raises questions about how strictly the law was followed and enforced. To understand the significance of this interplay between legal theory and observance this paper will first consider the history and role of the almanac in China and previous cases of censorship, before looking at this particular case and its implications.

A distinction is made in this paper between calendars and almanacs. The former refers to the official state publication, and the latter to unofficial publications, often containing additional information as discussed below. Both calendars and almanacs ‘fix the time’ based on a combination of solar days and lunar years, decide when the year of an individual ruler will commence, determine cyclical dates, and predict cosmic events. The traditional date for the first publication of an imperial calendar is 2265 BC, and the earliest extant example dates from the fifth to third centuries BC (although parts of it may date from the ninth century BC).\(^2\)

The fixed seasons in the pure solar calendar made it the most useful for farmers, but while Chinese astronomers used a solar calendar for their calculations, they then converted it into a mixed lunar and solar calendar. Because the lunar year is only 354 days it was necessary to make periodic adjustments – by adding intercalary months – to conform to the solar cycle of just over 365 days. The start of the year would therefore vary and it was not possible to assign a fixed date for sowing, harvesting crops or other regular tasks of the farmer. This indicates the calendar’s primary role was as a regulator of official, rather than agricultural, life.\(^3\)

The government produced the official calendar as a sign of its right to rule. A calendar displayed the moral perfection of the ruler in that he was in tune with events in the macro or cosmic sphere. His actions affected the balance of yin and yang and could lead to
Fig. 1. Almanacs: (left) of 882 from Chengdu, Or.8210/P.10; (right) 9th century from Xian, Or.8210/P.12
cosmic imbalance, displayed as unusual cosmic events such as eclipses or comets. The failure to predict these events was therefore a sign that the ruler was morally flawed. This had serious implications. The concept of ‘Heaven’s Mandate’ (Tianming 天命), propounded by Mencius, gave people the right to rebel if the current ruler had insufficient virtue to retain the mandate. Heavenly signs, if not predicted and appropriately interpreted by the ruler’s diviners, could legitimately be taken as an indication of the decline of a regime. Diviners were therefore vital to the ruler’s legitimacy but, if not under his control, they could also pose a threat to his power by making unwelcome predictions.

Each new dynasty was associated with a certain number, a colour and an element. The official astrologer of the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220), for example, decided to retain the existing calendar and, according to calculations based on this, he announced that the dynasty corresponded to a period dominated by the colour black and the element water. But a rival astronomer argued that the dominant element was earth and that a yellow dragon would appear in support of his claim. When reports of the sighting of a dragon were received, the second astronomer was installed in office and immediately calculated a new calendar. The Jesuits, by accurately predicting an eclipse, used similar means to gain control of the Bureau of Astronomy in China in the seventeenth century.

Apart from numbers, colours and elements, yin-yang theory and constellations were also incorporated into calendars. Despite the fact that the calendar was calculated to conform with these non-scientific elements, the scientific knowledge of early Chinese astronomers was considerable and their calendars were not inaccurate. Scholars long accepted that some elements of astrological knowledge in China – especially the use of twelve divisions of the ecliptic and of “moon stations” – came from the same original source as Indian and Arabic astrology, but there have been fierce debates about who gained this knowledge first.

Although it is certain that information travelled along the Silk Road from Arabia and India into China, the influences were neither direct nor simple. For example, the term ‘mi’ ( uptime or name) in a group of almanacs containing ‘Qi Yao’ 七曜 – ‘Seven Sources of Brightness’ or ‘Seven Planets’ – in their titles has been taken as a transliteration of the Manichaeans’ word for ‘day’ – ‘Mir’ – and also the first syllable of ‘Mithra’ – the Iranian sun god. Furthermore, these almanacs use transliterations of the Sogdian names for the five planets and at least one of these books’ authors was most probably Sogdian. The ‘Seven Sources of Brightness’ were also associated with the planetary seven day week, similarly an Iranian idea. Early scholars of China therefore assumed that the almanac was a Manichaeans import, knowing of no works so named pre-dating the introduction of that religion into China. But the evidence suggests otherwise. The term ‘Qi yao’ is used in the commentary to the history of the Former Han dynasty, Hanshu 漢書, compiled in the first century AD, before Manicheanism. The term also occurs in a Buddhist text, Sārdālakarnāvadāna Sūtra (Chinese: Modengqiejing 摩腾伽經), translated into Chinese in about 220. And the character ‘mi’ was used to indicate lucky days in other Buddhist
astrological works such as *Xiuyaojing* 夷曜經, translated into Chinese in the eighth century. A contemporary Chinese scholar summarizes the complexity:

Whoever or whenever it was brought to China is not relevant because the [*Qi yao Almanac*] is not a wholly imported product, but a mixture of Chinese and Western influences...[the Western influences] being established in India and brought to China with Buddhism.

There are many other similar cases, and a growing familiarity with early Chinese sources suggests that even if the Babylonian system helped shape the Indian and Chinese traditions, they then developed in interestingly different ways. Similarities across cultures, of course, do not always suggest transmission of information. So while some sixteenth-century English almanacs contain ‘lucky days’, there is no suggestion that this was taken from the long tradition of this practice in Chinese almanacs. Texts unearthed from Qin dynasty (221–206 BC) tombs include ‘day books’ (rishu 日書) which contain prognostications such as the following:

An auspicious day for religious services. One should, however, avoid building a new house or moving into a newly built house. Taking a woman in marriage on this day will result in domestic discord. Birth of a child indicates that the father will become a high ranking official.

By the Han dynasty such books circulated widely and the information was incorporated into almanacs where it became standard. When the calendar started to incorporate the same information in order to compete with the almanac in popularity there were several critical voices from the literati-official class. Their concerns anticipate those of sixteenth century English critics. Yet in both societies, among all sectors of society, divination relies on the gullibility and needs of the majority and can largely ignore the sceptical minority. And the evidence from early China (and sixteenth century England), suggests that the majority includes a large portion of the educated elite. Alfred Lister in an 1873 article on the Chinese almanac noted that the only reason people buy it is to choose lucky days, to divine on what days undertakings may be begun, and when they had better be left alone...So elaborate are the means provided in the Almanac for determining these and all other possible contingencies, that it might be thought that...the occupation of professional fortune-teller would be gone. But...a very cursory glance at the intricate pages...is sufficient to confirm the suspicion that it is the best friend the soothsayer has, and that anybody who has a few spare cash will gladly pay them to be rid of perplexity and responsibility.

Han dynasty diviners, with their stalls in the city marketplace, offered a wide range of services, as Richard Smith notes:

... various forms of astrology, ‘fate calculation’ and numerology – including consultation of the *Hetu* 河圖 (Yellow River Chart) and *Luoshu* 洛書 (Luo River Writing), diagrams associated with the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of Changes), the use of divining boards, milfoil stalks, oracle bones, and prognostication texts; the geomantic analysis of landforms; the selection of lucky days;
analysis of heavenly stems and earthly branches; communication with spirits; crack-making with bamboo; the interpretation of winds and vapors, birdcalls, and dreams; physiognomy; and the evaluation of written characters.\textsuperscript{21}

Such activities could be ignored by the state when they only concerned everyday activities of individuals but not when they had political implications.\textsuperscript{22} The same systems which could foretell an auspicious day for establishing a business, could also claim to predict a good day for a rebellion. In the Han dynasty, calendrical works predicting the end of the dynasty and containing the name characters of the founder of the succeeding dynasty started to be secretly produced, based on the theory of the Five Elements. This school, in which the teachings were handed down secretly from diviner to pupil, had a part in the Yellow Turban rebellion which brought down the Han dynasty in AD 220.\textsuperscript{23} Not surprisingly, therefore, works of divination were the subject of the first censorship ordinance in China since the infamous purge of the First Emperor, Qin Shihuangdi (r. 221–210 BC).

\section*{Censorship in China}

During the Warring States period when the several kingdoms occupying central China fought each other for supremacy, the Qin state put into practice many of the ideas developed by the Chief Minister, Shang Yang\textsuperscript{24} (d. 338 BC). This political philosophy was later called ‘Legalism’ because of its emphasis on rule by law and punishment. It was prescriptive whereas Confucianism relied more on exhortation, a necessary conclusion of the differing premises of the two: Legalists held that human nature was inherently evil and therefore needed control; Confucians that man was born with the potential to become good if suitably educated.

As Qin defeated the other states one by one, it imposed its own harsh laws which included the banning of certain books: ‘A state with an enlightened ruler will use laws rather than the writings in books for instruction; its officials rather than the words of former kings will be the teachers.’\textsuperscript{24} In 221 BC, Qin took control of all China. Roads, weights and measures were not the only things to be standardized: thought was also included.\textsuperscript{25} In a memorial drafted by Li Si\textsuperscript{25} (c. 280–208 BC), the Chief Minister, it was recommended that all histories except that of the Qin, Confucian ‘classics’ and those works that dared discuss the ‘classics’ all be destroyed. Practical works such as books on divination, medicine and agriculture were excluded.

This notorious ‘book burning’ was executed in 213 BC and the following year it is recorded that over 460 Confucian scholars who had dared to speak out against the Qin – to use the past to criticize the present – were buried alive. Only a decade later the Qin collapsed and the rulers of the succeeding Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220) made a show of distancing themselves by proclaiming themselves a Confucian state, even though they continued to employ many Legalist policies.\textsuperscript{26} Qin Shihuangdi was reviled by the succeeding Confucian historians, a sustained critical essay ‘The Faults of Qin’ (‘Guo Qin lun’ 趙卿論) being written only a few decades after his death – ‘He who does not
forget the past is master of the future’ – and Qin Shihuangdi’s book burning is still referred to as the despicable act of a despicable man.27

There was no instance of such comprehensive and well-enforced censorship again in China until the reign of the Qianlong emperor in the eighteenth century, but the next legally enforced act of censorship was directed against those who aimed to challenge the imperial prerogative as ‘masters of the future’ – the diviners.28 This was not unrelated to Qin Shihuangdi’s actions. His censorship led to a re-evaluation of the importance of the proscribed books and the eventual imposition of a state orthodoxy which excluded significant groups of texts: the chen and wei. I would suggest, however, that although these texts were declared heterodoxical and became the subject of frequent bannings, their contents were not entirely lost. In fact, they were gradually incorporated into the almanac, and this may have been one of the reasons that the almanac was banned four centuries later.

Chen and wei, although often cited together, refer to two different types of text. The former were divination texts or oracle books, while the latter were esoteric commentaries on Confucian texts.29 The literal meaning of ‘wei’ is ‘the weft’, while the term used for the Confucian ‘classics’ is ‘jing’, literally, ‘the warp’.30 Although wei texts were ascribed to Confucius, it seems probable that they developed during the Han dynasty. Tjan suggests a reason for this:

Whatever may have been the material on which the Classics were based, in pre-Han times it was used for purposes other than that of describing the past objectively; while in the Han the Classics acquired the character of traditional and devotional books, the sacred text of which was revered and never to be altered...[wei] took over the task of elaboration and new speculation.31

In other words, the proscription of these texts under the Qin only increased their importance and influence – it made them into classics.32 The Qin ban had another effect which was also an important factor in the eventual banning of the wei texts: the debate in the Han over which Confucian texts were ‘more accurate’.

When the Han replaced the Qin dynasty scholars attempted to reconstruct the destroyed texts. At first, they relied mainly on memory, but then a cache of texts was supposedly discovered in the wall of Confucius’s house, said to pre-date the ban. One action of the Qin dynasty had been to standardize the Chinese script and so the reconstructed texts were in the ‘new’ script. The ‘discovered’ texts were in the ‘old’ script, and hence the debate which ensued about the authenticity or otherwise of these discovered texts is referred to as the ‘Old-New Texts’ controversy.33

The proponents of the New Texts remained dominant for most of the Han, at the same time as wei texts were written to supplement the Classics. The wei texts were used for political legitimization of the Han dynasty, interpreting the Classics according to correspondence theories and thereby showing that Han rule was sanctioned. A leading figure in this interpretation of the classics was Dong Zhongshu (c. 179–104 BC), and his surviving writings contain wei elements. In many ways his writings exemplify the intellectual complexities of the Han scholar. Although he rejected the Qin and its
theoretical foundation, his memorial for the proscription of certain schools of thought is reminiscent of the rhetoric of Legalist statesmen:

In his ignorance your minister suggests that all that lies beyond the Six Arts and the techniques of Confucianism should be severed and not allowed to be promoted. Only after evil and licentious theories are destroyed is it possible to unify rules and regulations and clarify standards and measures so that people know what to follow.34

He became influential during the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC) and was writing in response to the Emperor’s support of diviners, fangshi 方士. We would be wrong in supposing, however, that he was averse to all forms of divination. One of his early acts, for example, was to interpret successive fires in the ancestral temple and funerary park of the first Han emperor as a portent that all was not right with the emperor’s rule. Emperor Wu, although a patron of diviners, did not want to hear uncomfortable predictions and sentenced Dong to death. Dong was pardoned, but the history notes that ‘he dared not speak again of disasters and portents.’ 35

Dong Zhongshu was, in fact, part of a tradition of sceptical thinkers in China. Although it is tempting to interpret their criticisms of ‘superstition’ as a wholesale rejection of everything currently subsumed under this label in the West, this would be anachronistic. But neither would it be correct to see the belief in portents as entirely devoid of pragmatism: ‘the reporting of portents was thus a means of criticising the government – one which could hardly be punished or stopped, since portents were supposed to be sent by Heaven, not by men.’ 36 The wei and chen texts seem to have been accepted in this light during the Han. They were certainly not considered ‘heterodox’ by most literati (and were even pronounced as ‘canonical’ by the Emperor Guangwu (r. AD 25–57)37). So Dong Zhongshu, although critical of the influence of diviners, used portents to criticize the emperor. In the Later Han, Zhang Heng 張衡 (78–139) opposed chen but still believed in other methods of divination such as by calendars, stars or hexagrams.38

By the Later Han (25–220) the New Text School became the orthodoxy and the use of wei texts in the interpretation of the jing – the Classics – was made obligatory.39 The Old Texts were officially ignored but some of their supporters continued to criticize the New Text scholars. One of their main lines of attack was an excessive use of chen and wei, and they thereby forged a link between the New Text School and these other texts. After the downfall of the Han the situation reversed and the Old Texts became the orthodoxy. They were engraved on stone between 240 and 248 and the New Texts rapidly disappeared. It was in this climate that chen and wei texts were banned.

The decree of 267, promulgated by the founding emperor of the Western Jin dynasty (265–316), started a new trend in censorship. The Jinshu 晉書 (History of the Jin Dynasty) records the event briefly: ‘Studies of divination by the stars and atmosphere, and of chen and wei books is forbidden’.40 Thereafter, edicts of this sort were passed regularly.

It is interesting that these repeated decrees have commanded little attention in
discussion of Chinese censorship. This is probably because the writers of history were, for a long time, descendants of the Old Text victors in the battle for orthodoxy. The ‘victors’ in this battle used chenwei as a weapon and their new orthodoxy therefore excluded these texts. The start of this rejection is seen in the Later Han when Old Text critics start to dismiss chen and wei as ‘vulgar’ and ‘fantastical’, but it became more effective in the next several centuries so that complete chen and wei texts entirely disappeared and the Song dynasty scholar, Ouyang Xiu (1007–72), could argue that even the quotations remaining in the commentaries to the Classics be expunged.

The Suishu (History of the Sui Dynasty) details their demise (although it fails to mention the initial banning in 367):

In the Daming period (457–65) of the Song, tu and chen began to be forbidden. In the Tianjian period (502–20) of the Liang and after, the measures were augmented. When Emperor Gaozu of the Sui (r. 590–604) received the mandate, the prohibition was made more severe, and when Emperor Yang (r. 605–17) ascended the throne, he sent officials to the four quarters of the empire to make a search for books and documents. Those which bore some relation to the chen and the wei were burnt; those people who were impeached by the authorities were executed. From hereon, their study never recovered, while in the archives there were no more than remnants.

Chen and wei experienced a revival in the late imperial era when scholars noticed their worth and made several collections of extant fragments. But the effects of the post-Han banning are still present today, despite the observation of Paul Pelliot that ‘Il y a une littérature importante pour la connaissance des traditions courantes sous les Han, mais nul sinologue n’en a encore abordé l’étude’. A recent study of Dong Zhongshu, for example, fails to mention these texts, or to refer to (or refute) the assertion in an eighteenth-century catalogue that: ‘Dong’s writings were apocrypha.’

The Jin Code was promulgated in the month following the initial ban. It contained a book-banning article which read: ‘All those with books on astronomy and on prognostication in their private collection will be subject to a period of two years’ penal servitude.’ In 336 under the succeeding dynasty, the Western Jin, there was an ordinance forbidding the private study of astrology and ‘chen and wei’. The penalty for defiance was death. Similar banning ordinances followed under various rulers and dynasties in 485, 511, 517, and 593.

China was divided during this period under different regimes most of which were short-lived, and therefore their rulers had good reason to fear prognostication of their downfall. Yet they were not averse to making use of the diviner’s art when it suited their purposes. It was a question of keeping the diviners under state control, which is why the emphasis in all these ordinances is on private ownership and private study. There were also periodic bans during this period on both Buddhist and Daoist works, but these were according to the whim of particular rulers and were not generally sustained.

The 593 ban was promulgated by the Sui Dynasty, which had succeeded in reuniting China in 581, and it again concerned the private ownership of prognostication texts. However, the ban was also extended to the compilation of private histories, which were
seen as being potentially critical of the Sui rulers. The Sui Dynasty only survived until 618, and private histories were not included in the legal code of the succeeding Tang dynasty (618–907). Article 110 of the Tang code, promulgated in 653, reads:

All cases of possession of astronomical instruments, astronomical charts, charts and books of prognostication (tushu and chenshu), military books, Qiyao Almanacs, the Methods of the Great Monad, or the Methods of the God of Thunder, by private persons punish violators by two years of penal servitude.

Private study of astronomy receives the same punishment. Wei, hou and Lunyu Chen are not within the scope of this ban.50

This article varies in a number of respects from those of previous dynasties, although it remains a ban only against private possession. First, it makes a clear distinction between various categories of books. In particular, it differentiates between chen, which are banned, and wei, which are not. The only exception is Lunyu Chen (Prognostication of The Analects). Many of the previous bans had simply put these two terms together. The commentary defines tushu (‘chart books’ 諲書) and chenshu (chen books) as ‘books recorded by the sages and wise men of previous eras.’ It is not clear why one work in this category should be exempted. Secondly, the code mentions Qiyao almanacs for the first time. The commentary explains that ‘Qiyao Almanacs refer to those dealing with the calendar, the Sun, Moon and Five Planets.’ The other two works mentioned by name are ‘books with methods to prognosticate good and evil’. The commentary closes with the warning that: ‘If one transmits or uses incantations so as to involve people in disobedience, then the law on making magical incantations is followed.’ This refers to Article 268, for which the punishment is strangulation,51 and it clearly shows that these texts were considered a possible source for subversion. The fact that some texts were exempted suggests that it was felt that those particular texts were not a political threat. Other articles dealing with book banning were Article 32, concerning the possession of forbidden goods, the subcommentary reading: ‘This refers to such things as armour, crossbows..., as well as forbidden books...’.52 Article 37 concerns pardon for those who confess undiscovered crimes. It excludes several categories of criminals from this pardon, including ‘those who make unauthorized studies of the heavenly patterns’.53 It also mentions the possession of unauthorized books.54

Chan Zhenghong ends his discussion on the Qiyao, with a question: ‘Why, if the Qiyao existed from the Han, were they not banned along with similar works such as chen and wei?’.55 The answer to this may lie in the nature of the almanac. Early almanacs probably were little more than a calendar, used to name the days. By the Tang, writers are complaining that they contain ‘superstitious’ elements such as the ‘lucky day’ system. In fact, Tang almanacs contain many charms and different systems of divination, such as elements of fengshui (geomancy) and hexagrams. However, they do not seem to include texts such as the apocryphal dialogue between Confucius and a small boy. This appears on several Dunhuang manuscripts, but separate from the almanacs.56 The modern almanac, however, incorporates a similar dialogue.57 The modern almanac also
incorporates 'form letters', which likewise existed independently in the Tang. It is this syncretic aspect of the almanac, I would suggest, that made it so popular but also dangerous in the eyes of the state. The almanac, from the Han onwards, started to incorporate elements previously found in chen and wei texts. The censorship of these texts led to their marginalization and eventual disappearance as distinct texts. Indeed, the exclusion of wei texts from the Tang banning, suggests that the post-Han attack and subsequent censorship were so successful that by the Tang these texts were no longer seen as a threat: perhaps because literati-officials no longer took them seriously, or perhaps simply because so few examples existed. But certain elements of these texts along with the prognostications involved in the chen were still influential, both as independent works and as part of the expanded almanac. These texts were therefore banned.

There was not another book-banning ordinance until 738 when the emperor, Xuanzang (r. 713–55), prohibited all works on 'yin-yang' theory except 'those relating to predications or marriage and death'. His endeavours, however, did not prevent a major rebellion – the An Lushan Rebellion of 755 – which, although finally quashed, severely weakened the Tang regime. And it was also at this time that there was another threat to the state's attempts to monopolize any information it deemed potentially subversive: the development of printing.

THE DUNHUANG PRINTED ALMANAC AND CENSORSHIP

Printing, using carved woodblocks, was probably developed in China in the eighth century, but the earliest dated examples are from the ninth and tenth centuries. One group to recognize and exploit the new technology's potential was the Buddhist Church. It used woodblocks to print Buddhist images and prayer sheets for sale to monks, nuns and lay believers, and printing developed rapidly so that a printed sutra found at Dunhuang, but possibly printed in Sichuan and dated 868, is clearly the product of a mature industry. Almost all the examples of printed material found in Cave 17 at Dunhuang are of Buddhist material. The exception are several fragments of ninth-century almanacs.

It was not until the Song dynasty that the state tried to monopolize printing, by which time important provincial centres had developed. One of these was the area now called Sichuan Province, the location of the first large scale printing project: the Buddhist Canon was printed there in 972–83. There is also evidence from the Song of provincial printers defying the law by printing banned works. But the evidence in the early stages of printing is scarce, which is why the discovery of the Dunhuang almanacs is so interesting.

The evidence suggests that almanacs were very popular. Both private and official works are mentioned frequently in the official histories from Hanshu onwards, while the bibliography attached to the Suishu lists over twenty works in the Qiya genre. Songshu (History of the Song Dynasty) notes that a new popular almanac appeared in the
Five Dynasties period (907–60), ‘The Greatest Almanac’. A memorial of 835, which called for the prohibition of these works, is also evidence for their popularity. Even if the plaintiff is overstating the situation to emphasize his point, the fact that it was felt necessary to ban the works suggests that they had a wide circulation.

In all the provinces of Szechwan and Huai-nan, printed calendars are on sale in the markets. Every year, before the Imperial Observatory has submitted the new calendars for approval and had it officially promulgated, these printed calendars have flooded the empire. This violates the principle that [the Calendar] is a gift of His Majesty.

The Tang dynasty was attempting to monopolize production of the official calendar – probably both for political and economic reasons – and after this memorial it was stipulated, in what is almost certainly the oldest publication ordinance in the world, that the private printing of almanacs by local administrations and their private possession was forbidden. In 936, in the dynasty following the downfall of the Tang, the Directorate of Astronomical Observation was directed by imperial order to compile and print annual almanacs for sale to the general public. In 953 all almanacs for previous years were banned. The 958 Song dynasty law was similar to the Tang articles and there were more decrees to this effect in 1071 and 1080. In the 1202 legal code, the punishment for those who pirated almanacs was specified as 100 blows with the heavy stick.

By the tenth century the government, in an attempt to pre-empt pirating, began issuing special public editions of the calendar. In the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) the official calendar included lucky and unlucky days, influenced by the popularity of ‘day books’. Some officials complained that this made the official work too much like ‘vulgar almanacs’. The statutes of each dynasty continued to prohibit unauthorized reproduction and in the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) codes it was stipulated that the punishment for transgressors was decapitation.

The Stein Collection of documents from Dunhuang at the British Library contains three printed almanacs and several manuscript versions. Or.8210/P.6 is for the year 877 and comprises a scroll over 1 m. long by 27.5 cm. high. The text, like that in modern almanacs, is divided into sections and is very small. The upper register is divided into five rows with details of the months and days, including the elements associated with each day and the use of the character ‘Mi’. Part of the central register is devoted to the animals of the twelve year cycle with small illustrations (see Plate I). This system almost certainly came into China from India, and assigns an animal to each year. Some of the animals here are accompanied by the character ‘ji’ (lucky), and advice on marriage is given below. For example, it advises rat people that the fifth to eleventh months are appropriate times for a wedding. The lower register contains various information, including geomancy based on Five Elements theory, and a charm. Charms were used to ward off evil, the almanac itself being hung from a bed or doorpost for this purpose. This particular charm is to ‘bring order to the household’ (zhong shai fu). The normal practice today is to transcribe the charm onto a piece of paper which is then usually burned, the ashes mixed with water and either sprinkled or drunk.
This is the most complete printed calendar. Or.8210/P.10 is a fragment of about 26 cm. high by 8 cm. wide (see fig. 1). It is dated Zhonghe 2 (882) and begins: 'Family calendar of Fan Shang of Chengdu in Xichuan, province of Jiannan.' This refers to modern day Chengdu in Sichuan Province, a centre of printing as discussed above and also the start (or end) of a trade route leading west into Tibet, one branch of which went north to Koko-nor and thence to Dunhuang. Whether this is the route this almanac took it is not possible to say, but its existence in Dunhuang by the early eleventh century at the latest opens the possibility that other Dunhuang printed documents, such as *The Diamond Sutra*, were also printed in Sichuan. But Sichuan was relatively protected from the influence of the Chinese state. Hemmed in by mountains, the journey from the capital to Chengdu was, in the words of one Tang poet, 'harder than the journey to heaven'. This being the case, it is not too difficult to imagine how printers there might defy government prohibitions with little risk of detection. But the third printed almanac is from the capital itself.

This is also fragmentary (Or.8210/P.12; see fig. 1), measuring 17 cm. high by 7 cm., and is also undated, although Giles assigns it to the ninth century. At the end it reads: 'Large print of the Dadao Family in the East Market of Shangdu.' We know nothing about the 'Dadao Family' printers, but contemporary accounts attest that there were many booksellers in the capital's two markets. The West Market was where foreign merchants traded on their way to and from the Silk Road and was, by all accounts, the more rowdy of the two. The East Market was located near the imperial palace and the mansions of grand officials. There was every chance, therefore, that an almanac for sale here would be noticed by those in the highest tiers of government.

These are not the earliest nor the only extant almanacs from Dunhuang. There are several manuscript almanacs, including eighth century examples. But most of these date from around the time of the founding of the Song dynasty in 960 and have been compiled by a local official, Zhai Fengda. This indicates that they were probably officially approved copies or were produced at a time when there was no central control. Like their unofficial counterparts, by this time the calendar contained many sections on divination, including the system of twelve animals (see fig. 2) and hexagrams. One example is unfinished (Or.8210/S.612). The scroll has been carefully divided with ink lines into the appropriate registers and sections, but they are only partially completed. The regular reiteration of the prohibition, the evidence from the official histories and other historical texts, and the existence of printed almanacs at Dunhuang, all suggest that the government's attempts to censor almanacs were not successful. If this is the case, then there must have been a positive reason for publishers to defy the law. This reason was undoubtedly an economic one. The almanac would have been sold cheaply, to appeal to everyone, and the evidence points towards its achieving mass sales. In England, the almanac was often restricted to only two to three sheets as anything longer would have been too expensive for the poor. This was the situation several centuries after the invention of printing, yet the later evidence in China on prices and the extant almanacs
from an earlier period – some of which are a considerable length – suggest that Chinese-produced almanacs were both long and cheap. There is ample evidence from the nineteenth century on the popularity and price of almanacs. Lister, for example, writing in 1872, notes that: 'Bad too as a Chinese almanac is, it is wonderfully cheap. We have an extensive penny literature at home, but the English cottager cannot buy anything like the amount of printed material for his penny that the Chinaman can for even less.'

The stated punishment for production and ownership was severe, but the impunity of the Dadao printers suggests that it was not seen as a real threat. As I have shown above, this could not have been because the government was unconcerned about the possible subversive applications of astronomy. Nor was it in such a confident position that the regime could afford to ignore challenges: these were the declining years of the Tang dynasty (it ended in 907). It also needed the revenue from the sale of the official calendar. But the political will could not have been present to enforce an unpopular ban, otherwise it would be highly unlikely that the Dunhuang documents would contain printed almanacs of this time. That legal codes and actual practice do not always conform with each other is evident from many societies. It is interesting to see such a clear case from ninth century China. Given this one example, it is necessary to consider that the Tang Code may not have been strictly enforced in other cases.
Almanacs continued to be popular. In the mid-nineteenth century the Taiping rebels adopted a Western calendar, but the traditional almanacs reappeared after the rebels' downfall and continued in popularity into the modern era, despite an attempt at banning by the Nationalist government in 1927. The Communists were more successful in their suppression but almanacs are still available. They are also produced in large numbers in Taiwan, and in Hong Kong the calendar maker continues to present a copy to the governor each year, perpetuating the traditional political importance of the calendar.85

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1 This was first noted by Denis Twitchett in a talk he gave to The Wynkyn de Worde Society, 25 Sept. 1977, published as Printing and Publishing: Medieval China (London, 1983), p. 23.

2 The Yue Ling 月令 (Monthly Ordinances). See Needham 1959, p. 195, for a discussion of this work. See also Hirase 1993 for a discussion of early calendars and their imperial usage.

3 '[The Shang calendar] was not concerned with the needs of the farmer – who continued to regulate his activities by the onset of floods, the coming of the rains, the heliacal rising of a star, or some similar phenomenon – but rather was one of a set of accounting devices fashioned to facilitate the ritualistic and managerial functions of sacrally oriented elites.' Paul Wheatley, The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins and Character of the Ancient Chinese City (Edinburgh, 1971), pp. 385–6, quoted in Schafer 1977, p. 15.

4 'A warning that the the monarch's virtue was not adequate to keep him in touch with celestial rhythms.' Smith 1991, p. 2.

5 See Smith 1991 for a fuller discussion of this. Also Sivin 1995 who discusses (p. 9) the origins of the link between court power and astronomy: 'Those who spoke in the name of the monarch learned to portray cosmic order and imperial power as images of each other. They reinvented the state as a microcosm, resonating with the rhythms of the cosmos.'

6 Palmer 1986, p. 17. The development of a new calendar without official sanction was seen as a revolutionary act.

7 Although, as Needham points out, they totally misunderstood the Chinese system (Needham 1959, p. 258). See n. 8 below and Ho Peng-Yoke 1969, pp. 150–1, for details of the prediction.

8 See Eberhard 1957, pp. 62–6, for a discussion of this. See also Eberhard and Mueller 1936.

9 These twelve divisions must not be confused with those of the Greek zodiac, the mistake the Jesuits made. The latter are of equal length unlike the Chinese system. The Chinese subdivided each division into two or three parts, resulting in a system of twenty-eight unequal 'xiu' or lodges, each marked by a star and known by the name of that asterism. It is the 'xiu' which have been identified with 'moon stations' of the Indian and Arabic systems (India: naksharta and Arabic: al-manazil) (see Needham 1959, pp. 252ff.; Smith 1991, pp. 34ff.).

10 This is summarized in Needham 1959, pp. 253–4. Schafer 1977, p. 101, for example, accepts the argument that the use of the '28 lunar lodges' entered China with the translation of a Buddhist astrological work in 220, but Needham points out that eight of the twenty-eight are mentioned in the Yue Ling, which may date back to the 9th century BC (Needham 1959, p. 254). Also, see n. 14 below. Babylon has been suggested as the most likely candidate for the common source: 'One might fairly surmise, therefore, that the equatorial moon stations of East Asia originated from Old Babylonian astronomy before the middle of the -1st millennium [BC] and probably a long time before' (Needham 1959, p. 256).

11 Chuang Shen 1960 and Needham 1959, p. 204. The Sogdians were a Persian people. As merchants on the Silk Road they played an important part in the transmission of knowledge both to and from China.

13 *Hanshu*, juan 21, p. 977.
14 Although Eberhard argues that this text in fact dates from the eighth century (see Needham 1959, p. 258).
15 Needham 1959, pp. 202 & 258 note a. *Xiuyaojing* contained Western-style horoscope procedures linked with the systems of the 28 moon stations and the seven-day week.
17 Capp 1979 notes that, *Erra Pater*, an almanac published at least twelve times between the English Reformation and Civil War ‘added lists of lucky and unlucky days’ (p. 31). See also Capp, p. 63, for the use of almanacs for choosing good days for harvesting, hunting and marriage: ‘The farmer will not cast his seed i’ th ground / Before he looks in Bretnor [name of an almanac]; there he finds / some word which he hugs happily, as Ply the Box, / May Hay Betimes,...’ from a Middleton masque, quoted in Capp, p. 31.
18 Quoted and translated in Kudo Motoo 1990, p. 26. The woodslips he discusses are from Shuihudi, Yumeng County. They include prognostication based on the 28 lodges.
19 Diaries in Japan and other countries influenced by this system still carry such information.
20 Lister 1872-3, p. 239.
21 Smith 1991, pp. 30-1
22 For Western almanac makers see Capp 1979, pp. 35ff.
23 See Eberhard 1957, pp. 66–8, for a discussion of this and its effect on the development of science in China; and Eberhard and Mueller 1936, p. 227, for details of the school.
24 *Han Feizi* 漢非子, juan 49. Han Fei, incidentally, met an early death due to the machinations of his erstwhile friend, Li Si.
25 They probably also standardized the calendar. See Kudo 1990.
26 Although the Qin laws on private scholarship were incorporated and kept in the Han legal code for over a decade.
27 The reputation of Qin Shihuangdi experienced a brief revival in Communist times when Mao Zedong compared himself to him (and judged that he, Mao, had been far more effective in silencing his critics). Fung Yu-lan also makes some attempt at exoneration (Fung Yu-lan 1983, vol. i, p. 15) but his claim, that the emperor’s aim was ‘rather’ than to completely wipe out the learning of their time’ appears rather contradictory.
28 For a survey of censorship in pre-modern China see Whitfield 1999.
30 Wei and jing also indicate the opposite movement of the twenty-eight lunar lodges (see n. 9 above).
31 Tjan 1949, p. 120. Sarah Queen discusses this canonization of the classics in her book, *From Chronicle to Canon* (Queen 1996). However, she makes no reference to *wei* texts.
32 This is a frequently seen effect of censorship that is not lost on current Chinese writers. Some, for example, argue that their fellow writers over-emphasize the censorship imposed on them in order to increase the prestige of their own works.
34 Dong Zhongshu quoted in Queen 1996, p. 23.
35 Quoted in Tjan 1949, p. 120. See also Queen 1996, pp. 26–30, and Itano 1976, pp. 81–6, for an account of this episode.
36 Dubs 1944, p. 364.
37 Itano 1976, pp. 50ff; and 1978, pp. 87ff.
38 Quoted in Tjan 1949, p. 152. Also see Itano 1976, pp. 48ff.
41 Although, in fact, there is very little discussion of censorship in pre-modern China at all. A recent survey published in China is a notable exception (An Pingqiu and Zhang Beiheng 1990).
42 Tjan 1949, p. 106.
43 *Tu*, literally ‘charts’, are another form of divination text.
44 *Suishu*, juan 32, p. 941.
45 Pelliot 1920, p. 356. Fung Yu-lan also devoted a chapter to these texts in his history of Chinese philosophy, first published in 1934 (references to 1983 ed.).
48 See An Pingqiu and Zhang Beihong 1990, pp. 13ff, for a survey of this period.
49 The Buddhist traditions also saw the exclusion
of works considered apocryphal, and these included certain prognostication texts probably modelled on *chen* (Züri cher 1959, vol. i, p. 308).

50 Translated by Johnson 1997, pp. 78–9, with some amendments.


52 Johnson 1979, pp. 179–80, in which he cites Deloustal as saying that forbidden books are those dealing with astronomy, prognostication and military strategy (p. 180, n. 47).

53 Johnson 1979, p. 30

54 Johnson 1979, pp. 208–9.


57 Palmer 1986, Section 26, pp. 135–8.

58 See S.6180, S.361, S.3399, S.5566, etc. (Giles 1957, nos. 7485–7506 (pp. 252–4)) for examples from Dunhuang, and Palmer 1986, Section 27, p. 139, for the modern example.

59 Or even because the extant examples had been brought into the mainstream tradition and were no longer recognized as *wei* texts, as in the case of Dong Zhongshu’s work (see n. 30 above).

60 Many of the prognostications were associated with the calendar and it was therefore natural that they should be included. For example, a surviving *wei* text reads: ‘The period between *wu* (the fifth month) and *hai* (the tenth month) is that for changing (Heaven’s) Decree. The period between *mao* (the second month) and *yu* (the eighth month) is that for reforming and rectifying.’ *Shiwei Fanliqu* (*Wei on the Book of Songs: Pivot of the Extensive Calendar*) quoted in Fung Yu-lan 1983, p. 125.

61 All the earliest dated examples are of Buddhist texts.

62 Or.8210/P.2, a Chinese translation of *Vajracchedikāpārabhāsottama Sūtra*, known as ‘The Diamond Sutra’.

63 In the Stein collection in London: Or.8210/P.6, Or.8210/P.10 and Or.8210/P.12 (all illustrated).

64 *Tian 1949*, p. 22.

65 ‘Tongshu’ 通書 (‘almanac’) is a term still in use today. They are mentioned in all the histories from the first, *Shiji* (juan 18, p. 881; juan 86, p. 2525; etc.). *Hanshu* refers to “private almanacs” using the term ‘sitong’ 俗通 (juan 97 xia, p. 398), but the terms ‘shi’ 世 and ‘xiaoli’ 小曆 – ‘private’ or ‘small calendar’ – do not seem to have come into use, judging from the official histories, until the post-Tang period (‘xiaoli’ is first used in *Jiu Wudai shu*; *Tangshu* 8, p. 441) and the context is a memorial calling for the banning of private ownership of these works.

66 The first reference to ‘Qi Yao’ in the dynastic histories is in the commentary to the *Hanshu* (see n. 12 above). Qiyaoli are mentioned in the ‘Treatise on the Calendar’ in *Songshu* (juan 12, p. 261); in *Beishi hishu* (juan 82, p. 2762); in *Liangshu* 梁書 (juan 51, p. 752); and *Nanshi* 南史 (juan 76, p. 1905). Twenty-two works are listed in the ‘Calendar’ section in the bibliography in *Suishu* (juan 34, pp. 1023–4).

67 Not all books are popular before they are banned (although most become so after banning), but in the case of a ‘genre’ of books, I would suggest that a banning ordinance is more likely to indicate the popularity of that genre.

68 Memorial by Feng Su, quoted in Palmer 1986, p. 18.

69 *Jiu Tangshu*, juan 176, p. 563.

70 ‘The apparatus for observing heavenly bodies, astronomical charts, prognostication books... Qiyaoli Almanacs... shall not be in the possession of ordinary people. Offenders will receive two years imprisonment.’ Quoted in Chan 1983, p. 5.


72 Interestingly, when the nineteenth-century Taiping rebels produced a calendar omitting lucky days, it was not widely bought or consulted. See Smith 1991, p. 88–9.

73 It is not dated but see Giles 1957, p. 280.

74 This is the large character at the bottom of Plate I.

75 See Palmer 1986, p. 80, for other uses of charms, such as to relieve pain and cure sickness.

76 Palmer 1986, p. 81.

77 ‘Jiannan Xichuan Chengdufu Fan Shang jia li’ 創南西川成都府樊上嘉文集. (Present-day Xian. The name ‘Shangdu’ came into use in the first year of the reign of Emperor Suzong (756).)

78 Giles 1957, p. 280.

79 ‘Shangdu’ Dongshi Dadao jia da yin’ 上都東市大刀要大印.

80 Present-day Xian. The name ‘Shangdu’ came into use in the first year of the reign of Emperor Suzong (756).

81 S.2620 (Giles 1957, no. 7037, p. 227).
See, for example, Or.8210/S.95, S.2404 for example of Zhai Fengda’s calendars.

It is improbable that they were produced by any individual or institution with the political aim of subversion.

One of the reasons for this may be the concentration of English printers in London (Oxford and Cambridge being secondary centres), and the lack of the development of regional printing (Capp 1979, p. 34). For comments on prices in the 16th and 17th centuries of English almanacs see Capp 1979, p. 41, where he notes that in order to keep the almanac to a saleable price of 2d (two pennies) it was necessary to confine it to three sheets. It was also necessary for English almanacs to carry advertising. The disparity continues today: the 1998 Hong Kong Almanac with 200 pages and no advertising costs HK$10, under GBP1, while ‘Old Moore’s Almanak’ with 80 pages of which only 27 are not advertisements costs GBP1.

This was certainly the case up to the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997. I have not been able to verify whether the calendar was presented to the new governor, Tung Chee-wah, for the new year, 1998.
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