

## ***Pheasant-cap Master: Héguan Zî and the 'End of History'***

### ***Abstract***

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Reconciliation of Way and Law (Dào, Fâ) marks *Héguan Zî* as an ideology that spanned the Qín ascendancy and early Western Hàn (c. BC 250-165). The Way's Law ('law of the Way') philosophy had been forgotten until the 1973 re-discovery of silk manuscripts with this theme ascribed to the mythical Yellow Emperor, along with Lâo Zî's *Virtue and Way* (in that order), in a baron's tomb sealed in 168 BC, near Chángsha, Húnán. This close association of manuscripts suggests that the Way's Law and lost Huáng-Lâo (Yellow Emperor-Lâo Zî) schools were twins if not identical. *Héguan Zî* (xii 'This Generation's Arms') refers to the Yellow Emperor along with the Five Emperors and Three Kings.

The Way's Law school's disappearance coincides with the period of the precipitate fall of Qín and Hàn's replacement of its Law-centred synthesis by a more familiar Confucian-Daoist amalgam. The resulting oblivion of the Way's Law school, with the obscure identity of Pheasant Cap Master the man, compounded the problem of interpreting the philosophy in the book that bears his name. In Eastern Hàn it was classed as Huáng-Lâo or Daoist, while a book of Páng Zî was classed as real-politik (Zonghéng). Yet it shows strongly practical political and military concerns projected into a cosmic framework.

Rather than simply looking backwards to a mythic past, as modern interpreters have supposed, I argue *Héguan Zî* uses the cycle of the mythic Nine Emperors to predict the imminent emergence of a new order, the Complete Ninth (Chéngjiû). In this he is not unlike Mèng Zî who sensed the time was ripe for Heaven to appoint a true king who would unify the Under Heaven by virtue. *Héguan Zî*'s utopian vision is of a pro-active Sage King, attuned to the times' dynamics (quánshì), who will install a meritocratic (rather than hereditary) system of government in harmony with the cosmos, described in detail. Unlike the pessimist tone of Jiâ Yì (BC 201-169)'s *Owl Rhapsody* and the scattered lines in *Zhuang Zî* which share much of the same language, *Héguan Zî* (xii)'s poem displays an vital positivism which inadvertently proclaims its primacy. In sum, this is Daoism with a social program and universal vision of contemporary focus and relevance, not the introverted abstractions of a mystic recluse.